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**TROJAN WARS:  
GENRE AND THE POLITICS OF AUTHORSHIP IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND  
EARLY MODERN ENGLAND**

A Thesis in

English

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the writing of Trojan War narratives by major English authors from the late fourteenth to the early seventeenth centuries with a focus on how these authors appropriate various literary genres in response to their particular social and political circumstances. My project challenges prevailing notions of the function of Troy as England's foundational myth in both the political and literary cultures of the medieval and early modern periods. In the Middle Ages the English claimed to be descended from the Trojans who had survived the war and participated in the founding of Rome alongside Aeneas. Many modern critics argue that the conflation of the historical and the literary in this myth of national origin worked to forward the imperial agendas of English monarchs, and that these agendas found support in the medieval retellings of the Trojan War narrative. I argue that the political formulation of England's national identity puts certain pressures on how a writer can express his own authorial identity and that one form of identity constantly threatens to undermine the other. My work locates authorial politics – that is, authorial self-definition in response to both literary tradition and issues in English court culture – within the Trojan narratives of Chaucer, Lydgate, Caxton, and Shakespeare. This approach demonstrates how authorial identity is expressed textually through the negotiation of genre and competing narrative forms with respect to cultural context.

For medieval and early modern English authors, the truth of the story is merely a surface concern as the author seeks to lay claim not to the Trojan legend but simply the right to tell it. Whereas the Arthurian legend seems to be available to writers who wish to invent new episodes or reformulate established narratives, the Troy story necessitates that an author justify his literary project by showing appropriate deference to the other poetic texts in the Trojan tradition. In so

doing, the writer claims a right to author his own account of the legend. No other story in English literature requires such a claim, and it is for this reason that the Trojan War narrative functions as an important site for investigating English authorship.

The dissertation's title, *Trojan Wars*, is meant to remind the reader of the multitude of competing narratives that constitute the legend of the destruction of Troy. At the center of the legend lies neither a war nor a city but a conspicuous absence, and it is around this absence that Trojan Wars have been fought by poets and historians trying to claim authority over a disputed territory that was never really there in the first place. The medieval Troy story conflates the historical and the literary, and recent scholarship on Trojan texts tends to privilege the former over the latter. My dissertation will use the important observations made by recent critics concerning the historiographic importance of Troy in order to highlight its significance in the formation of an English literary tradition as defined by the idea of authorship and negotiated through genre. My thesis is that each author's appropriation and idiosyncratic fashioning of various genres, particularly epic, romance and history, allows him to claim authority over the Trojan legend that he chooses to tell while simultaneously critiquing any royal or imperial agenda that seeks to do the same. The specific choices in genre, I argue, are inherently intertextual and entirely self-conscious, as each Trojan text functions as a response to the other works in circulation as well as the political concerns of the nation during the time of its writing. Through this approach, I identify the emergence of an English authorial identity that begins with Chaucer and trace its development through the Middle Ages and Renaissance in order to demonstrate how literary authority functions in relation to political authority.

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## Epigraph

I have lived in important places, times  
When great events were decided, who owned  
That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land  
Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims.  
I heard the Duffys shouting 'Damn your soul'  
And old McCabe stripped to the waist, seen  
Step the plot defying blue cast-steel—  
'Here is the march along these iron stones'  
That was the year of the Munich bother. Which  
Was more important? I inclined  
To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin  
Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind  
He said, I made the Iliad from such  
A local row. Gods make their own importance.

"Epic," Patrick Kavanagh (1938)

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **New Troys: The Construction of an English Literary Tradition**

In the Middle Ages, Troy was not ancient history. As a living myth that continued to evolve along with the English nation, Troy functioned as a site for examining England's cultural and political questions. Troy was never fixed within an ancient past but was located within the English present in order to critique political ideologies and cultural practices. As a myth of national origin, Troy was used by monarchs to legitimize dynastic claims and imperial ambitions, to fashion England and its ruling class as the successors to a celebrated Trojan civilization that continued to flourish in the New Troy of medieval London. For English writers, Troy served as a valuable analog for exploring the pressing political and cultural issues of the day, for questioning the value of dominant ideologies and presenting alternative modes of discourse, and for revealing the dark underbelly of England's cultural institutions, particularly chivalry. Troy was the absent city that remained ever-present in medieval and early modern England, its ghosts continually resurrected through royal pageantry and iconography, its tragic legend endlessly played out on the written page and Renaissance stage as a means for England to come to terms with its place within its own modern historical context.

This dissertation is a study of how writers in the late medieval and early modern periods established a literary tradition of English authorship based on textual representations of the Trojan War. Traditionally, scholarship on Troy's significance in England during the Middle Ages and early modern era has focused on either historiographic issues – how representations of

Troy provide us ways of understanding approaches to historical consciousness and the writing of history – or how particular authors used the Trojan legend to offer social commentary.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation offers the first sustained examination of the development of Trojan legend in England across the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries as it was written by authors attempting to establish a literary canon and locate their works firmly within an English Trojan tradition. For the authors that I have chosen to focus on in each of my chapters – Chaucer, Lydgate, Caxton, and Shakespeare – Troy functions as a site for establishing literary rather than historical or imperial authority. I argue that as they used the Troy story in order to forward their own authorial ambitions, their understanding and re-imagining of the legend put them at odds with the political agendas of their monarchs and England’s dominant aristocratic factions. The establishment of literary authority thus became a means for countering political authority, and it is this mode of authorial discourse that I have termed English Trojan authorship.

The interplay between authorship and politics, between the literary and the national or dynastic appropriations of the Trojan legend, demands a particular concern with the function of genre. The Troy story was, from its inception, a myth that exploited the possibilities of epic, romance, and history. From Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the foundational epic and romance of the Western literary tradition, to the *Aeneid*, Virgil’s poetic meditation on how these two genres

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<sup>1</sup> For historiographic approaches to Troy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, see Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Francis Ingledew, “The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*,” *Speculum* 69 (1994): 665-704; James Simpson, “‘The Other Book of Troy’: Guido delle Colonne’s *Historia destructionis Troiae* in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England,” *Speculum* 73 (1998): 397-423; John Curran, *Roman Invasions: British History, Protestant Anti-Romanism, and the Historical Imagination in England, 1530-1660* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002).

Studies of Trojan literature as social critique include C. David Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980); Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Alan Shepard and Stephen D. Powell, eds. Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

function in the making of a Roman nationalism founded on historical awareness and genealogical determinism, Troy became a site for demonstrating how political action could be understood in generic terms. As the Troy story evolved from its classical origins in Greece and Rome and spread throughout medieval Europe as part of the *translatio imperii et studii*, issues of genre conditioned the ways in which Troy could function as part of a nationalizing historical discourse and as a literary subject for writers translating the Trojan legend into the vernacular.

### **The Literary History of Troy**

The English Trojan tradition has its basis in the French Trojan romances and Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin *Historia regum Britanniae*. The medieval French versions of the Troy story synthesize Virgilian and Ovidian approaches to genre by highlighting the role of individual erotic desire as a driving force behind political action. Francis Ingledew argues:

It is items in the Book of Troy, the *Roman d'Enéas* and Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, that launch erotic narrative in Western medieval culture – and not, as one might expect, by opposing sexual desire to history as the realm of the private but by embedding it in the matrix of history. In Troy those two dominant modes of medieval secular textuality, romance and historiography, find a common source, as if the image of Troy were the necessary correlate of both discourses.<sup>2</sup>

Ingledew is right in identifying Virgil as a proponent of the link between erotics and politics, but he fails to acknowledge Ovid's influence on the translation of classical Trojan epic into medieval romance. While Virgil had privileged political and historical necessity over individual desire,

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<sup>2</sup>“The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History,” p. 668

Ovid had argued that the latter should not be lost at the expense of the former.<sup>3</sup> Ovid's *Heroides* is the prime example of his attempt to undermine Virgil's imperial epic by making war an impetus for erotic exchange rather than the other way around.<sup>4</sup> The *Roman d'Enéas*, composed in Normandy around 1160, incorporates Ovidian erotic discourse into Virgil's epic scheme, and is thus identified as the first major vernacular romance of the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> Around the same time, Benoît de Sainte-Maure composed his *Roman de Troie*, which greatly expands the material found in Dares' and Dictys' Latin "eyewitness accounts" of the Trojan War by inventing erotic subplots to compliment the political and military struggles between the Greeks and Trojans.<sup>6</sup> In its comprehensive account of the war, Benoît's *Roman de Troie* provides the fullest narrative of the Trojan origins of European medieval nationhood and chivalric culture. By inventing and privileging episodic narratives of erotic interplay between individual agents, Benoît also makes romance a genre of personal literary expression.<sup>7</sup>

The *Roman d'Enéas* is a romance that remains closely tied to its epic source by continuing to locate political authority in Aeneas and his dynastic line. The *Roman de Troie*

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<sup>3</sup> Lee Patterson writes that Virgil "is at pains to define eroticism not merely as hibernal irresponsibility but more powerfully as a regressive surrender to dark, chthonic forces, a reversionary impulse toward an obscure and unredeemed primitivism" in *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 167. For Ovid, eroticism is an impulse toward civilization and culture, especially in Book I of his *Ars Amatoria*.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Hardie locates another Ovidian counter to Virgil's epic discourse in the story of Cadmus and Thebes in *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4. See "Ovid's Theban History: The First 'Anti-Aeneid'?" *The Classical Quarterly* n.s.40 (1990): 224-35. Similar anti-Virgilian sentiments are found throughout almost all of Ovid's works, particularly in his treatment of the Trojan War and its aftermath in *Metamorphoses* 12, 13, and 14, commonly referred to as the "little *Aeneid*" where the dominant theme is the fates of individuals rather than the state.

<sup>5</sup> Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 183

<sup>6</sup> Dares Phrygius, *De excidio Troiae historia*, Ed. Ferdinand Meister (Leipzig: Teubner, 1873); Dictys Cretensis, *Ephemeridos belli Troiani libri a Lucio Septimo ex graeco in latinum sermonem translate*, Ed. Werner Eisenhut (Leipzig: Teubner, 1958). For a critical introduction to these texts, see R. M. Frazer, Jr., trans. *The Trojan War: The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of Benoît's fashioning of himself as an *auctor*, see Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 22-28.

decentralizes monarchical authority and relocates it in the chivalric knights who not only fight in service of the state but also shape political policy. Benoît includes numerous scenes of the Trojans meeting in council to determine the best course of action for the city-state, and Priam's voice is only one among many. The real power of Troy lies not in its monarch but in Hector, whose opposition to the rape of Helen and the continuation of the war is voiced throughout the poem. When Hector falls, Troy is lost. Similarly, on the Greek side, military strength and effective strategy is located not in Agamemnon or any single authority but is dispersed throughout the army in the powerful figures of Ulysses, Achilles, Diomedes, and Ajax. In its lengthy and detailed explanation of how the Troy story plays out as a result of individual action based on both political and erotic desires, the *Roman de Troie* presents history not as received truth but as endless process and progress wrought by human choice and agency.<sup>8</sup> In Benoît's re-imagining of the Trojan myth, the rigid teleology of epic is replaced by an unfolding narrative of individuals acting in response to historical contingency. Benoît's poem celebrates individual will and action over genealogical imperative and inaugurates a shift from epic to romance as the dominant genre of the Trojan narrative.

Benoît never claims to be writing a romance; his title is meant to distinguish the poem's use of the vernacular rather than Latin. He grounds his poetic authority in his stated intention to write a history based on credible sources in order to recover the truth of the Trojan legend from writers like Homer who made it into mere fable. Benoît's insistence on his poem's historicity in his preface is persistently and explicitly undermined, however, with the inclusion of fantastic episodes, like Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, and his extensive additions to his source

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<sup>8</sup> Patterson writes that "in the world of romance, history is less given than made" and he contrasts the "secular and causal historiography" of Trojan romance with the determinism of ecclesiastical history. *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 96

texts.<sup>9</sup> These additions and his decision to present them in French rather than Latin highlight Benoît's authorial role and his careful crafting of Trojan history to reflect the political and social issues of twelfth-century Normandy and the court of Henry II. When history becomes a means of legitimizing poetic invention rather than a narrative of *res gesta*, we find the birth of both the romance genre and medieval Trojan authorship.

Geoffrey of Monmouth similarly exploits the possibility of poetic invention based on history and romance, but his version of the Troy story retains a fundamental epic component absent from Benoît's poem. Completed in 1136, the *Historia regum Britanniae* provides a genealogy of the British nation that is explicitly linked to Troy and Rome and thus legitimizes imperial ambition. In its use of Virgilian prophetic history as a means of authorizing dynastic claims, Geoffrey's *Historia* offers "the image of a hegemonic imperative more or less constantly active in the royal imagination of England from the Normans into the fifteenth century."<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Geoffrey's rewriting of Virgil's *Aeneid*, presented in the same manner in which Virgil had translated Homer's Greek epic and romance into the language and political framework of Augustan Rome, grants his text a literary authority and makes England the site of both political and cultural empire. The mutual reinforcement of political and literary authority plays out through the text's appropriation of classical epic and its assimilation of epic into the genre of medieval romance.

Geoffrey's *Historia* provides a genealogical account of the founding of Britain and the means by which its dynastic line realizes the promise of a prophesized imperial destiny. The narrative begins with Brutus, who unwittingly kills both his Roman mother (Lavinia's niece –

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Strohm, "Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives," *Speculum* 46 (1971), p. 349.

<sup>10</sup> Ingledew, p. 698

she dies giving birth to him) and his Trojan father (Ascanius – whom Brutus accidentally shoots with an arrow while out hunting). Forced to leave his homeland, Brutus embarks on a journey that will eventually allow him to found a new empire, the New Troy that he will establish on the island of Britain. Brutus' circuitous route and his exercising of personal valor in the face of military obstacles marks him as a hero modeled on Aeneas.<sup>11</sup> Like Aeneas, Brutus does not succeed solely through his own virtue but because his success has been divinely-mandated. The goddess Diana appears to Brutus, telling him:

Brute, sub occasu solis, trans Gallica regna,  
insula in Oceano est, undique clausa mari;  
insula in Oceano est habitata gigantibus olim,  
nunc deserta quidem, gentibus apta tuis.  
Hanc pete: namque tibi sedes erit illa perennis:  
haec fiet natis altera Troia tuis.  
hic de prole tua reges nascentur et illis  
totius mundi subditus orbis erit.<sup>12</sup>

Brutus, beyond the setting of the sun, past the realm of Gaul,  
There is an island in the Ocean, surrounded on all sides by the sea:  
The island in the Ocean was for a long time inhabited by giants,  
Now it is deserted, ready for your people.  
Set out for there, for that will be a home to you forever:

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 677

<sup>12</sup> *Historia regum Britanniae*. Ed. Jacob Hammer. (Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1951), p. 34



This for your offspring will be another Troy.

Here from your descendents kings will be born and to them

All of the round world will be subject.

As Ingledeu points out, Diana's speech suggests that "the genealogical-imperial plot of British history is a function of prophecy: it unfolds as necessity" (678). The Trojan saga that opens Geoffrey's narrative, however, also unfolds as literary necessity, claiming and then displacing its own genealogy through its appropriation of Virgil. As the *Historia* continues, it stakes out new literary ground through Geoffrey's continued invention of British pre-history, most fully realized in the presentation of Arthurian legend, which culminates in the British return to Rome as Brutus' descendents conquer Aeneas' line and establish Britain as a new empire. In so doing, Geoffrey combines the discourse of Virgilian epic with medieval romance in order to legitimize his writing of a British national identity based on his own literary authority.

Geoffrey of Monmouth presents his text as a translation of "Britannici sermonis librum vetustissimum" ["a very ancient book in the British tongue"] that provides a historical account of pre-Christian Britain, but the legacy of his *Historia* is more closely tied to its function as romance than its veracity as a true historical account of British origins.<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey's Trojan narrative was adapted and included in chronicle histories, with the story of Brutus as eponymous founder of Britain giving his name to the *Brut* chronicle tradition, but his creative license and original invention in the myth of King Arthur gave rise to Anglo-Norman and English romance, which made similar – and equally doubtful – claims to historicity. The epic quality of Geoffrey's *Historia*, its fundamental concern with the linear teleology of the historical narrative,

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<sup>13</sup> Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 22-7.

continued to influence the nationalizing function of romance throughout the Middle Ages. As the Troy story began to form the basis of an emerging English literary tradition in the fourteenth century, however, its epic ideology gave way to a focus on Troy as a site of tragic romance.

While Geoffrey's *Historia regum Britanniae* uses Virgilian epic discourse to locate the fall of Troy as an origin that presages the rise of an English empire, this narrative was superseded by a counter-tradition based on Guido delle Colonne's thirteenth-century *Historia destructionis Troiae*, a Latin prose translation of Benoît's *Roman de Troie*. James Simpson has identified Guido's *Historia* and its Middle English redactions as anti-Galfridian and anti-Virgilian:

It is anti-Galfridian insofar as it makes no serious play with the genealogical potential of the Troy narrative; it is instead relentlessly exemplarist in its presentation. And (more actively) it is anti-Virgilian insofar as it holds out no hope whatsoever for the divinely sanctioned foundation of empire... This tradition is intensely historical, but history holds no promise of transition from catastrophe to empire; history is instead the story of societies imploding under the pressure of poor decisions and the cumulative weight of events.<sup>14</sup>

There is a persistent pessimism that permeates Guido's version of the Troy story. He highlights the faults of each major player in the narrative and ultimately concludes, as C. David Benson points out, that the "villain of the Trojan War is simply the ignorance and weakness of the human condition."<sup>15</sup> The actions of the characters are not guided by prophecy or divine intervention, and each hero falls not in service of a predetermined course of history but because of his own moral, martial or strategic failings.<sup>16</sup> The text concludes with the epitaphs of Achilles and Hector and makes no mention of the rise of future kingdoms and empires from the ashes of the decimated city. It disassociates epic from the Trojan narrative and, in its subordination of the

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<sup>14</sup> "The Other Book of Troy," p. 404

<sup>15</sup> *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*, p. 23

<sup>16</sup> *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*, p. 27

Ovidian erotic subplots celebrated in Benoît's poem, attempts to deny the genre of romance a place in the historical account of the fall of Troy.<sup>17</sup> Guido works to make his text read like a chronicle history, as the characters proceed to the best of their ability in response to immediate contingencies brought about solely through human agency. By refusing to function as either an ideologically-driven historical epic or an allegorical romance-history, Guido's *Historia* provided a chronicle account of the events of the Trojan War, which could then be re-imagined and reshaped into other genres. As history, it provided a space for literary invention and formed the basis for the rise of the English Trojan tradition.

Guido's *Historia* served as the definitive text of Trojan history and historiography, but, like Geoffrey's *Historia*, its primary legacy is as part of a literary tradition. When it is translated into English in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Guido's Latin prose is rendered into verse. Even as these texts – the *Laud Troy Book*, the alliterative *Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy*, and John Lydgate's *Troy Book* – make explicit claims to historicity, the historiographic function of each text is compromised by their form.<sup>18</sup> Guido's tragic vision of history provides a means for examining the ways in which individual agents function within inherently flawed and ultimately doomed societies, and his literary inheritors translate this vision into English verse in order to highlight the allegorical function of the narrative for their contemporary audiences. The study of human action is intensified through each poet's use of the conventions of medieval romance as a means of imagining alternatives to the tragic course of history, and the rhetorical claims of textual fidelity to their source serve to highlight the continued relevance of the Troy

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<sup>17</sup> Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, p. 204

<sup>18</sup> See Strohm, "Storie, Spelle, Geste Romaunce, Tragedie" for an overview of the generic labels each author applies to these texts. Benson's *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature* remains the fundamental and most in-depth account of the *Laud Troy Book* and the *Gest Hystoriale*.

story to understanding England's own place within secular history. History becomes not a means of legitimizing empire but a means of legitimizing poetic authority, as the only celebration of individual achievement in these poems occurs on the meta-level of textual production. It is the telling of the narrative, not the narrative itself, that provides an escape from the recursivity that plagues the Trojan heritage.

Because of the complicated textual history of the Troy story and the ambiguity that surrounds the meaning of individual episodes and the entirety of the narrative whole, Troy provides an ideal site for medieval writers to claim poetic authority by newly presenting a story already well-known, a transformation that occurs on the level of genre. Patterson says that Trojan historiography reveals that "the various tensions and contradictions that inhabited medieval thinking about history per se were registered at the level of textuality as generic vacillation between history and romance, an instability that itself put into question not merely the authenticity of a particular narrative, or even of historiography as a whole, but the legitimacy of the historical life itself."<sup>19</sup> These contradictions are resolved, I suggest, by making Trojan history into Trojan literature, by transforming the historical project into one of poetic expression. In an effort to provide England with a literary tradition to compliment and counter its historical lineage, English writers establish their own place within literary history by claiming fidelity to textual precedents and then disrupting the continuity of the tradition through a reinterpretation of its generic and political efficacy. This mode of authorship, which began with Virgil and Ovid and was perpetuated in the Middle Ages by Benoît, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Guido delle

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<sup>19</sup> *Negotiating the Past*, p. 204

Colonne, provides the basis for reexamining the Trojan texts of medieval and early modern England.

### **Negotiating the Present: History, Epic, Romance**

The meaning ascribed to medieval and early modern Trojan narratives depends on our understanding of their genres. While each of these texts refuses simple generic categorization, the ways which their authors use and challenge generic conventions presents us with a new way of reading and understanding the events of the Trojan War and its place within English political and literary culture. Genre functions as an intertext, invoking previous literary and historical accounts of the Trojan War as well as its role in contemporary political discourse, which, in turn, adds to the social function of the text in question.

Julia Kristeva's theory of the multivalence of the poetic word can be applied to literary genres in order to demonstrate genre's intertextual function. Kristeva explains that poetic words and sequences operate in three dimensions: "The word's status is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus... [E]ach word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read." Literary genres are, for Kristeva, "imperfect semiological systems" that work in tandem with the text's linguistic structures.<sup>20</sup> This theory is perfectly illustrated by the Trojan War narratives of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, as each consciously looks back to its sources and specifically directs its

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<sup>20</sup> "Word, Dialogue, and Novel." *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 37.

audience to consider its relation to those anterior texts. The invocation of textual precedent and claims to translinguistic fidelity force the reader to consider not only the continuity of the tradition but, more importantly, its fissures, the places in the text where tradition is supplanted by invention. These fissures occur primarily on the level of genre, as meaning is created by each text's restructuring of the narrative according to different generic conventions.

The function of genre is determined diachronically and synchronically, as the production of meaning for a particular genre occurs in relation both to its traditional conventions and its function at a particular historio-cultural moment. In each of the chapters of this dissertation, I discuss the understanding and employment of generic forms in the specific political and literary environments that surround the production of the primary Trojan text under consideration. It would be useful, therefore, to establish general definitions of each generic term – epic, romance, history – as it relates to political ideology and informs the structural conventions of literary texts. I do not seek to reduce any genre to a distinct and unwavering set of absolute principles but rather to highlight the differences between the political and structural ideologies that characterize these literary forms.

Epic is the genre of triumph. It describes the establishment of order based on a single, unifying principle of hierarchical authority ultimately located in the person of the monarch, who represents the nation-state and seeks to expound hegemonic control over both domestic and foreign communities. In its effort to perpetuate the dominant ideology of the sovereign, epic argues for and represents a monological discourse upon which the ideology depends, representing any challenge to that ideology as illegitimate and dangerously subversive to both the sovereign and his subjects, whose safety and well-being are entirely contingent upon the

maintenance of the established order.<sup>21</sup> Seeking to expound the triumph of the existing power as the teleological end of previous struggles, epic represents all speech and action by the sovereign and his loyal subjects as the fulfillment of a predetermined and divinely-sanctioned program of control.

As both a political tool and literary structure, epic propagates a linear view of history in which the events of the past culminate in the successful establishment of the power that rules the present. David Quint explains:

Epic draws an equation between power and narrative. It tells of a power able to end the indeterminacy of war and to emerge victorious, showing that the struggle all along had been leading up to its victory and thus imposing upon it a narrative teleology – the teleology that epic identifies with the very idea of narrative. Power, moreover, is defined by its capacity to maintain itself across time, and it therefore requires narrative in order to represent itself. In this sense, narrative, like ideology, is itself empowering. The epic victors both project their present power prophetically into the future and trace its legitimating origin back into the past.<sup>22</sup>

As a literary form, epic is defined by its linearity, by the purposive driving of the narrative toward its necessary end: the foundation of empire. Its language, like its structure, is direct, providing the reader with a poetic representation of ideology that corresponds to the poem's contemporary political and social hegemonic discourse.<sup>23</sup> R. Howard Bloch points out, "In the epic an assumed (though violable) linguistic propriety combines with a realized narrative coherence to produce the somewhat unidimensional universe which proliferates, according to a

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<sup>21</sup> See Bakhtin's "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 3-40 and Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," pp. 47-57

<sup>22</sup> *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.45

<sup>23</sup> I do not want to claim that epic always conforms to or supports the state-apparatus. Even the *Aeneid*, often regarded as the primary exemplar of epic, cannot be read simply as propaganda for the Augustan empire. It does retain ambiguity and, in many ways, offers a powerful indictment of the fascistic demands of the Augustan regime. Still, on the surface, Virgil's poem seems to fulfill its generic function of representing the founding of Rome as a validation of Augustan principles.

genealogical model, in the direction of ancestry. There can be no distinction between the narrative and referential continuity of the epic, the biological continuity of lineage, or the economic continuity of noble family property.”<sup>24</sup> Epic depends on linearity as both a structural and linguistic principle, and it rejects any deviance from the teleology of the narrative as a threat to the perpetuation of its ideology. It operates within time, presenting a history that, however distant, is continuous with the present and that must be maintained into the future.

Romance, on the other hand, represents a distinct counter to the political and formal ideology of epic as its structural and linguistic directness is replaced by circularity, recursion, and ambiguity. Quint explains, “The romance narrative bears a subversive relationship to the epic plot line from which it diverges, for it indicates the possibility of other perspectives, however incoherent they may ultimately be, upon the epic victors’ single-minded story of history.”<sup>25</sup> Romance allows for alternatives to the hegemonic discourse of epic, locating competing authorities that operate outside of the imperial agenda of the nation-state. Quint continues by noting that “in opposition to a linear teleology that disguises power as reason and universalizes imperial conquest as the imposition of unity upon the flow of history, the dissenting narrative becomes deliberately disconnected and aimless” (41). This aimlessness gives romance an episodic structure in which individual adventures can take on a significance beyond the narrative whole.<sup>26</sup> Unrestrained by the totalizing logic of the epic narrative, romance attempts to ignore or forestall the relentless march of history by celebrating individual erotic and

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<sup>24</sup> *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 108.

<sup>25</sup> *Epic and Empire*, p. 34

<sup>26</sup> See Morton W. Bloomfield’s essay “Episodic Motivation and Marvels in Epic and Romance” in *Essays and Explorations: Studies in Ideas, Language, and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970): 96-128.



martial adventures undertaken for personal satisfaction rather than in service of ideological principle.

As literary genres, both epic and romance make claims of historicity and use narrative to comment on their contemporary moments. Epic, however, is dependent on the continuity between its narrative and external referents while romance privileges its own internal logic over a direct correlation with historical reality. John Finlayson defines romance as “a tale in which a knight achieves great feats of arms, almost solely for his own *los et pris* in a series of adventures which have no social, political, or religious motivation and little or no connection with medieval actuality.”<sup>27</sup> Morton Bloomfield notes that romance often consists of “irrational episodes” in which the actions of the hero are shrouded in mystery.<sup>28</sup> This imagining of a parallel universe allows for a close examination and critique of the dominant political ideology and behavior codes of a particular social group. The genre foregrounds the loss, suffering, and confusion that epic seeks to expunge from its historical narrative and refuses to provide comfort to the reader by espousing a single, unifying ideology. Although romance often ends with the successful completion of the hero’s quest and his reintegration into the social order, the circular structure of the narrative suggests the ways in which disorder, both personal and social, always threatens to return.

For the purpose of my argument, I use history as a term to designate both the narrative of *res gesta* (things that have happened) and the political and social reality contemporary to a given text. In terms of the former, Trojan history involves the narrative of the major events that most, if not all, writers accept as fact: the Trojans’ abduction of Helen, the Greek retaliatory response,

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<sup>27</sup> “Definitions of Middle English Romance,” *Chaucer Review* 15 (1980): 55

<sup>28</sup> “Episode Motivation and Marvels in Epic and Romance,” p. 106

and the destruction of Troy. These events were, for most people living in the Middle Ages, accepted as true stories and provided a starting point for secular history. The poems of Homer and Virgil were considered literary fictionalizations of the events of the war while the chronicle accounts of Dares and Dictys were seen as the best textual sources for the truth of the narrative. The specific interactions of the major figures and the details of the war were open to debate and provided subjects for literary invention – particularly the erotic exchanges between Paris and Helen, Troilus and Briseida/Criseyde, and Achilles and Polyxena – but the fact of the war and consequences were regarded as historical truth.

In a contextual sense, history refers to the political and social events occurring immediately before and during the composition of a particular work in the English Middle Ages and Renaissance. The actions of the monarch and Parliament, domestic and foreign military conflicts, and the day-to-day concerns of individuals and communities are all part of this history, which we, as modern readers and scholars, can best recover through a careful evaluation and use of contemporary and modern textual accounts. These accounts can be no less suspect than the Trojan histories of the Middle Ages, but we can accept as fact certain truths that are important to my study: the power struggles between Richard II, the Appellants, and the Parliaments of the 1380's, the military agenda of Henry V, the Wars of the Roses, and the rise of print culture and English nationalism at the end of the sixteenth century. History here refers to the actions of individual agents in response to contingency, the decisions made in an attempt to shape the political and social environment of which they are a part. I accept as truth that the historical figures whom I discuss – Chaucer, Lydgate, Caxton, Shakespeare and their monarchs – acted with an awareness of their place within history and made distinct efforts to establish both a mode

of operation within their social circumstances and a historical legacy for themselves that would continue after their deaths.

Of course, none of the genres in question exist in a “pure” form, as every text from the medieval and early modern period (as well as before and after) draws from a variety of structural, linguistic, and narratological modes in the presentation of a unique literary and historical artifact irreducible to a single formal principle or meaning. Genres collide, intermix, and change over time, as does our understanding of them. The language available to us as twenty-first century readers and critics for thinking about and describing genre differs significantly from that used by medieval and early modern writers, as does the sense of what exactly it means to be a writer of “history” as opposed to “literature.” Still, it is safe to say that none of the major authors I discuss in my chapters would consider themselves to be “historians,” nor would any modern reader confuse them as such. While history is a major part of their writings, especially their Trojan narratives, they fashion themselves, and have been accepted by their contemporary audiences and succeeding generations of readers, as authors of literature, which forces them to make conscious decisions about the formal qualities of their texts and the power of genre to shape meaning.

### **Argument and Methodology**

The Trojan legend serves as the foundation for not only an English national identity but also an English literary identity. I argue that one form of identity constantly threatens to undermine the other. My work locates authorial politics – that is, authorial self-definition in response to both literary tradition and issues in English court culture – within the Trojan

narratives of Geoffrey Chaucer, John Lydgate, William Caxton, and William Shakespeare. Each author's appropriation of particular genres allows him to claim authority over the Trojan legend while simultaneously critiquing any royal or imperial agenda that seeks to do the same. While the chronological progression of each chapter suggests a linear and continuous trajectory for the development of the Trojan legend in England, I am interested not only in the ways in which each text builds upon its predecessor but in the ruptures and fissures that allow each writer to challenge tradition in order to make his own authorial claims. For medieval and early modern English authors, the truth of the story is merely a surface concern: English Trojan authors lay claim not to the legend but simply the right to tell it. How they secure this right and use it to promote their own authorial ambitions in opposition to royalist and imperial discourse will be the subject of each chapter.

Each of these writers was not only a product of the social and historical forces of their era but that they were very much aware of the ways in which these forces shaped the types of texts that they could produce. Their texts reveal this awareness primarily through each author's use and manipulation of various genres as a way of highlighting and pushing back against the political pressures that potentially limited the discursive possibilities available to them. For Chaucer, Lydgate, Caxton, and Shakespeare, the decision to present Trojan narratives at particular points in their literary careers demonstrates a desire to respond to and influence the ongoing and ideologically-driven conversation about the place of Troy in English nationhood and its literary tradition. Their motives, I argue, are both political and personal, as their efforts to reshape England's national identity are a function of the claims they make for their own literary identities. While politics and generic convention may impose certain bounds on literary

discourse, the ability to operate within these bounds while simultaneously critiquing their legitimacy becomes the fundamental characteristic of English Trojan authorship.

In the following chapters, I contextualize each Trojan text in the political climate of its time. This approach allows for a new consideration of the generic structures and ideologies of these texts and demonstrates the manner in which each author uses genre to comment on contemporary political discourse and forge a place for himself within the English Trojan tradition. The dissertation begins with a discussion of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as a poem that considers the problem of epic discourse and its conspicuous absence in English literature of the Ricardian era. As the most widely-read and influential English Trojan narrative of the Middle Ages, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* provides a fitting starting point for defining English Trojan authorship as a program invested in the discursive possibilities and limitations of particular genres. Chapter 3 examines the way in which John Lydgate uses *Troy Book* to represent the need for his patron and monarch, Henry V, to eschew romance as a generic model for kingship. In Chapter 4, I consider the ways in which William Caxton uses his Prologue and epilogues to his *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* to present himself as more than simply a translator and printer. He fashions himself as an English Trojan author modeled on Chaucer and Lydgate and offers the *Recuyell*, which is the first book ever printed in English, as a new hybrid of romance and history that seeks to repair the division caused by the Wars of the Roses. Finally, I read Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* as a play-text that systematically delegitimizes the epic, romance, and historical function of Trojan discourse in Renaissance England through its critique of the fetishization of Troy as part of the English literary tradition.

This dissertation is an attempt to demonstrate how genre, politics, and authorship intersect, how literary texts are shaped by an individual author's awareness of his own place

within political and literary history. As the foundational legend of both English nationalism and literary expression, Trojan War narratives provide the ideal site for medieval and early modern authors to take up questions of how literary texts can function in the political sphere and in relation to one another in service of promoting a English literary tradition. Similarly, for modern readers and scholars, these texts allow us to construct our own narrative about the development of a particular legend across time and the ways in which this development is shaped by individual authors working to establish their own voice as part of national and literary discourses. In my research and writing, I have tried to introduce historical contexts for thinking about textual production and highlight important synchronic and diachronic intertextual conversations between the English Trojan War narratives of the medieval and early modern eras. While theories of genre, history, and authorship are all important subjects of study in their own right, I am, in the end, a literary critic, and my project proceeds from what must always be a critic's primary purpose and goal: to provide new and interesting ways of reading important literary texts.

## Chapter 2

### Chaucer's Second Hector:

#### Diomedes and the Possibility of Epic in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

*Troilus and Criseyde* is a poem about being second-best. Set in the besieged city of Troy, it presents the story of the ill-fated love affair between the disgraced daughter of a traitor and Hector's little brother. Chaucer tells us from the beginning that his subject is failure: the "double sorwe of Troilus" (1.1) will be told in "woful vers" (1.5) so that we might hear how he was forsaken while his hometown was about to be destroyed (1.56-63). Many readers recognize the historically determined futility of the Trojan cause, but they wish to claim a moral victory for Troilus, whose ascension to the heavens after his death seems to signify the ultimate reward for a virtuous pagan. Regardless of any personal, psychological, or philosophical developments that he may experience, however, the fact remains that in both love and war, Troilus is playing second-string on a losing team.

The hero of *Troilus and Criseyde* can never be the hero of the Trojan War, and I believe that Chaucer wants the reader to remain aware of this fact despite the poem's apparent claims to the contrary. As Gayle Margherita points out, "Even before the narrative gets started, the specter of the classical Trojan saga threatens to trivialize this romance, just as the figure of Hector continually threatens to diminish the heroic stature of Troilus in the poem."<sup>29</sup> I argue that the

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<sup>29</sup> *The Romance of Origins: Language and Sexual Difference in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 108.

“specter of the classical Trojan saga” is embodied in *Troilus and Criseyde* in the figure of Diomedes, who, in both Chaucer’s poem and in the classical and medieval traditions of Troy, serves as a true second Hector. While Troilus represents the failure of the romance hero, Diomedes represents the possibility of epic success, a possibility that must be explicitly denied by Chaucer even as he hints at its presence throughout Book 5. Just as Hector articulates alternatives to the course of tragic Trojan history during his speeches before the Trojan Parliament in the *Troilus* as well as in other medieval accounts, Diomedes stands as the lone figure who is actually able to escape the cycle of violence that comprises the stories of Thebes and Troy.

The reluctance of both Chaucer’s narrator and readers of the *Troilus* to acknowledge Diomedes as the epic alternative to the poem’s eponymous romance hero speaks to the conditions of Chaucer’s Trojan authorship. Chaucer had identified Troy as the most famous and contentious legend in the House of Fame, noting “[s]o hevye therof was the fame / That for to bere hyt was no game” (1473-4). Indeed, the name of Troy is so well-known that it takes Homer, Dares, Dictys, Lollius, Guido delle Colonne and Geoffrey of Monmouth to sustain it. In offering an extended treatment of Trojanness through the story of Troilus, Chaucer makes himself part of this tradition and aligns himself with these writers of epic history. They exist in the House of Fame because of their handling of Troy and, with the exception of Homer (who is subject to slander on account of his favoring of the Greeks) they are safely guarded by their pastness. Chaucer is writing at a time when writing can be dangerous, when invoking Troy carries serious consequences. In choosing to break from the narrative trajectory that moves from Virgil to Dares to Guido by translating an Italian romance by Boccaccio, a source that is carefully hidden under the guise of the fictional Lollius, Chaucer confronts his own inability to



write epic in 1380s London. The *Troilus* is, after all, not a celebration but a lament: a lament for Troilus, a lament for Troy, and a lament for the inherent failure of the genre of romance to speak directly to the political concerns of the day. Through the *Troilus*' intertextual apparatus – its series of allusions and evocations of prior textual representations of Troy – Chaucer suggests the underlying presence of epic discourse as a productive countermeasure to the circular and recursive structure of romance. The *Troilus* creates and maintains this opposition, and it allows Diomedes to undermine the romance ethos of Troilus that the text only seems to privilege and that Ricardian poetry requires. Chaucer's Trojan authorship is thus defined by his use of the intertextuality of genre to operate within and critique the limitations imposed by his political and literary environment.

In this chapter, I first address the issue of epic impossibility as a defining feature of Ricardian poetry. I next discuss the importance of Chaucer's repeated use of the term "Hector the Second" as a means of legitimizing Troilus as a poetic subject and Chaucer as a Trojan author. I then argue that critical desire to retain Troilus' reputation as the hero of Chaucer's text and to force the poem into distinct generic categories has resulted in the negative response to the character of Diomedes. As a counter to this critical tradition, I discuss Diomedes' Theban heritage and his role in classical and medieval Trojan War narratives in order to claim him as the figure of epic success. A fuller account of Diomedes' role in Virgil, Benoît, and Guido allows for a reading of Chaucer's *Troilus* as a poem that rewrites epic into romance as a counter to Boccaccio's project of separating the latter from the former.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas C. Stillinger, *The Song of Troilus: Lyric Authority in the Medieval Book* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 135

## The Absence of Epic in Ricardian Poetry

When J. A. Burrow coined the influential term “Ricardian Poetry” in 1971, he not only identified particular elements present in many of the important poetic texts of the late fourteenth-century but he also pointed out key absences. Burrow argues that much of Ricardian poetry is self-contained and exhibits a “circular structure” that makes each poem’s only referent its own textuality.<sup>31</sup> He finds that “the chief characters in Ricardian narrative...achieve little of public consequence” even in works such as *Troilus* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, whose historicity and subject matter would seem to lend them to political commentary.<sup>32</sup> The reluctance of Ricardian writers to present narratives that espouse a particular political ideology accounts for the absence of epic in England during this time. D.W. Robertson called attention to this in *A Preface to Chaucer*, pointing out, “During the second half of the fourteenth century English art fails to show any outward manifestation of the heroic.”<sup>33</sup> Burrow reiterates this claim, noting that there is no Ricardian poetry that “exhibits that species of linear form which derives...from following a hero through a long series of trials and adventures.”<sup>34</sup> While Ricardian protagonists are often said to possess conventional heroic traits such as martial prowess and political efficacy, these characteristics are discussed indirectly and are never actually demonstrated in the text. For Burrow, Chaucer’s *Troilus* serves as a prime example of “how even the most eligible Ricardian hero can fall short of epic stature.”<sup>35</sup> While Chaucer’s narrator tells us that *Troilus* performs valiantly on the battlefield, he restricts his narrative to the

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<sup>31</sup> *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and the Gawain Poet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 64

<sup>32</sup> Burrow, p. 100

<sup>33</sup> *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 284

<sup>34</sup> Burrow, p. 68

<sup>35</sup> Burrow, p. 99

courtship of Criseyde and never presents Troilus as a political entity. Despite the explicit linking of literature and politics by identifying the period as “Ricardian,” the poetry seems, on the surface at least, remarkably apolitical.<sup>36</sup>

Burrow’s designation has proven apt enough to be adopted as part of the critical vocabulary of medieval literary studies, and the characteristics of Ricardian poetry have been generally accepted.<sup>37</sup> While critics have agreed that there is a preponderance of staunchly apolitical narratives in the romance mode and a discreet lack of any text that can truly be classified as an epic, there has not been any sincere effort to explain this phenomenon. There has been a great deal of discussion about Ricardian poetry as a literary movement but very little attention to its political significance. Why does circularity become such a dominant feature of Ricardian poetry? Why does epic fail to appear on the English literary scene in fourteenth-century England? Why does Chaucer, as a figure so intimately acquainted with Virgil, Ovid, Statius, and Lucan, not try his hand at composing his own epic? And why does Chaucer look to Boccaccio’s romance when he decides to take up the Matter of Troy in the 1380s?

To address the first two questions, we might consider the political function of epic and romance. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, epic is a narrative genre that follows a linear path toward the establishment of a new world order and reflects a particular ideology. Its ideological

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<sup>36</sup> Many of the poems of the Ricardian era do, of course, lend themselves to political readings and have been understood as veiled allegories. Also, certain notable exceptions to this rule stand out; *Piers Plowman* is one example of an explicitly political poem composed during Richard’s rein. Still, “Ricardian Poetry” is a useful term that calls attention to the way in which politics influences literary discourse, as seems to be the case in the 1380’s and 90’s.

