

John Lydgate and His Readers  
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## **Abstract**

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John Lydgate and His Readers

Thesis directed by Professor William Kuskin

Fifteenth-century poet John Lydgate holds the distinction of being both prolific and popular in his own time. Unfortunate comparisons to his literary forbear, Geoffrey Chaucer, dampened his early reputation, and Lydgate spent centuries out of favor with literary critics. In the past decade, he has enjoyed a resurgence of critical attention; this project considers why this may be and also why he remained in the critical shadows for so long. To answer these questions, I turn to Lydgate's approach to his readers and the manuscripts and early printed books with which his early (and enthusiastic) audience would have been encountering his works. This project argues that Lydgate's encouragement of readers to participate in the work, to correct him where they find fault, is sincere. He undertakes a system of literary creation that deliberately does not enforce a hierarchical approach to authority; instead of literary authority remaining with the poet, Lydgate attempts to bestow it upon those among his readers who would prudently and earnestly correct his work. In examining the manuscripts and early printed books of the works, I am able to determine those places where communication between Lydgate, the bookmakers, and the readers concerning this issue were most visible, and most able to elicit readerly interactions.

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## Introduction

This project examines John Lydgate's three major works, *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes*, and *Siege of Thebes*, and describes an attitude of reciprocity with their readers. Lydgate engages and incites readers towards an active role within literary creation. They oblige. This productive, generative relationship between author and reader plays out on the pages of books, the medieval manuscripts and early printed books which contain Lydgate's works. By examining these books, I am able to sketch a picture of an active fifteenth-century readership and Lydgate's role in encouraging it. This relationship between Lydgate and his readers impacted his works; when readers entered into the realm of literary creation, when they edited, amended, altered, and amplified Lydgate's works, they were rendering them more useful, relevant, and acceptable to their current environments. This meant that Lydgate's active readers were ensuring the survival of his works across time and place and taste. Active readership preserves works. And it does so through their alteration or, in essence, through their destruction. This dissertation works to identify and explain these moments of destruction, or, more precisely, of destructive preservation.

British Library MS Arundel 99, a fifteenth-century copy of John Lydgate's *Troy Book*, contains an interesting instance of a reader entering into the physical space of the work and altering it in a small way. The text in this manuscript is divided into two columns per page. In the middle margin of folio 2r, an early hand has drawn a particularly elaborate manicule: a hand holding a thistle points at a line in the second column. The nearby lines read:

Whos story yit age hath nought diffaced,  
 Nor cruel deth, with his mortal strokys;  
 For maugre deth, ye may beholde in bokys

The story fully rehersed new and newe  
 And freschely floure of colour and hewe,  
 From day to day, quyk and no theng feynt.  
 For clerkys han this story so depeynt  
 That deth nor age, by no maner weye  
 The trouthe may not make for to deye (Prologue ll. 250-258)<sup>1</sup>

The manicule points directly at the line “The story fully rehersed new and newe”.<sup>2</sup> The appearance of a manicule in this manuscript is not out of the ordinary, but in the greater scope of Lydgate manuscripts, I have found that *Troy Book* is less likely to be marked by readers than *Fall of Princes*. Perhaps this is due to the production of large, prestigious books for *Troy Book*, ones that make reading, and notating, difficult. What does strike me as relevant here is the consideration shown for a line that has little to do with the action of the story. Perhaps it is simply that the first time I read the line, it struck me as revelatory and I marked it in my own copy, underlining both “new”s twice. To find that another reader, separated from me by centuries, thousands of miles, and any number of differing characteristics and contexts, would also single out this line and go to the trouble to mark it, although, admittedly, in a much more artistic way than I did, strikes me as odd. But it should not.

Both the reader of Arundel 99 and I realized that this short line contains the heart of Lydgate’s matter. Here his reason for writing, the reason for literature, resonates. The story, fully rehersed, becomes new and new. Lydgate and his early publishers often term his work

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<sup>1</sup> Lydgate, John. *Troy Book*. Edited by Robert R. Edwards, Medieval Institute Publications, 1998. All further quotations are from this edition, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> This line corresponds with line 253 of the prologue in both the TEAMS edition (on page 33) and the EETS edition (page 8). The spelling is somewhat different as both modern editions relied on Cotton Augustus A.iv as the main copy text, referring to Arundel 99 only where the previous seemed flawed. Both modern editions also emended the final –e.

translation. He takes something familiar, like the Troy story, and simply renders another's version of events into English. But in this line, we see Lydgate's attitude towards the act of so-called translation. He uses the word "reheresen." When looking at the definition of this word, it is clear that by the time Lydgate uses it, the meaning is roughly what we think of today. The Middle English Dictionary provides the following definitions: to narrate, report, or tell, to recite, or to repeat or reiterate.<sup>3</sup> The OED provides an etymology that gives a bit more insight into the word. The prefix re-, of course, means again, but the root word –herse seems to be trickier. It appears to be a word that describes a harrow, or long rake that is pulled over fields after they are plowed in order to break up remaining dirt clods; the word is also used as a verb to describe the action completed by a herse or harrow.<sup>4</sup> So to harrow a field is to go over it again, readying the soil for planting by making the consistency of the ground finer and easier to work, ultimately making the crop yield greater. When the prefix re- is added to this word, the repetition is doubled. And when this word is used to describe the efforts of a translator, like Lydgate in relation to the Troy story, it makes a certain amount of sense. The author (or translator's source) is the first to harrow the material; he takes the actions or ideas and renders them into language, attempting to make them finer than they were. The translator, then, re-harrows or rehearses the material, making it accessible in another language, going over the words again and again to get the sense just right. The rehearsal of the story of Troy, here, makes it ready and available to more readers; the yield will be even greater because of Lydgate's rehearsal.

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<sup>3</sup> "reheresen, (v.)" *Middle English Dictionary*, [www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED36539](http://www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED36539)

<sup>4</sup> "rehearse, v." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/161472](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/161472). Accessed 16 April 2018; "herse, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/86352](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86352). Accessed 16 April 2018; "harrow, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/84371](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/84371). Accessed 16 April 2018.

But the rehearsal of the story does not stop with the translator. Like a field's growing cycle, each rehearsal or re-harrowing stimulates growth and renewal. Each time the story is retold, it becomes new again, finer than before. In many instances, Lydgate instructs his readers to correct him where they find fault.<sup>5</sup> The reader, then, is breaking down the larger clods of earth into finer, more fertile soil. By correcting bad meter or the final -e, the reader removes those stumbling blocks for future readers and enables a greater understanding of the heart of the work.

It is only through this type of rehearsing, this active refinement of the fields of the work, that the work can become new and new. Lydgate insists here that rehearsing the work makes it new, never previously in existence. But the line reads "newe and newe."<sup>6</sup> This repetition mimics the imbedded repetition in the word "reheresen." Like that repetition, "newe and newe" requires the reader to recognize the presence of the past in the present. "Newe" seems to imply a rupture of sorts, a break from what has come before, something that exists now only for the first time. But the repetition of the word indicates that with each rehearsal of the story, it can become new. That it can become new again and again means that newness is not a unique state. Further, the

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<sup>5</sup> This can be seen most clearly in *Troy Book* and *Fall of Princes*, rather than in *Siege of Thebes*; in that work, rather than asking his readers to correct him, Lydgate models active reading for them. In *Troy Book*, however, Lydgate uses each break between books to invite the reader to participate. At the end of the prologue, he asks that "alle that schal it rede or se / Wher as I erre for to amenden me...Commytyng al to her correccioun" (ll. 379-382). Similarly, at the end of the first book, he asks his readers, "Where ye fynde that I fayle or erre, / For to correcte or ye further flitte" (ll. 4434-4435). The conclusions of the second, third, fourth, and fifth books all state that Lydgate can only continue the tale through the support and grace of his readers. Although this seems a vaguer instruction to readers, since he has already specifically asked for their correction, it can easily be assumed that support in these cases means correction. The final section of the book, the envoy, concludes definitively by telling his book that it should defend against error by "Requerynge hem all that is mys to amende" (ll. 107).

<sup>6</sup> The OED and MED definitions for this phrase bear out the idea of an imbedded repetition. The OED defines the phrase as meaning "ever anew," and the MED entry reads, "again and again; continually; repeatedly." Both these definitions convey a sense of repetition that occurs over and over. The repetition, of course, would seem to be at odds with the sense of newness (as being an original occurrence), but the point here is that the act of repetition creates newness. Interestingly, the OED provides Chaucer's *Troilus and Crisedye* as the first recorded instance of the phrase; clearly Lydgate would have been familiar with it and its various implications. See "new and new, adv." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, January 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/255503](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/255503). Accessed 12 April 2018; "neue (adv.)" *Middle English Dictionary*. [www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED29404](http://www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED29404). Accessed 12 April 2018.



story becomes new through rehearsal, which, when examining the definition and etymology of the word, we see is not akin to the spontaneous creation of something original. Instead, newness is achieved through a process of raking over the same material with a finer tool. “Newe and newe” is not indicative of the manufacture of completely different works, but of the same work in a different form.

Rehearsal producing newness, then, is transmutation of the work. Rehearsing the work is like the alchemical process of transmuting lead into gold; the material at the beginning of the process and the material at the end are both metal, but one is finer than the other. And, fittingly, the philosopher’s stone, which turns lead into gold, can also bestow immortality. Rehearsing the story, transmuting it over and over, in turn also preserves it and protects it against death. As Lydgate says, “[The Troy] story yit age hath nought diffaced, | Nor cruel deth, with his mortal strokys; | For maugre death, ye may beholde in bokys | the story fully rehersed new and newe.” Lydgate here describes the story as able to achieve immortality because of its rehearsal in books. Books preserve the story, but the rehearsal that occurs through reading, revision, and republication allows the story to resist stagnation. Through readers, the agents of change in the work, the Troy story becomes “newe and newe.”

Ultimately, this dissertation is about power and authority in literary creation. It argues that Lydgate and his readers engaged in a reciprocal system of literary production that made (and remade) literature “newe and newe.” In the works of Lydgate and the books containing those works, power and authority is not strictly hierarchical and roles in literary production are not rigid. Lydgate, because of the position in which he found himself, one of apparent subjugation to his poetic father Chaucer, advocated for a more accessible notion of literary authority. He did this by inviting his readers to participate in his works, by enlisting those readers to enact what I

call destructive preservation in their literary pursuits, and by demonstrating his own power as a hybrid figure, a literary bastard. For Lydgate, the author is not the only authoritative role with regards to literary production.

