

FLORILEGIUM 11, 1992

LYDGATE AND THE *ROMAN ANTIQUE*

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The obsession with Lydgate's style, according to Derek Pearsall, "is endless, and to some extent self-sufficient, for there is no other poet in whom 'style' becomes so nearly an end in itself, a fixed entity, whose relation to 'subject' is one of abstract congruence not expressive embodiment."¹ For John Ganim Lydgate's "often prolix narrative style . . . can be understood as part of a process of literary history that begins to include an audience broader than the court or monastery. His style comes about from a union of the perspectives of the court and the cloister; . . . his creation of a voice that could speak to prince and merchant on the same level."² This paper focusses on the relation of narrative and moral generalization in *The Siege of Thebes* and suggests that it springs from a elaboration of elements in the tradition of the *roman antique* and, in particular, the recovery and assimilation of *Le Roman de Thèbes* into the prose text of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, the earliest ancient history written in Old French.

Lydgate's "anxiety of influence"³ to "complete" Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* by narrating the beginnings of the story of Thebes led him to choose the prose *Thèbes* in the *Histoire ancienne* as his source rather than the verse *Roman de Thèbes*, which Chaucer negotiates in his adaptation of Statius's *Thebaid* in the *Knight's Tale*. And that has made all the difference. Lydgate makes explicit the moral significance of the story of Thebes, which Chaucer

left implicit. While the *Knight's Tale* can still be considered a chivalric romance, the *Siege of Thebes* is a historical romance-like narrative in the historiographical tradition of the *Histoire ancienne*.

The revival of ancient learning in the twelfth century led to the inception of the *roman antique* and in turn this new genre gave birth to many offspring. The epic stories of Thebes, Eneas, Troy, and Alexander and the heroes associated with them were adapted to the wider romance context and clothed with the ornaments of chivalry. The stories were related in such manner that the conflict between Christian and pagan virtues and the difference between historical and classical elements became indistinct. At the end of the twelfth century, the verse *Le Roman de Thèbes*, which had undergone three transformations since its composition in 1150, continued to influence Old French and Middle English literatures. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, it was transposed into prose and served as model and textual source of the new dominant literary form.

As the first *roman antique*,⁴ *Le Roman de Thèbes* combined learned traditions (*translatio studii*) and political concerns (*translatio imperii*) into a romance paradigm connected with the establishment of the Norman-Angevin kingdom in England and later political problems caused by the rebellious parricidal and fratricidal sons of Henry II.⁵ The short version of *Le Roman de Thèbes* reflects and comments on the dangers of civil war and the contemporary political crisis and uses poetry to denounce war. In the long version of the *Roman de Thèbes* these historical and political values are replaced by *adventure* scenes as the text moves away from contemporary historical concerns. At the beginning of the thirteenth century verse form was thought of as intrinsically false and inappropriate for the exploration of truth and for a "true" historical text.⁶ Around 1200 the truth of a narrative was contingent upon not only the authority of Latin *auctores* or the narrator's position as observer, but also the proper literary mode. A new standard of authority was needed and the prose romances served this new requirement for authentication. Prose had the authority of the Bible and the chronicle and could recover romance. The appearance of prose as the new authoritative literary mode has been attributed to politico-historical and religious influences. Theorists concerned with the appearance of prose note the beginnings of early prose chronicles and a new religious monastic ideal.⁷ As romance in mid-twelfth century moved away from historical reality toward elaborate adventure tales, it became verbose, misdirected, and detached from historical significance. The addition of adventure episodes in the *Roman de Thèbes* did not directly contribute to the development of the

story. The change of this text from verse to prose at the beginning of the thirteenth century suggests an attempt to recover its historical significance.

Dated ca. 1208–1213, the *Histoire ancienne* reveals the early thirteenth-century perception of the *romans antiques* and the historiographer's strategy in the transposition of verse romances into prose texts. The radical change from verse to prose in the transformation and continuity of the story of Thebes discloses criticism and limitation of verse romance and raises important issues in the textual history of the romance of Thebes. Although Paul Meyer called attention to the literary significance of the *Histoire ancienne* in 1885,⁸ the text remains unedited, though it recently has spawned some critical interest.⁹ The seventy, widely divergent extant manuscripts of *Histoire ancienne*, many with illustrations, some dating from ca. 1300, bear witness to its contemporary significance.¹⁰

