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Wars Among Friends: Poetry and Sovereignty in Medieval England

Klement, Leah

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WARS AMONG FRIENDS: POETRY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Leah Elise Klement

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Abstract

This dissertation traces an unexamined aspect of classical reception in the literature of fourteenth-century England. In contrast to the well-known Trojan narratives that framed the English as the descendants of a Trojan refugee, the texts studied in this dissertation turn to Thebes and Rome instead of Troy, as a way of exploring the major disjunctions in English history and contesting Trojan narratives of singular descent. This alternative narrative allows writers to assess critically the foundations and extent of sovereignty in England, prompted by the rebellions and civil unrest that troubled late fourteenth-century English society. Bringing English legendary history together with classical models of domestic division, such as Lucan and Statius, these writers wonder whether and how these inheritances have come to bear on present social divisions, and also whether histories of difference and disunity might undermine sovereign authority to suppress such conflicts with violence. Further, in their attention to classical models as a pattern for ethically reading and writing about violence, these texts represent an unexpectedly early humanistic approach to questions of governance in later medieval England.

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Introduction: Literature and Civil Strife in Fourteenth-Century England

In his sermon on the Maccabees, the tenth-century English homilist Aelfric includes a fourfold classification of violent conflict.[1] Leading up to this passage, Aelfric has been engaged in explaining the meaning of the violence in those books, emphasizing that while it was justified for Judas and other Old Testament figures to wage war with weapons against their enemies, modern-day Christians living under the law of the New Testament ought to focus instead on fighting their spiritual enemies: vices, and unseen devils, with spiritual weapons. Nevertheless, he says, (perhaps thinking of England's very corporeal enemies, the "men across the seas"), there are distinctions to be made between different types of war: there is "just war" (*iustum*) against aggressors, "unjust war" (*iniustum*) that comes of anger, "civil war" (*civile*) between fellow-citizens, and "more than civil war," (*plusquam civile*), which arises "between relatives" (*betwux freondum*).[2] However, the relationships between the various types of war that he mentions are unclear, and the questions this schema immediately raises, such as whether civil war could ever be just, or war against foreigners unjust, Aelfric does not answer.

Nevertheless, most of the categories here are familiar to us from a long and diverse tradition of thought on these matters: just war, unjust war, civil war – that is, except for the

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[1] The schema comes from Isidore (*Etymologies* XVIII i.2-3), who himself is drawing on Cicero, but Aelfric's glossing of the terms is his own. On the origin of Cicero's ideas in Roman fetial law, see Jonathan Barnes, "Cicero and the Just War."

[2] Secgað swa-þeah lareowas þæt synd feower cynna gefeoht.
iustum þæt is rihtlic – *iniustum* unrihtlic
ciuile betwux ceaster-gewarum *Plusquam ciuile* betwux siblingum
Iustum bellum is rithlic gefeoht wið ða reðan flot-menn.
oþþe wið oðre þeoda þe eard willað fordon.
Unrihtlic gefeoht is þe of yrre cymð.
Þæt þridde gefeoht þe of geflite cymð.
betwux ceaster-gewarum is swyðe pleolic.
ond þæt feorðe gefeoht þe betwux freondum bið
is swiðe earmlic and endeleas sorh.
(Aelfric's *Lives of the Saints,* XXV.ix:I Maccabees ix.1-22, ed. Skeat) Translation adapted from Skeat.

fourth and final type. This fourth category of war, *bella plusquam civilia,* "more than civil war," is defined primarily by its affect and little else. It describes, Aelfric says, a type of war that arises between relatives or friends, and it is "very wretched, and an endless sorrow."[3] It is difficult to know exactly what Aelfric had in mind when he included this type of war; it appears in his source, Isidore, but Aelfric considerably adapts and condenses Isidore's definitions in this passage in his translation. Isidore remarks that this type of war occurs when relatives fight, as did Caesar and Pompey, but says nothing about the affective toll of such warfare. However, in many ways Aelfric's obscure definition discloses this type of war's most salient characteristic more effectively than Isidore's untroubled appeal to textual authorities: as Aelfric's abdication of taxonomy to emotion suggests, this type of warfare confounds attempts to see it clearly, and exists in a perpetually contested space. The difference between civil war and "more than civil war," as we will see it in the analysis that follows, is that while the former category designates a circumscribed domestic – even civic – conflict, the latter confuses the very definition of domestic and foreign space, disrupting borders, boundaries, and subjectivities, turning the closest of intimates into the most savage enemies, and former enemies into unlikely allies. It is utterly wrapped up in the discourse of just and unjust war, in seeking to delineate licit from illicit violence. At the same time, however, it poses an exceptionally difficult challenge to such discourses in its complication of the categories of friend and enemy, fellow-citizen and foreigner.

This dissertation takes as its subject this last and most difficult type of warfare, as it appears in poetic texts from late fourteenth-century England. The literature of this period, I will

[3] Confounding the definition further is Aelfric's change in vocabulary: while Aelfric is consistent in his glossing of civil war, in both appearances here naming it as "between citizens," (*betwux ceaster-gewarum*, literally "fellow city-dwellers), in describing this fourth category, Aelfric changes his initial "between relatives" to "between friends." Old English *freond* has a range of meanings and can denote a relative, but frequently is equivalent to *amicus,* and its modern English descendant: a friend. In changing his vocabulary here, Aelfric is perhaps influenced by the play on words available in the Latin, as this category of war turns friends into their precise opposite, enemies: the *amicus* into the *inimicus.*

argue, is characterized by a preoccupation with the problem of domestic strife and division, but curiously figures this division in terms of foreign relations, or as a war against a foreign enemy. This elision of domestic into foreign space has meant that the depth of these texts' concern with domestic issues of governance has often not been fully recognized in their criticism. In order to bring these concerns to light, the concept of "more than civil war" is a particularly useful category through which to view the violence that they depict, which does not fall easily into established ways of classifying warfare.

There are several major historical factors that may have contributed to these texts' concern with civil unrest, and its roots, meaning, and political ramifications. In the last few decades of the fourteenth century, certain longstanding social conditions began to erupt in civil strife in England, in the form of the so-called Peasants' Revolt of 1381[4] and its long-term effects at court throughout the reign of Richard II. These effects took nearly twenty years to settle, and even then, it was an incomplete resolution, achieved at the death of the king, and leading only to further unrest.[5] During these years, feudalism changed its form considerably, and merchants and professionals, especially in London, rose in prominence in society and government.[6] However, these processes did not occur painlessly, and rebellions, the vicious persecution of rebels, conflict between London guilds, relations between the city of London and the crown, and relations between Parliament, the crown, and the aristocracy, were all characterized by extreme animosity at various points during the reign of Richard II. In different ways, England was at war

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[4] The term has been convincingly queried in contemporary critical use, as it seems clear that the rebel group was comprised of wide range of societal elements. However, medieval sources consistently refer to the rebels as *rustici.* On the social composition of the rebels, see Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* 176ff. Hilton characterizes the rebels as a group whose "grievances…divided the mass of the population from the lords, the lawyers, and government officials." (Hilton 184)

[5] For Richard's reign, see Nigel Saul, *Richard II;* and the essays collected in Goodman and Gillespie, *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*. On Richard's conflicts with the aristocracy, see McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval England.*

[6] See Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism.*

with herself for nearly two decades, and yet these conflicts do not fit easily into the category of civil war, nor perhaps even into the category of "war."[7] At the same time they are not *not* civil war, as conflicts between different arms of the government and factions in society that result in bloodshed, depositions, and social upheaval are certainly characteristic of civil war. It is at this odd juncture between civil war and something more difficult, even more deeply domestic, that the concept of "more than civil war," and its particular disorientations, comes into play.

From the perspective of literary history, this is also a period during which the most well-known of medieval English authors were active: the Pearl poet, Chaucer, Gower, and Langland. Moreover, many of the texts from this period have been the subject of scholarly attention in recent years for their emerging consciousness of English political cohesion. That cohesion has taken the form, in critical discourse, of thinking through what it might mean to consider the medieval English state as a "nation."[8] Thorlac Turville-Petre argues that concepts of nationhood in England emerged under external pressures, "from outside attack or influence," but his study stops at the year 1340, as does Rees Davies's study of "the first English empire," in which he finds that after the year 1343, English attention turned away from the conquest of Ireland and

[7] In some sense the argument below explains the absence of the concept of "civil war" in surviving literature about these conflicts; as we will see, the portrayal of a conflict as a civil war vs. portraying it as a rebellion has serious political ramifications for the waging of that war and the sovereign authority to punish after it ceases. Though certainly known at the time, "civil war" does not appear in connection with the social conflicts of the late fourteenth century in England in any of these texts. The earliest vernacular citation for "civil war" in the OED is in John of Trevisa's *Polychronicon* (c. 1387), and both it and the next oldest citation, from Lydgate (c. 1439), refer specifically to the Roman civil wars between Caesar and Pompey. "Rebel" (often as predicative) is the far more common word throughout the fourteenth century, with many citations and in multiple senses. The Latin *bellum civile* and even *bella plusquam civilia* do appear much more frequently in medieval chronicles from England describing not only the Roman civil war, but also recent domestic events. *Bellum civile* and *discidium civile* appear several times in Geoffrey of Monmouth, though describing legendary events. Catherine Clarke has examined the extensive influence of Lucan on Latin chronicles of the period during the twelfth century known as the Anarchy in particular, as well as other chronicles from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. (Clarke, "Crossing the Rubicon") Haahr, "William of Malmesbury's Roman Models," discusses the influence of Lucan on that author. However, this direct influence does not seem to have persisted into our period; a more diffuse influence is charted below.

[8] See the essays collected in Kathy Lavezzo's edited volume *Imagining the Medieval English Nation* for a wide range of recent work on this topic.

Scotland that had seemed to be a secure aim of the state since the eleventh century.[9] In the later years of the fourteenth century, I will argue, internal pressures are more important than external concerns in considering the meaning of "Englishness" in literature. Furthermore, these internal antagonisms created a different type of pressure in reckoning not with simple otherness, but rather the more unsettling question of the otherness within Englishness.

Criticism of late fourteenth-century literature has addressed the intersection of literature with social unrest, particularly in the context of the rebellion of 1381. This event and the texts that surround it have drawn attention especially for the way in which literacy seems to have been the grounds upon which the rebellion played out, even (unexpectedly) from the perspective of the rebels. Lynn Arner has argued that Chaucer and Gower, in his vernacular works, created a readership out of the literate "upper strata of non-ruling urban classes" to allow them some degree of social and cultural capital, while even more deeply excluding the peasantry from the same.[10] Steven Justice's study *Writing and Rebellion* engages directly with the literacy of those engaged in the rebellion, detecting a distinct strategy and "outsider" understanding of the means and ends of literate culture in the rebels' destruction of written records and in what Justice argues are their own written productions.[11]

This study takes a more abstract view of the problem of rebellion during this period, placing it within the landscape of the wider social divisions that we see playing out in Ricardian England. For the most part, I do not argue that these texts respond to particular events directly but rather that they respond to a recurrent challenge throughout the period: domestic unrest and

[9] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation;* Davies, *Earliest English Empire.*
[10] Arner, *Chaucer, Gower, and the Vernacular Rising.*
[11] Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381.*

conflict between various other elements of English society and their king.[12] We will see that the concept of rebellion and sovereign responses to it is a consistent theme throughout the works in this dissertation, and that it spurred these writers to think deeply about English origins and the meaning of "Englishness" in a divided political climate, defining themselves not so much against other peoples but (in many ways the more difficult task) in the face of their own diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic heritage.

Moreover, focusing on internal rather than external pressures discloses a new perspective on the meaning of "Englishness" at the close of the fourteenth century. We know that the concept of the foreigner was not confined to those who spoke different languages or originated from a geographically remote place, and yet it has not been fully recognized how close at hand indeed the concept of the foreign can be in medieval English literature.[13] In the texts to come, someone from a different class or city, a neighbor or servant who has taken up arms, a born and bred Londoner, or indeed a family member, can be fully considered a foreigner – with important repercussions for the violence that may be perpetrated against them and the sovereignty of the lord that rules them. Could a domestic rebellion be pursued with the battle "rage" of a foreign campaign? Were rebellious peasants removing themselves from the English state entirely? What would it mean for the sovereignty of England to imagine a rebel King Arthur? Under such conditions, "Englishness" becomes fluid and impermanent, something that one can take up and

[12] The exception is Gower's *Vox Clamantis,* which is expressly written in response to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Even in that case, I will argue, Gower's conception of rebellion far exceeds the immediate context of its writing.
[13] See Pearsall's "Strangers in Late Fourteenth-Century London," in *The Stranger in Medieval Society,* for an interesting survey of the various types of foreigners present in London at this time, including the *forinsecus,* those who are "foreign" in their lack of access to citizenship, not by birth or place of origin. Pearsall makes the point that even those born in London could be "foreigners," as opposed to "citizens," which provides a persuasive legal corrolary to my literary findings, but my argument below will focus on a more fluid concept of "the foreign," in which conflict can make foreigners even out of those who were formerly fellow-citizens. Paul Strohm, in "Trade, Treason, and the Murder of Janus Imperial," charts the status of the indeterminate merchant class in England, often foreigners with some degree of protection under English law but nevertheless not English, and who were sometimes met with xenophobia and violence. For a sense of the range and number of foreigners living in England during the later Middle Ages, see also the "England's Immigrants" project, a database of foreign natives living in England from 1330-1550, based at York University. (www.englandsimmigrants.com)

put down again, be granted or be stripped of, not only in contradistinction to specific foreign identities, as Claire Sponsler has convincingly argued, but also within the bounds of what we would consider to be securely English identities.[14]

This analysis therefore does not so much tell the story of an "imagined community" as an "imagined disunity," which in turn has the potential to be a uniting or dividing force, depending on the hands that it falls into. The memory of difference is a powerful political tool, and modern studies of the nation and "bordering" have also found that the lines between citizen and foreigner, native and non-native are often blurred and arbitrary, but also rigorously, sometimes brutally enforced in the service of political aims.[15] In the Middle Ages, before the nation, the concept of the "border" as a fixed geographical referent for social divisions is not available as such, but the discourses of indigeneity and domesticity (often through the figure of the state as "household") that characterize "bordering" do play a prominent role in shaping the questions of sovereignty, violence, and belonging that we will trace out here.[16]

In medieval Europe, this "memory of difference" reached far back in time. All of the texts under consideration here engage in some capacity with the classical world, imaginatively or by direct textual allusion; two of four are written in Latin. It will not come as a surprise to students of medieval English literature that texts I have identified as looking for English origins should turn to the classical world. Where we today draw a distinct periodic line between

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[14] Sponsler, "Captivity of Henry Chrystede."

[15] See, for example, Michael Neocosmos, *From "foreign Natives" to "native Foreigners": Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa;* and for "bordering" as a political tool, and the mismatch between social and geographical borders even in the face of their elision, see Julia R. Johnson, "Bordering as Social Practice," *Border Rhetorics,* 36ff.

[16] Lynn Staley's recent study, *The Island Garden,* demonstrates the way in which Britain's medieval "language of nation" was centered on its status as island, with discrete but permeable geographic borders. One of Staley's most interesting conclusions is the way in which she finds sovereignty dislocated from geographical place: "nation is a place possessed of laws and liberties worked out and passed down to princes lest they identify place with lordship." (Staley, *Island Garden,*70). In this study, as well, we will see that the decoupling of sovereignty from place is also a feature of this "alterative" take on *translatio imperii,* which emphasizes the dislocation of sovereignty inherent in that translation, undermining the continuity that it promises.

antiquity and the Middle Ages, in medieval historiography, there was a clear line of continuity between Troy, Rome, and the great kingdoms of the medieval world. Medieval texts and cultures link themselves to the classical world in order to situate themselves as the heirs of classical knowledge and power, a belief referred to by the linked concepts of *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii*. In England, the imagined connection between Troy and Britain's legendary founder, Brutus, was particularly powerful.[17] Brutus was supposed to have been one of many Trojan refugees who founded new kingdoms, lending their names to the great cities and powerful regions of medieval Europe. Starting with early medieval chroniclers and widely popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth's foundational *Historia Regum Britannie,* chronicles of England's history traced English origins back to Brutus – in fact, perhaps the most famous chronicle is titled simply with his name (Wace's *Brut*). Several romances, developing out of and sometimes crossing over into the chronicle tradition, begin and end with framing narratives of Britain's founder and his Trojan ancestry.

Nor was the power of this founding story confined to the realm of literature. This fantastical genealogy was widely adapted from the genres of chronicle and romance into political discourse. In a royal letter dated August 1400, "Locrinus the son of Brutus" makes a prominent appearance in Henry IV's appeal for authority in a manner reminiscent of the diplomatic situation that begins the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and that will be the subject of more detailed discussion below.[18] The letter begins imperiously, with the newly-seated English king formally greeting the king of Scotland, Robert III, listing Henry's titles, and "exhorting" (*exhortare*) the Scottish king to do "what he ought to do" – that is, pay tribute to the English king. This is

[17] See Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages,* which explores the importance of the Trojan legend in late medieval literature and politics.
[18] Mary Hamel, in her edition of the alliterative *Morte*, suggests that this letter or the overall political situation that it depicts may have inspired the events of the poem. (Hamel, *Morte* 257 n. ad.88-115)

justified, he says, by an inherited right to fealty from Scotland, extending "from our ancestors and progenitors, kings of England by the authority of the High and Upright God, from the most ancient and past time, that is to say, from the time of Locrinus son of Brutus."[19] A direct line of descent, a clear appeal to *translatio imperii*, is put to work here to justify the English king's contemporary right to tribute from his neighbor via the most ancient of claims.

The importance of this motif of Trojan origins and of London in particular as a "New Troy" is well established in the study of medieval English literature and political culture. Sylvia Federico's *New Troy* has surveyed the various ways in which the idea of Troy contributed to "fantasies of empire" in both literature and politics in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and numerous book chapters and articles similarly record the flexibility and durability of this idea. Alex Mueller's *Translating Troy* has also identified a competing and distinctly anti-imperialist, anti-centralized strain of Trojan appropriation based on Guido della Collone's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, a work whose translation into English he takes as the foundation of a tradition of "skeptical," "provincial" perspective on Troy in English literature in opposition to what he sees as an "optimistic," "providential" approach in courtly and urbane literature from the south.[20]

Troy was undeniably an important figure in the Middle English political and literary imaginary. However, medieval English classical reception is considerably more diverse than the focus on Troy narratives in the criticism would suggest, and includes texts that seem to explicitly reject Trojan affiliations, as we will read below. Although studies of Trojan appropriation have emphasized its richness and diversity of perspectives, the exclusion of other classicizing English

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[19] *...Antecessores et Progenitores nostri, Reges Angliae, iure superioris & Directi Dominii, ab antiquissimis retroactis temporibus (videlicet) a tempore Locrini Filii Bruti*. Rymer, *Foedera* VIII (August 1400).
[20] Mueller, *Translating Troy.* On the Guido tradition of the destruction of Troy, see also James Simpson, "The Other Troy Book."

poetry has distorted the picture of Trojan appropriation itself. We have come to expect resistance to centralizing Trojan narratives from texts deemed provincial or marginal, and studies of the alliterative tradition, in which the alliterative *Morte* often features, have aligned alliterative poetry with just such a perspective.[21] However, two of the three English texts studied here are written by authors at the heart of the courtly and urbane literature of London: Gower's *Vox Clamantis* and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. As I will show here, Chaucer himself has a place at the center of critical thought about *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, and within one of his most apparently traditional works. Indeed, both *The Knight's Tale* and Gower's *Visio Angliae* share primary concerns about violence, sovereignty, and textual misappropriation with the alliterative *Morte,* in a way that challenges many of the dichotomies that have applied in studies of "Englishness" in the Middle Ages: provincial/urbane, Latin/vernacular, and alliterative/syllabic verse.[22]

This wider reception landscape is centered on no other single classical place or text, which perhaps explains why classicizing medieval poetry that is not overtly Trojan has not been studied as widely or as a distinct phenomenon. The texts here reach out not to Troy but to other centers of the ancient world: the Roman empire, in the case of the alliterative *Morte Arthure;* Thebes and Athens, in the case of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*; and the significant absence, rather

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[21] Christine Chism (drawing on Crane and Field) lists a concern with "the questioning of cultural centers from outsider (or provincial) perspectives" as a distinguishing feature in common with earlier insular romances, though she goes on to emphasize that later alliterative poetry explicitly poses a tension between center and periphery rather than simply challenging the center (Chism 2). Mueller, *Translating Troy*, complicates the concept of "provincial" alliterative verse, but maintains alliterative verse as a distinct critical group: "Transcending the limits of their regional locales, I consider these poems provincial inasmuch as they acknowledge and interrogate the doubtful practice of celebrating England's status as a Trojan province." (Mueller 7) Randy Schiff, in *Revivalist Fantasies*, however, argues against the grouping-together of alliterative poems and uncover the nationalist projects that supported such efforts in the first place, though see the review of Thorlac Turville-Petre, who makes (among others) the point that Schiff's own methodology seems to undermine that effort.

[22] Ralph Hanna first convincingly challenged these dichotomies in a seminal essay on alliterative poetry, arguing that alliterative verse was present in London circles, circulated, and copied in the urbane environment. Intriguingly, for this project, he also draws attention to the disproportionate influence of Latin materials on alliterative verse, in comparison with other contemporary romance forms. (Hanna, "Alliterative Poetry" 500, 510-11)

than presence, of an ancient place, as Gower engages with Ovid's exile poetry in the first book of his *Vox Clamantis.* In short, as this dissertation will show, there is classicizing literature during this period that is deeply concerned with "Englishness" but that is not about Troy, and these texts are not necessarily provincial, nor speaking from the fringes of Englishness, though they do articulate a distinctly domestic set of concerns that may at first seem "small." However, as we will see, these domestic concerns are often projected onto the widest possible geographical and temporal scale, so that a peasant rebellion in the fourteenth century is connected with Ovidian exile and the story of Cadmus, of man's primal antagonism; or the king's response to domestic unrest connected with the legendary recursive violence of Thebes.

Therefore, it is not the case that the texts I read below are entirely unconcerned with or simply dismissive of the concepts of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii.* On the contrary, they engage with it in depth, but they highlight qualities within it that are different from those that could produce "fantasies of empire." What these texts recognize is that the idea of relocation inherent in the "translation" of power and knowledge dislocates sovereignty, literary authority, and space in a deeply troubling way. I contend that we see this perspective arising particularly clearly in medieval English literature because the case for tying sovereignty to a specific space was even more complicated by England's legendary history, as it was recorded in medieval chronicle: founded by an exile, and then repeatedly conquered, and settled, by several distinct peoples from "across the sea." As Sir Cleges will say to a foreign knight in the alliterative *Morte,* "*Fro the Brute broghte vs and all oure bolde elders / To Bretayne the braddere within chippe-burdez"*: Brutus brought the English "and all their elders" to Britain on board a ship. Sir Cleges's phrasing here implies, somewhat amusingly, that Brutus brought all of the Britons who have ever lived over the seas with him ("brought us and all of our bold elders"), but he is not ultimately so

wrong about this. As chroniclers from Nennius to Bede to Geoffrey and William of Malmesbury recorded, England was successively conquered by the Romans, the Saxons, the Vikings, and the Normans. If what it means to be English is to have, most likely, come from somewhere else, what does that mean for the sovereignty of England itself, let alone its place in the parade of medieval claimants to *translatio imperii*?

Thus, this dissertation also shows that *translatio imperii* as it might function elsewhere in medieval Europe cannot be assumed to have the same meaning in English literature. In some ways, it does seem to operate along similar lines, enabling the "fantasies of empire" that studies of Trojan appropriation have traced out. But inherent in the Trojan legend is the belief that not only Britain but other great European powers also were founded by Trojan refugees: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* mentions several alongside Brutus in its opening stanzas. Thus, thinking England as "Trojan" automatically implies thinking it in an international context, as part of wider phenomena such as shared chivalric practice, religion, and economic connections. However, I will suggest here that English writers turn to other classical locations when they intend to think truly domestically, even when the domestic sphere is sometimes figured for aesthetic or political reasons in international terms. If Trojan narratives help situate England as part of an international medieval narrative to do with *translatio imperii,* the texts we read here worry that domestic unrest in England might instead indicate that she is the particular and only heir to other, darker classical inheritances.

Francis Ingledew has linked the providential appropriation of Troy in medieval England with a Virgilian sensibility, in which prophecy and history converge to generate a single undisputed and teleological claim to sovereignty. [23] In this dissertation, the "other, darker classical inheritances" that antiquity bequeathed to the Middle Ages start with Lucan, whose

[23] Ingledew, "The Book of Troy."

uncompromisingly bleak portrait of the end of the Roman republic records what he deems Rome's suicide.[24] Unlike "civil war," "just war," and "unjust war," concepts that have all enjoyed a long and varied intellectual tradition, from Aristotle, to Cicero, to numerous medieval and early modern manuals, and up to present day political theory, the category of "more than civil war" can be traced back to this single text. Aelfric found the schema of warfare with which we began in Isidore, who took it from Lucan's *Pharsalia,* now known by its slightly malapropos modern title as the *Bellum Civile*. The *Bellum Civile* treats the events of the civil wars between Pompey and Caesar from 49-45 BC, the battles of which were fought across the breadth of the Roman Empire at the time. These wars ended the Roman republic, and Lucan's poem has been read since then and studied in its reception as flying the flag of republicanism in times of crisis, notably in David Norbrook's *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics 1627-1660.* Here, Lucan comes to stand for the republican cause in the English civil war, against what Norbrook calls the Augustan (royalist) tradition. Patrick Cheney has argued that Marlowe's translation of Lucan's first book (1603) ought to alert us to a republican consciousness in that author, earlier in the tradition of English republicanism than has previously been known.[25]

The medieval Lucan is not so easily characterized, although the poem was widely read across Europe during this period. The *Bellum Civile* was a popular school text in the Middle

[24] David Quint has famously opposed these two traditions in his study *Epic and Empire,* as the "winning" and "losing" strains of epic and romance, respectively. Quint skips over the Middle Ages in his study, though there is much there that would complicate his opposition between epic and romance, and particularly his concept of "medieval epic" (though by this he means "medievalizing epic"). In the present study the position of epic critique is not restricted to the "loser's" side, but rather assumed to be open to readers who reject epic for aesthetic or ethical reasons in addition to a feeling of political loss of sovereignty.

[25] Several recent studies, however, have begun to nuance this aspect of Lucan reception and read Lucan's influence in other arenas. See Freyja Cox Jensen, *Reading the Roman Republic in Early Modern England*; and Edward Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar,* who links Lucan to humanistic pedagogy in the sixteenth century.

Ages, and Lucan was certainly present in medieval England.[26] He is quoted extensively by Anglo-Latin writers, including Geoffrey of Monmouth, and mentioned in several vernacular texts by name, often along with Ovid, Statius, and Virgil as the great lights of classical poetry. Additionally, and perhaps primarily, English writers encountered Lucan through French translations and adaptations, such as *Li Fait des Romains,* which circulated very widely, or *Li Hystoire de Jules César*.[27] However, the lack of a translation into English until the early modern era (the first full English translation, by Arthur Gorges, would not appear until 1614) has meant that he has received very little attention with regards to medieval English literature, especially in the vernacular. But this is not unusual in medieval reception history; writers encountered the stories of Troy, Alexander, and Aeneas through multiple late antique and medieval intermediaries as well, and the popularity of the *Bellum Civile* suggests the possibility of widespread, though perhaps subtle, influence.

What Lucan modelled for the Middle Ages, I contend, is an ethical approach to the complexities and strange inversions encountered in civil war. [28] His text sees civil conflict not as

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[26] For commentary on Lucan in the Middle Ages, see Esposito, "Early and Medieval *scholia* and *commentaria* on Lucan," and for sources on the use of Lucan by medieval Latin writers, see "Lucan in Medieval Latin: A Survey of the Bibliography," both in the *Brill Companion to Lucan.*

[27] Neither has been edited recently. Settegast (1881) last edited *Li Hystoire,* and Flutre, Fernand and Kornelis Sneyders de Vogle (1935-8) are the most recent editors of *Li Fait.*

[28] Lucan as ethical guide was a role that seems to have extended well after the Middle Ages, although Lucan has primarily been read for his republicanism in contemporary criticism of his early modern reception. The introductory matter to an early modern English edition of the poem contains the following laudatory verse, which weaves Lucan's "truthfulness" in with his demonstration of perfidy for other, ostensibly less truthful strains of poetry:

Lvcan, that first in the Imperiall tongue
(In naked truth of acted history)
The ciuill wounds made for an Empire song;
Hath checkt precedent, taught succeeding Poesy,
That flatteries and fictions may delight,
May please a Tyrant, wrong a rightfull King,
May please an Orphan Iudgment, wrong the right,
Enuelop Truth, proclaime an vntrue thing.
Lucan, that first hath showne the force of verse,
Relating onely what was seene, felt, donne,
Of Conqu'rors triumphs, of the Conqu'reds herse,

a simple domestic matter but for the complicated way that it represents a perverse conquest of the self, an invasion and violation of the most proper and sovereign "home" space. In the first chapter of this dissertation, the medieval Lucan is introduced as such in the form of a twelfth-century commentary by Arnulf of Orleans. Arnulf, a famous schoolmaster and classicist, was part of the great twelfth-century French renaissance of classical studies, and his commentary on Lucan is wide-ranging, learned, and expands considerably from grammatical and interpretive advice into detailed information on the geography, astrology, and natural history of the poem, as well as occasionally ranging into commentary that connects ancient cultural practices or Latin linguistic peculiarities with medieval practice and language. He also, importantly, gives us a window into the major medieval ways of reading difficulties in Lucan's text, including the one most pertinent to our purposes here: the consistent conflation of domestic and foreign space, of conquest and civil war. As we will see, this is one of Arnulf's main points of interest in the text, and his attempts to disentangle Lucan's repeated conflations represent for him an effort to read the text as an example of writing "ethically" for future generations. Arnulf approaches Lucan as a warning to future readers against the kind of violence that the poem depicts, of the perverse exercise of conquest in the domestic sphere. Furthermore, Arnulf's commentary introduces many of the themes that we will see developed in later chapters in the English literature of "more than

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All as it left, all as it first begunne.
Not like the Trojan Theamers, fit for schooles,
Fabling of this and that in Heauen, Earth, Hell,
Sober to mad-men, turning wise to fooles,
Gods to be Neat-heards, men in starres to dwell,
Hath match't the faith, that History requires:
Hath match't best History in choyce of phrase:
Hath taught, that History in nought aspires
Aboue the truth of deeds, it selfe to raise.
This Lucan for his truth a Truch-man gaines
As true to him, as he to Truth remaines.
T. W.
(*Bellum Civile*, trans. Gorges)
For a study of Gorges's translation of Lucan that complicates the picture of early modern Lucan reception, see Paleit, "Arthur Gorges: The Unstable Translator?" in *War, Liberty, Caesar.*

civil war": questions about indigeneity and belonging, poetry and sovereignty, and the uneasy overlap between logics of conquest and rebellion.

Arnulf's commentary was popular for generations across Europe, influencing Dante and his Italian contemporaries, and was widely copied.[29] Chaucer may have known his commentary on the *Metamorphoses* and could have come into contact with the Lucan commentary through an Italian milieu, though the *Metamorphoses* connection is more concrete.[30] In any case, Lucan's vision of Rome, and perhaps even Arnulf's interpretation of that vision, was current in medieval European literary circles throughout the Middle Ages. Lucan is also an important model for a "poet and historiographer," who tells the "truth" about events in a way that makes the poem appropriate for reading ethically, as an important record of historical patterns, even though he tells of events "poetically" – that is, not strictly in order and continuously. As we will see in the chapters that follow, all of these poems similarly make a claim to some form of historicity, which represents not so much a "truth" claim in the sense of veracity or even exact verisimilitude, but rather a moral "truthfulness" that allows for such ethical reading.

The second chapter of this dissertation turns to medieval England and the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, though we remain in the setting of this text close to Rome both temporally and geographically. In some literary works, the connection between the classical and medieval worlds feels remote indeed, such as in *St. Erkenwald,* where the ancient, disinterred judge must be brought up to date by baptism before being once again rendered up to the distant past, to dust. In this text, the longing for connection with the past is palpable, but it remains unknowable; the judge returns to the grave with the mysterious inscriptions on his tomb still undeciphered.

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[29] Marti lx ff. surveys the manuscript tradition. For literary influence, see Black, "Ovid in Medieval Italy," *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, esp. 127-8.
[30] See McKinley "Gower and Chaucer," in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*,esp. p.225 for evidence of use of the *Metamorphoses* commentary.

However, this distance is not always so large: in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, the classical world walks straight into King Arthur's New Year's feast. Yet, instead of a happy reunion of political and intellectual descendants with their forebears, the representatives of the Roman emperor in this text arrive to challenge, rather than support, Arthur's sovereignty. The delegation demands their lands back, appealing to records of British submission to Julius Caesar to legitimate their demands for tribute, and an apology for Arthur's recent reconsolidation of lands lost by his father. In so doing, the Romans disrupt the clear connection between land, literature, and sovereignty, which the English chronicles that form the sources of the alliterative *Morte* claim, and which is claimed in other areas of this same poem on behalf of chronicle. At first, this unmooring from established borders seems to free Arthur, and he proceeds to embrace a burst of ecstatic expansionism, enlarging his empire as far as the gates of Rome itself. However, this new empire quickly collapses, as the Arthurian world always does, from within.

What is remarkable about the alliterative *Morte Arthure* is this devastating collision with an imagined Roman empire, and the way that this collision exposes the insufficiency of the written and oral historical tradition – even when it is, as here, envisioned as a tradition common to Rome and England – to establish rightful sovereignty over disputed lands. Both Arthur and his Roman rivals will come to characterize their sovereign aggression in the terms of a rebellion that they are rightly subduing, with appeal to documentary sources to support their claims. At issue in the dispute and the appeal to documentary authority are fundamental questions about the durability of documentary culture: is the most novel claim on a land the strongest? Or the most ancient? In a dispute over sovereignty, who or what confirms who is in rebellion against whom? Finally, and most importantly, does textuality confer or undermine sovereign authority?

Ultimately, I argue, this poem suggests that the documentary and memorializing power of poetry are best suited not to centralizing narratives but to narratives of fragmentation. As we will see, although the poem at first seems complicit in Arthur's imperial overreaching, joining him in helping to "devise" his imperial program, the poem systematically turns back on itself as it (and Arthur's life) draw to a close and his empire dissolves. This poem also, unusually, explicitly rejects the concept of Trojan appropriation in constructing English origins in a way that demonstrates its allegiance to a different vision of English history and English poetry: one of historical difference and differentiation, the memory of which is, for this poet, the true aim of Arthurian poetry.

In my next chapter, questions about sovereignty, violence, and the complicity of poetry in the exercise of both take shape not in a clash between Rome and Britain, but rather in a confrontation between generic forms: epic and romance. It has long been recognized that Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* has features of both, but I argue here that the tension is not meant to be resolved but rather recognized as indicative of the text's own concerns about sovereignty, violence, and the legacy of the classical tradition in English literature. As I point out, the poem's central figure Theseus struggles throughout the tale to impose a satisfactory ending on the quarrel of the two rival lovers, cousins Palamon and Arcite, and I link his inability to do so with his continued behavior as a "conqueror" even after he has returned home to his domestic realm. In this sense, Arcite and Palamon are not simply warring lovers but critical "reminders" of the violence Theseus wreaked abroad, challenging him instead to react with mercy on his home ground. It is only when he does so that the tale finally ends, and I link this resolution with contemporary political language of wrath and mercy, which associates wrath with foreign conquest and mercy with the domestic sphere. However, the divided identities of those that

Theseus conquers, who become, in their subjection, members of his "domestic" sphere, highlights the difficulty of maintaining this distinction clearly, and the necessity of keeping mercy at the forefront of sovereign virtue – a consideration that I suggest the text imagines as extending to rebellious elements on English soil, who are similarly between foreign and domestic identities.

Whereas "rebellion" in the first three chapters is a concept pursued in the abstract, even if it might seem to overlap with contemporary political concerns, the first book of John Gower's *Vox Clamantis* is overtly concerned with the Rebellion of 1381. Gower presents himself as a chronicler of those events for the ages – a book that will act as an eyewitness account for future generations of the momentous and horrific events of the rebellion. However, at the same time, Gower's poem is manifestly nonhistorical, presenting a fantastical and often disjointed, even hallucinatory, take on the rebellion and, for long stretches of the poem, even departing from the main narrative entirely. Gower has been consistently read as a conservative and royalist figure and in some ways this poem seems to bear that assessment out quite securely, as Gower depicts the rebellious peasants as simple beasts, as critics often note, incapable of intelligible speech.

In this chapter, however, I make the case for Gower as a detailed and important thinker about the rebellion and its meaning.[31] Although the beast allegory that opens the *visio* has struck many readers as entirely dismissive, I show that the poem is a sustained effort to come to terms with the wider meaning and significance of the rebellion for the English state, the ruling classes, and English self-conception. In an elaboration of the argument first presented in the previous chapter on the *Knight's Tale,* I follow in Gower's text a more detailed consideration of the

[31] A trend of such interpretation does exist on this poem, including Salisbury on the *Vox Clamantis,* "Violence and the Sacred City," and Arner on Gower's other work, in her *Vernacular Rising.* However, Arner explicitly disavows the *VC* as a vehicle for Gower's serious thought on the topic, seeing this instead as a later development in the *Confessio Amantis.* These readings are addressed in more detail below.

peasants as a potentially foreign political element within English heritage and English domestic space. Although it might initially seem to be a profoundly dismissive choice to cast the peasants as beasts, Gower also demonstrates an uneasiness about the vicious punishment of the rebels in this effort to remove them from English political space and cast them as stateless, suggesting that the treatment of English citizens as such was troubling to him. Gower's palpable sense of profound betrayal, moreover, expressed through this figure of exile, demonstrates compellingly his apparent belief, prior to the rebellion, that the peasants were his countrymen and fellow-citizens, a conclusion that may seem counterintuitive given his animalistic portrayal of them. This conclusion is borne out by the surprising connection that Gower draws between the rebellious peasants and the earliest founders of England, who, the comparison suggests, share a common heritage of "wandering" and exile. In some sense, then, the peasants are at their most English in their rebellion, manifesting a trait inherent in England's historiography. Ultimately, the real horror of Gower's vision is derived not from the abomination of the peasants, but from the prospect of this rebellious element in English society as inherent in the meaning of "Englishness" itself. In this case, all of English society is condemned by the *visio Angliae*: the foreign element at the heart of "Englishness" is not a glorious Trojan inheritance, but as the alliterative *Morte* poet, Chaucer, and Gower all suggest, the recursive violence and disputed sovereignties of the darkest tales that the classical world had to offer.

Thus, what the texts that I read here represent is not English literature grappling with how to define England against other European powers or against classical models, but against the kernel of strangeness, of foreignness, at its core. However, despite this dark image of English social and literary heritage, there is running throughout these chapters a theme that is perhaps well-known about medieval poetics, but that nevertheless bears repeating: for these writers, the

poem is an ethical object.[32] It is from this position that they examine and critique the violence in their sources and the violence that they themselves depict, even as aesthetic or political concerns come in and out of view. In other words, violence in these texts is never entertainment, never less troubling because it is "unreal." For these texts, domestic unrest and sovereign responses to it, and sometimes even perpetration of it – what I have been here designating together with the term "more than civil war" – present a genuine ethical difficulty that is the province of poetry to explore: a people has become enemy to itself. How does one treat an enemy in one's own home, or next door? What is justified or unjustified under such conditions? Does a rebel *de facto* renounce his homeland, or his rights?