I use the term destructive preservation deliberately. It describes, quite literally, the constant push and pull between destroying or obliterating a previous state of the work, and preserving the work as a whole for the future. It is the dynamic state of the present, which must balance the past and the future carefully. This dissertation will examine both small-scale and large-scale acts of destructive preservation, ranging from readerly marginalia in manuscripts to massive additions and alterations to works. It is important, then, to understand how these acts happen and why Lydgate would appear to endorse and incite them from his readers. Lydgate requests this type of destruction quite explicitly. At the end of the fifth book of *Troy Book*, for instance, Lydgate incites readers “To race and skrape thoroughoute al my boke, / Voide and adde wher he semeth need” (Book 5 ll. 3538-3539). It is important that here he calls for a very literal, physical destruction of the book; he asks his readers to erase words and scrape the ink from the surface of the page, to void and add inked words. This destruction, the literal removal of words from a page, is necessary to Lydgate. It allows for room to add new, better words. The destruction, the removal of flaws or hindrances, creates the opportunity for improvements to the whole, which encourages the overall preservation of the work itself. Lydgate frames these destructive acts of preservation as a need. The need, identified by the reader, must be answered; the flaws must be removed and resolved so that the work itself can continue, albeit in a new (but not entirely new), slightly different form. Destructive preservation, then, becomes a crucial act carried out by readers who are deeply involved in the survival of the work.

This call to readers that Lydgate deploys is often seen as a humility trope, and one that Lydgate inherits from Chaucer.<sup>7</sup> While both authors (at times) adopt a sense of modesty or humility regarding their works, their intent regarding readers could not be more different. At the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer addresses his work (or possibly the book containing it) directly, saying “Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye, | Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye, | So sende myght to make in som comedye! | But litel book, no makyng thow n’envie, | But subgit be to alle poesye; | And kis the steppes, wher-as thow seest pace | Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace” (ll. 1786-1792).<sup>8</sup> Chaucer refers to his book in a diminutive way, calling it “litel” and telling it to be “subgit” and to kiss the steps of those authors who preceded, and presumably surpassed it. In this, Chaucer conveys a clear sense of humility regarding his literary creation. Whether that humility is sincere or not comes into question in the next stanza. “And for ther is so gret diversitee | In Englissh and in wrytyng of oure tonge, | So prey I God that noon myswrite thee, | Ne thee mys metre for defaute of tonge. | And red wher-so thou be, or elles songe, | That thow be understonde God I beseche! | But yet to purpos of my rather speche—” (ll. 1793-1199). Chaucer begins this stanza by mentioning the “gret diversitee in Englissh” and noting that as a potential root cause for misunderstanding of the text. In that sense, he is being humble not only about the work, but also about the language in which it is written. But one could take that “gret

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Julius Holzknrecht discusses the humility topos at work in directions to “litel boke[s]” in Chaucer, Lydgate, and others saying that these passages “are interesting because they form part of the evidence that there was connection between the nobility and the author in the Middle Ages” but that this connection can be characterized by “sycophancy and slavishness” (123). In Holzknrecht’s conception, the humility at work displays the disparity in status and authority between poet and patron. Ideas about the function of the humility or modesty topos have changed since Holzknrecht; although critics still agree that there is a status gap between poets and patrons, the humility topos is no longer seen as a straight-forward depiction of that gap. See for example, Robert Meyer-Lee, who argues that it functions to allow the poet to self-aggrandize and promote unpopular positions or opinions to powerful patrons. Meyer-Lee, Robert. *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt*. Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 81-87. Holzknrecht, Karl Julius. *Literary Patronage in the Middle Ages*. Octagon Books, Inc., 1966.

<sup>8</sup> This and all further quotations of works by Chaucer will be from *The Riverside Chaucer*. Third Edition, General Editor Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

diversitee” and interpret it, and the following prayers that the work not be misunderstood, mismetered, or miswritten, in a different light.

The diversity in English, in the writing of the tongue, as Chaucer puts it, is a detriment to proper understanding; it happens because there are those who attempt to write “oure tongue” when they lack the skill or knowledge to undertake that task (presumably one of translating the spoken word to written, or a Latin work to English). The result is subpar English works. When Chaucer sets up the “gret diversitee” of English as a barrier to understanding works in English, he is indicating that his work (and he as an author) has a proper command of English; he hopes that those people exposed to faulty English might not come to his superior work and misinterpret it out of a lack of familiarity with his better, finer English. When Chaucer mentions that he hopes that “noon myswrite thee, | ne noon mysmetre” he follows that directly with the qualifying prepositional phrase “for defaute of tonge.” He wishes, or commands, that no one will look at his work, misunderstand his use of the language because of their own faulty knowledge, and then attempt a revision. Such an undertaking, based on misreading and misunderstanding, would harm the work. Chaucer is clear here that he is worried about the potential damage that could be inflicted by well-meaning but inept readers. They could destroy his well-crafted work.

Lydgate’s call to readers to “race and skrape” his book illustrates the opposite intent, as well as a diametrically opposed trust in the capacity of his readers. He feels as though his readers may have a better command of English, of the meter, than he does, so he invites them to correct his work through destructive acts of erasing and scraping. Though these two versions of the humility trope seem to exist on opposite ends of a spectrum of sincerity, they do share a similar, though not completely aligned, view of readership. Lydgate, just before he asks readers to “race and skrape” directly addresses those readers, saying “To hym I make a direccioun | Of this boke

to han inspeccioun | Besechyng hem with her prudent loke” (Book 5, ll.3536-3537). He asks readers to use their “prudent loke” to inspect the book, discover its faults, and then to make the necessary changes. Prudence is important here. Lydgate does not simply open the door for any and all readers to change whatever words or lines they happen to dislike. He asks for prudence and inspection. In a way, Chaucer asks for the same thing. Chaucer’s concern is that imprudent readers will wield their faulty grasp of English on his carefully crafted work and rip it to shreds. To address this, he simply bans (or tries to ban) readers from miswriting and mismetering his poem. Lydgate takes a more measured, trusting, and open approach. He realizes that he may have made mistakes and that some readers might catch them, while others might not, or might misunderstand certain things. He therefore calls to prudent readers, those who can exercise caution, knowledge, and good judgement, to inspect his work. Both authors, in their own ways, make a case for prudent reading. Chaucer sees it as less likely to occur and therefore bars those readers from becoming writers. Lydgate acknowledges the potential in his readership and grants prudent readers access to his works. The move is riskier, but the reward has the potential to be higher. Lydgate asks for prudent readers to judiciously destroy the imperfections in his works knowing that an imprudent reader could dismantle his whole endeavor.

Much depends upon prudence. Perhaps because of this, Lydgate imbues his works with examples of the characteristic and its opposite(s).<sup>9</sup> Prudence has its roots in classical thought, but

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<sup>9</sup> For discussions of prudence in *Troy Book* and *Siege of Thebes*, see: C. David Benson’s section on the topic in *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*, where he clarifies that the role of prudence in Hector’s death is part of a larger lesson on countering the destructive force of fate with virtue; Colin Fewer’s article argues that Lydgate uses prudence as an ideological “principle of self-governance” that could be employed by the multitudes (rather than those in power in society) to create not only individual agency, but also social stability (235); Scott-Morgan Straker sees prudence as ultimately failing in *Siege of Thebes*, arguing that despite the council of prudent advisors, Thebes still burns, and that this stands in contrast to Lydgate’s hope in both the prologue and *Troy Book*. Benson, C. David. *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*. Boydell & Brewer, 1980, pp. 124-129. Fewer, Colin. “John Lydgate’s *Troy Book* and the Ideology of Prudence.” *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2004, pp. 229-245. Straker, Scott-Morgan. “Deference and Difference: Lydgate, Chaucer, and the ‘Siege of Thebes.’” *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 52, no. 205, 2001, pp. 1-21.

was popular to medieval writers and theologians as well.<sup>10</sup> The Middle English dictionary provides a definition as “the wisdom to see what is virtuous.”<sup>11</sup> Reginald Pecock, a fifteenth-century bishop defines prudence in his *Folewer to the Donet*, a study of “the favorite scholastic ideas of mediaeval Europe” (vii).<sup>12</sup> In this work for laypersons Pecock adopts a Socratic structure and to the question “what is prudence?” he answers, “ it is a kunnyng or knowing wherbi we knowen treupis longen to oure gouenauce, pat is to seie, it is pe knowing wherbi we knowen what is to be doon or to be left vndoon in oure gouernauncis” (52). These definitions provide an idea of what prudence meant in the fifteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Prudence was a virtuous wisdom that allowed a person the ability to self-govern, to know when and how to act, and when not to. When combined with the classical context, dating from Plato, that aligns prudence with good counsel, advice, or governance, prudence takes on a more communal sense, involving instruction given to and administered by more than a single person. Prudence becomes a virtue that speaks particularly to Lydgate’s concept of active, engaged reading. It works towards the common good

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<sup>10</sup> Plato, in book four of *The Republic*, discusses prudence (or wisdom) as one of the four qualities that make up an ideal state; it is a wisdom or capacity for good counsel possessed by the guardians or governors of the state. The Bible lists prudence among the qualities which wisdom teaches (in *Wisdom of Solomon* 8:7). Ambrose, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas all count among the church fathers and leaders who integrated this classical virtue into Christian theology; for a very thorough account of the four classical virtues (prudence, courage, temperance, and justice) and how they were interpreted and deployed in the middle ages, see Bejczy, Istvan P. *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages: A Study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century*. Brill, 2011. See also Takami Matusda’s section on prudence and death in *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry*. Boydell & Brewer, 2011, pp. 174-186.

<sup>11</sup> “prudence.” *Middle English Dictionary*. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED35090>. Accessed July 3, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Pecock, Reginald. *The Folewer to the Donet*. Edited by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock. Oxford UP, 1924. For an extended discussion of Pecock’s life and works, especially with regard to their controversiality, see James Simpson’s chapter “Reginald Pecock and John Fortescue” in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*. Simpson, James. “Reginald Pecock and John Fortescue.” *A Companion to Middle English Prose*. Edited by A. S. G. Edwards, D. S. Brewer, 2004, pp. 271-288.