The unedited text of the *Histoire ancienne* appears to be a French prose translation of Paulus Orosius's *Seven Books Against the Pagans*, with interpolated narratives for Thebes and Troy. The authorship of the *Histoire ancienne* has been attributed to Wachier de Denain, a thirteenth-century translator, and the work is dedicated to Roger, Châtelain de Lille. It is worth noting that the text of the *Histoire ancienne* creates "history" from "literary" romance sources and reveals a close relationship between the two, manifesting generic transposition and preference for moralization. Moral commentary is an important feature of this text as it was of vernacular historiography during this period of transition which witnessed formal changes from verse to prose, selections of different subjects, and the appearance of the layman as a new kind of author. Early vernacular historiography often served the purpose of an important family or dynasty who sought to glorify lineage and military adventures, and moralization became characteristic of the historian's way of evaluating events in an impartial or non-annalistic manner.¹¹ Thus "literary" romance sources are transposed into history for the purpose of moral edification and justification. The translator of the *Histoire ancienne* recognizes the "historical" significance of the *romans antiques*, yet he is concerned with the veracity of the narratives because they were composed in verse.

According to Guy Raynaud de Lage,¹² the *romans antiques* in the *Histoire ancienne* provide a unified and coherent character: "les seules parties qui fassent l'object d'un development correspondent bien a des romans antiques" (*MA* 63 [1957], 269). *Thèbes* fills up 28 folios, *Troie* 25, and *Enéas* 30. The history of Rome, which fills 196 folios, lacks unity and coherence, contains long digressions on the Persians and Macedonians, and 32 folios on

a prose version of the *Roman d'Alexandre*. It is interesting to note that the denunciation of verse in the quest for truth is often voiced in rhyme. Paul Meyer edited a verse prologue, composed around 1226, to a lost prose life of Philip Augustus:

por melz dire la verité
 et por tretier sans fauseté
 quar anviz puet estre rimée
 estoire ou n'ait ajostee
 mençonge por fere la rime.¹³

This apparent discrepancy, that is the use of verse to introduce a "true" prose text, recurs in the verse Prologue to the *Histoire ancienne*, where the thirteenth-century clerk reveals his historiographical intention.

He addresses the audience directly ("seignor") and alludes to an oral source ("je ai oï retraire"), which provides moral principles for writing, not the material:

Li hom ne vit c'est une sole ore,
 Ainz trespasse et va a la fin,
 S'il a eü vrai cuer et fin
 Que s'uevre ait este bone et fine. (4-7)

Like *Le Roman de Thèbes* poet, the historiographical clerk connects vernacular writing and moral truth, and like the *romans antiques* poets he insists on truth which is assured by the use of *auctores*. In his invocation to his patron he insists on the accuracy of his translation from Latin:

Por qu'il plaise le chatelain
 De l'Isle Rogier, mon seignor,
 Cui Deus doint santé et honor,
 Joie e paradis en la fin.
 S'il veut, en romans dou latin
 Li cuic si traire lonc la letre
 Que plus ne mains n'i sera metre. (262-68)

Yet for the Thebes section, the clerk used and abbreviated the Old French *Le Roman de Thèbes*. Implied in his criticism of his material is a denunciation of verse romance form: "tant com il au siege furent n'est mie grans mestiers que ie vos descrise quar asses tost por bel parler porroie dire mesonge que ne seroit raisnable ne convegnable ne a profit ne torneroit a nulle creature. Por ce lairai ie a deviser lor conrois . . ." (fol. 114^r b). He justifies his use of prose in recounting the siege because it was originally composed in verse

which lies. The clerk's criticism of verse romance includes the *auctores* who do not escape the complaint of lying.

The transposition from verse to prose in the *Histoire ancienne* provides further incongruities that undermine the romance source. For example, the prose *Thèbes* gives two different (optimistic and pessimistic) versions of Laius's death, and three versions of the death of Thideus's brother.¹⁴

The clerk seems to be aware of the long (*AP*) version of the verse *Thèbes* since he objects to the elaboration of certain episodes (hiding of Thideus by Lycurgus's daughter and the treason of Daire le Roux) that are not found in Statius's epic.

Dou iugement de Daire si com li romans le conte n'est mie l'actorites veraie ne en auctorite certaine. Segnor et bien saches ausi que ne me veull antremetre de raconter le iugement de Daire le rous. (fol. 114^v a)

In a later manuscript of the *Histoire ancienne* (B.N. f. fr. 246, dated 1364), the feudal trial of Daire la Roux is not mentioned. Moreover, the critical comments of romance scattered throughout the prose *Thèbes* suggest that clerk's close relationship to the text of the verse *Thèbes*, as the story of Thebes is recovered from romance and restored to historiography. Like the verse *Thèbes* poet, he does not identify his sources, though Virgil and Dares and Dictys are named in the Aeneas and Troy sections.