In asking and answering these questions in different ways, these poems of "more than civil war" are an unwritten entry in the study of just war literature in the Middle Ages, which tends to focus on warfare against external enemies and religious obligations.[33] As much as these international chivalric standards apply in campaigns abroad, they do not answer the particularly difficult questions posed by the category confusion of domestic rebellion. But there is also a wider point, despite their sometimes minute domesticity: in these poems, there is a persistent

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[32] See Mary Carruthers, "Memory and the Ethics of Reading," *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, ch.5, where she argues that medieval ethics is understood to be "contained" in textual memory rather than in an abstract ethical code. (Carruthers 182) John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the* Libro de buen amor, stresses the involvement of the reader in constructing the ethical example from a text, characterizing medieval adaptation of classical texts as an effort to make them able "to be consumed ethically." (Dagenais 61-2) J.Allan Mitchell makes a similar argument in his work on exemplarity in Gower and Chaucer, arguing that ethical meaning depends on narrative and that exemplary narratives therefore explicitly fashion themselves with an eye to their reception and the reader's participation in creating ethical meaning. (Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*). In the present study, medieval adapters of the classics exemplify both of these approaches; they certainly alter or seek out altered versions of the classical stories for their own works, but there is also the sense of a distinct and consistent ethical meaning, for example, inherent in the story of the recursive violence of Thebes, a "textual memory" of ethical reading. In this case, we will see that the recursiveness of the textual tradition itself becomes implicated ethically in its continued propogation of the violent cycle that it depicts.

[33] See Frederick Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages.* The essays in Richard Kaeuper, ed. *Violence in Medieval Society*, take a wider view of the forms of violence in medieval society and attempts to control it. Of course, such studies generally do not engage literary texts as indications of ethical behaviors and judgments, but as I indicate above, the texts studied here take on the imperative to read their violence ethically, in their claim to be, like Lucan, both poets and historians.

ethical dimension to the division of space into domestic and foreign spheres, and the terms of these disputes often reveal more insidious goals. Breaking down the correlation between "friend" and "fellow citizen" also undermines the correlation between "enemy" and "foreigner," a distinction we will see is often difficult to maintain in any case, and certainly in the Middle Ages, in the face of the cultural memory of shared descent, universal history, and a shared "human race" (*genus humanum*). Poetry itself is sometimes complicit in projects of designation and exclusion; but can also, as we will see here, powerfully expose the interpretive strategies that authorize sovereign violence, can speak through the "wretchedness," and the "endless sorrow" of wars waged "among friends."

Civil War, Inside and Out: Reconstructing Rome in Arnulf of Orléans's Glosses on Lucan

Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile* enjoyed a great deal of popularity throughout the Middle Ages as a core school text, and it is in this context that Arnulf of Orléans, the twelfth-century Classics master, most likely composed his commentary on the poem.[1] Arnulf was part of the renaissance of classical study that took place in the twelfth century in France, during which the teaching, annotation, and translation of classical works was a central activity in cathedral schools.[2] Arnulf apparently wrote several commentaries on the works of Ovid, a commentary on the *Bellum Civile*, and possibly also on Horace.[3] In his commentary on Lucan, Arnulf in many ways performs the same activities that the poem's early medieval commentators do, though in more detail. He offers a great deal of philological information on Lucan's poem, explaining difficult grammatical constructions and the meaning of obscure phrases, joining up discontinuities in the narrative, and offering further information on unfamiliar place names, tribal names, and the flora and fauna of the remote and exotic locations in the poem.

However, the utility of Lucan in Arnulf's eyes did not stop at the level of its prosody, the wittiness and bite of its famous *sententiae,* or the arcane details of astronomy, geography, and zoology that so fascinated medieval commentators and encyclopedists.[4] For Arnulf, the

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[1] Arnulf has received some critical attention as a major figure in the twelfth-century revival of classical studies, but almost always for his commentary on the *Metamorphoses,* not Lucan, although the *Metamorphoses* commentary has not been reccently edited. The most sustained study of Arnulf is Ghisalberti, *Arnolfo d'Orleans.* See also remarks in the introduction to Marti, ed. *Glosule super Lucanum.* Murgatroyd, "Arnulf and Lucan," does consider the utility and interest of this commentary for classicists.

[2] The classic study is CH Haskins, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance*; see also Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*. Canterbury was also a center of classical study and had close links with Chartres, the other major French center of classical scholarship.

[3] Marti, *Glosule,* xxiii-xxv.

[4] On Lucan scholia, see Paolo Esposito, *Gli scolii a Lucano ed altra scoliastica Latina* and "Early Medieval Scholia." For medieval readers, Lucan was also unique in occupying two distinct roles at the same time: *poeta et historiographus*, "poet and historian," because he records historical events with a high degree of verisimilitude, but with a poetic – that is, indirect – method of presentation. See Arnulf's Accessus 4.4. Arnulf is widely quoted on this

primary function of Lucan's poem was, in fact, ethical (*ethice*).[5] In this sense, Arnulf's commentary is a key link between early medieval philological and grammatical readings of the poem and a later, ethical approach to the issues of violence and sovereignty that it explores. Arnulf announces this ethical content at the very beginning of his *accessus*, his preface, to his commentary on the poem:

> [Lucan's] intent is to treat of this history, so that it might be pleasing to the Roman people and the senate, and so that he might dissuade others from waging a similar war. This is very useful, since after seeing what happened to each of the main players in the civil war – that is, Pompey having lost his head, and Caesar stabbed twenty-four times in the capitol – we might be warned off starting a similar war ourselves.[6]
>
> *Intencio sua est tractare de hac historia, tum ut populo Romano placeat et senatui, tum ut ceteros a consimili bello deterreat. Vtilitas magna quia, uiso quid contigerit utrique de ciuili bello, uidelicet et Pompeio capite truncari, Cesari XX et IIII plagis in Capitolio perforari, caueamus nobis a bello consimili.* (Accessus p. 3)

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remark with reference to medieval poetics; his *accessus* is edited separately in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*. On Lucan as *poeta et historiographus* and medieval literature, see, e.g. Mark Chinca, "The Example of Lucan."

[5] The phrase "ethice supponitur" is a tag that appears in many medieval commentaries on ancient works, as part of the textual apparatus that assessed the area of philosophy to which the work pertained. Several other examples, including commentaries on Ovid and Horace, are edited in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism.* See Minnis, *Theory of Authorship,* esp. 23-28 for a more detailed discussion of the "parts of philosophy" aspect of medieval literary commentaries.

[6] Translations in this chapter are my own. The text of Arnulf is from the only modern published edition, prepared by Berthe M. Marti in 1958. Selected glosses do not necessarily represent Arnulf's entire gloss on that lemma; I have excerpted relevant portions of some glosses here for reasons of length. Throughout this dissertation, quotations from the main text under discussion in the chapter are cited parenthetically by line number; quotations from other text are cited in footnotes. Quotations from Arnulf's commentary are cited by the book and line number of the *lemma* to which they pertain in Lucan's text.

Lucan's poem is to be read as a negative example, a warning to future readers about the dangers of such warfare as it depicts. However, the precise nature of that warfare, and therefore what warning it might have offered to future generations, is a complicated matter, and one that has vexed the criticism of Lucan from his earliest readers consistently up to the present time. Lucan says that the topic of his poem is *bella plusquam civilia,* "wars worse than civil," or "more than civil wars." But "more" in what sense? "Worse" how?[7]

In Arnulf's case, this phrase provokes a curious reaction, not for the diversity of the possible explanations he offers but, on the contrary, because of his decisiveness in its interpretation. On the whole, Arnulf is inclined to provide multiple explanations side-by-side within a gloss if they are available to him, often offering several more interpretations than earlier commentaries, and from multiple sources. This practice extends even to variant manuscript readings, which Arnulf presents alongside one another without adjudicating between them. On *bella plusquam civilia,* however, he is unusually definitive, not only in affirming a single correct interpretation, but in his vehement denial of the validity of one school of thought.[8] In particular, Arnulf dismisses as "silly" (*frivolum*) the opinion of those who would say that the wars are "worse than civil," or "more than civil," because of the considerable involvement of foreign fighters in what is nominally a Roman civil war: both Caesar and Pompey's armies are full of soldiers from conquered lands. Instead, Arnulf claims, we are to read "more than civil" as a war in which family members fight against one another –

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[7] The question remains an open one. Modern readings of Lucan offer a number of ways in which the wars of the poem might be characterized as *plusquam civilia.* See Roche's commentary, *Lucan, De Bello Civili Book I,* ad loc. for a useful summary.

[8] Arnulf in fact begins in more customary fashion by offering multiple interpretations of the plural that opens the poem, *bella*: "Wars," [Lucan] says in the plural because there was not just one war, but rather many of them; or, he uses the plural in place of the singular." *BELLA dicit pluraliter quia non unum sed multa fuerunt bella, uel plurale pro singulari.* Marti notes that Arnulf does feel comfortable denouncing the opinions of others in rather uncategorical terms, but this tendency considered across the entire bulk of the commentary is not as frequent as it sounds here, and rarely as vehement as in this first gloss. (Marti xxx)

brother against brother, father against son. Moreover, after dismissing the idea in his gloss on the first line of the poem, Arnulf returns in a later gloss on a different term to once again denounce such interpretations.

What initially seems here like it could be a moment of pique, or perhaps a personal grudge against particular contemporaries, develops, as the commentary progresses, into a way of reading Lucan's poem that first reveals and then attempts to resolve one of its most persistent ambiguities: the consistent conflation of citizen and foreigner through which Lucan develops his critique of Roman imperialism. As we will see, Arnulf, in his commentary, deploys a postclassical vocabulary to try to make sense of these conflations, carefully distinguishing between foreigners and Romans in his explanations of the various conflicts in the poem – two categories that Lucan repeatedly challenges. Looking at the poem through Arnulf's eyes not only provides unexpected insight into a major complication of Lucan's poem, but also into a medieval mind considering the complicated role that indigeneity plays in the war for sovereignty in the *Bellum Civile.*

For Lucan, Rome's hunger for conquest, which has left almost the entire known world under Roman control, has rendered useless the distinction between Roman and non-Roman, citizen and foreigner, friend and enemy, and opened the door in turn to the conquest of Rome by its own armies. Arnulf, however, attempts to restore these categories that are so confused by Lucan's "wars worse than civil," reconstituting a distinct interior, domestic space, and an exterior, foreign space for contemporary readers. In drawing such boundaries within the poem, Arnulf seeks to categorize its violent conflicts as clearly licit or illicit in medieval terms, where Lucan is consistently ambiguous. In this sense, Arnulf's glosses indicate that he believed the *Bellum Civile*'s particular vision of the interplay of indigeneity, citizenship, and

political sovereignty to be of keen interest to medieval readers, but that it required paratextual support to clarify the moral quality of the poem's violence. Ultimately, for Arnulf, clarifying Lucan's terminology is aimed at the higher goal of clarifying the relative culpability of the wars' participants in a way that makes the poem useful as an object for later readers to be able to "read" their own present situations with reference to its ethical lessons. In later chapters of this dissertation, we will see that later medieval writers do bear out this interest in the convoluted ethics of "wars worse than civil," as debates over space and sovereignty play out in fourteenth-century English literature, provoked by this same type of ambiguous violent conflict somewhere between conquest and civil war.

Lucan's Rome

While Arnulf sees in the *Bellum Civile* a warning to future generations, the tone of the poem itself is one of lament rather than admonition. Lucan wrote from the Neronian era, when the results of the civil wars that he narrated in his poem had solidified into longstanding political and social conditions. Lucan's own politics are a topic of heated debate in the study of his work, not least because of the tantalizing (but ultimately unreliable) detail that has reached us in his *vita*, which claims that he was executed for his role in a rebellious plot against the emperor. As proof of its author's political beliefs, the poem is far less conclusive, its allegiances seeming to shift from moment to moment, Pompey to Caesar, the Republic to the current emperor. Even the title of the poem has been subject to debate. Lucan's epic is now generally called the *Bellum*

Civile or *De Bello Civili*, but historically, it was called the *Pharsalia.*[9] The alternation between these two titles is illustrative of major tensions at the very heart of its criticism: is the poem a critique of a specific set of historical circumstances and actors, which converged on the battlefields at Pharsalia? Or is the poem concerned with a more abstract concept of civil war and its atrocities, and therefore a wider indictment not only of historical figures but also current ones, whose power is derived from the events he reluctantly narrates? Is the poem about an internal, civil war, as the current title would suggest? Or is it about a worldwide war, whose climactic battle occurs on foreign soil, at Pharsalus, as the historical title acknowledges?

From this perspective, the problems that Arnulf and many generations of further readers have encountered in defining the war as a *bellum civile* begin to make sense. The concept of civil war in this poem is challenged by the multifaceted and often shifting political identities of conquered peoples as they take their place as parts of the ever-expanding Roman Empire. They are not exactly Romans, but also not entirely foreign, and this is particularly true of those who belonged to very recently conquered areas.[10] Moreover, the city of Rome herself, both at the time of the *Pharsalia's* writing and its setting, was full of foreigners, freed slaves, and noncitizens.[11] And the defining events in Rome's journey from republic to empire happened far from Rome, in the dual, often-conflated locations of Pharsalia and Philippi. It will become clear that the issues of space and identity in fact converge: when the Roman Empire expanded in space, its identity and the identity of the domestic citizen was challenged. As Rome added territories to itself, not only was it forced to redefine its own political identity,

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[9] The alternative, historical title "Pharsalia" has fallen out of favor. See Ahl, *Lucan: An Introduction,* 326-332 for a discussion of the arguments against the title, which stems from Lucan's phrase *Pharsalia nostra* at line IX.985 of the *Bellum Civile*. (Herafter *BC* in notes.)

[10] The Social Wars at Rome, from 91-88 BC were not very distant in time from the civil war between Pompey and Caesar in 49-45BC. The Social Wars admitted only the citizens of Italian city-states into Roman citizenship; as Lucan's poem highlights, but the time this civil war arose, the issue of citizenship at Rome was of direct relevance for much more of the world than the Social Wars covered.

[11] Lucan himself points this out at *BC* I.510-514. This passage will be discussed in more detail below.

but its conquering generals came to possess a distinctly divided identity as well, one which would trouble Rome greatly upon their return to the city.[12]

The presence of these foreigners, and the power that the victors Caesar and Pompey have derived from conquering them, has had a destabilizing effect on the Rome of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.[13] For the first time, the question arose: when Aeneas's descendants were given *imperium sine fine,* did that apply to Rome herself? In Lucan's poem, the weight of Rome has shifted away from the city, and for the duration of this poem Rome herself occupied the position that previously was known only to her conquered peoples: victim of Rome, outsider, and foreigner to herself. Lucan's evocative Virgilian technique of overlaying multiple perspectives on the same battle, making it unclear whether we are witnessing foreign conquest, or civil war, marks this unusual role reversal. This confusion of traditional roles of aggressor and victim, conquering peoples, and conquered, allowed the conquerors themselves to step into the ideological vacuum to exploit their own split identities, transgressing on the previously differentiated and protected domestic sphere.

Accordingly, Lucan's words for "enemies" in the poem all turn out to be challengingly contingent: on wartime, on rapidly changing emotions. Just before the battle of Pharsalus, Lucan laments the contrast between the impending battle and more glorious examples from Rome's past, in the process demonstrating the exact source of the tension Arnulf's glosses trace out:

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[12] See Galinsky for a discussion of Augustus's staging of the transition from military general to civilian ruler. (Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* esp. "The Altar of Augustan Peace," 141-154).

[13] Although Lucan would have had no way of knowing as much because of his early death, Nero would be last of the Julio-Claudians, so that his meditation on imperial power instituted by Caesar, exploited by Augustus, and brought to a level of excess by Nero spans a delineated arc in the history of imperialism at Rome. The shifting of the "great weight" of Rome toward the outer edges of the empire might suggest one more reading for the infamous Neronian dedication, in which Lucan urges Nero to occupy the middle ground, with Rome (the domestic sphere) always in his sight:

Sed neque in Arctoo sedem tibi legeris orbe,
Nec polus aversi calidus qua vergitur Austri;
Unde tuam videas obliquo sidere Romam.
(*BC* I.53-55)

"Every war gave new peoples to you, [Rome]!" (*Omne tibi [Roma] bellum gentes dedit...)*[14] The statement is a proud boast about Rome's great martial past, but at the same time an illustration of the challenges that underlie its current state of conflict. Although Pharsalia itself, to Lucan's displeasure, did not add new foreign conquests to Rome, this does not mean that the *novae gentes* are not visible in the poem. We will see them populating Rome's armies, and fighting Rome's civil war, and we will see in Arnulf's glosses an attempt to clarify their role and their stake in the ongoing violence. In their capacity as foreigners-turned-allies, they end up sharing an ambiguous political space with Romans-turned-enemies in a way that consistently disrupts the equation of "foreigner" with "enemy," and "friend" with "fellow-citizen."

From Peoples to Foreigners

As the difficult phrase *bella plusquam civilia* appears in Lucan's very first line, Arnulf too is compelled to address this central issue of the poem just as his commentary begins. His intention in this first gloss on *bella plusquam civilia* is to dismiss, rather than examine, the relevance of the involvement of foreigners in Rome's civil war. However, the terminology that he uses to explicate this issue for readers neatly illustrates the genuine difficulty in distinguishing "inner" and "outer" in Lucan's poem, and forms the first indication of a concern that, despite his protestations to the contrary here, takes up a considerable amount of his energy in the commentary that follows. On *plusquam civilia*, Arnulf offers the following:

> "MORE THAN CIVIL" because not only [was it] citizen against citizen, but also brother against brother, even son against father. For it seems silly that they say it is

[14] *BC* VII.421

> MORE THAN CIVIL because it is not only citizens but also foreigners that were involved. For one type of war is a "hostile war," another civil, another waged within the "shell" (*testa*) of the city, from whence it is called "in*test*ine," another outside, from which it is called "not in*test*ine," another more than civil, of fathers against sons, of sons against fathers and the like, whether it is internal or external.
>
> PLVS QVAM CIVILIA *quia non tantum ciuis contra ciuem sed etiam frater contra fratrem, filius quoque in patrem. Nam illud friuolum esse uidetur quod dicunt* PLVS QVAM CIVILIA *quia non solummodo ciues sed etiam extranei interfuerunt. Bellum aliud hostile, aliud ciuile, aliud intra testam urbis factum, unde intestinum dicitur, aliud extra, unde non intestinum, aliud plus quam ciuile, patrum in filios, filiorum in patres et similium, siue intra siue extra.*
>
> (Arnulf, *Glosule* I.1)

As with the schema of warfare that we saw from Aelfric, what initially looks to be an attempt to create a comprehensive division of the types of war quickly dissolves, under scrutiny, into a system whose hierarchies, gaps, and overlaps are unclear. In between "civil" and "more than civil" there appears a curious category of war that is confined to a city, as well as war that is waged outside its walls. It is also unclear whether some of these categories might logically fall under others – is "non-intestine" warfare a "hostile war"? Is "intestine" war a civil war, or something different? Finally, and most importantly for our purposes here, how could one possibly have an "external" war in which the combatants were fathers and sons?

Several of these concerns will recur for Arnulf in his commentary as he encounters concrete instances of violence in the text. However, what is clear in this comment already is that Arnulf will be focused on reconstructing an inner and outer layer in this poem, a clear domestic and a clear, separate foreign sphere within the Roman Empire as Lucan depicts it. In his gloss above, Arnulf amplifies the "peoples" (*generes*) of Lucan's poem into "foreigners" (*extranei,* "outsiders"). Similarly, nonspecific "war" (*bellum*) becomes "hostile war" (*bellum hostile*), seemingly in opposition to "civil war." The dichotomy of inner and outer appears repeatedly within the gloss, as Arnulf posits wars inside and outside cities; among citizens and among outsiders; and finally, a "more than civil war" that is envisioned in a nebulous "inner or outer" space, with the precise limits of that space (inside or outside what, or where?) left unspecified. In other words, even as Arnulf explicitly states his disbelief in the claim that a war occurring "internally or externally" had any bearing on its definition as *plusquam civilia,* the clarifications that he must make to Lucan's terms in this comment illustrate its validity as an active interpretive problem in the text.

In earlier medieval commentaries on the *Bellum Civile,* we can see what Arnulf was reacting to in the commentary tradition. We possess two major early medieval collections of glosses on Lucan, edited separately as the *Commenta Bernensia* and the *Adnotationes super Lucanum.*[15] The former in particular draws upon a body of glosses that may date back, in portions, to late antiquity, though Arnulf may not have had these particular commentaries to hand as he compiled his own.[16] Both of these early medieval commentaries explain that the civil war is *plusquam civilia* both because it involves intrafamilial warfare and because it involves "peoples" (*generes*) warring against peoples. The author of the *Adnotationes* states*:*

[15] Henceforth *ASL* and *CB*. The characterization of these texts as separate works has been questioned. On the relationship between the two commentaries, see Shirley Werner, "On the History."
[16] See Marti xxix – xxxiv for a discussion of Arnulf's sources.

"MORE THAN CIVIL," because it was waged between peoples and between kindred" (*PLVS QUAM CIVILIA inter generum enim et socerum gerebantur*).[17] The *Commenta Bernensia* expands this slightly: "MORE THAN CIVIL from the quality, that is waged between both peoples and kindred. Where sons fought savagely against fathers and brothers with brothers." (*PLVS QVAM CIVILIA a qualitate ut pote inter generum et socerum gesta. ubi et filii cum parentibus et fratres dimicauere cum fratribus*).[18]

Arnulf's term *extraneus* is not a word that appears in these glosses, nor, in fact, anywhere else in these commentaries. Instead, they have *genus*, an ambiguous term which does not in itself draw any line between "inner" and "outer," and thus also poses something of an interpretive problem both in the commentaries and in the *Bellum Civile* itself. Here, however, Arnulf's later reaction implies that these commentaries, and others like them, mean by it something like "peoples" or "races." Thus, for these early medieval readers, the tension in the phrase *plusquam civilia* meant recognizing that at the same time that the poem narrates a war that turns fatally inward, the war between Caesar and Pompey also expands outward into the entire Roman, and even non-Roman, world. It expands so widely that on the battlefield at Pharsalus Lucan can say: *vincendum pariter Pharsalia praestitit orbem, "*the whole world lay in front of Caesar to be conquered at once." What kind of civil war could this be? The answer is: it can't be, and these commentators, perceptively, locate the quality of "more than" civil war *both* in the fighting between family members and on the very opposite end of the scale: the involvement in the war of the farthest-away people and places.

Lucan's early medieval readers, then, accept the poem's own terminology on this point as sufficient, in spite of, or perhaps because of, its ambiguity. For Arnulf, however, it seems to

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[17] *ASL*, ed. Endt. I.1
[18] *CB*, ed. Usener I.1. *CB* also adds the possibility that it is *a quantitate* – a result of the large number killed.

have been critical to clarify both prior commentary on this phrase, and to begin the work that he would continue in the glosses to come: of disentangling the multiple threads of warfare – against foreigners; alongside foreigners, against fellow-citizens; within the city of Rome, and outside of it – that make up the *Bellum Civile.*

A War Without an Enemy

Taking up the task of disentangling these threads was no small undertaking. As Lucan's poem goes on, terms that fail to designate one side or the other in the war only proliferate. Not only *genus,* but "associate" (*socius*), "enemy" (*hostis*), and "victor" (*victor*) are applied to combatants and leaders of both armies, regardless of place of origin or allegiance to Pompey or Caesar's side. In part, this reflects Lucan's apparent disgust for both sides of the conflict and their leaders. But it also, often, has a deliberately disorienting effect when used during a battle scene, in which it will often become very difficult to follow the action, and to keep track of who is enemy or friend to whom. Where Lucan deliberately dislocates the concept of the enemy from that of the foreigner, Arnulf seeks to restore this connection for readers.[19]

[19] The link between "enemy" and "foreigner" at Rome is an insecure one already, but it is a distinction that Lucan builds up ostentatiously at the beginning of his poem, in wishing for a "foreign enemy" rather than a civil one, before systematically dismantling that equivalence in the rest of his poem. On the relationship between foreignness and hostility in Latin usage, see Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européens,* who points out that the term *hostis* does not necessarily signify foreignness in many cases, even if it originally did, but rather a range of meanings to do with equality in rights and even the obligation to provide hospitality to an equal under the law (Benveniste 92-94). Cicero muses in similar fashion in the *De Officiis* on the tangled relationship between foreignness, hostility, and hospitality via the *hostis/hospes* connection: "This also I observe—that he who would properly have been called "a fighting enemy" (perduellis) was called "a guest" (hostis), thus relieving the ugliness of the fact by a softened expression; for "enemy" (hostis) meant to our ancestors what we now call "stranger" (peregrinus). This is proved by the usage in the Twelve Tables: "Or a day fixed for trial with a stranger" (hostis). And again: "Right of ownership is inalienable for ever in dealings with a stranger" (hostis). What can exceed such charity, when he with whom one is at war is called by so gentle a name? And yet long lapse of time has given that word a harsher meaning: for it has lost its signification of "stranger" and has taken on the technical connotation of

Initially, it seems that the conjunction of enemy and foreigner in Lucan's poem is actually quite secure. In contrast to the citizen-enemies of civil war, Lucan wishes repeatedly for an apparently foreign enemy at the beginning of his poem. In the proem, Lucan urges Rome to complete its subjugation of the world before turning on itself, for *nondum tibi defuit hostis,* "not yet are you lacking a [foreign] enemy." At the end of this first book, the priestess's prophecy repeats lines from the opening of the book, including the lament about an absent enemy: "What is this madness, Phoebus, tell me, why do Roman troops meet [each other] with spears in hand, and what is this war without an enemy?" (*Quis furor hic, o Phoebe, doce: quo tela manusque / Romanae miscent acies, bellumque sine hoste est?*)[20] At the beginning of the second book, he again wishes: "We don't ask for peace, oh gods; enrage the peoples [against us]…make of all those [foreign] people enemies for us: avoid civil war!" (*non pacem petimus, superi; date gentibus iras…omnibus hostes / Reddite nos populis: civile avertite bellum)*.[21] In all of these cases from early in the poem, however, the correct interpretation of the term is dependent on an immediate juxtaposition with civil war.[22] The idea of an alternative type of war gains its meaning from a negative definition (anything that is *not* civil war, not illicit), rather than a comprehensive definition of licit, foreign war, the type Arnulf wishes to designate with *bellum hostile*.

"an enemy under arms." (*Equidem etiam illud animadverto, quod, qui proprio nomine perduellis esset, is hostis vocaretur, lenitate verbi rei tristitiam mitigatam. Hostis enim apud maiores nostros is dicebatur, quem nunc peregrinum dicimus. Indicant duodecim tabulae: "aut status dies cum hoste," itemque: "adversus hostem aeterna auctoritas." Quid ad hanc mansuetudinem addi potest, eum, quicum bellum geras, tam molli nomine appellare? Quamquam id nomen durius effect iam vetustas; a peregrino enim recessit et proprie in eo, qui arma contra ferret, remansit.*) (*De Officiis* I.xii ed. and trans. Walter Miller) However, it seems for Arnulf that the old equivalence of foreignness and hostility was to be maintained in his mind, whether through a sense that this was the correct historical meaning in Latin or because he felt it to be true with reference to his own time.

[20] *BC* I.681-2

[21] *BC* II.47; 52-53

[22] Part of the confusion here (which Arnulf also attempts to address in his terminology) is a category difference: the *hostis* is being contrasted with *bellum civile*, but these terms are not of the same order in that they describe a person or group, and a type of warfare, respectively. Although they may be drawn from the same register, their direct contrast is an uneasy one which incorporates considerable slippage between interpretive categories.

Arnulf glosses all of these lines in Lucan consistently, with the term we first saw above on the gloss to *bella plusquam civilia:* "foreigner," *extraneus.* At I.23, as Lucan laments the turning of Roman arms inward, against herself, he offers: "DEFVIT HOSTIS that is, a foreigner, since for lack of a [foreign] enemy you turned your hand against yourself." (*SED NONDVM DEFVIT HOSTIS extraneus scilicet ut pro inopia hostis in te uertas manus.*) At I.47, where Lucan asks the gods not for peace, but to make the nations of the world rise against the Romans, Arnulf specifies that these are to be foreign peoples: "GENTIBUS [that is,] foreigners" (*GENTIBVS extraneis*). When Lucan's prophetess asks the Romans what madness drove them to pursue a war without an enemy, Arnulf explains: "SINE HOSTE [that is, a] foreign one since on every side there are citizens and Romans." (I.682 *SINE HOSTE extraneo cum ex utraque parte sint ciues et Romani.*) As Lucan remarks on the depth of the wound when inflicted by a fellow citizen's hand, Arnulf reiterates the connection between hostility and foreignness: "Rome or Italy is not cut down by foreign enemies but instead by the Romans themselves." (I.32 *ALTA SEDENT Per hostes extraneos non est excisa Roma uel Italia sed per ipsos Romanos.*) We saw above that Arnulf opposed civil war to "hostile war" (*bellum hostile*), implying that this designates a "war against a foreign enemy." It seems clear from his further glosses here that this is how he understands the term, and Lucan's use of it.

However, the concept of the "enemy" as a foreigner does not remain stable in Lucan's text, and thus offers a further challenge for the commentator. As the poem transitions into actual violent conflict, the earlier clarity over the term in the abstract begins to fade in the confusion of battles in which Romans fight Romans, with foreign tribes on both sides. It is not that the idea of the "enemy" no longer appears; "enemies" (*hostes*) abound in the scenes of fighting, but in his use of this and other terms to describe enemies, allies, winners and losers,

Lucan does not discriminate between Caesarian and Pompeian, Roman or non-Roman. As the armies of both leaders are massing in the second book, the "wavering cities of Italy" (*urbes Latii dubiae*) also prepare their ramparts against "the enemy" – who, exactly, the enemy will be is not immediately clear.[23] Most convincingly, when Brutus uses the word in his speech to Cato, he makes explicit that the *hostis* is a contingent category, and not a specific person or group: *Nunc neque Pompei Brutum neque Caesaris hostem, / Post bellum victoris habes.*[24] Here again, the term *hostis* has no content except for the outcome of the war.

For Arnulf, the general concept of the *hostis* remains stable, as equivalent to "foreigner," *extraneus,* which is how he consistently glosses this word throughout his commentary. However, as the actual violence begins and soldiers begin to mix with one another on the battlefield, Arnulf has to work ever harder to sort fighters and leaders into their respective camps. In the well-known suicide scene of Vulteius and his soldiers, Lucan exploits the confusion of "friend" and "enemy" to particularly high dramatic effect, drawing ironically on the image of the conquering Roman – only this time, the Roman is conquering himself. In his commentary, we can see Arnulf wrangling with the deliberately confusing language of this section, resolving the "sides" into clear opposition with one another and clarifying who he believes is to be seen as the victor, a point on which Lucan is especially vague.

In this scene, a troop of soldiers from Caesar's army is trapped between an occupied headland and a Pompeian naval fleet, caught up by chains that their enemies have strung across the channel. These trapped men, on the urging of their leader Vulteius, choose to kill each other rather than give the enemy the opportunity to do so, in effect reappropriating the category of *hostis* from their Pompeian enemies to themselves. The scene has been identified

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[23] *BC* II.447
[24] *BC* II.283-4

as a microcosm for the poem as a whole, the raft upon which they make their stand a deliberately reductive metaphor for the Roman "ship" of state and the suicidal soldiers a figure for its societal self-destruction. Initially, the scene reads straightforwardly this way. Vulteius emphasizes that the men are "in full sight of both friends and enemies," here making a simple distinction between Caesarians and Pompeians: "The gods have placed us on this ship in sight of friends and enemies both." (*Nos in conspicua sociis hostique carina / Constituere dei...*)[25] Then, as the men fall upon one another, the categories of *socius* and *hostis* collapse, with the bloodshed from their combat with the enemy flowing without pause into their group suicide: "The scant few of them resisted the uncountable attacking hands both on land and by sea: such was their allegiance to death. When they were satisfied with the amount of blood flowing from the enemy, they turned from him and killed themselves." (*Innumerasque simul pauci terraque marique / Sustinuere manus: tanta est fiducia mortis. / Utque satis bello visum est fluxisse cruoris, / Versus ab hoste furor.*)[26] Vulteius's men die after turning their "battle rage" (*furor*) from its correct target (the enemy) to each other, and *socii* are thus transformed into mortal enemies: a version in miniature of Rome's entire civil war.[27]

Arnulf is busy during this scene keeping the sides of the battle straight. He assigns everything from actions to objects, to ships, soldiers, and their leaders to one side or the other, where Lucan's text is ambiguous. The nature of this scene means that this sometimes results in a high frequency of the same tags within a very short space of verse, as at lines 463-70, where Arnulf must label the Pompeians three times in seven particularly confusing lines: IV.463 *PVPES Pompeiane* 467 POSCIT *Pompeianos* 470 TOT MILIA *Pompeianorum*. As the scene

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[25] *BC* IV.491-2 The scene seems to occur in a natural amphitheater, encouraging spectators. See Leigh, *Lucan: Spectacle and Engagement,* esp. ch. 7 "A View to a Kill," 259-64.
[26] *BC* IV.537-40
[27] The phrase at *BC* IV.537, "*terraque marique"* is often shorthand for the Roman world, further suggesting to the reader the connection between the incident and the war as a whole.

draws to a close, he must even clarify which side are the winners (*victores*) of the battle. As Vulteius's men lay dying, a succession of emotions passes over them, and the perspectives of winners and losers, conquerors and conquered are momentarily, but profoundly, conflated:

> They delight to see the light they have despised, with disdainful face to watch their conquerors, to feel death. Now the raft is visibly heaped with bloody slaughter, and the conquerors release the bodies to be burnt and their leaders are amazed that to any man a leader can be worth so much. (trans. Braund)

> *...Despectam cernere lucem,*
> *Victoresque suos vultu spectare superbo,*
> *Et mortem sentire iuvat. Iam strage cruenta*
> *Conspicitur cumulata ratis: bustisque remittunt*
> *Corpora victores, ducibus mirantibus, ulli*
> *Esse ducem tanti.*
>
> (*BC* IV.568-73)

As with *hostis*, the particular circumstances of the men's deaths make it difficult not to read the word "victor" ironically: in committing suicide, they are their own "victors."[28] However, Arnulf, who as we will see below is in general a staunch Pompeian, assigns the victory unambiguously to the Pompeians, albeit based on a "last man standing" definition rather than

[28] The "pride" of their expressions as they look upon their victors echoes the famous prophecy of Anchises at *Aeneid* IV.853 that characterizes the Roman mission as one of "battling down the proud" (*debellare superbos*).

their direct killing of Vulteius and his men: "VICTORES that is the Pompeians who buried them." (*VICTORES scilicet Pompeiani qui eos sepelierunt*).[29] Arnulf also directs readers to consider the *ducibus* of line 572 as the Pompeians, "DVCIBVS [that is,] the Pompeians" (*572 DVCIBVS Pompeianis*), though it is unclear which leaders are being identified here, as soldiers from both sides are watching this event. In many other aspects of his commentary, Arnulf embraces ambiguity in interpretation, offering multiple possibilities; in this scene, however, he strives to consistently clarify who is on what side of the violence, who is spectating, and who is the "winner," even when the textual support for a particular interpretation is unclear.

Indigeneity and Citizenship

This scene also presents a further complication for Arnulf as a commentator, and one leads him to introduce a concept into his commentary that seems to tell us more about Arnulf's concepts of citizenship and belonging than Lucan's: indigeneity. Many of the combatants in the Vulteius battle scene are not referred to by Lucan with their affiliation in the present conflict (as Pompeian or Ceasarian) but rather, are persistently identified by their ethnic identity. At 4.448-9, the troops on Pompey's side who string chains across a channel to trip up the passing ships were, or perhaps are, named as Cilicians practicing their "old tricks" (*Poempeianus...antiqua parat arte Cilix*) – pirates, in fact, only recently subdued by Pompey, and this is ostensibly where they learned such a useful way to trap passing boats.[30] At 4.462-3, the soldiers on the doomed raft are

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[29] *BC* IV.569

[30] Pompey subdued the pirates of Cilicia in 67 BC, and resettled them as farmers in the Roman fashion before recalling them to his armies during the civil war. Opitergium had been under unofficial Roman control, but the town gained the status of Roman *municipium* under Caesar's Lex Iulia in 49 BC, as a result of this very war, and perhaps

specifically referred to as "colonists" from Opitergium, in the Venetia region: (*Hic Opiterginis moles onerata colonis / Constitit*). In both cases, those named are peoples in transition from foreigners and enemies to subjects of Rome, if not Romans.[31] Arnulf glosses these origins for readers, explaining that the reference to Cilicians refers to the "forefathers" of the current combatants. (*IV. 449 CILIX patrium*) He also explains that the associates of Vulteius are all colonists from Opitergium, as they too are referred to by this name rather than as Romans: "OPITERGINIS Opitergium is the town from which the men of Vulteius come" (IV.462 *OPITERGINIS Opitergium opidum est de quo erant socii Vulteii*.) Similarly, Arnulf takes the time to clarify the allegiances of the other tribes that Lucan mentions in the scene, which further muddies the waters of who is fighting who: "529 HISTRI these are people who support Pompey 530 LIBVRNOS these also support Pompey 531 TEMPTAVERE the Caesarians." (IV.529 *HISTRI populi sunt qui Pompeio fauebant 530 LIBVRNOS similiter isti Pompeio fauebant 531 TEMPTAVERE Cesarianos.)* Indeed, as is clear from this commentary, the text itself could be describing skirmishes among barbarians themselves, with no Roman involvement whatsoever - except for the fact that these peoples are all drawn from quite varied geographical quarters, thrown together by their subjection to the Roman empire, and now fighting one another in a Roman civil war.

The question of the colonist and his political status is one that has further implications in Arnulf's commentary, as it puts pressure on the distinction that Arnulf tries to draw throughout his commentary between citizen and foreigner. Colonists do not fit easily into one

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even the result of their bravery in this specific incident. On Pompey's pirates, and the way in which piracy in general represents a curious legal position with respect to the concept of the *hostis*, see Heller-Roazen, *Enemy of All* esp. 50-55, 93-102.

[31] See P. Encycl. of Classical Sites, *Oderzo (Opitergium)* for the history of the town. The *Commenta Bernensia* ad loc. claims that Caesar both suspended military obligations for the town for 20 years and considerably enlarged their territory in addition, as compensation for the men lost in this episode. (*Commenta*, ed. Usener)

or the other side, nor do the tribes that are becoming or already Roman, but identified here by their native land. In his commentary on these in-between terms, pressured by the ambiguity in the text, Arnulf ends up relying on the place of birth of those involved in determining their political status in the civil wars. We saw above that foreignness, or extraneity, defined hostility for Arnulf; here, on the other hand, indigeneity comes to define citizenship.