<sup>37</sup> The idea of Ricardian poetry, however, has not gone unchallenged. Derek Brewer points out that much of Chaucer’s personal and intellectual development took place during the court of Edward III, but he admits that culture of Richard’s court conditioned the composition and response to Chaucer’s later poetry, including the *Troilus*. Brewer is entirely right, I think, in classifying Chaucer’s poetry of this period as “anti-Ricardian.” See “Chaucer’s Anti-Ricardian Poetry,” *The Living Middle Ages: Studies in Mediaeval English Literature and Its Tradition*. Uwe Böker, Manfred Markus, and Rainer Schöwerling, eds. (Stuttgart: Belser, 1989), pp. 115-28.

message is linked to the linear structure of narrative as well as the text's linguistic relation to its contemporary world. As R. Howard Bloch points out, the epic "both presents events in their natural (chronological) order and maintains an always assumed continuity between words and the referent – or between language and the possibility of representation."<sup>38</sup> As such, the epic is a genre that consistently invokes and responds to its extratextual circumstances. In so doing, the narrative's linear, teleological progression exhibits a political ideal that comments on the text's political moment.

Though usually considered a genre that reproduces and endorses the hegemonic discourse of its period, the epic often critiques existing power structures. For example, the *Aeneid* had long been regarded as a poem in service of the Roman Empire under Augustus Caesar, but modern critics have located important moments of dissent within Virgil's poem. As A.J. Boyle argues, "The narrative critically presents, rather than eulogizes, the world of political and military power (*imperium* and *arma*) and its idealizing self-image, examining the relationship of that image to Roman reality and the effect of the political world and its imperial achievement on human values and human history."<sup>39</sup> The epic's function as a genre of critique is continued in the Middle Ages in the French *chanson de geste*. Bloch finds that in French epics, "Right lies on the side of an oppressed aristocracy which, through the means of self-help and resistance at its disposal, upholds the principle of justice against the more restrictive monarchic principle of order... A swan song of declining aristocracy, the epic of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries

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<sup>38</sup> *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 100

<sup>39</sup> "The Canonic Text: Virgil's *Aeneid*," *Roman Epic*, ed. A.J. Boyle (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 84

is, in effect, France's first literature of protest."<sup>40</sup> In its imagining of an idealized future that overcomes and reestablishes political dominance, the epic is a genre of subversion.

Romance is a genre born of epic that seeks to disguise ideology through circularity and recursion. In considering the relationship between Old French epic and romance, Sarah Kay writes, "Epic poems provide a clue to the political unconscious of romance: many of the political conflicts and contradictions exposed by the *chansons de geste* are repressed, disguised, or otherwise 'mystified' by romance texts... They practise a politics of evasion, which seeks to sanitize or disguise the rifts in the social and symbolic order which the *chansons de geste* exhibit."<sup>41</sup> According to Geraldine Heng, romance in England allows for an articulation of a nation's history that it would otherwise seek to repress.<sup>42</sup> Even in its dealings with explicitly political subjects, romance avoids politicizing by refusing to locate itself in relation to extratextual referents. Its circular structure leads the reader back to the text's beginning rather than outside of itself, ensuring that its world remains self-contained both structurally and linguistically. Romance becomes, therefore, a site for linguistic play and the exploration of plural meaning.

If we understand epic and romance in these ways, and recall the violent factionalism in England in the 1380s, we can see why Ricardian poets avoid such an explicitly political genre as epic in favor of the closed world of romance. Romance becomes a means of expressing a variety of discourses without particularly favoring any single one. The dangers of direct speech that might seem offensive to either Richard II or the Appellants during this time were very clear, as

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<sup>40</sup> *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 101. The French *chanson de geste* provides the most direct influence on English romance.

<sup>41</sup> *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 6

<sup>42</sup> *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003)

the consequence of verbal offense was often death.<sup>43</sup> Recently, Lynn Staley has argued that the “slippery” language of Pandarus and Troilus reflects the problematic linguistic policies enacted by both Richard’s court and Parliament in the 1380’s. She finds that Chaucer’s poem, through its portrayal of Troy, laments the lack of a “language of self-understanding” that characterizes his own historical moment.<sup>44</sup> Given the perilous linguistic terrain, Ricardian poets needed to tread very carefully when seeking to make any sort of political statement.

Critics have long admired, though often grudgingly, Chaucer’s ability to disguise his personal politics. Given the highly volatile political climate of the 1380s and Chaucer’s association with both the royalist faction of Richard II and John of Gaunt, this talent allowed him to escape the political persecution that claimed the lives of many of his friends, including fellow writer Thomas Usk.<sup>45</sup> Chaucer succeeded not by completely removing himself from the political sphere, but by recognizing the need to operate within competing factions. As Paul Strohm points out, “Twentieth-century literary historians have rather wishfully thought him apolitical, a free agent between parties or even wholly free of factional ties. But any freedom of personal choice or perspective he enjoyed was achieved from within the conditions imposed by his factional situation, not by ignoring them but by manipulating them with patience and skill.”<sup>46</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde* is the greatest example of this, as simply to speak of Troy in the 1380s carried a host of

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<sup>43</sup> Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 37. The execution of the Lord Mayor, Nicholas Brembre for, among other offenses, trying to change the name of London to New Troy is a prime example of England’s violent response to epic discourse.

<sup>44</sup> *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). Chapter 1 offers the clearest link between the language of Richard’s court and Chaucer’s *Troilus*.

<sup>45</sup> It is not my intention to recapitulate the specific conflicts between Richard II and the Appellants, which are well-known and have been discussed in detail in a number of places. See May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), and Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 155-64.

<sup>46</sup> *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989): p. 25

political resonances. This has lead readers of the poem, both medieval and modern, to puzzle over Chaucer's *entente* in choosing to author a Trojan narrative during such a dangerous time.<sup>47</sup>

I want to suggest that an examination of genre may serve as one method of inquiry that may allow us to locate not a Chaucerian political ideology but rather a Chaucerian *desire* for the articulation of ideology in a time of divisive and dangerous factionalism. Chaucer's manipulation of romance and epic in *Troilus and Criseyde* allows us to locate a distinctly Chaucerian conception of English Trojan authorship that is firmly rooted in genre, intertextuality, and political critique.

### **“And, next his brother, holder up of Troye!”**

Chaucer's dissatisfaction with the absence of direct discourse accounts for his decision to translate Boccaccio's *Filostrato* and put Troilus at the center of his Trojan poem. The suggestion of Troilus' second-tier status is presented through his frequent comparisons to Hector and the numerous references to Troilus as “Hector the Second.” Troilus is either a double for Hector, and therefore equal in stature, or else he is second to Hector, in which case the comparison is diminutive.<sup>48</sup> The linking of the two Trojans was traditionally read as an indication of Troilus' exemplary heroism and nobility, though some have argued that Hector serves as a foil for the

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<sup>47</sup> For recent discussions of the political significance of Troy in medieval London, see C. David Benson, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) and Sylvia Frederico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)

<sup>48</sup> Ann S. Haskell, “The *Doppelgangers* in Chaucer's *Troilus*,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 72 (1971): 723-34

passive and ineffectual Troilus.<sup>49</sup> K. S. Kiernan has pointed out that Chaucer makes Hector a much more important figure in the *Troilus* than he appears in *Il Filostrato* and that his expanded role highlights Troilus' shortcomings.<sup>50</sup> While debates about the poem's characters as doubles and "doppelgangers" are no longer current, having been superseded by recent critical attention to the doubling of Thebes and Troy, it will be useful to revisit the doubling of Hector and Troilus in order to see how poetic authority is sought and conferred through not only the choice of historical matter but through the heroic subject. Chaucer's use of the phrase "Hector the Second" serves to validate Troilus' role as a Trojan hero and a worthy subject for the poem while simultaneously reminding the reader that Troilus is *not* another Hector. The phrase thus legitimizes Chaucer's invention and poetic authority as it preserves the larger Trojan tradition of which the poem is to become a part.

The relationship between Troilus and Hector mirrors Chaucer's position with regard to the Trojan tradition. Like his hero, Chaucer seems unwilling to deal with Troy on a historical or political level – the Troy of Homer, Dares, and Dictys – and so he chooses to tell a story about Troilus' private concerns. As Lee Patterson has effectively argued, the poem's "inward focus on the subjectivity of the protagonists" becomes a means of trying to "efface the historical."<sup>51</sup> Patterson finds that in the *Troilus*, "the private stands wholly apart from and seeks to efface the public, just as, at the level of genre, romance, a story focused on the fate of a single individual, seeks to preempt tragedy, a story about (in the definition of Isidore of Seville) *res publicas et*

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<sup>49</sup> For favorable comparisons between Hector and Troilus, see Sanford B. Meech, *Design in Chaucer's Troilus* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1959) and John Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>50</sup> "Hector the Second: The Lost Face of Troilustratus," *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 16 (1975): 52-62. Chauncey Wood supports Kiernan's reading in *The Elements of Chaucer's Troilus* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984), p. 88

<sup>51</sup> *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 86



*regum historias.*”<sup>52</sup> The poem emphasizes the *intratextual* relationships of its characters and seeks to deny its *intertextual* influences – a strategy represented by Pandarus’ famous interruption of Criseyde’s reading about Thebes in Book 2 – as well as its political and cultural context. Boccaccio employs this strategy in *Il Filostrato*, a poem that claims to be entirely self-referential in the Prologue’s address to Filomena, in order to claim a literary authority that aligns him with Ovid and Dante as poet-lovers.<sup>53</sup> Following Boccaccio, Chaucer presents the *Troilus* as a tragic romance about private affairs, thus allowing the poem to stand alongside yet separate from the classical *auctors* of the Trojan legend through its generic difference.

The first explicit comparison between Troilus and Hector is made by Pandarus when he approaches Criseyde in Book 2. After some pleasant conversation and playful teasing, talk turns serious as Criseyde asks her uncle “how Ector ferde, / That was the townes wal and Grekes yerde” (2.153-4). Her interest in Hector’s well-being is not surprising since he is her protection from both the invading Greek army and those Trojans who bear a grudge because of her father’s alleged treason. Whether the description of Hector as the “townes wal” is Criseyde’s indirect speech or the qualification of the narrator is unclear, but either reading emphasizes his singular importance to the city. Pandarus responds by subtly dismissing Hector and turning attention to Troilus:

“Ful wel, I thonk it God,” quod Pandarus,

“Save in his arm he hath a litel wownde;

And ek his fresshe brother Troilus,

The wise, worthi Ector the secounde,

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<sup>52</sup> Patterson, p. 107

<sup>53</sup> Janet Levarie Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiammetta: The Narrator as Lover* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986): 5; 14-15

In whom that alle vertu list habounde,  
As all trouthe and all gentillesse,  
Wisdom, honour, freedom, and worthinesse.” (2.155-61)

Pandarus compares and contrasts the wounded Hector with his “fresshe brother,” who seems not to possess any weakness. By calling Troilus “Ector the secoude,” Pandarus makes him a military hero who exemplifies both public and private virtue.<sup>54</sup> Sanford Meech points out that by the comparison, Pandarus “means a duplicate, rather than a lesser paladin by claiming for him ever perfection, civil and military, which is acknowledged in this brother.” Pandarus hopes to elevate Troilus’ reputation and make him seem a worthy potential lover for Criseyde, but Meech claims that despite Pandarus’ self-interest, “the testimony is meant by Chaucer to be taken at face value.”<sup>55</sup> As Pandarus’ project of “writing” the romance of Troilus and Criseyde parallels Chaucer’s own writing of his Trojan text, the legitimizing strategy of making Troilus seem to be another Hector is necessary for both to succeed.<sup>56</sup>

Chaucer, however, allows Criseyde to question the authority of Pandarus, and, by extension, his own poem. Pandarus insists on linking Hector and Troilus to such an extent that the two could be interchangeable as their martial prowess and moral virtues are matched by none but each other; he effuses, “God help me so, I knowe nat swiche tweye” (2.182). Criseyde’s response is less certain:

“By God,” quod she, “of Ector that is sooth.  
Of Troilus the same thyng trowe I:

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<sup>54</sup> Haskell, “The *Dopplegangers* in Chaucer’s *Troilus*,” p. 726

<sup>55</sup> *Design in Chaucer’s Troilus*, p. 37

<sup>56</sup> For Pandarus as author of the “romance” of Troilus and Criseyde, see Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 216-24

For, dredeles, men tellen that he doth  
In armes day by day so worthily,  
And bereth hym here at hom so gently  
To everi wight, that alle pris hath he  
Of hem that me were levest preysed be.” (2.183-89)

That Hector is the world’s best knight is “sooth,” an indisputable fact of which Criseyde is entirely sure. That Troilus is also worthy seems open to debate, as his worthiness is known only through hearsay. Criseyde trusts those that tell her of Troilus’ merit, but there is a significant difference between “soth” and what one hears from good sources and wants to believe.<sup>57</sup> This distinction, carefully articulated by Criseyde, reminds us that one’s reputation is not the same thing as one’s actual worth.<sup>58</sup> As Derek Brewer has pointed out, “True worth *should* be recognized by public approbation: public approbation *should* signalize true worth; appearance and reality *should* coincide. But we all know that in the world they do not always do so.”<sup>59</sup> Hector *is* worthy because he has proven himself to be so; Troilus only *seems* to be because people say so.

Every other comparison between the two brothers contains a reminder that Troilus does not quite match up with Hector. As Criseyde watches the Trojan army march through the city after a day of fighting, the people of Troy greet their warriors. Troilus has enjoyed a particularly

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Firth Green points out that “Chaucer generally preserves a clear distinction between *trouthe*, as a subjective quality, and an objectively verifiable *sothe*” in *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 28

<sup>58</sup> It is Criseyde’s speech rather than Pandarus’ that Chaucer may mean for us to take at face value since it is consistent with his argument in *The House of Fame*. The first thing the dreamer/narrator of that poem sees in the temple is the summary of the *Aeneid*, in which the first line reads, “I wol now singe, yif I kan” (143), a deliberate rewriting of the opening line that injects a sense of doubt into the truth-claims of any poetic text, even one so prized as Virgil’s.

<sup>59</sup> *Chaucer*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (London: Longman, 1973), p. 192

good day on the battlefield and the crowd cries out, “Here cometh oure joye, / And, next his brother, holder up of Troye!” (II.643-4). With the soldiers riding “in routes tweyne” (2.620), or side-by-side, Troilus is physically positioned “next his brother,” but these lines remind us that he is also next to his brother in importance. While Troilus might be the people’s “joye” on that one day, it is still Hector upon which the defense of the city rests; he remains the singular “holder up of Troye.”

Criseyde’s initial reaction to seeing Troilus suggests that she is utterly overwhelmed by the sight of him, as she cries out, “Who yaf me drynke?” (2.651). But her astonishment does not last long, as she soon “gan in hire thought argue” (2.694) about her best course of action. As she considers Troilus’ virtue, she decides, “For out and out he is the worthieste,/ Save only Ector, which that is the best” (2.739-40). As Criseyde deliberates about the nobility of Troilus, his honor and worth are figured in relative terms. Even when he is recognized as “the worthieste,” this distinction is qualified by his being not-Hector. As long as Hector lives, Troilus may enjoy a favorable reputation but never the privileged position of his brother in either the eyes of the people or the mind of Criseyde.

The narrator himself admits that the hero of his story and the subject of his poem is secondary to the greatest Trojan warrior in the tradition. Describing Troilus’ prowess on the battlefield after he has consummated his relationship with Criseyde, the narrator tells us:

In alle needes for the townes were  
He was, and ay, the first in armes dyght,  
And certeynly, but if the bokes erre,  
Save Ector most ydred of any wight. (3.1772-75)

Chaucer here reminds us that the authoritative histories of the Trojan War unanimously regard Hector as the Trojans' primary military asset. The *Troilus* is a poem meant to enter the Trojan tradition but on issues of historicity it defers to the "olde bookes" of the recognized authorities: Homer, Dares, and Dictys (1.146). In order to assert his own literary authority, Chaucer must make Troilus seem a worthy subject for a poem, but he can never claim that his hero surpasses the military might of Hector.

In the medieval Trojan tradition, the death of Hector represents the turning point of the war, and the death of Troilus, while tragic, is simply another loss leading to the ultimate destruction of the city.<sup>60</sup> In *Il Filostrato*, Boccaccio opens Book 8 by mentioning

l'alto dolor, da non poter mai dire,  
che 'l padre, ed egli e' fratei per la morte  
ebber d'Ettòr, nel cui sovrano ardire  
e le fortezze e le mura e le porte  
credien di Troia... (3-7)<sup>61</sup>

the deep and inexpressible grief that he [Troilus], his father, and his brothers felt at the death of Hector, to whose supreme bravery they had entrusted the bulwarks, walls and gates of Troy.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Hector is the epitome of Trojan military heroism in Benoît and Guido, but he enjoys a particularly strong reputation in England. He becomes the foremost protagonist of the Trojan narrative in the Middle English redactions, especially *The Laud Troy Book*. Hector is an exemplary chivalric hero imbued with particular flaws that allow poets to use him to address a variety of thematic issues. See Lynn Staley Johnson, "The Medieval Hector: A Double Tradition," *Mediaevalia* 5 (1979): 165-82

<sup>61</sup> *Tutte le opera di Giovanni Boccaccio*. Vol. 2. Ed. Vittore Branca (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1964), p. 216

<sup>62</sup> *Chaucer's Boccaccio: Sources of Troilus and the Knight's and Franklin's Tales*. Ed. and trans. by N. R. Havely (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), p. 98

An even more explicit and perhaps immediate source for Chaucer's "seconding" Troilus to Hector can be found in Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*:

Prime cladi secunda subsequitur: ab eodem hoste, ab eadem manu  
Troilus, altera miseri patris spes, peremptus est, quem etsi non meritis  
paribus, amaris tamen lacrimis deflevit occisum.<sup>63</sup>

For Priam a second loss followed the first. By the same enemy, by the same hand, Troilus – another hope of his desolate father – was slain; and though he had not been the equal of Hector, still Priam lamented his death with bitter tears.<sup>64</sup>

Recognizing Hector's role, Chaucer devotes three stanzas to the death of Hector while Troilus is slain in a single line. In Book V, Hector's death is an occasion of "swich wo that tonge it may nat telle," especially for Troilus, "that next hym [to Hector] was of worthynesse welle" (5.1563-65). Even after Hector has died, Troilus cannot escape his shadow, as in the stanza leading up to his own death, Troilus remains second to his brother. The narrator tells us that on the battlefield Troilus "was withouten any peere,/ Save Ector, in his tyme, as I kan heere" (5.1803-4).

Despite the clear hierarchy between Hector and Troilus, the mere association of the two has been enough to elevate Troilus' stature in the minds of Chaucer's fictionalized Trojans as well as his readers. By emphasizing the relationship between Troilus and Hector, however, Chaucer makes us even more aware of Troilus as not-Hector, just as the narrator's refusal to tell the story of the war only reminds us of Troy's impending doom.<sup>65</sup> I have argued that this association is part of a necessary rhetorical strategy for legitimizing both Troilus as a poetic

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<sup>63</sup> *Tutte le opera di Giovanni Boccaccio*. Vol. 9. P.G. Ricci and V. Zaccaria, eds. (Milan: Mondadori, 1964), p. 70

<sup>64</sup> *The Fates of Illustrious Men*. Trans. and abridged by Louis Brewer Hall (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1965), p. 30

<sup>65</sup> Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 287

subject and Chaucer as an author in the Trojan tradition. For this strategy to succeed, Troilus must be removed from Hector so that he may exist as a hero in his own right, and this separation is achieved through the poem's distinct division between the public and private spheres. Hector represents the historical and political Troy, and, as a heroic subject, is defined by his mighty deeds performed outside of the city's walls. Eclipsed by his brother on the battlefield, Troilus' identity and status as hero can only be recognized through his personal relationship with Criseyde, a relationship that continues only as long as she remains in the city. Because of the poem's focus on Troilus as a chivalric lover rather than a political entity, Troilus is usually regarded as the tragic hero of Boccaccio and Chaucer's Trojan romance.

If *Troilus and Criseyde* occupies the space of tragic romance, however, it does so uncomfortably.<sup>66</sup> Although critics have made various attempts to fix the poem within a particular generic system, the *Troilus* has been celebrated for its generic instability. Paul Strohm explains that "much of the challenge and narrative excitement of the *Troilus* is Chaucer's play on his audience's previous expectations. Telling us from the outset that his poem will end with Troilus 'out of joie' (1.4) -- that is, in a form that his audience would recognize as tragic and that he finally does label 'tragedye' (5.1786) -- Chaucer sets about to deflect his audience's attention from this announced pattern by signaling all sorts of other generic possibilities."<sup>67</sup> The generic possibility that threatens to emerge throughout *Troilus*, and the possibility that must be explicitly denied, is epic.<sup>68</sup> Whereas Boccaccio had extracted the tragic romance of Troilus from the epic frame of Benoît and Guido, Chaucer reinserts epic into romance, even as he denies its presence,

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<sup>66</sup> Barry Windeatt, "Troilus and the Disenchantment of Romance," *Studies in Medieval English Romances*, Ed. Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988), pp. 129-47

<sup>67</sup> *Social Chaucer*, pp. 61-2

<sup>68</sup> Barry Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Oxford Guides to Chaucer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.

through the figure of Diomedes. In what follows, I will address Diomedes and the Theban intertext of the *Troilus*, a topic that has received much recent scholarly attention, and then turn to the subject of Diomedes in the *Aeneid* and post-Trojan War return narratives, a subject that has escaped critical notice.

### **Diomedes: The Monster and the Critics**

Diomedes is not well-liked. He has been called an “opportunistic cad,” a “man of limited cerebral powers and little morality,” and “the arch-symbol of falseness in love.”<sup>69</sup> At best, he is recognized as a “self-interested pragmatist”; at worst, he is “a devil.”<sup>70</sup> There have been a few attempts to defend Diomedes as a more worthy character than critics have previously allowed, but these arguments either have been quickly dismissed or completely ignored.<sup>71</sup> While critics have recognized that Diomedes serves as a foil for Troilus, it has been assumed that because our sympathies should lie with the Trojans, Diomedes and the Greeks must represent a baseness that further emphasizes Troilus’ nobility.<sup>72</sup> That is, Diomedes is regarded as the poem’s villain because Troilus is understood to be the poem’s hero. The critical opposition to Diomedes is necessary for Troilus to continue to be understood as the hero of a tragic romance on a noble

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<sup>69</sup> Gregory M. Sadlek, *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love’s Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), p. 255; Stephen Knight, *Rymyng Craftily: Meaning in Chaucer’s Poetry* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1973), p. 75; Stanley B. Greenfield, “The Role of Calcas in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Medium Ævum* 36 (1967), 150

<sup>70</sup> Benson, *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 86; Vance, *Mervelous Signals*, p. 305

<sup>71</sup> The two most important articles arguing for a reconsideration of Diomedes are Paul E. Edmunds, “A Defense of Chaucer’s Diomedes,” *Classical Folia* 16 (1962), 110-23 and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, “In Defense of Diomedes: ‘Moral Gower’ and *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *In Geardagum*, 8 (1987), 1-12. Stephen Knight criticizes Edmunds’ argument in *Rymyng Craftily*, pp. 65-76. Alice Kaminsky mentions this debate and abruptly dismisses Edmunds in *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde and the Critics* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), pp. 166-7

<sup>72</sup> Diane Vanner Steinberg, “‘We Do Usen Here No Wommen For to Selle’: Embodiment of Social Practices in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Chaucer Review* 29 (1995), 259-73



theme. Those who seek to demonize Diomedes, a project that neither Chaucer nor his narrator explicitly undertake, fail to recognize his larger role in the Theban and Trojan narratives and, therefore, deny the possibilities of epic in the *Troilus*.

Even when recognizing that Diomedes is a more capable and self-aware suitor for Criseyde, critics refuse to see him as anything but a villain. Two recent discussions of Diomedes's courtship illustrate this point. Lynn Staley has recently written:

Troilus, like the city he comes to represent, does not have a language capable of serving as a means of self-analysis; his limits are reflected in the very paucity of the terms he can use to describe himself, his passion for Criseyde, and his grief over her loss. He can therefore not hope to understand the gravity of his situation because he does not have the rhetorical skills he needs. Diomedes's cruder and more brutal deployment of language assures his survival into another age. I do not here mean that Diomedes is to be praised for his sharp practices, but that in the contest between Troilus and Diomedes, Chaucer dramatizes the terrible causality inherent in unexamined rhetoric.<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, Gregory Sadlek has argued: "Most critics see Diomedes as an unsavory, self-centered character, and that evaluation is not unjust. However, from the perspective of love's labor, he is as diligent and as clever a worker as Pandarus."<sup>74</sup> After briefly examining Diomedes's courtship of Criseyde, Sadlek concludes, "From a moralistic perspective, Troilus is an idealist and Diomedes an opportunistic cad, but from the discourse of love's labor, the former is a slacker and the latter a determined, practical worker" (255). Staley and Sadlek admit that Troilus is severely flawed in his ability to realize the reality and significance of any given situation, especially in issues concerning his own desires. Diomedes, on the other hand, possesses an awareness that allows him to act with confidence, but this is criticized as brutal opportunism rather than celebrated as a positive *exemplum*. Staley's important point that Diomedes's use of language

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<sup>73</sup> *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II*, p. 62

<sup>74</sup> *Idleness Working*, p. 251

“assures his survival into another age” is quickly qualified by her denial that this fact should excuse his behavior on moral grounds. Sadlek uses many positive terms to characterize Diomedes’s performance as a suitor, but he safeguards his analysis by standing behind the critical consensus that Diomedes is “unsavory.”

These two recent examples illustrate the larger point that the critical response to Diomedes over the years has failed to allow him to serve as anything but the poem’s villain. Barry Windeatt explains that the moral objection to Diomedes in the *Troilus* is that “Chaucer has replaced all evidence in his sources that he is motivated by love; his thoughts are wholly given over to calculation and he is not shown to act under any impress of feeling... The impression is that Diomedes is motivated above all by the desire to gain, to win, to conquer.”<sup>75</sup> The irony is that Diomedes is chastised because he does not appear to love Criseyde as critics feel that she deserves to be loved and, as a result, they have been repulsed by the one character in the poem (besides Hector) upon whom Criseyde believes she can depend.<sup>76</sup> *Troilus*, on the other hand, is rendered completely ineffectual both personally and politically by his desire, but his failures produce sympathy while Diomedes’s successes receive only scorn. As I argued in the previous section, this response is necessary for *Troilus* to function as a protagonist and for the poem to function as a tragedy and a romance. Chaucer himself works to produce such affect through the voice of his narrator, as Thomas Bestul has argued, but I submit that this affect merely masks the subversive presence of epic discourse in the *Troilus*.<sup>77</sup> Casting moral judgments aside, I will

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<sup>75</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 295

<sup>76</sup> For a reading of critical infatuation with Criseyde, see the opening chapter of Carolyn Dinshaw’s *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989)

<sup>77</sup> Thomas H. Bestul, “Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*: The Passionate Epic and Its Narrator,” *Chaucer Review* 14 (1980): 366-78

trace the figure of Diomedes in Chaucer's sources to demonstrate his crucial role as a figure of epic, which will allow for a reconsideration of his role in Chaucer's poem.

### **Diomedes as the First Aeneas**

Much of the bias against Diomedes has to do with his connection to Thebes and the reputation of his father, Tydeus, which makes him genealogically suspect. In medieval historiography, Richard Fehrenbacher explains, Thebes is "chronologically prior to the originary moment of Troy as that false start, that wrong turn, that Other against which Troy defines itself."<sup>78</sup> If Troy is a site where modern readers can locate ancient examples of chivalry, Thebes presents human baseness at its absolute worst. Characterized by incest, patricide, fratricide, insatiable rage, and cannibalism, the story of the war at Thebes can only be regarded as a spectacular parade of negative *exempla*. While the Theban and Trojan conflicts contain a number of similarities that justify their frequent association in classical and medieval historiographical treatises, Troy is the only city that continues to flourish through Aeneas' founding of Rome and the idea of *translatio imperii*. Because the war between Eteocles and Polynices over the right to the throne results in the utter annihilation of a cursed city and royal line, Theban history traditionally ends with no promise of the city's restoration or a redemptive reemergence of its heritage. As Fehrenbacher points out, "From Thebes there emerges no Aeneas figure" (352).

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<sup>78</sup> "Al That Which Chargeth Nought to Seye": The Theme of Incest in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Exemplaria* 9 (1997): 352

The idea of Thebes presented above is based on Statius' *Thebaid*, the most authoritative classical text on the Theban war. Recently, critics have looked to Statius for evidence that the relationship between Diomedes and Criseyde is incestuous, a position recently advanced by Fehrenbacher. Dominique Battles argues that Cassandra's interpretation of Troilus' dream in Book V of *Troilus* invokes the *Thebaid* in order to emphasize Diomedes' troubled heritage as the "son of Tydeus," the warrior remembered for his cannibalism.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Catherine Sanok argues, "Diomedes is defined by his genealogy as part of the continuous, even cyclical, story of Thebes... Though not a participant in the disastrous siege of Thebes, Diomedes is a descendent of the story of Thebes – indeed, in Chaucer's poem, of the *Thebaid* itself."<sup>80</sup> This Statius-based reading of Diomedes suggests that he is guided entirely by genealogical imperative and is unable to transcend his association with Tydeus and Meleager. There is, however, a counter-tradition in the Middle Ages based on the French *Roman de Thèbes*, written in the twelfth century. The *Roman de Thèbes* might be regarded as a redemptive text in that it rescues Tydeus from Statius' brutal portrayal of his final moments and provides for the possibility of an Aeneas figure: Tydeus' son, Diomedes. Critics have agreed that Chaucer knew both texts and cited from each as he saw fit.<sup>81</sup> Just as Chaucer chooses to selectively employ both Statius and the *Roman*, so, too, have critics examined each text as a source in order to forward their own arguments about the *Troilus* and, particularly, the character of Diomedes. While Statius is an important classical

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<sup>79</sup> *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the Roman de Thebes, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 138-9

<sup>80</sup> "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*: Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 58

<sup>81</sup> For discussions of Chaucer's use of the *Thebaid* and *Roman de Thèbes*, see Sanok, Paul M. Clogan, "The Theban Scenes in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s.12 (1984), 167-85 and Valerie A. Ross, "Believing Cassandra: Intertextual Politics and the Interpretation of Dreams in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Chaucer Review* 31 (1997): 339-56

source for understanding Diomedes's lineage, the *Roman de Thèbes* influences the medieval tradition of Diomedes in three important ways. First, it reconfigures Diomedes's lineage as untainted by the cannibalism of Statius' Tydeus. Second, it establishes Diomedes as a chivalric hero in his own right, a man of great honor and martial prowess. Third, it continues the tradition begun by Virgil of linking Diomedes and Aeneas as the two figures who manage to escape the Theban and Trojan cycles of violence.

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer refers three times to Diomedes as the "son of Tydeus," describing him as "Hardy, testif, strong and chivalrous / Of dedes, like his fader Tideus" (5.802-3). Battles points out that this description invokes the medieval characterization of Tydeus but it also necessarily brings to mind the infamous episode in Statius of the dying Tydeus' savagely gnawing on the head of a slain Theban.<sup>82</sup> This episode does not occur in the *Roman de Thèbes*, however, and the death of Tydeus is instead followed by a lengthy, passionate speech by Polynices in praise of his deceased brother-in-arms (lines 6429-87). Chaucer's ambiguity regarding his Theban sources and his deliberate refusal to privilege either Statius or the *Roman de Thèbes* allows both texts to exist together; thus, as Tydeus is condemned by one, he is celebrated by the other. Because Chaucer makes no explicit reference to Tydeus' cannibalism and instead chooses to emphasize the strength of Tydeus' character as a chivalric *exemplum* in the medieval tradition, we might just as well privilege the latter as the former. To be the "son of Tydeus," therefore, may be a title of distinction rather than shame.

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<sup>82</sup> *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes*, p. 138

The *Roman de Thèbes* not only redeems Tydeus, but it introduces Diomedes as a new Tydeus untainted by the Theban conflict. Upon Tydeus' death, King Adrastus worries that the grief of Tydeus' father may be enough to kill him. Still, there is hope:

Mes Thideüs a un enfant  
da ma fille, non gueres grant;  
donrrai le lui s'est qui li port,  
si li fera mout grant confort;  
quant il avra son grant deul fet,  
en lui seront tuit si refret,  
et mout a gueri se tendra  
quant de son filz un oir verra. (6859-66)<sup>83</sup>

But Tydeus has a baby boy  
By my daughter, a little one still breast feeding:  
I will give the child to him, whoever may carry him,  
And he will give Tydeus' father great comfort;  
After he has mourned a great deal  
All his recurring thoughts will be of the child,  
And he will consider himself entirely provided for  
When he has an heir of his son. (7203-10)<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Le Roman de Thèbes*, Les Classiques Français de Moyen Age, 2 vols. (Paris: Guy Raynaud de Lage, 1966-7)

<sup>84</sup> *Le Roman de Thèbes (The Story of Thebes)*, trans. John Smartt Coley, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, vol. 44. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986)

Adrastus relies on this unnamed son to provide comfort to Tydeus' father by taking Tydeus' place in the genealogical line. As Tydeus' sole heir, he has the potential to carry the martial and chivalric tradition of his father into the next generation; the son can validate Tydeus' worthiness while making a name for himself. Indeed, a few lines later, the author of the *Roman de Thèbes* explains that this son would play an important role in the western world's next great conflict:

De l'enfant vous di une rien:  
mout restora son pere bien,  
car, puis que il vint en aage,  
mout par fu de grant vassalage;  
chevaleries fist ads  
et si ot non Dÿomedés;  
en l'ost de Troie fu dehors  
et se combati cors a cors  
a Eneas, qui mout fu prouz,  
fors Hector, li mieudres de touz;  
se cil n'en eüst adjutoire,  
Dÿomedés fust la victorie. (6885-96)

I say to you one thing about the child:  
He will represent his father well;  
For, as soon as he came of age,  
He performed many greatly courageous deeds;  
He always did acts of chivalry,

And he was named Diomed;  
He was in the army outside of Troy  
And fought person to person  
With Aeneas, who was very valiant,  
The best of all outside of Hector:  
If Aeneas had not had help,  
Diomed would have been the victor. (7279-40)

These lines directly invoke Diomedes' own speech in Book 11 of the *Aeneid* where he similarly recounts his single-combat with Aeneas. By citing Virgil rather than Statius, the *Roman de Thèbes* emphasizes Diomedes' exemplary status as epic hero while effacing any suggestion of moral corruption. To fully appreciate these lines, one must look back to Virgil's positive portrayal of Diomedes.

Diomedes' appearance in the *Aeneid* has, unfortunately, almost completely escaped critical notice. Though he appears only briefly and through the report of a messenger, Diomedes plays a crucial role in allowing Aeneas to succeed against Turnus and the Latins and realize his epic destiny. Virgil affords him a special place in his poem by elevating his status as a Greek warrior and closely aligning him with Aeneas.<sup>85</sup> Sophia Papaioannou explains that in Homer and the post-Homeric tradition, "Diomedes and Aeneas shared a striking number of biographical details, both in their performance in the *Iliad* as well as in their course of adventures following

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<sup>85</sup> For discussion of Diomedes' parallels with Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, see Will W. de Grummond, "Virgil's Diomedes," *Phoenix* 21 (1967): 40-43, Susan Ford Wiltshire and August H. Krickel, "Diomedes and Aeneas: A Vergilian Paradox," *The Classical Bulletin* 58 (1982): 73-7, and Sophia Papaioannou, "Virgilian Diomedes Revisited: The Re-evaluation of the *Iliad*," *Mnemosyne* 53 (2000): 193-217



the end of the Trojan War.”<sup>86</sup> Virgil aligns the two warriors in the opening book of the *Aeneid*, granting Diomedes a unique privilege. Diomedes’ name is invoked, as Will de Grummond points out, “only five lines after the first mention of Aeneas’ name; it is spoken by Aeneas himself, and is, in fact, the hero’s very first speech.”<sup>87</sup> Wishing that he had died on the battlefield of Troy rather than face the possibility of drowning at sea, Aeneas exclaims:

O terque quaterque beati,  
quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis  
contigit oppetere! O Danaum fortissime gentis  
Tydide! mene Iliacis occumbere campis  
non potuisse tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra,  
saevus ubi Aeacidae telo iacet Hector...

O thrice and four times blest, whose lot it was to meet death before their fathers’ eyes beneath the lofty walls of Troy! O son of Tydeus, bravest of the Danaan race, ah! that I could not fall on the Ilian plains and gasp out this life-blood at thy hand! where, under the spear of Aeacides, fierce Hector lies prostrate... (1.94-9)<sup>88</sup>

Aeneas names Diomedes as the strongest of the Greeks, a distinction traditionally held by Achilles. More importantly, Aeneas singles out Diomedes as the Greek warrior to whom his defeat may have been fitting and acceptable. This crucial linking of Aeneas and Diomedes in

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<sup>86</sup> “Virgilian Diomedes Revisited,” p. 193

<sup>87</sup> “Virgil’s Diomedes,” p. 40

<sup>88</sup> *Aeneid 7-12*, trans. H. R. Fairclough. Revised by G.P. Goold. The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000)

Aeneas' first speech becomes especially important once Aeneas attempts to claim his imperial right through war with the Latins.<sup>89</sup>

In Book 8, we learn that Latinus had sent an emissary to Diomedes to ask for help in fighting Aeneas: “mittitur et magni Venulus Diomedis ad urbem” (8.9). In Book 11, it is revealed that this last-ditch effort to obtain reinforcements has failed, thereby ensuring victory for Aeneas as foretold by the Fates. The messenger recounts his conversation with Diomedes for Latinus, beginning by telling his king that he survived the journey and “grasped the hand whereby the land of Ilium fell” (“contigimusque manum, qua concidit Ilia tellus”) (11.245). Previously a figure of destruction, Diomedes is now founding his own city, an act of construction not unlike what Aeneas is attempting with the founding of Rome. In this scene, Susan Wiltshire and August Krickel note, Diomedes “represents what Aeneas must yet become.”<sup>90</sup>

Diomedes' speech to Latinus' emissary reveals that he has reached a level of maturity to which Aeneas can only aspire through most of the *Aeneid*; de Grummond remarks that “the

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<sup>89</sup> Diomedes is explicitly contrasted with Troilus in Book I as Aeneas looks upon the painting of the fall of Troy in the temple Dido built to Juno:

Nec procul hinc Rhesi niveis tentoria veils  
agnoscit lacrimans, primo quae prodita somno  
Tydides multa vastabat caede cruentus,  
ardentisque avertit equos in castra prius quam  
pabula gustassent Troiae Xanthumque bibissent.  
Parte alia fugiens amissis Troilus armis,  
infelix puer atque impar congressus Achilli,  
fertur equis curruque haeret resupinus inani  
lora tenens tamen; huic cervixque comaeque trahuntur  
per terram et versa pulvis inscribitur hasta.

Not far away he discerns with tears the snowy-canvassed tents of Rhesus, which, betrayed in their sleep, the blood-stained son of Tydeus laid waste with many a death, and turned the fiery steeds away to the camp, before they could taste Trojan fodder or drink of Xanthus. Elsewhere Troilus, his armour flung away in flight – unhappy boy, and ill-matched in conflict with Achilles – is carried along by his horses and, fallen backward, clings to the empty car, still clasping the reins; his neck and hair are dragged over the ground, and the dust is scored by his reversed spear. (1.469-78)

<sup>90</sup> “Diomedes and Aeneas,” p. 75

fighter has grown into a philosopher king.”<sup>91</sup> He refuses to involve himself in the conflict, explaining, “Nec mihi cum Teucris ullum post eruta bellum/ Pergama, nec veterum emini laetorve malorum” (“Neither have I any war with Teucer’s race since Troy’s towers fell, nor have I joyful remembrance of the ills of old”) (8.279-80). Recalling his personal experience with the Trojan leader on the battlefield, he suggests that the Latins will never be able to defeat such a capable warrior:

stetimus tela aspera contra  
contulimusque manus: experto credite, quantus  
in clipeum adsurgat, quo turbine torqueat hastam.  
si duo praeterea talis Idaeae tulisset  
terra viros, ultro Inachias venisset ad urbes  
Dardanus et versis lugeret Graecia fatis.  
quidquid apud durae cessatum est moenia Troiae,  
Hectoris Aeneaseque manu victoria Graium  
haesit et in decimum vestigia rettulit annum.

We have faced his fierce weapons, and fought him hand to hand: trust one who proved it, how huge he looms above his shield, with what whirlwind he hurls his spear! Had Ida’s land borne two others like him, the Trojans had even stormed the towns of Inachus, and Greece would be mourning, the doom reversed. In all our tarrying before the walls of stubborn Troy, it was by the hand of Hector and Aeneas that the Greeks’ victory was halted and withdrew its advent till the tenth year. (8.282-90)

Diomedes concludes his speech with a plea for peace: “coeant in foedera dextrae, / qua datur; ast armis concurrant arma cavete” (Join hand to hand in treaty, as best ye may; but beware your

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<sup>91</sup> “Virgil’s Diomedes,” p. 42

swords clash not with his”) (8.292-3). Having displayed arrogance and bloodlust throughout the *Iliad*, Diomedes seems to have learned harsh lessons about war and has chosen to put his military past behind him. Virgil has allowed Diomedes to develop as a character that is, in the words of de Grummond, “fully realized and epic in scope.”<sup>92</sup> Papaioannou explains that Diomedes “is the representative of the old epic Greek world who, tired of endless fighting, willingly acknowledges the new world order soon to be dictated and controlled by his former enemy Aeneas.”<sup>93</sup> By founding his new kingdom and refusing to continue to fight the Trojans, Diomedes is shown to have fulfilled his own epic destiny in anticipation of Aeneas’ eventual success.