The history of the text of this narrative had been associated with the rise of the new Norman-Angevin dynasty in England and later with the political problems caused by fratricidal and parricidal rebellions of the sons of Henry II. The short version of the *Thèbes* expressed the dangers of civil war and warned the audience of contemporary crisis. The long version of *Thèbes* omitted the historical and political concerns of the short version and added *adventure* episodes aligned with later development in romance literature. These frivolous *adventure* episodes led to the prosification of the text in the thirteenth century in an attempt to recover romance and introduce a moralizing trend visible in later treatment of classical and romance texts.

Paul Meyer dated the *Histoire ancienne* between 1223 and 1230, but Raynaud de Lage argued for an earlier date, 1208 to 1213, noting an emphasis on the reign of peace and its incompatibility with the destruction of Lille and Flanders in 1213. Since the *Histoire ancienne* is dedicated to Roger, who was Châtelain of Lille from 1208 to 1230, and since the text cannot be dated later than the *Faits des Romains* composed around 1213 and 1214, Raynaud de Lage (*MA* 55 [1949], 5-16) argued that the *Histoire* must have been composed between 1208 and 1214. He also notes that the emphasis

on the reign of peace is incompatible with the devastation of Flanders and the sack of Lille in 1213, prior to the battle of the Bouvines, an important event in historical writings.¹⁵ Raynaud de Lage suggested that in light of the emphasis on peace in the *Histoire ancienne* the text was written prior to the campaign of Philip Augustus in Flanders.

When we relocate Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* in the conceptual framework of the *roman antique* and its transposition into prose and integration in the *Histoire ancienne* its ideological purpose becomes clear. Robert Ayers argued that Lydgate "regarded his material not as fiction but as history, and that his purpose in writing was not so much to tell a story of any kind as it was to teach some moral and political lessons by reference to what he regarded as ancient historical example."¹⁶ He observed that Lydgate's purpose in the *Siege* "was to provide an historical 'mirror' wherein kings and governors particularly might observe the social effects of their actions, on the assumption that similar historical antecedents would lead to similar consequents."¹⁷ The poem "demonstrably has moral—and thus extraliterary—relevance and application."¹⁸ Yet A.C. Spearing noted that it is "an error to draw a sharp distinction between the literary and the moral, at least so far as Lydgate's likely intentions in *The Siege of Thebes* are concerned; . . . each is developed and indeed exaggerated on its own terms, and the result is sometimes odd or painful discord."¹⁹

The text of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* exists in twenty-nine manuscripts designed for aristocratic patrons.²⁰ Though it has generally been assumed that Lydgate had no patron for *Thebes*, recently it has been noted that "no fifteenth-century poet wrote at such length without a patron in mind," and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, has been suggested as a likely patron.²¹ Three of the manuscripts contain Lydgate's *Troy Book*, and the two works are linked in many ways. The stories of Thebes and Troy were associated in the medieval mind and became, as we have seen, the first *romans antiques*, and were later transposed into French prose in *Histoire ancienne*. Lydgate composed the *Siege* toward the end of 1420, after completing the *Troy Book* for Henry V, and finished it in 1422.

In the Prologue, Lydgate praises Chaucer without naming him:

Echon yrite and put in remembraunce
 By hym that was yit I shal not feyne,
 Floure of Poetes thorghout al Breteyne,
 Which sothly hadde most of excellence
 In rethorike and in eloquence. (38-42)

The use of *circumlocutio* expresses Lydgate's imitation and concern for "rhetoric" and "eloquence." When he by chance encounters the pilgrims at Canterbury as they are leaving, Chaucer is absent and is identified only as "Chief register of this pilgrimage" (48). Like Chaucer, Lydgate treats the pilgrimage as a real event, and creates the fiction of his visit to Canterbury:

The holy seynt pleylnly to visite
 Aftere siknesse my vowes to aquyte. (71-72)

Dressed in a black cope and riding on a scraggy nag with a rusty bridle, Lydgate's self-portrait is entertaining and recalls the unexpected arrival of the Canon's Yeoman who was also dressed in black clothes and narrates an additional tale (Spearing 67). The lively humor of the Host's language, whose character is generalized, leads to his joining their company and is coaxed by the Host, "her gouvernour," into telling this tale. It is framed as one of the *Canterbury Tales* — the first tale of the return journey, closely related to the *Knight's Tale*, the first tale of the pilgrimage. The *Siege* narrates the initial phase of the story of Thebes and leads us to the appeal of the Argive widows to Theseus which marks the commencement of the *Knight's Tale*.