Indigeneity as the opposite term of extraneity, calling on a notion of birthplace rather than current allegiance to determine insiders and outsiders, is a dichotomy that appears throughout the commentary, as for example at I.375, where Laelius is swearing to fight for Caesar against any comer. Arnulf comments: "QVOCUMQVE that is a foreigner or a native; he shows that he has dedicated himself to [his] leader." (*QVOCVMQVE extraneo scilicet uel indigena; deuotum se esse duci ostendit.)* Where earlier commentators merely reiterate the devotion referred to in this line, Arnulf has translated an indefinite term in Lucan's text into binary categories opposed to one another: his enemies are either going to be native Romans, or foreigners – but no one in between, as, for example, the colonists we saw above. Arnulf is similarly interested in pointing out the difference between a province and a colony with reference to the locals' foreignness or indigeneity: "PROVINCIA A colony is where outsiders live; a province where indigenous people live." (I.338 *PROVINCIA…Colonia est ubi extranei, prouincia ubi indigetes remanebant*.)[32] Finally, indigeneity seems to be a critical criterion for determining citizenship, as we see in his note at book seven, line 405: "HIS [FELLOW]-CITIZEN that is, born in the same place." (*CIVE SUO id est inde genito*). By this definition, a

[32] The word *indigetes* refers to gods, not peoples, but as the following comment indicates, Arnulf seems to have understood them as possibly interchangeable, or perhaps a mistake or alternative form for *inde genitos*: "I.556 INDIGETES that is the likenesses of the gods, or INDIGETES that is something that concerns the gods, or INDIGETES that is lacking nothing, or indigenous peoples, that is, the Romans." (I.556 *INDIGETES indigetum imagines, uel INDIGETES id est inter deos agentes, uel INDIGETES id est nullius rei egentes, uel inde genitos id est Romanos.*) It is unclear here exactly what he means to say here; the best sense in the passage above seems to derive from treating *indigetes* as he glosses it above, *inde genitos*, as this is elsewhere the opposing term for *extranei.*

person's relative "Romanness" or their current political status as part of the Roman empire, is not what determines a common citizenship, but rather a common place of origin. This definition is quite different from the vision of Rome that Lucan depicts in the text, in which Vulteius can refer to all of the tribes on diverse sides fighting for Pompey as his fellow "citizens" (*cives*).[33]

The reason for this disjunction originates not necessarily from a particular misunderstanding of Roman citizenship laws, but rather from Arnulf's apparent perception of the basic political unit at play in the poem. Citizenship and belonging, for Arnulf, is specifically bound up with the institution of the city as a political unit, and in this sense, Arnulf does not engage Lucan's text on the level of its imperial politics, but rather its civic politics. In doing so, he translates the poem into a medieval framework, in which the political challenge of separating self from other is not so much due to the complications of running a vast bureaucratic empire like Rome, but to the cosmopolitan cities and towns of medieval Europe. And indeed, this turn of interpretation is foreshadowed in Arnulf's initial gloss above on *bella plusquam civilia*, where we saw that two of the categories available to him for describing the violence in this poem were a war within a city, an "intestine" war, punning on "shell," *testa,* and the somewhat more peculiar "non-intestine" war, one fought outside the boundaries of the city. However, as we will see, this idea takes slightly different form as it develops in the rest of the commentary, where it is not the location of the violence but rather the origin of the combatants that is at issue.

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[33] *BC* IV.485-6. Vulteius names the crowd gathered onshore, waiting to slaughter the raft's inhabitants, as *cives:* "they are standing on all sides, our fellow citizens, looking hungrily at our necks." *(stant undique nostris /Intenti cives iugulis).* The word is ironic in several ways: first, as a wry acknowledgement that their own countrymen are setting out to kill them; and second, because they are not yet, in fact, fellow-citizens. Opitergium would later receive that dignity as a result of their mens' bravery in this conflict.

Early in the *Bellum Civile*, Lucan does pose war within the walls of Rome as a perverse example of moderation in waging civil war.[34] Marius and Sulla, in their civil wars of 88-87 BC, confined their war to the city itself, not expanding their ambitions, as Arnulf notes, beyond taking the city itself and then taking revenge on their political enemies.[35] However, as in the opening lines of the poem, the relationship between Caesar and Pompey's war and the existing understanding of civil war is quickly complicated by a nebulous sense of "excess":

> These sufferings await, again to be endured, this will be the sequence of the warfare, this will be the outcome fixed for civil strife. Yet graver threats arouse our fear; the rush to battle brings much greater loss to humankind. For the Marian exiles, war's greatest prize was Rome regained; for Sulla, victory provided no more than complete destruction of enemy factions. These rivals, Fortune, you summon for another purpose. Neither would rouse civil war, if content with what contented Sulla. (trans. Braund)

Haec rursus patenda manent, hoc ordine belli
Ibitur, hic stabit civilibus exitus armis.
Quamquam agitant graviora metus, multumque coitur
Humani generis maiore in proelia damno.
Exulibus Mariis bellorum maxima merces
Roma recepta fuit, nec plus victoria Sullae
Praestitit invisas penitus quam tollere partes:
Hos alio, Fortuna, vocas, olimque potentes

[34] See Micah Myers, "Lucan's Poetic Geographies," 413.
[35] See Arnulf's gloss at *BC* II.225: "…Marius demanded nothing except Rome, Sulla nothing except to eradicate his enemies…" (*Marius nil nisi Romam postulauit, Silla nil nisi sibi inuisos tollere…*).

Concurrunt. Neuter civilia bella moveret,

Contentus quo Sulla fuit.[36]

This excess proves similarly difficult to characterize. The language in which the difference between these wars is conveyed to the reader is characteristically obscure: if the current combatants would be satisfied with the city herself, or simply to destroy their enemy factions, Lucan says, they would *not* wage civil war.[37] However, this is precisely what Sulla did, so it is difficult to see how Sulla would be an example of moderation, of stopping short of the kind of disaster that is about to happen in Rome. By this logic, if the conquerors were satisfied with Sulla's winnings, they *would* wage civil war – and they are. What has changed is that now "the entirety of the human race" is involved, and neither Rome (which Caesar takes quickly and without fanfare) nor the destruction of partisans in the city (who are barely mentioned in the poem, edged out by Pompey and Caesar's foreign armies) appropriately addresses the scope of the war.

Arnulf, characteristically wishing to create a binary between Romans and non-Romans, notes at this passage that the "greater part of the human race" refers to the presence of both Romans and others in the city of Rome: "HUMAN since there were more there than just Romans, and the Roman race was there, this indeed would be [the] human [race]." (*II.226 HVMANI quod plus fuit quam Romani et quia ibi Romanum genus fuit, hic uero humanum…*) The particularly cosmopolitan nature of Rome is an idea that Lucan returns to several times within the poem, as an illustration of the changes at the very heart of the empire that its

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[36] *BC* II.223-232

[37] The phrase is repeated verbatim at *BC* II.655: *[Roma] Ipsa, caput mundi, bellorum maxima merces...*

imperial reach has wrought. When the city of Rome itself is deserted in anticipation of Caesar's arrival, Lucan specifically mentions the presence of many conquered peoples:

> Rome, a city teeming with peoples and with conquered nations, large enough (should the masses gather) for all humankind, was abandoned at Caesar's coming by cowardly throngs, easy prey. (trans. Braund)

> *...urbem populis victisque frequentem*
> *Gentibus et generis, coeat si turba, capacem*
> *Humani facilem venturo Caesare praedam*
> *Ignavae linquere manus.*
>
> (I.511-514)

In other words, the domestic space of Rome is already crowded with foreigners and those whom the Romans have conquered – in fact, apparently to the exclusion of Roman citizens, who are not mentioned here. Or, perhaps, they are simply undifferentiated: these terms used here are some of the same ambiguous ones that we saw posed a problem for Arnulf above: (*populi, genus, gentes*), terms that do not separate out the Roman from the non-Roman, the citizen from the non-citizen.

Arnulf struggles here also to frame this passage in terms that make sense to him and that might make sense to his readers. He reaches, in fact, rather resourcefully for a quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid*, which appears to organize the same difficult terms that he encountered

in the Lucanian passage above. In this line, Vergil describes his own home, Mantua, and the intersection of peoples and families that make up the population. Arnulf says, of the Lucanian passage:

> Explain [the passage] as such: POPULIS that is, those born there, for a people comes from a single city; a people is a group of those from the same city, a *gens* of diverse ones. Vergil says [of Mantua] 'the major family (*gens*) of that population (*populus*) is threefold, under each of whom are four further groups (*gentes*)' VICTIS GENTIBUS [that is,] foreigners, FREQVENTEM inhabited, or VICTIS POPVLIS ET GENTIBVS: All of this pertains to outsiders; we understand by "populos" to be those from the cities, by "gentes" those from the nations, and according to that [interpretation] FREQVENTEM is "an abundance."

> I.511 … Modo expone: POPVLIS id est indigenis, nam populus est unius ciuitatis, populus collectio eorumdem ciuium, gens diuersorum. Virgilius: 'gens illi triplex populi sub gente quaterni'. VICTIS GENTIBUS extraneis. FREQVENTEM habitatam, uel VICTIS POPVLIS ET GENTIBVS Hoc totum legatur de extraneis, per populos intelligimus de urbibus, per gentes de nationibus et secundum hoc FREQVENTEM id est habundantem.

It appears that Arnulf was looking for a cross-reference that would help him differentiate, or at least rank, these different terms for groups of people. The Vergilian quotation suggests to him his first interpretation here, which is that the "peoples" are natives (to Rome), as opposed to

the "tribes," who could come from multiple places of origin. On the other hand, it could be the case, he says, that this entire passage applies to foreigners, some from cities and some from areas of the countryside. His first instinct, however, is to see here as well two distinct groups within the city: natives, and non-natives who are differentiated from one another, even as the point of the poem itself is that they have mixed together irrevocably at Rome.

During the climactic action at Pharsalia, Lucan is less ambivalent about this condition in the city, urging the gods with rather circular logic to spare the foreigners on the battlefield, as they will be the future Romans. Again, Arnulf emphasizes that the contrast here is between foreigners and specifically indigenous Romans: "ROMANVS ERIT that is, [foreigners] will be able to live in Rome, [which will be] empty of its natives." (VII.543 *ROMANVS ERIT id est Romam indigenis uacuam habitare poterit.)* And in particular, he offers, Lucan must be upset because those who are not natives are unlikely to be of a desirable sort: "CIVE SVO that is, born in the same place FECE that is, the people, but since aliens who make a home for themselves outside their country are not of the nobility, for if they had anything of value in their country, they would not easily remain outside it, therefore he says FECE EO that is for this reason." (VII.405 *CIVE SVO id est inde genito. FECE id est plebe, sed quia alienigene qui extra patriam ponunt sibi mansionem non sunt de melioribus, nam si aliquid boni in patria haberent, extra illam de facili non remanerent, ideo dixit FECE EO, id est ad id.*) Here, we seem to get a glimpse of Arnulf's own perspective on migration, in which he explains Lucan's disdain in economic terms: it is not the nobility but the everyday worker, merchant, or tradesman who was most likely to leave home to settle elsewhere. In other words, it seems that on this difficult issue in Lucan's text – the fraught question of citizenship, peoples, races, families, groups – Arnulf reaches more than usual outside the text for an explanation of these

terms, in a way that seems to reveal the importance of indigeneity for citizenship in his own frame of reference.

Arts of Rule

Arnulf's commentary here on citizenship and indigeneity, and his commentary at the beginning of the poem on the question of *bella plusquam civilia* and the profusion of missing "enemies" (*hostes*) all share a common thread: they construct clear dichotomies out of messy conflations, establishing a correlation between insider and outsider, friend and enemy, Pompeian and Caesarian, foreigner and native-born. But to what end? Why does Arnulf care for his contemporary readers to know at all times who belongs to what side and what birthplace in the poem? Arnulf might well be simply a particular diligent explicator of this poem, dedicated to resolving readerly confusion in all corners for the sake of clarity. However, Arnulf does reveal himself to have a vested interest in resolving these ambiguities when it comes to the difficult question of assigning the moral right in this poem – something Lucan is not committed to doing; for him, blame is everywhere, as Masters's account of the poem above made clear. But Arnulf sets out to help the poem be read "ethically" by contemporary readers, and a major difficulty in reading Lucan as an ethical example, even as a negative one, is that the poem provides scant material for positive moral judgments; instead, condemnation abounds. In this context, the efforts that we have been charting to assign "sides" in the poem take shape as the prelude to an effort to understand how blame might also be assigned, and the utility of the poem for contemporary readers thus better understood.

For Arnulf, there are instead degrees of responsibility and right, as we can see in the gloss below, where Arnulf explicates "evil," (*nefas*) a frequent term that Lucan uses to characterize the literally "unspeakable" material of his poem:

> TOTIS CONCVSSI VIRIBUS ORBIS IN COMMVNE NEPHAS that is, commonly CONTENDED not commonly WICKED since the foreigners have not sinned as much as the citizens, nor the ones unknown to each other as much as the ones who did know one another, nor Pompey defending his country as much as Caesar fighting against his country; or EVIL IN COMMON lest one of the leaders seem more just, and the other more unjust, he absolves neither of them.
>
> I.5 TOTIS CONCVSSI VIRIBVS ORBIS IN COMMVNE NEPHAS id est communiter CERTATVM, non communiter NEFAS quia non tantum extranei peccauerunt quantum ciues, nec tantum non cognati quantum cognati, nec tantum Pompeius patriam defendens quantum Cesar patriam impugnans, uel IN COMMVNE NEFAS ne alter ducum iustior, alter iniustior uideatur, neutrum absoluit

At this point, the efforts that Arnulf will go to in his commentary to identify insiders and outsiders, citizens and foreigners, natives and transplants, makes sense: their identity as one or the other of these categories affects the moral quality of the violence they perpetrate in this poem.

Arnulf returns to a similar point to wonder about the difference in quality between Lucan's use of the term "wickedness" (*scelera*) and "evil," (*nefas*). As Lucan embarks on his apparent panegyric to Nero (another flash point of ambiguity in the criticism of the poem), he remarks that "wickedness and evil are acceptable costs [for the reward of receiving Nero as emperor]." (*scelera ista nefasque / Hac mercede placent*)[38] On this line, Arnulf posits:

> WICKED [DEEDS] that is civil wars which are WICKED inasmuch as they are against men, EVIL inasmuch as they are against the gods, or WICKED inasmuch as they are against foreigners, EVIL inasmuch as they are against fellow citizens.
>
> I. 37 SCELERA id est bella ciuilia que SCELERA sunt quantum ad homines, NEFAS quantum ad deos, uel SCELERA quantum ad extraneos, NEFAS quantum ad ciues.

Arnulf picks up on the difference in quality between *scelera* and *nefas,* the second having the connotation of a taboo or sacrilegious act. Committing "wickedness" is then a bad deed, but to commit "evil" goes a significant step further. This degree of difference in the moral culpability of those involved divides again here along their "national" allegiances: the war against outsiders is "wicked," perhaps because, as Arnulf comments on Cato's reference to the *gentes...ignotae*, "unknown peoples," joining this supposedly civil Roman war, "they have nothing to do with it," or perhaps because, as Aelfric says before he offers his schema of warfare, Christians under the

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[38] *BC* I.37-8

New Law ought to wage only spiritual warfare.[39] But the war of citizen against citizen is of more fundamental evil, in the same category as offending against the gods themselves.

Even though Arnulf recognizes that the wars had "nothing to do" with at least some of the foreign tribes involved, he nevertheless entertains the possibility that the violence perpetrated against them was still less evil than the violence perpetrated against the self. In fact, a more definite statement of this sentiment appears a few lines earlier in the commentary. On the phrase from the poem's opening lines, "What great misuse of weapons," Arnulf comments:

> WHAT MISUSE OF WEAPONS that is, abuse, just as we call the misuses [of words, figures, etc.] in the authors "taking liberties." For if one is fighting with an enemy, a weapon may be [rightly] used, but if one is fighting against oneself, then it is abuse.
>
> I.8 QUE TANTA LICENCIA FERRI id est abusio, sicut abusiones auctorum licencias uocamus. Si cum hostibus pugnarent tunc ferro uterentur sed in se modo abutebantur.

The single use of "ferro" here reinforces the point: all that matters in the exercise of war is one's perspective on the enemy. The same sword used against the self is a grave "abuse." In other words, violence is licitly exercised on foreigners, but as soon as the conqueror reenters domestic space, the same instrument turned against the self becomes a gross misuse of that impulse. But the problem, as we have seen in this section, comes in finding the dividing line between the self

[39] *BC* II.292-4, Arnulf at II.292: "GENTESTNE FVROREM Still he is proving why he [Brutus] out to be involved in the Roman wars, since there are those involved who have nothing to do with it." *GENTESNE FVROREM Adhuc probat quod debet interesse bellis Romanis quia illi intersunt ad quos nil pertinet.* "

and the other – a particularly difficult task if one is engaged in the process of aggregating more and more others to oneself. Furthermore, the process is made even more difficult if the aggressor is himself split between the identity of the other and the self – in our case, the conquered peoples and the Roman.

Together, these three comments form a train of thought that provides a rationale behind what we've seen play out in Arnulf's glosses later in the poem, in his efforts to separate the combatants in this war from one another along several fault lines. In the gloss below, we can see Arnulf musing at unusual length on the interplay of justice, wickedness, and laws in Lucan's vision of these wars:

> LICENSE GIVEN TO WICKEDNESS that is, power given over to evil; an emphatic figure of speech, not to the wicked leaders but to WICKEDNESS itself, since they were wickedness itself, who did not shrink from such warfare. This is added to augment the previous verses….or IVS DATUM SCELERI that is just Pompey, to the wickedness of Ceasar, or that is given to the more just part in wickedness, that is victory; for the one who is the victor seems more just, or that is the power given to the wicked or IVS that is indulgence of the law shown when there ought to be punishment [instead], For there is natural law, another positive, another legal, another by custom. Note that every type is violated [here] since it is against the natural law for sons to fight against their fathers, and indeed law by custom is hardly able to be observed in civil war; however, who would doubt that laws have been violated?

> I.2 IVSQVE DATVM SCELERI id est potestatem datam sceleratis; enfatica locutio, non sceleratis ducibus sed ipsi SCELERI, quia ipsum scelus erant, qui tale bellum non abhorrebant. Ad augmentationem precedentis uersus hoc adiungitur... uel IVS DATVM SCELERI id est iustum Pompeium, Cesari scelerato, uel IVS DATVM SCELERI id est iustiorem partem datam scelerato, scilicet uictoriam; iustior enim uidetur qui est uictor, uel IVS id est potenciam esse datam sceleratis, uel IVS id id est ueniam de iure datam cum puniri deberet, uel IVS DATVM id iest ius fuisse causam sceleris cum pro lege qua dampnabant reos maiestatis Romane, Cesare dampnato, maluerunt ciuiliter pugnare quam Cesarem ut ciuem recipere. Ius aliud naturale, aluid positiuum, aliud legale, aliud consuetudinarium. Nota omne ius esse uiolatum quia contra naturale filii agebant qui cum patribus pugnabant, consuetudinis uero ius in ciuili bello minime potest obseruari; leges autem uiolatas esse quis dubitet?

Here, Arnulf provides a somewhat astonishing array of possible interpretations for this phrase. At issue in this moment are questions that must be answered in order to read the poem, as Arnulf wishes to, ethically: what are the criteria of wickedness or evil in the poem? And who performs it? Is Pompey or Caesar on the right side of the law? On this last question, Lucan's poem itself is closer to the perspective of Brutus, who makes it clear in his talk with Cato that whoever returns the victor – the "conqueror" – from the war will be held as his enemy: *Nunc neque Pompei Brutum neque Caesaris hostem, / Post bellum victoris habes.*[40] Pompey and Caesar are both seasoned conquerors with armies of barbarians behind them; both vain and power-hungry, though Pompey is careful to say that he stopped just short of taking an imperial stance. For the moment, here, early in the poem, Arnulf entertains a multitude of possibilities.

[40] *BC* II.283-4

As his commentary goes on, however, Arnulf emerges as a relatively consistent Pompeian, though perhaps ultimately by default, because of Pompey's passivity rather than any special virtue. Caesar, on the other hand, is an overly active force in the poem, unable to transition from a general to a private citizen. In particular, Caesar's advance on Rome is explicitly compared to his conquering activity in the empire's outer provinces; it is the transference of that aggression, the use of the same weapon used against foreign enemies on the self, that makes his activities transgressive – "licence" or "abuse," as we saw Arnulf putting it above. We can see this in the way that Lucan describes Caesar as he prepares to cross the Rubicon. In the eyes of the people of Ariminum, a border town where Caesar wages his first brief campaign, he seems more mighty than they remember him before – he is *victoque immanior hoste*. There are two ways to read the phrase: as an ablative absolute ("greater after conquering the enemy"), or an ablative of comparison with *immanior* ("fiercer than the enemy he had conquered"). Arnulf mentions both possibilities, but in any case it is the ferocity of the enemy that in some sense transfers to Caesar himself, a direct throughline from his conquering abroad to his conquering at home:

> FEROX VICTOQVE IMMANIOR HOSTE that is more fierce than before, since he was proud on account of the enemy he conquered, or IMMANIOR that is more fierce than the enemy that he conquered, who was fierce enough in his own right and to that extent he spared neither his own [countrymen] nor enemies in war.

> I.480 FEROX VICTOQVE IMMANIOR HOSTE magis scilicet furibundus quam primitus, pro uicto hoste erat superbus, uel IMMANIOR id est magis furibundus quam

> hostis quem uicerat qui satis est furibundus et adeo quod nec sibi parcit in bello nec hosti.

Much of Caesar's fearsomeness derives from the foreign peoples at his back, both in the sense of those who serve in his army and those he has left behind, conquered. But it also seems that he himself has undergone a change during his activities abroad, and been made more fierce by the exercise of military power. In other words, the townspeople of Ariminum do not simply see potential enemies in Caesar's train, but they also see represented in the great mass of fierce-looking conquered tribes Caesar's own power, which for the first time he appears ready to exercise in the domestic sphere.

Like Pompey, Caesar has also mobilized his troops (who are "sparsas" – scattered all over the empire, also like Pompey's) straight from a foreign province, Gaul, and set them immediately on a course for Rome:[41]

> DESERVERE He recounts the ones who are called up so that Caesar's strength might seem all the greater, with the scarcity of his partisans and the multitude of Pompey's supporters known – he who was able to conquer such a great many with so few.

> I.396 DESERVERE Enumerat euocatos ut cognita Caesariensium paucitate et Pomepianorum multitudine, uirtus Cesaris maior uideatur esse qui cum paucis tantam multitudinem deuincere potuit.

[41] *sparsas per Gallica rura cohortes / Evocat et Romam motis petit undique signis...* (*BC* I.394-5)

Arnulf also traces Caesar's slippery way of speaking, which attempts to exploit the category confusion we have been following throughout this chapter:

> CIVEM not as an enemy, as [he will not plunder] with fire nor sword; or, as a citizen to be honored, not as an enemy to be feared. Note why Caesar should wish for this, that is, so that his cause will appear more just.
>
> II.446 CIVEM non hostem cum nec igne nec ferro depopuletur uel ut ciuem honorari non ut hostem metui. Nota cur Cesar hoc desideraret, uidelicet ut sua causa iustior appareret.

Here, as Arnulf's glosses indicate, we see the categories that we have been tracing of citizen and enemy collapse within a single person. The earlier difficulties we saw with the category of an absolute "enemy," and the use instead of words that are highly contingent is illustrating that the ideological vacuum that the emperor stepped into already existed, and in fact perhaps even precipitated the change in government that Caesar will bring about. The categories of the enemy and the foreigner, and their difference from the Roman *cives,* were already becoming unclear as Rome's avarice, and the avarice of its generals, grew, and this in turn left the door open for conquerors to exploit that ambiguity, and to treat citizens as foreigners to be conquered.

Memory and Forgetting in Civil War

We have been following Arnulf's commentary on Lucan as an effort to redraw boundaries, reconstitute affiliations, and remind readers of difference where Lucan has occluded these things. However, there is a significant exception to Arnulf's efforts to fill Lucan's silences, and it occurs in a prominent place: at the climactic moment of the poem, the battle at Pharsalia. At first, this comment seems to run counter to his efforts elsewhere, but it in fact discloses Arnulf's insight into the realities of civil war. As the two armies finally meet and rush toward one another in battle, Lucan's narration pulls back from the detail and assumes a distanced, wide-angle perspective, mixing together the two armies as one as he says that "these right hands ensure that, whatever plays out in Rome's ninth century [of existence], it will be free of war."[42] As he considers Lucan's authorial reasons for passing over the details of this episode, we get a glimpse into Arnulf's engagement with the emotional aftermath of civil war, and the consequences for those who would tell its stories:

> HE FACIENT Where Lucan ought to describe the battle, and to recount in what order a certain person was killed by another, and he instead passes over these things, he shows that a great deal of destruction came about because of this war, since as we have said his intention was to recall and make Roman minds recoil from civil war, and if he should say who was killed by whom, perhaps on this account the Romans would once again take up the opportunity to fight among themselves, and this is why he says EXPLEAT in restoring the number of those killed.

[42] *BC* VII.387 *Hae facient dextrae, quidquid nona explicat aetas, / Ut vacet a ferro.*

> VII.387 HE FACIENT Cum bellum deberet Lucanus describere et quo ordine quis a quo sit interfectus narrare, his pretermissis, ostendit quantitatem ruine que euenit per hoc bellum, quia ut diximus intentio eius erat reuocare et absterrere animos Romanorum a ciuili bello, et si narraret quis a quo fuisset interfectus, forsan inde Romani sumerent occasionem iterum inter se pugnandi, et hoc est quare exclamat EXPLEAT reparando numerum interfectorum.

Arnulf's comment is made in recognition of Lucan's narratorial move here to the distanced, historical viewpoint, as he unexpectedly refrains from enumerating the details of the climactic battle that readers have waited six books for, in favor of a consideration of the battle's long-term effects. And so, Arnulf too turns to consider the necessity of forgetting in civil war, a necessity that Nicole Loraux has pointed out in her study of civil war in ancient Athens.[43]

Arnulf explains this need to forget as a matter of revenge here – if citizens are reminded of who exactly killed whom, they might take up arms again and spark a new cycle of violence. However, there is another way in which the detailed narration of violent deaths can function to incite continued violence: as an example, an inspiration to continued unrest. Turning back again to the suicide scene of Vulteius, our miniature representation of the civil war as a whole, we can see Arnulf also preoccupied with the problem of visibility and invisibility when it comes to the acts perpetrated by the soldiers on the raft. In order to function as an example of virtue that will incite others on their side to war, they must be seen, named, and individualized:

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[43] Loraux, *Divided City.*

> IV.488 NON TAMEN that is, it is necessary – it is not however to be lamented, this necessity, since we are not to die in a degraded way as one does in war, when many die of whom no further mention is made. IN CECA NVBE since it is not known who kills and who is killed.
>
> IV.488 NON TAMEN licet sit necesse, non tamen nobis est dolendum de hac necessitate quia non moriemur turpiter ut in bello in quo moriuntur multi de quibus nulla est mentio deinceps. IN CECA NVBE quando et qui interfeciant et qui interficiantur ignoratur.
>
> IV.489 PERMIXTIS TENEBRIS [this means] ignorance, when it is not known who was killed by whom.
>
> IV.489 PERMIXTIS TENEBRIS id est ignorantia ubi nescitur quis a quo interficiatur.

Here, this obscurity is not a matter of blame but of valour, and spectatorship of that valour. Rather than dying anonymously on the battlefield, as Arnulf points out frequently happens, these men instead die witnessed by friends and enemies both, functioning as an example (*exemplum*) of courage for those fighters left to wage the wars after them:

> IV.491 OBRVTA unknown, since when all die together, there virtue is not seen, that is, it is not known who acted virtuously.

IV.491 OBRVTA incognita, quia cum omnes moriuntur pariter, ibi non uidetur uirtus id est nescitur quis fecerit uirtuose.

IV.492 NOS But for us it will not be that way, since we are placed before the eyes of both our enemies and those on our own side, and if we conduct ourselves admirably here, we will have witnesses from all sides.

IV.492 NOS Sed ne nobis non erit ita, quia nos in presentia hostium et nostrorum positi sumus, unde si bene egerimus testes utrobique habebimus.

Memory and civil war, then, act along two contradictory axes when they intersect. In Arnulf's commentary, these combatants are both seen and not seen, remembered and forgotten, for different reasons. Arnulf is interested in, as he puts it above, "who acted virtously" and who did not, to make this text legible for medieval readers at far remove from its events by remembering and reconstructing precisely the details that he admits must be effectively forgotten in the short term, after such a trauma.

In the chapters that follow, we will see this tension between remembering and forgetting playing out repeatedly in the waging of civil wars and wars of conquest. For those "outsiders," the *extranei* that Arnulf takes pains to identify, remembering the details of this violence will be a critical tool of resistance. For the "insiders," forgetting and even suppressing those same details will be the key to imagining an unbroken line of sovereignty that pretends resistance never existed. The profound difficulty of Lucan's text here is that those two perspectives are merged into one; the great interest of Arnulf's commentary is that while he works for the most part to

separate these perspectives in a way that makes the poem accessible and usable for medieval readers, he nevertheless does not remove himself so completely from this endeavor that the emotional and political realities of such violence are not also reflected in his commentary.

Conclusion

In his second gloss on the phrase *bella plusquam civilia,* Arnulf muses in more personal mode than the rather technical gloss we first saw above, that laid out the four distinct types of war that he knew. In this gloss, which is actually attached to the lemma *cognatas acies,* "battle lines of those known to one another," he muses:

> THE KNOWN LINES See what he said above: PLUS QUAM CIVILIA; for it is possible in a war between the Roman people and the senate to have lacked killing between brothers and acquaintances. For I don't approve of the thought of those who say that PLUS QUAM CIVILIA is said because of the foreigners. For who can recall reading about a war made among only fellow citizens without a massing of foreigners [also]?
>
> I.4 *COGNATASQUE ACIES Ecce quod superius dixit PLVS QUAM CIVILIA BELLA; posset enim populus Romanus et bellum inter se et cum senatu egisse ita quod nec fratres nec cognatos interfecissent. Nam sententiam eorum non approbo qui dicunt PLVS QVAM CIVILIA dictum esse pro extraneis. Quis enim hominum inter solos ciues preter extraneorum aggregationem prelia facta se legisse meminit?*

Remarkably, here, a possibility that Arnulf seems to dismiss out of hand in his first gloss on *bella plusquam civilia* seems to be entirely normalized by him here, as he asks: "after all, who wages a civil war without some help?" In the texts we will study in the next chapters, we will see that in their medieval framework of warfare it is entirely normal to enlist the help of foreign allies to fight civil wars. Moreover, the reverse is also true, as Arnulf's reading also highlights: friends and fellow-citizens will become foreigners in civil conflict. These types of engagements and the tales that tell them call on many of the same difficult questions about violence, belonging, and insiders and outsiders that we have seen in this chapter.

In this sense, Arnulf's commentary takes shape not only as a commentary by a great classics master for the use of his students, but a document that he believed could have wider, even political, significance, a rather startling finding in the medieval reception of Lucan, which acknowledges his popularity in the Middle Ages, but "only" as a school text. As we move later in the Middle Ages in the next chapters, Lucan's text is physically present to varying degrees. Highly visible in the twelfth century, it fades from view in the later Middle Ages, although never completely.[44] Lucan's influence in the English civil war and revolutionary period is well-covered by several excellent studies, but his spirit and his name, as an emblem for a mode of thinking, if not always his actual words, were present throughout the earlier period. What we are taking into the next chapters is the unique idea that the *Bellum Civile* and Lucan's name are associated with, and that Isidore, Aelfric, and Arnulf, among others, carried into the Middle Ages. In our investigation of the relationship of land, literature,

[44] Marlowe is the first to translate a piece of the work into English: Lucan's first book, in 1600. The first full translation was that of Arthur Gorges, in 1614. However, Lucan and Statius continue to be quoted in Latin chronicle throughout the period, often topically, as when Walsingham borrows from Lucan's description of the headless Pompey to describe the decapitation and display of the body of Henry Percy, the rebel earl of Northumberland. (Taylor, Childs, Watkiss, eds. *The St.Albans Chronicle,* v. 2 534-5 and notes) Knighton and Walsingham both quote Lucan repeatedly, and Statius is also a frequent source for Walsingham, especially in the latter half of his chronicle.

and sovereignty, Lucan's contested space of *bella plusquam civilia* will remain a critical tool for understanding the stress that domestic unrest in fourteenth-century England placed on concepts of citizen and foreigner, king and conqueror, and domestic and foreign political space.

In our next chapter, we turn to an English text, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure,* though we will not, in many ways, be leaving Rome, or even the Lucanian vision of Rome as it is read here by Arnulf. In imagining an encounter between imperial Rome and Arthurian Britain, the *Alliterative Morte,* like the *Bellum Civile,* will blur the boundaries of domestic and foreign space, of civil war and conquest, and will similarly question the appropriation of the concept of "rebellion" for the support of sovereign claims. But it will do so in a distinctly English and medieval context, sharing Arnulf's emphasis not only on understanding the ethics of the violence that it narrates, but also with the ethics of reading and representing past violence in the present. The poem will thus both depict and enact the invitation that Arnulf's commentary presents to read the classical world ethically, and against contemporary concerns; however, the conclusions reached by this practice of reading in its collision with the details of English history are more unstable than we might expect.

"Rebel to Rome": Sovereignty and Documentary Culture in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*

Toward the end of the alliterative *Morte Arthure,* Arthur has reached the city of Rome in a conquering sweep across Europe. However, as he prepares to accept the title of Roman emperor, he has a terrifying dream: having climbed to the top of Fortune's Wheel and received the riches of an emperor, the lady Fortune suddenly casts him mercilessly down again. When the rattled king calls his "philosopher" over to help him interpret the dream, the man's response also offers a grim assessment: Arthur, he says, like other great rulers before him, has reached the height of his fortune, and has nothing to look forward to but the downswing.[1] However, there is some consolation: while Arthur's life is about to come to an end, his story will live on "forever" in chronicle, romance, and the memory of kings, knights, and clerks alike. It will even, the philosopher claims, form the basis of his testament on Judgment Day, when he will be found to have been the "doughtiest" of men that ever lived.[2]

The philosopher's overall message is familiar: heroic literature preserves the hero and his deeds beyond his death. Moreover, it appears that the alliterative *Morte* itself, the intricate product of an accomplished poet, represents the quality of the stories that will be told about Arthur. Nevertheless, as a final testament, the king may have wished for a document less ambiguous about the moral quality of the deeds it describes and about his lasting political

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[1] Anke Janssen, in "The Dream of the Wheel of Fortune," argues that it is a particular type of fortune, *fortuna belli,* "fortune in war," that this wheel represents in the alliterative *Morte*. According to Janssen, Arthur is therefore culpable in a way he would not be should he have been subject to the vicissitudes of mere "fortune," as he deliberately exposes his entire realm to risk in his drive to conquer. The dream has had a high profile in criticism of the poem as a whole, including the only book-length study of the *Morte,* Matthews's *The Tragedy of Arthur,* to which see the review and response of Benson, "Medieval Tragedy and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*." Matthews's study has been extremely influential in suggesting that the poem be read as an example of medieval tragedy, in which the concept of Fortune in conjunction with the fall of kings and great men is foundational..

[2] For a detailed reading of this dream and Arthur's other major dream in the poem, featuring a battle between a dragon and a bear, see Brent Miles, "Lyouns Full Lothely: Dream Interpretation and Boethian Denaturing." Miles argues that the animal imagery of these dreams calls upon a Boethian imagery that joins wickedness with a bestial nature, and highlights Arthur's descent into "immoral kingship."

achievement. By the end of the poem, the alliterative *Morte* leaves many important questions unanswered in a way that makes the philosopher's claim more of an interpretive puzzle than a consolation.[3] Arthur may well be spoken of and written about "forever" – but how? As a founder, an emperor, a tyrant, a rebel? Further, will his story be told differently in the different contexts that the philosopher mentions — in romance, chronicle, gossip among knights, in his final judgment before God? Behind these questions lies also a prior question, and one which has so far occupied most of the criticism of the poem, concerning the extent of, and the methods by which, Arthur carries out his military campaigns. Readers have debated whether the poem ultimately criticizes or glorifies this violence, and have shown that the poem at times seems to pay special attention to the suffering of innocents, but at others seems admiring of the exercise of military prowess.[4] Depending on one's answer to this prior question, Arthur becomes either a tyrant or a great conqueror, a bloodthirsty warmonger or the tragic founder of a renewed English empire. In these readings, Arthur and the violence he perpetrates have, in many ways

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[3] Critics of the poem have been especially divided over its perspective on the violence of the poem, which is detailed and gruesome. This level of detail has provoked debate over whether it is the result of a particular enjoyment on the part of the poet or whether it is an implicit indictment, of Arthur and perhaps by extension the campaigns of Edward III that many readers have seen reflected in the details of Arthur's continental wars. Some have seen in the poem's attention to the suffering of innocents an indictment of the violence of war (Matthews, *Tragedy*); others a way of processing the unspeakable horror of rumors of cannibalism during the crusades (Heng, *Empire of Magic*). Editors of the text, Finlayson and Krishna both find the text to be critical of warfare; for a dissenting opinion that addresses the alliterative *Morte* alongside readings of Chaucer's Knight, see Elizabeth Porter, "Chaucer's Knight, the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and Medieval Laws of War." Dorsey Armstrong finds in the poem two distinct narratives: an overt martial narrative and a covert pacifist narrative that "suggests peaceful alternatives to Arthur's warlike actions." (Armstrong, "Rewriting the Chronicle Tradition") Andrew Lynch sees the state of peace and the state of war conceived of as instead continuous with one another, in an analysis that also addresses the Arthurian tradition more widely. (Lynch, "Peace is Good") Finlayson and Whetter both find in the poem an appreciation of the "heroic" and "epic-heroic" aspects of Arthur's character, but Whetter argues the extreme view (against the established criticism) that the "tragic fall" of Arthur is not meant in any sense as a condemnation, and that "the presentation of heroism and its costs in the poem is neither ironical nor critical nor religious" (Whetter 61), but his argument does not address some of the most convincing evidence of the poem's criticism of Arthur, as well as rather oversimplifying debates over its generic status. See also Twomey, "Heroic Kingship and Unjust War."

[4] For example, as Patricia Ingham puts it, "momentary critiques of kingship," (Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies* 84); a theme that has been followed in other work on the poem: see Bruso, "The Sword and the Scepter," and Miles, "Lyouns Full Lothely," both of whom point out ways in which Mordred seems unexpectedly to possess more of the virtues of a great king – that is, a domestic ruler – than Arthur in the *Morte*.

productively, been bound together as the fundamental unit of assessing the poem as pacifist, militaristic, dispassionately historical, or passionately revisionist.