Ovid’s representation of Diomedes in the *Remedia amoris* and the *Metamorphoses* similarly evokes his status as an epic figure and further associates him with Aeneas. Ovid’s characterization of Diomedes stems from his wounding of Venus in Book 5 of the *Iliad*, an episode that had first established the link between Diomedes and Aeneas as the two heroes met on the Trojan battlefield. In the opening lines of the *Remedia*, Ovid asks Cupid to forgive him for any perceived slight against Love, insisting, “Non ego Tydides, a quo tua saucia mater/ In liquidum rediit aethera Martis equis” [“I am not Tydeus’ son, from whom thy mother fled back wounded on Mars’ chariot to the pure air of heaven.”] (5-6).<sup>94</sup> Andreas Michalopoulos points out, “In the *Remedia amoris* Diomedes constitutes the epic representative of the anti-elegiac and anti-erotic way of life; he is the personification of violence, which threatens the carefree life of

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<sup>92</sup> “Virgil’s Diomedes,” p. 43

<sup>93</sup> “Virgilian Diomedes Revisited,” p. 212

<sup>94</sup> Michael Calabrese finds a certain irony in the fact that in while Ovid claims not to be Diomedes, in Chaucer’s *Troilus*, Diomedes is the epitome of an Ovidian lover. See *Chaucer’s Ovidian Arts of Love* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), pp. 70-71

love.”<sup>95</sup> For Ovid, Diomedes’ attack not only marks him as a single-minded soldier forcing love off of the battlefield but it also sets him on a trajectory that allows him to fulfill an epic destiny to parallel that of Aeneas.

In *Metamorphoses* 14, Ovid emphasizes the epic journey of Diomedes, who overcomes great hardships and challenges from the gods after leaving Troy and lives to found his own city. Ovid rewrites the scene of the Latins’ embassy to Diomedes in *Aeneid* 11, reworking Diomedes’ “dissertation...on Aeneas’ ethic and martial credentials of peerless excellence” from Virgil’s poem into a speech that directly echoes the words of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 1, thus consolidating Diomedes’ association with the founder of Rome.<sup>96</sup> Claiming that he cannot join the fight against Aeneas because of lack of resources and manpower, Diomedes explains how Venus took her revenge during his attempt to return home after the war: “me tamen armiferae servatum cura Minervae/ fluctibus eripuit, patriis sed rersus ab agris/ pallor, et antique memores de vulnere poenas/ exigit alma Venus” [“Well-armed Minerva’s care, however, saved me from the waves; but again I was driven forth from my native fields, for fostering Venus, still mindful of the old wound I had given her, now exacted the penalty”] (475-78). As Stephen Hinds remarks, “Substitute Juno’s mindful anger for Venus’, and what we have here is a near-double of the opening five lines of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.”<sup>97</sup> While Ovid is, in many ways, writing against Virgil in the *Metamorphoses*’ “little *Aeneid*,” Papaioannou finds that, “As the speech of Vergil’s Diomedes in *Aeneid* 11 and the first two speeches of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 1 intersect, Ovid endorses

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<sup>95</sup> “The Intertextual Fate of a Great Homeric Hero: Diomedes in Vergil (*Aen.* 11.252-93) and Ovid (*Rem.* 151-67),” *Acta antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 43 (2003), p. 78

<sup>96</sup> Papaioannou, *Epic Succession and Dissension: Ovid, Metamorphoses 13.623-14.582, and the Reinvention of the Aeneid*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), p.147

<sup>97</sup> *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 149

Vergil's reading of Diomedes."<sup>98</sup> Although Ovid's portrait of Diomedes in *Metamorphoses* 14 is of an arguably more weathered and downtrodden hero than Virgil presents in *Aeneid* 11, Diomedes continues to be regarded as a double for Aeneas and a celebrated epic hero.

The most significant aspect of Ovid's treatment of Diomedes is the story of his followers' transformations into birds. Caught at sea, Diomedes' men despair, and one, Acmon, mocks Venus, calling out, "Audiat ipsa licet, licet, ut facit oderit omnes/ sub Diomede viros, odium tamen illius omnes/ spernimus: haud mango stat magna potentia nobis" ["Though she herself should hear and, as indeed she does, should hate all those who follow Diomede, nevertheless we all scorn her hatred; great power counts not greatly in our eyes"] (491-93). Diomedes joins the majority of his men in reproving Acmon and then watches in amazement as his companion is transformed into a swan-like bird. Papaioannou points out that this moment marks Diomedes' "complete and definite severing of his last ties with his Greek past and Homeric identity" and "brings Diomedes even closer to Aeneas," whose ships were transformed into sea nymphs in *Aeneid* 9.<sup>99</sup> It demonstrates Diomedes' development and maturity as he, who had once had the audacity to actually strike the goddess on the battlefield, refrains from cursing her and reprimands Acmon for doing so. Papaioannou also argues that the particular detail of Diomedes' men turning into swans ("cygnis") is a "poetological nuance tied to the character of Diomedes" that highlights Ovid's rivalry with Virgil as an epic poet. Read this way, the famous myth of Diomedes' birds is not a critique of his crime against Venus or a degradation of his moral character, but functions as part of Diomedes' characterization as a figure of epic.

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<sup>98</sup> *Epic Succession and Dissension*, p. 149

<sup>99</sup> *Epic Succession and Dissension*, p. 151

Diomede's epic reputation continued through the post-classical era. The First Vatican Mythographer mentions Diomede's wounding of Venus but primarily characterizes him as a founder of cities (1.138).<sup>100</sup> After the Trojan War, he atones for his other famous crime, the stealing of the Palladium, by returning it to Aeneas (1.139). Ovid's version of the transformation of Diomedes' followers is challenged by the claim that Diomedes' men were turned into birds not in front of his eyes but "post ducis sui interitum quem extinctum impatienter dolebant" ["after the death of their leader whose death they were impatiently grieving"] (1.140). In the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Ausonius continues the tradition of linking Diomedes and Aeneas in his *Epitaphia Heroum Qui Bello Troico Interfuerunt* (*Epitaphs on the Heroes Who Took Part in the Trojan War*). In Epitaph 6 ("For Diomedes"), he writes:

Conditur hic genitore bono melior Diomedes,  
crimen ob uxoris pulsus dotalibus Argis,  
Argyripam clarosque viris qui condidit Arpos,  
clarior urbe nova patriae quam sede vetusta.

Here lies buried Diomedes, nobler son of a noble father, banished through his wife's sin from Argos, the city of her dowry, who founded Argyripa and Arpi, famed for heroes, and gained greater fame from his new city than from the ancient seat whence he was sprung. (p.145)

Diomede is a figure of epic success and a founder of civilizations, which aligns him with the founder of Rome and the *translatio imperii*. It is this important notion of Diomede as the first Aeneas that will influence the Trojan War narratives of the Middle Ages and allow for a new reading of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.

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<sup>100</sup> *Mythographi Vaticani I et II*. Ed. Péter Kulcsár. Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina XCI. (Turnholt: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1987), pp. 57-58

## Diomedes as Second Hector

The lack of attention to Diomedes' role in the *Aeneid* has prevented modern readers of *Troilus and Criseyde* from fully understanding the Greek hero's important status as a figure of epic. Virgil's characterization of Diomedes, however, significantly affected the character's development throughout the medieval Trojan legend. We have already seen how the author of the *Roman de Thèbes* offers a pseudo-prophetic glimpse of Diomedes' future greatness by looking back to Virgil and effacing Statius' portrayal of Tydeus. The writers of the medieval Troy story continue to privilege Diomedes as one of the few Greek heroes who is able to survive the treacherous journey home after the war. His post-war role is expanded throughout each redaction of the narrative, from Dictys to Benoît to Guido to John Lydgate, who explicitly claims him as a "Second Hector" by awarding him the title of "Protector of Troy" (*Troy Book*, 5.1388). What Diomedes represents in the medieval Trojan tradition, therefore, is the possibility of epic success through a transcendence of the cycles of violence that had constituted the Theban and Trojan legends.<sup>101</sup>

The final book of *Dictys Cretensis Ephemeridos Belli Troiani* begins by describing the treachery that awaits the Greek kings attempting to return home after their ten-year absence. Where Agamemnon and many of the other Greek heroes had failed, Diomedes succeeds. Agamemnon and Diomedes are both betrayed by their wives, who are led to believe through false report that they will be forsaken for women brought back from Troy. While Agamemnon is

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<sup>101</sup> Robert R. Edwards has pointed out that Diomedes represents an alternative to tragic history through his post-war exile and reclamation of his throne. Edwards writes that, "[T]he force of Diomedes' will lends another perspective to the determining shape of mythological descent... He envisions and claims possibilities wholly different from fatalistic acceptance or despair." (*Chaucer and Boccaccio: Antiquity and Modernity* [New York: Palgrave, 2002], p. 55)



killed upon his return, Diomedes is merely turned back from his city. The other Greek kings meet in Corinth to reassemble their armies with the hope of taking back their respective kingdoms by force, a plan that threatens to launch Greece into a massive civil war. This potentially catastrophic course of action is only avoided through the actions of Diomedes:

Diomedes in Aetolia ab his, qui per absentiam eius regnum infestabant, Oeneum multimodis adflctari. ob quae profectus ad ea loca omnes, quos auctores iniuriae reppererat, interficit metuque omnibus circum locis iniecto facile ab sui receptus est. inde per omnem Graecaim fama orta suos quisque reges accipiunt summam in his, qui apud Troiam bellaverant, virtutem neque in resistendo cuiusquam vires idoneas existimantes. (p.121)<sup>102</sup>

Diomedes learned that his grandfather, Oeneus, was being afflicted in every way by those who gained control of Aetolia during his absence. Accordingly, he went to that region and killed the guilty usurpers. Those who favored his cause easily welcomed him back, for all Aetolia feared him. When news of Diomedes' success spread, all of the Greeks reinstated their kings, thinking that no one could match bravery or strength of those who had battled at Troy. (p.120)<sup>103</sup>

The return of the Greek kings might have precipitated the renewal of war, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence that had claimed Troy. Through Diomedes' successful attempt to reclaim his genealogical right, however, further conflict is avoided and Greece returns to a state of relative peace. Diomedes' individual victory has very significant political implications as Dictys makes him the primary figure responsible for finally achieving a conclusion to the war.

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<sup>102</sup> *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani*, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, Ed. Werner Eisenhut (BSB B. G. Teubner, 1973)

<sup>103</sup> *The Trojan War: The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian*, trans. R. M. Frazer, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966)

Diomedes' return story is greatly expanded by Benoît in the French *Roman de Troie* and Guido delle Colonne, in his *Historia destructionis Troiae*.<sup>104</sup> These two foundational texts in the medieval Trojan tradition privilege Diomedes by allowing him to recreate both the Theban and Trojan conflicts and emerge successful from each. Through a synthesis of Virgil, Statius, Dictys, and the *Roman de Thèbes*, the post-Trojan War narratives of Benoît and Guido allow Diomedes to return to past conflicts and perform as a classical epic hero in order to then transcend the cycle of violence and achieve a victory that would usher in a new era. A brief summary of the Diomedes episode from Book 32 of Guido's *Historia* will demonstrate how the Greek scoundrel is transformed into a second Hector.

According to Guido, Diomedes was married to Egea, the daughter of Polynices, who had been made king of the Argives. After Polynices' death, Egea and her brother, Assandrus, divided the kingdom between them. On the way to Troy, Assandrus had been killed while fighting alongside Diomedes, but Egea had been led to believe that Diomedes was responsible for her brother's death. When Diomedes attempts to return to his kingdom after the Trojan War, Egea forces him into exile and Diomedes is forced to retreat and regroup. The intrigue in the kingdom ruled by Diomedes, son of Tydeus, and Egea, daughter of Polynices, continues the violence associated with Thebes and directly links it with the Trojan War. This episode reworks what is found in Dictys in order to more explicitly establish the problematic genealogies that constitute Theban history and induce continued conflict.

While Diomedes is being exiled from his kingdom, Aeneas is continuing to defend the ruins of his. Remaining at Troy until his ships can be refitted, Aeneas and his men face attacks

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<sup>104</sup> Because Guido closely translates Benoît and his Latin version seems to have been more readily available in England, I choose here to quote from Guido's text in recounting Diomedes' post-Trojan War episode. Since my argument is structural rather than semantic, I feel that using only one of the two texts is sufficient.

from opportunistic neighbors who march upon what is left of the city to face the depleted army.

Badly in need of assistance, Aeneas contacts an old enemy:

Miserunt itaque Troyani pro Dyomede, qui, auxilio vndecunque quo potuit conquisito, cum multa celeritate se contulit apud Troyam. Qui cum inuenisset quasi Troyanos obsesses et adhuc Heneam ibidem, qui inter se gauisi sunt ualde, ambo ad bellum se parent, et ordinatis Troyanis aptis ad bellum, in armatu manu ad prelium egrediuntur cum eisdem. Diebus igitur septem continuis est pugnatum. Inter quos Dyomedes multa commisit de sue strennuitate... Octauo uero die in multa bellandi astucia sic uiriliter irruiat contra eos quod ipsos undique circuncinxit, sic quod manus eius effugere non ualerent. (p.251-52)<sup>105</sup>

The Trojans sent for Diomedes, who, having collected aid wherever he could, went to Troy with great speed. He found the Trojans almost besieged and Aeneas still there. They greeted each other warmly, and both prepared for battle; and when they had drawn up the Trojans who were skilled in battle, they marched out to combat with them in an armed band. They fought continuously for seven days. Diomedes did many things among them on account of his personal valor... On the eighth day he rushed up on them manfully with much skill in warfare, so that he surrounded them on all sides, with the result that they could not escape from his hands. (p.242)<sup>106</sup>

As reports of Diomedes' skill in battle and the cruelty with which he treats the vanquished invaders spread to the nearby regions, the attacks on Troy cease. Guido writes: "Vnde quies est maxima parata Troyanis, si quies in eorum tribulacionibus dici potest" ("After this, the Trojans enjoyed a very great peace, if in their afflictions it could be called peace"). Book 32 ends with Aeneas' departure from Troy (and a referral to Virgil's *Aeneid* for more on this story) and Diomedes' peaceful return to his kingdom after Egea, worried that her husband might lead his

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<sup>105</sup> Guido de Columnis, *Historia destructionis Troiae*, ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffen (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1936)

<sup>106</sup> *Historia destructionis Troie*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974)

army against her, invites him back. Finally, just as in Dictys, the rest of the Greek kingdoms restore the returning kings to their thrones and the process of rebuilding begins.

In the medieval Troy story, Diomedes becomes a second Hector by fighting alongside Aeneas in defense of the city in an episode that recalls Book 9 of the *Aeneid*. Whereas Virgil's Diomedes had denied help to the Latins, the medieval Diomedes rushes to the aid of Aeneas in an effort to save the Trojans from annihilation. Just as Virgil had made Diomedes older and wiser after leaving Troy, so, too, do the medieval Trojan *auctores*. Because of the decidedly pro-Trojan stance taken by medieval writers, Diomedes and his fellow Greeks are regarded with disdain throughout most of the text. After the fall of Troy, however, the Greeks generally receive a great deal of sympathy because of their troubled returns. Diomedes is frequently chastised for his impulsive behavior during the Trojan War, yet he enjoys remarkable favor from each of medieval Trojan authors after the destruction of the city. He becomes a figure of development and epic success, a character, unlike most of the others in Trojan War narrative, capable of profound change. He thus becomes the figure twice responsible for the conclusion to the Trojan War, having helped to carry out the Palladium before the final Greek assault on the city, and the means by which epic history, through Aeneas, can progress. The development of his character in the Middle Ages is most clearly articulated by John Lydgate in *Troy Book*, who writes of Diomedes' defense of the Trojan ruins:

And Diomedes þus gan wexe stronge  
By longe processe, as made is mencion,  
Chef protector now of Troie toun. (5.1386-88)

Having become the "chief protector of Troy," it is Diomedes who doubles Hector in the medieval Trojan tradition. Because he takes up the mantle of the epic hero in Virgil's *Aeneid*

and in each of the classical and medieval redactions of the legend, Diomedes triumphantly concludes the Trojan saga. Despite the fact that he may come from problematic origins, we should keep in mind Pandarus' wise words to Criseyde in Book 2 of *Troilus*: "Th'ende is every tales strengthe" (260).

### **Chaucer's Diomedes: The Unambiguous Lover**

A truly intertextual reading of the figure of Diomedes – one that considers not only his status as the son of Statius' Tydeus but his appearance in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the medieval *Roman de Thèbes* and the post-Trojan War return narratives – allows for a radical reconsideration of the Greek hero in Chaucer's *Troilus*. We can read Chaucer's characterization of Diomedes in light of a long tradition that eminently privileges Diomedes over both his Greek allies – Achilles, Agamemnon, and even Ulysses – as well as his Trojan enemies, especially Troilus. In what follows, I will demonstrate that even as the narrator of the *Troilus* struggles to "efface the historical" (to again borrow Patterson's phrase) by refusing to consider the larger political stakes of the Trojan narrative, Chaucer allows Diomedes to represent the possibility of epic success in the romance world of the poem. Whereas Troilus can only transcend his own Trojanness after his "dispitous" death, Diomedes has, by the time he first appears in Book 5, already transcended his own troubled genealogy and is in the process of becoming the epic hero celebrated throughout the Trojan tradition.

As discussed earlier, Diomedes has been roundly condemned for his courtship, which has been regarded as brutish, thuggish, and insincere. I want to suggest, however, that what is really at stake in Diomedes' courtship of Criseyde is the question of "entente" and that much of the

objection to Diomedes is due to the fact that he explicitly rejects the romance language of Troilus and the romance genre as a whole. Barry Windeatt summarizes this critical position that has dominated readings of Diomedes in the *Troilus*. Windeatt describes him as:

a disturbingly distorted and debased replica of Troilus as lover of Criseyde. Chaucer's Diomedes is positively created to be the least complicated of the principal characters in *Troilus*. He is the only significant character in the poem whose intentions are *unambiguous*, while in pursuing them with Criseyde he is consistently disingenuous. (emphasis added)<sup>107</sup>

Windeatt's use of the term "unambiguous" is more significant than he acknowledges, as it is precisely Diomedes's lack of ambiguity that sets him apart from Troilus. Ambiguity, from the Latin *ambages*, signifies the kind of wandering that characterizes the romance genre. According to John Fleming, "The Latin word *ambages* has three principal meanings: (1) the pathways of a labyrinth; (2) the meanderings of literary digression; and (3) dark ambiguities, especially those of oracles."<sup>108</sup> Its connection to the romance genre is expressed in the Middle Ages by Dante, who, in *De Vulgaria Eloquentia*, speaks of "Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime" ("the lovely digressions in the fables of King Arthur") which are linked linguistically but set apart generically from genuine historical writings.<sup>109</sup> In Chaucer's poem, Troilus and the Trojans are defined by their *ambages*. Unwilling or unable to confront the progress of history unfolding outside the walls of the city, they wander aimless within.<sup>110</sup> Diomedes, on the other hand, rejects ambiguity in favor of direct and purposeful action, marking him as the epic hero of Chaucer's Trojan romance.

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<sup>107</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 295

<sup>108</sup> *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's Troilus* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), pp. 56-7

<sup>109</sup> *De Vulgari Eloquentia: Dante's Book of Exile*. Trans. Marianne Shapiro (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 57

<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of Chaucer's characterization of the Trojans as a people unable to look beyond their own walls, see Vance, *Mervelous Signals*, p. 283 and Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, pp. 109-112

While Troilus never succeeds in locating a non-circular trajectory as he confronts his own feelings about Criseyde and employs Pandarus in the “bisynesse” of courtship, Diomedes moves with direction and force, full of self-awareness and mindful of his threefold duty as Greek soldier, erstwhile lover of Criseyde, and heir to his father’s throne.

Chaucer expands upon Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* in the first meeting between Diomedes and Criseyde in Book 5, and, in so doing, highlights the contrast with Troilus’ own behavior in the first four books. Howell Chickering notes that in the *Troilus* it takes Criseyde only 186 lines to give her affection to Diomedes whereas it takes Troilus and Pandarus over 1500 lines to achieve the same affect. Chickering writes, “For readers sympathetic to Troilus (or to Criseyde), the difference in scale hurts. Yet Diomedes’ rehearsal of the conventional moves of a courtly lover is so much foreshortened, and so painless, in comparison to Troilus’s equally conventional sighs and protestations that it can also be taken as a parody of Troilus’s earlier courtship.”<sup>111</sup> Troilus, upon first feeling the sting of Cupid’s arrow in Book 1, had retreated to his bedroom and “argmented” his newfound feelings (1.377). His interior debate and struggle to come to terms with his infatuation is represented by the circular dialectic that characterizes the romance genre and the conventional rhetoric of courtly love, the clearest example of which is the translation of Petrarch’s Sonnet 88 in the *Canticus Troili*. His inability to proceed in actual courtship is recognized by Pandarus, who immediately makes Troilus’ desire his “bisynesse.”

Diomedes’ rejection of Troilus’ romance ethos and his own ability to proceed deliberately and with confidence is evident in his first appearance in the *Troilus*. After the prisoner-exchange, Chaucer writes that “Troilus to Troie homward he wente” (5.91), a line that

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<sup>111</sup> “The Poetry of Suffering in Book V of *Troilus*,” *Chaucer Review* 34 (2000), 248

emphasizes the circularity of Troilus' journey and his inescapable connection with the doomed city. Diomedes, however, immediately demonstrates his understanding of how a would-be lover should conduct himself as he leads Criseyde to the Greek camp:

This Diomedes, that ledde hire by the bridel,  
Whan that he saugh the folk of Troie aweye,  
Thoughte, "Al my labour shal nat ben on ydel,  
If that I may, for somewhat shal I seye,  
For at the werste it may yet shorte oure weye.  
I have herd seyde ek tymes twyes twelve,  
'He is a fool that wol foreyete hymselfe.'" (5.92-98)

The stanza shows that Diomedes "already knows and can do everything that Pandarus has to teach and do for Troilus."<sup>112</sup> Pandarus explains:

"Now loke that atempere be thi bridel,  
And for the beste ay suffer to the tyde,  
Or elles al oure labour is on ydel:  
He hasteth wel that wisely kan abyde.  
Be diligent and trewe, and ay wel hide;  
Be lusty, fre; persevere in thy servyse,  
And al is wel, if thou werke in his wyse." (1.953-59)

Troilus, like "proud Bayard" unleashed (1.218), struggles throughout the poem to regain self-control, to take up his own bridle. At the end of Book 4, as Criseyde and Troilus spend their last

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<sup>112</sup> Calabrese, p. 71. Robert Edwards points out that Diomedes is "the most successful embodiment of Pandarus' Ovidian principles" in *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, p. 68



night together, Criseyde tells him that she acquiesced to him because “youre resoun bridlede youre delit” (4.1678), suggesting that Troilus has learned to act with reason but he never really learned how reason and desire might exist together. It is Reason’s bridling of desire that causes Troilus to remain silent during the Parliamentary debate that concludes that Criseyde should be sent away (4.164-75). Diomedes, on the other hand, knows how to act according to both reason and desire – “He is a fool that wol foreyete hymselfe” – as he quickly takes the bridle of Criseyde’s horse as he leads her toward the Greek camp. While the image has been harshly read as indicating Diomedes’s “thuggishness” and his “physical domination” of Criseyde, this is not necessarily so.<sup>113</sup> Rather, the clear and direct parallel with Troilus’ failures in Book 1 and Book 4 suggest that Diomedes is capable of both reason and erotic action while Troilus is rendered impotent by his desire.

While the scene in the Trojan Parliament in Book 4 emphasizes Troilus as not-Hector, Diomedes’s interaction with Criseyde as he leads her to the Greek camp demonstrates that he is, in Chaucer’s poem, her true second Hector. In Book 1, Hector had told Criseyde that she would be under his protection:

“Lat youre fadres treson gon  
Forth with meschaunce, and ye youreself in joie  
Dwelleth with us, whil yow good list, in Troie.

“And al th’ouour that men may don yow have,  
As ferforth as youre fader dwelled here,

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<sup>113</sup> Chickering, “The Poetry of Suffering in Book V of *Troilus*,” p. 249

Ye shul have, and youre body shal men save,  
As fer as I may ought enquire or here.” (1.117-23)

Hector is, according to Stephen Knight, “exactly what Criseyde needs. He is a source of reassurance and strength; his speech is imperative in construction as one might expect of a clear-headed, decisive prince.”<sup>114</sup> Knight also claims that Diomedes’s speech is “suggestively different from the more rugged, honest reassurances she has received from Hector” (p.68), but he never really explains how. It seems, rather, that Chaucer’s construction of Diomedes’ speech, one that does not appear in *Il Filostrato*, is precisely modeled on Hector’s earlier promise. Diomedes’s words to Criseyde echo Hector’s by assuring her that she would have the same respect in the Greek camp that she was afforded in Troy. He asks her to leave her sorrow behind, pointing out, “Iwis, we Grekis kan have joie/ To honouren yow as wel as folk of Troie” (5.118-19). While Troilus makes no such assurances and certainly never displays an ability to protect Criseyde from anything (except potential dishonor through his disastrous silence in Parliament), Hector and Diomedes recognize the precariousness of her situation and make efforts to assuage her fears.

The entire monologue delivered by Diomedes while leading Criseyde to the camp is based not on Boccaccio, who simply says that Diomedes began to grow attracted to her, but on Benoît.<sup>115</sup> While Chaucer takes a number of cues from the *Roman de Troie*, it is clear that in crafting Diomedes’s speech, he refers back to passages from earlier in his own poem. The rapidity and directness that characterize Diomedes’s courtship invoke and eclipse the combined efforts of Troilus and Pandarus for both Criseyde and the reader of the text. The scene reveals Diomedes to be perceptive and forceful in both erotics and politics, important spheres of action

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<sup>114</sup> *Rymyng Craftily*, p. 56

<sup>115</sup> Windeatt, “*Troilus and the Disenchantment of Romance*,” p. 134

that define the epic-heroic ethos. The progression from Troy to Greece is a movement away from the doomed romance world that Troilus and the narrator struggle to maintain. While Diomedes and Criseyde move forward on a linear course, the journey is bookended textually by Chaucer's poetic conflation of his poem's nominal hero with the besieged city. Leaving Criseyde, as noted above, Chaucer remarks that "Troilus to Troie homward he went" (5.91), and he reemphasizes this circularity after Criseyde is reunited with her father, writing, "To Troie is come this woful Troilus" (5.197). The contrast between Diomedes's forward action and Troilus' endless recursion defines Book 5 of *Troilus and Criseyde* until Troilus' final ascent to the Eighth Sphere.

The contrast continues when Diomedes appears again in Book 5, this during a private moment that again recalls Troilus' initial retreat to his bedroom in Book 1. In a scene that also has no counterpart in Boccaccio's poem, Diomedes considers how to proceed now that his desire for Criseyde has grown:

This Diomedes, of whom yow telle I gan,  
Goth now withinne himself ay arguyng,  
With al the sleghte and al that evere he kan,  
How he may best, with shortest taryng,  
Into his net Criseydes herte bryng. (5.771-75)

While Troilus' inner "arguments" had considered love on a meta-level and wrought only inaction, it is here that we see Diomedes as "self-interested pragmatist." He is a strategist, a man skilled with language and courtship, someone who refuses to remain idle. As he worries about how best to proceed, he voices an important maxim: "'But for t'asay,' he sayde, 'naught n'agreveheth,/ For he that naught n'asaieth naught n'acheveth'" (5.783-84). While critics have

found Diomedes's pithy adages to be too simple and blunt to have real value,<sup>116</sup> this is, we must remember, the exact same conclusion reached by Criseyde when considering how to respond to Pandarus' and Troilus' overtures. After her own long argument, "hire thought gan for to clere/ And seide, 'He which that nothing undertaketh,/ Nothyng n'acheveth'" (2.806-8). Diomedes's citation of Criseyde's own thoughts suggests that his understanding of the need to actively pursue desire makes him a stronger compliment to Criseyde than the paralytic Troilus.

Immediately after Diomedes decides that he will pursue Criseyde, Chaucer presents portraits of the poem's three lovers. The portraits are modeled on the descriptions found in Joseph of Exeter's *Frigii Daretis Ylias*, but Chaucer makes some important changes to the characterization of Diomedes. Joseph of Exeter's writes of Diomedes:

Voce ferox, animo preceps, fervente cerebro  
Audentique ira validos quadratur in artus  
Titides plenisque meretur Tidea factis,  
Sic animo, sic ore fero, sic fulminate armis. (4.124-27)<sup>117</sup>

His voice was fierce, his temper violent. His brains boiled and his rage was daring; his limbs were massive and he stood four-square. His mighty deeds made him the worthy son of his father, Tydeus – such were the lightening bolts leaping from his spirit, his savage voice, his arms.<sup>118</sup>

Chaucer's portrait removes the direct claims of brutality and instead paints him as a formidable yet honorable figure:

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<sup>116</sup> Michaela Paasche Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), p. 77

<sup>117</sup> *Joseph Iscanus: Werke und Briefe*, Ed. Ludwig Gompf (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 143

<sup>118</sup> *Joseph of Exeter: The Iliad of Dares Phrygius*, trans. Gildas Roberts (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1970), p. 43

This Diomede, as bokes us declare,  
Was in his nedes prest and courageous,  
With sterne vois and myghty lymes square,  
Hardy, testif, strong, and chivalrous  
Of dedes, lik his father Tideus.  
And som men seyn he was of tonge large;  
And heir he was of Calydoigne and Arge. (5.799-805)

We have already seen that the “dedes, like his father Tideus” may contain the suggestion of insatiable rage and savage cruelty if one recalls Statius, but it may serve to elevate Diomede’s stature for readers more familiar with the *Roman de Thèbes*. In this case, the rhyme of “chivalrous” with “Tideus” is not an instance of Chaucerian irony, but a reminder Diomede’s noble lineage and extraordinary martial prowess. Chaucer adds to the portrait that Diomede is the heir of Calydon and Argos, again emphasizing the epic success Diomede is to enjoy by reclaiming his kingdoms after the end of the war.

A few lines later, when Diomede approaches Criseyde to make his feelings known, he tells her of his lineage in an attempt to prove that he is noble and, therefore, would make a worthy lover. The stanza should serve the same purpose for the reader, as it encompasses the epic course that the Greek hero will follow as he strives to regain the land of which he was dispossessed:

“For if my fader Tideus,” he seyde,  
“Ilyved hadde, ich hadde ben er this  
Of Calydoyne and Arge a kyng, Criseyde!  
And so hope I that I shal yet, iwis...” (5.932-35)

We know that Diomedes will succeed, and this is at least as important as the fact that he acknowledges his own personal history and his larger political aims. Robert Edwards notes, “Here the force of Diomedes’s will lends another perspective to the determining shape of mythological descent... Diomedes looks to a future in which his actions can prevail over circumstances. He envisions and claims possibilities wholly different from fatalistic acceptance or despair.”<sup>119</sup> This is yet another pointed contrast with Troilus, who had ended his first speech after seeing Criseyde by surrendering his noble status: “For myn estat roial I here resigne / Into hire hond” (1.432-33). Diomedes’s larger political goals and responsibilities are never overtaken by erotic desire; rather, the two compliment each other as it seems that each serves the other’s purpose. His courtship is characterized by military language – “Whoso myghte wynnen swich a flour...myghte seyn he were a conqueror” (5.792-4) – and he begins his conversation in Calchas’ tent by discussing the war and its effect on Criseyde. Just as Virgil had brought together erotics and politics in the epic figure of Aeneas, so too does Chaucer in Diomedes, the consummate epic man of the Trojan War and the *Troilus*.<sup>120</sup>

Diomedes’s confidence in the righteousness of the Greek cause and the inevitability of their victory is tempered only by his justifiable distrust of the Trojans. The eventual success of the Greeks is assured by Calchas, a knowledgeable man favored by Apollo but suspect because of his Trojanness. It is here that Chaucer, through Diomedes, condemns the problematic romance language that always threatens to undermine the progress of history: Assuring Criseyde of the destruction of Troy, Diomedes says:

“And but if Calchas lede us with ambages—

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<sup>119</sup> Chaucer and Boccaccio, p. 55

<sup>120</sup> Francis Ingledew, “The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*,” *Speculum* 69 (1994), 665-704

That is to seyn, with double wordes slye,  
Swiche as men clepen a word with two visages—  
Ye shal wel knowen that I naught ne lie...” (V.897-900)

Diomedes’s definition of “ambages” invokes a host of intratextual resonances crucial to reading the *Troilus*. A few lines earlier (V.825), Criseyde had been described as “slyding of corage,” a phrase that has been read as not only indicating her unfaithfulness but also the fluidity, or ambiguity, of her meaning as a character.<sup>121</sup> The problem of doubling, of employing “a word with two visages,” characterizes the speech of Pandarus throughout the poem, and it is also suggestive of the two visages of Pandarus and Troilus working together in the single “bisyness” of courtship. This is the problem of “slippery” language, the language of romance that allows for semantic indeterminacy as a means of effacing the historical, and it is this language that Diomedes refuses to accept.

While Diomedes has failed to win the approval of critics, he succeeds in wooing Criseyde because of his unambiguous speech. Criseyde’s consideration of whether or not to accept his advances is ultimately decided by her reflection upon “the wordes of this sodeyn Diomedes” (5.1024), and she finally gives herself over to him because “So wel he for hymselfen spak and seyde” (5.1033). This phrase “for hymselfen spak” contrasts Diomedes with Troilus, who speaks to Criseyde only through Pandarus, even during the moments leading up to consummation in Book 3. Diomedes speaks for himself with clear, direct speech as he pursues his erotic and political interests. His success in winning Criseyde foreshadows the Greek defeat of the Trojans, as Diane Steinberg has pointed out, but it also precedes his larger success in ending both the

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<sup>121</sup> Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, p. 58

Theban and Trojan cycles of violence.<sup>122</sup> While Troilus represents the tragedy implicit in the *roman antique* of Troy, Diomedes demonstrates the possibility of epic success.

### **Conclusion: Chaucer, Author of the Future**

Diomedes's eventual success contrasts the unavoidable death of Troilus and the fall of Troy and allows for Chaucer to suggest the possibility of an alternative to tragic history. As Sylvia Frederico points out, "*Troilus and Criseyde* is concerned especially with how the past interacts with the future."<sup>123</sup> Troilus defends a city that has no future, at least in Chaucer's conception of it within his poem. While Troilus transcends time and space at the end of the poem, disappearing into the Eighth Sphere and laughing at his previous endeavors, Troy stands on the brink of destruction, and the poem includes no mention of Aeneas or the *translatio imperii* that will follow. The only future we can see is that of Diomedes, who we know will survive the war and usher in a new era that will allow Troy to serve as a site of origin for Rome and England. While many critics point to Cassandra's interpretation of Troilus' dream as a sign that Diomedes represents "the oppression of a tragic past that controls the present," implicit within that history is the fact that the "son of Tidesus" is the epic figure who refuses to acknowledge genealogical imperative.<sup>124</sup>

Diomedes is thus the unacknowledged hero of *Troilus and Criseyde* by virtue of his larger role in the Troy story. His characterization shows Chaucer pushing against the limited discursive possibilities available to him while remaining firmly within acceptable generic bounds. The

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<sup>122</sup> Steinberg, "We Do Use Here No Women for to Selle," p. 271

<sup>123</sup> *New Troy*, p. 66

<sup>124</sup> *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's Troilus*, p. 127



embedding of epic discourse within his Trojan romance through intertextual means allows for Chaucer to both present and deny its presence in his own work. As such, Diomedes represents a distinctly Chaucerian mode of authorship: an authorial position that both announces and denies its own authority through deference to textual precedent as means of safely offering extratextual critique. Chaucer does not call for a new world order or present any specific counter to the existing political situation in Ricardian England, nor does his text imply support for any particular faction. Instead, the tragedy of *Troilus* functions as a lament for the current state of affairs in 1380s England. Diomedes provides a means for thinking outside of the circular discourse of romance and the cycle of violence perpetuated by vengeance and retribution for past wrongs.

Chaucer never shows Diomedes on the battlefield; his actions within the poem show the important link between erotics and politics and demonstrate the benefits of direct discourse in these spheres of action. Diomedes's speech is based on an awareness of and formulated as a response to contingency, not a perpetuation of ideology. He functions as the epic hero operating within history in contrast to *Troilus* as the romance hero seeking to escape history. In Ricardian England, the acts of retribution carried out between the Appellants and the supporters of Richard II, many of which had their basis in discursive offenses, reveal the problem of privileging ideology over contingency, of failing to consider the consequences of violence as a response to speech. In generic terms, the court of Richard II and the Parliaments of the 1380s attempt to assert their (epic) ideologies through romance means rather than with a proper attention to historical contingency.

When Chaucer announces at the end of *Troilus* that he is going to begin work on "some comedy" (V.1788), he suggests that he needs to escape from the oppressive tragedy of romance.

When he writes the *Canterbury Tales*, however, he continues this same project of demonstrating the problem of how to respond to the articulation of conflicting ideologies. Chaucer never argues for a particular position on any of the many issues that he raises in the *Tales*, but, as in the *Troilus*, he argues for the ability to articulate any position without fear of violent retribution. This desire is at the center of Chaucer's poetics and his authorial self-representation, an authorship defined by his relationship to the political discourse of his time. Famously self-effacing, Chaucer's authorship is defined through his use of genre, through a constant consideration and manipulation of macro-forms and the possibilities of discourse within each. This authorial position comes to define the future of England's Trojan authorship after the fourteenth century, as Lydgate, Caxton, and Shakespeare all employ similar methods of authorial positioning within their particular historical and political moments.

### Chapter 3

#### **Ulysses and the Threat of Romance in John Lydgate's *Troy Book***

While Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* had feigned an escape from the historical, Lydgate's *Troy Book* argues for an urgent need to return to it. Writing at the request of Henry V, Lydgate offers a much more topical version of the Troy story in an effort to counter the imperial designs of his patron. *Troy Book* provides Lydgate with an opportunity to announce himself as a Trojan author and secure his status as a laureate poet in the both the Chaucerian and continental traditions.<sup>125</sup> Lydgate inherits a textual tradition in which Trojan authors fuse history and romance so that their works can transcend the realm of chronicle and enter into the literary, a tradition made all the more complex by the stunning poetic power of Chaucer's *Troilus*. Lydgate thus faces the formidable task of satisfying his own authorial ambitions by composing a work that can stand alongside Chaucer's while remaining true to his own sense of political responsibility as he writes for England's future king. Lydgate responds to this pressure on the level of genre by privileging history over romance as a form that provides greater opportunity for both political efficacy and poetic expression.

In this chapter, I contextualize Lydgate's composition of *Troy Book* within the years of Henry V's kingship and consider how Lydgate responds directly to the personal and political

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<sup>125</sup> For recent discussions of Lydgate's status as a laureate-poet, see Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Robert J. Meyer-Lee, "Laureates and beggars in Fifteenth-Century English Poetry: The Case of George Ashby," *Speculum* 79 (2004): 688-726 and "Lydgate's Laureate Pose," *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, Larry Scanlon and James Simpson, eds. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006): 36-60

interests and ambitions of his patron. This approach challenges notions that the lessons of *Troy Book* are “general” and “universal” rather than “topical” or “immediate.”<sup>126</sup> Lydgate addresses the issue of Henry’s textual representation in Lancastrian propaganda and the king’s conscious self-fashioning of himself as a romance hero by authoring the *Troy* story as a counter-romance.<sup>127</sup> While Henry had commissioned *Troy Book* as a text that could legitimize his imperial ambitions, Lydgate presents him with the opposite. As Walter Schirmer points out, “[Lydgate’s] romantic and chivalrous patron envisaged the *Troy Book* as a tale of military heroism and adventure that would inspire its readers to emulate such exploits themselves. The author did not share this conception of the work, and remarks that this tale of war, lust, and revenge merely pointed the moral of the transitoriness of life, fading as the flowers of summer.”<sup>128</sup> Lydgate’s opinions are made explicit through his generous moral commentary on specific episodes in the story, but his warning to Henry also occurs on a formal level as Lydgate disavows any romantic ideals normally associated with military conquest. Lydgate’s representation of generic difference is thus a deliberate and measured response to the specific events of Henry’s reign and the personal and political desires of his patron.

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<sup>126</sup> Pearsall and John Finlayson read *Troy Book* as part of the *Mirror for Princes* genre and so argue that the text presents commonplaces rather than commentary on specific events. See Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 139 and John Finlayson, “Guido de Columnis’ *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, the ‘*Gest Historyial*’ of the *Destruction of Troy*, and Lydgate’s *Troy Book*: Translation and the Design of History,” *Anglia* 113 (1995), p. 158. Walter Schirmer finds *Troy Book* to be more topical in *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, trans. Ann E. Keep (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 40-53

<sup>127</sup> In the Introduction and previous chapter, I had argued that epic is essentially a genre that espouses a political ideology through a narrative teleology directed toward imperial conquest. Romance functions in opposition to epic through its circularity and endless recursion. Henry V, with his explicit goal of uniting the crowns of France and England, might, it seems, be more fairly viewed as an “epic” rather than “romance” hero since his actions are directed toward a defined end. I will demonstrate, however, that Henry’s military campaigns follow a romance rather than an epic trajectory as he continues to seek out battles in France even after uniting the crowns. Unlike Aeneas, Henry never makes the transition from romance to epic hero. He is, as I will demonstrate, much more closely aligned the wandering Ulysses.

<sup>128</sup> Schirmer, p. 47

I am interested not in examining Lydgate's Chaucerian poetics, a topic that has already received substantial critical attention, but in considering his engagement with a Trojan poetics.<sup>129</sup> Lydgate was commissioned by Henry to write the definitive English version of the Trojan War, and I wish to show how Lydgate's writing of Trojan history reflects his own attitudes toward his history-making patron. While Lydgate writes his text over the same eight-year span in which Henry assumes the throne and wages his military campaigns in France, contemporary chroniclers of Henry's reign are engaged in a project of recording the king's efforts in order to win support for his policies. As Henry continues to seek battle even after winning decisive victories, however, Lydgate and other writers become increasingly concerned about Henry's insatiable desire for war, and their texts articulate these concerns, often by referring to the tragic ends of the heroes whom Henry tries to emulate. Lydgate's Trojan poetics helps advance his own conception of himself as an English author, his reading of the classical and medieval Trojan tradition, including the writings of Homer, Ovid, Virgil, Guido delle Colonne and Chaucer, and the uses of Trojan discourse in contemporary chronicles of Henry's life and kingship.

This chapter begins by demonstrating how Henry V's well-known interest in romance literature informs his political policies and fifteenth-century accounts of his life. Henry's life, from his early adulthood as Prince of Wales throughout his kingship and even after his early death was always a literary enterprise guided by the conventions of the romance genre. I then consider Lydgate's understanding of the differences between history and romance and his

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<sup>129</sup> For discussions of Lydgate's Chaucerian poetics, see A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 59-88; Derek Pearsall, "Chaucer and Lydgate," *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 39-53; C. David Benson, "Critic and Poet: What Lydgate and Henryson Did to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (1992): 23-40; Tim William Machan, "Textual Authority and the Works of Hoccleve, Lydgate, and Henryson," *Viator* 23 (1992): 281-99; and Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 23-56.

attempt to separate the two in the face of a Trojan tradition that had always allowed them to commingle. Finally, I read the final episode of *Troy Book*, the account Ulysses' voyage home and his death at the hand of his illegitimate son, as Lydgate's most explicit commentary on the threat of romance. Lydgate uses the Ulysses narrative as a conclusion to *Troy Book* in an effort to convince Henry to conclude his own romance adventures and take his rightful place in history as a mature and prudent king.