Lydgate's close imitation of Chaucer in the Prologue and his attempt to improve on Chaucer conceals his "access of confidence," having recently finished the *Troy Book* in his recreation of Chaucer's poetic growth (Pearsall 153). He has become the "absent Chaucer" and his "anxiety of influence" convinced him that "he was completing his predecessor's 'truncated' work, not just by supplying the omitted beginnings of the narratives of Thebes, but by making explicit a moral significance that Chaucer left implicit, and that seemed to demand clarification" (Spearing 84). While Lydgate's "misreading" of Chaucer that Bloom (*A Map of Misreading*, 1973, 3) considers essential to the association of poets to their predecessors may be of some assistance to the modern reader, the elaboration of elements in the tradition of the *Histoire ancienne* account for the relation of narrative and moral generalization in the *Siege*.

Lydgate dates the foundation of the city of Thebes in a traditional way typical of medieval historians by alluding to parallel events in sacred history:

I wol reherce a story wonderful,
 Towchinge the siege and destruccioun
 Of worthy Thebes the myghty Royal toun,
 Bylt and begonne of olde antiquitè,
 Vpon the tyme of worthy Iosùè,
 Be dyligence of kyng Amphioun

Chief cause first of his fundacioun,
 For which his fame which neuere shal away,
 In honure floureth yit vnto this day,
 And in story remembred is and preised. (184–93)

According to Jewish chronology the creation of the world occurred in the year 3761 B.C. Lydgate dates the foundation of Thebes in the time of Iosue during which Amphion built the city approximately in the year 1827 B.C. References to pagan rites of marriage and burial (598–96, 1555–56, 2541–42, 4047–58, 4128–29, 4495, 4565) and oracles (538–44) suggest that the story occurs at a certain time in the history of Thebes and Argos. The use of the term *story* in reference to the narrative of Thebes means “historia,” not *fabula* or fiction. History is here used for didactic purposes, offering examples of moral and political action. Lydgate turns the story of Thebes into a clear mirror for magistrates and provides examples of good (Adraste and Thideus) and divisive (Oedipus and his sons) rulers. This conception of history is traditionally medieval,²² but Lydgate laces it with his ideology of kingship, influenced by the moralizations in the prose *Thèbes*.

Lydgate commences his history of the city with the legendary figure of Amphion who built the city walls by the power of his words (184–327). Amphion was the son of Zeus and Antiope and husband of Niobe and was responsible with his twin brother Zethus for building a wall around the city by charming the stones into place with the music of his magic lyre. Statius briefly alludes to Amphion’s song that bade “the Tyrian mountains move to form a city’s walls” which incurred the wrath of Bacchus (1.9–11), and neither the verse nor prose *Thèbes* mentions Amphion. For the legend of Amphion Lydgate refers his reader to “myn auctour” and Boccaccio, but it is not clear that he took the legend from Boccaccio’s *De genealogia deorum* (v.30) only. Long before Boccaccio’s work Lactantius Placidus commented on Statius’s allusion (“quo carmine muris / iusserit Amphion Tyrios accedere montes) in *Thebaid* 1.9–10, and “myn auctour” may well refer to either the commentator, to whom Boccaccio was indebted, or a glossed manuscript of Statius’s epic.²³ Lydgate is aware of the other myth of Thebes’s founding, Cadmus’s sowing of the dragon’s teeth that caused the internecine strife, (293–96), but he relates only that of King Amphion because it expresses his ideology of kingship. He interprets the “derke poysye” of Amphion’s miraculous construction of the walls of Thebes as a political allegory. Amphion built the city walls by the music of his lyre, given him by Mercury, the god of eloquence and the husband of Philology or wisdom. The power of Amphion’s song was his sweet words, the rhetoric of crafty

speech, which won the love and the hearts of the people who built the city of Thebes. Lydgate recovers the legend of the Amphion and assigns it political significance as a mirror for kings. Amphion represents the wise and eloquent ruler who founded the city by the power of his words:

His cheer his port was outward so benygne,
 That thorgh his styryng and exortacioun
 With hym they went to bylde first this toun,
 And forsook ecch man his contrè,
 Be on assent to make this Cytè
 Royal and riche that lich was nowher noon. (234-39)

He is a civilizer and harmonizer of men. His story introduces a major theme in *Siege*: a coherent moral vision of kingship and an examination of the rhetorical means by which that vision has been itself produced. The Thebes of Amphion is described in terms that recall the *civitas Dei*: the rational, harmonious, and well-ordered city.²⁴ Lydgate begins his history of Thebes with the foundation myth of Amphion that serves as a Fürstenspiegel or mirror for princes, expressing the figurative image of Jerusalem and its king, David.