<sup>13</sup> For a concise overview of the history of the idea of prudence, especially as it relates to Lydgate, see Robert R. Edwards’ chapter in *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages*. Edwards, Robert R. “Lydgate’s *Troy Book* and the Confusion of Prudence.” *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages*. Edited by Thomas R. Litzka and Lorna E. M. Walker, Four Courts Press, 2001. pp. 53-56.

of all. In literary terms this means that the exercise of prudence when reading and correcting a work creates benefits beyond the reader, work, and author.

The point of destructive preservation is preservation. It allows for destruction of parts to preserve the whole. This idea has found a full articulation in the study of the natural world. Charles Darwin describes varieties as being individual living things that “have the same general characters as species, for they cannot be distinguished from species, -- ... [except by] a certain amount of difference” (58-9).<sup>14</sup> So, then, varieties share most features in common with their identifying group, but contain certain unique features marking them as different. Darwin goes on to say that if these variations are useful, they are preserved; he terms this process natural selection (61). In describing natural selection, the preservation of useful variation, Darwin links it with the struggle for existence. He provides illumination of this term saying, “the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life; or we forget how these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings, are destroyed by birds or beasts of prey” (62). Darwin’s point here is that destruction feeds life. And variety, those small differences that mark out an individual from others in its group (and if useful, become preserved), can provide that individual with the means of making its own struggle for existence a bit easier. They are destructive preservation in action. For literary production, this process includes the creation of variations by readers, and the preservation of those (useful) variations to ensure the survival of the work.

This process of destructive preservation, of the prudent reader entering the authoritative sphere of literary creation to ensure the survival of the work, does not have positive implications for the work alone. The reader, too, gains by it. Authority is the readers’ main reward. The

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<sup>14</sup> Darwin, Charles. *The Annotated Origin: A Facsimile of the First Edition of On the Origin of Species*. Annotated by James T. Costa. Harvard UP, 2011.

authority bestowed by Lydgate allows the reader to become a writer, and the affirmation of that authority occurs when the reader develops a variation that improves (and thereby ensures the continuation of) the work. Lydgate's works are bettering their readers, and, in turn, those readers are bettering the works. This cyclicity of mutual benefit does not remain narrowly circumscribed, but spirals outward from the work and reader, to encompass and impact more readers, who then become better readers, who then prudently and actively read and improve other works. The loop of reciprocal improvement, stemming from Lydgate's directive that his readers give the work a "prudent loken" and "inspeccioun," starts a reaction that leads to an ever-increasing outward spiral.

The benefit of active prudent readership extends beyond the relationship of one reader to one work. Its wide-reaching force of positive change can be described by the idea of common profit. The notions of common profit, common weal, or *res publica*, were significant ideas in late-medieval vernacular literature; they could be found in both the works themselves, and in the communities of book producers and readers.<sup>15</sup> Russell A. Peck discusses Gower's use of common profit at length and provides an apt definition of the term as Gower deploys it: "the mutual enhancement, each by each, of all parts of a community for the general welfare of that community taken as a whole" (xxi).<sup>16</sup> This definition has relevance for Lydgate's concept of the

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<sup>15</sup> The phrase "common profit" is used by Chaucer in *The Clerk's Tale* (l. 431) and by Gower in *Confessio Amantis* (prologue line 377 and several times in book 7, in lines 1609, 1993, 2828, 2957, and 3007). For a discussion of the notion of common profit in *The Clerk's Tale*, see Carol Falvo Heffernan's article "Tyranny and Commune Profit in the 'Clerk's Tale.'" *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1983, pp. 332-340. For an in-depth discussion of common profit in Gower, see Russell A. Peck's monograph *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's Confessio Amantis*. Southern Illinois UP, 1978. M. S. Kempshall, in a discussion of Cicero's *De Re Publica* in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, points out a connection between Lydgate and Italian scholars concerned with writing about *res publica* (the Latin term from which the English "common weal" and "common profit" derive): Humphrey Duke of Gloucester was simultaneous patron to Lydgate and Pietro Del Monte and Tito Livio Frulovisi, both of whom wrote on *res publica* while in England during the 1430s and 1440s. One of the literary communities in which Lydgate was a member, then, was (in some parts, at least) concerned with defining and exploring common profit. Kempshall, M. S. "De Re Publica 1.39 in Medieval and Renaissance Political Thought." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, vol. 45, no. S76, pp. 99-135. (129-130).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



mutual benefit of active readership. When readers and works are considered part of the same vernacular, literary community, the act of prudent inspection and correction, becomes the embodiment of a literary common profit. The readers inspect the works, becoming more prudent readers in the process, and then correct the works, improving them for future readers, who will benefit not simply by having better works to read, but also (possibly) by witnessing the interventions of previous prudent readers.<sup>17</sup> The concept of common profit, as it operates through readers, is the continual improvement, both of work and reader, through prudent, discerning, active reading and careful correction. The state of the work may be altered, even destroyed, but it occurs for the mutual benefit of all involved, for the common profit of the literary community.

This idea of common profit extended beyond the literary work itself to the physical realities of the book. In the fifteenth century in England, a practice of bestowing (or even creating) books for a common profit emerged.<sup>18</sup> Such manuscripts contained inscriptions dictating that after the death of the owner the book be passed on to another person; the difference between usual bequests of books in wills and these common profit books is that the beneficiary in these cases did not retain permanent ownership of the book, but was instructed to pass it on

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<sup>17</sup> This would only be the case in certain situations, where the book retained some indication of the previous state of the text prior to the readers' correction. A simple example would be misspelled name being crossed out and corrected, as seen in a manuscript containing Lydgate's *Troy Book* and an unfinished romance (shelfmark Morgan Library MS M 876 – see chapter one for further discussion). The original misspelling can be discerned, but the correction is clear.

<sup>18</sup> H. S. Bennet mentions the practice briefly, noting six manuscripts which contain specific notes that they are for a common profit or use. *Ibid.* 171. Wendy Scase and Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran both explore the phenomenon at greater length with regards to specific manuscripts and their owners/readers. Importantly, Reginald Pecock, who wrote on prudence, specified that manuscript be used in a common profit library. Scase, Wendy. "Reginald Pecock, John Carpenter and John Colop's 'Common-Profit' Books: Aspects of Book Ownership and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century London." *Medium Aevum*, vol. 61, no. 2, 1992, pp. 261-274. Moran, Jo Ann Hoepfner. "A 'Common Profit' Library in Fifteenth-Century England and Other Books for Chaplains." *Manuscripta*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1984, pp. 17-25.

after they had read it, or after a certain period of time, to another person.<sup>19</sup> The intent of these common profit books (or, in some cases, libraries) is clear: to allow as many readers access to these books as possible. The books were often meant to be lent to people who would otherwise not have access to them.<sup>20</sup> The purpose, then, is to aid readers, to grant them admission to a literary community that had previously been denied them. In doing so, the books would improve the lives of their readers and widen its scope of influence. These books share striking similarities to Lydgate's concept of active, engaged readership. Both schemes create a community of readers that is responsible for the work or book, but does not completely own it. Both invite those who would otherwise be excluded into a community that confers authority upon its members. Both do these things for the benefit of many, not one, for the common profit.

Common profit books physically embody Lydgate's ideas of active readership for mutual benefit, but also contain the element of destruction. Books that were passed from one new reader to the next every year or so, rather than at the end of a single owner's life, would be much more vulnerable to physical wear and deterioration. Moran points out that one such group of books, a library initiated by early fifteenth-century York cleric William Wilmyncote, was intended to circulate as long as the books survived (24). The expense of the common profit library was the physical survival of the books themselves.<sup>21</sup> The books would be read unto death, not (as was more usual) the death of their owners, but the deaths of the books themselves. In their lifetime, however, they would profit multiple readers, and the English reading public at large. This mirrors the destructive elements in Lydgate's scheme: a pristine page may not survive, but a

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<sup>19</sup> See transcriptions of inscription in Scase, pp. 261-262, and explanation of ownership versus use, p. 264 and Moran p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Moran 23. Scase 264.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that there were several manuscripts that survived their time as part of a common profit library. These have been noted by Scase, Moran, and Bennet.

corrected, improved line or rhyme will; the ultimate authority of an author over his work will be forfeited and dispersed to his several prudent readers, but the author's works (and thereby his role within their creation) will continue. Mutual benefit, common profit, does not come without its individual costs. This aligns with what Peck says of Gower's concept of common profit in *Confessio Amantis*: of an attack on capitalists and merchants, Peck says, "the mercantile definition of 'profit' is antithetical to 'common profit.' It seeks 'gain' rather than 'benefit.'" (70) Gain impacts the situation of the singular person, indicating a compiling of value or wealth on top of what has already been amassed. Benefit, however, improves rather than increases. It makes the whole greater. And at times, this requires sacrifice, destruction.

Lydgate invokes common profit continually. He not only seeks to engage readers in active reading, bestowing and revoking his own authority over his works for the benefit of both readers and works, but he also writes works that in themselves are meant to create common profit. *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes*, and *Siege of Thebes* are all intended to instruct their readers (variously) in how not to govern, how not to relate to others, and how not to view authority. The sacrifice for a common profit comes here from the subjects of the stories themselves. Jason, Hector, Troilus, Polymyte, and Ethiocles, among hundreds of others, all suffered, all fell. The stories of their faults and falls get retold to instruct others. The result, hopefully, is that the instruction will help others avoid similar fates, but this is the optimistic outlook. Not all who read may heed the advice carefully curated for them by Lydgate; though the common profit of the reading community is the goal here, it is not a guaranteed outcome, especially if the readers are not, as Lydgate hopes, prudent. This bleaker outlook is not without its upside. In the cautionary stories of Hector and the like, their sacrifices, their destructions, are not the only aspect that reflects on the subjects. Their tales are not solely destructive. They are told and retold to be

preservative, protective, and, perhaps, redeeming. In the continual retelling of these stories, the destructions of these people become warnings, so that their failings, missteps, and faults become like the beacons on lighthouses, warning those who come too close of the potential to crash. This beacon, then, in its capacity to warn, instruct, and guide others, reflects back more kindly on those who created it. Those that suffered destruction can recouperate some of their individual loss through the collective benefit of all that read and heed their stories. And for those that may not heed, but may too become the subject of a cautionary tale, they can know there is consolation and perhaps redemption in that path.