### **“Desire.../Of verray kny3thod to remembre ageyn”: Henry V as Romance Reader**

As Henry and his supporters sought to represent the king as the great chivalric champion of England, they had at their disposal a number of literary texts that provided models upon which they could base the Lancastrian project of heroic fashioning. Henry himself was intimately acquainted with stories of classical and medieval romance heroes from the time of his youth and he actively collected texts that dealt with chivalric themes. His reputation as a bibliophile remains intact to this day as recent scholars have linked the enthusiastic patronage and reading practices of Henry's immediate family to the rise of English humanism in the fifteenth century.<sup>130</sup> This view of Henry as a reader is nothing new, however; as Jeanne Krochalis points out, “Henry had a reputation in his own time as a reader of books.” Although catalogues of the royal library list a large number of devotional texts, Henry was clearly interested in also reading histories of celebrated heroes and stories of adventure.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> The most recent and comprehensive study of this phenomenon is Alessandra Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England: The Case of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, ed. A. J. Vanderjagt (Leiden: Brill, 2004)

<sup>131</sup> Jeanne E. Krochalis, “The Books and Reading of Henry V and His Circle,” *Chaucer Review* 23 (1988): 60

At a young age, Henry learned to appreciate literature. His father was a passionate reader and his love of books was passed on to each of his sons.<sup>132</sup> Henry received a standard medieval education afforded to nobility and was learning to read Latin by age eight.<sup>133</sup> He spent considerable time at the court of his cousin, Richard II, whose library contained a number of French romances, including stories about Perceval and Gawain.<sup>134</sup> While apparently studious, Henry also enjoyed outdoor activities and sport, of which his favorite seems to have been hunting. Accordingly, he developed an interest in hunting treatises as a young man that continued throughout his lifetime.<sup>135</sup> The Prince of Wales appreciated texts for their practical value as well as their aesthetic appeal and appears to have been well-versed in both classical and contemporary works, best evinced by his ownership of the famous manuscript of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M.817

Henry's literary tastes have been discussed in most specific terms by Krochalis, who finds that Henry was particularly interested in heroic romance literature. While on campaign in France, Henry carried with him elaborate tapestries for decorating his tent, almost all of which represent scenes and heroes from romance. Krochalis notes, "Romance can sometimes overlap with chronicle, and Henry has left evidence of his interest in history."<sup>136</sup> As he sought to unify the crowns of England and France, Henry would certainly have been aware of his own historical

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<sup>132</sup> K. B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972): 23

<sup>133</sup> McFarlane, p. 115. See also Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood and Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530* (New York: Methuen and Co., 1984)

<sup>134</sup> Krochalis, p. 58

<sup>135</sup> Margaret Wade Labarge, *Henry V: The Cautious Conqueror* (New York: Stein and Day, 1975), pp. 2-3. McFarlane notes, "In 1421 a London scrivener received £12. 8s. 0d. for making copies of twelve books on hunting" (*Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, p. 116).

<sup>136</sup> Krochalis, p. 64

significance, and he seems to have been interested in locating his own place in history within the textual tradition of heroic literature.

Writing under a monarch famous for his literary interests, poets like Lydgate and Hoccleve claim authority through their understanding of both English literary history and the readerly desires of the king. In *The Regiment of Princes*, the old man recommends that Hoccleve “Wryte to him [Henry] a goodly tale or two, / On which he may desporten him by nyght,/ And his free grace shal upon the lyght” (1902-4).<sup>137</sup> In his dedication to the Prince, Hoccleve acknowledges Henry’s readership by highlighting the practical value of his source texts and remarking, “I am seur that tho bookes alle three / Red hath and seen your inaat sapience” (2129-30). Still, Hoccleve hopes that his own work may prove useful as both entertainment and advice:

And although it be no maneere of neede  
Yow to consaille what to doon or leeve,  
Yit if yow list of stories taken heede,  
Sumwhat it may profyete, by your leeve;  
At hardest whan yee been in chamber at eeve,  
They been good for to dryve foorth the nyght;  
They shal nat harme if they be herd aright. (2136-42)

Hoccleve, even in his deference, rhetorically fosters an intimacy with the Prince, representing him as someone who likes to read in bed. This aligns his lord Henry with Hoccleve’s “maistir” Chaucer, who reads a romance in order to cope with his insomnia at the beginning of “The Book



of the Duchess.”<sup>138</sup> He also claims to know Henry’s literary tastes, as the old man had told Hoccleve to write “a goodly tale or two” and Hoccleve offers “stories” that may contain valuable moral advice (“profyte”). In presenting them to the Prince, Hoccleve has to trust that Henry will be able to read his text correctly, saying, “They shal nat harme *if they be herd aright*.” This caveat reveals an anxiety over potential misreading and the threat of real danger if the Prince misinterprets and misuses textual counsel. Read correctly, however, Hoccleve’s text, like Chaucer’s, may provide the *sentence* and *solaas* sought by Henry, which may prove morally and politically profitable for the king and financially profitable for Hoccleve.

In his Prologue to *Troy Book*, Lydgate similarly addresses Henry as a reader interested in receiving advice from literary texts. Although Lydgate is aware that his work is part of Henry’s Englishing project (ll.111-15), he claims that the Prince’s commissioning of *Troy Book* primarily stems from his personal interest in the exemplary value of chivalric histories. Henry is represented as an exemplary reader:

Whiche hath desire, sothly for to seyn,  
Of verray kny3thod to remembre ageyn  
The worthynes, 3if I schal nat lye,  
And the prowesse of olde chialrie,  
By-cause he hath Ioye and gret deynte  
To rede in bokys of antiquite,  
To fyn only, vertu for to swe  
Be example of hem, and also for to eschewe

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<sup>138</sup> Seth Lerer finds similar associations between Henry V and Chaucer in *Troy Book* in *Chaucer and His Readers*, p. 49

The cursyd vice of slouthe and ydelnesse. (75-83)

Lydgate's obligation as author is to satisfy Henry's readerly desire for ancient texts that present examples of "olde chiualrie," the reading of which may spur the Prince on to greatness through his own reenactment of these feats of martial prowess.<sup>139</sup> Henry, Lydgate says, finds joy in the act of reading as a means of helping him to emulate the great heroes of the classical world. While the Prologue to *Troy Book* may be read as fulfilling the conventions of the mirror for princes genre, this discussion of the Prince's reading in terms of his personal joy and desire highlights Lydgate's attempt to identify Henry as his singular audience and fashion him as his ideal reader. Regarding Henry as not only a literary patron but as a reader who approaches texts with a desire to interiorize and then act upon their counsel, Lydgate understands that Henry's reading may have both personal and political consequences. Aware of his patron's investment in the Troy story and his reputation as a committed reader, Lydgate must have expected that Henry would not only value his *Troy Book* as a textual artifact – as the royally-sanctioned English version of the Trojan legend – but that he would actually read it.

### **Henry V as Romance Hero**

Occupying the throne under questionable pretenses and facing very real threats from anti-Lancastrian factions, Henry needed to secure his reputation as a strong ruler in order to foster faith in his leadership that would help him consolidate his power. To this end, Henry and his pro-Lancastrian supporters worked to create an image of the king as the embodiment of the English nation and its greatest champion. In his own lifetime, Henry's deeds were recorded by

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<sup>139</sup> Schirmer, p. 47

chroniclers and court biographers so that the nation would come to view Henry as the rightful king whose claim was justified by both his personal valor and his divinely-sanctioned military victories abroad. Henry set out to prove himself on the battlefield, and though he always carried himself humbly and with appropriate piety, he and his supporters made sure that everyone knew that their king was the ideal English warrior: strong, skilled, and successful. In short, Henry fashioned himself as a romance hero.

Henry's life story follows the conventions of the romance genre. His legendary reputation began early in his career and has lasted well into the modern era; Charles L. Kingsford's early twentieth-century biography even bears the title *Henry V: The Typical Medieval Hero*. As the Prince of Wales, Henry had proven himself as a warrior while suppressing Welsh rebellions, but he had also garnered a reputation for unruly behavior and licentiousness. The chronicler now known as pseudo-Elmham writes, "Pro tempore juventutis lasciviæ æmulator assiduus, instrumentis organicis plurimum deditus, laxo pudiciæ freno, licet Martis tamen Veneris milicia ferventer militans, ipsius facibus juveniliter æstuabat, aliis quoque insolenciis, ætatis indomitæ tempora concomitantibus, inter proba gesta militaria vacare solebat" [For, in the time of the playfulness of his youth, he who constantly strove for fame, having been very much given up to musical instruments, with lax restraint of chastity, yet fervently being a fighting soldier of both Mars and Venus, he himself was youthfully seething with torches, also with other excesses accompanying the times of his wild age, [and] he used to take time from military matters for virtuous deeds].<sup>140</sup> Henry acted as a kind of knight-errant, often operating outside of the rule of his father and engaging in the kinds of military and erotic exploits

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<sup>140</sup> *Thomæ de Elmham Vita & Gesta Henrici Quinti, Anglorum Regis*, ed. Thomas Hearne (Oxford: E Theatro Sheldoniano): 12

characteristic of the immature romance hero who must survive a period of personal and political estrangement from the court before taking his place in the kingdom as a responsible and respected public figure.<sup>141</sup>

The death of his father and his subsequent ascension to the throne effected a remarkable transformation from wild youth to sober and determined monarch, a seemingly sudden turn most memorably presented by Shakespeare in *Henry IV, Parts I and II* and which had been noted by Henry's contemporary biographers. Henry, like Aeneas, begins as a figure of romance and, for a brief time, becomes an epic hero. His tenure as king is almost entirely distinguished by his military campaigns in France. Christopher Allmand points out, "Henry is rightly thought of as a soldier-king... It was the army which enabled him to win the respect due to a conqueror, and it was his conquests which primarily gave his brief reign its particular flavour and characteristics."<sup>142</sup> From his youthful exploits to his coming-of-age to his exceptional martial triumphs and early death, Henry V seems to have lived a life that neatly conformed to medieval literary tastes and reflected the best-known stories of ancient heroes. This fact was not lost on Henry's supporters who committed his deeds to texts, making his life a literary enterprise.<sup>143</sup> A brief examination of fifteenth-century textual representations of Henry V will highlight the Lancastrian project of constructing the king as epic hero who, unfortunately, returns to his romance origins.

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<sup>141</sup> Paul Strohm argues that the "youthful transgressions" of young Henry have no real historical basis but are an invention of biographers seeking to give the Prince's life a narrative arc. See *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 211-13

<sup>142</sup> Christopher Allmand, *Henry V* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992): 205

<sup>143</sup> For a discussion of the fifteenth-century biographies of Henry V, see Charles L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1913): 45-69 and Antonia Grandsen, *Historical Writing in England Vol. 2: c.1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982): 194-219

While any biographical or historical writing, especially writing as ideologically driven as Lancastrian propaganda, must be regarded with a certain degree of suspicion, Henry's reputation as an exceptional soldier was well-deserved. Throughout the early part of his father's reign, from 1401 through 1406, Henry spent most of his time helping to lead the English army against Welsh insurgents. He was officially thanked by Parliament for his service on a number of occasions and was commended for his "bone coer et corage."<sup>144</sup> Henry reported his successes to his father and the king made sure that his son's victories were publicized throughout London.<sup>145</sup> Hoccleve, in *The Regiment of Princes*, writing for Prince Henry as early as 1410, says that "al that longith to knyghthode / Was inned thyn excellent manhode" (2648, 2652-53). As a young man, Henry was afforded the opportunity to make a name for himself as a strong military leader, and both he and his supporters recognized that these victories would help legitimize the prince's claim to the throne.

Upon his ascension to the kingship in 1413, Henry turned his attention to France, where he would mount an invasion that would work not only to unify the crowns of the two countries, which Henry regarded as his ancestral right, but would also allow the king to secure his reputation as the supreme English monarch, a warrior-king in the tradition of Arthur and Richard the Lionheart.<sup>146</sup> His preparation for war began almost immediately as Henry spent the first two years of his kingship procuring the necessary military equipment for a major offensive.<sup>147</sup> While Henry led the army and displayed his own martial prowess, contemporary biographers and chroniclers loyal to the Lancastrian cause testified to the king's heroic qualities. The earliest of

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<sup>144</sup> Allmand, pp. 30-2. *RP*, iii, 569, 573-4, 577, 611-12

<sup>145</sup> Allmand, p. 29

<sup>146</sup> Labarge, pp. x-xi

<sup>147</sup> Desmond Seward, *Henry V: The Scourge of God* (New York: Viking, 1987), p. 51

these biographies, the anonymous *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, an eyewitness account of Henry's first expedition into France in 1415-16, focuses almost entirely on the battles between the English and the French. The text, however, rarely regards the battles as being fought by two opposing armies; instead, each assault, and, accordingly, each English victory, is represented as the effort of one man: the king himself. Henry always credits God with bestowing each victory upon him, but the *Gesta* nevertheless figures Henry as the embodiment of English military might who fights with God on his side as "milite suo" ["His own soldier"].<sup>148</sup>

Although the *Gesta* presents some detailed discussion of the movements of the army and the role of the archers and men-at-arms, the language of the text often collapses the whole of the English military force into the person of the king. It records an episode in which Henry even offers to settle the dispute with France by personally fighting a duel. He sends a messenger to the dauphin asking that his territorial rights be immediately ceded to him without further conflict. If the dauphin will not agree to surrender, Henry presents another option:

...vel saltem parcens multitudini controversiam illam, motam dudum, inde intermissam, et iam denuo resuscitatam sed indiscussam, super iure et dominio regni...sine quacumque alia sparsione fraterni sanguinis, inter se ipsos persona ad personam per duellum terminarent.

...or that, at least sparing the many, they might bring to an end that controversy respecting the right and dominion over the kingdom, begun long ago, then interrupted, and now revived afresh but still unresolved...and might do so without any other shedding of fraternal blood whatsoever, by a duel between them, man to man. (pp.56-9)

While Henry had no reason to expect that the dauphin would meet his challenge, the offer allows him to be seen as the English Aeneas, the leader of his nation willing to secure his imperial rights

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<sup>148</sup> *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, Ed. and Trans. Frank Taylor and John S. Roskell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 88-9

and protect his people by engaging his enemy in single-combat. If Henry is Aeneas, the dauphin must be seen as Turnus, the stubborn adversary who can only delay the inevitable victory of the divinely-sanctioned empire. Henry's courage is only made to seem greater when the dauphin refuses to meet him "persona ad personam." Whether or not the story is true, the clear Virgilian intertext serves to fashion Henry as an epic hero in the classical tradition.

The chronicles record further examples of exceptional bravery and strength, most famously the battle of Agincourt, in which Henry led a greatly outnumbered English force to victory. Henry seems to have been perfectly aware of the daunting task facing him, and the chance for glory only feeds his determination to fight. Adam Usk reports: "Rex, Deo se et gladii fortune animose et tanquam alter leo se committens, decem uix milibus bellicosus stipatus, uersus Calisiam perendinandum, per medium pagi, imo per medium Francie, pontium ob fracturam, cautus uias suas dirigit" [The king, committing himself to God and to the fortunes of the sword, set off bravely like a lion with barely ten thousand soldiers right through the middle of the land – through the middle of France, indeed – for the bridges had been destroyed, intending to stay at Calais].<sup>149</sup> In the *Gesta*, Henry and the author credit God for giving the English the victory after the battle, but when Henry later returns to England, the text goes on to celebrate the king himself as hero:

Et nec recolit senioritas nostra quod unquam princeps aliquis magis laboriose, strenuius vel humanius populum suum regebat per viam, seu qui manu propria se viriliter gerebat in campo, ymmo nec reperitur in cronicis vel annalibus Regum de quo antiquitas nostra meminit quod unquam Rex aliquis Anglie tot expedivit in tam brevi tempore et cum tanto et tam glorioso triumpho ad propria remigravit. Soli deo honor et Gloria in secula seculorum. Amen.

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<sup>149</sup> *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377-1421*, Ed. and trans. C. Given-Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 256-7

Nor do our older men remember any prince ever having commanded his people on the march with more effort, bravery, or consideration, or having, with his own hand, performed greater feats of strength in the field. Nor, indeed, is evidence to be found in the chronicles or annals of kings of which our long history makes mention, that any king of England ever achieved so much in so short a time and returned home with so great and so glorious a triumph. To God alone be the honour and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen. (pp.100-01)

Although God receives his due honor at the end of the passage, the *Gesta* figures Henry as the consummate soldier who “with his own hand” (“*manu propria*”) entered the fray and led the English to victory. The *Brut* corroborates Henry’s personal involvement with the fighting, noting that “he most fi3t with his owne honde3.”<sup>150</sup>

Henry’s return to London after his first campaign occasioned an elaborate celebration throughout the city that helped to secure the king’s reputation as a legendary hero. Henry’s procession was met by throngs of citizens who had decorated the city to honor their victorious monarch and commemorate English military supremacy. Adam Usk reports:

In ingressu pontis London’ unus gigantissimus armatus, ut alter Pallas, longitudine excedens muros, et cum lancia ut altera Turni... et cum una secure permaxima, eciam solo eius flatu non solum ad nemora struendum, uerumeciam ad exercitum cedendum... In medio pontis, ante eius leuabilem pontem, duo stant propugnacula, in quorum uno a dextris unus leo lanceatus, et in altero antelupus cum armis Regis circumcollatus, et ultra pontem ymago sancti Georgii decenter armata, ad ipsius pontis custodiam statuuntur positi.

At the entrance to London bridge there stood an enormous armed figure, like a second Pallas, taller even than the walls, carrying a lance like that of Turnus... and an enormous axe by the very breath of which not only might whole forests be piled high, but an entire army might be slaughtered...

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<sup>150</sup> Friedrich W. D. Brie, ed. *The Brut, or the Chronicles of England* (London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. for the Early English Text Society, 1908), p. 378



[I]n the middle of the bridge, in front of the drawbridge, stood two bulwarks, with a lion armed with a lance on the right-hand one, and an antelope, bearing the royal arms around its neck on the other, while beyond the bridge stood a fully-armed figure of St. George; these had been placed there to stand guard over the bridge. (pp.260-61)

While the king carried himself with humility and much of the celebration focused on praising God for favoring the English nation, the statues of Pallas and the “fully-armed” St. George and the display of the royal arms served to align Henry with military heroes and figure him as the righteous embodiment of English might. Lee Patterson has noted that “the theme of providential guidance was expressed with particular insistence,” which would seem to deflect attention away from the person of the king, whose own “quiet demeanor, gentle pace, and sober progress” was seen a sign of his humble piety and selflessness (*Gesta* 112-13). The ostentatious pageantry and focus on the king as victor certainly served to elevate Henry’s stature in the minds of the citizenry.<sup>151</sup>

Henry V’s early military victories allowed him to enjoy popularity not experienced by his immediate predecessors. While his militarism forwarded the Lancastrian project of legitimization, his subsequent campaigns endangered both the physical body of the king and his favorable reputation. Although his successes culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, which united the crowns of England and France, his subjects began to grow dissatisfied with the king’s absence from England and the economic strain that continued warfare was putting on the realm.<sup>152</sup> Having achieved epic success, Henry returns to the romance realm.

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<sup>151</sup> Lee Patterson, “Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate,” *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 84. Patterson suspects a “manipulated and manipulating complexity of Henry’s self-presentation,” suggesting that his outward display of piety, while probably sincere, also served a political purpose.

<sup>152</sup> Seward, pp. 175-6

Adam Usk ends his chronicle with by expressing serious concern for the well-being of the nation and the danger that Henry's campaigns bring upon himself as he faces threats both abroad and at home:

...et quam uindictam augmentaturus dominus rex quoscumque peccuniosos, diuites et paupers, per totum regnum dilaniando, fortissime in Franciam redire disponit. Sed heu me, ualide persone et regni peccunie circa hoc negocium dilabuntur miserime. Et nemirum exaccionibus populi importabilibus hoc exigentibus, cum murmure et oculata maladiccione, sed interna, sequentibus et excessum detestantibus. Vtinam non sit dominus meus supremus gladii furoris Domini, cum Iulio, cum Assuro, cum Alexandro, cum Ectore, cum Siro, cum Dario, cum Machabeo, finaliter particeps.

...and it is in order to avenge it that the lord king is now fleecing everyone with any money, rich or poor, throughout the realm, in readiness for his return to France in great force. Yet I fear, alas, that both the great men and the money of the kingdom will be miserably wasted on the enterprise. No wonder, then, that the unbearable impositions being demanded from the people to this end are accompanied by dark -- though private -- mutterings and curses, and by hatred of such extortions; and I pray that my supreme lord may not in the end, like Julius, and Ahasuerus, and Alexander, and Hector, and Cyrus, and Darius, and Macchabeus, incur the sword of the Lord's fury. (pp.270-1)

Usk here speaks to his audience in Lancastrian terms by grouping Henry among legendary heroes, as he reminds his readers that heroes die young, often as a result of overreaching. At the time that Usk is writing, Henry's only son and heir would have just been born, and so he and his fellow citizens would have feared that the death of the king could bring about serious threats to the Lancastrian line. Henry's recent exploits have led to a dangerous discontent at home and Usk is aware that the more Henry fights, the greater the possibility of his being mortally wounded in battle. By misusing his power and seeking to wage unnecessary wars, the king may face God's justice, as all hubristic warriors eventually do. Usk invokes the names of the very heroes that Henry seeks to emulate in order to remind him of their tragic ends.

Henry V was a hero, and while a hero enjoys tremendous glory during his lifetime, his death creates an absence that often endangers their realm. Henry overcame early threats to his kingship after his ascension to the throne and his first campaign in France shored up popular support, but his militarism and extended absence from England left him vulnerable. Even if he could take steps to ensure political stability while he occupied the throne, the king's militarism continuously put his body at risk. Indeed, Henry had been seriously injured as a young man at the Battle of Shrewsbury, having been shot in the face with an arrow, a fact noted only in passing in the chronicles and conspicuously absent from some of the biographies and the *Brut*.<sup>153</sup> Even the pro-Lancastrian texts like the *Gesta* describe the hardships faced by the English soldiers and present the brutality of battle in frightening detail. According to Titus Livius, when Henry learned that the French had laid siege to Harfleur, he made preparations to travel to France and personally lead the effort to dissolve the siege. Elmham writes that Henry's eagerness to go to battle had to be assuaged by the Holy Roman Emperor, Sigismund, who happened to be visiting Henry in England at the time. The author of the *Gesta* provides a first-hand account of a particularly treacherous trip from Calais to Dover when a storm arose and almost destroyed Henry's fleet. Henry himself was certainly aware of the great possibility that he might not return

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<sup>153</sup> Henry's injury and the texts' treatment (or lack thereof) of the incident has received almost no critical attention, possibly because it had been regarded as a superficial wound. Titus Livius in the *Vita Henrici Quinti* uses the episode to portray Henry's valor, writing that Henry refused to leave the field and encouraged his fellow soldiers to continue fighting, saying that if he was fighting wounded then so should they. However, the subsequent discovery of an early fifteenth-century manuscript detailing surgical techniques proves that Henry's wound was more serious than has previously been acknowledged. The manuscript is Thomas Morstede's *Fair Book of Surgery*, which was bound with other medical works in a volume entitled "Chirurgicall Tracts, Medicinal Receipts, etc." The manuscript has been transcribed and printed in R Theodore Beck, *The Cutting Edge: Early Histories of the Surgeons of London* (London: Lund Humphries, 1974). Morstede reports: "In the iij<sup>te</sup> yer of kynge Herry the iiij<sup>te</sup> on Mary Mawdlen Evyn at the batell of schrewesbery yt happyn soo that Herry the worthy prynce and eyr of the sayd Herry kynge was smetyn in the face be syd the nose on the lefte syd with an arow the wyche sayd arow entryd overwharte and after the schafte wase takyn owt and the hede ther of a bodstyll in the hyndrparte of abone of the hede after the mesur of vj ynche and that was John Bradmor surgen to the kynge and helyd hym in the castell of Kelyngworth..." (p.117). The text goes on to describe the instrument used by the surgeon to remove the arrow and heal what could have been a fatal wound.

from campaign, as he had wills drawn up before leaving for France in 1415, 1417, and 1421.<sup>154</sup>

The enthusiasm over Henry's victories was tempered by anxiety about the possibility that Henry might meet the inevitable fate of all romance heroes: a tragic death on the battlefield. While Fortune had favored the king and the English nation, it would only be a matter of time before her wheel would begin its downward turn.

### **The Uses of History and the Problem of Romance**

Lydgate recognizes that the commissioning of *Troy Book* provides him with a valuable opportunity to establish himself as an English *auctor* and to reshape Henry's political agenda. As we have seen, Henry's agenda was modeled on the genre of romance, a genre that Lydgate believes counterproductive to the realization of Henry's personal and political aims. What Henry seeks to find through the reading and emulation of chivalric romance, Lydgate locates in the genre of history. Lydgate, therefore, begins *Troy Book* with the expressed purpose of recovering the Troy story from the genre of romance in an effort to provide his patron with a new model of political and textual legitimization. Lydgate promises Henry that it is only through attention to the lessons of history and a rejection of his desire for romance that he will realize his political and personal ambitions. Furthermore, if *Troy Book* succeeds in guiding the Prince toward a successful and peaceful reign, Lydgate can realize his own authorial ambitions through his textual production of a new Trojan and English literary history, one that can present Henry V as

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<sup>154</sup> For the text and analysis of Henry's wills, see Patrick and Felicity Strong, "The Last Will and Codicils of Henry V," *English Historical Review* 96 (1981): 79-102

a triumphant rather than tragic heroic exemplar in the classical tradition, and, by extension, make Lydgate into a true *auctor*.<sup>155</sup>

For Lydgate, history is the record of things that happened in the past.<sup>156</sup> As such, it serves what Suzanne Fleischman calls a “commemorative function”; that is, it preserves and celebrates the deeds of heroic figures and, in so doing, it makes these events knowable to the readers of history.<sup>157</sup> It is through the remembrance of these events that readers can learn not only exemplary patterns of behavior but also how to avoid repeating the mistakes that led to the downfall of great kingdoms. This is how past writers of history envisioned their project, as Lydgate explains that they set down these events “vn-to this fyn, that we wer nat behyled / [o]f necligence thoru3 for3etilnesse” (Pro. 154-5). If history is not truthfully recorded in texts, it threatens to repeat itself in life, thus perpetuating the endless cycle of recursion most commonly understood in the Middle Ages as Fortune. C. David Benson identifies three conceptions of Fortune in *Troy Book*, each of which Lydgate appropriates at various times. Fortune can operate outside of the realm of human agency by representing either simple chance or the working of divine justice. In opposition to these two models, Lydgate also presents a Boethian view of Fortune, which suggests that men can, through proper understanding and action, determine their own fate by applying the moral lessons learned from knowing how Fortune operated in the past.<sup>158</sup> Colin Fewer suggests that “part of Lydgate’s project is to demystify the operation of

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<sup>155</sup> Here, by “literary history” I mean a self-consciously aesthetic representation of history that seeks to supplant chronicle in terms of cultural value.

<sup>156</sup> Paul Strohm, “*Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie*: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives,” *Speculum* 46 (1971): 352

<sup>157</sup> Suzanne Fleischman, “On the Representation of Truth and Fiction in the Middle Ages,” *History and Theory* 22 (1983): 283

<sup>158</sup> C. David Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980): 120-24

Fortune, locating the origins of historical processes in the contingent sphere of human action and motivation.”<sup>159</sup> The reading of history, therefore, offers the reader the moral instruction necessary for stopping the turning of Fortune’s wheel through virtuous action.

For readers to reach proper moral conclusions, historical writing should not only allow past events to enter into memory but it must present the facts in such a way that the truth can be known. For Lydgate, truth involves both the veracity of the historical record and its moral significance. The writing of history, therefore, simultaneously looks back to the event and anticipates its own exegesis. John Finlayson remarks that Lydgate values history “as a series of pre-determined events which provide the artist with opportunities for rhetorical flourish and exemplary comment.”<sup>160</sup> The representations of these events in historical texts serve “[t]o make a merour only to our mynde / [t]o seen eche thing trely as it was” (168-9), and it is only through clear vision on the part of both writers and readers that historical events can function as *exempla*. In “Englishing” a history of Troy, Lydgate’s dual roles of translator and poet require that he remain faithful to Guido’s historical account while exploiting his own particular rhetorical ability to illuminate each event’s moral significance. As Lois Ebin has effectively demonstrated, the idea of poet as illuminator fundamentally characterizes Lydgate’s understanding of his literary intent and responsibility. “As an illuminator or enlightener,” she writes, “the poet uses language to underscore significant truths to lead readers to order and harmony.”<sup>161</sup>

By employing of both poetic language and moral commentary, Lydgate offers *Troy Book* as explicitly didactic historiography that seeks as its aim the creation of a virtuous royal subject

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<sup>159</sup> Colin Fewer, “John Lydgate’s *Troy Book* and the Ideology of Prudence,” *Chaucer Review* 38 (2004): 231.

<sup>160</sup> Finlayson, “Guido De Columnis’ *Historia...*,” p. 152

<sup>161</sup> Lois A. Ebin, *Illuminator, Maker, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 39

in Prince Henry. Recent critics, including Benson, Fewer, and Robert Edwards have agreed that the virtue that Lydgate privileges throughout his poem is prudence.<sup>162</sup> Prudence involves the proper understanding of particular external circumstances as well as self-governance, both of which are necessary in order for one to act wisely and avoid tragedy. The understanding of one's particular circumstances requires an awareness of the historical contingencies that led to the current situation so that one may rightly anticipate the consequences of each available course of action.<sup>163</sup> "Negligence thoru3 for3etilnesse" (155) can be tragic consequence of the relentless march of time – what Lydgate calls "the serpent of age" (156) – which threatens to devour history and render it unavailable to modern subjects. Forgetting makes prudence impossible and forestalls the recognition of implicit consequence, which allows the tragic cycle of history to continue to repeat. The exercise of prudence provides a way of escaping this cycle and creating new history, of shaping circumstances that best reflect and perpetuate continued moral action. Prudence is both a personal and political necessity, as it is the only way of ensuring the well-being of one's own body and the body politic. For Lydgate, it is the means by which Henry can successfully achieve and maintain stability in "the unstable progress of history."<sup>164</sup>

While the writing of history can teach prudence and virtuous action through *exempla*, the inclusion of romance elements threatens to undermine its moral value. For Lydgate, erotic desire poses a significant threat to prudence by subsuming the heroic subject's self-governance. While previous writers of the Trojan legend had found erotic desire to be a force that drives action and,

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<sup>162</sup> C. David Benson, "Prudence, Othea, and Lydgate's Death of Hector," *American Benedictine Review* 26 (1975): 115-23 and *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*, pp.116-29; Robert R. Edwards, "Lydgate's *Troy Book* and the Confusion of Prudence," *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages: Studies in Cultural History of North-Western Europe*, Thomas R. Liszka and Lorna E. M. Walker, eds. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001): 52-69

<sup>163</sup> Edwards, p. 57

<sup>164</sup> Fewer, p. 241

therefore, history, Lydgate seeks to separate the erotic from the political. Desire, for Lydgate, always leads to what Edwards calls “the confusion of prudence,” by which he means “both misunderstanding and undoing.” Edwards explains, “Though prudence offers the hope of outwitting Fortune by anticipating the consequences of action, the correlative problem is to escape the consequences of false and sham prudence” (57). In *Troy Book* the exercising of “false prudence” most frequently occurs during the narrative’s romance episodes as desire, erotic and exotic, clouds the judgment of the heroic subject and leads him toward the type of *ambages* that always precede a tragic downfall.

Lydgate sees romance as a flawed genre that counters the moral fashioning of a heroic historical subject. Because it operates outside the sphere of actual historical contingency, romance removes the possibility of prudence and supplies in its stead “sham prudence.” Recent theoretical examinations of the function of romance have celebrated the genre’s ability to encode historical truths in stories of fantasy in order to offer cultural critique.<sup>165</sup> While modern critics may (rightly) appreciate the literary achievement of those authors who successfully mask a subversive counter-discourse within seemingly nationalistic narratives of empire, a writer like Lydgate, who attempts to provide clear moral and political guidance to his sovereign, finds such ambiguity and ambivalence extremely troubling. These “magical narratives,” to use Frederic Jameson’s famous phrase, cannot provide the same type of *exempla* as historical writings because the actions of the hero can never truly be characterized as “prudent” in any real sense when they are in response to fantastic, rather than historical, circumstances. As Jameson notes, “[F]ar from being an emissary of the ‘upper world,’ the hero of romance is something closer to

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<sup>165</sup> This is the central argument of Geraldine Heng’s *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003)



an observer, a mortal spectator surprised by supernatural conflict, who then himself is gradually drawn in, to reap the rewards of victory without even quite being aware of what was at stake in the first place.”<sup>166</sup> Morton Bloomfield has argued that romance is constituted by “irrational episodes” that deny the need for proper motivation in the narrative.<sup>167</sup> Despite the hero’s lack of genuine awareness and the abandonment of rational or realistic contingencies, however, romance celebrates the hero’s individual achievements by commemorating his victories as if they result from prudent deliberation and virtuous action.

The presence of sham prudence in romance results from the genre’s presentation of a sham hero in a sham world. As John Finlayson points out, “[T]he character of the romance hero is largely an idealization which bears little relation to social reality and certainly did not spring from it. The romance hero conforms to a code of behavior which was largely a literary creation and convention, rarely observed in practice.”<sup>168</sup> Romance is a genre created from the projection of desire rather than a reflection of reality, and, as such, it reaffirms the desires of its readers rather than questioning the value of these desires in relation to their historical circumstances. The martial and erotic adventures of romance heroes stem from their desire to leave the political sphere of the court and seek out the exotic in order to secure individual fame rather than address the needs of the realm. The romance narrative obliges this desire and, in so doing, legitimates it for both the hero and the reader of the text. It provides, therefore, an escape from historical necessity and functions as “an antidote to the sluggishness of time when we are *not* having fun; it

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<sup>166</sup> Frederic Jameson, “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre,” *New Literary History* 7 (1975): 139

<sup>167</sup> Morton W. Bloomfield, “Episodic Narrative and Marvels in Epic and Romance,” *Essays and Explorations: Studies in Ideas, Language and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 106

<sup>168</sup> John Finlayson, “Definitions of Medieval Romance,” *Chaucer Review* 15 (1980-81): 54

keeps desire moving over the blunt repetitiveness of the drive.”<sup>169</sup> The indulgence of escapist fantasies may account for the popularity of romance in all of its various forms in the Middle Ages and across time, but it also marks the genre, for a writer like Lydgate, as a dangerous alternative to facing the troubling historical realities of the day.

If the goal of historical writing is remembrance, romance is the genre of forgetting. David Quint has argued that the romance and epic elements that comprise the *Aeneid*, for instance, work to legitimize the Augustan policies of *clementia* and *pietas* that were enacted in order to repair the division caused by the recent civil war. Quint explains, “Clemency and revenge are both strategies for overcoming the past, the first by forgetting, the second by undoing; the first sees repetition of the past as regressive, the second sees in such repetition the possibility of mastery, and, as these negative and positive types of repetition produce the opposing romance and epic narratives of the two halves of the poem.”<sup>170</sup> Romance seeks an erasure of historical trauma by offering a replacement narrative that deflects attention toward the celebration of heroic triumph in a past that never really existed. By presenting an explicitly counter-historical narrative, it attempts to prevent the past from becoming present.

Considering the problematic circumstances by which the Lancastrians came to occupy the throne, we can see why romance’s historical erasure would have a certain appeal. Paul Strohm has argued that the Lancastrians “were committed from the outset to a program of *official* forgetfulness: a forgetfulness embracing their own dynastic origins, their predecessor’s fate, the promises and alliances which had gained them a throne.”<sup>171</sup> The “amnesiac text” that

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<sup>169</sup> L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, “Simply Marvelous,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 23.

<sup>170</sup> David Quint, *Epic and Romance: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 78

<sup>171</sup> Strohm, *England’s Empty Throne*, p. 196

defines Lancastrian rule allows for a revision of history, but, as Strohm points out, it never truly succeeds in erasing the past. For example, even if Prince Hal's youthful indiscretions were merely textual inventions, they always carry a threat of return. Strohm writes, "The wildness...cannot and does not go away; even the 'reformed' prince, the prince of maturity and self-imposed restraint, cannot immunize himself from this suggestion of his unruly origins" (213). This return is exhibited by the "mature" King Henry through his relentless campaigning in France and is recorded as such by writers like Usk, as mentioned above. As Lydgate is working toward the completion of *Troy Book*, as he nears the end of the Trojan War and the return narratives of the Greeks, he finds that Henry's past remains present, that the project of forgetting only succeeds in making remembrance more possible, especially for Henry's detractors. For Lydgate, Henry's attempt to replace recent English history with his own romance adventures can only preclude the king from ever gaining mastery over the history that he wishes to control.

Lydgate's attitude toward the genres of history and romance is unambiguous: history is functional and romance is dysfunctional. In seeking to fashion Henry as a morally and politically prudent subject, Lydgate must convince the king to reject romance as a literary model for his rule and learn from the lessons that history can provide. For this to succeed, Lydgate must first fashion Henry as a prudent reader so that the moral lessons of *Troy Book* can be easily seen. With these exigencies in mind, Lydgate attempts to promote his text as a recovery of the "truth" of the Troy story from competing versions that conflate romance and history, versions that always threaten to lead the reader away from history and trap him within the moral and exegetical labyrinth of romance. He does this not by excising the romance elements that intrude upon Trojan history, but rather through a careful writing of these episodes that emphasizes the

exegetical problem of the romance genre so that he can redirect his reader's desire back to history.

### **The Surplus of Troy**

Romance becomes a real threat when it masquerades as history, and the medieval Troy story always presents this problematic conflation. Lydgate writes that "3e may beholde in bokys/ [t]he story fully rehersed new and newe" (252-3), and we should be thankful for those "clerkys" (255) who have preserved the truth and kept it alive for modern readers. In opposition to these faithful writers of history are poets who have not illuminated, but rather darkened, the truth of the matter. They have purposefully not rehearsed the story as it actually happened:

But it transformed in her poysy  
Thoru3 veyn[e] fables, whiche of entencioun  
They han contrived by false transumpcioun  
To hyde trouthe falsely vnder cloude... (262-65)

"Veyn fable" poses as historical truth but is not available to the same type of moral hermeneutic. The problem with Troy is that its textual history is one in which the truth of the story is often eclipsed by authorial bias and poetic misrepresentation, leading to the celebration of wicked men over those more deserving of praise (ll.289-98). This generic corruption – the transformation of history into romance – becomes all the more insidious when the beauty of the poetry makes the shift difficult to distinguish.

In his castigation of Homer, Ovid, and Virgil for their poetic fictions, Lydgate is amplifying what he finds in the prologue of his primary source, Guido's *Historia*, the Latin text

that supposedly presents the complete story of Troy based on the eyewitness accounts of Dares and Dictys.<sup>172</sup> Guido's text is recognized as the authoritative history of Troy, commendable for Guido's faithfulness to the "substance" of the story (359), his ability "enlvmyneth by craft & cadence / This noble story with many fresche colour / Of rethorik" (362-4). Lydgate hopes to "folwe as ny3e as euer I may" in Guido's vaunted footsteps and continue to illumine the truth of the story as he presents it in English verse (375). Benson has argued that Lydgate "sees his task as preserving the eyewitness truth of the *Historia* – getting right all its facts and details," which explains why he finds it necessary to include in his translation almost everything that he finds in his source.<sup>173</sup> Benson cites Lydgate's commitment to historical fidelity in order to defend him against critical charges of poetic incompetence, a not-uncommon explanation for Lydgate's infamous verbosity.<sup>174</sup> Derek Pearsall and John Finlayson have argued that Lydgate is certainly interested in historical fact but that his primary focus is on using the Troy story for his didactic purposes rather than simply setting the story straight.<sup>175</sup> What seems to have gone largely unnoticed, however, is that in translating Guido's "true" and complete account of the Troy story, Lydgate must come to terms with episodes that are clearly fiction as even Guido's *Historia* wanders into the romance realm.

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<sup>172</sup> Guido omits Benoît as a source and claims to transcribe the incomplete Latin text of Cornelius, who omitted important elements from his own translation of Dares and Dictys.

<sup>173</sup> Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*, p. 113. Benson notes that Lydgate's "few reductions are inconsequential and usually consist of information that has nothing to do with the war itself, such as Guido's discussions of Mediterranean geography" (p. 114)

<sup>174</sup> Derek Pearsall was especially harsh in his critical biography of Lydgate, though he revised his assessment in the 1990's.

<sup>175</sup> Pearsall writes of Lydgate's understanding of his source: "It is immovable, it has authority, it is 'true', but it exists not for the sake of its own truth but for the truth that can be drawn from it." Pearsall, "Chaucer and Lydgate," p. 47. See also Finlayson, "Guido De Columnis...", p. 152

The medieval history of Troy is framed by romance, beginning with Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece and ending with Ulysses' voyage home after the war. The initial episode provides an account of the destruction of Lamedon's Troy by Jason and Hercules, which begins the cycle of retribution that comprises the Trojan narrative. Its romance elements, specifically the affair between Jason and Medea, provide Guido and Lydgate with occasion for providing moral commentary on the problem of erotic desire.<sup>176</sup> Lydgate, following Guido, is careful to point out that much of what is written about Medea's magical powers, especially by writers like Ovid, is mere fable and should not be believed since we know that no human can violate God's laws of Nature; both writers are willing to admit, however, that she was a powerful enchantress (*Historia*, Book II; *Troy Book*, Book I, ll.1707-28; 1793-98). Lydgate remains faithful to his source throughout Book I of *Troy Book*, taking just a few lines to chide Guido for his overenthusiastic condemnation of women. The episode allows him to highlight the tragic lack of foresight on the part of Lamedon and the Trojans and it sets up Lydgate's elaborate discussion of Priam's rebuilding of Troy as *Troy Book* moves into the historical realm in Book II.