The legend of Amphion leads to a long discussion on statesmanship (244-85), the duties of princes and kings, particularly their attitude regarding common people, which becomes a recurring theme in the poem. The poet admonishes princes and kings to be cheerful and kind toward their subjects, to avoid haughtiness and disdain which breeds envy. He paints a vivid picture of a contemporary scene in lines 258-61 which may well refer not only to Richard II, but also Henry IV and Henry V. Using the Corpus Christi myth—the idea of a uniform yet differentiated social body prevalent in medieval sociopolitical thought—the poet compares the members of the human body and the orders of the state, especially the relation between head and the foot (262-71). Princes and kings should not appropriate the nation's treasury to their pleasures and impose heavy taxes on their subjects (2688-94). Unless supported by the love of their people, princes and kings will in the end come to nothing (283-85). These admonitions may well refer to certain contemporary political situations and to Henry V, who was Lydgate's patron until 1420 and was engaged in the Hundred Years War against Charles VI of France.²⁵

The walls of Amphion's Thebes, according to Lydgate, are made of "lym and stoon" (240) and he describes the stones as "myghty square stonys" (312). The building of the ring of the walls as a symbol for the city and its persistence had already been used in classical art on coinage, which

contributed to the awareness of this imagery.²⁶ The ring of the walls in classical antiquity was often represented by a divinity with a turreted crown which served as emblem of a city, and this emblem continues in the Middle Ages.²⁷ This stereotype developed the mode of regarding the walls of the city as its essential characteristic. Lydgate associates the walls of Thebes with the walls of Jerusalem when he alludes to Nehemiah, the Jewish leader and governor of Judea, who by truth received permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem from "living" stones during the Babylonian Captivity (1728-41). The emblem of square stones, representing virtue, in the walls of Jerusalem is found in biblical commentaries.²⁸ In *De civitate Dei*, written after the sack of Rome, St Augustine notes that "The house of the Lord, the city of God, which is the Holy Church, is built in every land by men believing in God, who are like 'living' stones from which the house is built" (8.24.2). The walls of Amphion's Thebes, doomed to death as a earthly city, contain the mighty square stones of the heavenly city.

Lydgate uses the foundation myth of Amphion's music to emphasize the ideology of kingship and of city at the beginning of his history of Thebes. This image of the city, with its figurative implications of Jerusalem and of the *civitas Dei*, expresses human desire for ascendance over nature through control of the environment by abstract, conceptual mental pattern of the circle. The ring of the walls made of square stones and constructed by the harmony and concord of the music of Amphion's lyre expresses an ideal mode of social organization and reflects the moral character of its ruler. Yet Laius is "of the stok of Amphyoun" (332) by lineal descent according to Lydgate, engendering the house of Oedipus and his war-like sons and the *civitas terrena*. In contrast to the concord and harmony of Amphion's Thebes, the Babylonian Thebes of the house of Oedipus is ruled by discord, strife, fraternal hate, and death. The city is here represented as a predatory trap founded in fratricide and shadowed by conflict, leading to the siege and destruction of the walls of the city and the end of civic order. The two brothers, Tydeus and all, except Adrastus, are killed, and Theseus, duke of Athens, levels Thebes to the ground and delivers to the Argive widows the bodies of their lords. Lydgate, the historian, dates the siege and destruction of the city as occurring four hundred years before the building and foundation of Rome (4623-25). The Epilogue closes with a strong condemnation of war, which destroyed the worthy blood of both Greece and Thebes and brought the city to ruin, turned to wilderness and desert.

Lydgate places himself in the tradition of the *romans antiques* by developing topics associated with them and insisting on truth which is assured

by the *auctores* the *romans antiques* used. One of his many additions is an excursus on truth (1721-84, 1940-44) inspired by Eteocles's refusal to quit Thebes. Truth is the preserver of kingdoms (1768) and the chief treasure of a realm (1722-23). Truth shelters a king from all mischief and adversity (1745-46), for

Allas therfor that eny doublesnesse,
 Variaunce or vnsicrenesse,
 Chaunge of word or mutabilitè,
 fraude or deceyte or vnstabilitè,
 Shuld in a kyng han domynacioun.
 To causen after his destruccioun. (1747-52)

Truth and love are the firm principles that enable a king to maintain his rule. Unlike Oedipus a king ought not to be disdainful and proud (468-78), but like Amphion whose humble and kind speech won the love and hearts of his people who built the walls of Thebes for him (231-61). A theory of kingship emerges from the *Siege* that elucidates the virtues of the good king (truth, honor, and constancy) and acknowledges the value to the king of the respect and love of his people (2711-15, 4698-704).