In this chapter, however, I will argue that the ambiguity over the violence of conquest in this text is not aimed primarily at interpreting Arthur's character, but instead at the poem's vision of the literary and documentary arts, a category within which the poem places itself. This approach does not involve jettisoning the poem's concern with the ethics of the violence it depicts, which has been a consistent feature of the poem's criticism, but rather seeks to recenter that ethical critique instead around the ethics of reading and representing the past in an effort to account for the poem's own self-conception as a readable object. It has been noted that the poem, as part of its generally rich verisimilitude, pays detailed attention to the documentary practices of late medieval England.[5] From the first scene in which Roman bureaucrats appear with "rolls and registers" in hand to demand tribute from Arthur, who responds with an appeal to "chronicle," to the last, in which Arthur is told he will be translated into purely textual form, documentary culture is a persistent but often troubled presence in this generally warlike text.[6] However, I will suggest that the importance of documentary culture does not stop at its appearances within the poem, but extends to the poem's vision of its own role in the arts of rule. In this poem's vision of sovereignty, Arthur's political achievements are linked unusually closely with a keen awareness of their fundamental textuality, as the poet considers the multiple ways in which land and

[5] D.Vance Smith notes this interest in his chapter that focuses on heraldry and the "paternal metaphor" in the alliterative *Morte,* in which heraldry and other documentary claims to possession also always, in the economy of this poem, engender their opposites: loss, and destruction. (Smith, "Exchanging, Changing, Corrupting," in *Arts of Possession*, esp. 195-6).

[6] Emily Steiner has charted out a "documentary poetics" during this period in her study of the intersection of documentary and legal culture with poetic texts. Although Steiner does not address the alliterative *Morte* in her study, or indeed romance – her focus lies in questions of orthodoxy and the appropriation of documents for the purposes of social and political authority – her demonstration of the connections between literature and a burgeoning documentary practice provides a suggestive corollary to the issues of documentary authority discussed below in the *Alliterative Morte*. Steiner suggests that texts engaging with a documentary poetics do so as a "means of thinking through…how a text might be imagined to itself or classified for others, or how the community of a text might be defined, and its effects qualified and measured." (Steiner, *Documentary Culture,* 4) This self-reflexivity linked with a "documentary poetics" is a feature that I will argue is central to understanding the alliterative *Morte*.

sovereignty may be claimed through documentary culture, and whether that documentary culture forestalls or encourages more violent means of securing sovereignty. At first, it seems that the "kydde conqueror" Arthur, the poem, and dreams of English empire are bound together in a common purpose, but as the poem continues, these three elements will all rapidly dissociate from one another. Arthur's empire, which, this poem shows us, was only ever a textual phenomenon, will dissolve, and the poet will seem to "reread" the events of his own poem in a different light. But this revision and rereading does not, in turn, unravel the impact of the poem. On the contrary, the testimony to the political fragmentation of Britain that it professes is all that endures. Ultimately, the *Morte* poet suggests, Arthurian poetry – and perhaps even poetry at large – is a powerful tool, but as an agent of division rather than centralization, an art of rebellion rather than an art of rule.

Chronicle, Romance, Rolls, and Registers

The alliterative *Morte* is generally seen as a poem about empire, but it is at least equally, if not more, concerned with rebellion, its definition, and its sources. In fact, rebellion and imperial wars of conquest will sometimes be strangely conflated in this text, casting an air of confusion over its armed conflicts, the ends of which are unclear from the outset. We can see this confusion represented in the physical locations of the poem, as the action oscillates wildly from the ultra-domestic space of Arthur's own court in England to the world stage, and back again, several times. The poem begins in the wild territory of Dark-Age Wales, where King Arthur rests after a long campaign. Recovering the lands lost in his father's reign, he has reconstituted an immense realm across Europe and retired from the international stage to Carlisle, and to the

peacetime domestic pursuits of hunting, feasting, and "holding his round table." But at midwinter, the feast is interrupted: seventeen knights from the Roman emperor Lucius arrive with a demand for tribute from the English king. Expanded again to international scale, the poem then narrates Arthur's defeat of this challenger and his acquisition of even further lands. However, as Arthur stands at the gates of Rome, on the threshold of world empire, another envoy arrives with shattering news: Arthur's nephew and steward Mordred has rebelled at home in England, and the scale of the poem shrinks abruptly back down to domestic affairs.

The poem thus twice returns abruptly to the domestic sphere from an international scale, once to witness the beginnings of a potential *pax Arthuriana* and once to watch it fall apart. In the first scene of reversal, Arthur rests after a period of creation. He has recovered his father's lost lands, "all that Uter in erthe ought in his time," and apparently content with this, he then "rested...and held his Round Table." Arthur begins his rest on Christmas Day, and it lasts until New Year's Day – exactly one week. The religious echoes of "resting" after a period of creation and ordering, a resonance that we will see again shortly, as well as the timing on the first day of the new year, strongly suggest that Arthur's court could be at the start of a golden age of untroubled British dominance over territories believed to be historically theirs.[7] However, this golden age is short-lived, interrupted by a delegation from the most famous empire-builders that medieval history knew: the Romans, who assert that Arthur is instead part of *their* empire. As a subordinate king, his recent conquering activities amount, from a Roman perspective, to a rebellion against Roman authority. By the time we arrive at the middle of the poem, however, Arthur has defeated the Romans and is preparing instead to receive tribute from them, in a

[7] Hamel also points out that the text portrays Arthur as the founder of Caerleon-on-Usk, rather than Belinus (as the chronicle tradition maintains), because "the poet apparently wished to lay some emphasis on his hero as city-founder." The difference between founding and empire-building, and the influence of the classical tradition on the way Arthur's kingdom is defined, will be examined in the final section of this chapter. (Hamel, *Alliterative Morte*, 255).

nearly-complete role reversal. Before he can accomplish this final element of his victory, he learns that the territories he had reassembled at the beginning of the poem, as well as other foreign powers, are allied with Mordred in rebellion against him. The poem summarily unravels Arthur's brief *pax*, in the process casting considerable doubt on those achievements.

This geographical and ideological disorientation, which drives the main actions of the plot, originates in a key moment of reading at the very beginning of the poem, though it is perhaps more accurate to call it a moment of misreading. If it is a misreading, however, it does not initially seem to be a fault in the readers, but rather a fault in the texts, which fail to provide a secure basis on which to assign sovereignty to Arthur or to Lucius, the Roman emperor. Lee Patterson has drawn attention to the failure of documentary culture in the form of the text's vision of history, arguing that the alliterative *Morte* aims to disclose the "recursive futility of the historical life.*"*[8] However, the texts in the initial encounter between the Romans and the English are not imagined to be of exactly the same kind of "history," and they are put to very different uses by those that appeal to them. If we differentiate between the different aspects of documentary culture that the Roman delegates and the English king appeal to here, we can see that this scene sets up a dynamic that will continue throughout the text between the voice of bureaucratic, victorious imperialism and the voice of local appeal to popular forms of memory, which speaks in a voice of loss even as it remembers a victory.

When the Roman delegation appears in front of Arthur, their message is carefully phrased in legal terms. As Vale has pointed out, the language here reflects actual diplomatic terms and practices of later medieval England, officially summoning the lord (Arthur) to an audience with his king, the emperor Lucius:[9]

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[8] Patterson 230.
[9] Vale, Juliet. "Law and Diplomacy," 33-36.

Sir Lucius Iberius, the emperour of Rome,

Saluz the as sugett undyre his sele ryche.

It es credens, Sir Kynge, with cruell wordez,

Trow it for no trufles, his targe es to schewe.

Now in this Newȝers Daye, with noteries sygne,

I make the somons in sale to sue for þi landys

...

Thare [Rome] schall thow gyffe rekkynynge for all thy Round Table

Why thow arte rebell to Rome and rentez them wytholdez.

…

Thy fadyr mad fewtee, we fynde in oure rollez,

In the regestre of Rome, who so ryghte lukez;

Withowttyn more trouflynge the trebute we aske

That Julius Cesar wan wyth his jentill knyghttes.

(86-91, 102-3,112-115)[10]

The delegate's speech here is peppered not only with the legal terminology of medieval England, but also with particular attention to administrative detail based in what A.L. Brown calls the "writing offices" of the chancery, responsible for the drafting and copying of important letters and government documents.[11] The "credens" (certifying letter) is sent under the king's official "seal," which further features his "targe" (coat of arms), and the document is prepared and

[10] Quotations from the *Morte* are taken from Hamel's edition (1984).
[11] Brown, A.L. *The Governance of Late Medieval England*, 44-52.

stamped by a notary ("noteries sygne"), whose office was in the chancery.[12] Most notably, the delegate asserts that they have checked their records, their "rolls" and "register," and that these documents record an agreement between Arthur's father Uther to pay tribute to the Roman empire. "Rolls" recalls the form of the most important records of the medieval English government, including not only the chancery rolls of various types but also, by this period, the Rolls of Parliament. Important summonses, letters, records of taxation and petitions were all kept on parchment rolls, and the mention of this format and the details of various chancery offices in this speech results in a curious situation, as the Roman envoy uses English documentary terminology to describe the type of records he attempts to use against the English themselves. Speaking with local authority, he gives the impression, with his mastery of the English legal system, that his case represents a genuine understanding of the political situation: Arthur is in rebellion against his king. Moreover, he asserts, these records that he mentions are available to anyone. "Whoever looks upon them correctly" ("who so ryghte lukes") will arrive at the same conclusion that he has: they are not interpretable objects.

Arthur, on the other hand, responds to the delegates' demands with an appeal to another sort of document: a narrative, and more explicitly a "cronicle," corroborated by the memory of "awlde men":

> He askyde me tyrauntly tribute of Rome,
> That tenefully tynt was in tym of myn elders,
> There alyenes in absence of all men of armes

[12] It is worth noting that the position of notary in England was probably adopted from Italian practices, and relatively late in the Middle Ages; there is perhaps a nod here to the Italian origins of this office in the Roman use of this term, though it was well-established in England by the late fourteenth century. See Patrick Zutshi, "Notaries Public," 421-3.

Couerde it of comouns, as cronicles telles.
I haue title to take tribute of Rome:
Myne ancestres ware emperours and aughte it þem seluen –
Belyn and Brenne, that borne were in Bretayne,
They occupyede þe Empyre aughte score wynttyrs,
Ilkane ayere aftyre oþer, as awlde men telles;
Thei couerde þe Capitoile and keste doun þe walles,
Hyngede of þeire heddys-men by hunndrethes at ones.
Seyn Constantyne our kynsmane conquerid it aftyre,
þat ayere was of Ynglande and Emperour of Rome –
He þat conquerid þe Crosse and be craftez of armes
That Criste was on crucifiede, þat Kyng es of Heuen.
Thus hafe we euydens to aske þe Emperour þe same,
That þus regnez at Rome, whate ryghte þat he claymes."

(271-287)

We might recall here what Arnulf, in our last chapter, said about the different means of constructing history for lettered and unlettered men: "Learned men know about past deeds by reading history recorded in annal form, but rude men know it by reciting to themselves the succession of their ancestors in turn." (*Literati per historias annalium nouerunt antiqua, rustici uero per successionem patrum sibi a inuicem dicentium.*)[13] Here, Arthur's speech attempts to construct an unbroken line of sovereignty by performing exactly the latter act, vividly recalling the events of long past campaigns in narrative form, working through several

[13] Arnulf, ed. Marti at *BC* IV.592 PER MVLTOS PATRES.

generations.[14] However, the distinction between these two "camps" does not adhere to a strictly written/oral dichotomy, as Donna Lynne Rondolone has claimed, and as Arnulf's use of 'literati' would suggest.[15] Arthur cites both written "cronicle" and spoken record ("as awlde men telles") in his defense, but what distinguishes his appeal from the Roman case is its diachronic nature, in opposition to the senators' synchronic assertion.[16] The story is a longer one, he claims, than the single entry recording fealty to Julius Caesar: the sovereignty of Britain has been won and lost several times over between Rome and the British, and most recently by himself, as he has only just reassembled his father's lost lands. The Romans may have an antique claim, but he has the newest, and which of those is to take precedence? In other words, he suggests, the evidence *is* open to multiple interpretations, depending on the point in time one chooses to look to.

Both of these appeals present a strong claim to sovereignty, but the two claimants are talking past one another. No one is more correct than the other; nor is there a paucity of

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[14] Patricia Ingham, in her analysis of the relation that the philosopher's dream interpretation poses between romance and chronicle, argues that the poem imagines a "nexus" of official (chronicle) and popular (romance) literature in which the widespread appeal of "popular" literature supports the historiographical efforts of "official" chroniclers. (Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 81-2) But we can see here, earlier in the poem, that these two mechanisms are in fact opposed to one another, and that "chronicle" in this instance appears to be associated not with the official records that the Romans possess, but rather with the popular tradition that Arthur appeals to.

[15] Rondolone, "The Clash of Oral-Heroic and Literate-Ricardian Ideals," 219.

[16] When Arthur says "cronicle" here, we can perhaps read "the *Brut*," a source that is in line with contemporary use of the term "chronicle" to describe a narrative history. Wace was one of the poem's main sources and the poet especially follows it here, early in the poem. (See Hamel, 34ff. "Sources and Date" for the *Morte* poet's source use.) However, the authority that the fluid genre of the "chronicle" had is difficult to define. Criticism often confines it to this sense of continuous narrative history, but there are signs that the meaning was more widespread in medieval usage. Toward the end of the *Nun's Priest's Tale,* the priest begins to prepare the listeners for the downfall of Chanticleer: "God woote that ioye is soone ago / And if a rethor koude faire endite / He in a cronycle saufly myghte it write / As for a souereyn notabilitee." (440-444) Here a "chronicle" has authority – it is a place fitting for a "notabilitee," a "thing worthy of note" (if well-composed). The Nun's Priest's Tale responds directly to the Monk's Tale, a monotonous collection of *casus virorum illustrium,* "the falls of famous men," whose repetitiveness suggests a stretch to infinity before it is interrupted by the knight. The Nun's Priest's tale closely associates the genre of chronicle with this type of tragic rise and "fall of a great man" which the alliterative *Morte* also charts out. The great lesson of the casus genre, often considered the medieval incarnation of tragedy, is that "joy is soon gone" – as the narrator puts it here. In other words, the genre to which Arthur appeals to secure his case against Lucius suggests to the reader a pattern for the rise and fall which is about to happen to him. While the appeal to chronicle as a record of events fails to avert war, it is an accurate source of information in predicting the tragic final events of the poem.

evidence to prove who owes fealty to whom, but rather a plurality of it, in different forms. Which is more persuasive – the detailed procedure and non-narrative records of a bureaucratic government? Or the continuous cultural memory, both written and spoken, of a people on the edge of the world? The poem never takes a clear position on this question, but rather than suggesting creative confusion, this ought instead to suggest to us that deciding between these two claims is beside the point for the poet: the encounter is what matters. In this dispute, we see the poem, which places itself in Arthur's category of "chronicle," imagining a meeting with its documentary other: the singular, "authorized" account that bears the official stamp of imperial bureaucracy. Of course, these particular records for the Arthurian era did not exist, and never did, but the wider question that this incident raises stands: how durable is the authority of the cultural memory that Arthur seems to represent?

The imaginary power of Arthurian literature is in many ways related to its diversity and flexibility, but here we see, through its juxtaposition with the prospective authority of this single "notarized" record of battle, the possibility posed that this diversity will in fact undermine its political persuasiveness. Arthur appeals to both written and oral sources, and the plurality of evidence alluded to in this scene is in line with the array of possibilities that the poet himself had at his disposal when he sat down to compose this episode. Arthurian literature was diverse at this time, most likely far more than we actually know. Modern editors and critics have repeatedly remarked on the astonishing variety of sources that the *Morte* poet makes use of throughout the poem. This encounter with the Romans is drawn from the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and its ensuing translations and adaptations, and Hamel has shown that the author of the *Morte* used all four versions of Geoffrey available – the original, Wace,

Laȝamon, and Robert Manning – at different points in his composition.[17] None of the poet's sources pays such intricate attention to the administrative details of this diplomatic exchange, but the fact of their sheer diversity filters up here into the terms of the dispute between Arthur and Lucius. How authoritative could a tradition this diverse be? Does that multiplicity strengthen or undermine its ability to support sovereign claims?

A glance at this chronicle context shows why discerning the "true" claimant to the sovereignty of Britain could be so obscure. A great part of Geoffrey's work overall narrates the multigenerational battles that played out between Rome and Britain, mostly, but not always, to the detriment of Britain. In the chronicle tradition, the engagement of Caesar with Britain, the same engagement to which the Roman senators appeal in the *Alliterative Morte,* is especially complicated. Cassibelanus beats Caesar back twice, but fails to hold the advantage. In an incident that bears strong resemblances to the domestic strife that will be Arthur's downfall, Caesar reconquers Britain at the invitation of a treacherous element of Cassibelanus's own household: his man Androgeus, angry over the death of his nephew in a fight with the nephew of the king.[18] Brennius, Belinus, and Constantine do all reconquer and rule Britain and territories abroad for various periods of time, but Arthur's father Uther then loses these lands again – though to the Saxons, rather than the Romans, a detail to which we will return shortly. In other words, even an appeal to chronicle alone poses more questions than it resolves. The line between the Arthurian textual tradition and the sovereignty of Britain is found to be quite tenuous three times over in this encounter: challenged first by the prospect of administrative authority, by the diversity from within its own narrative tradition, and finally by the insufficiency of its own source texts in determining the right to rule.

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[17] Hamel, *Morte,* 35-6.
[18] *HRB,* ed. Reeve, Bk. IV. §61-3, pp. 74-81.

However, I return to the chronicle sources here not simply to emphasize the muddiness of these waters. In the account of this incident from the *Historia Regum Britannie* (which Wace, most probably the source for the *Morte* poet here, translates very closely), Arthur's reasoning provides a very different type of appeal for his right to rule:

> [Lucius] claims that he ought to receive [tribute] on the grounds that it was paid to Julius Caesar and his successors, who landed with an army after being called in because of dissent on our ancestors' part, and who by force of arms subjected our country to their power, when it was weakened by internal strife. Because they obtained it by these means, the tribute they exacted from us was unjust. What is obtained by force of arms is never the rightful possession of the aggressor. Therefore Lucius has no valid reason to claim the right to receive tribute from us. Indeed, since he has presumed to make unjust demands on us, let us by the same token ask him for tribute from Rome, and let the stronger party obtain what they desire.

> Dicit enim ipsum sibi dari debere, quia Iulio Caesari ceterisque successoribus suis redditum fuerit, qui discidio veterum nostrorum invitati cum armata manu applicuerunt atque patriam domesticis motibus vacillantem suae potestati vi et violentia summiserunt. Quia igitur eam hoc modo adepti fuerunt, uectigal ex illa iniuste ceperunt. Nichil enim quod ui et uiolentia acquiritur iuste ab ullo possidetur qui uiolentiam intulit. Irrationabilem ergo causam praetendit qua nos iure sibi tributarios esse arbitratur.

> Quoniam autem id quod iniustum est a nobis praesumpsit exigere, consimili ratione petamus ab illo tributum Romae, et qui fortior superuenerit ferat quod habere exoptauit.[19]

On the one hand, Arthur explicitly rules out force as a legitimate method of securing sovereignty over a particular land. Because Caesar took advantage of internal dissent in the island, his reconquest of Britain was illegitimate. Moreover, he goes so far as to say, *any* claim to land predicated on violence is unjust. The claim is somewhat curious, as his own conquering activities must fall into that same category; but here, perhaps the more important point is that the sentiment expressed is characteristic of the conquered, rather than the conqueror: the appeal to the right to rule by cultural memory rather than force. On the other hand, however, Arthur's concluding statement seems happy to abandon the decision of this difficult matter to that very same metric that he claims to abhor: the stronger party will prevail.

We can see that the *Morte* poet has elaborated considerably on this incident, replacing Arthur's straightforward appeal to the illegitimacy of violence as a form of claiming sovereignty with the intricate exchange between documentary claims that we followed above. But not all of this sentiment is gone in the poem: in this speech lies the germ of the strangely contradictory Arthurian character that we see in the alliterative *Morte,* who at once seems to speak in the voice of the conquered but is also ready, surprisingly so, to pick up the voice of the conqueror when provoked. We can see this transition, implicit in Geoffrey's text, made explicit in the *Morte* in the way that the poet translates this incident into the terms of documentary culture. In contrast to the detached and formal procedure of the Roman delegation, Arthur's appeal to "chronicle" and cultural memory starts out sounding a note of mourning, but as his own narrative continues, the

[19] *HRB*. ed. Reeve, Bk. IX §159, pp. 216-7. Translations from this text are from this edition, translated by Neil Wright.

recalling of these events incites him to bloodlust. What initially seems to be a moment of civilized recourse to documentary sources in fact ends up stirring Arthur to violence – an observation that casts a radically different light on the poem to follow, itself an Arthurian "chronicle."

Desire and Rebellion

After the initial parley between Arthur's court and the senators sent by the emperor Lucius, there is no remaining prospect of peace in the text except through the exercise of violence. And yet, the language of administration and record-keeping continues to play a prominent role in the poem as it develops the dynamic we saw introduced in the scene above, between the voice of the conqueror and the conquered. Violence becomes even more securely linked with documentary culture, even as the roles of conquered and conqueror reverse.

We can chart this development on a large scale in the afterlife of the word "rolls" in the rest of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure.* We saw above that the senators appealed to their "rolls and register" to authenticate Arthur's obligation to pay tribute. After its first appearance in the senators' challenge, the word "register" does not appear again in the text, but the word "rolls" appears several more times, in shifting contexts whose trajectory follows the wider action of the poem, on the upswing of Arthur's initially successful campaigns, and then the downswing, following the disintegration of the campaign into civil war. As we have seen, the word starts out as a possible solution to conflict: in a disagreement about lordship, the "rolls" are consulted to see who is vassal (and thus owes monetary tribute) to whom. However, after the failure of this endeavor, the "rolls" are no longer historical records but instead lists of soldiers. Sir Cleges

answers the boasting challenge of one of Lucius's officers with the following account of Arthur's preparations for battle: "He has araysede his accownte / and redde all his rollez; // For he wyll gyfe a rekenyng / that rewe sall aftyre..." (1677-8) The account of the "rolls" are revealed to be impressive indeed: sixty thousand men of arms, ready to march against Lucius and his armies. "They are nowmerde full neghe / and namede in rollez // Sexty thowsande, for sothe, / of sekyre men of armez." (2658-9) However, in their next appearance the "rolls" record the astonishing diminution of Arthur's forces, as he returns home to fight on his own soil against Mordred's forces: "And all Arthrus oste / was amede with knyghtes // Bot awghtene hundrethe of all / entrede in rolles; // This was a mache vnmete, / bot myghttis of Criste, // To melle with þat multitude / in þase mayn londis!" (4068-4071) From a great conquering army, Arthur now only retains less than two thousand men, and goes off to fight to his death an "uneven match" (mache vnmete), a pitched battle against the multitude of Mordred's forces.

Astute readers might notice in the quotation above that Arthur's men take not only the "rolls" over from the language of the Romans' original petition, but also the threat of a "reckoning." These two terms form part of a grouping of alliterated words surrounding the concept of rebellion in the poem, which itself is used as a weapon in the *Morte*. As we saw above, it is unclear how the Britons and Romans at this point could in any sense be considered part of one another's empires from either of the records to which they appeal, yet this is how they will both come to characterize their campaigns against one another: as a rebellion, taken in turns. The power of this strategy is made clear by the Roman emperor Lucius himself, who in his battle-eve speech reveals his reasoning behind attacking Britain:

Thoghe a rewme be rebelle, we rekke it bot lyttill;

It es resone and righte the renke be restreynede.

(2040-1)

Arthur complained above, in the passage from the *Historia Regum Britannie,* that Caesar had taken Britain illegally – that is, by force. The *Morte* is also careful to say that Arthur's conquering activities at the beginning of the poem were aimed at recovery, not expansion: he stayed within the historical bounds of his father's realm. However, here we can see the weakness of this mode of thinking, as the Romans themselves use it to their own advantage, characterizing the violence to come as their own "recovery" of lands owed to them. Thus, their war is justified – it is "reasonable" and "right," and Arthur, the "renke" can be "restrained" because they are fighting a rebellion instead of a foreign campaign.

Arthur's initial response to the Romans is dismissive and even enraged, but as the poem goes on, it appears that the "kydde conqueror" was actually following the argument of the envoys rather carefully. Arthur himself, when he prepares to invade Lorraine, having already re-conquered the lands Rome claimed back for itself, slips into this same rhetoric:

The renke rebell has bene vnto my Rownde Table,
Redy aye with Romaynes at ryotte my landes;
We sall rekken full rathe, if reson so happen,
Who has ryghte to þat rente, by ryche Gode of Heuen!"

(2402-05)

The language here closely mirrors that of the challenge that the Romans initially presented to Arthur and the language that Lucius uses in his battle eve speech. The envoys tell him he must appear at Rome:

> To ansuere anely why thow occupyes the lanndez
> That awe homage of alde till hym and his eldyrs
> Why thow has redyn and raymede and raunsound þe pople
> And kyllyde doun his cosyns, kyngys ennoynttyde.
> Thare schall thow gyffe rekkynynge for all thy Round Table
> Why thow arte rebell to Rome and rentez them wytholdez.
>
> (98-103)

The constellation of a "rebel" "renke," a "reckoning," and the question of who has the "right" to the "rent," and even Lucius's "reason" reappear in Arthur's mouth as he prepares to go to war to secure a land that was not originally in question. Moreover, instead of Arthur being a "rebel to Rome" we have him describing the duke of Lorraine as a "rebel / ready with Romans," a clear indication of how the power relations of the text, but not the interpretive strategies, have changed. Arthur is now in the position of imperial aggressor, imposing an interpretation onto the events that justifies his campaign.[20] Arthur speaks these revealing words after he has called a council with all his advisors, so that they may tell him, as he puts it, "how he may conquere by

[20] Chism finds in the *Alliterative Morte* a deliberate confusion of signification, expressed in the troubling fluidity of heraldic signs in the poem. In particular, the dragon, which is initially associated with Arthur, seems to eventually shift over to Lucius and also to one of his allies. Additionally, she finds that as Arthur crosses to France, he "acquires symbols that recall Lucius' tyranny, while Lucius is linked to symbols originally associated with Arthur." Chism suggests that the poet "began by trying to keep the sides of the conflict distinct and then deliberately began adding things to perplex them" (Chism, *Alliterative Revivals,* 209-10), but I believe the confusion is meant to be registered intratextually as well, as the result of Arthur's deliberate manipulation of the words and signs brought to him by the Romans, rather than as authorial or narratorial intervention.

crafte / the kythe þat he claymes," "how he might conquer with skill (or craftiness) the land that he claims." (2396-7) This "craft" appears to be an ability to manipulate the historical record to one's advantage to produce a narrative of "right." He asserts here that he is advancing on Lombardy because they have allied with the Romans against him, but the poem is careful to make it clear what his real motivations are:

> When he was passede the heghte, than the kyng houys
> With his hole bataylle, behaldande abowte
> Lukande one Lumbarddye, and one lowde melys
> In ȝone lykande londe lorde be I thynke!"
>
> (3090-3)

Arthur's desirous eye has led him to adopt the same interpretive strategies of his enemies, representing conquest as rebellion. The crucial shift hinges on the tense of "be" in this case, which is orthographically indeterminate – does it mean, "I am the lord" or "I will become the lord"? In fact, as we have seen, these two conditions are intimately linked. In our text, to *become* lord of an area, one presents oneself as *already* lord of that area, however disingenuous that interpretive move might be.

Additionally, this conceptual array that Arthur takes over from the Romans includes words with strong feudal resonance, and reading through the list gives the sense of a world-view contained in six alliterating words: the financial rewards of later-medieval warfare in "ransom," "reckoning," and "rent;" the administrative side of violence in "rolls," "reason," and "right;" the poet's focus on imperial "Rome," and the key word "rebel," which, as we have seen, allows an

aggressor to justly wage his campaign by portraying it as a war of reclamation rather than aggression. Supported by the documentary evidence that we followed above, not only the claim to sovereignty but the violence perpetrated in its name is justified. Lest we forget, mixed in and alliterated with this array is also a series of words denoting the violence that supports these campaigns: "riot," "raymede," "redyn." The alliterative form here contributes to the sense that in taking on one of these ideas, one takes on them all. It is impossible to invoke the category of "rebel" in this poem without taking on the idea of "ransom" and "rent," of financial gain from violence, of plundering, "redyn" and "ryott."

For a sharp contrast to this world-view, we can look to another alliterative run, this time in Arthur's opening speech at the beginning of the poem, where the alliteration falls on words with "t":

> He askyde me tyrauntly tribute of Rome,
> That tenefully tynt was in tym of myn elders,
> There alyenes in absence of all men of armes
> Couerde it of comouns, as cronicles telles.
> I haue title to take tribute of Rome…
>
> (271-5)

Here, the picture that the alliterating words present is quite different. We have "tyrantly," "tenefully" ("sadly"), "tynt" ("lost"), "title," the "time of...elders," and again, "tribute." The shift in outlook is particularly obvious in this final idea, where "rent" in the eyes of the emperor becomes instead "tribute" in the eyes of his underling. This is not an imperial voice; it is the

voice of the conquered, the voice of loss, which looks on the use of the imperial voice as a "tyrant," a word that asserts unambiguously its interpretation of these events. Arthur's voice starts out as this voice of lament, of loss – of the conquered instead of the conqueror, even though he begins the tale as a (re)conqueror of lands. However, his adoption of the word "rebel" in the middle of the poem brings with it all of its undesirable associations: he begins to "ryott" the lands he desires, and he desires them for financial gain – for "rents". When Arthur takes on this word "rebel," then, we see him assuming not only an interpretive trick but an entire imperial perspective on the world and on war. This shift culminates in Arthur's shocking declaration: "We sall be ouerlynge of all / þat on the erthe lengez!" (3211) This is quite a far cry from the king who voices a plea for moderation in the council of kings that begins the poem.

This hollow and opportunistic use of rebellion has a strange echo in this poem in the form of Mordred's rebellion, which is unambiguously a rebellion, not only within Arthur's homeland but within his own home. The news of this rebellion comes to him just as he prepares to step into the position vacated by the defeated Lucius: emperor of Rome. Coming as it does at this moment in which Arthur, having already adopted the rhetoric of an emperor, prepares to receive his first tribute and fully take on this role, the news of Mordred's rebellion provides a stark contrast for the invented "civil war" that has come before. This civil war to come will feature all of the pathos, regret, and sense of futility that has been absent from the rebellions in the first part of the poem: Arthur and Mordred, kinsmen, will kill one another; children and innocents will die; and Arthur's realm will fragment.

Division

Arthur receives the news of Mordred's betrayal from one of his own countrymen, a pilgrim on his way to Rome. As we are learning is common in this text, a fellow-countryman is at first not easily distinguished from a foreigner. Taking him at first for one of the locals, Arthur addresses the man in Italian, but when he replies, his British accent alerts Arthur to the fact that he is speaking to a friend. The man passes on some unwelcome news from their common homeland, where Mordred has acted decisively in his absence:

> He devisede þe rewme and delte as hym likes,
> Dubbede of þe Danmarkes dukes and erlles,
> Disseueride þen sondirwise, and cités dystreynede,
> To Sarazenes and Sessoynes appon sere halues.
> He has semblede a sorte of selcouthe berynes...
>
> (3527-3531)

It appears that Mordred is engaged with disassembling everything that Arthur has built. He has "divided up" Arthur's empire and parceled it out to whomever he wished; he has "dissevered" cities apart and "distreyned" them, "oppressed" them, perhaps under siege – but "devise" can also mean "cut off," or "severed." He has also assembled armies, including many foreigners, in preparation for the retaliation that he is certainly expecting from Arthur. Moreover, the particular allies that are mentioned here are not any allies, but rather a list of England's actual, historical enemies from different eras: the Danes, the Saracens, and the Saxons, lumped together here as

the new ruling class of "barons" under Mordred's regime. Not only has Mordred divided up Arthur's empire in his absence, but he has handed it, apparently, to her known enemies.

Mordred's activities are clearly presented as a betrayal in the text. At the same time, however, the actual business that he undertakes in his revolt is not easily distinguished from Arthur's own methods of governance as they are characterized throughout the poem. In describing the administration of empire, the *Morte* exclusively uses the word "devisen," which covers the sense of both Modern English "divide," to portion out or cut up, and "devise," to form a plan or strategy.[21] In Middle English, "devise" has also a wider meaning, and in addition to drawing up plans can mean to form ideas, buildings, or even poems. To divide is to create: this sensibility runs deep in Christianity, all the way back to Genesis: *Et vidit Deus lucem quod esset bona et divisit lucem ac tenebras,* "And God saw the light, which was good, and he divided the light from the darkness."[22] *Dixit quoque Deus fiat firmamentum in medio aquarum et dividat aquas ab aquis.* And God said, "Let there be land in the middle of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters."[23] In the case of "devise," the extension of meaning occurred in French before the word was taken into English: "Old French had the senses, 'to divide, distribute, dispose in portions, arrange, array, dispose of, digest, order, form a plan or design, invent, contrive, express or make known one's plan or will."[24] Middle English also took on these meanings, but in this particular text this word, with only a single exception, means "to apportion lands in order to impose rule on an area."[25]

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[21] The former comes from the Latin *dividere,* while the latter comes via Old French from the vulgar Latin *divisare.*
[22] Genesis 1:4 Vulgate.
[23] Genesis 1:6 – we will remember that the beginning of the poem took pains to portray Arthur's rule as the beginning of a golden age, at rest from a period of creation.
[24] Oxford English Dictionary, "devise."
[25] The exception occurs at line 1389, where it describes a head cleaved from a body in battle.

The extensive use of the word "devise" in the *Alliterative Morte* in this latter sense is very unusual – the word is almost always seen otherwise in Middle English in the sense of "to think up" rather than "to apportion lands." In this poem, to "devise" is a political action both of creation and destruction, whose positive or negative connotations therefore rely completely on context. In the short portrait of the "golden age" before the intrusion of the senators at court, Arthur has set up his empire by "dividing and dealing out" lands: "Qwenn he thes dedes had don, / he doubbyd hys knyghtez, / Dyuysyde dowcherys and delte / in dyuerse remmes..." (48-9) Arthur's governance appears to involve the necessary division of his kingdom into multiple subrealms, under the control of his personally-chosen dukes and rulers. "Thane aftyre at carlelele / a Cristynmese he haldes, // This ilke kyde conquerour, / and helde hym for lorde // Wyth dukez and dusperes / of diuers rewmes." (64-66) The diversity of the areas under his control seems to be testament to his power, as they all recognize his lordship. After that lordship is challenged by Lucius, he appears to repeat the same process as he regains control of these areas on the European continent:

> When þe Kyng Arthure had lely conquerid
> And the castell couerede of þe kythe riche,
> All þe crowell and kene be craftes of armes,
> Captayns and constables, knewe hym for lorde.
> He deuysede and delte to dyuerse lordez
> A dower for þe duchez and hir dere childire...
>
> (3068-72)

Rather than attempting to centralize power in these contested lands, he reasserts control in the same way that he has been accustomed to: by "dividing" it up, "dealing it out," and forcing "diverse lords" to hold him as their own lord.

Early in the poem, this activity seems to be a matter of practical and political utility. Arthur's empire as it is envisioned in the early parts of the poem is enormous, much of it overseas, and so he must, of course, install delegates. The fact that these are chosen by himself and to pay homage to him seems only to strengthen his hold on the sovereignty of those areas. Unsurprisingly, then, when he sets his eye on Lombardy, the first land outside of the historical boundaries of his control, he looks to organize this territory in the same way:

> The lordchipe es louely, as ledes me telles;
> I will that ducherye devyse and dele as me lykes,
> And seyn dresse wuth þe duke, if destyny suffre.
>
> (2399-2401)

The land is "lovely," he has heard, and he desires it, so he will asserts control over the area by "devising" it (here meaning "divide") and deal it out as he pleases, according to his own sovereign will. Then, after that, he will "deal with the duke" – presumably the current owner of the land, who will not be pleased to be removed from his position. The language here, however, of "dealing as he pleases," begins to creep away from simple governance and toward an emphasis on sovereign whimsy, additionally recalling Mordred's activities as a usurper, as he also "dealt as he liked," in a nearly identical phrase, with lands in Arthur's absence. Moreover,

we will recall that Mordred had assembled "an army of many barons," which suggests that there were lords in England itself that were prepared to rise against Arthur.

The poem also seems in other ways to suggest that the diversity of Arthur's realms at the beginning of the poem, which is initially presented as a strength of his lordship, might actually be a weakness. We saw above in our discussion of the voices of the conqueror and the conquered that the alliterative form of the poem, through linking words together by sound, posed another level of connection – thematic, ideological, or otherwise, and here too, the alliteration of Arthur's lists of conquest has a thematic in addition to aesthetic point. In the *Alliterative Morte*, the poet deploys this technique extensively, continuing alliterative runs for up to ten lines at a time on the same sound. In the passage that follows, form and content work together to raise questions about the nature of Arthur's initial kingdom – whether it is an empire or a realm, an international or a domestic entity, and ultimately whether it is a single entity at all. At the beginning of the poem, Arthur's conquests encompass:

> Orgayle and Orkney and all this owte iles,
> Irelande uttirly, as Occyane rynnys,
> Scathyll Scottlande by skyll he skyftys as hym lykys,
> And Wales of were he wane at hys will,
> Bathe Flaundrez and Fraunce fre til hym seluyn
> Holaund and Henawde they helde of hym bothen,
> Burgoyne and Brabane and Bretayn the lesse,
> Gyan and Gothelande and Grece the ryche,
> Bayon and Burdeux he beldytt full faire,

Turoyn and Tholus with toures full hye,
Off Peyters and of Prouynce he was prynce holdyn;
Of Valence and Vyenne, off value so noble,
Of [Ou]ergne and Anjou, thos erledoms rych,
By conqueste full cruell þey knewe hym fore lorde
Of Nauerne and Norwaye and Normaundye eke
Of Almayne, of Estriche, and oþer ynowe;
Danmarke he dryssede all by drede of hym seluyn
Fra Swynn vnto Swetheryke, with his swerde kene.

(30-47)

Alliterative poetry has a special affinity for the literary technique of *variatio,* in which the poet composes a long list of terms, giving him a chance to show off his alliterative prowess. This technique is used to sumptuous effect when describing feasts, decorative objects, or even battle scenes, and indeed the original list of Arthur's conquered territories presented here is impressive both in characterizing him as a ruler and in demonstrating the poet's skill.

However, considered from a different perspective, and especially the perspective one gains from knowing what is to come in the poem, the list takes on a more sinister aspect. Two things hold these various realms together: Arthur, and alliteration. However, at the same time that the length and diversity of this list seems to prove Arthur's prowess as a conqueror, those same features also remind us of the heterogeneity of these lands, held together only by accidents of sound, and a name. The poet starts the list with Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, all of which had a troubling history with England at the time of the poem, and the final two especially, where

major rebellions occurred in the late 14th and early 15th century.[26] These three regions, whose status as separate nations or rebellious domestic was genuinely in flux at the time, are placed unproblematically alongside areas to which England had no historical claim at all, such as Germany, Austria, and Holland. Additionally, the metrical demands of the alliterative line here force the poet to skip around geographically, as well as to include place-names on widely differing scales, from individual towns in Denmark and France to larger regions, such as Normandy, to all of Germany and Norway, naming some places two or three times by mentioning towns as well as their larger area – all of which serves to increase the impression of disunity. Alliteration appears to be linking together items that have no inherent likeness in terms of geography or category, simply through accidents of sound.