The last few books of Guido's *Historia*, which tell of the Greek heroes returning home after the fall of Priam's Troy, present Lydgate with a significant problem of genre. These episodes counter Lydgate's historical project of Books II through IV and threaten to return the narrative to its romance origins in the story of Jason. These mini-romances are drawn from Dictys of Crete, a Greek sympathizer, and were considered spurious enough to have been completely excluded from all but one of the other Middle English translations of Guido. The *Seege or Batayle of Troy*, the *Laud Troy Book*, and the prose *Sege of Troy*, all of which are

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<sup>176</sup> Guido also finds occasion to present a misogynistic diatribe against women, a diatribe that Lydgate translates before offering an apology and asking that Guido, not he, be blamed. (*TB*, I, ll.2072-2135)

contemporary with *Troy Book*, end immediately after the destruction of the city and simply state that the Greeks returned home with treasure. Only *Troy Book* and the “*Gest Hystoriale*” of the *Destruction of Troy* detail their post-war adventures. Lydgate himself seems reluctant to continue the story after the fall of Troy, citing exhaustion. Benson points out that “more reduction than elsewhere” occurs in the final book and Pearsall finds that “Book V has a faintly posthumous air... Lydgate takes little interest in it, and seems in haste to finish it.”<sup>177</sup> Still, Lydgate translates the return narratives and, I suggest, in such a way that reveals that he actually takes a great deal of interest in it, despite his claims to the contrary. An important question that we must ask is why Lydgate finds it necessary to include at the end of *Troy Book* material that is potentially disruptive to his historical project. Or, to frame the question in Lydgate’s own terms, once we have already been presented with the truth of the Troy story, what do we make of the surplus?

The surplus of the story is the death of Ulysses, whose perilous voyage home occupies a significant part of Book V. His post-war activities as recounted in Dictys chronicle are only loosely based on Homer’s *Odyssey* and their inclusion in Guido’s *Historia* and Lydgate’s *Troy Book* necessitates a double shift in generic mode as Ulysses embarks on a series of fantastic (or, as Lydgate terms them, “wonderful”) adventures before returning to Ithaca to reclaim his throne. As Ulysses fights the Cyclops and enjoys a lengthy sojourn with the enchantress Circe, the narrative clearly moves from history to romance. When Ulysses finally makes it back to his kingdom, he takes his place in history by consolidating his power and ensuring his succession by marrying his son Telamon to the daughter of King Alphenon, thus uniting two crowns in a

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<sup>177</sup> Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*, p. 114; Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 143

“mighty alliance” (V.2300). Although Lydgate seems content to leave Ulysses living with Penelope “in Ioie and in solace” (2311), there is one final chapter to be found in his source and it is with great rhetorical reluctance that Lydgate returns to Ulysses “of his ende þe surplus for to telle” (2914).

The word “surplus” carries the connotation current in modern usage of what is left over, but for Lydgate it is also the insidious and potentially misleading aspect of dialectic. He uses the word only three other times in all of *Troy Book*, twice during discussions of women’s fickleness. Perhaps not surprisingly, the word appears in Book I during the Jason and Medea story where Lydgate warns that women’s speech is not to be trusted:

For if þe trouthe inwardly be sou3te,  
With þe *surpluse* and remnaunte of her þou3te,  
Men may þer þe trewe patron fynde  
Of Inconstaunce... (I.1865-68)

“Surplus” is that which is in excess of truth, a narrative or language that leads the subject away from that which is to be heeded. In women, surplus originates in their uncontrollable lust; for men, the blindness wrought by unchecked desire may allow what is “surplus” to appear as truth, often with tragic consequences. By characterizing the Ulysses story as “surplus,” Lydgate attempts to forestall potential misreadings by reminding the reader of his responsibility to practice a prudent and historically aware hermeneutic. But if the “surplus” is, by definition, misleading, the question must again be asked as to why Lydgate chooses to include the surplus in his *Troy Book*.

Lydgate uses Ulysses’ death as an opportunity to illustrate textually the dialectic opposition between romance and history, between surplus and truth. In his translation of



Guido's account, Lydgate simultaneously highlights and suppresses the story's romance elements in order to emphasize the exegetical problem of the romance genre while locating its disruptive elements in human agency. By endowing the story with greater human accountability (Ulysses' death, while unavoidable, results from his own failures), Lydgate offers a final indictment of erotic desire as a dangerous force that forestalls the virtue of prudence. As he is completing *Troy Book* in the early 1420s, Henry continues to organize and participate in military expeditions into France, so we can see how the Ulysses story would seem particularly exigent to Lydgate. It is this particular narrative in which Lydgate's poetic vision is most fully realized as he represents the threat of romance, the triumph of prudence, and a warning for Henry V to abandon his desire for romance and take his place in history.

### **Ulysses' Endless Romance**

Ulysses has long been recognized as the original and most enduring symbol of the romance genre; in the Western tradition, Homer's *Odyssey* is the genre's foundational text. As Quint points out, "The romance that Virgilian epic sees as the 'other' of its teleological plot is almost pure adventure – embodied in the wandering ship of Odysseus tossed by the winds of fortune."<sup>178</sup> As a character, Ulysses has been subject to various allegorical appropriations, but throughout the Middle Ages he is consistently defined by overwhelming and often tragic personal desires: martial, erotic, and, according to Dante, epistemological.<sup>179</sup> Piero Boitani

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<sup>178</sup> Quint, p. 9

<sup>179</sup> For comprehensive studies of the character of Ulysses from the classical through the modern eras, see W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963); Harold Bloom, ed. *Odysseus/Ulysses* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991), and Piero Boitani, *The Shadow of Ulysses: Figures of a Myth*, trans. Anita Weston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

summarizes the Greek hero's trajectory in each singular text and across time: "The centre of the circle Odysseus described in twenty years of war and exploits was Ithaca; at the centre of the circle of the second half of his life lies the world of the dead. 'Circular' Odysseus is becoming a 'linear' Ulysses, whose definitive *telos* is Hades."<sup>180</sup> Though roundly praised for his eloquence and celebrated for individual achievements, Ulysses ultimately embodies romance's dark secret: that continued wandering through the world of the unknown can only lead to certain death. The version of Ulysses' return from Ithaca that appears at the end of the medieval Troy story demonstrates that romance is inescapable and potentially lethal.<sup>181</sup>

In narrating the final chapter of the Troy story, Lydgate relies on Guido's *Historia* and Gower's "Tale of Circe and Ulysses" in Book VI of *Confessio Amantis*.<sup>182</sup> An examination of Lydgate's careful reworking of this narrative will demonstrate the manner in which he uses the Ulysses episode to illustrate the problem of genre. In order to ensure a proper reading of the story, Lydgate carefully signals the story's generic shifts from history to romance and back to history. The death of Ulysses serves as a warning to those who refuse to recognize the distinction, as Telemachus' patricide enacts a tragic conflation of romance and history that

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<sup>180</sup> Boitani, p. 19

<sup>181</sup> The story is as follows: During his year with Circe, Ulysses fathered a child named Telegonus. After returning to Ithaca, he rules the kingdom in peace for a number of years until one night a figure appears to him in a dream. Attracted by her appearance, Ulysses tries to embrace the figure, but she pulls back and tells him that his "affeccioun... is so perilous,/ So inly mortal and contagious" that "oon of vs moste anon be ded" (*TB*, V.3005-3010). Unable to interpret the meaning of this dream, Ulysses seeks the counsel of wise men, who tell him that he will be killed by his next of kin. In an effort to avoid his fate, Ulysses has Telemachus, his son by Penelope, imprisoned, and he locks himself in a well-guarded fortress. Telegonus, having reached maturity, decides to seek his father, and when he attempts to enter Ulysses' fortress, a fight ensues. Hearing the commotion, Ulysses runs to the gate, where he is mortally wounded by his son. It is only after being pierced with Telegonus' spear that Ulysses recalls his dream and asks who this stranger is that has slain him. Telegonus reveals his identity and Ulysses' realizes that his fate has been fulfilled. He sends for Telemachus, whose attempt to kill Telegonus is stopped only by Ulysses' intervention. Ulysses makes peace between his sons before finally expiring. The Troy story ends with the two sons of Ulysses ruling their separate kingdoms in peace.

<sup>182</sup> Claire Fanger, "Magic and the Metaphysics of Gender in Gower's 'Tale of Circe and Ulysses,'" *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Asheville: Pegasus Press, 1998): 203-19

threatens continuing violence, which is forestalled only by Ulysses' final moment of historical consciousness. The "surplus" of Troy and *Troy Book* is thus made into a practical allegory about the problem of desire and the threat of romance, an allegory that Lydgate hopes will have special resonance for his adventurous patron and king.

After departing Troy, most of the Greek heroes encounter difficulties involving personal feud and political intrigue as they attempt to reclaim their kingdoms; Ulysses' trials, however, include distinctly romantic elements. Lydgate signals a generic shift in the text as begins to narrate this episode:

O Vlixes, by ordre in my writing,  
Bin adventures comen on þe ring,  
Ful wonderful boþe on lond and se,  
Entermedlid with grete aduersite! (1781-4)

The adjective "wonderful" in line 1783 clearly signals that Ulysses "adventures" exist outside the realm of historical possibility. While the events of Trojan War and its aftermath can be explained through human action or the workings of Fortune, Ulysses' journey is shaped by encounters with exotic and supernatural beings: Polyphemus, Circe, and the Sirens. These "adventures" are "entermedlid," or intermingled, with very real obstacles, including bad weather and run-ins with sworn enemies. The word "entermedlid" speaks to the problematic manner in which the narrative sets fable alongside the historically possible without discrimination. It is the same word that Chaucer had used in the *House of Fame* to describe how rumors are carried in "scrippes Bret-ful of lesinges,/ Entremedled with tydynges" (2123-24). This mixing of fact and fiction accounts for Ulysses' fame throughout the centuries. Lydgate, by linking his text to Chaucer's, questions whether Ulysses' fame is truly deserved.

Lydgate avoids committing the same poetic offense for which he had chided Homer and Ovid in the Prologue by calling attention to the legendary nature of the Cyclops, Polyphemus. Lydgate interrupts Ulysses' account of his fight with Polyphemus, and his own translation of Guido's text, to direct the reader's attention to Ovid:

But of þis man like as writ Ovide,  
Poliphemus þe geaunt, out of drede,  
Had an eye mydde of his forhede,  
Whiche Vlixes smot out at a stroke... (1958-61)

In Ulysses' speech to Idomeneus, he mentions only that Polyphemus is a "my3ti geaunt strong" (1898) and does not include that fact that he is a Cyclops, a creature of mythological origin.

Lydgate's interruption and recapitulation of the story makes explicit Polyphemus' monstrosity, signaling the fact that Ulysses and the poem have entered the world of romance. He cites Ovid twice, emphasizing that the story's true source lies not in the history of Guido but in classical fable:

þus seith Ovide, in conclusioun  
In his boke of transformacioun –  
Methamorphoseos – þer 3e may it se,  
Whan-so-euere þat 3our leyser be  
Ceriously þe story for to rede. (1971-5)

Lydgate aligns the story with romance and denies it any practical or moral value as he tells the reader to read Ovid's account "whan-so-euere þat 3our leyser be." This episode is merely for entertainment ("leyser") unlike the true historical events from which the reader may learn virtue. Lydgate's interruption of Ulysses' story demonstrates his own knowledge of the classics and his

ability to separate history from myth. It serves, therefore, as a model for dealing with stories that would conflate the two.

Ulysses' voyage contains two other monstrous encounters that fix the narrative within the romance genre: his affair with the enchantress Circe and his passage through Charybdis, where he craftily avoids the lure of the Sirens. Lydgate makes a significant addition to Ulysses' narration of his time with Circe as presented in Guido in order to distill its magical elements. In the *Historia*, Ulysses accounts for his time spent with Circe by claiming to have succumbed to her potions:

In potestatem igitur harum duarum me fortuna deduxit, quarum vna, videlicet Circes, meo quasi amore bachata, suas inmiscuit pociones, et suarum incantacionum insidiis sic fatue me allexit quod per annum integrum non fuit michi ab ea recedendi facultas. Infra quem annum Circes grauida est facta et concepit ex me filium, qui postea natus ex ea creuit et factus est uir numium bellicosus. (Book XXXIII; p.259)

Fortune led me into the power of these two sisters, one of whom, that is, Circe, almost crazed by love for me, mixed her potions, and with the wiles of her enchantments charmed me so that I did not have the ability to leave her for a whole year. During that year Circe became pregnant and conceived a son by me, and this son, whom she bore, grew and became an exceedingly fierce hero.

Clare Fanger points out, "If Ulysses experiences any lust on his own behalf, it is never mentioned" in Guido's text.<sup>183</sup> Lydgate's Ulysses mentions Circe's powers as a sorceress, but his reason for remaining with her resides more in her erotic appeal:

"And she also so fair vp-on to se,  
pat fro hir power no man my3t[e] fle.  
For be þe werke of þis sorceresse,

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<sup>183</sup> Fanger, p. 207

I was so foned vpon hir fairnesse,  
þat finally þus with me it stood:  
þat al a 3ere I with her [a]bood,  
And pleyedly had power noon ne my3t  
For to depart, nouþer day ne ny3t,  
So lusti was þe lyf þat I ladde, --  
In whiche tyme by me a child she hadde,  
Ri3t inly fair & goodly to þe si3t.” (1995-2005)

While Guido makes no mention of Circe’s beauty, Lydgate introduces it as a cause of Ulysses’ detainment. The “werke” in line 1997 is ambiguous and can refer to either her magical powers or her natural seductiveness, but his characterization of his life with her as “lusti” suggests the latter. Although he claims to have not had the power to leave, it is clear that this “powerlessness” results from his own erotic desire, which has trapped him in the romance realm. Ulysses, therefore, bears responsibility for the conception of his son, Telegonus, the offspring of his romantic union with Circe who will eventually return to kill him. Ulysses’ description of his son as “goodly to þe si3t,” a marked departure from Guido’s text, will prove ironic when he fails to recognize Telegonus when he appears years later.

After escaping from Circe, Ulysses eventually returns to Ithaca, where he quickly dispatches of Penelope’s suitors and reclaims his throne. The narrative here shifts back into history, as Ulysses’ “wonderful” adventures have come to an end and he assumes his duties as king. His first order of business is to marry Telamon to Nausica, the daughter of King Alphenon, thereby enabling his son to claim rightful succession to two kingdoms. This consequence of the marriage is not mentioned by Guido, as Lydgate acknowledges (lines 2305-6), but considering

Henry's 1420 marriage to Katherine of Valois in his effort to secure the French crown, Lydgate's *amplificacio* bears a significant exigence. The joining of the realms of Ulysses and Alphenon in a "my3ti alliaunce" (2300) through Ulysses' "purviaunce" (2299) offers Lydgate a chance to connect Ulysses' historical awareness to England's contemporary political concerns.<sup>184</sup>

Throughout all of Ulysses' post-war travels and strange adventures, Lydgate has refrained from moralizing; after Ulysses returns to Ithaca, the poet creates an opportunity for political commentary. It is only when the narrative returns to history that the text can fulfill its useful function "to make a merour only to oure mynde" (Pro. 168).

Ulysses' story seems to come to an end after the marriage of Telamon and Nausica, as Lydgate says that he will leave him "in Ioie and in solace" (2311) to live with Penelope to reign in his kingdom until the end of his life. But after 600 lines relating Pyrrhus' struggle to regain his throne, Lydgate says that despite his weariness he must return to Ulysses in order to conclude *Troy Book* (2912-2936). This is, as mentioned above, the "surplus" of the story, yet it provides an opportunity to show how the surplus of romance might be prudently resolved. It is in this final episode that romance most explicitly and violently intrudes upon history as the unity of Ulysses' kingdom is threatened by the king's failed prudence when faced with the product of his previous romantic adventures. Ulysses' final moments, however, present the triumph of history over the threat of romance, thus allowing the episode to function as practical matter and an important lesson for Henry V.

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<sup>184</sup> Scott-Morgan Straker notes that "Henry treated marriage as a necessary concomitant to military activity" that could either secure a peaceful alliance or set the stage for future attempts at territorial expansion. Straker argues that "Lydgate's celebration of Henry's marriage cannot be read apart from the history that it concludes," and that the end of *Troy Book* is meant to lead Henry to choose peace over continued war. See "Rivalry and Reciprocity in Lydgate's *Troy Book*," *New Medieval Literatures* 3 (1999): 119-47

The last chapter of Book V opens with Lydgate's prayer to a new muse: Morpheus, the god of sleep. It is a fitting invocation since the narrative begins with a dream sent to Ulysses. More importantly, it signals to the reader the need to read with particular alertness, to fend off the sleepy charms of the god that has been invoked and the genre that he represents.<sup>185</sup> As Fradenburg has pointed out, romance "wants to keep us awake and interested in life as well as lull us to sleep."<sup>186</sup> This is precisely the danger for a poet like Lydgate for whom remembrance and historically aware deliberation are personal and political necessities. By invoking Morpheus, Lydgate reminds his reader of the need to be more awake, more alert, when treading through the dangerous waters of the romance realm. Morpheus is not only the god of sleep, however; he is also the giver of dreams, which can, if properly understood, can serve as a light in the dark (V.2939-44). Transforming the dream-world of romance into a practical and useful narrative requires, as the Ulysses episode proves, prudent deliberation and a historically aware hermeneutic.

Romance literally comes back to haunt Ulysses. A strange figure appears to him in a dream and warns him of his impending death, but Ulysses, blinded by lust, fails to correctly interpret the signs that might allow him to escape his fate. While the figure's sex is ambiguous in Guido, but most probably male, Lydgate makes the figure female:<sup>187</sup>

Hym þou3t he sawe appere a creature

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<sup>185</sup> Morpheus is particularly associated with romance in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, where he figures prominently in the romance dream-world that the narrator reads about in the opening episode of the poem (ll.62-230)

<sup>186</sup> Fradenburg, p. 22

<sup>187</sup> In the *Historia*: "Videbatur enim sibi uidere quendam ymaginem iuuenilis forme tante mirabilis speciei quod ymago non putaretur humana sed potius diuina pre nimia pulchritudine forme sue" ["For it seemed to him he saw an apparition of a handsome young man of such amazing beauty in appearance that the apparition did not appear to be human but rather divine, because of the exceeding beauty of its appearance"] (Book XXXV). Gower, attempting to explicitly align the figure with Telegonus, makes it seem masculine: "A man it semeth was it non,/ Bot yit it was as in figure/ Most lich to mannyssh creature" (VI.1526-28)



To his si3t celestial of figure –  
Noon erthely þing, but verraily devyne,  
Of port, of chere wonder femynyne,  
And, as hym sempte in his fantasye,  
Like a þing sent oute of fair[i]e. (2959-64)

Fanger observes that in his description of the figure Lydgate “has clearly shifted the tale into a different genre” and makes the entire story “far more romantic than any of the other versions.”<sup>188</sup> His use of the words “wonder,” “fantasye,” and “fairie” link the figure to romance, and his feminizing of the image emphasizes the dream’s erotic element. Because of the figure’s beauty and femininity, Ulysses is overwhelmed by desire and, consequently, unable to read the figure as a symbol of his illegitimate son.

Attracted by her beauty, Ulysses tries to embrace the figure, but she refuses his advances. When she asks him what he wants, Ulysses’ answer reveals that his erotic desire has effected an ontological crisis:

“Certis,” quod he, “my lyues emperesse,  
Wher þat 3e ben woman or goddes  
I can not deme nor Iugen half ari3t,  
I am so dirked and blendid in my si3t...  
To my recure I can no remedie,  
For lak of rouþe but I most[e] dye.  
Now haue I al, a-twexe hope & drede,

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<sup>188</sup>“Magic and the Metaphysics of Gender,” pp. 214-15

My silf declared to 3oure wommanhede.” (2985-88;2997-3000)<sup>189</sup>

Pearsall has described Ulysses’ address to the figure as “fifteen lines of the most conventional and ludicrously inappropriate courtly complaint.”<sup>190</sup> While Ulysses’ characterization throughout the centuries makes him a symbol of rhetorical eloquence, when overcome by desire and unable to clearly recognize the situation in which he finds himself, he can only resort to the language of romance, a language that enacts self-effacement and the abandonment of reason. The language of blinding and darkness harkens back to the description of Homer in the Prologue to *Troy Book* and is consistent with Lydgate’s description of other heroes who tragically fall in love. It is in stark contrast with Lydgate’s project of illumination and suggests that Ulysses will be unable to read the dream and understand its practical significance. Lydgate’s earlier characterization of the figure as “noon erthely þing” (2961), allows the reader to know what Ulysses cannot: what Ulysses desires is both a figure of romance and the genre of romance itself.

Ulysses’ desire for the dream-figure can only lead to his death, as she explains:

“Sothly,” quod she, “þin affeccioun  
Wolde fully turne to confusioun  
Of vs boþe, it is so perilous  
So inly mortal and contagious,  
þat outterly, þer geyn[e] may no red,  
But oon of vs moste anon be ded.” (3005-10)

Ulysses’ “affeccioun” negates his ability to function as a morally self-aware agent within history, as the word “confusioun” makes clear. He becomes a divided subject no longer capable of

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<sup>189</sup> The lines echo Palamon’s reaction to first seeing Emily in *The Knight’s Tale* – “I noot wher she be womman or goddesse” (*Canterbury Tales*, I.1101) – the event that sparks irreparable fraternal strife.

<sup>190</sup> Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 133

understanding historical contingency or prudent action. As the king of Ithaca, his personal confusion can only lead to confusion and division within his realm, a scenario that plays out through the rest of the narrative.

Ulysses' actions throughout the rest of the story exhibit his misunderstanding and "sham prudence." He cannot interpret the spear and the images on the banner that the dream-figure show him, images that Lydgate had earlier characterized as "tokens ful notable" and "signes verray demonstrable" (2953-4) of his imminent death. Although Ulysses had throughout the Trojan War proven himself to be extremely perceptive, now confused by his desire for romance, he cannot decipher his dream "for it surmountid, sothly, his resoun" (3037). After learning from his clerks that the dream signifies that he will be killed by his son, Ulysses devises a plan that will prevent the prophecy from coming true. His confusion, however, is evident:

He stareth brode, but he may nat se,  
His inward loke was with a cloude shent;  
But wenyng he to haue be prudent,  
Made calle his sone Thelamoun,  
And to be take & shette vp in presoun,  
He supposyng fully in his wit  
Fro alle meschef þer-by to go quyte. (3057-64)

The blindness wrought by his desire prohibits Ulysses from seeing a clear course of action. He seems to act prudently in imprisoning Telamon, but he fails to remember that he has had a second son with Circe. In the next twenty lines, Lydgate explains how the signs in the dream clearly signify this second son, making the offspring of Ulysses' romantic adventures available only to the readers of Lydgate's history and thus contrasting Ulysses' blindness with the

illuminating power of the text. Ulysses acts with a “sham prudence” that facilitates his own tragic end and threatens the security of his kingdom.

When Telegonus, now a grown man and eager to meet his father, arrives in Achaia, he is turned away at the door by a porter who had been instructed not to admit anyone in order to protect the king. A fight ensues and fifteen men are killed. When Ulysses arrives on the scene and attempts to kill the intruder, Telegonus mortally wounds him, thus fulfilling the prophecy. Neither Telegonus nor Ulysses is fully aware of the situation until Telegonus identifies himself as the son of Circe, at which point Ulysses recognizes that “my woful destine fulfilled is” (3231-2). Telegonus, the physical embodiment of the fusion of history and romance, disrupts Ulysses’ historical realm with chaotic violence that results in the death of the king and possibly, with the introduction of this second son, a threat to succession. At this moment, Ulysses’ personal confusion becomes political.

Ulysses does manage to redeem himself and save his kingdom from continuing violence through a final moment of historical self-awareness. After he, through “faderly pite” (3272), prevents Telamon from avenging his death, Ulysses diplomatically preserves the unity and stability of his realm:

And amyde of al his greuous peyne,  
By his prudence – & þat was don anon –  
He made his sones for to be al oon  
And gaf in charge vn-to Thelamoun,  
Of enternes and affeccioun  
And of hool herte, feyned neuer-adel,  
Al his lyue to loue his broþer wel,

To parte with hym tresour, gold, & good,

As to þe nexte born of al his blood. (3274-82)

In making Telamon and Telegonus “to be al oon,” Ulysses ends their division, and his command that Telamon provide his brother and his descendents with treasure serves to prevent future disputes over succession. Ulysses’ final act is recognized by Lydgate as truly prudent and its practical benefits are manifest as Telegonus and Telamon each rule their respective kingdoms in peace for a generation. The death of Ulysses thus resolves the generic crisis of Trojan historiography by representing the desire for romance as a disruptive force that must be rejected.

### **Conclusion: Lydgate’s Eternal Rewards**

Although the primary purpose of *Troy Book* is to use classical history as a mirror for England’s modern history, Lydgate includes a look to the future as a final appeal for Henry to reject romantic desire. Ulysses’ “wonderful” adventures in Book V include a visit to “a spiritual oracle” (2034), where Ulysses inquires about the fate of a man’s soul after death. Since this information is “reserued vn-to Goddes my3t” (2048), he receives no answer. After Ulysses’ death, Lydgate refuses to speculate on where his soul now resides: “I can nat seyn, pleynly, to what cost / After þis lyf þat his soule is goon” (3288-9). He does include in his narrative, however, the fates of Telamon and Telegonus’ souls: “And boþe two to Iubiter þei wende, / To regne þere among þe sterris bri3t” (3324-25). Ulysses sons, having chosen peace over war and eschewed the desire for romance that had plagued their father, enjoy spiritual transcendence. Although they were not Christians, their good governance earns them recognition and reward after death, an option unavailable to most other pagans.

The apotheosis of Telamon and Telegonus that concludes the Troy story in *Troy Book* is an original addition by Lydgate; it does not appear in any of his sources. Neither Guido, Dares nor Dictys mentions this heavenly reward. While Guido ends his *Historia* with epitaphs for Hector and Achilles, the two most famous heroes of the Trojan conflict, Lydgate chooses not to translate these memorials, instead ending his account with a celebration of Ulysses' sons who chose peace over war. With their souls shining as stars, Telamon and Telegonus will continue to reign in the realm of Jupiter, and their fame will never be lost even as the progression of time obscures the names of other men, as Lydgate had warned against his Prologue. Their apotheosis recalls the final fate of Troilus in Chaucer's poem, but the two brothers serve as a symbol of futurity and eternity rather than a mocking comment on the pagan past. Troilus' apotheosis is a post-death moral corrective as he looks back and laughs at the "false worldes brotelnesse" (*Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1832); Telamon and Telegonus, the two figures who look toward the future and exercise prudence and virtue during their lives, are rewarded with eternal rule amongst the stars.

The epilogue to *Troy Book* includes Lydgate's prayer for Henry's eternal soul, asking that the king be granted the same fate enjoyed by Ulysses' sons:

So þat his name may be magnified  
Here in þis lyf vp to þe sterres clere,  
And afterward aboute þe nynþe spere,  
Whan he is ded, for to han a place! (3600-03)

Eternal fame and heavenly glory awaits those who learn from Ulysses' mistakes, those who avoid the threat of romance through proper attention to history. Lydgate praises Henry's achievements in conquering France and uniting the two crowns throughout the final lines of *Troy*

*Book*, and he wishes that since Henry has, through his knighthood, “concluded al þis þing” (3444), that he will continue to reign “in Ioie and in quyete” (3457). This line echoes Lydgate’s earlier assessment of the situation that Ulysses had initially enjoyed after his return to Ithaca, before the “surplus” of Telegonus’ return: “Where I hym leue in Ioie and in solace” (2311). Lydgate’s repetition of this line draws a parallel between the two romance heroes and “myghty conquerors” and serves to remind Henry of the dangers of allowing one’s desire for romance to disrupt the peace that had been so difficult to achieve. Eternal reward and continued reign is reserved for those who can escape the cycle of violence and the ceaseless wandering that that results from a privileging of romantic desire over prudent political and personal governance.

Henry is not the only one who stands to benefit personally from following Lydgate’s advice. Lydgate himself, through his authoring of *Troy Book* and association with Henry V, also seeks fame and eternal recognition. He has given Henry the gift of writing him into history, the reward for which is an elevation of his own name alongside his patron’s. Lydgate’s interests are also political and personal, as the well-being of his monarch and the nation will allow him to join his “maister Chaucer” as a major figure in the burgeoning English literary tradition. Henry’s apotheosis has, in effect, already been achieved through Lydgate’s promise and representation of it, and through this representation Lydgate joins Chaucer as great memorializers. Lydgate, however, in writing history rather than romance, seeks to move beyond Chaucer in the way that he hopes that Henry will move beyond a desire for reliving the pagan past of Troilus and his fellow romance heroes. *Troy Book* serves as Lydgate’s vehicle for demonstrating to Henry that peace and prosperity, both personal and political, are matters of narrative form. To choose to live according to the conventions of romance can only lead to darkness. A rejection of romance in favor of history, however, will allow one’s name to shine brightly throughout eternity.

Lydgate promises, therefore, that the writing of history by both poet and patron offers the reward of textual salvation.



## Chapter 4

### Caxton's Trojan Authorship

William Caxton is celebrated as England's first printer, a capable translator, and an important figure in the development of English literary history, but scholars have never conceded him the title of author. His achievements have been discussed in terms of the technical and commercial aspects of early printing and his attempts to create a market for English printed texts, but there has been little concern for his status as a man of letters. Historical studies of printing have overshadowed Caxton's deliberate attempt to use translation and the new technology of the press to establish himself as an English author in the tradition of Chaucer and Lydgate. Caxton did not simply bend to the force of the English market; he pushed back, trying to shape literary tastes by contributing to the emerging English canon. It is this determined attempt to forge a place for himself within the medieval literary tradition that should compel us to recognize Caxton as an author in his own right.

By examining not only his decision to personally translate texts from French to English but also the particular texts that he chose to translate and print, we can see that Caxton strives to establish himself within the English tradition as a Trojan author. Caxton bookends his career with two Trojan texts: *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye* (1474-75) and *Eneydos* (1490), both original translations that include prologues and epilogues that firmly establish him as an author. This chapter will first consider Caxton's decision print his own translation of Raoul LeFèvre's *Le recueil des histoires de Troie* rather than an English text such as Lydgate's *Troy Book*. Critics have generally agreed that Caxton's decision was primarily based on his

association with the Burgundian court and his economic interest in promoting an Anglo-Burgundian alliance. I argue that this particular text also allows Caxton to claim a place for himself within the English canon by evoking Chaucer and Lydgate, whose presence legitimates Caxton's project, while simultaneously claiming a Trojan textual space that is entirely his own.<sup>191</sup> Caxton appropriates English authorial conventions as he translates and prints an unconventional Trojan text, a pre-history of the Trojan War that leads to the final destruction of the city. The *Recuyell*, like Lydgate's *Troy Book*, is an announcement of authorial ambition legitimized by both textual tradition and political association, and it marks out these claims through its engagement with the genre of romance. *Eneydos* closes Caxton's career in a similar fashion by both evoking and denying the authority of Virgil. This chapter will examine the political contexts and authorial intertexts that influence and appear throughout the *Recuyell* and *Eneydos* with a particular focus on the generic shifts that occur within and between these two Trojan texts.

Caxton's modern reputation as a printer unconcerned with his personal literary achievements was shaped by the work of N.F. Blake in the 1960s and 70s. Blake draws a clear line between translation and authorship, claiming that Caxton "made no original contributions of note to English literature; the bulk of his literary output was translation."<sup>192</sup> According to this reader, these translations were fairly literal and unexceptional, performed hastily so that he would have books to print and sell.<sup>193</sup> The rise in scholarly work on Caxton around the quincentenary of his establishment of the first English press at Westminster supported Blake's

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<sup>191</sup> Seth Lerer argues that in the late-fifteenth century, English writers, including Caxton, made Chaucer into an "antique" poet in order to make room for contemporary English literary authorities. See Chapter 5 of *Chaucer and His Readers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)

<sup>192</sup> *Caxton and His World* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1969), p.13

<sup>193</sup> Blake's evaluation of "Caxton as Translator" is Chapter 7 of *Caxton and His World*.

conclusions that Caxton's career was shaped by economic concerns and that he showed little regard for his literary reputation.<sup>194</sup> Recently, David Carlson has reiterated what has served as a critical commonplace in Caxton studies throughout the past century: "Caxton would have been occupied by consideration of such cultural abstractions as literature only secondarily, as a by-product of his preoccupation with distribution of the productive capacity of the technology in which he had invested. His book publishing was strictly business, a reaction to the prior, materially determined fact of the technology's productive capacity."<sup>195</sup>

Even as critics and historians have focused on the economic aspects of print, few have considered the opportunity cost of Caxton's decision to translate books from French into English himself. The time spent translating could have been spent working through the technical issues of preparing existing texts for the press or raising immediate capital through jobbing, which is "the production of printed ephemera such as handbills, indulgences, and other blank forms, usually to order for particular customers."<sup>196</sup> His decision to produce literary folios, however, was based not on economic or market concerns and suggests that Caxton desired to be recognized as an author through his translating and printing of texts. Even though Caxton established a successful business model for printing in England, this practice of personally translating texts was never regarded as economically productive by his fifteenth- and sixteenth-

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<sup>194</sup> Book-length studies of Caxton have been almost entirely biographical, chronicling his work as a mercer, diplomat and printer and contextualizing the production of his press within the political and economic pressures of late fifteenth-century Burgundy and England. See Edmund Childs, *William Caxton: A Portrait in a Background* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), Richard Deacon, *A Biography of William Caxton: The First English Editor, Printer, Merchant, and Translator* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1976), George D. Painter, *William Caxton: A Biography* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), Frieda Elaine Penninger, *William Caxton* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), and Lotte Hellinga, *Caxton in Focus: The Beginning of Printing in England* (London: British Library, 1982)

<sup>195</sup> "A Theory of the Early English Printing Firm: Jobbing, Book Publishing, and the Problem of Productive Capacity in Caxton's Work," *Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing*. Ed. William Kuskin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006): 58

<sup>196</sup> Carlson, p. 36

century successors. Russel Rutter notes, “What literary activity – mainly translation – Caxton engaged in he engaged by choice: he could have easily paid translators, as de Worde and other printers were to do.”<sup>197</sup> Anne Sutton and Livia Vissser-Fuchs point out that Caxton “was the most prolific of English fifteenth-century translators” and that when he translated texts “he had to immerse himself in them and be convinced that he was spending his time profitably.”<sup>198</sup> Caxton translated twenty-two books totaling almost 4,500 pages, a remarkable investment of time for someone also involved in the day-to-day working of the press.<sup>199</sup> The return on this investment would have been one of status, not capital; or, the expectation that status would lead to capital instead of vice-versa. Even though Caxton seems not to have been regarded as an English author in his own time or throughout the ensuing centuries, this suggests a failure of critical appreciation rather than a lack of authorial ambition.

This chapter will begin by establishing the historical and political background of Caxton’s *Recuyell*, which was prepared for print around the time of Edward IV’s exile in the Low Countries in the early 1470s. I discuss the literary environment of this time in which the writing of chronicle history incorporates both epic and romance conventions as it supersedes the production of literary texts. I then turn to Caxton’s prologue and epilogue to consider his self-fashioning as a Trojan author through his translation project. Next, I offer a reading of the *Recuyell* itself as a *roman ancienne* that allows Caxton to claim literary authority as an author of romance while basing this authority on the writing of history. The *Recuyell* initiates a Trojan authorial career for Caxton, whose subsequent translation-projects secure this status. The

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<sup>197</sup> “William Caxton and Literary Patronage,” *Studies in Philology* 84 (1987): 453

<sup>198</sup> “Choosing a Book in Late Fifteenth-century England and Burgundy,” *England and the Low Countries in the Middle Ages*. Caroline Barron and Nigel Saul, eds. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995): 69

<sup>199</sup> Colin Clair, *A History of Printing in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 12

*Eneydos*, printed in 1490, is Caxton's final attempt to fix himself firmly within the English literary tradition as a Trojan author.

### **Caxton and the Wars of the Roses**

The second half of the fifteenth-century is something of a dark period in English literary history. From the death of Lydgate in 1450 until the publication of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* and the laureateship of John Skelton in the 1480s, there is relatively little production of what may be considered "literary" texts. No poet emerges to claim the place of Lydgate, successor to Chaucer, as a national English literary figure. Literary writing of the kind practiced by Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, and Hoccleve at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries is overshadowed by the production of chronicle histories, and we find little in the way of romance.<sup>200</sup> When we consider the violent aristocratic disputes that have come to be called The Wars of the Roses, we may begin to explain the dearth of English romance and the rise in historical writing. Such a phenomenon shows a clear link between genre and politics, so it would be useful to examine briefly Caxton's place within the literary and political climate of the 1460s and 70s in order to appreciate how he presents himself as a new English author through his production of *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*.

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<sup>200</sup> These writers, especially Chaucer, remained popular throughout the fifteenth-century, as manuscript evidence suggests that there was a large and diverse audience eager for English poetic texts. The continued manuscript production of fourteenth and early fifteenth-century English texts and the importation of French romance and poetry into England is all the more reason to question the lack of original romance production during the period. See Carol M. Meale, "Patrons, Buyers and Owners: Book Production and Social Status," Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall, eds. *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 201-38

As a young man, Caxton had been apprenticed in the economically and politically powerful Mercer's Company, which took him to the Low Countries in the 1450s. He spent most of his time in Bruges, but business required him to travel back and forth to England on a number of occasions. His success as a businessman and the accompanying rise in social reputation led to his being elected Governor of the English Nation at Bruges around 1462, an appointment that has been seen as evidence for Caxton's Yorkist leanings.<sup>201</sup> As governor, Caxton became involved in trade negotiations between England and Burgundy, and he was appointed by Edward IV to represent English interests at a summit meeting in 1464.<sup>202</sup> This diplomatic service put Caxton in contact with the most powerful men in both England and Burgundy, including the Earl of Warwick and the counselors to Philip the Good and Charles the Bold. The dispute over the importing and exporting of cloth and other goods was only one part of a complex network of political alliances between the two countries, both of which had a common enemy in the kingdom of France. While England sought to maintain economic, military, and political allegiances with its neighbor across the Channel, however, the nation continued to face a host of troubles within its own borders. As Governor of the English Merchants and a representative of Edward IV, Caxton was involved with all of this first-hand.

Caxton's political association gave him a certain privilege but it also put him in a tenuous position because of England's political instability. Controversy over legitimate succession to the English throne was renewed in 1460 when Richard, Duke of York, after defeating Henry VI's Lancastrian supporters in battle at Northampton, tried to claim the crown based on his descent

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<sup>201</sup> Blake, *Caxton and His World*, p. 40. The Mercer's Company and Merchant Adventurers in the Low Countries were strong supporters of the Yorkist alliance with Burgundy because of their economic interest in trade with Flanders.

<sup>202</sup> Painter, pp. 22-23

from Edward III. Not willing to fully accept York's claim, the lords allowed Henry to keep the crown but decreed that York's son would become the heir to the throne. After York was killed at Wakefield, his son, the Earl of March, made his way to London and took the place of Henry VI as King Edward IV on 4 March 1461. Edward was able to consolidate his power and suppress Lancastrian resistance during the early years of his reign, but the problem of France always loomed large. Indeed, it was Henry VI's loss of the French crown and surrendering of French territories that had precipitated the disputes between the Yorkist and Lancastrian factions.<sup>203</sup> It was important, therefore, for Edward IV to establish an Anglo-Burgundian alliance in order to posture a hard-line stance toward France and demonstrate his worthiness over the weak Henry VI. Although a strong Anglo-Burgundian alliance seemed to be interests of both countries, disagreements over trade made total cooperation difficult. Without the full support of the Burgundian dukes, and with France aligning with the Lancastrians, Edward and his Yorkist supporters remained vulnerable.

The Anglo-Burgundian alliance was secured with the marriage of Margaret of York, sister of Edward IV, to the Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, in July of 1468. This arrangement thwarted the hopes of Louis XI, King of France, who had been seeking an Anglo-French alliance, and angered Warwick, who had been working toward such a deal. Edward had already frustrated many of his most powerful lords by secretly marrying Elizabeth Woodville in 1464 and by refusing to allow his brother, George, Duke of Clarence, to wed one of Warwick's daughters. While the marriage of Margaret and Charles seemed like a strategic diplomatic maneuver, it created a rift between Edward and Warwick that would lead to Warwick's open

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<sup>203</sup> Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 121

revolt against the king. It was also viewed with suspicion by English commoners and merchants who were angered by Charles' restrictions on the importation of English cloth. Still, the marriage was publicly celebrated in both England and Burgundy as a major political victory for both Edward and Charles.

Caxton, as Governor of the English Nation and a diplomat in service of Edward during the marriage negotiations, most likely attended the marriage ceremony and the elaborate celebratory pageants that took place over the following nine days.<sup>204</sup> The arrival of Margaret was heralded with banners and pageants that gave the marriage a great degree of symbolic import, much of which had to do with England and Burgundy's genealogical descent from Troy. Margaret crossed the Channel on a ship named the *New Ellen*, which maybe should have raised some eyebrows but does not seem to have caused concern, at least according to the chronicle accounts. Tapestries depicting Trojan heroes and episodes from the Trojan War were exhibited in the Duke's palace at Bruges.<sup>205</sup> One witness, describing Charles' first meeting of Margaret at the port of Sluis, wrote that when Charles "loked and regarded the beaute of hur, he rejoyced; and in his rejoyse in soche case me thought as Troilus was inne."<sup>206</sup> The Burgundian connection to the story of Jason and the Argonauts, officially sanctioned by the founding of the Order of the Golden Fleece in 1430, was particularly emphasized through the wedding pageantry.<sup>207</sup> The arrival of Margaret and her marriage to Duke Charles seems to have been regarded as a new

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<sup>204</sup> Blake, *Caxton and His World*, p. 43

<sup>205</sup> Christine Weightman, *Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy, 1446-1503* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989): 49

<sup>206</sup> *Excerpta Historica*. Ed. Samuel Bentley (London: Richard Bentley, 1833): 230

<sup>207</sup> For the Burgundian use of the Troy story and the Order of the Golden Fleece, see Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 146-61



beginning for both England and Burgundy as each nation harkened back to their foundational myths and their shared connection to the city of Troy.