The representations of Tydeus and Adrastus allow Lydgate to insert a moral significance in the narrative. The account of Tydeus's embassy to Thebes on behalf of Polyneices and the account of the ambush which is often illustrated in a number of the manuscripts (1795-2543) are quite well done. Tydeus lectures the court of Eteocles regarding the importance of truth and covenant in a king. He threatens the unfaithful Eteocles with war, "For this the fyn falshede shal not availe, / Ageynes truth in feeld to hold batayle. / Wrong is croked bothen halt and lame" (2077-79). In the episode of the ambush, Tydeus kills all but one of the fifty armed knights of Eteocles. Lydgate elucidates the moral significance: "By which ensample ye opynly may se / Ageynes trouthe falshed hath no myght"; and "Ageynes trouthe who that list take hede, / For at the ende falshede may not spede / Tendure longe ye shul fynde it thus" (2236-37, 2245-47).

Above all the *Siege* debates the burning issue of war and peace in the tradition of the *Histoire ancienne*. The war of Thebes illustrates the dire consequences of civil strife and that in war both sides are damaged and the high and low suffer (4645-59). The avarice and hate that brought about the destruction of the city can be traced to Lucifer's pride and *surquedy* in heaven, the prototype of all earthly wars (4660-64). Covetousness and ambition are the roots of all social turmoil (4673-89), "And werre in soth was neuer first ordeyned / But for synne of folkis to chastyse" (4658-59).

The significance of the destruction of Thebes for fifteenth-century England is expressed in lines 3655–73, one of Lydgate's additions, concerning public opinion in England on the question of war and peace. Jocasta's attempt to negotiate a settlement between Eteocles and Polyneices to avoid war may echo the sentiments of the peace party, those discontented with the long war with France. Adrastus's council, on the other hand, in lines 4134–44 also expanded by Lydgate, gives expression to the opposite view, that of Henry V and many knights and lords, who favored conquest and honour.

When we relocate the *Siege* in the conceptual framework of the *roman antique* and in particular *Histoire ancienne* from which it emerged, its ideological purpose becomes clear. It is not a chivalric romance but an historical romance-like narrative in the historiographical tradition of the *Histoire ancienne*. It was probably composed for Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, toward the end of 1420 and intended to celebrate the Treaty of Troyes which achieved peace and concord through the union of England and France by Henry V's marriage to Katherine and promise of their offspring as king of both countries. The image of Henry V is seen in the portrayal of the hero Tydeus, and Lydgate's elaborate praise of Tydeus may be seen as extolling the great achievement of England's youthful hero. The Treaty of Troyes in May 1420 concluded the war with the marriage of Henry V to Katherine, daughter of Charles VI, and may have been the occasion for Lydgate's decision to undertake the *Siege of Thebes*. The concluding lines of the Epilogue, 4690–703, express hope, peace, and concord between the realms and echo the terms of the treaty. Upon Henry V's death on 31 August 1422, however, royal power was in the hands of his rival brothers, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, in England, and John, Duke of Bedford, in France; and by the end of 1422 Charles VII abolished the treaty and acceded to the throne of France.²⁹ These important political events are indeed similar to the tragic events in the story of Thebes and in particular to the fraternal strife of Eteocles and Polyneices and may account for the politico-moral themes in the *Siege* and the poem's significance to fifteenth-century England. The relation of narrative and moral generalization in the *Siege* comes about from the elaboration of elements in the prose *Thèbes* in the *Histoire ancienne* that expressed opposition to romance, condemnation of war and praise of peace and truth. Lydgate turns the story of Thebes to a more didactic concern with the moral structure of the narrative as it rejoins historiography in fifteenth-century England.