Common profit, as it exists in fifteenth-century literary communities, contains a paradoxical sacrificial improvement, a destructive preservation, that turns back on itself to retroactively, posthumously, reflectively provide reward and recompense for the sufferer. For the subjects of tales, destruction becomes a positive reflective force. Books that are over-circulated deteriorate more quickly, but improve and widen the community of readers. Works may be penetrated by readers, but their enhancement and survival becomes the reward. And for Lydgate, bestowing authority grants him authority.

In Latin, the *auctor* is one who gives increase, the originator. Alastair Minnis details this in his canonical text, *A Medieval Theory of Authorship*; in it, Minnis lays out an Aristotelian concept of the *auctore* and *auctoritas* in which the author or efficient cause is valued for its authenticity and therefore respectability and believability.<sup>22</sup> In this model, the reader cannot lend a work any *auctoritas*. Minnis uses an example of a craftsman “who directs and guides a work and another who works with his hands in accordance with rules conveyed from the craftsman[;]

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<sup>22</sup> See pages 10-11 in which Minnis defines the terms *auctore* and *auctoritas*. His definition of *auctore* indicates that the person must be known and proficient, and thereby will become someone whose work is worthy of imitation. Minnis, Alastair. *A Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., U of Pennsylvania P, 2010.

the latter is not said to be the auctor of the work, but the former” (81). Though Minnis finds rigorous adherence to a model that greatly preferences the known author and the genuine work, he allows for some manipulation of the system in later works. By the time he gets to Chaucer and Gower, Minnis has begun to allow for a readership that does more than simply revere an *auctore*. Gower, he claims, is a compiler who gleans a modicum of *auctoritas* from the ancient and venerable *auctores* he cites; Chaucer, on the other hand, uses the cover of a compiler to shield him from any criticism his work might garner.<sup>23</sup>

Though Minnis allows for some flexibility in the modes of acquiring and using *auctoritas*, I believe that his model is not adequate to describing the relationship between source and poet in the fifteenth century, nor does it make any allowances for an active, involved readership. Minnis does not discuss readers at length, but I believe he would say that a reader who becomes involved in the literary work, changing, editing, or emending it, is like the craftsman who uses his hands: he can add no legitimacy or *auctoritas* to the work because he is not the ultimate guide of the work.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, I argue that the medieval author and his works

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<sup>23</sup> See the relevant sections in Minnis, chapter 5, pages 177-210.

<sup>24</sup>A number of scholars follow this view including Katharine Breen, Daniel Hobbins, Nigel Mortimer, Robert Meyer-Lee, and James Simpson. In *Imagining an English Reading Public, 1150-1400*, Breen builds on Minnis’ protocol of studying the ways medieval literary communities envisioned or defined themselves. She specifically concerns herself with the changing definition of habitus as it relates to language and vernacularity in the middle ages, and, like Minnis’ early chapters, finds that *auctoritas* is not a commodity available to the masses. In his exploration of the influence of Jean Gerson, *Authorship and Publicity Before Print*, Hobbins draws heavily on Minnis’ account of medieval *auctoritas* in monastic writings and how it shaped the relationship between author and source. In his study of Lydgate’s *Fall*, *John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes: Narrative Tragedy in its literary and political contexts*, Mortimer uses Minnis’ theory of authorship in explaining Lydgate’s relationship to his sources. Specifically, in his chapter ‘Lydgate’s Laureate Prose’ in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, Meyer-Lee uses Minnis’ argument to establish a point about monastic writing and the academic preface’s ability to establish veracity; more generally, Meyer-Lee agrees with Minnis about the separate roles of poet and patron/reader in literary creation. In his chapter on Lydgate in *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, Simpson discusses the matter of *auctoritas* in *Dance Machabre* by using the same formulations that Minnis does. Breen, Katharine. *Imagining an English Reading Public, 1150-1400*. Cambridge UP, 2010; Hobbins, Daniel. *Authorship and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2009; Mortimer, Nigel. *John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes: Narrative Tragedy in its Literary and Political Contexts*. Oxford UP, 2005; Meyer-Lee, Robert J. *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt*. Cambridge UP, 2007; Simpson, James. *Reform and Cultural Revolution: 1350-1547*. Oxford UP, 2004.

remain continually present through the mediation of the reader, who, quite capable of lending authority to the work, reproduces and alters it as needed to construct a coherent literary history and ensure the survival of important works within it. In this model, the one which I see as operating specifically in John Lydgate's works, increase does not only happen at the point of origination. It happens continuously, throughout the lifetime of a work. Each reader can increase the work. And with each increase, the work becomes renewed, extending its life and presenting itself for consideration to a new group of readers, or auctors. This project, then, defines readers as literary agents capable of producing or reproducing works through their active engagement with them. Scribes and editors fall into this category; they are readers of the work who do not simply act as a medium through which the work is translated from the author's mind or exemplum to a new page, but who, sometimes subtly and sometimes unmistakably, alter the work from their own position as a prudent, judicious, active reader. These readers, including the professional scribes and bookmakers, the editor, and the person sitting at home reading their personal copy of the work, possess a potential *auctoritas* that they enact as soon as they engage the work and change it, leaving behind an impression of their own judgments, biases, tastes, and reflections on that work; in short, their alterations are records of their readings.

This dissertation, then, is one that carefully examines identities within the realm of literary production, locating the places and spaces in which they may slip, elide, or transition. I find that Lydgate encourages the deconstruction and destabilization of terms that designate power and advocates for a more egalitarian, evenly-distributed approach to literary creation. For Lydgate, readers are just as important to literary creation and recreation as authors. This approach, this view of readers and authors in late medieval England as belonging to overlapping

groups of literary production, causes a revision of how we normally view the period directly following Chaucer.

The critical work on Lydgate tells an interesting story. Though it appears to be predominantly negative, and dismissive of Lydgate's abilities as a poet, there are consistent bright spots, positive reactions, that emerge even when attitudes seem to be the most contemptuous. The narrative of Lydgate's critical reputation and the actuality of it appear to be at odds. It is my belief that this discrepancy occurs for two reasons. Firstly, scholars are invested in Lydgate's negative reputation. Whether they agree with it, or they are working to disprove it, it is in their interest to repeat a critical narrative that is predominantly unenthusiastic when it comes to Lydgate's poetic prowess. Both positions rely on and propagate the narrative of Lydgate as unauthoritative poet. Secondly, Lydgate is untimely. Existing between Chaucer and the sixteenth century, Lydgate is portrayed as thoroughly medieval. His medieval-ness makes him undesirable, incomprehensible, or even repulsive to the modern critic. That Lydgate is currently enjoying a decided resurgence in popularity is due to certain similarities between his era and our own. Specifically, Lydgate's hybridism, dynamism, and concept of active readership make him familiar to us, ultimately knowable, and relatable. In what follows, I hope to elucidate the critical investment in Lydgate's negative reputation and his portrayal as untimely. I will describe the critical narrative out of which this study grows and show that we are at a moment in which we are capable of moving Lydgate and Lydgate studies beyond the critical shadow of Chaucer.

John Lydgate supplies his readers with biographical details in a few of his works. From these we know he was born in or around 1370 in the town of Lydgate (sometimes spelled Lidgate), which was near the abbey at Bury St. Edmonds. Lydgate joined the Benedictine order

at Bury as a novice in 1385 when he was about fifteen years old.<sup>25</sup> His progression to ordination as a priest took eight years and he was ordained on April 7, 1397.<sup>26</sup> The abbey at Bury was one of the most illustrious Benedictine houses in England and provided Lydgate with the resources necessary for him to become the most prolific poet of his age.<sup>27</sup> The library at Bury St. Edmonds was equally renowned and “helped to define the institution of the monastic library for its time” (20).<sup>28</sup> With a collection containing over two thousand books, the library at Bury was host to several developments in cataloguing and organizing that shaped the function of libraries.<sup>29</sup> This prestigious abbey and its foundational library form a major portion of the context for Lydgate’s life and work; his literary career hit its peak after his ordination. Although some of his minor poems date from the early 1400s, Lydgate’s major works fall between 1412 and 1440.<sup>30</sup> His three most popular works, *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes*, and *Siege of Thebes* all date from this period. He died in 1450.

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<sup>25</sup> In *Siege of Thebes* Lydgate establishes a date for the creation of the poem of 1421 and then states that he is “nygh fifty yere of age” (92-3), which would place his birth in about 1371. Lydgate took the name of his birthplace as his surname, a practice common among monks in the Middle Ages, as Derek Pearsall notes in his seminal monograph on Lydgate; variant spellings arise for both the surname and place name. Pearsall says Lydgate enters the order in 1382, though gives no source for that year. Walter Schirmer provides the date of 1385, and Pearsall’s bio-bibliography of Lydgate, which was published 17 years after *John Lydgate*, looks to Lydgate’s *Testament* (line 610) and provides an age of 15 for his entry to the abbey. Pearsall, Derek. *John Lydgate*. Routledge, 1970; Schirmer, Walter. *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*. Translated by Ann E. Keep, U of California P, 1961.

<sup>26</sup> In *John Lydgate* Pearsall provides a primary source, the Fordham register. See page 23, note 6.

<sup>27</sup> For more in depth discussions of the abbey, its history, and its situation during Lydgate’s residency, see Schirmer 8-23; Pearsall 23-45; and Lois Ebin’s study of Lydgate, pages 1-19. Ebin, Lois. *John Lydgate*. Twayne, 1985. 1-19.

<sup>28</sup> Summit, Jennifer. *Memory’s Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England*. U of Chicago P, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> See Summit 20-29.

<sup>30</sup> It is generally presumed that *Complaint of the Black Knight* and *The Flour of Courteseye* date from the first decade of the fifteenth century; *Temple of Glas* and *Resoun and Sensuallyte* also likely date from this period. See Schirmer 31; Ebin’s chronology; and the entry for Lydgate in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Gray, Douglas. “Lydgate, John (c. 1370–1449/50?), poet and prior of Hatfield Regis.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford UP, 23 Sept. 2004, <https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17238> Accessed 16 Apr. 2018.