At the same time, these place-names are also linked closely to Arthur's own person, as descriptions of the particular way in which he conquered a certain area are interwoven in the B-verse with the list of place names in A-verses, as with Denmark, which "he dressed all by drede of himselven," or "Scathel Scotland," which "by skill he skiftes as him likes." Arthur's person, then, is intimately connected with this collection of territories, their metrical intertwinement suggesting their shared political fate. Despite Arthur's great reputation, however, the poetic qualities of the passage also pull the reader in the other direction, introducing from the outset a note of doubt by emphasizing the difference of these supposedly-subsumed territories. In fact,

[26] Randy Schiff, in his *Revivalist Fantasies,* points out the strangeness of the poet's vision of Scottish and Welsh kings swearing full support and loyalty to Arthur when he calls his war council against Lucius (Schiff 121-2), arguing that the Welsh king's motivations of revenge against Roman war crimes in Wales might actually be a reference to English activities there. Schiff also notes that many of the lands mentioned in this initial catalogue come up again later as allies of Mordred, in rebellion against Arthur. (87) I will return to this detail below, however it seems important to note briefly that in siding with Mordred, these lands are still not in rebellion against English sovereignty, but rather in rebellion against one man. In fighting for Mordred, they are still fighting for an English ruler rather than defecting. This is one more instance, as I argue below, of what initially seems to be an international conflict dissolving into a domestic issue through the poem's deliberate resistance to clearly defining the line between these two concepts. I believe that this poses a significant difficulty for those who would see a clear pro- or anti-*English* bent to the poem. The lack of a sense of distinguishing ethnic or national identities in the way that the poet addresses both foreigners and English sub-kings, which Schiff himself notes, seems to me to point to yet another way in which the poem's international scale serves as a cloak for domestic political issues.

Arthur's identity will soon appear to be rather too intimately connected with this list, as his physical absence is followed quickly by the revolt of many of these same lands under Mordred's leadership.

Moreover, this list of territories points to a sense of excess in Arthur's conquering activities, from the very beginning, that fits with his later actions that we saw above, in adopting the Roman practice of staking wanton territorial claims. His fearsomeness as a conqueror, evident in the B-verses of this passage, in hindsight seems to dwell on the savagery of his actions rather than their glory. At the beginning of the poem, it seemed that the poet was complicit in Arthur's empire-building, weaving alongside him a network of alliterated lands under his control. Indeed, the way that Arthur puts together his empire, by "devising," is a word that can apply to poetic composition as well, so that the poet and the conqueror are indeed, it seems, embarking on a common mission. And yet, as we saw in our analysis of the diplomatic encounter with the Romans, textual documents are hardly a secure source of appeal for claims to sovereignty in this poem. In that first section, appeal to the documentary memory of conquest spurred Arthur to violence against the Romans, not capitulation. Thus, this passage full of conquered territories and the memory of Arthur's brutality as a conqueror, although temporarily complicit in his projects, functions ultimately as a testimony to the fragmentation of his lands rather than their consolidation. And indeed, we see that Arthur's most recent enemy, the Saxons – from whom he has taken back the lands at the beginning of the poem – are included prominently in the list of Mordred's allies. The Saxons, it seems, have not forgotten the conquests that this list records, and once again, sovereign claims dissolve into violence.

This dissolution reminds us of a quality of Arthurian empire that comes to the forefront in this poem: Arthur's empire was only ever textual, and the instability of the connection between

textuality and sovereignty means that the empire is therefore fragile indeed. In our next section, we will see that as the poem draws to a close, like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it imagines its own reception before the poem has even ended, but even more explicitly and comprehensively than that other alliterative poem. In the concerns that it raises about this imagined reception, we can see the poem's vision of itself as an object taking shape: as one of the memorializing documents that creates such difficulty within the poem.

The Poem Rereads Itself

By the end of the poem, the empire that Arthur assembled has fragmented, and he, Gawain, Mordred, and Mordred's children are all dead – the latter at his own orders. As critics have noted, despite the customary *rex quondam rexque futurus*, the poem does not seem to entertain any possibility of Arthur's return. All that appears to be left is the story of Arthur's deeds, the very story upon which the poem has so far been engaged. As Arthur's philosopher offers his words of comfort, he ties the alliterative *Morte* to Arthur's enduring legacy:

> This sall in romance be redde with ryall knyghttes,
> Rekkenede and renownde with ryotous kynges,
> And demyd one Domesdaye for dedis of armes
> For þe doughtyeste þat euer was duelland in erthe--
> So many clerkis and kynges sall karpe of ȝoure dedis
>
> And kepe ȝoure conquestez in cronycle for euer!

(3440-45)

The antecedent of "this" is unclear, with no clear referent in the previous lines, but in its indeterminacy it seems to refer to the poem itself, as the record of the events so far narrated. As several critics have noted, Arthur's conversation with the philosopher here occurs at the moment that the text departs from the preview of its events set out in the prologue, where it only mentions how he and his men will "sloughe Lucyus þe lythyre, that Lorde was of Rome, / And conquered that kyngryke thorowe craftys of armes." (23-4) It seems that there is the chance offered here that it will be only Arthur's glorious deeds as they have been told up to this point that will be remembered forever, rather than the ignominious civil strife that will kill him. And yet, at the end of the poem, the poem itself, Arthur's life, and the textual tradition seem to be coterminous: "Here endis King Arthure, as auctors allege…," (4342) which suggests that the events to come are unable to be divorced from those that come earlier. Moreover, as we have seen, the earlier sections of the poem are in themselves ambiguous, and in many ways at odds. The poem highlighted this quality in the Arthurian tradition early in the poem, when the dispute with the Roman senators raised the spectre of a divided textual and documentary tradition. As the poem draws to a close, it also begins to point to this quality in itself, seeming to reread incidents within the poem in a different light.[27]

The clues that the poem is beginning to examine itself from within begin with a jarring reminder of the extratextual world. The night that he has his dream of fortune, Arthur goes to bed "with a blythe herte": "Thane this comlyche kynge, / as cronycles tellys // Bownnys brathely to

[27] The study of narrative structure has been a fruitful avenue for criticism of the poem. Jan Ziolkowski, "A Narrative Structure in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*," focuses especially on linking the first and final quarters of the poem, where many others have found some kind of repetition of earlier events of the poem in later elements, but conceived of the repetition in various ways. See also Peck, "Willfulness and Wonders," and Keiser, "Narrative Structure." Ziolkowski provides a useful survey of the criticism on this point. (Ziolkowski, "Narrative Structure," 235-6)

bede with a blythe herte (3218) (Then this comely king, as chronicles tell / Goes impetuously to bed with a happy heart.) We are reminded rather abruptly here, with the narrator's sudden allusion to an outside textual authority, that Arthur is already a character in chronicle – the chronicle we are reading, as well as the chronicles that this poem draws on for its sources. Our suspicions are confirmed by the philosopher's use of this same term as he later interprets the dream: "So many clerkis and kynges / sall karpe of youre dedis //And kepe youre conquestez / in cronycle for euer!" (3444-5) Moreover, the philosopher emphasizes that Arthur will take his place among the Nine Worthies, an explicitly literary trope. The other eight worthies are august company indeed: Alexander, Julius Caesar, King David, Charlemagne – but their stories are told in medieval literature as much for their inevitable (the tradition holds) fall as for their accomplishments. Arthur too will now be included in the "Fall of Princes" genre.

The poem has been read through the lens of medieval tragedy, which narrates such falls of great men. Russel A. Peck, looking for a Boethian definition of tragedy in the *Alliterative Morte*, has argued that the poem follows what he calls a "bipartite" structure, replaying incidents from the first half of the poem in the second. However, it can also be seen as recursive, not only replaying the events of the first half but returning again to the beginning. Peck maintains that "...the actions of the second half of the poem tend to reflect deluded judgment and to parody the more rationally oriented events of the first part."[28] His division of the poem into two halves here is clearly dependent on an interpretation of the poem as Aristotelian tragedy, in the wake of Matthew's influential study *The Tragedy of Arthur.* He refers to Arthur's taking of the beard-kirtle as "incipient overreaching" early in the poem and refers to him as the "victim of his own tyrannical acts."[29] The Battle of Sessoine is a turning point only if it is the beginning of his "fatal

[28] Peck, "Willfulness and Wonder," 157.
[29] *Ibid.* 165-6.

flaw" – i.e., pride, or in Peck's Boethian terms, "willfulness". However, from the perspective of the *casus* tradition within which the poem imagines Arthur to be now included, Arthur's rise continues until the dream of Fortune, culminating with Arthur's victory at Lombardy and the surrender of Rome. Arthur's siege at Metz, however vicious, and his victory at Lombardy, which leads to Roman submission, go no farther than he said he would at the beginning of the poem. However, what Peck's article does point out is that the narrative structure supports not only a decline but a regression, a reinterpretation.

This structural design is confirmed and complicated by the words of the philosopher with which we began this chapter. The philosopher offers here an assessment of the deeds described in the poem that is quite different in tone from the way his campaigns were previously described. Instead of seeing them as great achievements, the philosopher instead emphasizes the human toll and unjustified nature of the wars Arthur waged in the poem:

> Thow has schedde myche blode, and schalkes distroyede,
> Sakeles, in cirquytrie, in sere kynges landis.
> Schryfe the of thy schame and schape for thyn ende!
>
> (3398-3400)

This is a shocking speech, particularly on one's first read through the poem – it is the first time that the problem of guilt has appeared overtly in the text, and it is easy to see why this moment has been the topic of much scholarly debate. And it is not just his lasting fame that now appears to be at stake: in his reassurance to Arthur quoted above, Arthur's dream interpreter wavers back and forth between earthly and divine "readers," transitioning from romance to divine judgment

and back again to chronicle without acknowledging a change of register. In the universe of the alliterative *Morte,* it appears that one's *gesta* is not merely a record left for the living, but also the account given to God.[30] The poet here is also revisiting one of the themes of his invocation: at the very beginning of the poem, the poet similarly elides audience reception into the moment of divine judgment. Similarly, Arthur himself also repeatedly refers to his "rewthe werkes" in the last half of the poem, introducing a new tone of retrospection, regret, and critically - reinterpretation. The opening of the poem says, as a point of pride, that Arthur and his knights are "ware in their werkes" – but now we are getting a different picture. Moreover, from the dream of fortune onward, the poem has exceeded the storyline as it is given in the invocation, which includes not only no mention of Arthur's returning home to a civil war but also no hint of his death. The tale is complete; now begins the interpretation. This moment is not just climactic because it is the moment of Arthur's fall, but also because the text here begins to curl back on and reinterpret itself, imagining the reception of the poem before it has entirely ended.

The alliterative *Morte* thus ends containing at least two competing interpretations of itself embedded within the text, as well as imagining two distinct audiences that both stretch out "forever," both earthly and divine. In the latter part of the poem, actions that seem to be celebrated earlier are systematically replayed and critiqued, in a way that confirms the fault lines that we had already discovered within the portrayal of documentary culture in our first section and Arthur's practices of "division" in our second. It remains to be seen, however, whether the close association posited by the poet between the narrative of Arthur and his poem – coterminous, dependent on one another for their continued fame – extends to a condemnation of what we saw earlier as an initial complicity in Arthur's projects. To what extent is the text itself

[30] At the very beginning of the poem, the poet similarly elides audience reception into the moment of divine judgment, wishing the poem to be both "wychip till Hym selvyn" (to God) and "plesande and profitabill to the pople þat them heres." (10-11)

implicated in this violence, and the repeated failure of documentary culture to avert such violence? The answer lies in the poem's approach to its classical setting, which helps us situate it within the wider context of contemporary classicizing poetry in medieval England.

Sibling Rivalry

It is common for medieval romance to "medievalize" and "romanticize" classical settings; classical figures are almost always figured in medieval dress, in medieval courts, and with medieval manners, and classical locations are overlaid with medieval English placenames, as when Winchester becomes Thrace in *Sir Orfeo*. In the *Alliterative Morte*, however, this convention takes the shape of a direct confrontation between an English figure and the classical world rather than an untroubled elision between them. It has been argued that French and English kings looking for validation of their power avoided association with Rome, choosing for their model Troy instead because of their interest in regional, rather than world, empire.[31] This reasoning would fit well with other work on the *Alliterative Morte* and alliterative romance more generally; it has been suggested that the poem, in consideration of its audience, reflects baronial political interests in decentralized government.[32] Except, the classical figure with which the

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[31] See Guenée, *States and Rulers in Later Medieval Europe*, 58-65 .

[32] Susan Crane has linked the thematic concerns of insular romance to the unique governmental system in medieval England, which relied heavily on powerful barons, who has found that insular romances reflect in their concerns the idiosyncratic governmental situation in England, "where virtually without military recourse, barons relied on the courts and on the right of inheritance to perpetuate their control of land. The romances of English heroes picture baronial claims that rise above the merely legal to the unquestionably just, and join blood lines inextricably to property rights...Beyond this wide ranging harmony are the pagans, usurpers, monsters, and wrong-headed kings who challenge properly established order. This poetic conception of noble life is grounded in the barony's history." (Crane 14) Although she focuses only on earlier Anglo-Norman texts, Rosalind Field bridges the temporal gap by tracing out a connection between Anglo-Norman romance and later alliterative poetry, which hinges on one key link: this audience. She characterizes this audience as regional aristocracy or barons, "which, while separate from the London court, was far from unsophisticated, and which appreciated lengthy well-structured romances with a conservative insular and often local flavour." Rosalind Field, "The Anglo-Norman Background to Alliterative Verse," 58.

poem engages is not the widespread motif of Troy, but rather Rome. Rome is an uncommon setting for medieval romance, but if Guenée is correct about the general reasons behind this preference, Rome should represent here fantasies of world imperial power, and in a way they do, briefly, for Arthur, as he tries to supersede that empire himself. However, as we have seen, the poem's take on these imperial fantasies is at least conflicted if not condemnatory, so that it does not seem to be the simple case that this text, in calling on Rome, embraces the imperial ambitions that Trojan texts stop short of.

Nor does the poem seem to call upon Rome for the reasons that other contemporary English literature might: as a source of "authorities," *auctores.* In contrast to the French romance tradition and contemporary English authors, such as Gower and Chaucer, which do engage with the Roman literary tradition frequently, if sometimes only to mention the names of these famous authors, medieval English romance on the whole does not explore a literary connection to Rome. The famous texts and authors of Rome appear nowhere in the *Alliterative Morte* either. Instead, the literary culture of the poem is firmly medieval and British, including details of late medieval heraldry, place names, military vocabulary, and cuisine. The Latin language, when it appears, is "corrumped alle" – in other words, Italian.[33] Instead of blending easily into the medieval context as knights, these messengers from the past (in fact from England's own past) clash with its present.

In fact the answer I propose to the riddle of this poem's engagement with Rome does have to do with Troy, but in a way that poses a dramatically different relationship with Troy than we see in other contemporary texts. In this poem, we have seen, Rome is at the heart of the action, but as a living political entity rather than a distant political ancestor. The Roman senators

[33] This phrase occurs in the exchange between Arthur and Cradock, who is dressed in pilgrim's garb, coming with the message of Mordred's rebellion. They greet each other in Italian, or perhaps the poet's imagined "corrumped" form of Latin, but he recognizes Cradock by his accent.

walk straight into medieval Britain, and compete with Arthur as contemporaries. They speak his language – as we saw, even his legal language – and he addresses Sir Cradock in their encounter on the continent in theirs. At the same time that Arthur and his men establish this connection with Rome, the poem also seems to explicitly reject connections with Troy. In another poem in which midwinter visitors arrive to challenge King Arthur, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Trojan lineage is cited both at the beginning and end of the poem as a device that places the poem in that distant, authoritative time of foundation.[34] The *Morte,* on the other hand, not only avoids Trojan allusion in its invocation, but seems to explicitly challenge it in the very few mentions that it makes to Troy in the rest of the text. It does, however, call on Troy at the end of the poem, in a context that suggests it is thinking not of the glory it derives from the allusion but rather the sorrow and misfortune. The allusion appears as Arthur lays dead with his empire dissolved: "Thus endes King Arthur, as auctors allege, / That was of Ectores kin, the kinge son of Troy / And of Sir Priamous, the prince, praised in erthe; / Fro thethen brought the Bretons all his bold elders / Into Bretain the brode, as the Brut telles." (4342-4346) We are reminded here by the connection with Arthur's fall and death that the Trojan story is, at root, one of defeat and destruction even if the names of its refugees are august.

Troy appears once more near the middle of the poem, and again in a context which casts doubt on the grandeur such claims really afford. When he is challenged about the antiquity and legitimacy of his coat of arms, Arthur's retainer Sir Cleges reaches immediately for Brutus:

Myn armez are of ancestrye enueryde with lordez

[34] "Siþen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye, / Þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondeȝ and askez..." (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* ll. 1-2). "þus in Arthurus day is aunter bitidde -- / Þe Brutus bokez þerof beres wyttenesse. / Syen Brutus, þe bolde burne, boȝed hider fyrst, / After þe segge and þe asaute watz sesed at Troye, Iwysse, /Mony aunterez herebiforne / Haf fallen such þer is." (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* ll.2522-2527)

And has in banere bene borne sen sir Brut tyme,
At the cité of Troye, þat tyme was ensegede,
Ofte seen in asawtte with certayne knyghttez,
Fro þe Brute broghte vs and all oure bolde elders
To Bretayne þe braddere within chippe-burdez.

(1694-99)

"The Brut" is again in a very real sense here the *Brut* – "within ship-boards" perhaps even recalling a text between "boards" – one of the poem's main sources, and another instance of this poem's consistent conflation between literary works and their protagonists, as Brutus is here conflated with the work that describes him as Arthur is for the alliterative *Morte*. At this point, however, Sir Clegis's solemn tone is interrupted by the derisive laughter of Sextynour, whose dismissive reply effectively deflates this claim to hallowed Trojan ancestry:

Sir, sais sir Sextenour, 'saye what þe lykez,
And we sall suffyre the als vs beste semes.
Luke thi troumppez be trussede and trofull no lengere,
For þoghe þou tarye all þe daye the tyddes no bettyr.
For there sall neuer Romayne þat in my rowtt rydez
Be with rebawdez rebuykyde whills I in werlde regne.

(1700-1705)

We can see here in Sextynour's dismissal a strong indication that by this time, Trojan claims were ringing hollow for at least one poet, despite the enduring appeal that Federico charts in her study of "New Troy" narratives in literature contemporary with this text.[35] Here, this "framing device" of English history is buried within indirect discourse in the middle of the text and explicitly derided by the target it is intended to impress.

Putting together the poem's antagonistic engagement with Rome and its dismissal of Trojan origins, the picture of England's situation with respect to the classical world is one of a sibling more than of a deferential son. After all, as Caesar remarks upon first arriving in Britain in the *Gesta Regum Britanniae,* they in fact share a common Trojan heritage: both were founded by refugees from Troy. Rome has its Aeneas and England its Brutus.[36] Elizabeth Bellamy, in her psychoanalytic reading of the relationship between Troy, Rome, and *translatio imperii,* has emphasized the confused temporal relationship of the idea of Troy-as-fallen-city constituted as an imagined prerequisite for the founding of Rome. As she points out, this conflicted, post-hoc construction of prior origins creates an image of Roman sovereignty that is just as "without beginning" as it is "without end."[37] The alliterative *Morte* pushes on just this element of insecurity in the Rome-Troy-*translatio imperii* nexus: born from the same historical and legendary foundation moment, which, it turns out, is itself unstable as an origin, Britain is first and foremost a troubled rival to Rome and other Trojan legacies more than it is direct heir to Trojan, and then Roman, power.

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[35] Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages*

[36] Geoffrey of Monmouth has Caesar remark on their shared heritage upon his first landing in Britain. In the exchange of letters between Caesar and Cassibelanus, the two leaders debate whether this shared heritage is cause for war or friendship. According to Caesar, the Britons must be much diminished in strength by occupying their lands at the edge of the earth; their political fates ought to be tied together like their blood is, but with Rome firmly in the superior role. Cassibelanus responds chastising Caesar for breaking the family bonds that they share. (*HRB* Bk. IV, §54-5, pp. 68-9.

[37] Bellamy, "Translations of Power" 70-71.

In other words, we see that the poem again, but on an even wider historical and geographical scale, attests to a narrative of fragmentation rather than single line of descent. Its vision of Arthurian Britain and of modern Europe is not one in which it makes sense to claim a single dominant sovereignty in the way that Trojan myths suggest; on the contrary, sovereignty in this text is a dynamic question that must be answered not with recourse to insufficient and unstable documents but rather perpetually contested in the present. In this sense, the poem is not about Arthur but about the Arthurian world – that middle place between the founding narratives that feature Brutus and the present. In that "middleness," Arthur represents the messy conflicts that interrupt that clear connection between Brutus and present-day England, some of the antagonists of which appear within his conquests and then within Mordred's rebel army, as we saw above.

Chronicle of the type that this poem writes, then, *is* the reckoning that Arthur and Lucius imagine when they threaten one another with it at the beginning of the poem, but not exactly as they imagine it. Instead of securing a clear claim to sovereignty, these texts instead remind the present of historical differences, forcing the present to reckon with the past and with disunity all over again. The concept of rebellion as it is manipulated, and then waged in earnest, is a manifestation of this historical difference that is suppressed by narratives of single sovereignty over Britain and Europe, a connection that we will see made even more clearly in Gower's *Vox Clamantis*.

Of course, in addition to a connection with the classical world through Rome, the poem is also an heir to and participant in the Arthurian textual tradition, which was appropriated widely for political ends.[38] We began by examining the instabilities of that textual tradition, and saw

[38] The phenomenon has been most studied with relation to Edward III. See Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry*, and Collins, *Order of the Garter*, which traces that institution from the mid-fourteenth to mid-fifteenth century. Chism

also how the text seemed in one sense to be complicit with Arthurian empire building, but then seemed to turn in on itself. But this need not necessarily suggest, as Patterson would say, that history as it is imagined in this very historical-seeming, chronicle-like romance fails. The role of historical consciousness in dismantling the Arthurian project in this poem is only futile if the goal is assumed to be a unified world empire, exceeding even the bounds of what Vance Smith has called Arthur's "patrimonial legacy."[39] Indeed, this seems initially to be the aim of the text, as the introduction of imperial Rome appears to confirm; England will challenge and even overcome the greatest empire in known history. As we have seen, however, the poem makes a strong case that Arthurian literature is properly not a poetry of conquest, and cannot be by its very nature. Quite the opposite: the *Alliterative Morte* testifies not only to the memory of difference and fragmentation that undermines the imperial projects in this text, but also to the implication of chronicle and poetry in supporting those projects in the first place.

In our next chapter, we will meet in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* another great conqueror suffering from domestic challenges. As in the alliterative *Morte,* these challenges seem to stem from a persistent memory of difference that cannot be erased but instead comes to haunt and disrupt the domestic sphere from within. However, while the *Morte* approaches this question from the perspective of textual foundations, the *Knight's Tale* casts this struggle instead as a problem of textual closure, both poetic and political. The poem begins by narrating what seems like the beginning of a great triumph, and seems prepared to tell the story of the glorious return home of a conqueror. However, the lines from Statius's *Thebaid* that appear before the *Knight's Tale* in several major manuscripts alert readers to the real tale to come: one in which the

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sees a line of continuity running through the efforts of Edward I and Edward III to recruit aristocracy to augment sovereign power through the pageantry of Arthurian aristocratic inclusion, such as the creation of the Order of the Garter, and the AMA's critical "attritional consciousness" which directs attention away from these formalities and toward the real costs of constant warfare. (Chism, *Alliterative Revivals,* 203-4)

[39] Smith, *Arts of Possession,* 189.

conqueror's return results not in a celebration of the end of war but rather the expansion of violence from the foreign battlefield to the conqueror's homeland, and even his own household. In this tale, the wartime conquests of Theseus are not entirely left on the battlefield abroad, nor is the tale's epic heritage firmly behind it. I link this geographical and generic boundary-crossing to the text's concern for the proper sovereign response to violence on domestic soil – in other words, to rebellion and civil unrest. In Theseus's struggle to contain this violent element that he himself has brought into his homeland, the poem asks: when and how does a sovereign take such enemies back into his household? How can he and the narrator both "domesticate" this recursive, Theban heritage of violence?

Triumph, Interrupted: Between "Conqueror" and "Governour" in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*[1]

Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* has proven perennially resistant to classification by even the broadest categories in our critical lexicon. As Charles Muscatine pointed out sixty years ago, it is remarkable that a poem that has been so well-studied should still enjoy little critical consensus on basic matters such as its purpose, tone, and genre.[2] Muscatine's own intervention, although it succeeded in establishing that the poem might leave a "struggle between noble designs and chaos" deliberately unresolved, has only multiplied the range of possible responses to the poem. In place of "noble designs and chaos," other scholars since have found different sets of ideological oppositions in the tale, often tied to specific characters: Arcite and the sphere of Venus versus Palamon and the sphere of Mars; Palamon as the representative of active life versus Arcite as the representative of the passive life; the clash between Christianity and Neoplatonism; or the forces of law and civilization against the unruly demands of erotic desire. [3] The range of such oppositions only makes it all the more difficult to establish the genre of the *Knight's Tale*. Is it an epic or romance? High drama or parody? Consolation, satire, or chivalric treatise?

One point of critical consensus, at least, has been that the *Knight's Tale* occupies a space somewhere between epic and romance, as does its source, Boccaccio's *Teseida.* However, as

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[1] I thank Leonard Barkan for his generous and helpful comments on an early version of this chapter as respondent for the COM dissertation colloquium.

[2] Muscatine opens his landmark 1950 article with a review of the unsatisfactory state of scholarship on the poem. In contrast to the criticism of other tales from the work, he says, the criticism of the *Knight's Tale* is marked by "a characteristic indecisiveness - made particularly evident where equally acute analyses produce conflicting and contradictory results - and by a simplicity that does not do justice to the poem and its five hundred years of popularity." (Muscatine, "Form, Texture, and Meaning in the *Knight's Tale*," 911) Muscatine himself read the poem as a "struggle between noble design and chaos," the world-view that was for him representative of late medieval English chivalry.

[3] See Douglas Brooks and Alastair Fowler, "The Meaning of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*;" Fairchild, "Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon;" Robert Hanning, "The Struggle Between Noble Designs and Chaos;" Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity,* 108-143; and Sherman, "The Politics of Discourse in Chaucer's *Knights Tale.*"

many critics have also noted, in the course of dramatically condensing Boccaccio's poem, Chaucer removes many of its epic features. I will argue in this chapter that what Chaucer omits is not as revealing as how he does so. Rather than silently omitting these generic features, the knight reshapes his narrative through extensive use of the device of *occupatio* or *praeteritio*, the act of negative narration in which one claims to pass over certain material, but discloses it in the disavowal. In his pervasive use of this technique, the knight tells a romance that constantly envisions, and then closes off, epic potentialities – or, at least, attempts to close them off.

In this way, he offers us a tale that fashions for itself a genre that I will call the "epic remainder" – a tale that defines itself not as epic, nor as romance, and not even as an epic romance, but a romance that is in danger of collapsing back into epic.[4] As an "epic remainder," Chaucer's Knight tells a tale that reopens the poetic matter of epic, but then struggles to conclude it, so much so that the difficulties of closure itself, both poetic and martial, become the driving force of the poem's narrative style. [5] In reading the tale as an "epic remainder," a new narrative emerges surrounding the poem's central figure Theseus. Paradoxically, Theseus is both the obstacle to, and the tale's best hope of, achieving narrative closure. As we will see, he struggles throughout the tale to impose an ending on the Theban campaign with which the tale begins, but

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[4] Boccaccio's poem falls easily into the category of an epic romance – a romanticized epic, in which the conventions of romance are lifted up to the level of epic. See Wetherbee, "Romance and Epic in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," p.312 for the lack of tension between the text's two generic categories. Chaucer's poem, however, is something generically different still.

[5] The link between the *Knight's Tale* and the *Thebaid* is not unexamined in the critical literature, although it has not attracted sustained attention. In the 1960's, the work of Paul Clogan and Robert Haller established a clear link between Chaucer's first tale and Statius, the former by demonstrating that Chaucer appears, based on certain textual details, to have been working directly in places from a glossed copy of the Latin poem; and the latter by emphasizing the remaining epic elements in the *Knight's Tale*, arguing that the poem takes Theseus as the "model ruler," and the epic as the appropriate form "to define the qualities of a ruler," and in doing so to comment on several contemporary political issues. See Clogan, "Chaucer and the *Thebaid* Scholia," and Robert Haller, "The *Knight's Tale* and the Epic Tradition." Leah Schwebel has most recently examined the genealogy of Statius-Boccaccio-Chaucer through the trope of the elision of the source text, as a way of taking up the epic tradition but also projecting forward to future adaptors. See Schwebel, "The Legend of Thebes and Literary Patricide." See also Wetherbee, "Romance and Epic in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," for a detailed discussion of the tale's relationship to Boccaccio, and the medievalized, "feminized" Dantean Statius.

is frustrated by the continued presence and continued quarrel of Palamon and Arcite.[6] Palamon and Arcite, as well as the two foreign war brides in Theseus's own household, are a constant challenge to the closure of Theseus's foreign imperial campaigns because they are living reminders of them, and living on domestic soil. Considered in this light, we can see why the epic elements of Theseus's story that derive from Chaucer's textual source, Boccaccio's *Teseida,* are not silently omitted, but rather brought clearly into view before they are whisked away again. Like his prisoners of war, Theseus's activities abroad at the beginning of this tale will come to haunt his domestic affairs, exposing his homeland of Athens to the violence that marked his foreign campaigns.

Such anxieties in the *Knight's Tale,* I will suggest, respond to a tension between ruling with wrath and ruling with mercy that would have been familiar to a late fourteenth-century courtly audience.[7] During his reign, Richard II was consistently challenged by domestic unrest, and I will argue that this text debates the proper response to rebellion, figuring a violent response as one that confuses the sovereign roles of the domestic ruler, who ought to rule with his eye primarily toward mercy, and the foreign conqueror, whose activities are marked primarily by wrath.[8] In the *Knight's Tale,* we will see Chaucer constructing a division between the domestic sphere of Athens as a supposed space of love and Mercy, associated with Venus, and the martial

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[6] The poem's insistence on the topic of conquering starts early on. The description of Theseus as a "conqueror" appears six times in the first 160 lines of the poem, but the word appears again in the tale only once more: in the portrait of Conquest in the temple of Mars at line 2028.

[7] On the *Knight's Tale* and contemporary court culture, see Robertson, "Elements of Realism." Patterson's chapter, "The *Knight's Tale* and the Crisis of Chivalric Identity," in *Chaucer and the Subject of History* is a detailed reading of the tale against the anxieties and inconsistencies in contemporary chivalric culture, arguing that in the tale "Chaucer…historicized his world." (Patterson, "Crisis," 168)

[8] Judith Ferster, in her book *Fictions of Advice,* considers the "advice to princes" genre during this period, dealing also with Gower and Chaucer, though with different works. Ferster convincingly argues for expanding this genre into literary works that may not immediately present themselves as such. In particular, Ferster's argument that the appeal to the antiquity of sources is a way to shield the author from political reprisal for his work and an identifying characteristic of the "mirror for princes" is of special interest for the present project, substantiating the link that is also found here between classical influence and poetic texts that address, often obliquely, questions of contemporary politics.

exploits on the battlefield at Thebes as a space of wrath: the conflict Palamon and Arcite are engaged in is translated from war to love as soon as the setting changes from Thebes to Athens. However, the main figures of the poem all must travel, some repeatedly, from one of these spheres to the other as captives, exiles, and conquerors in a way that confuses the easy division of Theseus's sovereign space into these spheres of wrath and mercy, and of his own kingly persona into the corresponding roles of conqueror or king.

This tension between Theseus's two identities is quietly set up within the first three lines of Chaucer's tale, where the Knight describes Theseus as "of Athenes...lord and governour, / And in his tyme swich a conquerour / That gretter was ther noon under the sonne."[9] (861-3) In many manuscripts of the *Knight's Tale,* lines from the very end of Statius's *Thebaid* which describe Theseus's return to Athens preface the tale, placing the beginning of Chaucer's tale very near the end of the *Thebaid.*[10] These lines signal the critical shift in Theseus's identity that occurs at this moment both in the *Thebaid* and in the *Knight's Tale*. Theseus is in the process of transitioning, as he approaches his home in Athens, from his role as foreign "conqueror" back to his role as "lord and governour" – a process that is interrupted by the plea of the Argive women, which sends him straight to Thebes to conquer again. That process of transition, which the women arrest, is in fact never completed in the tale. The divided identities of Theseus, Palamon, Arcite, and even Emelye and her sister Hippolyta, constantly cross over the line between foreign and domestic space, and between wrath and mercy, disrupting this order of rule and keeping a new "epic of conflict" of *Thebaid* proportions hovering just over the horizon.[11]

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[9] Quotations from the Knight's Tale (hereafter KT) are taken from The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd ed., ed. Benson.
[10] These lines may or may not be authorial, but they appear in both the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts. In any case, my argument centers not on these lines, but the point from the text of the *Thebaid* at which Chaucer begins his own tale.
[11] Haller, and other scholars since, have recognized that in many ways, the KT echoes the *Thebaid* much more than its immediate source, the *Teseida.* Haller's argument is based on genre, while Anderson focuses on narrative structure and theme, arguing that Chaucer's main interest in the poem is in the dramatic possibilities of fraternal

By focusing on Chaucer's careful situation of his text in the classical tradition, we can establish not only that Chaucer's primary intertext is with the *Thebaid*, but also to what end he engages with that text.[12] More specifically, Polynices and Eteocles's conflict is resurrected in this tale not so that Chaucer could explore the theme of fraternal strife, in general, through the ages, as Anderson suggests, but as an established epic framework to explore the problem of a divided kingship, which the *Thebaid* uniquely addresses in the epic tradition.[13] The figure of the two brothers who cannot share political power, when held up against the supposedly ideal figure of Theseus, expose his own split allegiance, suggesting that his dual identities of "conqueror" and "governour" cannot share "lordshipe" either. [14] Furthermore, the Knight's curious method of narration rejects the epic narrative of the *Thebaid* even as it continually invokes it, demonstrating a deep ambivalence about the dangers posed to domestic politics by a sovereign ruling his own

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strife. However, these approaches treat the relationship of the *Thebaid* to the KT in general terms, without considering in depth the particular moment that the poem chooses to take off from in the *Thebaid*. The importance of that moment, as we will see, goes beyond a relationship of simple allusion, linking the two texts instead in a complex relationship of epic continuation, traced out by Philip Hardie in the post-Virgilian tradition, but which here (and perhaps elsewhere in the Middle Ages) can be seen clearly in the reception of Statius. See Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Virgil.* Hardie discusses at length the way in which the *Aeneid* both achieves epic closure and invites continuation. Many of Hardie's conclusions can be applied generally to epic, and thus also to Statius, but Statius is sometimes overtly anti-Virgilian, the conclusion to his poem being one of those moments especially. The ending is discussed in detail below, both alone and in relation to Chaucer's encounter with it.

[12] Whether out of necessity or preference, the immediate practical intertext for the *Knight's Tale* is clearly the *Teseida,* but Chaucer fails to mention Boccaccio's text despite drawing heavily from it. I suggest here not that the *Thebaid* was Chaucer's mechanical source, but rather that it was intended to be his primary ideological interlocutor. It is the only source he names in the poem, at line 2284.

[13] Anderson, David, "Theban Genealogy." Anderson presents extensive textual evidence of the parallel between the events of the *Knight's Tale* and the *Thebaid,* tracing out this continuous thread of "brotherly strife" running through the history of Thebes and the background to Chaucer's text. Statius's predecessor and oftentime model, Lucan, also takes as a theme the trope *nulla fides regni sociis* (*BC* I.92) expressed in the *Knight's Tale* with the addition of love: "love ne lordshipe /Wol noght, his thankes, have no felaweshipe." (*KT* 1624-5), but the *Thebaid's* conflict between brothers means that this trope becomes the guiding theme of the poem, where in the *Bellum Civile* it is incidental to the poem's meaning. The familial relationship between Caesar and Pompey adds to the horror of their conflict, but not much in the scheme of the overall horror of the poem. The unnatural state of fraternal conflict in the *Thebaid,* however, paves the way for endless violations of natural and human law.

[14] Ernst Kantorowicz's enormously influential 1957 book *The King's Two Bodies* demonstrated how the body of the state mirrors the body of the medieval sovereign, but that the political body transcends mortality, while the individual king's biological body naturally passes away. Political dysfunction can thus be figured as bodily disease, etc. Here, another problematic dual identity for the sovereign arises. In this case, as we will see, the tension is not between the natural and the political body, but rather two aspects of the political body requiring dramatically different types of rule.

realm like a conqueror. In this tale Chaucer, like Statius, takes up the difficult question of endings – to war, and to poems – the conclusions of which, in both the *Thebaid* and the *Knight's Tale*, will not neatly coincide.

"The remenant of the tale is long ynough"

In the opening lines of the *Knight's Tale,* Chaucer carefully negotiates his poem's relation to its epic ancestor. Readers first encounter not Chaucer's English but instead abbreviated lines from the twelfth and final book of the *Thebaid* that describe Theseus's approach to Athens, having conquered the Amazons: *Iamque domos patrias, etc.*[15] The Knight then begins the English tale in high style: "Whilom, as olde stories tellen us...," proceeding to introduce Theseus, "duke of Athens," his virtues, and his great "chivalrie," as well as the story of how Hippolyta came to be on her way to Athens along with her sister Emelye. The Knight proposes to leave Theseus riding for a moment, flanked by his "hoost in armes." This is not for the stated purpose of telling a digressive story, however, for next, the knight says he would have told us the whole story of Theseus's last campaign, the siege, the wedding feast, and a tempest on the way home – but he has no time for that. He has "a large feeld to ere," and his plow-oxen are weak; furthermore, he says, he will not hinder the other pilgrims from telling their own stories, and making a fair competition for the dinner. He picks up, after this digression-that-never-was, where he had just left off: with Theseus, riding on the road back to Athens.

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[15] *Iamque domos patrias Scithice post aspera gentis prelia laurigero etc.* "And now after fierce battles with the Scythian people (Theseus) nears home in his laurel-crowned (chariot) etc." (*Thebaid* XII.519-20) Quotations and translations from the Thebaid in this chapter are taken from *Thebaid*, ed. and trans. Shackleton Bailey, unless noted otherwise.

There are several elements in this passage that make it a curious introduction to this tale, beginning with the epigraph. These lines call attention to the specific moment in the *Thebaid* at which Chaucer is starting his tale: a moment that is of particular complexity in itself. Readers of Statius will know that the final book of the *Thebaid* poses considerable critical difficulty as a gesture of closure, and especially closure to an epic poem.[16] Polynices and Eteocles finally meet, and kill one another, in a single combat that takes place in book eleven of the *Thebaid,* a narrative turn echoed in the *Knight's Tale* by Chaucer's tournament-cum-single combat between Arcite and Palamon. In terms of Statius's modeling of the *Aeneid,* however, this is the point at which the narrative ought to stop. Instead, breaking from Virgilian precedent in content but not in length, Statius proceeds with book twelve of his epic after the climactic battle, focusing on the atypical topics of grief, burial, and the aftermath of war.