A few months after attending the wedding, on 1 March 1469, Caxton began his translation of LeFèvre's *Le recueil des histoires de Troie*. Caxton worked for a short while before abandoning the project, claiming, as we will see in the next section, that his ignorance of both French and English made it difficult for him to proceed. More likely, however, the increasingly volatile political situation in England directly affected Caxton's work.<sup>208</sup> In July 1469, Warwick captured Edward and kept him prisoner until October. After regaining control of the country, Edward joined the Order of the Golden Fleece, further symbolizing his alliance with Burgundy. Warwick and the king's brother Clarence continued to fight against Edward and were forced to flee to France, where Warwick joined with Margaret of Anjou and joined the Lancastrians in a plan to restore Henry VI to the throne. In September 1470, Warwick and Margaret led an army from France to England and forced Edward into exile in the Low Countries, where he stayed with Duke Charles. In March 1471, Edward, with the help of Charles, successfully returned to England and defeated Warwick and the Lancastrians in battle, regaining the throne and putting an end to two years of violence. In June 1471, with the support of the Duchess Margaret, Caxton resumed his translation.

The break in Caxton's translation has more to do with the insecurity of England's political situation and Caxton's association with the pro-Yorkist Burgundian court than his abilities as a translator. Caxton had certainly lost his post as Governor during the Lancastrian restoration, which would have given him time to prepare a number of texts for the press, yet

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<sup>208</sup> Blake, *Caxton and His World*, p. 53; Painter, p. 39

there is no evidence that he continued any type of literary work during this period.<sup>209</sup> He seems to have spent much of this time at Charles' court, where he eventually secured the patronage of the Duchess Margaret, who asked him to finish his translation. By July 1471, Caxton relocated to Cologne, the site of one of the first major printing presses in northern Europe, and dedicated himself to finishing his edition of the *Recuyell*. Caxton clearly felt that publishing a Trojan text written for Charles' father, Philip the Good, during Edward's Burgundian exile would have been both economically unwise and politically dangerous. Caxton's dedication to this particular literary project in such a volatile time raises a number of questions. If Caxton was merely interested printing as an economic venture, why didn't he simply choose to prepare another text for the press? Why did he spend two years idle rather than working on a different project? Why did Caxton feel that the *Recuyell* should be the first text printed in English?

With the invention of the printing press, Caxton not only put himself in a position to capitalize on this technology financially but seized the opportunity to bring about a renaissance in English literature. The *Recuyell* is the ideal text for this enterprise, as it satisfies the demands of the English market and speaks to the current political situation through its fusion of romance and history. It also allows Caxton to announce himself as an English author in the Trojan tradition, which provides him with the cultural capital necessary for his ultimate project of shaping the English literary canon. In order to see how the *Recuyell* serves to usher in a new era of English letters, I will briefly consider the prevalence of historical writing in the fifteenth-century before turning to Caxton's self-presentation in the Prologue and epilogues to the *Recuyell* and then the generic complexity of the *Recuyell* itself.

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<sup>209</sup> Painter, p. 46

## **Chivalry Is Dead: The End of Romance in the Fifteenth Century**

The political factionalism of the 1460s and 70s was not unlike that of the 1380s and 90s. While the later century saw violence on a much larger scale, the debates over succession to the throne and England's relationship with France were essentially a continuation of those of the fourteenth-century. This was consciously articulated and even performed as part of Edward IV's return from exile in 1471, as Edward chose to land at Ravenspur, the site of Henry Bolingbroke's landing in 1399.<sup>210</sup> One key difference emerges, however, in the type of discourse used to register the political instability and accompanying violence facing the English nation. While the Ricardian age produced some of medieval England's most daring and innovative poetry, the Wars of the Roses wrought no such effect. The genre of verse romance flourished during Richard's troubled reign; it all but died out during Henry VI's. Instead, history overtook romance as the dominant genre of the period as a way for writers and readers to make sense of and comment upon the current political situation. As we have seen, Chaucer had turned to romance in the *Troilus* in order to feign an escape from history while Lydgate had promoted history as a morally instructive genre that could illuminate the present. English writers after Lydgate had fully embraced history and had begun to focus almost exclusively on prose in an effort to promote historicity over poetic fantasy and chivalric idealism. As Caxton began to consider printing texts for an English market, he would have been aware of England's preference for history over romance during such a tumultuous time and he chose his first project accordingly.

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<sup>210</sup> Paul Strohm discusses this phenomenon of patterning events on precedent in Chapter 1 of *Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005)

The fifteenth century saw a significant rise in secular historiography. Antonia Gransden, in her comprehensive study of medieval English historical writing, demonstrates that the era of the Wars of the Roses “was rich in the variety of historiographical genres,” including additions to the *Brut* chronicle, court-sanctioned “official” histories, and the development of antiquarian studies.<sup>211</sup> Carol Meale points out that “there was a broader movement within England to consolidate a sense of national identity through historical writing,” and that a similar movement had taken place at the end of the fourteenth century with the production and dissemination of the *Brut* chronicle.<sup>212</sup> Chronicle writers tended to side with whichever faction was in power at a particular time in order to curry favor with the ruling party, as rulers would use history for propaganda purposes.<sup>213</sup> As debates continued over the succession to the throne, history became the means through which the Yorkists and Lancastrians made their case, appealing to genealogical rolls, many of which were produced at this time.<sup>214</sup> With the violent conflicts between the English aristocracy and the sudden deaths of so many members of powerful families, it is easy to see why there was such a demand for contemporary chronicles. Equally important were histories of familial origins and England’s ancient history, the events of which could be seen to parallel the current situation and perhaps point to possibilities for resolution. In an era when the uncertainty of political allegiances and the rapid sways in personal and political fortune made writing an increasingly dangerous enterprise, the ostensibly objective genre of

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<sup>211</sup> *Historical Writing in England II: c.1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982): 249-50

<sup>212</sup> “Patrons, Buyers and Owners: Book Production and Social Status,” *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 215

<sup>213</sup> Gransden, p. 251

<sup>214</sup> Meale, p. 215; see also Alfred Hiatt, “Historical Writing,” *A Companion to Middle English Prose*. Ed. A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004): 175-93

chronicle history, which could be revised to reflect recent events, seemed to be a safe mode of discourse.

This characterization of the historical writing of the fifteenth century, with its emphasis on presenting genealogy in service of political claims, suggests an association with epic. The form of historical chronicle, however, mitigates the idealism of literary epic by recognizing history as an ongoing process that continually works toward a resolution that is never actually reached. In its endless deferment of resolution, the historical narrative differs significantly from the literary epic, which presents the narrative of personal and ideological conflict from the perspective of an already realized triumph of the ruling power. Fifteenth-century chroniclers never claim victory for one side or the other and only tentatively suggest its possibility, fully aware of continuing challenges to the dominant ruling faction. This awareness, reinforced by the sudden breaking of political alliances and swift changes in the fortunes of England's aristocratic families, forces writers to use epic conventions in service of historical writing rather than using history to create what we might regard as literary epic. Prose history, with its emphasis on truth claims based on the veracity of particular events, provides a relatively safe alternative to the voicing of a potentially dangerous ideological position and political association through the totalizing form of literary epic. And for an English readership in the mid-fifteenth century, the "truth" of chronicle histories would prove stranger, and more relevant, than literary fiction.

Romance also came to be seen as potentially dangerous, and the genre undergoes a distinct shift toward the historical in two important ways. First, there is a keen interest not in composing new romances but in reinventing earlier romances. As Derek Pearsall has claimed,

the fifteenth century “is the great age of fourteenth-century romance.”<sup>215</sup> Writers transcribed and often emended the English verse romances of the previous century, demonstrating a nostalgic appreciation for a chivalric code long-since abandoned. Romance becomes less complex both thematically and poetically in an attempt to promote moral certitude rather than the type of ambiguity endorsed by Chaucer and his contemporaries. Helen Cooper writes:

Fifteenth-century romance looks back beyond such Ricardian radicalism to restore older and safer traditions... The quietism is less a sign of apathy than of a sustained attempt to suppress or overcome the revolutionary or the subversive. In a period marked by religious turbulence at its beginning and end, and by civil war in the middle, romances appeared to offer a model by which the stabilities of piety and loyalty could be restored.<sup>216</sup>

The attention to English romance of a now-distant era both effaces the historical reality of the day and reminds its readership of England’s glorious past. As such, it provides not an escape from history but a hope for its renewal.

The second important change in romance is the movement from verse to prose, a generic shift that more closely aligns romance with historical writing.<sup>217</sup> Romances set in distant times and places gained a renewed legitimacy through their translation into prose by virtue of the medium’s association with history. Many of the prose romances of the fifteenth century, Cooper points out, resemble chronicle histories in their focus on origin and genealogy.<sup>218</sup> With romances being composed for a literate, reading audience rather than being performed orally, prose allowed writers to be more ambitious in scope, which further added to their legitimacy.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> “The English Romance in the Fifteenth Century,” *Essays and Studies* n.s. 29 (1976): 58

<sup>216</sup> “Romance After 1400,” *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, Ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 694

<sup>217</sup> Helen Cooper, “Prose Romances,” *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, Ed. A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004): 216

<sup>218</sup> Cooper, p. 220

<sup>219</sup> Pearsall, “The English Romance in the Fifteenth Century,” p. 71

No longer signaling generic difference through verse form, prose romance and history began to conflate, with romance writing becoming more historical and historical writing incorporating romance motifs.<sup>220</sup> The shift reflects a growing recognition that verse romance could no longer sufficiently speak to the dire state of affairs in England, and so romance needed to be updated if it was to survive as a genre capable of representing the desires of a growing English readership and commanding the attention of this new market.

History, as Alfred Hiatt has argued, is an authority unto itself, and so historical writing does not rely on the distinctly literary modes of authority.<sup>221</sup> The rise in historiography and the shift from verse or prose romance created a vacuum in English literary authority. As I have claimed, there is no dominant literary voice in England during this period. Caxton, with his connection to the Burgundian court, where chivalric romance had continued to flourish, was ideally situated to fill a void by setting himself up as a new literary authority in England through his translation and printing. The Burgundian romances of Raoul LeFèvre, who successfully exploited the literary possibilities of writing romance in prose, provided Caxton with a model and a text that would allow him to enter the literary scene by drawing from both the Burgundian and English traditions. Caxton's Prologue and epilogues to the *Recuyell* articulate his ability and desire to establish himself as an English author in the mode of Chaucer and Lydgate while meeting the demands of an English readership interested in history.

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<sup>220</sup> Cooper, "Romance After 1400," p. 708. This is not an entirely new development in the fifteenth century but the conflation becomes more pronounced than in earlier eras. See Rosalind Field, "Romance as History, History as Romance," *Romance in Medieval England*. Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol M. Meale, eds. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991): 163-73

<sup>221</sup> "Historical Writing," p. 176

## **Blind Bayard Sets Forth: Caxton's Prologue to the *Recuyell***

The printed edition of Caxton's translation of LeFèvre's *Recueil* includes an original Prologue and epilogues to Books II and III. These short compositions function as Caxton's attempt to present himself as an English author within the Trojan tradition. More than simply a marketing tool, the Prologue to *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* functions to legitimate Caxton's translation both politically and literarily by invoking the authority of not only Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy and Raoul LeFèvre but also Chaucer and Lydgate.<sup>222</sup> Caxton recognizes the terms of English authorship and he introduces his text by employing these terms so that his own authority can be recognized. In so doing, Caxton announces himself as a Trojan author able to negotiate the political and literary landscape of fifteenth-century England and willing to inaugurate a new era of English letters through his personal use of the technology of print.

Caxton's Prologue to the *Recuyell* is all about Caxton. His decision to translate LeFèvre's Trojan history, he says, is based partly on the lack of a comparable text in English, but stems mostly on his personal motivation. Like most of the prologues that Caxton would go on to write for his editions, the Prologue to the *Recuyell* privileges Caxton's own persona over the author whose work he has translated and printed. As Seth Lerer points out, "Within each of his critical accounts of publishing lies the humanist impulse to narrativize the personal encounter with the past as one of textual discovery and recovery: to tell a story of the book as a story of the

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<sup>222</sup> Kuskin writes, "Caxton's writing oscillates between a series of conventions – between Burgundian and English literary traditions, between personal autobiography and the requirements of the genre, and between patronage and commerce. These tensions allow Caxton to fashion his authority – his 'fourme' – in specifically literary terms." See "Reading Caxton: Transformations in Capital, Authority, Print, and Persona in the Late Fifteenth Century," *New Medieval Literatures* 3 (1999): 159



self.”<sup>223</sup> This desire to bring his own experience with the text to the forefront and to describe the labor involved in making his translation suggests that Caxton wished to be seen not only as a mechanical printer and supplier of texts but an author in his own right. Moreover, Caxton’s careful construction of an authorial persona is closely modeled on the medieval tradition of English Trojan authorship as he echoes Chaucer and Lydgate throughout his Prologue.

Caxton models his prologue on LeFèvre’s but it more directly reproduces Lydgate’s argument in *Troy Book* for the personal and political importance of remembrance.<sup>224</sup> Lydgate had claimed that Henry V requested *Troy Book* because of his desire to “remembre ageyn” the worthiness of “olde chivalrie” (Prologue, 76-7). The reading of chivalric history allows Henry to learn virtue through old examples, “and also for to eschewe / The cursyd vice of slouthe and ydelnesse/ So he enioyeth in virtuous besynesse” (82-4). As I argued in Chapter 3, this project of remembrance serves to fashion Henry as a prudent king and Lydgate as an English author through his personal association with political power. Caxton justifies his translation by using similar terms in order to demonstrate his own political prudence and literary authority. He begins his Prologue: “Whan I remembre that euery man is bounden by the comandement & counceyll of the wyse man to eschewe slouthe and ydlenes whyche is moder and nourysshar of vyces and ought to put my self vnto vertuous ocupacion and besynesse...” Caxton presents himself as both author and authorizer of his text, as someone who has an awareness of the “counceyll of the wyse man to eschewe slouthe” and the ability to do so through textual production. He becomes, as Lerer has argued, the ideal reader of vernacular texts and is, therefore, an important contributor to the vernacular tradition through his presentation of his own

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<sup>223</sup> Chaucer and His Readers, p. 150

<sup>224</sup> Kuskin points out the similarities between Caxton’s and LeFèvre’s prologues in “Reading Caxton,” p.

edition of these works.<sup>225</sup> As he echoes Lydgate's ventriloquizing of Henry V, Caxton appropriates the authority of both men and fashions himself as an heir to the English Trojan tradition that speaks to both a literary past and the political present.

Finding himself with "no grete charge of ocupacion," Caxton "toke a frenche booke and redde therin many strange and meruayllous historyes where in I had grete pleasyr and delyte as well for the nouelte of the same as for the fayr langage of frenshe, whyche was in prose so well and compendiously sette and wreton / which me thought I vnderstood the sentence and substance of euery mater." His description of the book and his response to it signals its genre. Containing "strange and meruayllous historyes" and producing "grete pleasyr and delyte" in its reader, the text seems to be a *roman ancienne*. The reading of the text provides Caxton with a task that should spur him out of idleness, but its romance elements and the production of pleasure and delight signal a danger inherent in this type of text: romance can produce imprudent action or even continued idleness. Still, Caxton, as ideal reader, can appreciate the text for its novelty and language, the prose being so well-written that he is able to achieve hermeneutic mastery of the work. Not only is the book delightful for its use of French, but it shares characteristics with the best works from Caxton's home country. The word "compendiously," Blake has demonstrated, is borrowed from Lydgate, who uses it throughout *Troy Book*. Blake says that "The term was used by Lydgate to describe his own poetic style. It was adapted by Caxton to the French prose style of his original in order to show that it had the same stylistic features as English poetry."<sup>226</sup> This French book, then, is valuable because of its *sentence* and *solaas* in the best English tradition; it provides a kind of productive pleasure that spurs its Caxton on to "good besynes."

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<sup>225</sup> *Chaucer and His Readers*, p. 163

<sup>226</sup> "Caxton and Courtly Style," *Essays and Studies* n.s.21 (1968), p. 30

LeFèvre's text had already gained cultural cache at the Burgundian court, having been written for and presented to Phillip the Good, and Caxton takes it upon himself to make the text available to his fellow Englishmen. Unlike the works of Chaucer and his French contemporaries, which had already come to be regarded as antique, the *Recueil* is a modern classic in Caxton's own time. Caxton's translation can be seen as not only economically advantageous, but morally philanthropic and personally edifying:

And for so moche as this booke was newe and late maad and drawn in to  
frenshe / and neuer had seen hit in oure englissh tonge / I thought in my  
self hit shold be a good besynes to translate hyt in to oure englissh / to  
thende that hyt myght be had as well in the royame of Englund as in other  
landes / and also for to passe therwyth the tyme.

Caxton first identifies the text as a missing component in English literary culture. While England can certainly boast of having notable Trojan texts, it does not yet have *this* Trojan text. The “good besynes” of translation speaks to Caxton's intent to print and market his edition in England but it also speaks to the moral virtue inherent in textual production.<sup>227</sup> This translation project will not only give Caxton a unique commodity to sell – allowing him, as Blake points out, to “capture the English home market” – but it will also be a good way “for to passe therwyth the tyme.”<sup>228</sup> This last reason for undertaking his own translation is, as skeptics should rightfully note, probably the least of Caxton's concerns, but it fashions him as a man of good intent even as he goes on to deny his worth as a translator.

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<sup>227</sup> Kuskin, “Reading Caxton,” p. 164. This is a distinctly Chaucerian theme, most directly articulated in the “Second Nun's Prologue,” where the narrator discusses translation as a means of keeping away the “roten slogardye” of “ydelnesse” (*Canterbury Tales*, VIII.17)

<sup>228</sup> *Caxton and His World*, p. 51

Caxton employs the humility topos common in the fifteenth century as part of literary convention.<sup>229</sup> In his particular phrasing of his rudeness and lack of linguistic skill, however, he shows a keen awareness of the English literary history of which he seeks to become a part. When he decides to begin, it is in tradition of the most celebrated of English authors. Caxton says that he “toke penne and ynke and began boldly to renne forth as blynde bayard in thys presente werke whyche is named the recuyell of the troian historyes.” Blake notes that Caxton “made repeated use of similar traditional phrases in his later books” but that the allusion to blind Bayard occurs only in the *Recuyell*.<sup>230</sup> Caxton’s presentation of himself as “blynde bayard” is conventional as part of the humility trope but is also a Chaucerian and Lydgatean phrase particularly used to describe the dangerous enterprise of translation and authorship. The allusion invokes a feeling of foolish audacity and so functions as a perfectly fitting description of one’s first attempt to assume the mantle of English author.

In Book I of *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer compares Troilus to “proude Bayard gynneth for to skippe” (as I discussed in Chapter 2) in order to signal Troilus’ translation from warrior to lover. He alludes to Bayard again in *The Canterbury Tales* during “The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale,” a tale about alchemy that has often been read as a metaphor for literary translation. In his polemic against alchemists, The Canon’s Yeoman tells them: “Ye been as boold as is Bayard the blynde,/ That blondereth forth and peril casteth noon” (VIII.1413-14). The attempt to produce a precious metal from a dissimilar element was a common but ultimately futile practice in the Middle Ages, and critics have noted the irony in Chaucer’s critique of alchemy because of its

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<sup>229</sup> For a discussion of the function of the humility trope, see David Lawton, “Dullness in the Fifteenth Century,” *English Literary History* 54 (1987): 761-99

<sup>230</sup> *Caxton and His World*, p. 50

associations with his own authorship. The author who seeks to produce his own text of value by translating a foreign text is, like the alchemist, blundering forth like blind Bayard.

Lydgate refers to himself as blind Bayard twice in *Troy Book*, both times as he protests his own rudeness in comparison to his master Chaucer. In Book II, when faced with the daunting task of describing Criseyde's beauty, Lydgate interrupts his translation of Guido's *Historia* to praise Chaucer. He claims to be but a poor imitator of Chaucer's verse and says that it is with great reluctance and trepidation that he will use English to try to describe the beauty that Chaucer had already presented so well. Still, Lydgate realizes that he must proceed:

3et for al þat, now I wil not leue,  
But ben as bolde as Baiard is, þe blynde,  
þat cast no peril what wey[e] þat he fynde;  
Ri3t so wil I stumble forþe of hede  
For vnkonyng, & take no better hede. (II.4730-34)

Lydgate uses the phrase again at the conclusion of *Troy Book* not long after naming himself – “Iohn Lydgate,/ Monke of Burie be professioun” (V.3468-69) – as author of the text. He asks that readers excuse any errors in his translation and ascribe them to his ignorance. Even though he knows that he lacks the necessary skill as a translator, Lydgate has gone ahead and composed 30,000 lines of Middle English verse anyway, an act of hubris that he says could get him into trouble like the famous horse: “For blind Baiard cast pereil of no þing,/ Til he stumble myddes of þe lake!” (V.3506-7). Lydgate uses the Chaucerian phrase to both deny and claim his own poetic authority. He intertextually cites both the *Troilus* and, more directly, *The Canterbury Tales*, borrowing Chaucer's image of the blind horse moving forward with a complete disregard for the inherent danger that lies ahead.

Caxton uses this particular image immediately before finally naming the “frenshe booke” that he has decided to translate. This “blynde bayard” boldly running forth has not only decided to try his hand at translation but he is Englishing a particular type of text: “the recuyell of the troian historyes.” The use of the Bayard imagery to announce the production of his own Troy book associates Caxton with Chaucer and Lydgate as Trojan authors. It suggests that Caxton was fully aware of the implications of translating this particular text, that it is not simply a way to pass the time but a major statement of English authorship.

It is only after he begins to “renne forth” with his translation that Caxton realizes that he does not actually have a good working knowledge of either language with which he is dealing. This is, of course, a statement of affected modesty, but it provides him with an opportunity to present some autobiographical information:

I remembryd my self of my symplenes and vnperfightnes that I had in bothe langages / that is to wete in frenshe & in englissh for in france was I neuer / and was born & lerned myn englissh in kente in the weeld where I doubte not is spoken as brode and rude englissh as is in ony place of englund & haue contynued by the space of / xxx. yere for the most parte in the contres of Braband. flandres holand and zeland

While the “symplenes” of Caxton’s speech has been read a conventional exaggeration, most scholars have taken the information presented in this passage at face value. Caxton tells his readers where he was born (Kent in the Weald) and that he has spent the better part of his life on the Continent in the Low Countries. Even as he claims to come from provincial origins, he boasts of a worldliness evinced by his time spent in some of the economic and cultural centers of northern Europe; this Bayard is obviously not as blind as he pretends to be. He establishes himself as an Englishman by noting his birthplace while also claiming to be part of the larger European community through his travels. The decision to include biographical information

demonstrates that Caxton wishes to be regarded as author of this Prologue and the translation he has prepared for print.

Not only is Caxton a cosmopolitan and well-read man, but he has friends in high places. Having become frustrated with the difficulty of translation, Caxton abandons his project for two years before he receives encouragement and the patronage of “mylady Margarete by the grace of god suster vnto þe kyng of england and of fra[n]ce.” Kuskin points out that this passage “finally resolves the tensions inherent in Caxton’s use of one set of conventions – how Caxton can complete his text if he is entirely defined by dullness – by appealing to another set, those of literary patronage.”<sup>231</sup> Margaret is the ideal patron for Caxton because of her prominence in both Burgundy and England. Her marriage to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, doubles the marriage of the two crowns of England and France under her brother, Edward IV, as well as Caxton’s own association with both England and the Continent. Caxton lists the many titles belonging to Margaret – “Duchesse of Bourgoine of lotryk. of brabant. of lymburgh. and of luxenburgh Countes of ffla[n]dres of artoys & of bourgoine Palatynee of heynawd of holand of zeal[n]d and of namur Marquesse of þe holy empire. lady of ffryse of salius” – in order to show how the importation of Margaret to the Continent allows him to export this culturally authorized text back to England.

Margaret is not only his patron, but she becomes actively involved in the production of the *Recuyell* as editor. Caxton says that after showing her the section he had completed, “she fonde a defaute in myn englissh whiche sche coma[n]ded me to amende a[n]d more ouer comanded me straytli to contynue and make an ende of the resydue than not translated.” Just as

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<sup>231</sup> “Reading Caxton,” p. 161

Lydgate had justified his translation by claiming to be working under the command of Henry V, Margaret's authority is conferred upon Caxton, who has now been ordered to finish his translation.<sup>232</sup> Like the remembrance of the "councell of the wyse man" and the fortuitous reading of the delightful and meaningful "frenche booke," Margaret's command inspires Caxton to labor and he resumes his translation. She has ordered him "straytli to continue," and the adverb signals both the immediacy with which he is to follow her command as well as an opposition to the "strange and meruayllous" romance wanderings of the text's heroes. Margaret's command to Caxton allows him to demonstrate his own command of the text, which allows him to be seen not only as a workaday translator but as a new English author.

#### **"Hit nedeth not to translate hit into English": Caxton's Epilogues**

The first two books of the *Recuyell* narrate the ancient wars between Saturn and Jupiter and the adventures of Hercules, both of which involve the destruction of the first two cities of Troy. Hercules' assault on the city had been known throughout the English Trojan tradition as part of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, most famously recounted in the first book of Lydgate's *Troy Book*. This war had begun with Laomedon's refusal of hospitality to Hercules, Jason and the Argonauts, who had sought port on the way to Colchos. After Jason completes his quest, the Argonauts return to Troy to take vengeance on the Trojans. They raze the city and Hercules takes Lamedon's daughter, Esione, as a spoil of war. This initiates the series of retributive acts – Paris' abduction of Helen and ensuing ten-year conflict between Greece and Troy – that constitute the Trojan War. What functions as a romance preface for Trojan texts in

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<sup>232</sup> Kuskin, "Reading Caxton," p. 162



the English tradition, which are more concerned with Hector, Achilles, and the destruction of Priam's city, serves as the central narrative in LeFèvre's *Recueil*.<sup>233</sup>

The absence of English texts detailing the initial founding of Troy and the adventures of Hercules makes LeFèvre's text a novelty and, therefore, attractive to Caxton because of the opportunity this provides. Caxton writes: "for as moche as I suppose the said two bokes ben not had to fore this tyme in oure englissh langage / therfore I had the better will to accomplishe this said werke." The first two books of the *Recueil* allow Caxton to contribute to the English Trojan tradition by presenting a previously unknown narrative to an audience of English readers, one that is important not only for its originality but also because of its topicality. Book III, however, poses a particular challenge because it tells the story already familiar to English audiences through the work of Chaucer and Lydgate. Caxton's epilogues to Book II and III address this problem, which Caxton is actually able to work to his advantage. By invoking Lydgate as his own literary master in the same way that Lydgate had used Chaucer to his advantage, Caxton secures a place for himself and his text in the English canon as a Trojan author.

The epilogue to Book II begins with Caxton establishing the linguistic and literary genealogy of his text and reminding his readers of its legitimization by Margaret of York. The first two books were "late translated in to frenshe out of latyn / by the labour of the venerable persone raoul le feure preest." The first two books are authorized by their initial composition in Latin and then retained through the labor of a worthy translator. The fact that the French version was "late translated" gives the text cultural relevance as a product of the Burgundian court. As the text is translated, so too is the authority of each translator, and Caxton becomes the new

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<sup>233</sup> By "English texts in the Trojan tradition" I mean not only medieval English accounts of the war but also the Latin texts known in England: those of Dares, Dictys, and Guido delle Colonne. There seems to be very little English writing about the pre-history of the Trojan War prior to the publication of Caxton's *Recuyell*.

LeFèvre through the production of his own edition. The *Recuyell*, Caxton writes, was “by me Indigne and vnworthy translated in to this rude engliss / by the comandement of my said redoubtid lady duches of Bourgone.” Even as Caxton reiterates his claims to rudeness, he asserts his presence rather than seeking anonymity, pointing out that the translation was done “by me.” He further reminds his readers of the authority conferred upon him by the “redoubtid lady duches of Bourgone,” at whose pleasure he serves. Caxton highlights the personal connection between text, patron, and author and his awareness of his own place within the vernacular literary heritage.

Caxton’s text is further authorized by its topicality, which advances Caxton’s own claims to authority. Caxton says that his work

was begonne in Brugis / & contynued in gaunt And finysshid in Coleyn In the tyme of þe troublous world / and of the grete deuysions beyng and reygnynng as well in the royames of england and fraunce as in all other places vnyuersally thurgh the world that is to wete the yere of our lord athousand four honderd lxxi.

The dating and geographical location of his translation closely associates his text with Edward IV’s exile in the Low Countries in 1470-71. While Caxton is moving around various cities in northern Europe, he remains tied to the events taking place in England. This account of the timing and location of his translation links Caxton’s personal biography with the political dealings between England, Burgundy, France, and the Low Countries.<sup>234</sup> Caxton began his translation in Bruges, the place on the Continent where Edward landed after fleeing from England. Edward was received by Louis de Bruges, lord of la Gruthuyse, a well-known

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<sup>234</sup> Painter notes that for “a formerly staunch Yorkist” like Caxton, this passage expresses “strangely neutralist sentiments.” Painter goes on, however, to admit the wisdom in maintaining a neutral appearance during such a tumultuous time. (*William Caxton: A Biography*, p. 51)

bibliophile whose literary tastes influenced Edward's own royal library.<sup>235</sup> As a mercer and the governor of the English merchants, Caxton had personal, political, and economic interests the establishment of alliances and trade agreements and would have welcomed any repair to the "grete deuysions" within England and between England and its neighbors across the Channel. With such personal knowledge and investment in contemporary politics, Caxton can again be seen as ideal reader of LeFèvre's *Recueil* and the ideal translator of such a topical work into English.

The timing and location of Caxton's translation of Books I and II of the *Recueil* help to establish his authority through his association with political power and cultural relevance, but he worries about narrating the events of the Trojan War in competition with Lydgate, whose *Troy Book* relates much of the same material. It made sense to translate the first two books because they narrated stories previously unavailable to English audiences; however:

as for the thirde book whiche treteth of the generall & last destrucco~n of Troye Hit nedeth not to translate hit in to englissh ffor as moche as that worshipfull & religyous man dan John lidgate monke of Burye dide translate hit but late / after whos werke I fere to take vpon me that am not worthy to bere his penner & ynke horne after hym. to medle me in that werke.

The sincerity of Caxton's anxiety about the presence of Lydgate is undercut by the passage's conventionality, for his expression of this anxiety is actually borrowed from Lydgate himself. Blake has pointed out that Caxton's phrase "[I] am not worthy to bere his penner & ynke horne after hym" echoes Lydgate's statement that in relation to Chaucer no writer "worþi was his

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<sup>235</sup> Malcolm Vale, "An Anglo-Burgundian Nobleman and Art Patron: Loius de Bruges, Lord of la Gruthuyse and Earl of Winchester." *England and the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages*. Caroline Barron and Nigel Saul, eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995): 115-31

ynkhorn for to holde” (*Troy Book*, V.3530).<sup>236</sup> Lydgate’s claim is proven false by Lydgate’s own success in establishing a literary reputation that allows him to be seen throughout the fifteenth-century as a worthy successor to Chaucer. In echoing Lydgate’s phrase, therefore, Caxton invokes a tradition whereby poetic authority can be shared by literary heirs by acknowledging the tradition and seeking to surpass their predecessors through original contribution. The convention of feigning humility and then forging ahead with textual production is part of the medieval system of authorial self-fashioning, and Caxton continues to operate within this system in his epilogue.

Caxton justifies his translation of the already well-known narrative by reminding his readers of Margaret’s command for Caxton to finish his work and claiming that he has “none other thyn ge to doo at this tyme.” Most important, Caxton establishes a key difference between Lydgate’s text and the *Recuyell*: “his werke is in ryme / And as ferre as I knowe hit is not had in prose in our tonge / And also paraventure / he translated after some other Auctor than this is / And yet for as moche as dyuerce men ben of dyuerce desyres. Some to rede in Ryme and metre. and some in prose.” Kuskin points out that Caxton “alternates between convention and personal experience – his inheritance of the Troy genre and his specific work in prose.”<sup>237</sup> This personal experience of translating prose from a different author than Lydgate had used allows Caxton to operate in a similar but separate literary space from Lydgate, allowing him to stand beside rather than behind Lydgate in the Trojan tradition.

Here, for the first time, Caxton invokes the authority of “dyuerce men” who desire works in prose. These “dyuerce men” appear throughout Caxton’s prologues as the impetus for

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<sup>236</sup> “Caxton and Chaucer,” *Leeds Studies in English* n.s.21 (1967), pp. 26-7

<sup>237</sup> “Reading Caxton,” p. 162

Caxton's translations as well as the intended market for his texts. Patronage and authority begin to move from being the privilege of the aristocratic elite to a wider range of readers amongst the middle and merchant classes. Caxton serves as a kind of intermediary between the royal authority of Margaret and the literary desires of the "dyuerce men" who ultimately legitimize Caxton's text through their readership. Caxton acknowledges a wider audience than simply his patron and, in so doing, reflects and responds to new way of imagining how one comes to be recognized as an author. The distinction is awarded immediately rather than by a literary successor and is expressed through a popular process of commodity exchange in the marketplace. This diversity within a potential readership allows Caxton to recognize his place in the literary tradition as an heir to Chaucer and Lydgate while promoting himself as a new author for his own time, thus allowing him to complete his translation of Book III and present it as a unique commodity to his English readers.

In the epilogue to Book III Caxton introduces the technology of the press, which, as Kuskin points out, gives him a new kind of authority as a printer.<sup>238</sup> The use of this technology has, over the centuries, allowed the labor of printing to overshadow Caxton's labor as a translator, but Caxton makes a point of telling his readership that he has worked hard in order to prepare this particular text for the press. He says that he has learned to use the press not only so that his text can be more quickly disseminated to "dyuerce gentilmen and to my frendes" but also because he has grown tired from the labor of writing. He emphasizes the difficulty of producing a written translation of LeFèvre's text:

for as moche as in the wrytyng of the same my penne is worn / myn hande  
wery & not stedfast myn eyen dimed with ouermoche lokyng on the whit

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<sup>238</sup> "Reading Caxton," p. 163

paper / and my corage not so prone and redy to laboure as hit hath ben /  
and that age crepeth on me dayly and febleth all the bodye.<sup>239</sup>

Before celebrating the ease with which printing allows for the production of multiple copies – he claims that “all the bookes of this storye named the recule of the historyes of troyes thus enpnyntid as ye here see were begonned in oon day / and also fynnysshid in oon day” – Caxton tells his readers of the intensive labor involved in the time-consuming process of translation. He again provides personal narrative in order to present himself as author of the *Recuyell* rather than simply the purveyor of the textual artifact. The image of the worn pen and physical weakness recalls Lydgate’s professed exhaustion as he nears the end of *Troy Book*. Just before telling the final story of the death of Ulysses, Lydgate writes:

For I shal now, lyk as I am wont,  
Sharpen my penne, boþe rude & blont, . . .  
For almost wery, feint & waike I-now  
Be þe bestes & oxes of my plow,  
Be longe day ageyn þe hil to wende. (V.2923-29)<sup>240</sup>

This intertextual moment links Caxton with Lydgate through their shared labor even as Caxton begins to separate himself from all other writers through his use of the press. Caxton needs for *The Recuyell* to be seen as a novelty in order for his business venture to be economically viable, but he also needs to make this novelty seem like a legitimate text in the English literary tradition.

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<sup>239</sup> This complaint is a scribal convention. In echoing this common complaint, Caxton associates himself and his text with manuscript culture as he introduces the new technology of print.

<sup>240</sup> Lydgate is citing Chaucer’s Knight, who says at the outset of his tale that he will skip over the war between the Athenians and Amazons, noting, “I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere,/ And wayke been the oxen in my plough” (CTI.886-87).

Caxton, therefore, must claim dual authority: that of printer and master of the new technology of the press as well as that of author.

Caxton's citation of Lydgate demonstrates that he had a copy of *Troy Book* available to him and that he was very much aware of the English Trojan tradition of authorship. He also mentions Dares, Dictys, and Homer, the ancient Trojan authors, in order to point out the instability of the Troy legend. Kuskin writes, "Though his sources [LeFèvre and Lydgate] present the Troy story as the result of a singular literary authority, Caxton suggests that, rather than fixed with each impression, the printed text's authority rests upon a literary history rife with conflict and unified only in the common point that Troy fell."<sup>241</sup> Caxton's recognition of the differences between texts can allow us to question the historicity of each treatment of the Trojan War, as each text manifests literary value in terms of its political and cultural meaning. Caxton's *Recuyell* speaks to the current divisions within England and between European nations, and he says that the fall of Troy "may be ensample to all men duryng the world how dredefull and leopardous it is to begynne a warre and what harmes. losses. and deth foloweth." The moral here seems rather general and conventional, but this does not necessarily lessen its topicality at the time of the text's printing. Given Caxton's attempts to associate his text with particular geographical sites and England's royal family, we can see Caxton arguing for his work's cultural relevance and his own ability to speak to both royal power and a larger English public as an English Trojan author.

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<sup>241</sup> "Reading Caxton," p. 165

### **“In tho dayes that the worlde was of gold”: Trojan Pre-History in the *Recuyell***

The *Recuyell* presents a new Trojan history to its English audience. While most of the Trojan narratives circulating in England during the Middle Ages open with Jason’s quest for the Golden Fleece, the *Recuyell* begins generations before with the wars between Saturn and Titan. LeFèvre had drawn heavily from Boccaccio’s *Genealogia deorum gentilium* for the first two books of his *Recueil*, and while this Latin text may have been known in England, it seems to have had little influence on the composition of English Trojan War narratives.<sup>242</sup> Part of what must have made this particular Trojan text so important to Caxton is its novelty; just as Chaucer had drawn from the previously-unknown Italian well-spring of Boccaccio, Caxton finds a way to make LeFèvre’s Burgundian Trojan history work in service of his own literary ambitions. But the *Recuyell* is not valuable just because it was unknown in England; on the contrary, the story must have seemed all-too-familiar. While an English readership may not have read the stories of Titan, Saturn, and Jupiter, they had lived it. The events of the opening book of the *Recuyell* present the same types of aristocratic disputes and succession crises that plagued England during the Wars of the Roses in the 1450s and 60s, making Caxton’s *Recuyell* seem both original and topical.

Trojan pre-history, like the chronicles of the mid-fifteenth century, presents narratives of violent retribution that suggest the possibility of endless cyclicity. In spite of these narratives of ideological conflict, the *Recuyell* works to contain the romance impulse that threatens to preclude historical progress by attempting to shape the narrative as linear history; at the same

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<sup>242</sup> I don’t mean to suggest that these stories were entirely unknown in England but rather that there was not a significant redaction of Boccaccio’s *Genealogia* in English. Readers of Latin and French may have access to these narratives.



time, however, it also resists the epic impulse toward a recognized teleology. Even though the Trojan pre-history has always already happened and will always lead to a definite and unimpeachable conclusion – the destruction of Troy – Book I of the *Recuyell* writes this historical narrative as ongoing process rather than the fulfillment of a series of predetermined events, closely aligning it with the contemporary chronicles of fifteenth-century English history that similarly attempted to forge a middle ground between romance and epic. While Guido delle Colonne and his English translators, particularly Lydgate, had used the pastness of Troy to locate allegorical meaning, Caxton, following LeFèvre, presents an alternative hermeneutic, forgoing straightforward moral allegory in favor of a kind of oblique topicality revealed through the interplay of generic forms.

Troy is first born out of the ashes of the Tower of Babel. Book I of the *Recuyell* begins: “What tyme alle the Children of Noe were sprad bi the Climates. regnes and strange habitacions of þe world By the general dyuysyon of tonges maad at the fondacion of the tour of babilon in tho dayes that the world was of gold” (p.9). By making the Tower of Babel the origin for everything that follows, the text links secular and sacred history and legitimizes its narrative as a crucial part of the world’s development.<sup>243</sup> The destruction of the Tower of Babel inaugurates the Golden Age, which, despite being the high point of earthly civilization, was characterized by division and human folly. In the matter of only a few lines, however, the distant geographical and chronological past of the Old Testament begins to look like a close reflection of fifteenth-century Europe, as the fall of the Tower leads to the founding of competing kingdoms ruled by

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<sup>243</sup> Jennifer R. Goodman, “Caxton’s Continent,” *Caxton’s Trace*, p. 107

royal families. With the establishment of the first royal family by Uranus and the births of Titan and Saturn comes a crisis in succession and civil war not unlike that suffered by England.

The first chapter of the *Recuyell* presents a conflict between the system of monarchical succession and that which is “prouffitable for the comyn welehe.” Titan, the eldest son of Uranus, “was ffoul, euyl fauourid and conterfet” and thus unable to win the favor of the people or even his own mother. His younger brother Saturn, on the other hand, “was merueylleusly fayr and amyable” and his reputation spread throughout the realm. When Uranus dies, Titan is first in line for the throne, but the queen, Vesca, proclaims that Saturn should succeed his father. Titan protests on genealogical grounds, claiming that his mother’s disinheritance of his right is unnatural. Vesca’s maternal pity for her son is not enough to change her mind, and she tells Titan that he is “not a man sufficyent for to deffende thy fadres herytages.” She points out that Saturn has the love of the people because of his beauty and virtue, which leads her to conclude that “Saturne shall obteyne by the fauour of hys wysedom mekenes and benyngyte & also be cause the comyn voys Iuggeth hym and seeth p<sup>t</sup> he shall ones by the man of whom hys lyf shall shyne gloriousli.” Vesca’s words, not surprisingly, anger Titan, who tells his brother, “As thou hast conspired in my temporel damage semblably y shal conspire to thy ternal damage and hurt and name me from hens forth thy mortal enemye.” Saturn responds that “he neuer thought in his lyf to come to the succession of ther fader ner neuer had ymagyned ner conspired hit,” but Vesca declares that Saturn would reign nevertheless. At this point, Titan says that he will step aside and allow Saturn to take the throne on the condition that Saturn put to death any male children born to him. Finally, “ffor the wele of bothe parties Vesca with her daughters and the Auncyent wyse people accorded to Tytan,” and peace is made between the brothers as Saturn becomes king. (pp.10-15)

It is easy to see how this episode would have had a particular resonance for an English audience in the 1470s. The issue of whether a king could be dispossessed of his crown on the grounds that he was physically and mentally unfit to rule was carried out throughout Henry VI's reign, especially during his bouts of mental illness and catatonia in the 1450s. The loss of France had made Henry seem weak and had disastrous consequences for the nation. The armed conflicts of the period were the culmination of a mounting tension between the system of an unimpeachable dynastic monarchy and the need for the commonwealth to be ruled by its most fit and able candidate. Titan and Vesca voice the opposing positions on this topic, with the weak Titan claiming primogeniture and Vesca appealing to popular assent and the needs of the commonwealth. The agreement that Saturn would kill any sons he may have echoes the resolution of Richard of York's rebellion in 1460, in which Henry agreed to disinherit his son in favor of the victorious York. The parallels between the *Recuyell* and recent events in England, which were being recorded and textualized in various chronicle histories, would have been striking for both Caxton and any English readers. In this context, Caxton's temporary suspension of his project during Edward IV's exile and his insistence on introducing this text into England once Edward's reclamation was secured seem politically and economically shrewd.