During his lifetime Lydgate witnessed the rise of the Lancastrians, widespread punishment of Lollards in England, and the Great Schism within the Catholic church; the Peasant's Revolt occurred in the year or so after Lydgate was born, Chaucer died while Lydgate was still a young man of around 20, and although the War of the Roses is given a starting date of 1455 (five years after Lydgate's death), its seeds were sown while he lived. Lydgate's historical milieu can easily be classified as unstable or turbulent. It is tempting to look to this climate to contextualize Lydgate's works, identifying political and historical motivations in his poetry or to point to the death of Chaucer as indelibly marking Lydgate's literary persona. This study claims neither to historicize Lydgate, nor to read him in the shadow of Chaucer, neither to contextualize nor to apologize, but to examine his works and the books containing them as authoritative and authorizing.

Manuscript evidence proves Lydgate's popularity in his own time.<sup>31</sup> Lydgate's major works, *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes*, and *Siege of Thebes*, are extant in more than twenty manuscripts each.<sup>32</sup> William Caxton printed Lydgate as early as 1476, and he and other early English printers continued to publish Lydgate throughout the sixteenth century. But by the nineteenth century Lydgate had fallen from critical favor. In 1802 Joseph Ritson wrote a scathing denunciation of Lydgate's works; his powerful and creative language has been quoted by scholars writing on Lydgate ever since.<sup>33</sup> "Prolix and voluminous" (66) stands on the tamer end of Ritson's condemnation; at the conclusion of his catalogue entry for Lydgate, Ritson appears

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<sup>31</sup> See Edwards, A. S. G. "Lydgate Manuscripts: Some Directions for Future Research." *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth Century England*. Edited by Derek Pearsall, D. S. Brewer, 1983, 15-26. (15)

<sup>32</sup> Edwards (1983) lists the manuscript numbers for a portion of Lydgate's corpus, which totals over 200.

<sup>33</sup> To be fair, it is speculated that Ritson's denunciation of Lydgate's works might have been influenced by his attitude towards clerics more generally. See D'Israeli, Isaac. *Amenities of Literature, Consisting of Sketches and Characters of English Literature*. Edited by Benjamin D'Israeli, vol. 1, Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1863. (197)

relieved to have done with the poet, saying, “This is believed to be the completest list of this voluminous, profaick, and driveling monk...in truth, and fact, these stupid and fatiguing productions, which by no means deserve the name of poetry, and their still more stupid and disgusting author, who disgraces the name and patronage of his master Chaucer, are neither worth collecting...nor worthy of preservation” (87-88).<sup>34</sup> This denunciation became the most vociferous opinion on Lydgate in the following centuries, eventually dividing Lydgate scholarship into two camps: detractors and defenders.

Ritson was highly quoted, probably because he was highly quotable; his condemnation of Lydgate not only contains pithy, inflammatory phrases that provoke reactions, but it seems to sum up modernity’s view of the middle ages. James Simpson has pointed out the impact of such periodic thinking on Lydgate studies, saying that, “Twentieth-century discussion of the fifteenth century, and of Lydgate in particular, worked within a strictly periodic...conception, whereby fifteenth-century literature was useful precisely by way of manifesting the ‘medieval’ norm” (45).<sup>35</sup> Simpson brings Chaucer into this summary saying, “Where Chaucer is a ‘Renaissance’ poet, his fifteenth-century imitators are irredeemably ‘medieval’” (46). This attitude sheds light on the popularity and repeatability of Ritson’s comments. Lydgate is medieval, and to be medieval is to be not modern, that is, not illuminating or humanist, not capable of interiority or innovation or even sarcasm. Ritson’s commentary sums this up easily. It gets repeated and reinforced by those who construct a “medieval” notion of the fifteenth century and position it relative to both the Renaissance and its forbearer, Chaucer.

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<sup>34</sup> Ritson, Joseph. *Bibliographia Poetica: A Catalogue of English Poets, of the Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Centuries, With a Short Account of Their Works*. C. Roworth, 1802.

<sup>35</sup> Simpson, James. *Reform and Cultural Revolution: 1350-1547*. Oxford UP, 2004.

Ritson's remarks do not just get repeated by Lydgate naysayers, however. Even those who appear to be sincere about their interest in Lydgate feel compelled to quote Ritson. When it comes to Lydgate, we ignore the praise and repeat the censures. The story of Lydgate's reputation becomes, then, one of neglect and dismissal at best, and vicious condemnation at worst, that persists for centuries. The reality is that champions of Lydgate crop up throughout this long, dark period, determined to show Lydgate in a different light.<sup>36</sup> But why do scholars insist on repeating Ritson and ignoring any praise? Why highlight the most negative critiques? I believe that this insistence on Lydgate's bad reputation reveals something about the nature of scholarship. For scholarship to be productive, it must advance the conversation surrounding a particular subject. It is possible to add nuances or perspectives to a current thread of the discussion, but it is easy to slip into a more adversarial or contradictory mode. In the case of Lydgate, if the conversation surrounding his work is resoundingly negative, then contradicting that reputation can become a natural position to take. And Ritson's puerile name-calling makes it easy to become the opposition, championing Lydgate from a place of mature intellect and taking down a literary bully. It makes sense then, that Lydgate's "driveling monk" persona becomes so monolithic: it provides scholars something concrete to work against, a wrong to right. While several scholars take up the challenge of defending Lydgate, the negative reputation, despite being somewhat a false construction, proves hard to shake. Lydgate's steadfast "medieval-ness"

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Warton is a particularly illuminating example of a Lydgate fan from roughly the same period as Ritson. Warton celebrates Lydgate's popularity and versatility saying, "he was not only the poet of his monastery, but of the world in general" (53). Warton goes further and praises Lydgate's poetic abilities: "Yet his genius was so lively, and his accomplishments so numerous, that I suspect the holy father faint Benedict would hardly have acknowledged him for a genuine disciple" (52). This somewhat flip remark about Lydgate's lively genius in contrast to his identity as a monk seems so vastly outside the usual spectrum of Lydgate criticism as to be about a different poet. Though coming before, it feels like a direct refutation of Ritson's "voluminous, profaick, and driveling monk" characterization. Writing a mere twenty-four years apart, these two men come to completely different conclusions about Lydgate. Ritson's colorful condemnations have persisted, while Warton's praise fell into relative obscurity. Warton, Thomas. *The History of English Poetry, from the close of the eleventh to the commencement of the eighteenth century*. vol. 2, J. Dodsley, etc., 1778.

becomes the sticking point, holding him fast to the fifteenth century and making his relevancy or comprehensibility in another time difficult. Scholars over the centuries, and especially since the mid-twentieth century, have attempted to unshackle Lydgate from his reputation; but it is not until recently that those efforts have come close to success.

The mid-twentieth century saw the clear beginnings of a reversal in Lydgate's critical fortunes. Walter Schirmer and Alain Renoir comprise a vanguard of critics willing to admit to Lydgate's poetic potential.<sup>37</sup> Though approaches, topics, length, and native languages differ in these two examples, they share a concern about Lydgate and time. Schirmer's approach was historical. He believed that in order to understand and appreciate Lydgate's work, and its appeal during Lydgate's lifetime, it must be viewed through a historical lens, and thus he provided historical contextualizations for the better comprehension of Lydgate's poems by a modern audience. In a concluding appendix covering Lydgate's reputation, Schirmer reminds his reader of the importance of historical context saying, "Evaluation of Lydgate's merit as a writer is necessarily conditioned by the literary fashions prevailing in the critic's own time" (257). It would seem, then, that people view Lydgate as being not for all time, but of an age (to misquote Jonson on Shakespeare). This is a view Renoir repeats: "The list of detractions [of Lydgate and his poetry] – polite or otherwise – could be extended at will, but it would tell us no more than we have already gathered: that Lydgate's poetry is anything but popular *with our own age*" (2 emphasis mine). Renoir has identified the problem. Lydgate's poetry is unpopular today. Today could be nearly any day from the late sixteenth century until about a decade ago. Lydgate remained steadfastly unpopular for centuries. This is true, except that scholars, like Schirmer and

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<sup>37</sup> Schirmer's study was published in his native German in 1952 and translated into English in 1961, the same year as Renoir's article. Renoir, Alain. "Attitudes Towards Women in Lydgate's Poetry." *English Studies*. vol.42, no.1, 1961.

Renoir, were attracted to this deeply unpopular poet, and while their assessments of Lydgate may not have been joyous celebrations of his accomplishments, they were attempting to uncover the value in his works. It would seem that Lydgate's problem of being untimely or out of fashion was not exactly universal.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Derek Pearsall's formative work on Lydgate. Within his monograph, Pearsall mixes pithy indictments with concessions of Lydgate's merits.<sup>38</sup> If we take the insights of Renoir and Schirmer seriously, then perhaps Pearsall's celebration cum critique is the result of a world that is just not ready to fully embrace Lydgate. Pearsall himself cites historical factors when, at a later date, he reflects on the tone of his (and others') scholarship.<sup>39</sup> He firstly attributes this "sneering and laughing often disguised...as what was usually called judgement of literary merit" to a particular period in literary scholarship that was fueled (at least in part) by the demographics of the scholars (10). While this seems to hold weight, it needs to be noted that "sneering and laughing" at Lydgate was not fashionable only in the 1970s, but for centuries previous. Lydgate has been determined unfashionable in many time periods, and scholars continue to point that out.

Fifteen years on from Pearsall's initial work, the scholarly work on Lydgate continued to demonstrate that he still felt sufficiently distant to produce a variety of opinions. Lois Ebin and A. C. Spearing mark two opposing ends of the spectrum. Ebin's 1985 study paints Lydgate as an

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<sup>38</sup> Pearsall (1970) devotes much effort to explaining and rectifying the notion of a decline in English literature of the fifteenth century, but he does not fully unmoor himself from the shackles of Lydgate's literary identity as a ponderous, prosaic monk. In describing Lydgate's *Troy Book*, Pearsall says it "is a homily first, an encyclopedia second, and an epic nowhere" (129). Though this appears to be an indictment of Lydgate's style, in the next paragraph Pearsall argues that Lydgate's amplifications, one of the causes of *Troy Book's* encyclopedic nature, merit their own investigations.