That Chaucer should begin his poem at the point in the *Thebaid* which ostentatiously diverts from epic precedents of closure seems counterintuitive: why take up the issue of poetic closure at the start of a work? The answer to this question affects a wide range of problems in the text, ranging from the tale's generic self-definition, to the figure of Theseus, and ultimately the significance of Theseus and the tale within the larger project of the *Canterbury Tales*. First, however, I would suggest here, as a starting point, that Chaucer recognizes in the *Thebaid* that text's emphasis on the lack of correspondence between "the end of war" and "the end of epic." The *Thebaid* ends not, as the *Aeneid* does, with a climactic death, but with the burial of the dead Argive fighters whose bodies, on Creon's orders, have been exposed to the animals. This vision

[16] Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Vergil,* esp. ch. 1, "Closure and Continuation, 1-19. See also Dietrich, "Thebaid's feminine ending," for reading of the ending of the poem through the lens of gender, arguing that femininity is associated in epic with lack of closure. It is interesting to note that what is often imitated by later poets of Statius's ending – by Chaucer, Lydgate, Spenser, and others well into the early modern period – is not the end of the narrative portion of the *Thebaid,* but rather its *envoi*, which, while acknowledging the poem's popularity and his hopes for its future, also cautions the poem not to rival the "divine Aeneid," but to follow instead in her "footsteps" (*vestigia*).

of closure maintains that the conflict is truly over only when the removal from view of the remainder (in this case, corporeal) of war has been effected through cultural processes of mourning.[17] As Hardie points out, the totalizing impulse of the epic genre is counterbalanced by its tendency to invite continuation through the sheer impossibility of achieving totality, and the treatment of the unburied "remainder" in Statius's deliberately extraneous twelfth book is a characteristically Statian thematization of this epic trope. In engaging, then, with this point in Statius's poem, Chaucer signals that the *Knight's Tale* will take up the invitation for continuation offered by the *Thebaid*. Initially, it seems, he might do so by telling the untold epic story of Theseus's campaign against Creon, a rare opportunity for digression passed up by Statius. However, as we will see, that campaign is also quickly eclipsed by Chaucer, and it becomes clear that the *Knight's Tale* is not only a continuation of Statius, but a continuation that will treat the subject of continuation, of the "remainder," itself.

Again, the tale sets up these terms at the outset, although if we are not attuned to the literary context in which Chaucer is writing his opening lines, their full significance is not immediately clear. With these observations about the *Thebaid* in mind, the knight's well-known remarks about the scale of his upcoming poem take on a new meaning: "I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere, / And wayke been the oxen in my plough. / The remenant of the tale is long ynough." (886-8) The knight's immediate meaning is that he plans to tell a long tale which he has only just begun, and he must get on with it – a signal that Chaucer plans to significantly abridge the much-longer *Teseida.* In this sense, the term "remenant" means only that which he has left to tell in the story of Palamon and Arcite's contention, but as we have just seen, the tale itself is also, as a whole, a "remenant" – a carrying-over of the story of the *Thebaid.*

[17] See Edwards, "The *Knight's Tale* and the Work of Mourning," for a reading of the KT against the economy of mourning, with particular attention to the lavish funeral of Arcite. The *Iliad*, on the other hand, similarly attends to burial practices to end the poem in a way that is movingly out of step with the poem's earlier events and tone.

Yet at the same time, even as it engages in this epic exercise of continuation, it is not in any straightforward way epic. Here, we can see the innovation and the formal challenge of Chaucer's interpretation of a tale that is an "epic remainder": a remnant of an epic poem, but not necessarily epic in itself. The most obvious difficulty is in content. Boccaccio took a love plot and made it the subject of epic by constructing around it an epic narrative framework; Chaucer, in turn, dismantles many of these cues while preserving the love plot. He does not, however, dismantle it into the recognizable form of romance either, with the narrative structure of the poem, among other elements, making much use of ekphrasis, parliaments of the gods, and other devices alien to medieval romance. Readers are now left with the dual problem of a poem whose genre is indeterminate both in form and content, hovering between epic and romance, philosophy (in the form of a consolation) and history (in the form of a *geste*), none of which fits in its entirety. However, if we consider the text's primary generic category to be "continuation" rather than a single classical or medieval genre, we can accommodate a more nuanced definition of the tale. In fact, I would suggest that it is more straightforward as a romance than critics often claim, although that it seems to look to older forms of romance rather than contemporary forms is a striking feature. [18] However, for the purposes of this study, it is more important to note that it is a romance which continuously looks to, and is always in danger of collapsing back into, its parent

[18] If we look to older and more popular English romances, and particularly Anglo-Norman romance, familial disputes over sovereignty are a common plotline. Even more common is a motif of exile-and-return, in which the disenfranchised heir or heirs of a kingdom eventually return with foreign armies to reclaim their lands from a usurper – although in the case of the *Knight's Tale,* they return with foreign armies to claim Emelye instead from one another. Romances of this type include *King Horn* and *Havelock the Dane*; Rosalind Field has done a great deal of work on Anglo-Norman romance involving familial dispute. On the other hand, these early romances are often called "historical romances" or "epic romances" as they are quite distinct from later courtly forms in treating political and historical topics in a realistic, rather than fantastical way; some are also extremely long, so that in this early period (which the KT seems to look back to) epic and romance characteristics are confused in any case. WP Ker, *Epic and Romance* is the classic study of the continuum of early medieval epic (for him, often equivalent to "heroic") and romance. For the relationship between Chaucer and vernacular English romance, see DV Smith, "Chaucer as an English Writer," 101-7, 115-8. See also Edward R. Haymes, "Chaucer and the English Romance Tradition." Haymes focuses on the verbal relationship between Chaucerian lines and native English romance, rather than plot patterns, but his article proves that Chaucer was reading native romance, including several examples of verbal parallels from the *Knight's Tale* with native romances.

genre of epic. What is at stake in this collapse is highlighted in the discussion below, in which we consider the knight's constant complaint that he must hurry onward as a resistance to taking on the form of epic.

Occupatio and the Remnants of Epic

What form would a genre-between-genres take? For the knight, it seems to come down to a matter of length. Even though it is one of the most prosaic ways in which we can define genre, the problem of length (figured as a problem of time for telling) recurs over and over again throughout the tale. Both of Chaucer's models for the tale are of precisely epic proportions: twelve books, which come to 9,896 lines for the *Teseida* (exactly the length of the *Aeneid*) and 9,741 for the *Thebaid.*[19] In contrast, the *Knight's Tale* consists of 3,108 lines in four sections – long for the *Canterbury Tales,* but still significantly shorter than both source materials (fitting, we should say, for a "remnant," which is always smaller than the whole). A great deal of omission and condensation must have occurred in this transition, and indeed, as he begins, the knight immediately emphasizes how much of the story he will pass over, framed as a simple mechanical problem: "certes, if it nere to long to heere, / I wolde have toold yow fully the manere" of Theseus's campaign against Hippolyta and the Amazons, (which we will recall makes up the first book of the *Teseida),* but he also has, as we saw above, "God woot, a large feeld to ere, / And wayke been the oxen in my plough, /The remenant of the tale is long ynough."

Some of Chaucer's practices of omission are silent, but many, like this one, are not: perhaps the most distinctive aesthetic feature of the *Knight's Tale* is the continuous use of a literary device, with which the knight shortens his tale without omitting information, stating

(often in great detail) that he will *not* be narrating the information he wishes to leave out. *Praeteritio* is not a popular device in romance, whose narrator usually appears for an invocation and envoi, and rarely makes himself manifest during the body of the tale. The technique is not a specifically epic convention either, but it does appear prominently at the very beginning of the *Thebaid*. Here, Statius tries and rejects various starting points in the Theban story, eventually settling on the house of Oedipus for the needed *limes,* the "limit," or place to begin, for his tale:

> Where do you command me to begin, goddesses? Shall I sing the origins of the dire folk, the rape Sidonian, the inexorable compact of Agenor's ordinance, and Cadmus searching the seas? Far back goes the tale, were I to recount the affrighted husbandman of covered soldiery hiding battle in unholy furrows and pursue to the uttermost what followed: with what music Amphion bade mountains draw nigh the Tryian walls, what caused Bacchus' fierce wrath against a kindred city, what savage Juno wrought, at whom hapless Athamas took up his bow, wherefore Palaemon's mother did not fear the vast Ionian when she made to plunge in company with her son. No; already shall I let the sorrows and happy days of Cadmus be bygones. Let the limit of my lay be the troubled house of Oedipus.[20]

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[20] ed. and trans. Shackleton-Bailey.

.....unde iubetis
ire, deae? gentisne canam primordia dirae,
Sidonios raptus et inexorabile pactum
legis Agenoreae scrutantemque aequora Cadmum?
longa retro series, trepidum si Martis operti
agricolam infandis condentem proelia sulcis
expediam penitusque sequar, quo carmine muris
iusserit Amphion Tyriis accedere montes,
unde graues irae cognata in moenia Baccho,
quod saeuae Iunonis opus, cui sumpserit arcus

For Statius, and for Lucan, who also employs this technique frequently, the device is part of a strategy of delay and avoidance in the poetic narration of the excruciating topic of civil war. Both poets make use of *praeteritio* to disavow the events that they narrate, recoiling, or at least pretending to, from the most shameful details, as Statius does here. We will recall that Chaucer, too, made use of *praeteritio* to help find an initial *limes* for his song, as the knight refuses to tell his listeners the full story of Theseus's campaign against the Amazons, "the regne of Femenye," during which he not only conquered Hippolyta, but married her. The comparison that Chaucer's clearly Statian opening effects here between Theseus's campaign and the dark history of Thebes is an uneasy one, suggesting a connection between the Scythian campaign and the string of misfortunes and evils that characterize the cycle of Thebes.

Rita Copeland, however, has argued that this device in the opening of the *Thebaid* is not *praeteritio* but instead the subtly different technique of *insinuatio,* an oratorical technique in which an undesirable detail (*causa turpis)* is deliberately acknowledged in order to shift responsibility for it away from the speaker, uniting the orator and the audience in thinking the *causa turpis* shameful.[21] Copeland suggests that Statius uses this technique as both an amplifying device for the subject matter of his poem, to "make the shameful more shameful," but also as a distancing technique, for, because he is a poet and not an orator, Statius is able to be "the

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infelix Athamas, cur non expauerit ingens
Ionium socio casura Palaemone mater.
atque adeo iam nunc gemitus et prospera Cadmi
praeteriisse sinam: limes mihi carminis esto
Oedipodae confusa domus...
(*Thebaid* I.3-17)

[21] Rita Copeland, "Insinuating Authors" *Taking Liberties with the Author: Selected Essays from the English Institute,* ed. McGill (2013). ACLS Humanities E-Books. Web. 27th Mar. 2015. § 22-67 (35).

recorder of the greatest *genus turpe* in Western fiction, but not […] its advocate."[22] This distinction is useful for differentiating between Chaucer's and Statius's approaches to the beginnings of their poems. Chaucer too makes use of a literary device that looks like Statius's gesture at the beginning of his poem to find an initial *limes* for his song, as the knight mentions in detail and then refuses to tell his listeners the full story of Theseus's campaign against the Amazons, "the regne of Femenye," during which he conquered Hippolyta, his new bride. At first, glance, it seems like the knight is reaching for an epic convention to highlight the grandiosity of his own tale, which begins indeed in high style: "Whilom, as olde stories tellen us…" and similarly passes over several potential starting points before settling on a particular moment. In imitating the opening gesture of his epic predecessor, then, Chaucer seems to take his place in the epic tradition of *auctores* on this Matter of Thebes.

However, although she does not discuss the *Knight's Tale* in her analysis, Copeland's argument helps us see that Chaucer's device here is not in fact identical to Statius's: the Knight, here and throughout the tale, practices *praeteritio* while Statius's opening device is *insinuatio.* Where *insinuatio* acknowledges an inconvenient fact already known to the audience, *praeteritio* deliberately brings into view a detail that could easily have been silently omitted, as Chaucer in fact does elsewhere in the *Knight's Tale.* At stake in the divide is a key difference in the approach to narrating shameful material: whereas Copeland finds that Statius is securely distanced from his topic, we can see here that Chaucer makes the struggle for such distance deliberately visible in his poem. The Knight's curious method of narration rejects the epic narrative of the *Thebaid* even as it continually invokes it, staging in his opening lines and throughout the tale an ongoing struggle between the narrator and his poetic matter, suggesting

[22] See Copeland, "Insinuating Authors" §51. Copeland does address Chaucer's awareness of this trope in the *Monk's Tale* , where she finds that he "does not so much perform the *insinuatio* as allude to the place or places where *insinuatio* achieved its efficacy in the folds of literary history." (§65)

that the violence of the Theban cycle cannot be so easily contained. In other words, Chaucer, by taking up and recasting this prominent Statian technique of beginning, doubts the very premise of the device of *insinuatio* – that a poet or his poem may remain untouched by the violence of his subject.

As the tale proceeds, the content of the knight's *praeteritiones* continues to follow this pattern, overtly declining to narrate epic matters but consistently alluding to them, occasionally in some detail. In the same first section of the text, the knight passes over Theseus's campaign against Creon, in which he takes up the women's request to pursue justice against Creon for them, defeats the usurper, "ransacking" the pile of bodies and pillaging the countryside, but allowing for the bodies from the battles of the *Thebaid* to be buried:

> But shortly for to speken of this thyng,
> With creon, which that was of thebes kyng,
> He faught, and slough hym manly as a knyght
> In pleyn bataille, and putte the folk to flyght...
> But it were al to longe for to devyse
> The grete clamour and the waymentynge
> That the ladyes made at the brennynge
> Of the bodies...But shortly for to telle is myn entente.
>
> (994-7)[23]

[23] This follows Statius very closely, who begins his envoi by stating that he could never capture the depth of the widows' and relatives grief, or the greatness of their mourning, so he will end his poem here.

Several hundred lines later, in the second section, we hear of Pirithous and Theseus, childhood friends, "So wel they lovede, as olde bookes sayn, / That whan that oon was deed, soothly / His felawe wente and soughte hym doun in helle -- / But of that storie list me nat to write."[24] (1198-1201) The descent into hell, of course, also has an extensive epic pedigree.[25]

The next time we see this device, it describes the chaos of the battle between Palamon, Arcite, and their armies. Here, the knight claims that "Ther is namoore to seyn, but west and est / In goon the speres ful sadly in arrest" – but then goes on at length to describe in detail the battle injuries of the various participants, which are extremely bloody considering Theseus's efforts to keep the fight non-lethal. Here, the *praeteritio* has much in common with a famous example from Lucan, in which, after the climactic Battle of Pharsalia, Lucan states that it would be "shameful" to dwell on individual deaths at the "funeral of the whole world," but then goes on to nevertheless enumerate a gruesome list of ways that soldiers were killed: "It is shameful to shed tears over many deaths, when one is present at the death of the world, or to follow the fate of single persons, asking through whose guts a deadly sword traveled, who stepped on his entrails which poured out on the ground..."[26] etc. Again, the knight does not specifically comment on how we are to interpret his presentation of the list of battle injuries, but the comparison of the example from the *Knight's Tale* with a similar instance from the epic tradition suggests that the device presents not only material inappropriate to the romance form, but also material that is unsavory or even immoral: pillaging, warfare, and bloodshed. It seems that the issue of length for the knight might be a symptom, and not the problem in itself.

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[24] This is not a classical story. The *Thebaid* does mention the pair twice; see Robinson, *Riverside* note ad loc. where he notes that Skeat, suggests *Romaunt de la Rose*, 8148-51.Theseus and Pirithous do go down to hell together to take Persephone.

[25] e.g. *Aeneid* VI; Orpheus in Ovid, *Met* X.

[26] *Inpendisse pudet lacrimas in funere mundi / Mortibus innumeris, ac singula fata sequentem / Quaerere, letiferum per cuius viscera volnus / exierit, quis fusa solo vitalia calcet...* (*BC* VII. 617-20)

The text's most lavish and extensive *praeteritio* comes at the very end of the tale, describing the funeral of Arcite, a set piece which in the criticism of epic we would normally call the funeral games.[27] The knight begins his clause in 2919: "But how the fyr was maked upon highte / Ne eek the names that the trees highte," going on to name the trees and list, for over forty lines, all of the events attending the funeral in detail, prefacing many of the lines with "Ne how [characters mourned]" or "Ne what [jewels, trees for burning, libations were expended]." The clause is not resolved until 2966, which means that the knight has gone on for 47 lines about a funeral he said he would not narrate. Like the extended ekphrases describing the temples to the three gods in the text's third section, this type of narrative styling works directly against the knight's claim that he is running out of time. The phrase "shortly for to tell," or very similar variations with a different verb, appears fifteen times in the tale, indicating a persistent desire for a shorter, and apparently non-epic, form. Yet, at the same time, the knight constantly keeps in view these epic elements; just like the tale as a whole, these *praeteritiones* reopen the material of the *Thebaid* and the *Teseida,* but seem unable to close them off again.

We can see, then, that the device of Chaucer's *praeteritiones* vacillates between beginnings and endings, and between the delay and the hastening of closure. Statius both begins and ends his epic with the device, and Chaucer takes it up at the beginning of his poem to link his work with the end of Statius's. The device gives the impression of haste, but in many places greatly slows down the narrative. Although many of the *praeteritiones* allude to events that are narrated in the *Teseida,* the device goes beyond intertextual allusion or a tool for condensing that text's longer narrative.[28] Instead, it becomes a means by which the knight controls his tale,

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[27] e.g. *Aeneid* V; *Iliad* XXIII.

[28] Mark Sherman has also examined the trope of *occupatio* as more than a narrative tic, concluding that the device is the Knight's way of "impos[ing] order on a seemingly unruly world threatening to go its own way." We differ on the reasoning behind the Knight's desire to compress or constrain his extratextual material, with Sherman focusing on

shaping the narrative into the unique form of a remnant of epic, which in this case takes the shape of a romance punctuated with persistent remnants of epic. The perspective that emerges on these "remnants," from comparison with the way that classical authors of civil war use the technique, suggests that the material that is passed over is repellent, a matter of horror, and that therefore if the knight does not control his narrative, this conflict between the brothers could also become an epic of horror: the *Thebaid* all over again.

The Human Remainder

We have seen how textual remainders, in the form of *praeteritio,* resist the form of epic in Chaucer's poem, but to understand the political ramifications of these remnants we turn to a different sort of remainder in the text: a human remainder. The knight's tendency to fill his poem with narrative "dead ends" through his use of *praeteritio* is reflected literally in the circumstances which prompt Theseus's intervention in Thebes. Creon is the first to leave the bodies of the defeated open to the animals, and, more importantly, visible to those left behind. In his turn, however, Theseus, called in to erase this terrible reminder of that first war, does exactly the opposite, intervening with a second campaign that leaves the exact same "remainder" as a "reminder": a pile ("taas") of bodies.

In this way, the text continues the strain of challenge to the closure of a conquering campaign, which began with Theseus's interrupted triumph and which is sustained throughout the poem by the *praeteritiones* we have just studied above. We know from our reading of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* in the last chapter that imperial meaning structures struggle with

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the repression of desire and "Femenye" in the Knight's narrative rather than epic elements of the source texts. Sherman, "Politics of Discourse" 93. In fact, the only source that Chaucer cites by name is Statius: he directs readers to "Stace of Thebes and thise bookes olde" for more on the ritual of Emelye kindling fires to Diana at line 2294.

"reminders," or what the *Knight's Tale* refers to as a "remnant." A conqueror who invokes a history of conquering risks undermining his claims to a single sovereignty, rather than shoring them up: dividing, rather than unifying, an empire. And indeed, in this tale, we do not have to wait long for a problematic remainder/reminder to surface, for out of Theseus's conquered heap emerges the unfinished business of that war: two cousins whose ensuing strife will continue that conflict, albeit in a different venue. These cousins, plucked from the pile of bodies "nat fully quyke, ne fully dede," serve as a different kind of remnant within the text as decidedly unplaceable figures; when they are first found, they are between life and death, and they continue to represent a troublesomely mixed identity as the tale goes on.

The way in which textual allusion and *praeteritio* created textual remnants in the knight's narrative has already been discussed, but the way in which a character in the poem could be considered a remnant is perhaps less obvious. In order to understand the way this develops in the tale and why, we will benefit from first considering the term itself, as well as some relevant conclusions from earlier in this dissertation. In Middle English, as in Modern English, the word "remenant" refers to something that is left over: a remainder.[29] In one sense, the word then describes something that is cast off, as, for example, the specific term we give to an oddly-shaped or awkward piece of fabric, the last remaining on the roll after the rest of it is sold: the "remnant." On the other hand, it is also possible for the word to describe a precious remainder.[30]

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[29] See OED, "remnant." The word is derived in English from Anglo-Norman *remanaunt.*

[30] When the term "remainder" is used today in translation studies, often with a postcolonial inflection, it tends to refer to a persistent marker of difference – some remaining element in a text that remains distinctly foreign and untranslatable. See Lawrence Venuti, as interpreted in Paul Bandia, *Translation as Reparation,* 259, where the "remainder" for Bandia is the untranslatable – the elements of a text that "resist all attempts at translation or assimilation into the fluency of the receptor language." Some critics extend this logic to populations, where some aspect of personal or group identity continues to mark the "Otherness" of otherwise absorbed peoples. Zita Nunes employs this term, which she derives from Freud, in her work *Cannibal Democracy: Race and Representation in the Literature of the Americas,* on cannibalism and "racial democracy" in Brazil and the United States, especially ch. 4. The "remainder" here is the "undigested" element of identity, the sign that an individual or group is still distinct from the whole; often, in her study, this is race. In some ways, the narrative of domestication in the *Knight's Tale*, in

The difference to be observed here is between "what is left" and "all that is left." This concept of the tale as a "remenant" recalls our argument in the last chapter, in which we found that the *Alliterative Morte* struggled consistently with the resurgence of previously-conquered peoples as a result of a renewed attempt by a sovereign to assert imperial historiography. In that chapter, the "remnant" of conquered peoples' identities troubled and eventually derailed Arthur's imperial ambitions, and we have seen that under certain political circumstances, this alternation in the meaning of "remenant" becomes critical: for the conquered, the "remenant" is the precious remainder; for the conqueror, the "remenant" is a troubling and potentially dangerous loose end.

Within the *Knight's Tale,* that "remenant" takes human form in Palamon and Arcite. To Theseus, these cousins are a continued threat as the last members of the royal line of Thebes.[31] Their contention over Emelye is an obvious continuation of the conflict between the brothers Polynices and Eteocles, the collateral damage of which was stopped by their deaths, but whose strife continued onto their very funeral pyre, upon which the flames from both of their bodies continued to fight one another. The aftermath of war is felt through the continued presence of Palamon and Arcite in this way, but it is also demonstrated by the two women: we should remember that Emelye and Theseus's wife Hippolyta are both war captives themselves. The dynamic center of these characters is Theseus, who is surrounded by these living representatives of his activities abroad.

When the term "remainder" is used today in modern postcolonial studies, it tends to refer to a resistant marker of identity – some remaining element in otherwise-absorbed populations

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which the only resolution of the cycle of violence between Palamon and Arcite that can be envisioned is marriage of one to a member of Theseus's own household, and the death of the other, is consistent with the desire to erase this memory of difference from the conquered foreigner.

[31] Chaucer diverges from Boccaccio in the treatment of the two cousins under Theseus's watch. In Boccaccio, they are treated as noble houseguests rather than prisoners, attended to by servants and put up in lavish apartments. Chaucer, on the other hand, makes clear that they are isolated and treated as prisoners by Theseus. In his study *Chaucer and Boccaccio,* Robert Edwards gives detailed accounts of Chaucer's modifications to the *Knight's Tale* as well as other of his adaptations from Boccaccio.

that continues to distinguish them from the dominant group, race, or colonial power. In the *Knight's Tale,* however, Palamon and Arcite are strangely faceless. In addition to the excision of the *Teseida's* epic machinery, which we mentioned earlier, the other major change Chaucer makes in translating from Boccaccio is in characterization. In the *Teseida*, Palamon and Arcite are easily distinguishable characters, and more narrative attention is devoted to Palamon. Chaucer, on the other hand, carefully adjusts the tale in order to emphasize the indistinguishability of Palamon and Arcite as well as their respective armies. When the cousins are found, the text emphasizes that they are found lying side-by-side and "in oon armes" – dressed in the same arms, most likely also a sly reference as well to the well-known Scropes trial in which it was decisively proven that two men could not bear the same arms.[32] Although the knight emphasizes that the cousins are obviously of royal blood, they are of "two sustren yborne," but those sisters are not named or matched to their sons. In contrast to the very detailed descriptions of their two supporting kings, Lygurge and Emetreus, later in the tale, Chaucer does not physically describe Palamon and Arcite at at the moment they are found, nor does he do so anywhere else in the tale. In fact, when they are named, the moment at which we might expect them to take on separate identities, the manner in which this is phrased only reinforces their interchangeability: "Of whiche two Arcita highte that oon, / And that oother knyght highte Palamon." (1011-1015) But which is which?

This indistinguishability is extended to their supporting armies, and the text dwells on this point at some length:

In al the world, to seken up and doun,

[32] Chaucer himself testified at the trial. Lee Patterson's chapter on the *Knight's Tale* in his *Chaucer and the Subject of History* provides a detailed account of Chaucer's testimony and argues that the events of the trial were an influence on Chaucer's poem.

So evene, withouten variacioun,
There nere swiche compaignyes tweye,
For ther was noon so wys that koude seye
That any hadde of oother avauntage
of worthynesse, ne of estaat, ne age,
So evene were they chosen, for to gesse
And in two renges faire they hem dresse.

(2587-2594)

Despite the fact that these two armies come from different geographical areas and that the kings that lead them are differentiated, the fighting ranks appear to be completely identical. The thorough uniformity of the armies has been taken as representative of the knight's constant striving for order and balance in the tale, but there is another, darker aspect to this uniformity. In narrating a situation of conflict where neither side has an advantage or any distinguishing features, deciding who is waging just war and, further, who ought to win, is impossible, and characteristic of the presentation of civil war: like against like. When Shakespeare rewrote this story, using Chaucer as a source for his play *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* under the pressure of this profound ambiguity, he ends the very last speech of the play by adjudicating the disagreement between the cousins, awarding the true right to Palamon simply because he saw her first.[33]

[33] *Two Noble Kinsmen,* Act V, Scene IV. Theseus's speech here is far more humble than his speech in Chaucer's work, merely marveling at the ironies of life and abdicating his roles of judge, governor, and even interpreter of events to the gods. In Chaucer's text, Theseus instead offers a strong and directional perspective on events that is challenged by the presence of many other voices in his text. In general, Shakespeare's version tends to "say out loud what Chaucer's text is thinking" – the play is thus far less mysterious and intriguing than the *Knight's Tale,* but also a very astute reading of it. See Donaldson, *The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer,* for a rather different take on the matter. Donaldson sees the play as far darker than the *Knight's Tale* because it attributes the chaos of the tale to human fallibility instead of the vagaries of destiny.

The inability to distinguish between these two combatants is problematic not just in absolute terms, but also within the poem's own definition of wise rule. Riding up to the cousins as they fight in the grove in section two of the *Knight's Tale*, Theseus is immediately enraged that these two men are back on his territory, one having escaped and the other violating his exile. However, the women in his party eventually convince Theseus to change his mind and show the men mercy. As he is deliberating, he begins to talk under his breath to himself:

> And softe unto hymself he seyde, "Fy
> Upon a lord that wol have no mercy,
> But been a leon, bothe in word and dede,
> To hem that been in repentaunce and drede,
> As wel as to a proud despitous man
> That wol mayntene that he first bigan.
> That lord hath litel of discrecioun,
> That in swich cas kan no divisioun
> But weyeth pride and humblesse after oon."
>
> (1773-1781)

The major factor in Theseus's definition of wisdom is the ability to make "divisiouns," meaning in this case "distinctions" between different situations, which might demand sensitivity and adaptability in one's response. In fact, the word used here is not "wisdom" but "discretion," or wisdom defined as the ability to separate one thing from another that might be very like it: the exact ability that Palamon and Arcite's strange lack of distinguishing features frustrates. It seems

that here, the remainder is not so much a source of agitation for the imperial power because it is a persistent reminder of difference, but rather because it discloses sameness, and exposes an inability to distinguish the just from the unjust cause.

Theseus's ensuing plan to move the duel between the two men to the stadium and the "lists" is often read as a civilizing gesture, bringing their violence under the purview of the law. However, considered in this light it appears instead to be an abandonment of judgment to Fortune, an attitude he expresses again, more prominently, in the well-known "First Mover" speech, where he proposes a radically different definition of wisdom: "Thanne is it wisdom, it thinketh me / To maken virtue of necessitee." (3042-3) This point has been taken as an expression of pragmatic governance, a genuine recognition of man's helplessness in matters of fate. However, coming from the mouth of the poem's great ruler, his apparent inability to conclude the matter of Palamon and Arcite, and even his showcasing of it in the public spectacle of the tournament, undermines the authority of such a statement and such a ruler. In fact, it seems that Theseus as conqueror is only allowing the bloodshed of his campaign at Thebes to continue in this new forum. Not only is he unable to distinguish Palamon and Arcite from one another, but he appears to be unable to distinguish his martial career from the problems presented by civic governance, turning the dispute between two foreign war captives into a war in which the very best of nobility to be found "of Engelond or elleswhere" faced the prospect of annihilation on the battlefield: the enactment of the *Thebaid* all over again.

What Theseus hopes to achieve with his proposal is precisely the opposite of such a scenario: the goal is an ending to this recursive history of conquering. Theseus's speech to Palamon and Arcite which follows this exercise of his "discretion" is completely preoccupied with closure. He prefaces his introduction to the plan of the tournament thus: "ech of yow shal

have his destynee / As hym is shape, and herkneth in what wyse; / Lo, heere youre ende of that I shal devyse. / My wyl is this, for plat conclusioun / Withouten any reapplicacioun --" (1842-6) He then explains the rules for the tournament, which includes a period of one year to recruit foreign allies, a necessary step, of course, because after the war at Thebes between Polynices and Eteocles and the campaign of Theseus against Creon, the entire Theban nobility has been killed. But before he sends them away, he further emphasizes his point that this tournament will be conclusive: "Ye shul noon oother ende with me maken, / That oon of yow ne shal be deed or taken. / And if yow thynketh this is weel ysayd, / Seyeth youre avys, and holdeth you apayd. / This is youre ende and youre conclusioun." (1864-9) As soon as the final blow is struck, Theseus, apparently relieved, hurries to intervene and exclaims immediately : "Hoo! namoore, for it is doon!" (2656)

It is not, of course, for although Arcite wins the battle, he dies soon after in an accident, and Palamon ultimately marries Emelye after a period of many years' mourning. For Theseus's purposes, however, the problem has been solved, as the divisions created by the cousins' quarrel are resolved by the integration of one of them into Athenian society, removing the troublesome reminder of his conquering exploits by domesticating him. This particular resolution of the cousins' quarrel points to the solution to the problem of the "remnants" of conquering in domestic rule. It lies not in continued violence, but in the voices of the conquered women in Theseus's household, themselves translated by the process of marriage from foreigners to Athenians. That voice focuses on one word: mercy.

The Altar of Clementia

The appropriate application of sovereign "mercy" has important resonances not only within the *Knight's Tale,* but also for two of the most important events within the reign of Richard II: the Peasant Rebellion of 1381, and the king's falling-out with the city of London in 1392. In the former case, very little mercy was given; despite hasty promises to the rebels of improved rights and freedoms, most were hunted down and killed, and new freedoms were quickly rescinded. In the case of Richard's dispute with London, no blood was shed, but the city was made to feel its subjection both financially and symbolically, with a pageant designed to demonstrate their submission and redraw the bonds of "love" between the city and the king. In both cases, however, the king was challenged to respond appropriately to his domestic enemies, with mercy or with wrath.

In both cases, it is interesting to note, Richard's initial response appears to have been wrath, with his queen, Anne, interceding to plead for mercy. In the parliament rolls of November 1381, we find that even before their marriage, the king has decided to pardon many of those involved in the uprisings (with a few exceptions), "al especiale requeste de noblee dame, dame Anne, file a noble Prince Charles nadgaires emperour" "at the special request of the noble lady, lady Anne, daughter of the noble Prince Charles the late emperor of Rome."[34] Similarly, Maidstone's *Concordia,* which records the reconciliation of Richard II with London in 1392, discusses in detail the supplications that Queen Anne made on the citizens' behalf.

In many places within the *Knight's Tale,* we can see that Theseus's initial reaction to difficult situations appears to be wrath, and the voice that intervenes to enforce order in this poem is not Theseus's voice, but the voice of powerful women: his sister-in-law and wife. At the

[34] Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, ed. Given-Wilson, November 1381, §32.

beginning of the *Knight's Tale*, it is the Theban widows who divert Theseus from his triumph and ask him to right Creon's wrongs, although it is a request that he fulfills with extreme violence. Even then, he reacts initially with scorn to their supplication, asking whether they are blocking his path, weeping, out of jealousy over his triumph. And later in the poem, as Theseus comes across the two cousins fighting in the grove, up to their ankles in their own blood, his immediate reaction is to kill them both: "ye shal be deed, by myghty Mars the rede!" (1747) It is Emelye and her ladies whose weeping entreaties convinced the initially-enraged Theseus to halt the fighting and offer another solution, though that solution as well involves the exercise of violence between and against noblemen.

Paul Strohm addresses this moment in Chaucer's text in the course of a larger argument about queens as intercessors, arguing that Chaucer offers a somewhat "feminized Theseus," having taken over these female sensibilities as a "new and more merciful standard of lordship." Strohm draws a comparison with Anne's influence on the king, arguing that Maidstone's *Concordia* conflates Queen Anne's sexual role as Richard's consort with her ability, as an intercessor, to restore the bonds of amatory love between the king and the city: "the queen's sexual concessions will parallel those symbolic and financial concessions to be made within the *thalamus* of the city as a whole."[35] Strohm's argument about Anne's role as intercessor, and the connection with the noble female intercessors of the *Knight's Tale,* is compelling, and his elucidation of the erotic context of Anne's intercession offers an interesting perspective on the meaning of the war brides as intercessors in Chaucer's poem. However, I wish to suggest here that another element of these womens' identities is coming into play here, in addition to their femininity: their foreignness, in a way that complicates the opposition between feminine mercy

[35] Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow,* 109. Jill Mann, "The Feminized Hero," ch. 5 in *Geoffrey Chaucer*, argues for a feminized Theseus based on his adaptation to a more merciful position throughout the text.

and masculine wrath. As we will see in a reading of a different passage from the *Concordia,* the problem of foreignness enters the question of the punishment of the Londoners in a surprising way, suggesting that the rebellious Londoners, as well as the figures of Palamon and Arcite in this poem, occupy a troubling middle ground between the foreign foe, who is unambiguously the subject of imperial wrath, and the domestic subject, who may be entitled to the king's mercy.

According to Richard Maidstone's *Concordia,* which narrates the events of the reconciliation pageant in August of 1392, one of the items presented to Richard II along his route through the city were carved *tabule, sacris altaribus apte* – "tablets, fit for an altar" depicting scenes from the crucifixion – Christ, Mary, a disciple, and the two thieves. Maidstone goes on to guide the king's reading of the tablets, the purpose of which, he says, is the moderation of the king's *ira*, his "wrath":

> The people's hope is greater still, when royal wrath
>
> Subsides and turns to mercy, pardoning them all.
>
> These tablets that you see are symbols of all this:
>
> Your faithful people give them to their faithful king.
>
> They beg the king, when touched by wrath, to look upon
>
> These tablets and reflect upon the death of Christ;
>
> And spare the ignorant, as heaven's king once did,
>
> Forgiving enemies, and always unavenged.
>
> A prince has power to extend his might abroad,
>
> But just against whatever foreigners he hates.[36]

[36] Spes etenim populi pocior fit, [u]t ad pietatem
(Qua datur hiis venia) regis et ira cadit.

The *Concordia* is a document that is usually read for the detailed information it gives us about the details of Richard's reconciliation with London and, in particular, the spectacular procession that symbolized the figurative "remarriage" of the city and the sovereign. In other words, it is a source document for the domestic politics of the time; however, the final two lines of this passage refer to the king's international presence – at first glance, a strange *non sequitur.* The king should look on these tablets, Maidstone says, and contemplate the mercy of Christ, the ultimate Lord. The king should follow Christ's example of forgiving enemies – in this case, designated by the provocatively oxymoronic domestic *hostes* – without exacting vengeance on them. But then the poet turns, with little effort at transition, to what we might call the king's "foreign policy": the king *is* allowed to exercise his power, to *extendere suas...vires,* but *only* against those foreign peoples, *populos externos,* whom he hates, *quos oderit.* The lack of transition here heightens the impression of the interconnectedness of these ideas for the poet: a king's imperial aggression is somehow relevant to his projected reaction to domestic disturbance. A curious dynamic is thus set up in which the fear that Richard's "wrath" will be exercised as vengeance on his own rebellious people, who have become *hostes* through their rebellion, is

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Significant satis hoc tabule quas cernitis iste:
Quas regi pia plebs optulit, ecce, pio.
Orat ut inspiciat has, rex cum tangitur ira,
Mortis et ut Christi mox velit esse memor;
Parcat et ignaris, veluti rex celicus ille,
Hostibus indulgens, semper inultus erat.
Principis est potuisse suas extendere vires
In tamen externos, quos oderit, populos.
(*Concordia,* ed. Carlson and trans. Rigg, 408-417)

Rigg translates "mercy" for *pietatem* here, which reflects the situation of supplication by the Londoners depicted in the poem.

figured as a potential exercise of imperial ambitions in the domestic sphere, which, the poet wishes to emphasize, is properly a space of mercy, and not of wrath.[37]

It is possible here that the poet is thinking of Richard's actual interests abroad, and therefore has a specific vision of the king as conqueror in mind. Michael J. Bennett has emphasized Richard's unusual interest in his wider realm among medieval kings of England, and suggests that Richard's avoidance of London, particularly in the later years of his reign, were not only "the result of pique" after the events of the 1380's, but also representative of his "universalist ambition" as a ruler, which in turn may have offended and worried Londoners and others concerned with domestic policy.[38] Rumors also circulated that the king hoped perhaps to be elected Holy Roman Emperor. However, Richard's imperial ambitions manifested more clearly only later in the 1390's, after the composition of the *Concordia,* and it seems that what we are more likely to be seeing here is, as we have seen elsewhere in this dissertation, an abstract figure of the conqueror standing in for a king who is dissuaded from acting inappropriately in his domestic role, warned against treating domestic enemies as foreign subjects to be conquered with exceptional "wrath."

In this chapter, we have seen that Theseus too faces a continuing struggle in exercising correct rule over his imperial "remainders" once they enter his domestic space, as the knight struggles in exercising control over his narrative. We have seen that Statius has been an important model and a critical challenge for Chaucer as a source, and on the point of mercy his poem also offers a point of connection with the *Knight's Tale* that has not yet been recognized,

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[37] In his book *Epic Romance,* Colin Burrow identifies the idea of "sympathy" as characteristic of the form of epic romance, a category, although he does not address medieval models in his study, that the *Knight's Tale* could certainly belong to. His findings provide an interesting renaissance analogy for this distinction between epic moments of wrath and epic moments of mercy, which I assign in the medieval context to different spheres of sovereignty. In the case of the *Knight's Tale,* however, I believe it is essential that we keep in view the tension that the text itself enacts between epic and romance in its invocation/rejection of the *Thebaid,* itself a complicated epic specimen.