Just as the bargain between Richard of York and Henry VI had proved ineffective and untenable, with violence continuing for the next ten years, the treaty between Titan and Saturn was short-lived and only served to precipitate a continuous state of war between the ancient ruling families and their realms. Saturn weds his sister and she gives birth to Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto, whom she saves from death by sending them away. Book I of the *Recuyell* relates the founding of kingdoms by these descendants of Saturn's royal line and the ensuing battles. Included is the founding of Troy by Dardanus, who had tried to claim the throne of Corinth after

killing his brother but was exiled by his subjects who fear that he would become a tyrant. The entirety of Book I can be read as an exemplar about the disastrous consequences of familial strife and overreaching ambition by powerful nobles. Fathers war against sons, brothers war against brothers, and every treaty made in good faith is quickly broken because of perceived opportunities for glory and an overwhelming drive for vengeance. Book I climaxes with the first destruction of Troy by Hercules in retribution for Laomedon's refusal to reward Hercules for saving his daughter. The cycle of violence has begun.

With its emphasis on demonstrating the humanity and mortality of the pagan gods, Book I of the *Recuyell* functions as history. It describes men acting with regard to contingency, fighting to secure power or in order to avenge personal and political slights. It spends a lot of time establishing genealogies, explaining how various figures descended from Titan and Saturn and how they their offspring would play important roles in the final destruction of Troy. Whereas most of the medieval English Trojan narratives had begun with the romance of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, the *Recuyell* grounds itself in the historical realm by focusing on conflicts of ideology and personal ambition rather than exotic adventures. While there are episodes that contain marvelous and supernatural events, the text is meant to be read as history, the truth of which lies in both the veracity of the account and the moral lessons the narrative can provide. In other words, its particular attention to problems of succession and political machinations makes it read much more like a fifteenth-century *Brut* chronicle than a chivalric romance. What Caxton really found in LeFèvre's text and the pre-history of Troy was a topical allegory for the present state of England.

The mythic history of Book I gives way to chivalric romance in Book II, which tells of the adventures of Hercules. As Jennifer Goodman has stated, "In the case of Lefèvre's *Recueil*

we find ourselves in the presence not just of a chivalric version of classical legend, but of a persuasive vehicle of instruction in chivalric morality.”<sup>244</sup> Celebrated more in France than England because of his connection with the Golden Fleece, Hercules, were are told, “was grete in herte & in courage exalted in honour he had leuer haue dyed than to haue don a thyng werof shold folowe ony dyshonoure” (p.298). The consummate romance knight and lover, Hercules travels throughout Europe to fight against tyranny. Book II consists mainly of episodic adventures that describe Hercules’ marvelous feats of arms, and the narration includes lengthy speeches that justify Hercules’ cause as righteous in opposition to the dishonorable actions of wicked rulers. Along the way, Hercules and Jason revisit Troy and destroy it a second time because of Laomedon’s outrageous offenses to the chivalric code of hospitality. It is during this second destruction that Esione, daughter of the king, is taken, which eventually leads to Paris’ abduction of Helen. The second book of the *Recuyell* is less concerned with the movement of history than the demonstration of how the cultivation of chivalry and personal honor functions in service of good governance of the commonwealth.<sup>245</sup>

Book III tells the already-familiar story of the war between the Greeks and the Trojans and the final destruction of the city. LeFèvre’s version is a translation of Guido delle Colonne, and Caxton’s edition introduces this foundational text into English prose for the first time. Book III reorients the text in the historical mode by focusing on the war between opposing nations rather than the exploits of one man, yet it retains the romance elements (Troilus’ love for Briseida, Achilles’ love for Polyxena, etc) common to the medieval Troy story. While Caxton knew *Troy Book*, as I demonstrated above, Lydgate’s translation of Guido’s *Historia* has little

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<sup>244</sup> “Caxton’s Continent,” pp. 105-6

<sup>245</sup> Margaret Kekewich, “Edward IV, William Caxton, and Literary Patronage in Yorkist England,” *Modern Language Review* 66 (1971): 481-87

bearing on his own. Caxton shows almost no interest in the anti-feminist moralizing of Guido and Lydgate and chooses instead to focus on the “incontinent” actions of the Greeks and Trojans that lead to continued destruction. Caxton’s version is a streamlined account that both compliments and counters Lydgate’s bloated verse-text for a late-fifteenth century audience.

For Caxton, the *Recuyell* allows him to present a Trojan text that satisfies the demands of both his contemporary English audience and the tradition of English Trojan authorship. He provides his readers with a topical mythic history coupled with chivalric romance, conflating both genres into a text that allows each to comment on England’s political affairs. LeFèvre had composed his *Recueil* for Charles the Good in celebration of Burgundian chivalry and Caxton transposes the text into the language of English in order to show his readers how England might settle its disputes by taking lessons from the disastrous divisions of the Golden Age. The repeated destruction of Troy signifies the consequences of bad governance, both personal and political, while its phoenix-like rise out of its own ashes suggests the promise of renewal. This cycle of destruction and restoration had been playing out in England over the past twenty years throughout the Wars of the Roses, and Caxton hopes for his text to serve as means to heal civil dissension. Caxton, through a close engagement with history and romance, makes the Chaucerian move of gesturing toward epic fulfillment without directly articulating an epic discourse. History and romance can provide lessons toward this end while allowing Caxton to claim authority over each genre as he announces himself as a Trojan author.

## Conclusion: Caxton, Troy, and an Authorial Career

With the printing of the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, Caxton entered the English literary scene as a Trojan author. Throughout his career he published 72 titles, 26 of which were his own translations.<sup>246</sup> He published only eight romances but he translated each of these himself. Caxton published LeFèvre's *Les fais et proesses du noble et vaillant chevalier Jason* in Bruges in 1475 and his own translation, entitled *The History of Jason*, at his shop at Westminster in 1477. Caxton probably intended to translate this text from the beginning as a companion piece to the *Recuyell*, just as LeFèvre had intended. He explains in his Prologue that the *Recuyell* had only briefly mentioned Jason because LeFèvre had already completed this book-length account of Jason's adventures. LeFèvre had composed *Jason* first and his *Recueil* second, but Caxton deliberately reverses this order. His final translation was *Eneydos*, an English version of the *Livre des Eneydes*, a French prose romance very loosely based on the *Aeneid*. While this last text could in no way be regarded as epic, its invocation of Virgil and narration of Aeneas' founding of Rome gives it at least an epic association. Caxton begins his career with a history of Troy, publishes the Jason romance once he has established his press in England, and exits the literary stage after publishing his closest approximation to epic in 1490. Caxton's decision to end his career with a version of the foundational Trojan text in the western literary tradition demonstrates his desire to establish his own legacy as an English Trojan author.

Each of Caxton's Trojan texts includes carefully crafted Prologues that allow him to claim authority over his text. In the Prologue to *Jason*, Caxton discusses the founding of the Order of the Golden Fleece by Duke Phillip of Burgundy and attests to having visited "a

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<sup>246</sup> Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, p. 69

chamber in the Castell of Hesdyn / where in was crafyly and curiously depeynted the conqueste of the Golden Flese by the sayd Iason / in whiche chamber I haue ben and seen the sayde historie so depeynted.” Once again, Caxton makes the Troy story and his text part of his biography, thus granting him a unique authority. He translates the text not only linguistically but also culturally from the celebrated court of Philip to that of Edward IV, to whom he still affords the title “kyng of Englund and of Fraunce.” Edward had been made a member of the Order of the Golden Fleece by Charles the Bold in 1468 around the time of Charles’ marriage to Margaret, and Caxton’s translation further solidifies the political, familial, and cultural alliance between England and Burgundy.<sup>247</sup> Caxton’s own authority stems from his association with royal power as well as his ability to disseminate aristocratic cultural artifacts to a wider reading public.

The translation is dedicated to Edward, but Caxton says that this version is especially for “my lord Prynce of Wales our tocomyng souerayne lorde . . . to thentent / he may begynne to lerne rede Englissh not for ony beaute or good Endyting of our Englissh tonge that is therin but for the nouelte of the histories which as I suppose that not be had bifore the translacion herof.” Like Lydgate’s *Troy Book*, the text becomes part of royal fashioning in its ability to make the future monarch a good reader of English and well-versed in important now-English texts. Caxton employs the humility *topos* by dismissing the competence of his language but claiming that the text is valuable for its novelty. Even though the story of Jason had appeared as the opening to the Trojan texts of Dares, Guido, and the English redactions of these texts, Caxton suggests that this version presents a more complete account than had previously been available to readers of

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<sup>247</sup> Richard Vaughn, *Charles the Bold: The Last Valois Duke of Burgundy* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1974), p. 60



English. With the *Jason*, Caxton continues to claim authority over the Trojan legend and serve as its sole English *auctor* during his time.

In the years following the publication of the *Recuyell* and *Jason*, Caxton printed a variety of literary, historical, and religious texts, as well as one-sheets commissioned by specific clients, but he remained committed to forming an English canon.<sup>248</sup> He printed editions of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, “the triumvirate of English writers whose affiliation had, by the end of the fifteenth century, become a commonplace of the literary panegyric.”<sup>249</sup> His continued writing of original prologues makes Caxton part of these texts and associates him with the major figures in English literary history. His publication of Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* reintroduced England’s mythic past into a contemporary political and cultural environment in the same way that he had done with the *Recuyell*, and his personal role in preparing Malory’s for print shows his keen interest in shaping its ideological function.<sup>250</sup> He continued to blur the line between and exploit the possibilities of history and romance, as Chaucer and Lydgate had done before him.

*Eneydos* is Caxton’s final statement of his Trojan authorship and solidifies his place as a part of the English literary canon. For his final text, he looks back past Chaucer and Lydgate and casts himself as a classical *auctor*. Although his work is a translation of a 1480s French text, the implications of choosing to present a new version of the story of Aeneas are clear. Caxton invokes and bypasses Virgil’s authority and demonstrates his ability to claim a cultural authority of his own based in the literary culture of Burgundy and England. Just as the *Recuyell* had allowed Caxton to appropriate the literary authority of Chaucer and Lydgate and then present a

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<sup>248</sup> William Kuskin, “Caxton’s Worthies Series: The Production of Literary Culture,” *ELH* 66 (1999): 511-551

<sup>249</sup> Seth Lerer, “William Caxton,” *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, Ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 729

<sup>250</sup> Lerer, p. 731

new text to his English readership, the *Eneydos* goes one step further by drawing from the well-spring of the Trojan tradition. In his Prologue, he mentions that his source is a French translation of the *Aeneid*, but he says that anyone has trouble reading his text, “late hym goo rede and lerne vergyll / or the pysltes of ouyde.” Caxton puts himself in good company by using the Chaucerian *topos* of citing another authority in service of establishing one’s own. The invocation of Virgil and Ovid situates his *Eneydos* between epic and romance, demonstrating Caxton’s ability to master literary as well as historical writing.

With his last translation, Caxton claims his place in the English canon while making way for the new English authors who would take his place. In the Prologue, he uses the familiar *topos* of asking for more-capable readers and writers to amend his rude text, but he identifies a particular figure who should take on this responsibility: “I praye mayster Iohn Skelton, late created poete laureate in the vnyuersite of oxenforde, to ouersee and correcte this sayd booke.” He then mentions Skelton’s works as a translator and praises his wide reading and abilities as an English author. Caxton presents himself as a literary forbearer of Skelton and so makes himself an authority for the poet laureate. By translating the *Eneydos*, Caxton establishes himself as part of a literary genealogy that begins with Virgil and Ovid. In his Prologue, he continues to fashion himself in this line by representing himself as the literary father passing his text, and the future of English authorship, to Skelton. The much-celebrated Prologue to *Eneydos* has nothing to do with printing and everything to do with English authorship.

*Eneydos* is dedicated to Prince Arthur, son of Henry VII. Henry had finally put an end to the Wars of the Roses and, at the time of Caxton’s writing of the Prologue in 1490, stands as the triumphant conqueror of England and the potential savior of the nation. His son, whose name carries the promise of renewal, represents a new beginning of the English dynastic line, and it is

fitting that Caxton should present a text about the founding of Rome to the Prince whose ascension to the throne of New Troy should finally heal the division that had plagued the country. Caxton, like Chaucer and Lydgate, casts himself as the Virgil of his time and place, a literary author who can successfully exploit the possibilities of genre in order to speak to both his monarch and the “diuerse gentilmen” who increasingly have the power to decide where true authority lies in both the political and literary realms.

## Chapter 5

### “A Juggling Trick: To Be Secretly Open”:

#### Intertextual Fetish and Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*

By the hand of Shakespeare, Troy falls.

Chaucer, Lydgate and Caxton seek the resolution of the violent conflicts and political divisions that disrupted the stability of their particular eras, and they use the story of Troy to speak to these particular personal and ideological struggles. Each of their Trojan texts suggest the possibility of epic renewal and stability, holding out hope for England to escape the fate of Priam’s Troy by recognizing its own faults in the narrative of England’s not-so-distant and no-so-foreign origin. For Chaucer, Diomedes serves as a figure of epic to counter to the romance discourse and violence that characterized Ricardian London. Lydgate attempts to dissuade Henry V from continued romance adventures and argues that the mighty conqueror needs to rule the united kingdoms of England and France in peace. Caxton uses the Troy story in both the *Recuyell* and *Eneydos* to offer visions of epic solidarity and unity as a means of healing the civil wounds of the Wars of the Roses. Even in its opposition to royalist and imperial appropriations of Troy in service of nationalizing ideologies, epic is the underlying principle and primary end of English Trojan authorship, where royal authority is used in service of literary authority rather than vice versa. The construction of an English literary tradition is, at its core, an epic enterprise that privileges genealogy, succession, and the consolidation of authority in the singular figure of

the author, who draws from a literary past and a unifying idea of Trojanness in presenting his text as the literary and political foundation for a New Troy.

Shakespeare rejects epic as a principle of Trojan authorship. By colliding medieval Trojan romance and classical epic in a dramatic form, Shakespeare powerfully asserts his command of both genres and exposes the problem of incorporating each into a literary and nationalist discourse. *Troilus and Cressida* is Shakespeare's most direct engagement with the foundational narrative of English literary history and directly responds, I argue, to the proliferation of Trojan discourse in early modern England. Interweaving the Homeric and Chaucerian Troy stories into a single dramatic text, Shakespeare counters the neo-classical enterprise of Chapman's translation of the *Iliad* and Spenser's medieval chivalric romance-epic *The Faerie Queene*, two monumental texts that invoke the nationalist mythology of England as New Troy. These texts represent the fetishization of Troy as a site of overdetermined analogical significance, a discursive process that is further perpetuated through the medium of print. The fetish becomes the central focus of the final act of *Troilus and Cressida* through the Chaucerian configuration of the Troilus-Cressida-Diomedes love triangle. By emphasizing the fetish in one of his most literary plays, Shakespeare criticizes not only the Trojan legend but, more specifically, the legend's place within English culture.

Critics have often read Shakespeare's play as an attempt to deconstruct England's foundational myth through its harsh treatment of the legend's celebrated heroes and the chivalric ethos, as well as its commentary on the problematic nature of the story's textuality.<sup>251</sup> Heather James has observed, "Shakespeare extends the destabilizing function of literary history from a

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<sup>251</sup> See Douglas Cole, "Myth and Anti-Myth: The Case of *Troilus and Cressida*, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31 (1980): 76-84; Eric S. Mallin, *Inscribing the Time: Shakespeare and the End of Elizabethan England* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995): 25-61

single hero to the entire Troy legend: and when a writer demands that we confront the divisions internal to the myth of national origins itself, then the very authority which is its theme and *raison d'être* can only emerge as vitiated.”<sup>252</sup> In examining the play, however, many critics have failed to appreciate its grounding in medieval sources and its specific borrowings from Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>253</sup> Most acknowledge that medieval texts provided Shakespeare with certain narrative elements, but critics have rarely attempted in-depth analyses of the influence. This may be because Shakespeare’s deftness in adaptation and synthesis makes specific comparisons between isolated moments in the sources and the play difficult. Or it could be that the publication of Chapman’s *Seven Books of the Iliads of Homer, Prince of Poets* in 1598 has allowed the “original” Troy story to eclipse the medieval accounts. I want to suggest that in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare does not present “Iliadic materials...covered with a medieval-chivalric wash,”<sup>254</sup> but rather a play that takes up primarily medieval themes and concerns in its treatment of the Trojan War. Shakespeare’s challenge to the Homeric Trojan narrative is not as isolated or original as critics have often assumed; he is, in fact, drawing from a long tradition of counter-Homeric Trojan writing that began in the Middle Ages. If, as one critic put it, Shakespeare “debunks and undermines Homer’s legendary story,” it is only because Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton had done it first.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> *Shakespeare’s Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 32

<sup>253</sup> Matthew Greenfield claims, “Shakespeare displays no interest in creating a genealogy of English literature centered on Chaucer. Neither the play nor its prefatory material alludes specifically to Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*.” (“Fragments of Nationalism in *Troilus and Cressida*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 51 [2000]: 181-200)

<sup>254</sup> Charles and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990): 98

<sup>255</sup> François Laroque, “Perspective in *Troilus and Cressida*,” *Shakespeare’s Universe: Renaissance Ideas and Conventions: Essays in Honour of W. R. Elton*, Ed. John M. Mucciolo (New York: Scholar, 1996): 239. Although I argued in the introductory paragraph to this chapter that epic is an underlying principle of English Trojan authorship, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton are “anti-Homeric” in their approach to the Trojan narrative as they

As I have argued throughout this study, to invoke the name of Troy is to recall its competing myths. Linda Charnes points out that since “[t]he invidious problem of ‘originality’ lies at the heart of Shakespeare’s play,” Shakespeare faces the difficulty of “giving mimetic spontaneity to, and representing viable subjectivity in, characters who are already deeply encoded in their meaning.”<sup>256</sup> Shakespeare’s project, therefore, is as hermeneutic as it is authorial, which again aligns Shakespeare with the medieval literary tradition. In his essay “Medieval Literary Careers: The Theban Track,” Robert R. Edwards explains:

For poets on the Theban track, invention deals specifically with *materia exsecuta* or *materia pertractata* – subjects of literary discourse already put into verse by an earlier writer. It depends on a critical reading of a literary source, an engagement with an anterior text for what it actually says and for what remains potentially to be said...[I]nvention is a form of intertextuality by which poetic creation proceeds from hermeneutics.<sup>257</sup>

Edwards focuses specifically on writers handling the topic of Thebes, but the Troy story certainly served a similar function as a closely related and thematically similar *exemplum* from antiquity. It is this model of authorship that Shakespeare dramatizes in *Troilus and Cressida* as

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attempt to establish their own literary authority. Even in Shakespeare’s rejection of Trojan authorship, he uses many of the same strategies employed by the medieval English Trojan authors in composing *Troilus and Cressida* as counter-epic.

The question of Shakespeare’s sources for *Troilus and Cressida* has been a matter of debate since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. M. C. Bradbook, Ann Thompson, and E. Talbot Donaldson have examined Shakespeare’s indebtedness to Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* while claiming that the play makes a number of departures from Chaucer’s poem and contains few instances of direct quotation or allusion. Thompson points out that Chaucer’s *Troilus* “was not only the best-known version of the story but also the Chaucerian poem most highly esteemed by Elizabethans.” (*Shakespeare’s Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1978, pp. 111-14). Thomas Speght’s *Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* appeared in 1598 and was reprinted in 1602 with Robert Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseid* appended to the end of the *Troilus*. William Caxton’s *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* was reproduced in a number of editions in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and is generally accepted as Shakespeare’s primary source for the narrative of the Trojan War. John Lydgate’s *Troy Book* was printed in 1513 and 1555 and has, for the most part, been accepted as a source for Shakespeare’s play.

<sup>256</sup> *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993): 74

<sup>257</sup> *European Literary Careers: The Author from Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Patrick Cheney and Frederick A. de Armas, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002):106-7

the play continuously signals its intertextuality through its discourse of publication and Troilus' fetishized sleeve.

In this chapter, I argue that Shakespeare's decision to compose a Trojan play based on both *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Iliad* is a direct response to Spenser's successful self-fashioning of himself as a Trojan author and literary heir to Chaucer and Homer. Shakespeare contests the very grounds upon which English authorship is based by characterizing Trojan discourse as inherently empty of productive meaning. In my reading of the play, Troilus' sleeve, which replaces Cressida as an object of desire for both Troilus and Diomedes, serves as a metonym for Troy itself: an empty signifier endowed with meaning beyond reason and function. This fetishization of the sleeve is taken directly from Chaucer's *Troilus*, and the intertextual affinity that connects Chaucer's poem with Shakespeare's play aligns these two authors in a way that has heretofore been unrecognized. Shakespeare, in a sense, out-Chaucers Spenser and, in so doing, establishes himself as the legitimate heir to the English Trojan tradition, a tradition that he ultimately rejects.

### **“Their countreys auncestry to vnderstond”: Spenser, Shakespeare, and *Troynovant***

Spenser is Renaissance England's great Trojan author. In *The Faerie Queene* Spenser tells the story of the Trojan settlement of Britain in both II.x and III.ix in order to emphasize England's illustrious ancestry and represent Queen Elizabeth's London as the narrative *telos* of history. Shakespeare offers a pointed critique of this narrative in *Troilus and Cressida* by challenging the idea of Troy as a noble origin by revealing the inherent dysfunction in Trojan society. While Spenser perpetuates the myth of London as *Troynovant* in order to glorify



England, Shakespeare counters *The Faerie Queene's* epic ideology by parodying this discourse.<sup>258</sup>

In valorizing or criticizing the tradition of Britain's Trojan origins and the representation of London as Troynovant, Spenser and Shakespeare consider not only Troy's historiographic and political significance, but its function as the literary theme upon which English authorship is based. The critical consensus of the past few centuries that Shakespeare was not terribly interested in his literary reputation has recently been challenged by Lukas Erne and Patrick Cheney, who argue that Shakespeare did indeed consider the literariness of his own works and strove to be recognized as England's "national poet-playwright."<sup>259</sup> Shakespeare felt himself to be in competition with the other writers of his day on both the stage and the page, and we can read Shakespeare's poems and plays as engaging the other major figures in English literary tradition, particularly Spenser, England's laureate and the inheritor of the Trojan authorial tradition.<sup>260</sup> What does it mean, then, when Shakespeare presents his own Trojan work that empties Troynovant of its analogical significance?<sup>261</sup> Cheney has argued that Lucrece's attack of the Troy painting in *The Rape of Lucrece* represents Shakespeare's attack of "the Spenserian

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<sup>258</sup> I am grateful to Judith Anderson, Susan Oldrieve, and Anne Lake Prescott, my group members in the Spenser and Shakespeare seminar at the 2006 Shakespeare Association of America conference, for their comments on this section. While Spenser's use of the Trojan myth is not as straightforwardly nationalistic or imperialistic as it might seem, and I do think that Spenser reveals a deep ambivalence about England's Trojan heritage, it seems that to many of his early modern readers who were eager to claim him as England's Homer and Virgil, Spenser clearly and proudly makes London into New Troy. In his discussion of Spenser's linking of London and Troy, James Carscallen finds that "The typology that appears only casually and fitfully in Geoffrey [of Monmouth] is fully alive for Spenser." ("How Troy Came to Spenser," *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Alan Shepard and Stephen D. Powell, eds. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004, p. 19). My interest in presenting Spenser as England's imperial Trojan author is to recover a context for Shakespeare's composition of his *Troilus*.

<sup>259</sup> Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

<sup>260</sup> For a discussion of Spenser as laureate, see Richard Helgerson's seminal work, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Milton, Jonson and the Literary System*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983)

<sup>261</sup> James, p. 32

nationalist myth.”<sup>262</sup> I contend that *Troilus and Cressida* attacks the Spenserian authorial myth by deconstructing the validity of an authorial epic ethos expressed through the writing of the Trojan legend. Since Spenser’s Virgilian epic uses the Trojan narrative to assert his own textual authority, the devaluing of this mythology in *Troilus and Cressida* allows us to read Shakespeare’s play as a triumphant anti-epic that engages Spenser’s use of classical and medieval myth in order to critique the early modern discourse of Troynovant on the printed page.

Spenser intends for his poetry to promote the idea of London as Troynovant, a goal that would prove mutually beneficial to England’s national pride and Spenser’s own status as laureate poet. Cheney has demonstrated how Spenser modeled his poetic career on the Orpheus myth and Virgil’s generic trajectory,<sup>263</sup> and the resurrection of Troynovant is an important articulation of Spenser’s authorial ambition. The *Ruines of Time* and *Ruines of Rome* foreground the desire for poetic regeneration of a lost past, and this regeneration is finally realized in *The Faerie Queene*. Lawrence Manley observes, “In contrast to the Verulamium or the Rome Spenser translated from DuBellay, the *Faerie Queene*’s Troynovant substitutes for the poetic idolatry of visible desolation a prophetic sense of history as potentially renewable.”<sup>264</sup> Troynovant is renewed through levels of textualization as part of the *Briton moniments* chronicle that Arthur and Guyon read in Eumnestes’ chamber in Book II, Canto x, a book that exists only in the printed text of *The Faerie Queene* itself. The printed page of *The Faerie Queene*, like the chronicle it represents in II.x, serves as bridge between the ancient and lost city of Troy and its new inception in England. *Briton moniments* draws from both classical myth and English medieval

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<sup>262</sup> Shakespeare, *National Poet-Playwright*, p. 139

<sup>263</sup> Spenser’s *Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993)

<sup>264</sup> *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 178

chronicle history to locate Tudor London as the *telos* of the Trojan epic tradition and makes Spenser the undisputed laureate of Troynovant.

The title of the chronicle history speaks to Spenser's Orphic project as well as his epic aims. Bart van Es has discussed the ambiguity of the word "monument" for Spenser and has shown that its conflicted meanings are always in play: monuments invoke loss and unknowability even as they strive to recover and make present part of the past.<sup>265</sup> Spenser, however, in his representation of Britain's Trojan history, attempts to guide the reader's response in order to endow his "monument" with productive meaning. In both II.x and III.ix, Spenser presents Arthur and Britomart as ideal readers of British legendary history who, through their sheer desire to look upon Troynovant, make its presence possible. These scenes exemplify and model Spenser's own desired response to his poetry and its Orphic possibilities.

The discovery of the two books, *Briton moniments* and *Antiquitee of Faery*, in Eumnestes' chamber creates in Arthur and Guyon a desire for understanding their place in history and promises to satisfy that desire. When they first find the chronicles, their yearning to find out what the books contain is almost overwhelming:

Wherat they burning both with feruent fire,

Their countreys auncestry to vnderstond,

Crau'd leaue of *Alma*, and that aged sire,

To read those bookes; who gladly graunted their desire. (II.ix.60.6-10)

Since Book II is the book of Temperance, the description of the two knights "burning both with feruent fire" should seem problematic since it suggests that they are on the border of being

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<sup>265</sup> *Spenser's Forms of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 37-48

overcome by yearning. While such a description would certainly signal real danger in an erotic context, the desire created by the chronicle is sanctioned by Spenser through the figure of Eumnestes, “who gladly graunted their desire.” Van Es has observed that the chronicles’ primary purpose is “to give enjoyment to its readers” and he notes that Spenser says that even the usually-stoic Arthur is “quite rauished with delight” (II.x.69.1) upon reaching the end of the chronicle. (21) The economy of desire that centers on the book consists of endless perpetuation and satisfaction, as the book, through its title, *Briton moniments*, signals a loss that it immediately promises to recover. Even in its acknowledgment of certain absences, such as the fissure created by the end of Brutus’ line – “That in the end was left no moniment / Of Brutus, nor of Britons glorie auncient” (II.x.36.8-9) – the book functions as the textual monument that stands in for what has been lost. Even when the text breaks off just before addressing Arthur himself, the Prince’s recognition of something lost is immediately overridden by what has been made present:

that so vntimely breach

The Prince him selfe halfe seemed to offend,

Yet secret pleasure did offence empeach,

And wonder of antiquity long stopt his speach. (II.x.68.6-9)

The satisfied response of Prince Arthur to the text of *Briton moniments* serves as a model for the reader, who should likewise burn with the desire for “their countreys auncestry to vnderstand” and find the fulfillment of this desire in the pages of *The Faerie Queene*.

Book II, canto x argues for the ability of the text to make the past knowable through its presence, but the ultimate realization of Spenser’s Orphic ambition occurs in Book III, canto ix, as Britomart describes how “*Troynouant* was built of old *Troyes* ashes cold” (III.ix.38.9). She

refutes Paridell's lament, "*Troy*, that art now nought, but an idle name" (III.ix.33.1), by demonstrating how it still lives in Rome and England, and we are encouraged to trust Britomart's perspective because of her exemplary status throughout Book III. The fundamental difference between Paridell's and Britomart's versions of the Troy story is, according to Heather Dubrow, generic: Dubrow identifies Paridell's account as romance and Britomart's as epic.<sup>266</sup> While, as Dubrow suggests, Britomart's version may not be as unproblematic as it might initially seem, Spenser does ultimately mean for his reader to endorse her narrative as a completion of the epic trajectory of the Trojan *translatio imperii*. Britomart first prophesizes that "a third kingdom yet is to arise,/ Out of the *Troians* scattered offspring," (44.6-7), but she then switches to the present tense to speak of it: "It *Troynouant* is hight, that with the waues / Of wealthy *Thamis* washed is along" (45.1-2). Her words themselves seem to raise the city and make it present. Conversely, the reference to its physical presence along the Thames allows its extra-textual existence to legitimate her narrative. The end result is a validation of the Orphic construction of London as *Troynouant* and an endorsement of English imperial claims.

In bringing to life the third Troy through his poetry, Spenser forwards his own authorial ambition by making himself a Trojan author in line with Homer and Virgil. The presentation of *Briton monuments* in II.x is an "Argument worthy of *Mænian* [Homeric] quill," and Spenser lets us know through Arthur's enthusiastic response that it has been beautifully executed. The Trojan aspect of Spenser's writing was recognized by his contemporaries, and many of his admirers linked Spenser's poetic achievement to the idea of *Troynouant*. A brief survey of some of the

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<sup>266</sup> Heather Dubrow, "The Arraignment of Paridell: Tudor Historiography in *the Faerie Queene*, III.ix." *Studies in Philology* 97 (1990): 323

praise afforded Spenser shows the extent to which his particular fashioning of himself as a Trojan author succeeded.

Sir John Stradling, in his 1607 *Epigrammatum Libri Quatuor*:

To Edmund Spenser, the British Homer:

Si nos Troiani, noua nobis Troia sit: Ipse

(Vt Graecis suus est) noster Homerus eris.

If we are Trojans, we have a new Troy.

You (as for the Greeks theirs is) shall be our Homer.<sup>267</sup>

Stradling's lines to Spenser repeat the claim made by many of Spenser's contemporaries who wished to honor him: Spenser is England's national poet and the sole inheritor of the literary genius and reputation afforded to the preeminent poets of antiquity. But the New Poet does not simply stand alongside Homer because of his literary achievements; he *is* Homer, an English reincarnation of the Greek epic poet. Charles Fitzgeoffrey, in his *Sir Francis Drake* (1596), had similarly claimed that Spenser's "hart inharbours *Homers* soule." As if it is not enough for Spenser to possess the soul of the Greek's greatest poet, he is also infused with that of Rome's literary master, as Fitzgeoffrey claims in his *Affaniae: sive Epigrammatum Libri tres, Ejusdem Cenotaphia* (1601):

Our Virgil in Dan Chaucer dost thou see?

Badly! if aught can badly come from thee

Chaucer our Ennius, thou our Virgil be!<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Sir John Stradling, *Epigrammatum Libri Quatuor* (1607). Qtd. in Cummings, R. M., ed. *Spenser: The Critical Heritage*. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971): 123

By claiming Spenser as England's Homer and Virgil, Stradling and Fitzgeoffrey invoke the tradition of *translatio imperii* that makes England, or, more specifically, London, into the New Troy. Just as the imperial spirit of Troy is carried by Aeneas to Rome and Brutus to England, so are the spirits of the great writers of Troy granted to Spenser. Spenser's success is both literary and political, as he achieves personal fame by promoting the English imperial agenda through his promotion of the Trojan myth. While Homer and Virgil had brought to life the long-deceased city of Troy through their poetry, so too has Spenser allowed Troy and the Trojans to be seen as inhabiting Tudor London.

In *The Lamentation of Troy, for the death of Hector* (1596), the author, known only by his initials, I.O., describes the appearance of the ghost of Troy, who comes to him in a dream. While "she rather Spenser would haue told them," the responsibility of recounting the ghost's words falls to I.O. because Spenser had not answered her call. The ghost of Troy interrupts her complaint to wish again that her remembrance and celebration of Hector had been left in more capable hands:

O then good *Spencer* the only *Homer* liuing,  
Deign for to write with thy fame-quickeninge quill:  
And though poore *Troy* due thanks can not be giuing,  
The Gods are iust and they that giue them will.  
Write then, O *Spencer* in thy Muse so trim,  
That he in thee and thou maiest liue in him.

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<sup>268</sup> "Nostru Marone Edmonde Chavcerum vocas? / Male hercle! si tu quidpia potes male; / Namq; ille noster Ennius, sed Maro." In that same work, Fitzgeoffrey explains that this is a singular privilege: "If fertile England can number three hundred poets, why cannot she number two Spensers? That is my question. And the answer comes from our English Apollo (Spenser bids us use that honourable title): Greece, they say, bore only one Homer, nor Rome herself two Virgils." (Cummings' translation, p. 109)

The *Lamentation of Troy* and the epigrams to Spenser quoted above all speak to his ability to resurrect Troy and make it live again in England through his poetry. One dedicatory epistle to *The Faerie Queene* refers to Spenser as “this Bryttane *Orpheus*,” a title that, as Manley suggests, “portrayed the writing of *The Faerie Queene* as a triumphant act of Orphic reconstruction, a recreation of a city that would endure against the flow of time.”<sup>269</sup> Spenser was, to his contemporary admirers, not only a follower of “the antique Poets historicall,” as he writes in his *Letter to Raleigh*, but he was one of them. By removing metaphorical signification (Spenser is not *like* Homer; he *is* Homer), his admirers suggest that Spenser’s allegorical poetry transcends time and actually makes it possible for London to exist as Troy itself. From these examples of Spenserian praise, we find that Spenser was regarded as an Orphic poet who brings about the Trojan renewal promised throughout English chronicle history.

The idea of Troynovant invokes both a classical and medieval literary tradition. Spenser inherits the laureate crown of Trojan authorship that had moved from Homer to Virgil in antiquity and became part of the English laureate tradition when Chaucer wrote his Trojan poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*. Not only is Spenser regarded as the English Homer and Virgil, but he claims to be the new Chaucer, a status that is also confirmed by his contemporary admirers. Spenser asserts his right to continue the unfinished “Squire’s Tale” in *The Faerie Queene* by addressing Chaucer, telling him that he continues his work “through infusion sweete, / Of thine owne spirit, which doth in me survive” (IV.ii.34). The two renowned sixteenth-century editors of Chaucer, Thomas Speght, and Francis Thynne, validate Spenser’s claim. Speght quotes Spenser’s lines in his printed edition of Chaucer’s works (1598), and Thynne writes in his epigram to Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* that “the famous *Chaucer* yealds his Lawrell crowne / unto

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<sup>269</sup> *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London*, p. 209



thy sugred penn for thy renowne.”<sup>270</sup> William Camden says that Chaucer was the greatest of England’s poets and that Spenser is “the one who came nearest him of English poets in happiness of genius and the rich vein of poetry.”<sup>271</sup> Spenser is not only the laureate poet of his own historical moment, but he stands as the culmination of the classical and medieval literary tradition. His writing of *Troynovant* is a not only monument to England’s dynastic ambition and success, but it is, more importantly, a monument to Spenser’s own literary genius.

This is the literary environment in which Shakespeare wrote his *Troilus and Cressida*, and I think it is important to read Shakespeare’s play as a response to Spenser’s use of the Homeric, Virgilian, and Chaucerian aspects of Trojan authorship. Just as Spenser had created an image of himself as their literary heir, Shakespeare authors his own Trojan play by drawing from the classical and medieval traditions and, in so doing, challenges the legitimacy of Troy as a site of national pride and laureate ambition. While Spenser had become the “Brittayne Orpheus” capable of resurrecting a lost city, Shakespeare asserts his own literary authority by launching an attack on the unstable walls of Troy.

### **“Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?”**

*Troilus and Cressida* has a complicated performance and publication history, but we know this: the play makes Shakespeare a printed Trojan author. The play was entered into the Stationers’ Register on 7 February 1603 and two Quarto editions were printed in 1609, the same

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<sup>270</sup> *Emblemes and Epigrammes* (1600). Qtd. in Cummings, p. 107

<sup>271</sup> *Britannia* (1600): “Quique minime tacendus Poetarum Anglorum principes Galfredus Chaucer, & qui ad illum ingenij faelicitate, & diuite Poeseos vena proxime accessit Edm. Spencerus.” Qtd. in and translation by Cummings, p. 114

year that saw the publication of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Although the two quartos include different prefaces that make opposing claims for the play's performance history, both title-pages proclaim that the play was "Written by William Shakespeare." While there is no direct evidence to prove that Shakespeare authorized the printing of *Troilus and Cressida*, its appearance on the print-market, the publisher's preface to the second edition of the Quarto, and the text's discourse of publication do suggest that Shakespeare was regarded as a print-author during his lifetime and that he was concerned with the role of print in his authorial legacy.

The two states of the 1609 quartos have been the subject of much speculation. The first state refers to the play's performance on its title page, naming it "The Historie of Troylus and Cresseida. As it was acted by the Kings Majesties servants at the Globe."<sup>272</sup> The second includes an epistle to the reader, which opposes this claim of performance: "Eternal reader, you have here a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar." Richard Dutton, Lukas Erne, and Katherine Duncan-Jones have noted the plausibility of authorial revision in adapting the text from its stage-version to the printed page, thus validating the epistle's claim that this is "a new play."<sup>273</sup> Whether or not Shakespeare actually sat down and revised his play for print, the Quartos make clear that, as David Bevington notes, "Shakespeare was a name with which to sell books by 1609."<sup>274</sup> The play was obtained, prepared, and introduced into the print-market with Shakespeare's name attached and, in the

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<sup>272</sup> All quotations from *Troilus and Cressida*. The Arden Shakespeare. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. Ed. David Bevington. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998)

<sup>273</sup> Richard Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship, and Authorship in Early Modern England: Buggeswords*. (Basingstoke Palgrave, 2000): 103-5; Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, 103-5; Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes From His Life*. The Arden Shakespeare. 3<sup>rd</sup> Series. (London: Thomson Learning, 2001): 219

<sup>274</sup> "Introduction," p. 3

instance of the second state of the Quarto, with an effort to privilege the printed text over stage performance.

The publisher's epistle recalls Shakespeare's popularity as a printed author by referring to his other works. He praises Shakespeare's talent as both a dramatic and narrative poet: "So much and such savoured salt of wit is in his comedies that they seem, for their height of pleasure, to be born in that sea that brought forth Venus." By recalling Shakespeare's first printed text, *Venus and Adonis*, which had been reprinted for the ninth time in 1608, the epistle suggests that *Troilus and Cressida* is the most recent work of an author already well-established in the print market.<sup>275</sup> The epistle praises the play as Shakespeare's wittiest comedy and remarks that "It deserves such a labour as well as the best comedy in Terence or Plautus."<sup>276</sup> Harkening back to the classical tradition and the enduring legacy of the Roman playwrights reminds the reader of the ability of text to preserve the dramatic work of important authors across centuries. Most educated Englishmen would have first encountered Terence and Plautus by reading their plays in the classroom (often before preparing them for performance using the printed text). The renunciation of the play's staging as a sully of the text and the alignment of Shakespeare with classical dramatists immortalized on the page make *Troilus and Cressida* an important part of Shakespeare's career in print.

Shakespeare himself includes the language of publication and numerous references to the play's reliance on textual sources throughout *Troilus and Cressida*. In its careful reworking of

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<sup>275</sup> Dunan-Jones, 219

<sup>276</sup> The writer of the epistle reads *Troilus and Cressida* as a Roman comedy, and Shakespeare certainly borrows from this genre in this and many of his plays. For modern critics, to classify it solely as Roman comedy, however, would obscure its more direct engagement with the epic and romance elements of the medieval and Early Modern Trojan tradition, which, as I will demonstrate, form the basis of Shakespeare's dramatization of this particular legend.

Homer, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton, the play is Shakespeare's most literary; its levels of reference and meaning can begin to emerge, as most critics have noted, only after repeated readings. Referring to Chaucer's poem in the play's title and subject matter invokes important ruminations on textual dissemination and the endurance of the printed page, and Shakespeare develops this theme throughout his text. Both Shakespeare's play and Chaucer's poem emphasize their own textuality after the scene Troilus' betrayal as they reflect on how the character of Criseyde/Cressida will be read. In Chaucer's *Troilus*, Criseyde laments:

“Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,  
Shal neyther ben ywritten nor ysonge  
No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.” (V.1058-60)

Her words, like her counterpart's “As false as Cressid” speech in Act 3 Scene 2 of Shakespeare's play, prove prophetic, as Chaucer's narrator points out in his refusal to chastise the woman who has already been so maligned:

Ne me ne list this sely woman chyde  
Forther than the storye wol devyse.  
Hire name, allas, is publysshed so wide  
That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise. (V.1093-96)

The narrator can refrain from criticizing Criseyde since there her name has already been “publysshed,” here meaning “made known.” He chooses not to address the issue of her guilt, but in articulating his decision he reminds us that she is deserving of punishment. Chaucer's *recusatio* allows the intertexts to speak through the silence.

Shakespeare echoes Chaucer's use of the word "publish" at roughly the same point in the narrative. After Diomedes leaves her tent, Cressida voices her guilt, and, keeping with the medieval tradition, generalizes her behavior to criticize all women.<sup>277</sup>

Ah, poor our sex! This fault in us I find:

The error of our eye directs our mind.