<sup>39</sup> Pearsall gives a laundry list of his most scathing comments, including "hack-work," "third-rate fumbling," and "grotesquely inept" (10). Pearsall, Derek. "The Pleasure of Popular Romance." *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, edited by Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon, D. S. Brewer, 2011, pp. 9-18.

underdog whose works can be understood and appreciated better when judged by the intentions set out by the poems themselves.<sup>40</sup> Spearing characterizes Lydgate as a chronic misreader of Chaucer, engaged in a Sisyphean struggle to emulate his master, but doomed to fail.<sup>41</sup> Spearing's denigrations represent the tone we are used to hearing in reference to Lydgate. It comes from forcing a comparison between Lydgate and Chaucer, and being unable to make Lydgate like Chaucer. Lydgate will always be wanting in that binary; he himself has come to that conclusion and tells us so over and over again. The difference between critiques that characterize Lydgate as a skilled poet and those that find him lacking results from a difference in approach. Some compare him to Chaucer, and Lydgate cannot make the comparison work; others contrast the two and the differences become cause for admiration rather than denigration.

This, too, can be characterized as a matter that hinges on time. A comparison between Chaucer and Lydgate, one that forces Lydgate to try to be like Chaucer and then finds fault with Lydgate when he inevitably fails, makes the assumption that Lydgate, writing in a period after and different from Chaucer, can or should produce writings like his predecessor. Those who choose to contrast the two find the resultant scholarship more productive. They generally examine those features of Lydgate's poetry previously disparaged by critics, such as his tendency

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<sup>40</sup> She aptly points out that "many of the same qualities that appealed to Lydgate's contemporaries are a source of concern for modern readers in dealing with his poems" (Preface i). Ebin then provides these modern readers with a means of dealing with Lydgate in a manner that is both more productive and places Lydgate in a better light. She asks readers to judge Lydgate against himself and his intentions in each poem. Ebin's work prefigured the rehabilitative path of Lydgate scholarship that was to follow.

<sup>41</sup> Spearing's chapter on Chaucerian tradition in *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* appears, at times, to channel Ritson. He says, "Throughout his poetry, Lydgate attempts highly ambitious syntactical structures on the Chaucerian model, *but...*" (74, emphasis mine). The coordinating conjunction "but" seems to sum up the negative evaluation of Lydgate in contrast to Chaucer. Lydgate tries. He tries to emulate, imitate, and reproduce Chaucer. But. Although. However. He cannot. Spearing details Lydgate's failure, using words like "lumbering," and "rambling," and "expires from exhaustion" (75). Spearing, A. C. *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*. Cambridge UP, 1985.

to amplify or moralize, and find in them an intentionality and attention to craft.<sup>42</sup> This is only possible if Lydgate is not being judged by the standards of Chaucer.<sup>43</sup>

The latest wave of Lydgate rehabilitation takes the matter of Chaucerian comparisons to heart. This wave can, I believe, be roughly divided into two camps: those who attempt to rehabilitate Lydgate by situating (or resituating) his position relative to Chaucer, and those whose elevate Lydgate simply by considering him separately (or as separately as possible) from Chaucer.<sup>44</sup> In other words, those who find contrasting the two poets productive, and those who do not. This may seem like an artificial categorization imposed on a large, diverse group to make it seem not only more manageable, but more knowable and more suitable to the aims of the present project. Similarly, it could be successfully (but exasperatingly) argued that all living things fall into two groups: potatoes and not potatoes. But the division I mention holds here. The most often cited proof of Lydgate's ineptitude is not his lack of metrical understanding, his verbosity or over-amplification, or his moralizing, but all these things (and more) in comparison

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<sup>42</sup> For example, in the collection of essays *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature* James I. Miller Jr. reexamines a section of Lydgate's *St. Edmund and St. Fremund*; the section in question had been critiqued for its lack of adherence to chronology. Miller finds "artistic balance" (280) in the arrangement of tales, citing Lydgate's "use, as a conscious literary artist, of considerable skill in design and control" (290). Where previous scholars have found Lydgate wanting, Miller sees a deliberate execution of literary skill. He repeatedly notes Lydgate's artistry. Miller Jr., James I. "Lydgate the Hagiographer as Literary Artist." *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, edited by Larry D. Benson. Harvard UP, 1974. 279-290.

<sup>43</sup> Ebin speaks directly to this in a later work on the fifteenth century. She characterizes Lydgate as a self-conscious craftsman, whose decisions are evidence of that: "In our haste to pass Lydgate off as a poor Chaucerian, we have overlooked the extent to which he deliberately departs from the basic assumptions of his 'master.' Underlying his writing, his digressions make clear, is a view of poetry that differs substantially from his English predecessors" (48). Ebin, Lois. *Illuminator, Makar, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century*. U of Nebraska P, 1988.

<sup>44</sup> Several works make up the latter category. Maura Nolan's *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* and Claire Sponsler's *The Queen's Dumbshows* provide excellent examples. Both attempt to centralize the Lydgate's marginal writings. Nolan flips the more usual historicist argument around; rather than saying that in order to understand Lydgate's form, we must consider it in its historical context, she argues that form can help us to better comprehend its historical moment. Likewise, Sponsler's work positions Lydgate's mummings at the center of early English drama; she argues that understanding them can shed light on the forces at work on England's nascent stage. Both projects, and others that follow suit, consider Lydgate separately from Chaucer, and in doing so, turn to overlooked works or aspects thereof. Nolan, Maura. *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture*. Cambridge UP, 2005. Sponsler, Claire. *The Queen's Dumbshows: John Lydgate and the Making of Early Theatre*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2014.

to Chaucer. Thus the rehabilitative movement must either carefully renegotiate Lydgate relative to Chaucer, or attempt to position him in some other narrative. The latter route has produced volumes that consider Lydgate in terms of his contributions to English drama, the materiality described by his poems, and his relationships to both public and private readerships, among others. The former path produced an origin story.

The scholarship that produced (and revised) this origin story provides the base out of which this study grows. Each new voice in this field ascribes Lydgate and the fifteenth century a greater authority. The main players in this particular arena, Seth Lerer, Larry Scanlon, James Simpson, and William Kuskin, portray Lydgate as at least somewhat responsible for creating Chaucer (his reputation, his canon, or his authority) and thereby gleaning a certain amount of literary authority for himself.<sup>45</sup> This project adds to this in two ways. Firstly, it considers readers, the agents who conceivably could follow Lydgate in this literary genealogy. The methods of attaining authority described by the origin story scholarship all possess readerly characteristics. If Lydgate could grant himself authority by reading Chaucer, what happens to those who read Lydgate? How does he view them? What authority could they gain and how? While considering these questions of fifteenth-century readership, this study also attempts to make its own mark on

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<sup>45</sup> Lerer contends that Chaucer, as aureate and laureate, was constructed by his fifteenth-century readers, the poets, scribes, and (later) printers who imitated, venerated, and reproduced him. That construction, though, was based on literary system that allowed Chaucer to draw up the terms of how he would be read. Lydgate and Chaucer, then, are caught in a ouroboros-like system of creation; Chaucer creates Lydgate, who in turn constructs Chaucer. Scanlon argues that Lydgate's treatment of his sources is deliberately constructed. Lydgate, he claims, he describes the method by which his literary forebears have gained power and authority, and then followed that method for himself, thereby granting himself a similar level of authority (334). Simpson presents a similar idea by saying that Lydgate, and other fifteenth-century authors, gain authority by impersonating the authority of their patrons and sources (65). Kuskin takes recursion as his model for describing the relationship between Lydgate and Chaucer (and, indeed, in literary history more broadly) and states that by embedding Chaucer as a poet within his (Lydgate's) own poetry, Lydgate is referring to his own ability to identify and reconstruct poetic authority. To do so is to herald his own authority. Lerer, Seth. *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England*. Princeton UP, 1993. Scanlon, Larry. *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and Chaucerian Tradition*. Cambridge UP, 1994. Simpson, James. *Reform and Cultural Revolution: 1350-1547*. Oxford UP, 2002. Kuskin, William. *Recursive Origins: Writing at the Transition to Modernity*. U of Notre Dame P, 2013.



the origin story. It examines the places where Lydgate reads Chaucer, providing an example for his own readers to follow, and finds Lydgate productively deploying his position as reader and as literary inheritor of Chaucer. The project, then, is interested in readerly authority in the fifteenth century, especially as described and modeled by Lydgate.

It is no accident that Lydgate's interest in readerly authority finds resonance today. We are now living in a moment that allows Lydgate and his fifteenth-century context to be comprehensible. Lydgate authorized his readers to become active participants in the creation of literature, to become owner/occupiers of it. Readers in the fifteenth century were writers. The same is true today. With the preponderance of new media, reading has become synonymous with writing. On any number of social media platforms, it is not simply possible, but often a preferred mode to take another's words (or images, or video) and publish them. Retweets, reposts, or shares all allow the reposter to include their own text alongside the material which they are reposting. The reposters take the material, and either use it to convey something about themselves, or adapt, edit, critique, or praise it to better fit their purposes. Though this happens over different media and in a greatly increased volume today, it bears a strong resemblance to what Lydgate instructs his readers to do, to take the material he provided into their own hands and change it to better suit the current environment. The similarities between today and Lydgate's time, between the ways we produce and reproduce texts in both periods, allows Lydgate to be comprehensible, understandable, even relatable to the current critical field. This idea of Lydgate's timeliness can be traced in the decades leading up to the present, and an increasing ease with Lydgate's works bears out this idea.

Media studies helps illuminate the question of why a study of fifteenth-century readership is relevant to the current climate and why scholarship is ready now to receive it. When thought of

in terms of “new media” as representative of the twenty-first century, Lydgate seems to fit comfortably. This could explain his apparent ability to alienate critics of other eras. In defining the term “New Media” Leah A. Lievrouw says that “they differ from other media forms and systems in four important ways: in terms of their design and use, they are continuously *recombinant* and complexly and dynamically *networked*; in terms of their social consequences, new media are widely perceived as being pervasively *ubiquitous* and *interactive*” (477).<sup>46</sup> Though referring to the likes of Twitter or Instagram, this description, when considered carefully, has the feel of the fifteenth century about it. When considered against the criteria of interactivity, networks, and ubiquitousness, Lydgate’s works fit easily into the category of new media. Lydgate’s model of readership, for example, demands interactivity. Readers do not simply consume a text, but must take it into themselves, judge it, and determine when and how to alter it. The “new” or resultant text continues to interact with its readers, but in a different way than it did in its previous state. In this way, the physical object, the book containing the work, provokes reactions from readers, records them, and then projects them forward to the next reader, creating a network of active readers across time. Beyond this, Lydgate creates his texts out of a network of sources, his translations becoming the site of interaction with them. He not only translates the works, but uses the translation as an opportunity to encounter and engage their creators, chiding them or celebrating them as he sees fit. This interaction between Lydgate and his sources becomes the model with which his readers can envision and enact their own encounters with the work. And though manuscript production could be argued to be anything but ubiquitous, the age of print must certainly have felt as though it made the book much more so.