[38] Bennett, "Richard II and the Wider Realm."

although it is in fact specifically mentioned in Chaucer's poem: the Altar of Mercy. The location appears in Chaucer's text at line 928, briefly, as "this temple of the goddesse Clemence," where the Argive women, as in Statius, wait overnight in anticipation of Theseus's arrival.[39] However, I suggest that the influence of Statius's vision of this altar has a wider importance in Chaucer's text that this single citation would suggest. In Statius, just before the moment the *Knight's Tale* begins with (Theseus approaching Athens with his retinue), Statius digresses into an extended description of the altar of *clementia* in the city of Athens.[40]

> At the town's center stands a temple raised
> To no almighty god. It is the seat
> Of kind Compassion, sanctified by souls
> In grief and misery. She never lacks
> New suppliants nor will reject a prayer.
> Whoever asks is heard and day and night
> One may approach and win the goddess' heart
> By piteous tears alone. Her worship claims
> Small cost: no incense-flame will she accept,
> No welling blood. With tears her altar flows,

[39] Anderson, "Fourth Temple," explores the connection between Statius's altar of Clementia and Chaucer's "fourth temple" of Clemence cited here.

[40] urbe fuit media nulli concessa potentum
ara deum, mitis posuit Clementia sedem,
et miseri fecere sacram; sine supplice numquam
illa nouo, nulla damnauit uota repulsa.
auditi quicumque rogant, noctesque diesque
ire datum et solis numen placare querelis.
parca superstitio: non turea flamma nec altus
accipitur sanguis: lacrimis altaria sudant,
maestarumque super libamina secta comarum
pendent et uestes mutata sorte relictae.
(Statius, *Thebaid* ed. Shackleton-Bailey, XII.481-90)

And offerings hang there, sad severed tresses,

And garments left behind when Fortune changed.

(trans. Melville, p. 320)

Melville translates *clementia* as "compassion," but we might equally call it "mercy"; what the women beg for is an end to the warfare that has so long oppressed them – a final act of closure for the violence of the *Thebaid.* The "Altar of Mercy" ought to remind us of the passage from Maidstone's *Concordia* which we saw above: the item that was meant to stir Richard to mercy and away from wrath was a set of altarpieces.[41] It is these women, also, who appear at the beginning of the *Knight's Tale* to beg for Theseus's mercy – which he responds to in turn by decisively exercising his "wrath" against foreigners in his vicious defeat of Creon, touching off the cycle of violence that persists throughout the tale.

Those who come to the altar of Compassion, the *Thebaid* tells us, are the *innumerae gentes,* the "uncountable peoples," *victi bellis,* "conquered by war," who become in many ways the king's domestic subjects, as Palamon and Arcite do here. But the suppliants are also, as the

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[41] We know that Richard appreciated fine art in this form; the Wilton Diptych is one of only few artifacts of his reign, but is a fine example of this type of material. Richard's *ira* and *irae* are a recurrent topic in the *Concordia,* appearing also in lines 216, and 520, in which Maidstone's Richard himself takes up this language to express his forgiveness, but also a warning of the future consequences should the rebels rise again:

I weigh the gifts you've made
  And also take account of pleadings from my wife.
So, citizens, henceforth beware the prince's wrath;
  Don't scorn or hold my lords and nobles in contempt.
Observe the ancient law. Reject for evermore
  New doctrines that the ancient fathers did not learn.
(trans. Rigg)

...data munera penso,
  Coniugis atque mee pondero valde preces.
Vos ideoque cavete deinceps principis iras;
  Contemptu proceres non habetote meos.
Antiquam servate fidem. Nova dogmata semper
  Spernite, que veteres non didicere patres.
(*Concordia,* ed. Carlson, 518-23)

On the Wilton diptych, see Gordon, "Regal Image" and *Making and Meaning.*

Concordia shows us, the king's subjects made enemies by their rebellion. The *Knight's Tale,* then, in its engagement with Statius, speaks to current domestic issues of governance at a time when the figure of the conquered foreigner shared a political space with the domestic rebel, and the figure of the conqueror inhabited the same king's body as the domestic ruler. The altar in Statius, and the mercy it represents in the *Knight's Tale*, is "A common refuge where the wrath and threats / Of monarchs should be far removed and chance / Withdraw from sacraments of righteousness."[42] In order to achieve closure to war in the *Knight's Tale,* neither Fortune nor wrath attend at the altar of *clementia,* as they do in Theseus's attempt at righteousness at the very beginning of the tale; but rather the ruler's "discrecioun" in combination with the authority of the "conseil and baronage," a very medieval and, of course, uniquely English, legal institution that has not appeared at all in the poem before this point of resolution. Theseus finally exercises this "discrecioun" at the end of the poem, and the *Knight's Tale* finally succeeds in resolving the cycle of war, which it resurrected from the *Thebaid*, not with Mars but with Venus, as Palamon and Emelye are married, designating him firmly within Theseus's domestic sphere. Finally, the knight concludes, "Thus endeth Palamon and Emelye," the *Knight's Tale,* and the strife it took over from the *Thebaid.*

The poem thus emerges as a flirtation with the type of failed governance that the *Thebaid* so viscerally witnesses. Here, poetic and political "governance" – we ought to remember that "division" as Theseus practices it can be poetic "making" as well – converge. As the knight struggles to keep his tale from collapsing back into epic, Theseus struggles to keep his wrath in

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[42] sic sacrasse loco commune animantibus aegris
confugium, unde procul starent iraeque minaeque
regnaque, et a iustis Fortuna recederet aris.
(*Thebaid,* ed. Shackleton Bailey XII.504-6)
In Chaucer's description of the temple of Mars in the third section of the *Knight's Tale,* the elements of misfortune, or "mischaunce" (2009) and Conquest, which this analysis suggests may well map onto the "wrath and Threats of monarchs" sit right next to one another in the temple of Mars.

check as he faces what is in many ways an entirely foreign element within his own household: his wife, her sister, and the two Theban cousins. Lee Patterson has argued, about the Thebes of Chaucer's *Troilus,* that "Thebanness is a fatal doubling of the self that issues in a replicating history that preempts a linear or developmental progress."[43] Theseus's turn to mercy resolves this doubling of the self in both himself and the members of his household, a doubling that in this tale takes the form of an identity trapped between foreign battlefields and the amatory domestic household. What finally ends the cycle of violence in this text is not mercy given where mercy is not due, to an enemy, but rather, the reinvention and recognition of that enemy-at-home as a relative: a countryman.

Throughout this chapter, the figure of the knight and his possible motivations as a teller have not been at the forefront of the analysis, but his reasons for an interest in the problem of closure deserve attention. The Knight too has waged war abroad and returned home to an England troubled by domestic strife. We will see that Gower is horrified by the prospect of the elimination of the nobility as a result of such strife, and it seems that the knight might share some of his concerns. In the shared *praeteritio* we mentioned above, in which both Lucan and Chaucer list the grievous wounds inflicted on the field of battle, the issue of "blood" hovers behind both scenes. For Lucan too, the great tragedy of that list of wounds is not so much their inherent gruesomeness as the fact that they are inflicted on the nobility: "Here perished all the honor of Rome: in a great heap on the battlefields lay the bodies of the nobility, not mixed with any plebian."[44] Chaucer's tale, as well, begins with a vision of a battlefield filled with noble bodies, and as the tournament begins in lines 2110-2116, the impressive vision of all of the greatest knights "of Engelond or elleswhere" displayed in battle on the field changes from a grandiose

[43] Patterson, "Theban Writing," in *Chaucer and the Subject of History,* 77.
[44] *Hic patriae perit omne decus: iacet aggere magno / Patricium campis non mixta plebe cadaver.* (*BC* VII. 597-8)

chivalric vision to a potential disaster of governance. The problem that is presented as the tale unfolds, and which we have been tracing out, is how to bring about closure to that narrative of destruction without the same result.

We know that London, and by extension England, was captivated by Troy, especially in the later medieval period. But if Troy represented its fantasies, Thebes as it is envisioned in the *Knight's Tale,* "the citee / fulfilled of ire and iniquitee," must be its nightmare. (939-940) In contrast to the neat machinations of the *Miller's Tale,* which "quites" it, the *Knight's Tale's* struggle for closure in war and in narrative reflects the difficult realities of a current issue in the late fourteenth century: how to respond to elements of society that were no longer clearly foreign or domestic, and whose position as enemies or subjects was cause for renegotiation of the sovereign's political roles and obligations. The successful navigation of these new relationships would determine which path – Trojan, or Theban, Ricardian England would take.[45]

In our next chapter, the problem of a specific rebellion in England is now the explicit topic of the poem under consideration, the first book of Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, a dream vision which details the events of the rebellion of 1381 as Gower claims to have witnessed it. However, despite its initial claims to historicity, Gower's vision takes off quickly into a level of fantasy that is unusual among medieval dream visions in approaching the absurdities and disjunctions of a real dream. The spectacularly unnatural vision of the natural world that results reinforces the impression that Gower conceives of the rebellion as a volation of natural law, of base animals revolting against their masters. However, I argue that there is a more nuanced narrative within Gower's beast allegory and within the wider context of the poem. In the *Knight's Tale,* Thebes

[45] The Miller's Tale begins with a description of the troublesome scholar who makes "conclusiouns" (3193) in the house – meaning he uses divination to predict the future. The neat way in which his plan works out and easily reaches a conclusion provides a clear counterpoint to the narrative struggles of the *KT*.

appeared in its well-known role as a representative of neverending violence, raising the spectre of continuous and unmanaged rebellion on domestic soil; in Gower's vision, however, we see him considering whether the origins of rebellion lie within English historiography itself. In doing so, he poses the unsettling question: are the rebels, even in their rebellion (and perhaps especially in their rebellion) more English than the English ruling classes, English "citizens," themselves?

A Land Born from Varied Seed*:* Exile and Englishness in Gower's *Vox Clamantis*

The first book of John Gower's *Vox Clamantis,* often referred to separately as the *Visio Angliae,* is one of our most important literary sources treating the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Gower himself appropriates this role for the poem: he refers to the matter of the rebellion as *experta res,* a "thing experienced," representing himself as a direct witness. Moreover, Gower suggests that he narrates these events as a public poet of England, telling readers that the subject of the *Vox Clamantis* will be "recent events in my land" (*mea terra*).[1] It will be a "patriotic task," (*pius labor*), he says, "to treat the deeds of [his] country" (*patrie facta referre*).[2] Gower claims here the public narrative of the rebellion, emphasizing the relevance of these events (and his poem) to the politics of his *patria,* his *terra,* and his own position as the domestic chronicler of those events.

This self-positioning as a "public poet" is in line with Gower's persona in other works, as when he characterizes the *Confessio Amantis* as a "bok for Engelondes sake," a much-discussed modification from the earlier "King Richardes sake."[3] Gower has already taken up that mantle here in the *visio,* offering his talents up for the sake of his land. And yet, in that same prologue to

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[1] All quotations from the *Vox Clamantis* (henceforth *VC*) in this chapter are drawn from *John Gower: Poems on Contemporary Events: The Visio Anglie (1381) and Cronica Tripertita (1400)* Edited by David R. Carlson and translated by A.G. Rigg. This first book is sometimes treated as a separate work, and referred to as the *Visio Angliae;* in this chapter, the work will be cited as book one of the *VC.* The poem has now been translated both separately in Carlson and Rigg and with the rest of the *VC in* Sharpton, trans. *John Gower: The Major Latin Works.* I have consulted Rigg's verse translation throughout, but because Gower's specific terminolgy (or a specific interpretation of Gower's terminology) is in certain places important for my argument, I have often heavily adapted his translations in this chapter.Citations from *VC* are from the first book unless otherwise noted.
Quos mea terra dedit casus nouitatis adibo,
Nam pius est patrie facta referre labor.
Quod michi flere licet scribam lacrimabile tempus,
Sic quod in exemplum posteritatis eat.
(*VC* I.prol.29-32)

[2] On "public poetry" as a feature of Ricardian literature more broadly, with Gower's *Confessio Amantis* as primary exemplar, see Anne Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II."

[3] On this alteration, see Nicholson, "The Dedications of Gower's *Confessio Amantis,*" Staley, *Languages of Power* 25ff; Irvin, *Politics and Personae,* 57ff; and Fisher, *John Gower,* 116-22.

the *Vox Clamantis* and throughout the poem, Gower also represents himself as an exile from England, quoting extensively from Ovid's *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto,* describing his poem as a *flebile carmen* in the Ovidian and Boethian tradition, and even inserting himself into his narrative in the guise of a shipwrecked exile.[4] In this poem, England's public poet is at the same time a self-declared exile from that land, occupying a paradoxical position that claims authority from both an intimate connection with, and a strange distance from, the momentous domestic events he describes.

In this chapter, I will argue that Gower develops this strange self-positioning as a response to the challenge the 1381 rebellion posed to concepts of citizenship and sovereignty in late fourteenth-century England. As we will see, in the poem, citizenship and Englishness are intimately bound up for Gower with a sense of place, but the connection is not a straightforward or literal one.[5] For example, in the poem, Flemish weavers killed by the peasants in London are "citizens," (*cives*) although they are foreigners (*advena*), but the rebellious peasants are not; nor is it the case that Gower maintains a straightforward opposition between city-dwellers and the countryside. Therefore, "citizenship" in this text does not describe city-dwellers or those enfranchised under law, but rather an element of society (including a person but also a group of affiliated persons) harmoniously operating in its proper place in the English social order. Social harmony is a consistent interest throughout Gower's work, but in this text we will see that the concept of that "place" becomes much more directly tied to literal space: order, and particularly

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[4] *VC* I.33.

[5] Olsson, in "John Gower's 'Vox Clamantis' and the Medieval Idea of Place," has argued that Gower develops a theory of place throughout the entirety of the *Vox Clamantis,* though with a different emphasis than here. Olsson concentrates on Gower's wandering as a spiritual failing, falling into fear and unreflectiveness, and over-attachment to the physical land of England to the neglect of spiritual matters, all of which Gower seeks to correct in Book II. Additionally, Olsson treats the entire *VC* in his article, and so also necessarily treats the first book far more briefly than in this chapter. Our major point of disagreement consists in the coherence or incoherence of Book I. Where Olsson sees a work that "presents and imitates the cacophony of the beasts and the disharmony of their prey," I see presentation but not imitation, arguing below that a coherent line of thought on place, exile, citizenship, and English identity emerges from the book.

social order, depends on members of society dwelling within their natural bounds, a concept that for Gower is circumscribed by the "home" (*domus*). The domestic sphere of "home" is in this view the critical space for connecting literal and metaphorical place, enforcing the boundaries of class and rank by confining the peasantry within domestic boundaries. In abandoning their plows, roaming the countryside, and eventually marching on the city of London, the rebels challenge this critical boundary, in turn displacing the rest of English society.

Gower seeks to understand the new and ambiguous political roles that are generated by this dislocation through the concept of exile. Not only does he see himself and his poem through that lens, but the peasants too become exiles in Gower's eyes when they leave the *domus* of their lord. Most curiously, as we will see, the figure of the exile also paradoxically comes to define a citizen of England, as England's legendary past comes to bear on the present through a common "error." Founded by an exile, Brutus, a refugee from the fallen Troy, and defined throughout the early Middle Ages by a history of foreign invasion, England was, to a fourteenth-century man of letters, home to a population made up of exiles, originally from other lands. In this sense, even as the rebels overturn the most basic social and natural hierarchies, they are also fulfilling a hereditary, and distinctly English, legacy of displacement. In Gower's time, the poem suggests that this lineage of wandering and dislocation may have come home to roost in the form of the peasant rebellion, threatening state unity in the present and future, and dooming England to civil war. In searching out the sources and meaning of the rebellion, Gower asks in this poem: Who is truly "at home" in England? And can such a state, an "island of exiles," expect to endure?

Exiled at Home

The beast allegory that opens the poem has, by far, received the most attention in studies of the *visio* (and we too will return to it), but the first book continues for 1000 lines – almost half its length – after the beast allegory has faded. This latter section of the poem has perhaps been neglected because, rather ironically, it is often stranger and more difficult to follow than the fantastical vision of monstrous beasts that precedes it. Following the narration of the events of the rebellion, shortly after the death of Tyler, whom Gower calls "Jack Straw," the initial vision of the dreamer begins to falter. Having witnessed but not involved himself in the vision directly to this point, Gower the narrator suddenly becomes a character in his text. Turning from his vision of the rebels attacking London, he retreats in fear to the forest, where he suffers nearly to death from hunger, confusion, and worry. A ship appears as the dreamer begins to despair, and he embarks alongside "many other nobles," hoping to sail to safety. However, the ship quickly sails instead into a storm, and is tossed about violently, with Gower begging and fearing for his life for several hundred lines before landing on the shores of a land he does not recognize. The land, it turns out, is England, to which he and his noble shipmates return as apparent foreigners, exiles from their own land.

Gower is unambiguous in representing himself as an exile and his vision as a poem of lament in the Ovidian and Boethian exilic tradition. At the same time, even in the depths of his "shipwreck," in his loose allegorical style, he explicitly names the "ship" as the Tower of London, assailed by the raging peasants, its doors open and admitting the rushing tides of rebels. Although the nobles are tossed on the seas, we never truly leave England. In other words, exile as a physical condition is not the topic of the poem; instead, the concept of exile provides an

intellectual framework for the particular social questions raised for Gower by the rebellion. Gower figures the upset of domestic space, the disorientation caused by the rebellion, as if it has propelled him away into an entirely new land, though strictly speaking he and the setting of his poem never leave England. As we have seen throughout this dissertation, domestic disruption is projected onto an international scale, emphasizing the monumental and historic nature of these events in Gower's eyes.

The extent of the Ovidian influence on Gower's poem supports this impression of the way that the exile motif functions in this text. The influence of Ovid on the *visio* is pervasive: the poem is about a quarter to a third Ovid overall, and in some places much more, ranging from borrowed phrases up to entire transplanted lines. However, in many cases, the language is taken out of context, used not in service of a specific textual allusion but rather as a persistent, underlying support structure that only very rarely makes itself fully visible.[6] Thus, it is often difficult to know how much a reader is meant to recognize these borrowings as thematic connections with specific Ovidian works or stories, or even whether she is meant to recognize them as Ovidian at all.[7] Some work has been done on the connection between Ovid and Gower in this vein, but such criticism has tended to focus on Gower's use of Ovidian poetic techniques as a way of making a wider point about the uses of poetry.[8] This approach has the effect of

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[6] The extended use of material from Ovid's Ceyx and Alcione episode in *Met* XI, for example, to supply language describing the storm and shipwreck scenes from 1593-1694 seems tome to be a borrowing of convenience and aesthetic taste, rather than specific textual allusion, whereas the material from the story of Cadmus in *Met* I discussed below seems to have clear thematic significance. See, however, Maura Nolan's detailed account of Gower's four uses of this episode across his different works. (Nolan, "Poetics of Catastrophe")

[7] R.F. Yeager connects Gower's practice here with the poetic technique of *cento*, borrowing material directly from a source but translating it to an entirely different context. See RF Yeager, "Did Gower Write *Cento*?" Maura Nolan argues that the Ovidian background to Gower's poetry in the *Vox Clamantis* is however meant to be recognized by readers (and the Ovidian context remembered), as an "Ovidian counter-text," part of the *VC's* "perforated text," that allows Gower to develop a "notion of poetics as a mode of attachment that can remake the world by fostering harmony between the individual and the group," and allows Gower to find surprising points of connection between his own voice and the voice of the rebellious peasants. (Nolan, "Poetics of Catastrophe" 117-18)

[8] Yoshiko Kobayashi and David R. Carlson both see in Gower's use of Ovid the imitation of Ovidian techniques rather than simple allusion. The former focuses on Gower's imitation of Ovid's literary self-fashioning as an exile in

minimizing one of the truly strange aspects of Gower's borrowing: the poem provides an unusual example of a medieval author alluding explicitly to the persona of another author rather than constructing a relationship through his text or shared textual practices. Abstracting the Ovidian connection to the explicitly transhistorical level of poetic appropriation and reappropriation means that the focus has been taken off Gower's use of exile to paradoxically encounter questions of Englishness at the present moment. As much as Gower calls upon Ovid as a poetic authority, he also calls upon him as an authority on exile in itself, and in this sense his approach to Ovidian borrowing not only places him in a line of august poets of exile, but also thoroughly domesticates Ovid's words and content to address his own contemporary, English circumstances.

One important point of thematic continuity between the two poets, however, is a sharp contrast between the political centrality of the lost home and the wildness of the place of exile. For both Gower and Ovid, exile is made particularly painful not only by the absence from "home," but by the rusticity of the place they are exiled to, in comparison with the urbane culture they have left. Longing for Rome, Ovid emphasizes the uncouth nature of his neighbors at Tomis in *Epistulae ex Ponto,* in lines that Gower himself borrows: they do not obey laws, Ovid says, nor do they recognize their political masters, and the land sows only bitter fruit.[9] Ovid and his poetry both suffer away from the culture that fed them, as the poet grows thin and unrecognizable, and his poems lose their wit.[10] Gower is similarly bewildered by the caves he is forced to inhabit in the wilderness, to the extent that he also loses his own sense of personhood, becoming a "stranger to himself" (1480) and inhabiting an "alter ego." (1490) He lives like a

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comparing himself to literary examples of suffering; thus Gower does the same with Ovid as an exemplar, but with a prophetic edge derived not from Ovid but from the Old Testament. (Kobayashi, "Voice of an Exile") Carlson argues that Gower adopts a poetics of supercession from Ovid, which provides him with the agenda to poetically overcome Ovid, Chaucer, and Gower's vision of his younger poetic self. (Carlson, "Gower Agonistes")

[9] *Ponto* III.18.45-7; these lines are discussed in more detail below.

[10] His poetry is different (See *Ponto* I.V) and his physical appearance is changed (I.X.25-6)

wild animal, sleeping in caves (1439) and running blindly from place to place (1391) like a bird (1390) or a boar, fleeing hunters (1395) and eating grass, leaves, and acorns (1447-9).

For Gower, however, there is a critical difference: the land of exile and the homeland are one and the same. He is not exiled from home, but rather exiled at home, by the disruptive actions of the rebels. In fact, as Gower himself says, the peasants and the nobles have simply switched places within England. Now he and the other nobles must live in the forest like wild animals, the same forests that the peasants emerge from in beast form, while they in turn take over the homes of the nobility: *En statuunt cani nemoris dimittere vulpes / Antraque gentiles urbis adire domos.* ("Behold, foxes decide to quit their holes in the woods, and to seek out the noble homes of the city," 479-80) The peasants seem to believe that they will derive new rights from this specific act of turning nobles out of their homes: *A domibus alios expellunt...ius equum appropriare sibi.* ("They turn others out of their houses, and [the peasants, although they are only "donkeys,"] appropriate the rights of horses for themselves." 197-8) Although Gower and the other nobles remain in their homeland, they are nevertheless exiled from their own space, their proper "homes."

The sense in which Gower and his nobles have been exiled, then, is more complicated than Ovid's physical banishment. The contrast that Ovid feels most keenly is between the beloved city, Rome, and the rustic, uncultivated countryside on the fringes of the empire. David Carlson has remarked on this element of similarity between the two authors in this respect, noting that London seems to function similarly in Gower's poem as the object of elegiac longing.[11] When we look more closely, however, it is not the city as a coherent whole that Gower focuses on in opposition to the countryside in his narrative, but instead this concept of the "home," at once more specific than the entire city of London and also more abstract. For Gower,

[11] Carlson, "A Fourteenth-Century Ovidian," 296.

the idea of the *domus* as the organizing force of civilization in the poem is more powerful than the concept of the *urbs.* When the "foxes" leave their dens to approach London in the couplet quoted immediately above, it is not London herself, but "the noble homes of the city" (*gentiles urbis adire domos*) that Gower names. The donkeys that hope to become horses turn the nobles "out of their homes" (*a domibus*). Even as Gower calls specifically upon the gates and walls of the city, which are worryingly open, it is the houses in particular upon which he again rests his thoughts:

> London which before would surround itself with walls now lay vulnerable without them, nor was the gate able to close its own bolts. A thousand wolves mixed in with bears approached from out of the forests, and decided to attack the homes of the city.

> Que solet [London] ex muris cingi patuit sine muro,
> Nec potuit seras claudere porta suas.
> Mille lupi mixtique lupis vrsi gradientes
> A siluis statuunt vrbis adire domos.
>
> (881-4)

The final lines here reproduce the ideas, and nearly reproduce the words, of the lines describing the rustic foxes leaving their dens. In both cases, the peasant/beasts emerging from the woods advance upon "the homes of the city" (*urbis adire domos*) rather than the city herself. And

indeed, in his description of the unrest in London, Gower represents the destruction in the city by focusing in turn on particular significant places (or, perhaps more accurately, palaces) rather than the city as a whole: the Savoy (translated literally but ironically by Gower as the *Via Salva*, the "safe way"), the Tower, and the Temple. When he describes the burning of legal documents at the Temple by the peasants, it is not the documents but, again, the "house" (as he calls the Temple) that Gower focuses on, repeating the word three times in nine lines.[12]

Somewhat surprisingly, then, it is not London as capital that stands in metonymic relation to the English state in the *visio*, as Ovid's Rome did for the empire and in some sense the civilized world. Instead, the *domus* is the unit of space that acts as representative and symbolic touchstone for England. As Gower the character prepares to flee from the rebels, his thoughts dwell even more intensely on the idea of the "home" in this wider sense. Gower's own property did not suffer in the rebellion, but the destruction of these significant locations amounts to him to a destruction of his own home, for which we can instead read "homeland": he says "my home has been ruined by them." (*Est michi rupta domus per eos.* I.1377) He "doesn't dare to approach even the threshold of the violated home" any longer. (*Non ausus lese limen adire domus.* I.1380) Nor can he reenter what he calls "the fertile garden" (*fertilis ortus*, I.1402), a way of describing and thinking about English nationhood in the Middle Ages whose importance Lynn Staley has emphasized in her recent monograph.[13] This point of distinction between the city and the "home" also clarifies an otherwise obscure remark that Gower makes about the depredations of the peasants: "That rage trod down not just cities, but indeed ground down underfoot the entirety of

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[12] *VC* I.830-42 *Sit domus exusta que maledicit eis.* (834)…*decapitatus erit, et domus igne perit* (836)…*plena fit igne domus* (842) None of these locations falls easily into the category of a "house," although John of Gaunt's palace, the Savoy, was a residence. The Tower was where the king and his men took shelter during the rebellion, and where the rebels eventually killed two of the king's advisors after the king fled. Scholars have found the targeting of the documents in the Temple of particular interest. See Justice, *Writing and Rebellion* 40-43; and Susan Crane, "The Writing Lesson of 1381."

[13] Staley, *The Island Garden*.

our country." (*Vrbes non tantum generaliter, immo per omnem / Iste furor patriam subpeditauit humum.* I.1357) In attacking these landmark "homes" in London, in other words, the peasants are not simply attacking London, but attacking the entire state. Gower's thought vacillates between the *domus* and the *patria,* figuring the English state as a collection of representative great houses.

If the most significant opposition in the poem's use of exile imagery is not a simple dichotomy between country and city, rustic and urbane, but rather between "home" and "not home," we face a curious circumstance in which England herself becomes a foreign land. And indeed, Gower remarks that, "quitting his own home, he ran across foreign fields, the guest now of the beasts and the forests." (*Tuncque domum propriam linquens aliena per arua / Transcurrique feris saltibus hospes eram.* I.1381-2)[14] Gower transitions immediately in his flight from his "home" to a foreign space, the "foreign fields' of the *aliena arua.* Very shortly, this foreignness translates into complete disorientation, as Gower is afraid that not only is his own home not safe, but in fact that there is nowhere to turn, as all places seem to have lost their sense of "placeness:" "The woods are afraid of the woods, and the fields of the fields / The city is afraid of the city: no place now knows its place." (*A siluis silue, set ab aruis arua timescunt, / Vrbs et ab vrbe: locus nescit habere loca.* I.1207-8) Nothing can be safe in any place, save at the very center, or above the sky itself. (*Tunc nisi sub centro res aut super ethera nulla / Salua potest fieri proprietate loci.* I.1213-14) Here, we can see the extent to which Gower has complicated the idea of exile in this poem. Not only is the land of exile reviled, but the longed-for homeland has been destroyed, as well as the distinction between the two: the cruel distance that divided Ovid from the center of his universe, Rome, has collapsed for the exile Gower. Fleeing the social world previously ordered by the *domus,* Gower enters a realm of complete uncertainty, in which space itself has become disorganized.

[14] At 1530, Gower repeats his comment about the threshold.

The peculiar definition of exile imagined by the *visio* helps us see what "England" meant to Gower: domestic spaces, under the control of the aristocracy and the king, constitute "England," and all that is outside is foreign, the realm of what Gower calls, as we will see, *fera rusticitas*, "wild peasantry.*"* It is unclear how this space, into which Gower is forced to flee, fits into frameworks of Englishness. While Gower is there, he is officially, by his own declaration, "in exilio," occupying "foreign fields." (I.1460) And yet: these "foreign fields" are the domain of the rebels, the places from which they come to trouble the English state. What political status does this suggest that those who occupy such a "foreign" land hold in the eyes of England? Are the peasants, then, aliens – not citizens of the English state despite their language and geographical origin, their English names, their living on the estate of an English lord?

In our next section we will see that behind the apparent disdain of the beast allegory lies an unexpectedly complex meditation on the inadequacy of such reliance on the *domus* to account for the political realities of the peasant rebellion. I will argue that the *domus* for Gower is a figure for the *demesne*, the manor, and the unit of political and legal control that was so challenged by the rebellion. Again, there is no easy opposition between the city and the countryside: the manor or *demesne* encompassed the countryside, land owned by a lord and worked by peasants. Rather, Gower constructs an opposition between the ordered society of the *domus/demesne* and the disordered society outside of that system. In the next section, we reread Gower's beast allegory, the best-known section of the poem, in light of these concerns.

Animal Citizens and Stateless Beasts

The most visible social divide in the *visio* is that of what we would now call class (though for Gower, this divide falls along the lines of "noble," *ingenuus,* vs. "rustic," *ruscitus,* the latter covering many distinct "classes"), and this is primarily the lens through which the poem has been read. Gower's poem begins with an allegorical vision of the peasant rebellion, in which the peasant participants appear as wild and uncontrollable beasts, savaging first the countryside and then the city of London. To a modern reader, the device is embarrassingly frank: Gower, revolted by the peasants' pretensions above their class, depicts them as pigs, asses, dogs, cattle, and other beasts that "desire to eat the grain of a better sort" and whose voices of protest amount to nothing more than unintelligible "clamor." At first glance, it appears that the beast allegory fits neatly into the class divisions that Gower so wishes to enforce. The translation of the peasants into the animal world makes it clear that it is not only a matter of social, but of natural, order that noblemen are placed above peasants, and peasants remain placidly below.[15] This overt interpretation also fits with the common critical narrative about Gower that portrays him as a conservative, propagandist, and royal apologist, almost always in opposition to Chaucer's progressive and aesthetic approach to poetry. [16]

I do not seek to rehabilitate the social views represented in the *visio*. However, I will argue that Gower's beast allegory, rather than reflecting a straightforward, reactionary

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[15] In refraining from depicting aristocrats or the king in an animal guise, Gower also activates Biblical notions of mastery of men (the nobility) over the "beasts" of the peasant class.

[16] The picture of Gower as a royal propagandist has been influential in the field of study on this author: a recent major work on Gower is dedicated to the topic of "poetry and propaganda" in the poet's work. Carlson seeks not to rehabilitate Gower directly, but rather to rehabilitate propaganda in later medieval England itself, redefining it as "state-official writing." (Carlson, *John Gower: Poetry and Propaganda in Fourteenth Century England*). Richard Firth Green briefly addresses Gower's relationship with Henry Bolingbroke in his chapter on "The Court Apologist" in *Poets and Princepleasers,* also characterizing Gower's work during this period, especially the *Cronica Tripertita,* as propaganda – though due to "genuine and fervent" support of Henry's claim, rather than the work of a "loyal servant" or "cynical timeserver." (Green, *Poets and Princepleasers* 179-183) Other recent approaches to Gower's work have begun to find some points of complication and uneasy identification in Gower's work, and especially between Gower and the peasants in the *visio,* including Justice, *Writing and Rebellion* 212-6; Nolan, "Poetics of Catastophe;" and Zarins "Rich Words" 150, where Zarins even suggests that Gower recognizes the poetic potential of the peasants' violent self-construction.

conservatism, actually presents a complex picture of the political status of the rebellious peasants that acknowledges the nature of the challenge the 1381 rebellion posed to the established social order. Although undoubtedly aimed at reinforcing the peasants' subordinate status, Gower's animal vision also suggests that the peasants may have carved out unprecedented political territory for themselves, escaping, however briefly, from a system in which they occupied a secure position of subordination.

This more subtle point emerges as a nuance of Gower's original vision of men turned to beasts: in fact, the peasants change twice. At first it appears that Gower, the dreamer, is disturbed primarily by a monstrous turning of rational men into irrational beasts: *Qui fuerant homines prius innate racionis, Brutorum species irracionis habent.* ("Those who before were men with inborn reason / take on the appearance of irrational beasts," 177-8) However, it quickly becomes clear as the poem progresses that Gower's disturbing imagery dwells not on the transition from man to beast, but instead the transition from familiar domestic animals to monstrous hybrids: domestic beasts that have taken on the savage forms and behaviors of wild animals.[17] Gower's first sight is of domestic asses that take on the ferocity of lions: *Elatos asinos subdita nouitate rebelles / Vidi, nec frenis quis moderauit eos...*(183-4) *viscera...repleta furore leonum* (185). The cows, once docile, have also transformed and lost their true nature (*transformatas formas natura reliquit,* 253), taken on the feet of bears, and developed dragons' tails (255). These fearsome hybrids wander the countryside, breathing fire and burning whole villages to the ground. Pigs become savage, leaving aside their domestic habits and acting instead in the manner of wolves:

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[17] *Et quia res huiusmodi velut monstrum detestabilis fuit et horribilis, fingit se per sompnium vidisse diuersas vulgi turmas in diuersas species bestiarum domesticarum transmutatas: dicit tamen quod ille bestie domestice, a sua deuiantes natura, crudelitates ferarum sibi presumpserunt.*
And since the details of this incident were like to a terrible and horrible vision, so he presents it as if he saw in a dream different members of the rabble changed into many different types of domestic animals: however he says that these domestic animals, contrary to their usual nature, took on the ferocity of wild beasts. (*VC* I.Cap. iii)

deuia natura sic errat ab ordine, mores / porcus quod porci non habet, immo lupi. (319-20) "Nature departs from its usual course; the pig doesn't keep to the habits of a pig, but rather ones of the wolf." Even the barnyard fowl have gone wild: the rooster becomes black like a raven; the goose becomes a kite, and both hunt for live prey like a hawk.

Even that most familiar domestic companion, the dog, changes its nature. Dogs now possess the tusks of a boar, which "deform their doglike faces." (417) Here, Gower's emphasis on the affectionate gestures that normally characterize human interaction with dogs marks the traumatic severing of social bonds that these transformations represent:

> No one would want to pet the backs of these [dogs]
> Nor touch their tails, or cradle their head,
> Always enraged, they bare their teeth,
> And their peasant nature does not retain anything like love.
>
> Hii quorum dorsa nullus planare valebit,
> Tangere nec caudas, nec retinere caput,
> Irati semper denudant nam tibi dentes,
> Nec sua rusticitas quicquid amoris habet.
>
> (409-12)

In the final line, the veil of the allegory is briefly pulled back, and readers are reminded of the humans behind the dogs, whose "peasant nature" Gower expects to be characterized by a certain natural "love" in the manner of a dog for its human master. In the fourteenth century, the bond

between lord and subordinate was frequently discussed in erotic terms, from the king down to his own lords and landholders.[18] In the *visio*, this "love" itself is not only gone, but even exiled, like the nobles themselves, from the peasant's hearts: "Exiled love flees the [peasant] mind." (*Mentem deserit exul amor,* 1016) Michael Clanchy has argued for an opposition between "law" and "love" in medieval English politics, "love" being characteristic of an older system of social bonds that allowed for the settlement of grievances out of court, in opposition to formal and centralized means of settlement represented by "law."[19] Under the former model, the lord had the clear upper hand, whereas the latter model allowed direct contact between the lower classes and the state. For Gower, here, the relationship of "love" is portrayed as natural and unconditional as the love of a dog for its master – and the severing of that relationship unnatural in equal proportion.[20]

More importantly, this turn to the absent master of the "dogs" points to what is politically and socially at stake in the poet's distinction between domestic and wild animals. Gower's insistence that the peasants ought to take the form of placid, domesticated animals is linked to his vision of the peasants as those who belong, like certain animals, to a "master." In the Middle Ages as now, domestic animals were characterized by their presence within the household (*domus*), under the control and ownership of the master of the household: the *dominus.*[21]

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[18] Staley, *Languages of Power,* argues that the political language is one of "erotic petition" in Richard II's early years as monarch, transitioning to a more imperial model after the Merciless Parliament, see esp. chs. 1 and 2.
[19] Clanchy, "Law and Love in the Middle Ages."
[20] The prologue of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* poses "love" as the factor that binds the entirety of society together, in contrast to the "division" that is the root of all strife, war, and sin from Biblical times onward including that portrayed in the *visio*. The role of love in the *Confessio* has been the subject of two major book-length studies: see Matthew Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower;* and Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's* Confessio Amantis.
[21] Contemporary definitions of domestication rely primarily on a genetic, evolutionary distinction. However, Susan Crane points out that the Middle Ages, although they too had the distinction between domestic and wild, tended to define domestication as a matter of cohabitation – the domestic animals were the ones brought into the household – the *domus.* (Crane, *Animal Encounters* esp. ch. 1 "Cohabitation.") See, however, evidence for the interesting phenomenon of animal trials in the Middle Ages in Srivastava, "Mean, Dangerous, and Uncontrollable Beasts: Medieval Animal Trials" – even as animals the peasants may not have fallen outside of the law.

Similarly, unfree peasants belonged to English society only through the filtering presence of their lord, contacting the state only through that intermediary. Peasants were unable to plead a case in the crown court, but rather had to plead before their lord's court only – a difficult position should the grievance be against the lord himself. But throughout this early section of the *visio,* the higher ranks of society that might provide that intermediary level of governance are conspicuously absent, and never integrated into the allegory. Gower remarks on their absence in looking at the pigs, whose swineherd is absent along with his tools: the switch, nose ring, and halters that would normally control the beasts are nowhere to be found, and the pigs run wild wherever they please.[22] The cow too refuses to suffer a cowherd (*Contra iura bouis bos spernit habere bubulcum,* 243), and ranges widely outside his stable.