What error leads must err. O, then conclude:

Minds swayed by eyes are full of turpitude. (5.2.115-18)

Hearing this, Thersites says in an aside, "A proof of strength she could not publish more, / Unless she said, 'My mind is now turned whore'" (119-20). "Publish" here also means "to make known," but by the time Shakespeare was writing *Troilus and Cressida* it also referred to the printing of texts.<sup>278</sup> This becomes especially significant as the word "publish" is repeated less than ten lines later when Troilus asks Ulysses, "But if I tell how these two did co-act, / Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?" (124-25). In these two lines, Shakespeare's Troilus moves from theater to print discourse, suggesting that Diomedes and Cressida's performance (with Troilus' sleeve as the main prop) will be recorded on the printed page. Like Chaucer's narrator, Troilus then attempts to preclude the reading of Cressida that has already been accepted as the moral of her story:

Let it not be believed, for womanhood!

Think, we had mothers. Do not give advantage

To stubborn critics, apt, without a theme

For depravation, to square the general sex

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<sup>277</sup> Both Lydgate and Caxton comment on the inconstancy of women at this point in their texts.

<sup>278</sup> Cheney, *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright*, p. 109

By Cressid's rule. (135-39)

The language of printing, reading and critical interpretation replaces the discourse of performance as the play comments on the literary tradition from which its story and its characters are drawn. Like Cressida keeping one eye on Troilus and one eye on Diomedes, Shakespeare looks back to its sources and ahead to future criticism and his own publication of the famous story.

Shakespeare's use of the language of publication suggests a conscious introduction of his play into the textual tradition of the Troy story, a tradition that was making the transition from manuscript to print beginning with Caxton's *Recuyell*. He evokes Chaucer in emphasizing the fetish, highlighting the play's intertextuality and the tradition's potentially destabilizing moments by calling attention to the "anterior text and what it actually says." In doing so, he also disrupts the silence of Lydgate, whose project of legitimizing Lancastrian dynastic claims and his own authorial ambitions is entirely dependent on the stability of both his text and its ideology.<sup>279</sup> Taking up the Troy story as subject matter is always a hermeneutic and authorial enterprise, and Shakespeare offers a unique moment of authorial self-reflection by saturating the scene of Cressida's famous betrayal with the concept of the fetish and the discourse of print culture.

As much as his words, Shakespeare's silences resound with intertextual significance. *Troilus and Cressida* fulfills the paradox quoted in the title of this chapter: the play itself is "secretly open." This is most evident during Cressida's famous betrayal of Troilus in Act 5, scene 2, a scene replete with half-lines, whisperings, and ambiguous questions. When Diomedes arrives at Cressida's tent, he initiates the following exchange:

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<sup>279</sup> See Alan S. Ambrisco and Paul Strohm, "Succession and Sovereignty in Lydgate's Prologue to *The Troy Book*," *Chaucer Review* 30 (1995): 40-57

Diomedes: Will you remember?

Cressida: Remember? Yes.

Diomedes: Nay, but do, then,

And let your mind be coupled with your words. (14-16)

The lack of specificity in Diomedes' question and the absence of a possible referent in any of the play's earlier scenes forces one to wonder, like Troilus, "What should she remember?" (17).

Within the fiction of the play, Diomedes seems to be asking Cressida to remember an earlier conversation, but the question also asks that she acknowledge her own textual history, a textual history that Thersites had called to attention immediately before this exchange in his remark that "[s]he's noted" (13). Through Diomedes' cryptic question to Cressida, Shakespeare asks his own audience to read intertextually and recall *Troilus and Cressida's* medieval sources that have already made the play's "secrets" known.

In Act 5, scene 3, Shakespeare again presents an important silence as Troilus receives a letter from Cressida. Pandarus asks, "What says she there?" to which Troilus replies, "Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart" (106-7) before tearing the letter and throwing it away.<sup>280</sup> The scene brings the *Litera Criseydis* from *Troilus and Criseyde* (V.1590-1632) to the stage only to have Troilus destroy it in an effort to efface the discourse of his former lover. Despite Troilus' actions, however, the textual artifact remains intact in Chaucer's poem. Though absent from the stage, and therefore silent, after her betrayal, Cressida continues to speak through the enduring intertexts. This attention to the necessity of intertextual reading, an

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<sup>280</sup> This scene echoes Hamlet's exchange with Polonius in Act 2, Scene 2, where Polonius asks Hamlet what he is reading and Hamlet replies, "Words, words, words." (192). Troilus' exchange with Pandarus is, therefore, intertextual not only in its reference to the *Litera Criseydis* of Chaucer's poem but also in its invocation of Shakespeare's own work.

authorial and hermeneutic enterprise only possible through the textual monument, signals Shakespeare's awareness of the privileged status of the page over the stage.

### **Criseyde's Glove and Troilus' Brooch: Fetish in the Medieval Troy Story**

The story of Troilus and Cressida is always a story of betrayal. After Chaucer's poem, Criseyde comes to represent the false woman, as she herself predicts in Shakespeare's play: "If I be false, or swerve a hair from truth.../ Let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood, / 'As false as Cressid'" (3.2.179;190-91).<sup>281</sup> In each version of the story, the shifting of her affections from Troilus to Diomedes is enacted through the exchange of love-tokens, which become the signs through which Troilus learns that he has been betrayed. The types of tokens, the manner of their exchange, and the way in which Troilus recognizes his abandonment through them vary significantly in each text, but there is a consistency in the fetishizing of these objects. In this section, I will trace the exchange of tokens in Chaucer, Caxton, Lydgate, and Henryson before turning to Act 5 of *Troilus and Cressida* in order to show how Shakespeare uses these tokens to *uninscribe* Troilus, the figure who would become "truth's authentic author" (3.2.176).

In Book V of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the first sign of Criseyde's "slydyng of corage" (825) is Diomedes's taking of one of her gloves. Ten days after her arrival in the Greek camp, Diomedes visits Criseyde in her father's tent and makes his romantic overture to her. Criseyde verbalizes her conflicting emotions, telling Diomedes that she has left behind her lover

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<sup>281</sup> Her reputation is attested to by Chaucer himself in his prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* as the God of Love reprimands Chaucer for telling the story of her betrayal: "Hast thou nat mad in Englysh ek the bok / How that Crisseyde Troylus forsook, / In shewyng how that wemen han don mis?" (G 264-66)



in Troy and that she is worried about how her betrayal of him would be perceived. Still, the Greek persists:

This Diomedes al fresshly newe ayeyn  
Gan pressen on, and faste hire mercy preye;  
And after this, the sothe for to seyn,  
Hire glove he took, of which he was ful feyn;  
And finally, whan it was woxen eve  
And al was wel, he roos and tok his leve. (1010-15)

Diomedes receives no verbal sign of Criseyde's affection, but he finds satisfaction in his successful taking of her glove, which functions as a recognizable chivalric token of a woman's acceptance of a knight's service. Although Criseyde does not actively bestow her glove upon Diomedes, her willingness to part with her glove signals her acquiescence, a submission that recalls her earlier yielding to Troilus and Pandarus. Chaucer's syntax links Diomedes's happiness to his possession of the glove with a suggestion of erotic fulfillment; it is the taking of her glove "of which he was ful feyn." Diomedes remains with Criseyde for a while before leaving when "al was wel," but the narrator never makes any explicit mention of sexual consummation.

The taking of the glove does not occur in Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, Chaucer's primary source. For this detail, Chaucer has drawn from Boccaccio's own source, Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae*. While Boccaccio passes over this moment, Chaucer finds it important enough to include it in his narrative, as the glove represents a material shift in Criseyde's desire. In Book XIX of the *Historia*, Diomedes takes one of Briseida's gloves immediately after leading her to Calchas's tent following her exchange for Antenor. Diomedes reveals his love to her on the ride back to the Greek camp, to which Briseida replies, "At present

I neither refuse nor accept the offer of your love, since my heart is not so disposed that I can reply to you in any other way” [“Amoris tui oblaciones ad presens nec repudio nec admitto, cum cor meum non sit ita dispositum quod tibi possim aliter respondere”]. Encouraged by the possibility of eventual satisfaction, Diomedes stays with her until they arrive at her father’s tent, at which point he secures a token of her affection:

He stayed with her up to the place where Briseida was to go, and when she had reached that point, he went promptly to her as she was dismounting from her horse, and, without anyone realizing it, slyly took away one of the gloves which Briseida was wearing on her hand. Although she alone perceived it plainly, she concealed the pleasing theft of the lover. (p.158)

Quare associauit eam usque quo Briseida recipere se debebat, et ea perueniente ibidem, ipse eam ab equo descendentem promptus adiuit et vnam de cyrotecis quam Briseida gerebat in manu ab ea nullo percipiente furtiue subtraxit. Sed cum ipsa sola persenserit, placitum furtum dissimulauit amantis.

Guido places the emphasis on Briseida’s satisfaction as she considers Diomedes’ action a “pleasing theft” [“placitum furtum”]. This same moment is translated by Raoul Lefevre and then recorded in Caxton’s *Recuyell of the Hystories of Troye*, again with the emphasis on Breseyda’s happiness: “And he accompanied her unto the tente of her fader, and halpe her doun of her hors and toke fro her one of her glovys that she helde in her handes, and she souffryd hym swetely.” Both Guido and Caxton follow this moment by lamenting female inconstancy in love, marking the exchange of the token as the sign of her betrayal. If Chaucer really did “medievalize” Boccaccio’s text, as C. S. Lewis famously suggested, one way in which he succeeded is through the added focus on love tokens.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> “What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*,” *Essays and Studies By Members of the English Association*, XVII (1932): 56-75

Criseyde's glove functions not only as the material object that prefigures the eventual fulfillment of Diomedes' erotic desire, but it also becomes the fetishized object through which desire is articulated. William Pietz explains that one purpose of the fetish is "the subjection of the human body (as the material locus of action and desire) to the influence of certain significant material objects that, although cut off from the body, function as its controlling organs at certain moments." The idea of the material fetish presents "an object established in an intense relation to and with power over the desires, actions, health, and self-identity of individuals whose personhood is conceived as inseparable from their bodies."<sup>283</sup> By surrendering her glove, therefore, Criseyde surrenders herself. Chaucer's Diomedes recognizes this in the fact that it is the taking of her glove "of which he was ful feyn." He accepts the deferral of erotic consummation by displacing his desire to Criseyde's glove, which Criseyde seems to support in her complicity. Caxton's admonishment of Briseida for "the vyce of trayson whiche she her self excersised in forgetyng her contre and her trewe frende Troyllus" links the giving of her glove with the giving of her body, an act that Caxton characterizes as both a personal betrayal of her lover and political betrayal of her city.

In Chaucer's poem, Criseyde offers Diomedes more gifts that signal her infidelity to Troilus, including a horse that Diomedes had taken from Troilus in battle:

And ek a broche – and that was litel need –  
That Troilus was, she yaf this to Diomedes.  
And ek, the bet from sorwe hym to releve,  
She made hym were a pencil of hire sleve. (1040-43)

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<sup>283</sup> "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *Res* 9 (1985): 10

Both the brooch and her sleeve are meant to be worn by Diomedes on his armor as public displays of her affection. Troilus had given Criseyde the brooch for her to keep in his absence as a representative object of his affection for her, so in giving his brooch to Diomedes to wear, she publicly empties the object of the meaning with which Troilus had endowed it.<sup>284</sup> The brooch eventually confirms Troilus' fear that Criseyde had forsaken him when he sees it on a coat that his brother Deiphobus had taken from Diomedes on the battlefield. Recognizing the betrayal, Troilus curses Criseyde and laments her infidelity ("Allas, youre name of trouthe / [i]s now fordon" [V.1686]), but he seems particularly upset over the fact that she gave up his love-token:

"Was ther non other broch yow liste lete  
To feffe with youre newe love," quod he,  
But thilke broch that I, with teris wete,  
Yow yaf as for a remembraunce of me?  
Non other cause, allas, ne hadde ye  
But for despit, and ek for that ye mente  
Al outrely to shewen youre entente." (V.1688-94)

For Troilus, the brooch encapsulated his identity as Criseyde's lover. The word "remembraunce" emphasizes the idea that the object was intended to remove the temporal and spatial distance that had come between them. For her to keep the brooch would be to keep Troilus present and continually reaffirm his identity as defined by their relationship. By giving it

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<sup>284</sup> Ann Thompson suggests that Chaucer's handling of this particular detail may have provided Shakespeare with the inspiration for Act 5, Scene 2: "Chaucer cannot refrain from commenting on this 'and that was litle need' (1040), and it may have been his recognition of this as one of the worst and most unnecessary things about the betrayal that made Shakespeare elaborate it into the painful play with the sleeve" (p. 142)

away, Criseyde effectively negates Troilus' self-conception through her public disavowal of his status as her lover and her personal rejection of his desire.

Identity and desire are rooted not in bodies but in objects, as Chaucer makes clear in one his poem's most provocative lines.<sup>285</sup> After describing Criseyde's gifts to Diomedes, the narrator says, "Men seyn – I not – that she yaf hym hire herte" (V.1050). According to the narrator, one cannot be sure whether Criseyde ever truly abandoned Troilus emotionally, and there is no explicit mention in the poem of a sexual consummation of her relationship with Diomedes. It is clear by Troilus' reaction to seeing his brooch on Diomedes' coat that it is the exchange of tokens that carries the greatest significance as these objects represent the very identities of the characters. They are the material signs of desire, the physical tokens of one's allegiance and self-conception, more important than any verbal articulation of a character's subjectivity. Thus, Criseyde's betrayal is enacted entirely through her transferal of the brooch, not in the submission of her body to Diomedes' desire.

Henryson echoes this linking of love-tokens to betrayal in *The Testament of Cresseid*, a poem that Shakespeare shows familiarity with in *Twelfth Night*.<sup>286</sup> Toward the end of his poem, Henryson's Cresseid, suffering from leprosy, sits down to compose her will so that her remaining possessions might be properly dispersed. Her last words focus on the love-tokens:

"O Diomeid, thou hes baith broche and belt

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<sup>285</sup> I argue that this will become the central tenant of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, a theme that the play shares with *King Lear*. For a discussion of *Lear* and the function of clothing and objects as locations of identity, see Margreta de Grazia, "The Ideology of Superfluous Things," *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 17-42

<sup>286</sup> In Act 3 Scene 1, the Clown says, "Cressida was a beggar" (55). This notion begins with Henryson's poem, in which Cressida, having been abandoned by Diomedes, contracts leprosy and becomes a beggar in the Greek camp.

Quhilk Troylus gave me in takning

Of his trew lufe,” and with that word scho swelt. (589-91)<sup>287</sup>

She had earlier made a verbal complaint in which she laments her betrayal, but her invocation of the “takning” (meaning both token-giving and signifying) provokes the ultimate emotional response as it seems literally to break her heart. By having Cresseid write about this exchange herself, Henryson allows her to author her own story and attempt to control her legacy in a tradition in which she had always been written by men. And it is at this key moment that Henryson’s Cresseid chooses to write not a confession or apology, but a testament that centers on objects. After her death, another leper takes a ring that Troylus had given her from her body and delivers it to back to him, as per Cresseid’s wishes, and it is through this particular symbol that Troylus learns that she is dead. As a “sequel” to Chaucer’s *Troilus*, Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseid* succeeds in taking its place next to Chaucer’s poem by maintaining the concept of the fetish.

Lydgate, in *Troy Book*, occludes any mention of the exchange of love-tokens as he refuses to translate the scene of Criseyde’s betrayal. He summarizes the majority of the story as told by Chaucer, but as soon as Criseyde arrives in the Greek camp, he interrupts his translation and claims that he does not need to include the pivotal scene:

Al is rehersed ceriously and wel

In Troylus boke, as 3e han herd me seyn –

To write it efte, I hold it wer but veyn.

But Guydo seith, longe or it was ny3t,

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<sup>287</sup> Quotation from *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, Ed. Robert L. Kindrick. (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University for TEAMS, 1997)

How Cryseyde for-soke hir owne kny3t,

And 3af hir herte vn-to Dyomedede... (III.4432-37)

The omission of the scene is striking given that Lydgate is not known for choosing brevity over amplification. It suggests that in his reading of both Guido and Chaucer, he found something in the specifics of Criseyde's betrayal that he did not want to include in his *Troy Book*. Rather than amplifying the scene, he pulls back to offer only a general and conventional reading of its significance: Criseyde is, by nature, inconstant. Lydgate must have found the fetishizing of Criseyde's glove, as presented in Guido, and the erotic transactions enacted by the exchange of love-tokens in Chaucer, to be threatening to the seriousness and moral agenda of his project, which is to present examples of "the worthynes.../And the prowess of olde chivalrie" (Prologue 77-8). It is a project dependent on the stability of each character's identity and meaning, and it is this stability that the concept of the fetish deconstructs. In *Troy Book*, Lydgate sublimates the threat of the fetish; in *Troilus and Cressida*, as we shall see, Shakespeare explodes it.

### **"He that takes that doth take my heart withal"**

In composing the scene of Cressida's betrayal Shakespeare adds levels of commentary and perspective that both heighten the tension and reduce the love story to near-farce. The exchange of tokens in both Chaucer's and Caxton's versions occurs during private moments that culminate in Criseyde's silent assent; in *Troilus and Cressida* the exchange is public, witnessed by Troilus, Ulysses, and Thersites, and potentially violent, as Diomedes confronts Cressida and takes the token that she reluctantly surrenders. Linda Charnes notes, "The scene of multiple voyeurism in Act 5, scene 2...is the *playing out* – the visual equivalent – of intertextual

citacionality... What is for Troilus a 'betrayal' is for the audience not betrayal at all but rather the meeting of a textual obligation, the paying of a legendary *debt*."<sup>288</sup> There is a dissonant intertextuality, however, as Troilus is not supposed to observe his betrayal.<sup>289</sup> Placing Troilus in the Greek camp outside her father's tent as a witness to the exchange of love-tokens both fulfills and disrupts expectation, providing the audience with a new take on the old story.

For all of its dialogue and seemingly familiar subject matter, the scene is full of secrets. As mentioned before, we do not know what it is that Diomedes asks Cressida to remember when he first arrives at her tent. In an effort to clarify, he then asks, "What did you swear you would bestow on me?" (27), to which she replies, "I prithee do not hold me to mine oath, / Bid me do any thing but that, sweet Greek" (28-9). As he prepares to leave, angry at her indecision and apparent failure to keep her word, she pleads with him to "[c]ome hither once again" (51). Diomedes responds with another unfinished question: "But will you, then?" (60). The half-lines and Cressida's obvious inner conflict suggest that the issue at hand is sexual consummation and erotic fulfillment, but this is never explicitly stated.<sup>290</sup> Instead, when Cressida swears that she will follow through on her promise, Diomedes demands, "Give me some token for the surety of it" (62). Cressida exits the stage to fetch him one.

She returns carrying Troilus' sleeve, which he had given to her before she was to be taken to the Greek camp. Cressida, in exchange, had given him one of her gloves (4.4.69-70). Carol Chillington Rutter suggests, "These piecemeal tokens of absent bodies are loaded with the

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<sup>288</sup> *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993): 100

<sup>289</sup> Thompson, p. 141

<sup>290</sup> Daniel Juan Gil points out, "What is surprising here is not that Cressida finally gives in but that she comes close to holding out; this would surely be something of a suicidal gesture... For if Troilus loved her better than Diomedes, Diomedes can certainly protect her better now that she is in the Greek camp." See "At the Limits of the Social World: Fear and Pride in *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52 (2001): 350



promise of metaphor, for hands pledge hearts, and chivalric arms defend female honor. But the tokens are likewise cruelly ironic, for they are, literally, emptied out of meaning. The sleeve comes without the arm, the glove, without the hand.”<sup>291</sup> For Troilus and Cressida, however, their physical separation empties their bodies of meaning, as they had come to conceptualize their identities through their union, and it is through the fetishization of these objects that their union can remain intact. Pietz explains that “the fetish is precisely *not* a material signifier referring beyond itself, but acts as a material space gathering an otherwise unconnected multiplicity into the unity of its enduring singularity” (p. 15; his emphasis). But fetishization always involves loss.<sup>292</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones point out, “The power of the fetish emerges through an act of separation, but that separation is haunted by the possibility of further separations, further exchanges. If the fetish keeps the absent beloved present to the lover, it also potentially gives a part of the lover away.”<sup>293</sup> The giving of the fetishized sleeve to Diomedes thus creates an epistemological crisis for both Troilus and Cressida, as their union, and thus their identities, are destroyed through the object’s reappropriation.<sup>294</sup>

When Thersites sees Cressida return with the sleeve, he exclaims in an orgasmic aside, “Now the pledge; now, now, now!” (67) As she gives it to Diomedes, Cressida recognizes its erotic significance: “You look upon that sleeve? Behold it well./ He loved me – O false wench! – Give’t me again” (73-4). The sleeve is not just a symbol of Troilus’ absent body, but, for her,

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<sup>291</sup> “Designs on Shakespeare: Sleeves, Gloves, and Helen’s Placket,” *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honor of R. A. Foakes* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000): 225

<sup>292</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, p. 202

<sup>293</sup> “Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001): 126

<sup>294</sup> Janet Adelman states, “The play seems to enact the fantasy that Cressida becomes radically unknowable, irreducibly other, at the moment of her separation from Troilus.” (“‘This Is and Is Not Cressid’: The Characterization of Cressida,” *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether, eds. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985: 128)

indistinguishable from his body, which is made apparent by the rapid movement from the pronoun “it” to “he”; Cressida sees Troilus in the sleeve. When she takes it back, the sleeve makes Troilus present to her in her memory, as she envisions him with her glove:

O all you gods! – O pretty, pretty pledge!  
Thy master now lies thinking on his bed  
Of thee and me, and sighs, and takes my glove,  
And gives memorial dainty kisses to it –  
As I kiss thee. (83-7)

The glove and the sleeve are more than symbols of erotic attachment; they become the very objects of desire. For Cressida, memory is linked to corporeality, as the object now serves as the material embodiment of the absent lover and, as such, can be kissed as if it were the lover. Erotic desire is displaced onto the fetishized object, allowing the fulfillment of that desire to be realized through the presence of the sleeve. This fulfillment reaffirms Cressida’s identity as Troilus’ lover; the material object functions as the location of identity for the desiring subject. She imagines that Troilus likewise fetishizes her glove and that their simultaneous expressions of erotic attachment to their received tokens can preserve their unity despite their physical distance. If Diomedes is to claim Cressida as his own, he must break her bond with Troilus by taking Troilus’ sleeve.

When Diomedes grabs the sleeve from her, Cressida admits, “He that takes that doth take my heart withal” (88), suggesting that her identity is indistinct from and contained within the love-token.<sup>295</sup> The line responds directly to the narrator of Chaucer’s *Troilus*, who, as mentioned

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<sup>295</sup> The line does pose a textual problem as it reads differently in the Quarto and the Folio. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass suggest, “Cressida says of the sleeve, in Q1, ‘He that takes that doth take my heart

earlier, had refused such speculation (“Men seyn – I not – that she yaf hym hire herte” [V.1050]).<sup>296</sup> Shakespeare’s Cressida answers Chaucer’s narrator by rearticulating what Caxton and Henryson had made explicit and what Lydgate had refused to acknowledge: Cressida’s “heart” lives not in her body but in the material expression of her desire. Her betrayal, then, is not enacted through physical consummation or the swearing of oaths, but through the redeployment of the object that continuously contains and inscribes her identity. When Diomedes tells her, “I had your heart before. This follows it” (89), he recognizes that the sleeve completes Cressida’s betrayal: and now for the play’s audience, the “legendary debt” is paid. Having earlier assured Troilus that, “To her own worth / She shall be prized” (4.4.132-3), Diomedes now reveals that Cressida is worth no more and no less than a single sleeve.

### **“I come to lose my arm or win my sleeve”: Troilus’ Material Fetish**

Troilus’ reaction to Cressida’s betrayal has received a significant amount of critical commentary that focuses on his epistemological crisis, which leads him to claim, “This is and is not Cressid” (5.2.153). This crisis is often seen as resulting in madness, as Troilus “is brought to the edge of mental collapse.”<sup>297</sup> Janet Adelman points out that his speech reveals “a near-

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withal,’ or, in the Folio, ‘He that takes that, rakes my heart withal’ (5.2.82). Q1 captures the power of a piece of clothing magically to absorb its wearer; F1 captures the power of clothing to dispossess its owner’s self when the clothing is transferred.” (*Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: 202)

<sup>296</sup> Donaldson, p. 115

<sup>297</sup> Jonathon Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989): 40

psychotic denial of an obvious reality.”<sup>298</sup> François Laroque suggests, “He experiences a form of mental disjunction, an ontological breakdown that is the equivalent of schizophrenic hallucination” (238). Unwilling to accept and unable to understand what he has just witnessed, Troilus is “at odds with reason and reality” as he struggles to come to terms with the apparent and irrefutable loss of Cressida that calls into question his very identity.<sup>299</sup> Valerie Traub rightly notes that *Troilus and Cressida* “displays an *indifference* to the gender of the erotic object,” for the Troilus’ self-identity and erotic desire are tied not to Cressida’s body but to the sleeve he entrusted to her keeping.<sup>300</sup> Like Chaucer’s Troilus, Shakespeare’s hero articulates his material fetish.

Troilus’ speech in Act 5, scene 2, lines 144-66, is full of paradox – the “madness of discourse / That cause sets up with and against itself” (149-50) – and fragmentation.<sup>301</sup> He laments:

Within my soul there doth conduce a fight  
Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate  
Divides more wider than the sky and earth... (154-56)

Adelman suggests that “[b]oth Cressida herself and his union with her are this separated thing inseparable,” but I would suggest that the “thing inseparate” could just as likely refer to Troilus’ sleeve, the transfer of which has been the direct cause of Troilus’ despair (129). Recalling Pietz’s definition of the fetishized object as “a material space gathering an otherwise unconnected

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<sup>298</sup> “‘This Is and Is Not Cressid’: The Characterization of Cressida,” *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985): 119

<sup>299</sup> Cole, p.82

<sup>300</sup> *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (New York: Routledge, 1992):

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<sup>301</sup> Rosalie L. Colie, *Shakespeare’s Living Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974): 342

multiplicity into the unity of its enduring singularity,” we can see how the displaced love-token, an object endowed with the purpose of preserving Troilus and Cressida’s romantic union through space and time, produces division through its reappropriation.

As the speech continues, Troilus’ language continues to focus on material objects:

Instance, O instance, strong as Pluto’s gates,  
Cressid is mine, tied, with the bonds of heaven;  
Instance, O instance, strong as heaven itself,  
The bonds of heaven are slipped, dissolved and loosed,  
And with another knot, five-finger-tied,  
The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,  
The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics  
Of her o’ercreaten faith, are bound to Diomed. (160-67)

Troilus’ focus is not on the betrayal but on its material proof. His union with Cressida, secured with his “instance, strong as Pluto’s gates,” has been undone with the same “instance,” whose strength both mirrors and dissolves the “bonds of heaven.” The new “knot” could be “five-finger-tied” with her hand as the metonymic symbol of her body, but the image also invokes the glove Diomedes had taken in Caxton’s account of the story. Troilus sees the newly dispersed love-tokens as “fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics,” intrinsically worthless objects that establish Cressida’s new bond with Diomedes and now function as bitter monuments to Troilus’ forsaken affection. The recurring imagery of tying and loosening emphasizes the reliance on textiles in forming and representing union while simultaneously removing the corporeal subject from consideration. Cressida has been negated – she “is not” – by Troilus: there is only his sleeve.

Ulysses recognizes this, asking incredulously, “May worthy Troilus be half attached / With that which here his passion doth express?” (168-69). Troilus’ response reveals that the “that” to which he is attached is not Cressida but his sleeve:

Ay Greek, and that shall be divulged well  
In characters as red as Mars his heart  
Inflamed with Venus. Never did young man fancy  
With so eternal and so fixed a soul.  
Hark, Greek: as much as I do Cressid love,  
So much by weight hate I her Diomed.  
That sleeve is mine that he’ll bear in his helm. (170-76)

Eric Mallin points out, “The overcoming of feminine presence, will, and influence is a prominent movement of the last act of *Troilus and Cressida*... Cressida is abandoned by Troilus, who never once voices a desire to regain her” (60). Troilus acknowledges his enduring love for Cressida, but that love is superceded by his hatred for Diomedes and his desire to regain his sleeve. The movement of Troilus’ speech echoes a similar speech in Chaucer’s *Troilus*, where after lamenting Criseyde’s bestowal of his brooch on Diomedes, Troilus declares his unending love before quickly turning his attention to killing his rival:

“...I ne kan nor may  
For al this world, withinne myn herte fynde  
To unloven yow a quarter of a day!  
In corsed tyme I born was, weilaway,  
That yow, that doon me al this wo endure,  
Yet love I best of any creature!

“Now God,” quod he, “me sende yet the grace  
That I may meten with this Diomedé!  
And trewely, if I have might and space,  
Yet shal I make, I hope, his sides blede.” (V.1696-1705)

Chaucer’s Troilus voices his love only in the negative: “I ne kan nor may...unloven yow.” He loves only by obligation as his desire has become fixed on Diomedé. Despite his reputation as a true lover, in both Chaucer and Shakespeare, Troilus shows no concern with getting Cressida back; he hopes only for revenge after learning of Cressida’s betrayal. For Shakespeare’s Troilus, revenge is merely a means whereby he can recapture his love-token since to do so would secure his reputation as Cressida’s lover rather than as a cuckold. Indeed, when battle begins, Troilus proclaims, “Proud Diomed, believe, / I come to lose my arm or win my sleeve” (5.3.95-6). Ulysses question, then, is entirely appropriate in two ways: the fetishized sleeve is the material sign that “doth express” Troilus’ desire as well as the desired object that becomes the focus of Troilus’ passion.

*Troilus and Cressida* presents the Trojan lovers as figures who define themselves not through their desire for each other but through the fetishizing of material objects. The sleeve becomes the site where their identities are inscribed, and the final act of the play demonstrates the problem of investing identity in an object so easily reappropriated. Diomedes divests Troilus’ sleeve of its original meaning, and in displaying it on his helmet, he allows it to inscribe and proclaim his new identity. As Peter Stallybrass observes, “Diomedes, who wears the sleeve

on his helmet, appropriates both lovers.”<sup>302</sup> As Thersites watches Troilus and Diomedes meet on the battlefield, he says, “Here comes sleeve and t’other” (5.4.16) and then encourages them in their fighting: “Hold thy whore, Grecian! Now for the whore, Trojan! Now the sleeve, now the sleeve!” (5.4.23-4). The love-token ultimately supercedes each of the characters and becomes the sole object of desire. As we have seen, the material fetish plays a significant role in the medieval story of Troilus and Cressida, especially in Chaucer’s poem, from which Shakespeare certainly drew his inspiration. By highlighting this concept in his play, Shakespeare empties the love story of any valuable meaning by locating its essence in a literarily overdetermined, and intrinsically worthless, sleeve.

**“I cannot fight upon this argument; / It is too starved a subject for my sword.”**

Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* contests the medieval and early modern political discourse of England’s Trojan origin and the literary tradition of English Trojan authorship. The play continually reminds us that the Trojan War, as both a political and literary theme, is about nothing more than personal ambition. As Troilus lays down his sword at the beginning of the play and voices his unwillingness to fight for a cause in which he has no personal stake, Shakespeare takes up his pen in an effort to deconstruct the myth of Troy as a meaningful site of analogical significance. Through the play’s unabashed nihilism, we find Shakespeare at his most masterful even as he seems, like Troilus, to “fight upon this argument” with great reluctance. As I have demonstrated, Shakespeare’s questioning of the worthiness of Troy as a political and

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<sup>302</sup> “Worn Worlds: Clothes and Identity on the Renaissance Stage,” *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, p. 313



literary theme draws from an English tradition that begins with Chaucer and is perpetuated by Lydgate and Caxton. For Shakespeare, however, to be a Trojan author is not to come to the city's defense, but to strive to tear it down.

The Troy story's literary and national significance depends on the fiction of its ideological coherence. This fiction can only be maintained through a fetishizing of the story in an attempt to locate a singular meaning in its competing redactions. Shakespeare offers his own "authorized" version of the story in *Troilus and Cressida*, and by signaling its intertextuality, which is, in its recontextualizing of prior materials, a literary fetishizing, he reminds the audience of the inherently unstable nature of the Trojan legend. In denying the authority of his contemporaries to define Troy, Shakespeare asserts his own authority to define himself as an author in the English literary tradition. Having already secured his reputation through his earlier poems and plays, Shakespeare seeks to establish a lasting legacy that aligns him with English writers of the past, particularly Chaucer, and that brings him to the forefront of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. While most modern readers would place *Hamlet* and *King Lear* and a host of other plays ahead of *Troilus and Cressida* as Shakespearean masterpieces, it is important to note that at the time of Shakespeare's writing, as he is attempting to define his career, his Trojan play is a necessary component in constructing English authorial identity. While it may be too starved a subject for Shakespeare's pen, he nevertheless recognizes the importance of engaging the Trojan tradition in order to take his place within it. The manner in which he does this mirrors the teleology of Trojan narrative as it had been originally conceived by Homer and passed along through the centuries: Shakespeare decimates the city, its heroes, and its meaning so that he, as author, can stand in its place.

## Conclusion

The narrative of the transmission and reinvention of the Troy legend over time mirrors that of the legend itself in that it is traceable as both a linear and recursive phenomenon. For England, the Troy story has always been about the potential for the nation to move beyond its tragic origin by correcting the mistakes of its ancestors, but to do that it must continually look back to that origin with both reverence and contempt. So, too, do the medieval and early modern writers of Troy as they strive to push the boundaries of genre and poetic discourse by hearkening to the same material that their predecessors had used in order to practice imitation and innovation. With each iteration of the Troy legend, we find writers acknowledging an indebtedness to past texts while offering their own works as a corrective for those readers who wish to better understand Troy's place in their modern context. And so the legend develops like a gyre: every time a writer returns to the origin, he moves the story forward.

Throughout this study, I have examined the development of the Trojan legend in England from the end of the fourteenth through the beginning of the seventeenth centuries to show how each of the major Trojan authors in the English tradition re-imagines England's foundational myth in order to secure a lasting poetic fame. The Trojan legend is itself a story about efforts by men to continue to live on after death through heroic performances on the battlefield, but the telling of the legend has revealed how the name of the author can outshine even that of Achilles or Hector in the pantheon of famous men. The continual reiteration of the narrative keeps Troy from ever truly lying in ruin, from ever completely disappearing from the world, and English writers invoked Troy's eternal fame in order to perpetuate their own. This is the purpose and the function of English Trojan authorship for each of these writers: to establish a literary reputation

that would ensure that their texts would be read by their most influential and powerful contemporaries as well as future generations.

This study begins by locating the emergence of English authorship in the Middle Ages with Chaucer. Though long recognized as the “Father of English Poetry,” Chaucer’s reticence in identifying himself as an *auctor* has resulted in critical debates over his self-conception as a writer. When the Host asks Chaucer the Pilgrim “What man artow?” (*Canterbury Tales*, VII.695), Chaucer denies any poetic agency by delivering “a rym I lerned longe agoon” (709), the famously-bad Tale of Sir Thopas, and he abandons the *House of Fame* at the very moment that he must give voice to the “man of greet auctoritee” (2158). Yet by choosing to present a Trojan narrative, even one that seems to deny any interest in the larger story of the war and its historical significance, Chaucer announces himself as a Trojan author capable of synthesizing Latin, French, and Italian texts into an entirely new kind of English poetry. This intertextual engagement with and invocation of Trojan texts that form the basis of classical and medieval notions of authorship – Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* and *Metamorphoses*, Dante’s *Commedia*, Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* – demonstrates Chaucer’s desire to be recognized by an author in his own right, if not by his contemporaries (like the temperamental Richard II) then at least by his literary successors.

First among those literary successors is John Lydgate, who begins his literary career with *Troy Book*, a text that defers to *Troilus and Criseyde* on matters of love but attempts to supercede Chaucer’s poem in terms of historical scope and political significance. Lydgate grants Chaucer laureate status and, through his association with him as a Trojan author, claims laureate status for himself. While Chaucer had recognized that Troy was a necessary theme for a writer to become a European *auctor*, Lydgate understands that Chaucer makes it necessary for writers to take up

Troy in order to become an English author. The narrative of English authorship thus begins with Lydgate's hermeneutic of Chaucerian authorship and his own inscription of that ideal.

My arguments concerning the importance of Troy to English authorship allow for a reconsideration of William Caxton, England's first printer and, as I have claimed, next great Trojan author after Lydgate. Caxton's interest in presenting himself as an English author is evident from his decision to print a Trojan text from his own translation of a French source rather than an already-available English work. The prologues and epilogue to Caxton's *Recuyell* demonstrate his desire to link his name to the printed text and an awareness of the *Recuyell's* place within the burgeoning English literary tradition. This new consideration of Caxton as an author rather than simply a printer or translator may open up new ways of reading Caxton's printed texts and his role in English literary history.

My final chapter stakes out a position in the current debate over Shakespeare's interest in the publication of his plays. I have argued that *Troilus and Cressida* is a play about the place of Troy in print culture and helps reveal Shakespeare's interest in claiming a place in that culture as a Trojan author even as he questions the value of Trojan discourse. Shakespeare's *Troilus* offers his most direct engagement with the major figures of the English literary tradition from the "ancient masters" Chaucer and Lydgate to his contemporaries, Spenser and Chapman. I have tried to read *Troilus and Cressida* through Chaucer's *Troilus* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* by going beyond the limits of source study and with greater attention to uncovering a Shakespearean hermeneutic of authorship, print culture, and literary history. By revealing Shakespeare's marked interest in these topics, it is my hope that more readers would be willing to regard Shakespeare as an author with an interest in poetic fame and textual permanence.

In order to secure a lasting poetic fame, authors had to tend to the more immediate concern of navigating the discursive landscape, a landscape often characterized by potential political hazards which could endanger the proliferation of a particular text as well as the metaphorical or, sometimes literal, negation of the poet-subject. Each of the authors I have considered were linked to their monarchs at times of divisiveness and factionalism and are forced to adopt literary and political poses that would allow them to safely offer critique while ostensibly supporting the current regime. Throughout this study, I have demonstrated how the genre of romance allows authors to encode critique within a narrative that seeks to avoid the directness of epic while still invoking epic as the absent other that might provide a means of transcending the circular reasoning of romance ideology. My reading of medieval and early modern Trojan narratives thus contributes to a narrative of the development of these two genres.

For Chaucer, romance is a literary necessity because of the violent and retributive factionalism of 1380s London. However, the circular and solipsistic trajectory of romance only perpetuates each faction's entrenchment in oppositional ideologies and provides no means of escape from the cycle of violence. Chaucer's *Troilus* poses as a romance whose pathos provides a means of reading the poem as an endorsement of Troilus' tragic demise and post-mortem transcendence. The figure of Diomedes, I have argued, suggests the possibility of pre-mortem transcendence, of escaping the tragic end that romance, as both a political and narrative ideology, demands of its subject. Through its critique of romance, *Troilus and Criseyde* reveals the epic frustration underlying Ricardian poetry.

Lydgate's *Troy Book* offers a more pointed critique of romance in order to advise Henry V about the generic trajectory of his reign. Unlike during the reign of Richard II or even that of Henry IV, epic is a real possibility as a literary and political model for both Lydgate and Henry

V. Romance, however, as the dominant ideology of literary and historical narrative has guided the foreign policy and militarism of Henry's kingship and dictates the terms by which Lydgate addresses his patron. For Lydgate, as for Chaucer, epic is the preferred alternative to continued violence and the only means toward peaceful political and personal rule. My examination of Henry's biography and military kingship demonstrates how romance and epic function not only as discursive and narrative conventions but also as models for the political operation of historically-minded monarchs.

Caxton's decision to offer a Trojan text as the first book printed in English, I argued in Chapter 4, was an effort to revive literary production in England during the second half of the fifteenth century. The minority of Henry VI and the Wars of the Roses had precipitated a rise in history-writing and Caxton, looking to establish himself as both a printer and the literary heir of Chaucer and Lydgate, looked to French *roman ancienne* to appeal to English literary tastes. *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye* revives the long-stagnant genre of romance by offering a prose account of the mythological pre-history of the Trojan War. This understudied text marks an important development in the genres of romance and history particularly in regard to their relation to epic. It is the first of Caxton's three major Trojan texts, the last of which, *Eneydos*, shows a more direct, though still tentative, attempt to reintroduce epic discourse into the English literary tradition.

By the time Shakespeare begins to emerge as an English author, Trojan discourse has returned to the epic mode. With Spenser's *Fairie Queene* and Chapman's translation of Homer, the generic possibility of Troy is fully exploited. Chapman returns to the narrative's origin and allows English readers direct access to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Spenser's sprawling romance-epic puts the idea of London as Troynovant at the center and locates Elizabethan

England as the teleological fulfillment of Troy's *translatio studii et imperii*. Shakespeare recognizes the necessity of engaging Trojan epic in order to compete with both the Old and New Poets, and his response is to so deftly parody its ideology that the English Trojan tradition begins to fade after *Troilus and Cressida* is presented on stage and page. Troy has remained a popular topic but Shakespeare forever changed its analogical significance for England.

This study takes a broad look at a narrow topic in an attempt to trace the development of English authorship and the appropriation of literary genres throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period. The primary contribution of this study, I think, is the attention to the presence of epic in Middle English literature and English literary history. Even if we cannot locate a Middle English epic poem like that of the *Aeneid* or *Metamorphoses* or the *Thebaid*, we can still find epic discourse permeating medieval texts and providing the terms against which other genres are defined. Because the legend begins as epic and provides the foundation for the genre, the Trojan War narrative is the obvious place to begin such an examination, but I hope that we might begin to look for other places where epic serves as a guiding model for literary production. It's time to reintroduce the idea of epic as a political and narrative ideology into our consideration of medieval literature.

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Co-author of Introduction (with Sherry Roush), *Medieval Marriage: Prudence, Passion, Policy*. Co-edited by Sherry Roush and Cristelle Baskins. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies Series. Tempe: Arizona State University Press, 2005.  
Co-author (with Paul D. Stegner), “Of þam him aweaxed wynsum gefea”: The Voyeuristic Appeal of *Christ III*.” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. Forthcoming.

#### PAPERS PRESENTED

“New Troys: The Politics of Genre and the Construction of an English Literary Tradition.” Modern Language Association. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. December 2006.  
“Chaucer’s Second Hector.” New Chaucer Society. New York City, New York. July 2006.  
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