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<sup>46</sup> Lievrouw, Leah A. “Alternative and Activist New Media.” *Media and Cultural Studies Keywords*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Thus we can see how Lydgate's works, especially those appearing in early print, meet three of the characteristics of "new media."

To address Lievrouw's first trait of "new media," that it be continuously *recombinant*, it is important to understand the meaning(s) of the word. She provides a synonym, "hybrid," to illuminate the point, and continues, "they resist stabilization...[and] are the product of people's ideas, decisions, and actions, as they merge old and new technologies, uses, and purposes" (474). This exemplifies Lydgate's ideas about readership. It builds upon the idea of interactivity in literature and makes it a pastiche, a collage of old and new that results from the reader. It heralds back to the idea of "rehearsal" that Lydgate uses. A recombinant literature is one that gets made "newe and newe" by the continuous interaction of the reader. To take the idea further, consider recombinant DNA, that which is manufactured via genetic recombination, a process that takes genetic material from various sources and combines it to create something that would otherwise not be possible. Glowing fish (fish who have had a gene for fluorescence introduced to their DNA) are an example. Lydgate's works emerge from just such a continuous recombination. Consider the ways he draws upon Chaucer, but utilizes an aureate style. The result is a hybrid literature that exists because it merges the old and new, drawing on various sources for both form and content, and pushing the work into new territory. Lydgate's engagement of his readers ensures that this recombination is continuous, with new elements being added to the mix with each new reading.

This recombination, of course, is one reason why critics objected to Lydgate. They witnessed his attempts to emulate Chaucer, but saw the non-Chaucerian genetic material, his amplifications, digressions, and moralizations, and could not reconcile the various parts into a harmonious whole. It was, in short, like looking at a glowing fish, one that you are sure should

not be glowing. It feels strange, unnatural, wrong. Where Lydgate's hybridity made little sense to critics of the past, it is the very thing that makes him so appealing today. We live in a world of hybrid media. Here, Lydgate's ability to commit continuous recombination, his glowing fishness, makes sense, a world of shares and retweets, of CGI and Photoshop, of real news and fake news. In 1969 Walter Benjamin said, "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (39).<sup>47</sup> In summing up the importance, the primacy of "the original" in this way, Benjamin articulates the reason why recombination can elicit adverse reactions. The result of recombination obscures any sense of the original within it. By mixing the original with some part or characteristic that is alien to it, or by mixing two (or more) originals that would never otherwise meet, the recombinant result (apparently) deteriorates the authority granted by the original. Lydgate's recombination could be seen to do this to any vestige of Chaucer present in his works. His insistence upon readerly involvement in the work ensures that the original will continue to be obscured by new additions. Lydgate, however, operates unapologetically out of hybridity and recombination, making him unintelligible (or, at the very least, undesirable) to the modern critic, but highly interesting to the post-modern one.

Lydgate's relationship to new media can also help illuminate or underscore his relationship to readers. In 1995, Mark Poster theorized that the upcoming media age would "very likely enable a system of multiple producers/distributors/consumers," and this system would see "the boundaries between those terms [of producer, distributor, and consumer] collapse" (1).<sup>48</sup> Poster's concern with the subject in a new (or, to use his term, second) media age reflects Lydgate's. In similar ways, terms that once seemed stable and indicative of an authoritative

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<sup>47</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Media and Cultural Studies Keywords*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Poster, Mark. *The Second Media Age*. Polity, 1995.

structure, elide and collapse in the face of a shift in media. Poster attributes this movement to “the mechanism of interactivity” (33). What could be more reminiscent of Lydgate’s call to readers than this? Lydgate imbeds a mechanism of interactivity within his works. In soliciting their involvement, their interaction with him and his works, and by modeling interactivity for them, he destabilizes the terms, and the accompanying relative authorities, that defined how literature was made. The opportunity for unmooring a subject from their identity concerns and intrigues those who make new media their object of study. In an early study of electronic bulletin board users, David Myers found that “by far the most important result of the study was the extent to which...users manipulated the communication context to create personally meaningful identities” (254).<sup>49</sup> He elaborates on this more clinical observation by saying that “they [the users] have the power to escape those names that the outside world has given them – names they believe weak and unfortunate, names that are not to their liking” (263). This, then, is the real power of new media on the subject. It allows for the mutability in names, in identities. It allows people to shed the labels that have been pressed on them, the ones connoting weakness and powerlessness, and convincingly adopt new roles. For electronic bulletin board users in Myers’ 1985 study, young users adopted personas of authority (one dubbed himself “The Professor,” for example); for Lydgate and his readers, the interactivity of their media provokes, encourages, and affirms an authority in the role of reader, one which allows them to no longer be simply readers, but become writers as well.

Manuscript studies, however, has continually found Lydgate intriguing. Perhaps because it is less engaged with the literary work and more focused on the physical book, manuscript studies has provided a less biased lens through which to approach Lydgate. In his essay in

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<sup>49</sup> Myers, David. “‘Anonymity is Part of the Magic’: Individual Manipulation of Computer-Mediated Communication Contexts.” *Qualitative Sociology*, vol.10, no. 3, 1987. 251-266.

*Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England* (1983), Edwards outlined the potential rewards for studying Lydgate manuscripts, including (but not limited to) identifying the demographics of the reading public, describing the poet's relationship to his publisher, and understanding medieval scribal culture. Edwards concludes his call to (manuscript studies) arms by saying, "Lydgate's manuscripts merit much more systematic study than they have received, not because he is a great poet, but because of his great popularity and influence. His manuscripts can provide a mass of information which can increase our understanding of literary activity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" (26). Edwards' statement about the potential in Lydgate manuscripts remains as true today as it was nearly thirty-five years ago; though much attention has been paid to Lydgate's books in the intervening decades, the sheer volume of extant manuscripts of his works lends itself to continued attention. Edwards' statement about Lydgate's poetic greatness (or lack thereof), asks us to consider Lydgate not based on our own perceptions of his literary skill, but because of how he was perceived in his own time. Edwards uses the present tense "is great" to describe Lydgate. Edwards, and manuscript studies, asks scholars to put away their modern tastes and prejudices and examine Lydgate, and his manuscripts, from a less disparaging view point. Manuscript studies allow the history of the work and the histories within the works to become present and meaningful without the long shadow of Lydgate's negative reputation casting the work into darkness.<sup>50</sup> This project engages Lydgate's manuscripts and early printed books because they are the medium through which his first readers interacted with him and his works. In examining them, I am able to excavate the layered interactions

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<sup>50</sup> An example of such an examination can be found in Martha W. Driver's study of a particular manuscript containing Lydgate's *Troy Book*; Driver draws out the significance of historicized representations and memorializations in both the text and its manuscript. In this manuscript and its depiction of Hector's death and tomb, she finds a piece of evidence pointing to how the fifteenth-century reader would have envisioned this particular event and history more broadly. This study allows the material, the manuscript, to speak to a more ephemeral condition of the past and enhance our understanding of the period. Driver, Martha W. "Medievalizing the Classical Past." *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Traditions*, edited by A. J. Minnis, Boydell and Brewer, 2001.

between Lydgate and generations of readers. When combined with analysis of the literary works, the evidence of active readership (both its excitation by Lydgate and the books and the resultant engagement of readers within the process of literary creation) grows.

Alexandra Gillespie's *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate and Their Books 1473-1557* demonstrates the potential of combining book history with literary analysis and provides the current study with a procedural lead.<sup>51</sup> Gillespie explores what happens to the idea of the vernacular author, and to authorship, with the advent of print in England. Gillespie builds on previous scholarship which finds that the construction of authorship, or a particular author, occurs in the decades and centuries after that author dies; she brings book history forcefully to bear on this notion, considering the conditions of production and the material context of the work.<sup>52</sup> In doing so, she identifies the importance of bookmakers, publishers, scribes, artists, etc., in participating in the creation and utilization of the medieval vernacular author. This project also counts various bookmakers as among those actively participating in literary creation. Where Gillespie sees these agents as constructing the author, I see them as also constructing and reconstructing the work, as readers.

The current project follows Gillespie's methodological lead. I examine Lydgate's literary work and its various contexts, both late medieval manuscripts and early printed books, asserting the significance of material conditions. Sir Walter Greg, in his presidential address to the Bibliographical Society in 1930, expressed a desire to see the interests and pursuits of the Society more clearly connect the studies of bibliography and literature, saying that while "the

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<sup>51</sup> Gillespie, Alexandra. *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books 1473-1557*. Oxford UP, 2006.

<sup>52</sup> By studying the texts and their changing contexts, Gillespie articulates a theory about the ways in which authorship impacts a literary work. She says, "the figure of the medieval writer organizes and markets textual material, assigns it value, licenses it, sanctions it, or marks it out as illicit" (5).

significance of bibliography for literature has gained in recognition outside [the Society]” he wished to see within it “an appreciation that the various lines of investigation [in bibliography and literature] are somehow related in a common end” (219).<sup>53</sup> It seems to me that Greg’s wishes for the direction of the Bibliographical Society have not been fully embraced in the critical field at large, even nearly ninety years later. While bibliography, book history, and the study of the book as an object are fruitful fields of study, they do not often overlap with literary criticism. There is little appreciation of combining the two areas to get to Greg’s “common end.” This study endeavors to remedy that, to a degree. I examine manuscripts and early printed books as a way to recapture the experience early readers would have had with these works. In a project concerned with early readers, it was important to attend to the works as those readers would have encountered them, and to glean from them the details that would have stimulated them.

Greg describes bibliography as “the study of the material transmission of literary and other documents,” and further explains its aim is to “solve the problems of origin, history, and text, in so far as this can be achieved through the minute investigation of the material means of transmission” (215). Philip Gaskell explains Greg’s meaning of “transmission” as “not only the genealogy and relationship of variant texts, but also the evolution of particular texts in the processes of their production and reproduction” (1).<sup>54</sup> In this definition, though with a slightly different scope, my concern in the present study is bibliographical. I am not as concerned with textual evolution as that of the work. By this I mean that my purpose here is not to trace a scribal deviant through manuscripts and establish a chronology and line of descent. Instead I hope to use this bibliographical idea, of studying evolution, production, and reproduction, as it applies to the

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<sup>53</sup> Greg, W. W. *Collected Papers*. Edited by J. C. Maxwell, Oxford UP, 1966.