This dissociation from the master has wide-ranging political implications for the place of the rebellious peasants in English society. Elliot Kendall has argued, of Gower's *Confessio Amantis,* that it makes a strong case for the household as the best organizing principle of the English state.[23] In the *Vox Clamantis,* we see that ranging outside the *domus,* for the *rustici,* equates in Gower's eyes to being outside the English state; transgressing from the realm of the domestic animal into the realm of the wild beast strips the peasants of their English origins. [24] We can see this most clearly in the case of Wat Tyler, leader of the rebellion, and the only "beast" specifically named in this section of the poem. Gower calls Tyler 'the boar from Kent.' (*inter eos aper vnus erat quem Kancia duxit*, 321) However, in the very next line, Gower also paradoxically states that "no land could produce something like him": *terra sibi similem ducere*

[22] *Non erat aque bladis hominum porcarius vllus, / Qui tunc de solito more fugauit eos. // Non erat in nares torques qui posset eorum / Ponere, quin faciunt fossa timenda nimis. // Nullus et hirsuta nexus constringere colla / Tunc potuit, set eis omne licebat iter.* (I.313-8)
[23] Elliot Kendall, *Lordship and Literature*.
[24] In reality, as several scholars have argued, the peasants' rebellion was not entirely made up of peasants, but in this poem, Gower is secure and consistent in their portrayal as *rustici.* See Strohm, "'A Peasant Rebellion'?" *Hochon's Arrow,* 38; Justice, in *Writing and Rebellion* 125, argues that the rebels adopted this characterization for themselves as a matter of political utility.

nulla potest. On the one hand, Tyler is precisely located as a domestic antagonist, hailing not only from English soil but from the Home Counties. On the other however, the monstrous form of a fire-breathing boar, which he has taken on in his rebellion, dislocates him from any place: he becomes stateless, deprived of his Englishness by Gower for his monstrous change into a rebel.

What makes Tyler and the other rebels so dangerous in Gower's eyes is not, then, simply their ferocity. In depicting the peasants as domestic beasts turned wild, Gower recognizes that in breaking their bonds of love with the *dominus*, these beasts/peasants have taken on not only the savagery, but also the liberty of wild animals. "Beasts of the forest," prey animals such as deer, rabbits, and boar, could be considered the property of the landowner who possessed the land on which the forest grew. But none of these animals are represented among the peasants; instead, Gower turns to indisputably wild animals like bears and lions, or even fantastical creatures such as dragons. According to medieval English forest law, all other wild animals besides the "beasts of the forest" were considered to be "res nullius" – the property of no one, and had to be caught or killed before they could be considered as belonging to a particular person.[25] The wild and sometimes even fantastic beasts of Gower's vision are firmly in the realm outside of human domination.

Wild beasts are also, and perhaps more importantly for Gower, free to wander as they wish, not enclosed by the spatial confines of a particular *domus.* Gower uses the term *rusticitas*, "peasantry," to describe the peasants in the poem, but when they leave their homes to wander the countryside in this way he adds the modifier *fera,* "wild." This strange concept, the "wild peasantry" (*fera rusticitas*) verges on the paradoxical for Gower, as we can see in the animals he

[25] Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature,* 58–9. In fact, this was a point of frequent contention between the agents of the king and local peasants in the thirteenth century, who frequently resisted attempts to restrict access to hunting land and enforce fines for poaching deer. See Hanawalt, "Men's Games, King's Deer."

chooses to represent this transformation. (907, 975) Gower imagines that the barn cat *leaves* its barn to take up its "rusticity" – its "peasant role" – leaving the arena in which it would normally perform its rustic activities. The cat is not, then, taking up its peasant status but rather leaving it behind in favor of a new "wild" identity – still a peasant, but now wandering in a strange, new, and undefined social space. Similarly, the livestock "burst out" of their stables, and the cock and goose, formerly happy residents of the barnyard, leave to take up the identity of flighted birds: *"*Those who lived at home and were wont to walk around in the muck, / Presumed to take up the rights of eagles for themselves." (*Qui residere domique fimum calcare solebant, / Presumunt aquile sumere iura sibi.*)[26] The metaphor of flight gets at the heart of the challenge that the rebellion posed to Gower's particularly medieval way of defining English society through the *demesne/domus*: the peasants are leaving land – leaving *the* land, the place in which they occupied a coherent position in English society. Again, we can see that it is not simply their savagery that inspires Gower to create this beast allegory. Rather, it is their dislocation that makes the peasants equivalent to wild animals, and that makes them so threatening.

Indeed, the peasants have destabilized the whole world with their rebellion, a point that Gower makes with reference to the politically charged imagery of the plow. The priest John Ball, one of the leaders of the rebellion, prevailed in many of his writings on the radical image of the empowered plowman, and his most famous address urged the peasants to "cast off the yoke of bondage." When Gower says the peasant/cows "were unbent to the plow," or "unbent to the yoke," (*indomitos sulco,* 296), readers are clearly meant to think as well of the peasants who were seeking to cast off the plow, and its obligations, in their rebellion. This refusal to bend to the plow translates disorder all the way up to the celestial level, with the constellation of the plow (Boetes, or "The Wagoner") throwing the sky off center as it deviates from its normal

[26] *Per iuga, per colles, per deuia queque locorum / Diruptis stabulis soluitur omne pecus.* (*VC* I.511-512).

course: “The Wagon-driver turned the plow with the pole to one side, a straight line no longer guiding the plow / Breaking up the center, the ill-omened, enraged constellation sent hell up to earth.” (*Flexerat obliquo plaustrum temone Boetes / Nec via directa tunc fuit acta poli // Infortunata sed constellacio centrum / dissoluens rabide tartara misit humo,* 141) As we saw with Gower’s description of his exile, the rebels not only transgress space, trespassing outside the domestic sphere, but in fact disrupt space itself, sending the underworld up to the earth.

The image of the plow brings us also to the very real, practical fears associated with the rebellion in the poem. The rebellion took place in May and June, major planting and harvesting seasons. As much as Gower now imagines the peasants to be outside the English state, their role as the producers of food tie them practically to the other orders of English society. The bountiful, Edenic “island garden” that Gower describes in the conventional “May Morning” opening to his vision may be an attractive dream, but the real world in which the peasants rebelled relied on the work of peasant laborers to feed itself. Some of the most lucid moments of the dream vision are Gower’s expressions of fear over famine: “For shame! Oh! I have said that the cultivation of the fields will stop / and hunger must be feared in these times.” (*Prothdolor! O! (dixi) cessabit cultus agrorum / Quo michi temporibus est metuenda fames,* 297-8) This concern casts a new light on the use of *humo* in the image cited above, where the rebels are upsetting the order of underworld and “earth” – literally, “soil.” *Humo* emphasizes the way that the rebellion is disrupting society from its very foundations, both with respect to its source of sustenance – the soil – and, as we will see shortly, the legendary location from which the “first men” arose in the Ovidian story of Cadmus.

Gower’s beast vision is certainly delivered with a considerable amount of distaste; in fact, at 170, the peasants are already “monsters,” “freaks,” (*monstra*) even before their forms have

changed. To Gower the peasants were probably always beasts, and we can see in the vehemence of his tone that he is fascinated and repelled by their stepping outside of expected borders – both literal, and behavioral. But although Gower may have been disdainful of the rebel peasants, he was not dismissive. As Gower's imagery of the world turned upside down, triggered by the rebels' transgression outside the *domus,* would suggest, these men would otherwise not have been expected to have travelled much outside their local areas, but Gower sees that the rebellion brings them onto the national stage. The clear import of their actions for the English state – the political, but also the practical threat the rebellion posed – is clearly at odds in the poem with the "homeless," stateless status that they occupy in the unique position as peasant rebels, in their *fera rusiticas.* In the next section, we will see that this dislocation provokes Gower to an unexpectedly far-reaching musing on English legendary origins, a line of thought with considerable import for the political situation of the peasant rebels: what if England is nothing if not an island of exiles?

Island of Discord, Land of Exiles

For Gower, we now know, Englishness was tied to location through the organizing principle of the *domus,* not to language, or geographical origin. The analysis that follows will look at first glance like a revision of that position, but it represents an important nuance to Gower's thought. In one critical way, geographical origin does enter into Gower's thought on citizenship and Englishness, but it does so to trouble these categories rather than secure them.

Although we saw that Gower excluded the countryside from his vision of England the state, the concept of Britain the island does occur, and quite prominently, in the text. When the

dreamer is shipwrecked on the shores of an England he does not recognize, he is approached by a group of natives. Gower asks one of them, a mysterious old man who "seems nobler than the rest" to tell him about that land. However, the speech with which the noble old man answers Gower's questions is troubling and complex, painting a picture of an island at war with itself from its very beginnings. I will quote the speech in full, as it will be discussed in detail:

> This place is called the Island of the Exile Brutus, which Diana herself gave to him in her compassion. The people who are the native race of this land – their customs are very far off from those of love. For since this race is sprung from various other races, so it suffers from different varieties of error. They are beautiful in form, but in character, behold, they are more ferocious than the wolf. They do not fear laws, they believe only in force, and justice falls, overcome, under their warlike sword. Uncivilized in law, this pestilential people practices fraud, wickedness, battles, rages, and all kinds of evils. The hearts of the men of this land are more turbulent than the sea. This land is one that is born of varied seed, which bloodshed and violence and war always hold sway over. The poorly-shaped fields produce bleak wormwood, and what the land produces in the way of fruit shows its bitterness. If only there could be love within this people, I think that to the ends of the earth, no other people might be greater.

> A quo quesiui, "Dic, Insula qualis, en vnde
> Tantus adest populus, quis sit et inde modus?'
> Ecce senex ille, portu qui stabat in illo,

Reddidit ista meis horrida verba sonis.

‘Exulis hec dici nuper solet Insula Bruti,

Quam sibi compaciens ipsa Diana dabat.

Huius enim terre gens hec est incola, ritus

Cuius amore procul dissona plura tenet.

Nam quia gens variis hec est de gentibus orta,

Errores varie condicionis habet.

Egregie forme sunt hii, sed condicione

Ecce lupis seue plus feritatis habent.

Non metuunt leges, sternunt sub viribus equum,

Victaque pugnaci iura sub ense cadunt.

Legibus inculta fraudes, scelus, arma, furores,

Pluraque pestifera plebs nocumenta parit.

Que gestant homines terre de partibus huius

Pectora, sunt ipso turbidiora mari.

Hec humus est illa vario de germine nata,

Quam cruor et clades bellaque semper habent.

Tristia difformes pariunt absinthia campi,

Terraque de fructu quam sit amara docet.

Non magis esse probos ad finem solis ab ortu

Estimo, si populi mutuus esset amor.’

(1963-82)

It should not be surprising to readers of the *visio* that this is the idea of England that greets Gower upon disembarking from his ship. Although Gower's poem opens with the conventional "May morning" dream vision scene, describing a land full of abundance, bright and hospitable, this *locus amoenus* is quickly abandoned in his vision, and England becomes instead a place of terror and discord throughout the *visio*. When the ship of nobles goes looking for a safe port (1938, 1944), a "place of peace" *locum pacis* (1948), a "good harbor," *portum bonum* (1939a) it instead finds in England a "port of evil" *portum malum* (1950). And shortly after this old man's speech, Gower is told by a voice from heaven that he has reached a land of continuous strife: "The Isle of Discord has received you, a place where peace seldom stays for long." (*Discors / Insula te cepit, pax vbi raro manet.* 2023-4) The discord that Gower left behind him in England remains; but now, readers are finding out that this discord might have deeper roots than the ambitions of a particular group of peasants seeking to live beyond their means.

These roots lie in two mysterious remarks that the old man makes as part of his speech about the legendary origins of Britain. First, the wise man opens his speech by naming Britain as *Exulis...Insula Bruti,* "The Island of the Exile Brutus." As the island is named again within forty lines as the "Isle of Discord," Gower sets up an equivalence here between England's history of foundation by an exile and political strife of the kind that the poem itself documents. The second of the old man's remarks makes a rather more mysterious claim about English origins and the present-day rebellion: namely, that England's "mixed" heritage explains its tendency toward error and discord: "Because this people arose out of many different peoples, it suffers from different types of errors." (*Nam quia gens variis hec est de gentibus orta,/ Errores varie condicionis habet.*) This bold assertion appears without preamble, and the wise man goes on immediately to another point. However, ten lines later and just before the man finishes his

speech, he reiterates the same claim: “This land is one that was born from a varied seed, / which always suffers from bloodshed, fighting, and war.” (*Hec humus est illa vario de germine nata, / Quam cruor et clades bellaque semper habent,* 1977-8) Here Gower now takes up an explicitly biological metaphor, which focuses instead, somewhat nonsensically, on the literal soil of England (*humus*) and the “various seeds” from which it was born, reversing the order of generation. Again, the narrator does not elaborate on his claim, but moves on quickly to emphasize again the stricken nature of the land at war and the fine, but misled, character of the English people, as he concludes his speech.

But the implications of such a suggestion about the root cause of the rebellion sit uneasily with the overt claims that the rest of Gower’s poem seems to make about these events. Gower abhors the rebels as “beasts,” unnaturally in revolt against their masters, even if he admits the danger and potential power of their strategic position. And yet, they are united in this speech with the very founders of Britain in a common “error.” Gower does not elaborate on what this particular mistake might be, but it is perhaps the underlying sense of this word, which carries the critical connotation of wandering, that is the more active meaning here. It seems that the tendency to wander in a way that enacts political change might be a quality that has been passed down through the English people from their exiled ancestors to the rebellious peasants. The peasants advance on London as invaders, as previous visitors from across the seas have. This time, however, it is not the settlers and conquerors that approach England by ship. In what can only be an indictment of noble complacency, it is instead the nobles of England who flee before them in that manner. Considered in this light, it appears that this apparently domestic rebellion has taken on the dimensions of a conflict between the nobility of England and a foreign presence

within England's own borders: the peasant/exiles, who now occupy a new and strange political space as the most recent in a line of "conquerors" colonizing this land.

Moreover, under the alternative model of English society presented by Gower's old man in this speech, it seems that "natural" divisions in *gens* may account for this social unrest, rather than greed or ambition, for, as the wise man says, "bloodshed and fighting and war always hold sway over" such a naturally diverse land. Gower does address the peasantry as a discrete *gens*: "Oh insane fury, peasant people, violent commons, / your fraud is an evil above all others." (*O furor insane, gens rustica, plebs violenta, / Quam tua fraus sceleris est super omne scelus,* 1133-4) What originally seems to be a clear example of class conflict, then, transforms in these remarks into a kind of natural antagonism that arises between those from different peoples (*gentes*), arising from different "seeds" (*germina*). Looking at the legendary history of England, the *germina* of the English people are diverse indeed. Medieval English chroniclers and historians were well aware that England's history was one of invasions: Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Viking, and Norman.[27] As Carlson notes *ad loc* in his commentary on the *Visio*, this memory of invasion points especially to Geoffrey of Monmouth, whom Gower quotes on other matters in this passage, and who says of England: "it is inhabited by five peoples" (*quinque inhabitatur populis*), namely the Normans, Britons, Saxons, Picts, and Scots (the Irish). Variant versions of Geoffrey's text describe the original inhabitants as *incola,* "farmers," but also with the particular meaning of "settlers," a word that Gower also uses to describe the peasants.[28]

The pun on Brutus/bruti ("Brutus"/"beasts") further suggests that the peasants are being constructed as a foreign influence, as it draws a direct line from the legendary Trojan founder of

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[27] In this sense, their insistence on the derivation of "Britain" from the name of the Trojan exile Brutus, who supposedly founded Britain, is a reflection of their awareness that the population of contemporary England came from ships arriving on her shores, not seeds sown into the ground like Cadmus.
[28] Hammer, ed. *Geoffrey of Monmouth,* 24.

England to the peasant rebels.[29] The foundation story that traces the name of Britain to the Trojan refugee Brutus is well-represented in medieval English literature, but this formulation, which emphasizes Brutus's exilic status, is specific to Gower's poem. Here, this heritage is instead a distinct source of anxiety. If London is a "New Troy," the heritage is not an auspicious one for England. The terms in which Gower makes the comparison emphasize not the greatness and refinement of Troy, but rather its unfortunate downfall:

> Trojan victory fell, defeated and overcome, and Troy became the prey, like the lamb for the savage wolf. The peasant advances, and no soldier in the town puts up a fight: Troy lacks its Hector, Argos its Achilles: neither the daring of Hector nor Troilus prevails; rather, conquered, they cede the matter without any heart.

Subdita Troiana cecidit victoria victa,
Traoiaque preda fero fit velut agna lupo.
Rusticus aggreditur, miles nec in vrbe resistit.
Hectore Troia caret, Argos Achille suo:
Hectoris aut Troili nil tunc audacia vicit,
Quin magis hii victi rem sine corde sinunt.

(989-994)

[29] See e.g. *VC* I.507-10 *Non erat ex brutis animal quodcumque creatum / Quod de seruili condicione fuit, // Quin genus in campis vidi de talibus omne, / Mixtaque sic pariter sunt metuenda magis.*

Whatever glory England derived from its association with Troy is dismantled by Gower in these lines. Here, London as the "New Troy" is "prey" before the invaders-from-within, and the peasants and the fleeing nobles together bringing about the downfall of their own great civilization. The old man's curious speech is a way to explore more explicitly what the beast allegory suggests: there is an element of foreignness at the very heart of English identity.

Primal Chaos

The fall of Troy represented an ending, and Gower's vision of the violated London calls upon the pathos of its destruction. However, this fall was also a moment of foundation, or perhaps more accurately, refoundation, as the scattered refugees went on (according to medieval writers) to found the great medival European kingdoms. Another classical debt in the wording of the old man's speech suggests that this dynamic of conquest and refounding is also at work in Gower's poem, even as he laments the end of the stable "love" that had sustained English social relations until this point. In the second half of the man's speech, there is a rare moment in which the Ovidian framework of the poem resolves into specific allusion, and a thematic connection with Gower's poem. From line 1970 to line 1982, the speech is composed almost entirely of Ovidian lines from the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto,* totalling nine out of twelve lines. Of particular interest are the lines drawn from *Ponto* 3.18, complaining of the poverty of the land around him. He laments: "The deformed fields produce desolate plants, and what the land produces in the way of fruits is bitter. I don't believe there could be a greater people on the face of the earth, if only there were love among the people." (*Tristia difformes pariunt absinthia campi, Terraque de fructu quam sit amara docet. / Non magis esse probos ad finem solis ab ortu*

/ Estimo, si populi mutuus esset amor, 1979-82) Where Ovid applies these criticisms to the locals and the poor soil in Tomis, conflating the poverty of the land with the cultural impoverishment of its people, Gower applies the lines to his own homeland of England, which has been made strange by the rebellion. However, as we are beginning to see, the land was perhaps always strange – full of aliens, and exiles – and only reminded of this by the revolt.

The conjunction of the "seeds of a people" with the bitter fruits of the ground should remind us of another Ovidian story: the tale of Cadmus that appears in the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is quoted repeatedly in the *visio.*[30] In the third book of the *Metamorphoses,* Apollo appears to Cadmus after he has killed the dragon, and orders him to sow the beast's teeth in the ground as the raw material for a future people (*populi incrementa futuri*).[31] Cadmus obeys: "he does so, and as he opens the ground up with the plough, he sprinkles the teeth on the ground, the seeds of living people, just as he was ordered." (*paret et, ut presso sulcum patefecit aratro, / spargit humi iussos, mortalia semina, dentes.*)[32] From these seeds in the ground spring men, the first race of people, who fall immediately upon one another and decimate their own population: the first civil war. The survivors of that conflict go on to found Thebes, whose own legendary history seems to replay that bloody foundation over and over, and demonstrates the same quality Gower assigns to England in the *visio:* peace never reigns there for long.

The connection between the land, birth, and inherent strife surfaces also in the vocabulary of class that Gower uses throughout the poem. In the Rolls of Parliament, the word normally used for the group of those of noble birth was *nobilitas,* a term that does not appear in Gower's poem. Instead, Gower uses the word *ingenuus,* which carries the meaning, as Isidore says, of

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[30] *VC* I.1079ff and I.1435-6; he quotes Ovid also on the creation of man, I.751ff. See Carlson, notes ad. loc.
[31] *Met*. III.103
[32] *Met* III.104-5

those who are not free by circumstance or manumission but rather by birth.[33] In the face of a challenge from the peasants, however, the nobility forgets its "class" with Gower playing on the *genus* within *ingenuus*: "The class of the nobility forgets that that [the nobility] is its class." (*Vix genus ingenuum scit genus esse suum,* 1198*)* However the translation of *genus* as "class," here, though it seems to be what Gower means by this, obscures the natural historical overtones of the term and the sense of this quality as inherently inborn in its possessors. What seems to be expressed in this claim about the nobility is that this quality is not as secure as it once seemed; as we saw above, the connection between birth, land, and social order is disrupted by the revelation that England's inhabitants are, in many cases, the descendants of those born elsewhere, to another "people" (*gens*), which makes their claim to an inborn "class" unstable (*ingenuus*). As we also saw in Arnulf's commentary to Lucan, the negotiation of the boundaries between "people" (*gens*), "population" (*populus*), and "type [of person]" (*genus*) is a difficult question, and within the old man's speech he himself slips between the three ideas in describing the fundamental faults of the English. It appears that one aspect of England's heritage is overcoming another here, as the innate historical division of "peoples" (*gentes*) subverts the innate nobility of its ruling classes.

The turn to these troubled foundation stories, of Brutus and of Cadmus, in Gower's narration of a domestic rebellion in England demonstrates the seriousness with which he took the unrest: as a possible moment of genuine breach and refounding in the history of England. The chaos that we saw earlier, in which "no place knew its place any longer," and the underworld was reversed with the earth, calls not only on simple chaos, but the primal chaos at the beginning of the world as it appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* in which the seeds of all matter are

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[33] Isidore, *Etymologiae,* IX.iv.46.

discordant and chaotic (*discordia semina rerum*).[34] The apocalyptic tone that colors the entire poem suggests that Gower is thinking of "endings" that are also "beginnings" in a Christian framework as well. In his prologue, Gower calls on John of Patmos "whose name I bear" to guide his work, and the poem repeatedly mentions approaching "ends."[35] At the beginning of the poem's actual narrative, Gower is already saying: "all things come to an end" (*omnia finis habet*, 125). Perhaps more tellingly, he imagines that each of the noblemen who flees England on board a ship "sees that his own end is here" (*finem spectat adesse suum,* 1278). At the same time, as the storm that shipwrecks the nobles recedes and allows them to turn back for England, Gower says that "new paths were now available for laws." (1926) However reactionary and one-dimensional Gower's poem looks upon first glance, the poem is a serious attempt to understand the roots and meaning of the rebellion in a long view of England's history.

Gower's initial presentation of this poem as a poem written by an exile might seem initially to be a strange choice for a poet adopting a public voice, and therefore speaking for a land that he locates himself outside of. Lynn Arner has suggested that Gower's real engagement with the events of the rebellion occurs in the vernacular, once he has admitted the utility of a shared political language with the elements of society that the *Vox Clamantis* explicitly excludes, in its learned and Latinate form. I agree that the *Vox* certainly represents a "dramatic refusal to engage" with the rebels, if we mean to engage with them directly – but I would argue that this does not extend to a refusal to engage with the wider meaning of the rebellion.[36] On the contrary, this analysis has shown that Gower's taking up of the mantle of the exile poet allows him to explore questions about Englishness, English history, and political belonging that were

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[34] *Met* I.9, drawing on Lucretius *semina rerum, De Rerum Natura* II.1059.
[35] See especially the extended "illa dies" section from I.635-669.
[36] Arner, *Chaucer Gower and the Vernacular Rising.* David Aers also categorizes Gower's position as "unselfreflexive" in the *visio.* See David Aers, "Representations of the 'Third Estate,'"345. See also Aers "*Vox populi* and the Literature of 1381."

particularly relevant to the social challenges raised by the rebellion. Moreover, the poem does indicate, as the analysis of the old man's speech above suggests, that Gower did envision the peasants as in some ways representing an authentically English quality, albeit a dangerous one for the cause of social cohesion. In this poem "England," island of exiles, is a perpetually moving target, founded by an exile, repeatedly conquered by foreigners and exiles, and now disoriented by a rebellion that threatens to exile one class or another.

Recent criticism has begun to acknowledge more nuance in Gower's approach to the rebellion in this poem. David Carlson calls the poem an "apology after the fact" for the actions taken against the peasants by Richard II, though he sees in Gower the concession that the peasants were poorly-treated – that is, as beasts. [37] However, I would argue in conclusion that the poem ends on a far less decisive note than that argument allows. Gower sees the peasants put in chains, and approves, but one of his last thoughts in the poem is the warning that "the untamed peasantry lies in wait." (*indomita rusticitate latet*, 2098) Lynn Arner does note briefly that Gower acknowledges that "other groups' experiences and perspectives…possess the potential to become ubiquitous" in the *visio*, and Eve Salisbury has argued that Gower develops a complex meditation in the *visio* on London and the violence of the rebellion as "sacrificial."[38] But what we have seen here is an even more specific and unsettling analysis: Gower fears that the rebels' "experiences and perspectives" will not only "become ubiquitous" but that they represent an element within Englishness that is inexorably divisive. The poem recognizes that although the leaders of the rebellion are dead, the large questions raised by the revolt, and elaborated in this analysis, remain: are the peasants domestic subjects or are they a foreign, antagonistic force? Is

[37] Carlson, "Gower's Beast Allegories" 257.
[38] Arner, *Vernacular Rising*, 154. Salisbury, "Violence and the Sacred City."

their abandonment of their traditional "home" an abandonment of their "homeland," or is the rebellion istelf a manifestation of their very Englishness as wanderers and exiles?

In this sense, the poem is not only a reaction to the immediate events depicted by the poem, but a reaction to the uncertain foundations offered by medieval accounts of English origins, a search provoked for Gower by the unsettling events of the peasants' rebellion. As conservative as Gower's reaction to the rebellion appears to be in this poem, this chapter has also demonstrated that Gower recognized the complications of supporting such a position. In some ways, England's diverse ethnic history could support an appeal to class divisions between the nobility and commoners, but that is in fact, and rather surprisingly, the opposite of the point Gower seems to be making here. Instead, he points out, it can also blur distinctions between subjects and foreign antagonists and suggest that the rebels may have carved out for themselves a political position outside of the system but well within the boundaries of "Englishness," though, as the persecutions that followed the rebellion demonstrated, they may not have been able to maintain that position.

Gower in fact concludes his poem not with a sense of having "closed the book" on the rebellion, but instead with a sense of great haste: as he ponders the meaning of the old man's mysterious speech, a "voice from heaven" tells him "scribere festines" (2049) – to "hurry up and write" what he's seen. This order suggests that the poem is not looking backward but rather forward, and that the ideas contained in his poem will be, as he says in his prologue, "an old book set as an example for those to come," who must meet the challenges of a changing society. In this sense, Gower's poem not only performs an ethical reading informed by classical models, but fashions his own text explicitly as an ethical model for future readers, as much for posterity as it is for now.

Postscript: *The Serpent of Division*

In 1422, at the request of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, then-regent of England, John Lydgate translated and adapted a number of sources on the life of Julius Caesar into a work entitled *The Serpent of Division.*[1] It was, Maura Nolan has pointed out, both one of the earliest secular biographies and the first translation of the substantial details of Julius Caesar's life into English.[2] If the text does date from 1422, the occasion was very likely to have been the uncertainty caused by the youth of Henry VI at his father's early death, and the motivation for its commissioning Humphrey's desire to keep domestic peace, and perhaps also power. Lydgate's work tells the story of Caesar's military campaigns as a way of constructing a warning against the dangers of social "division." In this work, Caesar's overreach begins with the conquest of Britain, when he stays in the field to conquer longer than the five years allowed to him by Roman custom, taking advantage of internal dissent within Britain to conquer there before turning back toward Rome. There is a clear, if unsurprising, throughline in Lydgate's text from this moment to the civil wars that initiated the beginning of imperial rule at Rome and finally to Caesar's death at the end of the piece. Running throughout is an admonition against the social division that made first Britain, and then Rome, easy prey for Caesar and the pride that drove Caesar to continue his bid for power, up to his eventual death.[3]

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[1] One manuscript records the date as 1400, which is most likely a mistake, though it has led to debate over the dating of the poem. See MacCracken, *Serpent of Division* 3 for the colophon with this earlier date; see MacCracken and Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate 1371-1449* 23ff for the argument for a later date.

[2] Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture,* 37. Nolan's chapter as a whole offers a particularly generous and comprehensive reading of *The Serpent of Division,* linking Lydgate's source use to a meditation on historical contingency and literature's ability to translate that tragic contingency into "rememberance" and therefore to see also the pleasure derived from contingency.

[3] Nolan points out that Lydgate realizes the inherent duality in Caesar's charcter and depicts him in a way that echoes the conclusions we saw in Arnulf's observations on Lucan: "[Caesar] quite literally makes Rome a space in which his sovereignty can exist, a place in which the doubleness of his position, as both "rebell and traitour" and "emperour," becomes that which validates the order he has imposed." (Nolan, *Lydagte and the Making of Public*

Among Lydgate's works, *The Serpent of Division* is easily overlooked, both for its relative brevity and for what many readers, and the text's 20th-century editor, have felt to be its considerable aesthetic deficiencies. However, one of these aesthetic deficiencies is precisely my point of interest in the work as a closing note to this study of classicism in later medieval England. The *Serpent of Division*'s most recent editor (though not particularly recent, dating from 1911), MacCracken, notes that "not only is the number of pages devoted to the causes, signs, and prognostications of civic rebellion out of all proper relation to the real matter of the story, but the disproportion extends down through paragraphs, sentences, and phrases..."[4] In MacCracken's assessment of the text as an aesthetic failure, we can see precisely the representational mechanism that we have been following throughout this dissertation: the life of Julius Caesar is the vehicle for Lydgate's admonitory message, the great (international) stage that this domestic problem is projected onto, which gives the impression that this text will thus also address wide-ranging and transhistorical questions, not least of which what it might mean at this time and to Lydgate to translate the story of Julius Caesar into English for the benefit and delight of an English sovereign. And perhaps that is the work that we wish Lydgate had written here, for our sake; but this was far from his intention, and MacCracken's criticism admits of a narrow conception of the range of classical responses available to authors in medieval England (and perhaps especially to Lydgate), a range that I have in this project been seeking to open up. The "real matter" of Lydgate's project is not to tell the life of Julius Caesar or to link British history up with the history of the classical world, amplifying Britain or the patron of this text by

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Culture, 63) In this sense, Lydgate's Caesar as such would not be his invention, but rather the recognition of a medieval tradition of interpreting Caesar that focused not only on his pride and downfall as a figure in the *casus virorum illustrium* tradition but also in the fundamental duality of governance that he represents as both conqueror and domestic ruler, and that we have seen here also in the "kydde conqueror" Arthur of the alliterative *Morte,* and Theseus in the *Knight's Tale.*

[4] MacCracken 2.

association. Rather, the main point here is exactly what MacCracken identifies as Lydgate's mistake: the "causes, signs, and prognostications of civil rebellion." Though painted on an international canvas, the text is aimed firmly at domestic politics.

We can see this aim confirmed not only in Lydgate's choice to start the story of Caesar with his conquest of Britain, and thus audaciously to link Caesar's entire career to an originary episode of British internal "division," but also in the straightforward conclusion that he offers readers, which presents both the circumstances of the text's commissioning and its main aims:

> And lete þe wise gouernors of euery londe and region make a merowre in here mynde of þis manly man Iulius, and consideren in þer hertis þe contagious damages & þe importable harmes of devision, and letehem seen avisely and take example how þe ambicious pride of Iulius, and þe fretynge of envie of Pompeyus, and þe vnstawncheable gredy covetise of Marcus Crassus were chefe and primordiall cause firste of here owne distruccion execute and complissched bi cruell deþe, and not onely þat þese þre abhomynable vices were cause of here owne deþe but occasion of many a þowsande oþer mo þan I can tell, the cite of Rome not onely made bare and bareyne of þer olde richesis and spoiled of here tresowre on þe too side, but destitute and desolate be deþe of here kniȝthod on þe toþer side; whiche me semyth owȝte Inow suffise to exemplifie whate hit is to begynne a werre, & specially to considre þe irrecuperable harmes of division."
>
> (MacCracken 65-66)

As we saw in *The Knight's Tale,* the classical world offers plenty of images not only of the greatness of bold "knights" like Caesar, Hector, and Aeneas, but also, in the *Thebaid* and in Lucan's *Bellum Civile,* this prospect of "desolation" and "destitution" "be deþe of here kniȝthod," by the wasted and perverse deaths men fighting their own countrymen. Lydgate opens the readership of the poem up to "governors of every land and region," but within that category this is not advice meant for them on how to deal with one another, but rather on domestic division within their realms. To that end, it is utterly relevant for Lydgate to dwell not on the greatness of Caesar, his transhistorical exemplarity, or the possibility of becoming another Troy or Rome under the leadership of his august patron, but rather on a detailed explication of the causes and political ramifications of rebellion in this place and time far away from England.

To be fair to MacCracken, the endeavor that Lydgate undertakes in the *Serpent of Division* is very different from Lydgate's classical appropriation practices elsewhere, especially in his *Troy Book,* which forms a neat counterpoint to the *Serpent of Division* and a further illustration of the dichotomy that we have seen playing out in this dissertation between Trojan narratives in English and those that turn to other classical locations. I said in the introduction that when English writers wish to think "England" internationally they turn to Troy; when they wish to think "England" domestically, they turn elsewhere, and especially to Lucan, as Lydgate does in the *Serpent of Division*.[5] We can see the different modes of classicizing activity operating within Lydgate's work in the differences between the epilogue to the *Serpent of Division* and the prologue to the *Troy Book,* both of which address frankly his authorial motivations. In *Serpent of*

[5] Lydgate uses many sources to compile *Serpent* but names Lucan repeatedly as his authority for various passages. Critics have argued that there is no direct evidence of Lydgate having used Lucan's text directly, but as I have been arguing more generally, it is not Lucan's text itself but rather his name and his persona, the poet and historiographer who writes for the future (a mode of engagement we saw with Gower and Ovid too) that he appropriates: he is the poet of Rome's downfall and division. Lydgate turns not only to the content of Lucan's poem but to the mode of reading it that Arnulf suggests: ethically, as *exemplum.* On Lydgate's use of Lucan (or non-use), see Nolan, *Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* 37-9, which also addresses his claims to be translating from Eusebius.

Division, we saw that Lydgate sought to warn governors against division within their own lands, to embrace domestic unity in the face of ruin. In the prologue to *Troy Book,* the act of vernacular translation serves not to unite an English kingdom but rather to place England among the great kingdoms of Europe, within the narrative of *translatio studii* of this great Trojan story:

> By cause he wolde that to hyghe and lowe
> The noble story openly wer knowe
> In oure tonge, aboute in every age,
> And ywriten as wel in oure langage
> As in Latyn and in Frensche it is,
> That of the story the trouthe we nat mys
> No more than doth eche other nacioun:
> This was the fyn of his entencioun.
>
> (*Troy Book* Prologue, 110-118)

The subject matter (great classical stories and figures) and the methodology (wide-ranging English translation from both Latin and other vernacular sources, and classical sources) are similar, but the aim and meaning of the effort entirely different. The *Troy Book* prologue articulates a translation agenda that puts England on par with other "languages" and "nations" in the search for "the truth of the story:" the great, international, story of Troy, Lydgate's "no more than doth eche other nacioun" suggesting that this truth is the same one in Latin, French, or now English, a truth shared across medieval Europe. *Serpent of Division,* on the other hand, urges a participatory ethical reading of the past for the edification of each specific prince, who must

make a "mirror" of the text for his own circumstances. The image of the mirror, in this case, suggests something quite different from the *Troy Book*: that this text's "truth" does not have its own particular content, but rather reflects a different picture for the circumstances of each reader – for Humphrey, Julius Caesar's life will "make a mirror" that shows England.

There is a specific and a general lesson to be taken here. First, as I have suggested, we can see in the gap between Lydgate's two texts both a more well-known mechanism of classical reception in Middle English, in the *Troy Book;* and a lesser-known one that I have been tracing out in this dissertation, in which the classics are brought to bear not to elevate England to an international stage but rather to provide a model – in some cases a negative one – for the fraught questions of domestic governance in times of civil unrest. In considering the landscape of classical adaptation in medieval England, we must be sensitive to the complexity of medieval writers, as classicists in their own right, if we wish to understand fully their connection to the classical world. *Translatio imperii* is part of that landscape, but a more minor one than it would appear from its domination of the critical literature on medieval classical appropriation.

Lydgate's endeavors also point to a wider consequence of this study for our understanding of the English intellectual tradition. Some have found in Lydgate's patron, Duke Humphrey (of Duke Humfrey's library) the beginnings of humanism in England. A recent study of English humanism starts with Duke Humphrey, which in itself, as the author points out, already considerably backdates previous models of the development of humanism in England.[6] Duke Humphrey engaged in many of the activities that we associate with Renaissance humanism, especially the finding, circulation, annotation, and translation of classical texts, and he had Italian connections. However, humanism also obtains as a mode of reading, as Wakelin

[6] On Humphrey and the beginnings of English humanism see chs. 1 and 2 in Daniel Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature 1430-1530*. For a study of Duke Humphrey's connections to Italian humanism, see Saygin, *Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester*.

points out in the introduction to his study. But if we admit of humanism as a mode of reading in the absence of other trappings of humanist thought, the story extends backward even further, as a few scholars have suggested.[7] Wakelin himself draws the line between pre-humanist encounter with the classical tradition and humanist encounter with the humanist sense of novelty, or rediscovery or classical "originals," not present, he claims, in earlier medieval adaptations, which drew on medieval vernacular sources in addition to (and often instead of) classical originals.[8] However, we have seen repeatedly here that medieval authors cite as their authority classical authors rather than their medieval sources. Chaucer mentions Statius by name, but never Boccaccio; Lydgate cites Lucan by name repeatedly, but not his multiple medieval sources; Gower cites Ovid and Boethius but not his medieval Latin sources from which he also borrows a large amount of material. There is a sense even for these writers that the "author" is the classical author, not his medieval transmitters.

Furthermore, as we know, Lydgate looked backward constantly to the age of Chaucer, and his *Siege of Thebes* is a direct response to Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*.[9] In his intimate literary connection to this period, Lydgate, rather than accessory to the first beginnings of humanism in England via Humphrey, becomes an important link in his own right to a prior, in addition to a future, tradition of classically-informed, ethical reading about violent conflict that we have seen developed in this project. This tradition depends not on an appeal to the absolute laws of natural

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[7] The major study is RW Southern, *Medieval Humanism,* though Southern stakes his claim on the period 1100-1320, stopping short of the later fourteenth century. James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 17-19 links Gower with Alan of Lille, positing a continuous humanism from the twelfth-century French and English renaissance of classical studies as the tie between the Alan of Lille and Gower. Minnis and Scott also argue, in their intoduction to *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism,* that what has been seen as a turn away from humanism after the twelfth century ought instead to be seen as "humanism of a high order," motivated by (in Southern's phrase) a "confident belief in 'the concept of natural nobility and of reason and intelligible order in the universe'" – as the texts in the anthology that follows demonstrate. (Minnis and Scott 6-9)

[8] Wakelin 16.

[9] See James Simpson, "Dysemol Daies and Fatal Houres" and A.C. Spearing, "Lydgate's Canterbury Tale." *Siege of Thebes* is roughly contemporaneous with *The Serpent of Division.* In this sense Lydgate is continuing rather than starting a new mode of reading in *The Serpent of Division.*

and scriptural order, nor on allegorical modes of reading, but rather to human precedent and cultural practices as a way of reading one's own moment. Although perhaps a less dazzling endeavor than constructing Trojan genealogies or advancing claims to world empire, a deep commitment to the past as it bears upon the present is no less critical in these texts, but it is different. Rather than seeking to repeat or even surpass the successes of their august forebears in antiquity, these writers seek instead to avoid their mistakes, to extract peace from cycles of historical violence, and to heed the warnings, left to them in poems, of those who came before.

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