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NOTES

- ¹ *Gower and Lydgate* (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 39.
- ² *Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), p. 108.
- ³ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973). On the application of Bloom's theory to Middle English literature, see Donald R. Howard, "Fiction and Religion in Boccaccio and Chaucer," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47.2 supplement (June, 1979), 307-28; A.C. Spearing, "Lydgate's Canterbury Tale: *The Siege of Thebes* and Fifteenth-Century Chaucerianism," *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, CT, 1984), 334-64.
- ⁴ On the source of the genesis of the *roman antique*, see E. Faral *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et des romans courtois du moyen âge* (Paris, 1913), 399. On the revival of classical learning, see C.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1927); *L'Humanisme médiéval . . .* [Colloque de Strasbourg] (Paris, 1964); *Entretiens sur la Renaissance du 12^e siècle* (Paris: La Haye, 1968); Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Old French Narrative Genres: Towards the Definition of the *Roman Antique*," *Romance Philology* 34 (1980), 143-59; and Barbara Nolan, "Ovid's *Heroides* Contextualized: Foolish Love and Legitimate Marriage in the *Roman d'Eneas*," *Mediaevalia* 13 (1987), 157-87; and Paul M. Clogan, "New Directions in Twelfth-Century Courtly Narrative: *Le Roman de Thèbes*," *Mediaevistik* 3 (1990), 55-70.
- ⁵ Paul M. Clogan, "The Knight's Tale and the Ideology of the *Roman Antique*," *Mediaevalia et Humanistica*, New Series, No. 18 (1991), 129-55.
- ⁶ See O. Jodogne, "La Naissance de la prose française," *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres*, 49 (1963), 296-308, p. 303.
- ⁷ See J.M. Dornbush, "Conjecture and Continuation in the Old French *Prose Lancelot*: Essays in Form and Craft in Thirteenth-Century Romance," diss. Princeton Univ., 1976; J. Beer *Villehardouin, Epic Historian* (Geneva, 1968); Peter Dembowski, *La Chronique de Robert de Clari: Étude de la langue et du style* (Toronto, 1963); Richard Hartman, *La Quête et la Croisade: Villehardouin, Clari et la "Lancelot en Prose"* (New York, 1977); Peter Schon, *Studien zum Stil der frühen französischen Prosa*, *Aaanalecta Romanica* 8, (Frankfurt, 1960). For theories on the rise of prose, see Erich Köhler, "Zur Entstehung des altfranzösischen Prosaromans," *Trobadorlyrik und höfischer Roman* (Berlin, 1962), 213-22; Peter Schon, *Studien*, 16-38; Herman Tiemann, "Zur Geschichte des altfranzösischen Prosaromans," *Romanische Forschungen* 63 (1951) 306-28; Rudolph Brummer, *Die erzählende Prosadichtung in den romanischen Literaturen des 13. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1948).
- ⁸ "Les premières compilations françaises d'Histoire ancienne," *Romania* 14 (1885), 1-81.
- ⁹ L. Constans, *La Légende d'Oedipe* (Paris, 1880); reviewed by A. Boucherie in *Revue des langues romanes*, 18 (1881), 295-307; L. Constans's response to A. Boucherie, 19 (1881), 97; A. Boucherie's response to L. Constans, *Revue langues romanes*, 19 (1881), 99-103; Gaston Paris's review of *La Légende d'Oedipe* in *Romania* 10 (1881), 270-77; L. Constans, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes* (Paris: SATF, 1890), II, pp. cxxiii-clxix; Paul Meyer, "Les premières compilations françaises d'Histoire ancienne," *Romania*, 14 (1885), 1081, esp. 40-41; G. Raynaud de Lage, "*L'Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* et les *Faits des Romains*," *Le Moyen Âge*, 55 (1949), 5-16; idem, "Les romans antiques dans l'*Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*," *Moyen Âge* 63 (1957), 267-309; idem, "Les Romans antiques

et le representation de L'Antiquité," *Moyen Âge* 67 (1961), 247-91; F. Vielliard, *Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Catalogue, Manuscrits française du Moyen Age* (Cologny-Genève: Fondation Martin Bodmer, 1975), pp. 79-85; Muhamed Nezirovic, "La Locution *Maun-ger ore luis* dans le manuscrit S du *Roman de Thèbes*," *Romania* 108 (1987), 520-23; Dietmar Rieger, "'Aufgehobene' Genera: Gattungszitate und Gattungsinstrate im altfranzösischen *Thebenroman*," *Vox Romanica* 46 (1987), 67-86.

¹⁰ Brian Woledge, *Bibliographie des Romans et Nouvelles en Prose Française Antérieurs à 1500* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1954), pp. 55-58, 120-21. On the miniatures in this vernacular *Histoire*, see Hugo Buchthal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (1957; London: Pindar, 1986); David J.A. Ross, *Alexander Historiatus* (London: Warburg, 1963); Ross, "The History of Macedon in the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 24 (1963); and Penelope R. Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990). On the relation of text and image in the *Histoire ancienne*, see, for example, Sandra Hindman, *Text and Image in Fifteenth-century illustrated Dutch Bibles* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 48, 62, 66. For the text of *Histoire ancienne* and the prose *Thèbes*, I use Paris, B.N. 20125 (XIII^e s.). I have also consulted Paris, B.N. 246 (1364), B.N. 301 (XIV^e s.), London, B.L. Add. 15268 (@1285), and B.L. Royal 20 D.i. (XIV^e s.).

¹¹ W. Sayers, "The Beginnings and Early Development of Old French Historiography," diss. Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1966, pp. 167-68.

¹² "L'*histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* et les *Faits des Romains*," *MA* 55 (1949), 5-16; "Les 'romans antiques' dans l'*Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*," *MA* 63 (1957), 268-309.

¹³ "Mélanges de poésie française," *Romania* 6 (1877), 498.

¹⁴ "Les 'Romans antiques' dans l'*Histoire ancienne* . . ." (at n. 9), p.272.

¹⁵ For the creation of a "Bouvines myth," see G. Duby, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines* (Paris, 1973), p. 199.

¹⁶ "Medieval History, Moral Purpose, and the Structure of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*," *PMLA* 73 (1958), 463-74, esp. 463 and 468.

¹⁷ Ayers (at n. 16), p. 467.

¹⁸ P. 468.

¹⁹ *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), pp. 66-88, esp. pp. 69 and 83-84.

²⁰ *The Siege of Thebes*, ed. Axel Erdmann and Eilert Ekwall, EETS, es 108, 125 (London, 1911, 1930), vol. 2, pp. 36-94. Citations in my text are to this edition. For modern criticism on this poem, see R.W. Ayers (at n. 16); W.F. Schirmer, *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, trans. Ann E. Keep (Berkeley: U of California P, 1961); Alain Renoir, *The Poetry of John Lydgate* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967); Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge, 1970); Ganim (at n. 2); and Spearing (at n. 19).

²¹ *Selections from Hoccleve*, ed. M.C. Seymour (Oxford, 1981), p. xxx, n. 20.

²² Renoir, following the suggestion of Schirmer, finds in the *Siege* "a somewhat unmediated attitude towards classical antiquity," which approaches that of "Renaissance humanism" (at n. 20, p. 126), and concludes that the *Siege* is a "French medieval romance translated into an English Renaissance epic" (p. 135). In this, I am more in agreement with Pearsall (at n. 20, pp. 14-15), Spearing (at n. 19, pp. 341, 343); and Ganim (at n. 2, pp. 121-22).

²³ See *Lactantii Placidi Qui Dicitur Commentarios in Statii Thebaida et Commentarivm in Achilleida*, ed. Richardvs Jahnke (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898), p. 10.

²⁴ St Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 17.14. For a miniature of a female figure depicting "Musica" in a city named Thebes, see Johannes Damrich, *Ein Künstlerdreiblatt des XIII Jahrhunderts aus Kloster Scheyern* (Strasburg, 1904), p. 26, f. 88.

²⁵ On Henry V, see Ernest Jacob, *Henry V and the Invasion of France* (1947); James H. Wylie and William T. Waugh, *The Reign of Henry the Fifth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1929), III, 197-426.

²⁶ J. Ehrenberger Katz, "Les représentations de villes fortifiées dans l'art paléochrétien et leurs dérivées byzantines," *Cahiers Archéologiques* 19 (1969), 1-27; and idem, "Les représentations de villes dans l'art chrétien avant l'an Mil," *L'information d'histoire d'art* 3 (1964), 130-32.

²⁷ W. Deonna, "Histoire d'un emblème: la couronne murale des villes et pays personnalisés," *Genava* 18 (1940), 119-212.

²⁸ Hugh of St Victor, "De artificibus," *PL*, 176, col. 1114; and Joseph Sauer, *Symbole des Kirchengebäude* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1922), 113.

²⁹ On Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, see Kenneth Vickers, *Humphrey of Gloucester* (London: Constable, 1927); and on John, Duke of Bedford, see Ethel Carlton Williams, *My Lord of Bedford* (London: Longmans, 1963). Much information about Henry V's rival brothers is contained in Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London: Methuen, 1981), and Ralph Griffiths, *Reign of Henry VI* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982). On Charles VII, see Malcolm Vale, *Charles VII* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974).