<sup>54</sup> Gaskell, Philip. *A New Introduction to Bibliography*. Oxford UP, 1972.



work. To this end, this study examines the physical qualities and elements of the books containing the works, analyzing those places where there is evidence of transmission, in Gaskell's definition. Evidence of transmission indicates a communication between those engaged in making or reading the book about the work's evolution, production, or reproduction.

I combine this with attention to questions of origins and authority brought up by recent scholarship. To answer these questions, I turn to readers. Readers drive literary creation. I assert that readers, for Lydgate, are not the silent consumers of literature, but the means by which it survives and thrives. And readerly participation in literary creation forces us to reconsider how literary authority works. Lydgate acknowledges and draws upon this authority. Throughout his works, he addresses the reader directly, asking not just for the reader's forbearance with his poetic ineptitude, but for the reader's active intervention and correction. In doing so, Lydgate tacitly admits that literary authority does not begin and end with himself; he sees it as passing through his authorial position and moving forward into the hands of his readers. He prepares them, with his poems and through the books which contain them, to take his work and alter it, create and recreate it, so that it can survive beyond his reach. Lydgate engages his readers in the process of literary creation so that they might make his works "newe and newe."

This project examines each of Lydgate's three major works, *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes*, and *Siege of Thebes*, to trace his relationship to his readers and to readership more generally. These works seem to have a natural allegiance, one that is worthy of exploration and explanation. *Fall of Princes* and *Troy Book* are the two longest of Lydgate's poems, and, together with *Siege of Thebes*, share similar subjects (broadly speaking, classical subjects). They also have the distinction of being works by a monk that are not religious or devotional in nature. These works, however, are bonded by something deeper and more complex than subject:

purpose. Each poem endeavors to move beyond itself, beyond the bounds of its lines or pages, to create an influence in the life of its readers. In looking at the moralizations found in each poem, a clear message to rulers or princes becomes clearly apparent. The reader of *Troy Book* is given a model of prudent governance (and its fatal lapse) in Hector, while *Fall of Princes* provides its audience with story after story warning against tempting Fortune; *Siege of Thebes* offers readers an anti-model in Ethiocles (and his brother Polymyte) in restraint, cooperation, and diplomacy. While often Lydgate instructs readers through negative examples and remonstrations thereof, he still clearly provides practical answers and advice for rulers. This purpose, in providing a mirror (or anti-mirror) for princes, binds *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes*, and *Siege of Thebes* and this purpose means these works are finely attuned to their readership.

The mirror, however, does not only reflect its messages for princely readers. Lydgate extends this purpose to include all prudent readers of these works, and the message reflected is one wherein usual pathways for authority can be circumvented. Lydgate begins this circumvention himself merely by authoring these works. In this act, a monk provides (sometimes unsolicited) advice to a prince and in doing so assumes a position of authority over someone whose authority he would never normally be able to surpass. Richard Firth Green asserts that Lydgate and similarly employed poets of the later middle ages “came to see themselves as mentors of royalty” (135).<sup>55</sup> In doing so, they managed to invert the normal political hierarchy. Lydgate accomplishes this through the act of reading. By reading his own sources, learning the lessons contained therein, and developing prudent translation practices, Lydgate gains authority in the matters of leadership contained in his sources and can then pass that knowledge on to his princely readers, who in turn will carefully read and enact this knowledge. Green affirms the

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<sup>55</sup> Green, Richard Firth. *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages*. U of Toronto P, 1980.

belief in literary exempla saying, “the belief that men might in practice modify their actions in accordance with the lessons to be learnt from the successes and failures of their predecessors...was widely held in the later middle ages” (137). While Green’s discussion considers the aristocracy in particular, here he uses the more general term “men.” I believe this is more encompassing term certainly applies. The lessons to be gleaned are often geared towards the upper classes, but have more widely applicable themes, such as pride, envy, and obedience to God’s laws. In addition, the form conveys a lesson about prudent reading and authority. These works are a lesson, then, not simply in leadership, but in the power of readership. Reading grants Lydgate knowledge and authority, and he models this reading for his own readers in the hopes that they too will read as a means of gaining authority. *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes*, and *Siege of Thebes*, with their carefully crafted purposes as mirrors for princes, share a common goal in mirroring reading practices for Lydgate’s readers. This dissertation explores these works through the lens of this shared goal. It seeks to discover the ways in which Lydgate’s works and the books containing them provide lessons in reading, and it asks how readers responded to those lessons.

It should be noted that the shape of this project does not follow the works’ chronology or thematic connections, and neither does it move in each case from the earliest manuscript witnesses through the history of book production towards print. Instead it examines the works and their books by virtue of their contribution to Lydgate’s concept of active reading and the authority it creates. As such, I start with *Troy Book*, a work that possesses characteristics of the first step in inciting active reading, invitation; I then move to examples of readers accepting that invitation in *Fall of Princes*, while asking how the process of readerly intervention works. Then I examine *Siege of Thebes*, which, through the example Lydgate himself sets, provides insight as

to how reading actively can be an authoritative act. I then move beyond Lydgate to consider his notions of authority and legitimacy in Shakespeare, developing an idea of how Lydgate's literary economy works outside of the immediate context of the fifteenth century. Finally, the project turns to *Mirror for Magistrates*, a work that demonstrates the great generative capacity of reading. In each case I examine the evidence in manuscript and print that most speaks to the argument at hand, which means that at times I move ahistorically from print to manuscript. The trajectory of this project, however, is not dictated by a linear history, but determined by following Lydgate's ideas about authority from poet to reader and back again. And each work, though representative of the step in Lydgate's process I am exploring within in, contains elements of the whole process.

In Chapter One, I look at *Troy Book* and some of its notable manuscript and early print editions; in both the work and the book Lydgate opens up the sacrosanct arena of literary production so that his readers might more easily enter and alter the works. I begin my examination with a heavily illustrated medieval manuscript of *Troy Book*, looking at the first image of the book closely. In it, author and patron are visually represented. These two figures are arguably the most important in the creation of the current work, which makes this illustration ripe for close scrutiny. The ways in which both poet and patron are figured on the page indicate an intricate balancing act of power between the two; the dynamics of literary power comes to a head in the book that both figures hold. Though the poet is prostrate before his kingly patron, he maintains possession of the book while simultaneously relinquishing it. The artist has managed to capture the very instant in which both figures own and control the book. This visual cue indicates that power over a literary object, or the literary work itself, is not straightforward or completely vested in a single individual. The opening illustration, when read in concert with a

rubric that appears just below the image, makes room within the sphere of literary creation for many agents; Lydgate's words make it clear that readers are supposed to witness and then occupy these spaces. Chapter one examines the text of *Troy Book* and follows Lydgate's invitation to readers throughout the text and books of *Troy Book*, locating a pattern of continued insistence upon active, generative readership.

Chapter Two examines Lydgate's massive *Fall of Princes* and locates the manner in which readers are able to enact their own literary creations and recreations. As a work that details the failures and tragedies of famous men and women, *Fall of Princes* provides readers with a template for avoiding the destructive power of Fortune. The goal of this poem, to use cautionary tales in order to influence the actions of its readers, relies heavily upon both an engaged readership and the power of destruction. The destruction at work in *Fall*, is not merely destructive. Its purpose is to preserve. Lydgate begins *Fall* with a metaphor linking poets to potters, saying that the potter will "Breke and renew ther vesselis to a-mende" (1.14).<sup>56</sup> Similarly the poet must read his sources critically, breaking the whole apart in order to access the pieces that will be most useful to him, most beneficial to the overall form of his poem. This metaphor describes artistic endeavors as the product of destructive preservation, or even generation. It stands as the guiding principal behind the creation and reading of *Fall*. This process begins with the stories of destruction of Fortune, meant to prevent readers from falling victim to similar fates, and extends outward to the books that contain the work. In this chapter I examine several stories in *Fall* and their accompanying illustrations, both in manuscript and print, and find the process of destructive preservation at work. The idea extends, as intended, beyond the work itself and its initial creation, to include readerly interventions into the space of

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<sup>56</sup> Lydgate, John. *Fall of Princes*. Edited by Henry Bergen, vol. 1, Oxford UP, 1924. 4 vols.

literary creation. Several books which contain *Fall* bear the evidence of an engaged, active readership, one which has taken up Lydgate's call to enter a literary work and alter, or even destroy it, in order to ensure its continued survival.

Lydgate's relationship Chaucer comprises Chapter Three. In *Siege of Thebes* Lydgate attempts to write himself into Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; because of this, Lydgate plays the part of a reader here, more than an author. As such, he models for his readers the active, generative mode of reading in which he believes they should be engaged. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Lydgate deliberately loops himself and his story into and through that of Chaucer's, providing his readers with continual routes to power through his (and their) readings. I then turn to sixteenth-century editions of *Chaucer's Works* to explore the ways in which publishers and printers in the hundred years after Lydgate deployed him as a medium of authority. What I find is that Lydgate's authority comes to reflect back on Chaucer and upsets the implied hierarchy of author and reader.

Chapter Four asks the question of whether Lydgate's model of readerly participation is viable beyond his own works and the fifteenth century. I begin with a discussion of Lydgate with relation to Chaucer and find that a productive way to describe the relationship is that of a bastard son to his father. I examine this model in *Siege of Thebes*, contrasting the opening prologue to Chaucer's *General Prologue*, and find there an adherence to and deviation from the genealogical predecessor that mimics bastardy. I then consider whether Lydgate's literary successors gained from his model; to address this, I turn to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. Though it may seem a long leap from Lydgate to Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida* has strong roots in the vernacular stories of Troy from the later middle ages. Lydgate, Chaucer, and Caxton all serve as source material for Shakespeare's version of this Trojan War romance. The elements of

illegitimacy that occur within the play and its print history form a strong tie to Lydgate's ideas about the places and agents from whence literary authority can derive. The bastard characters within this play provide examples of the paradox of bastardy and the ability to generate power from an unauthoritative state. Thersites and Margarelon, the two bastards in *Troilus and Cressida*, embrace their bastardy in different ways, and yet to the same effect of self-empowerment, demonstrating that illegitimacy is somehow, inherently, legitimate. The print history of *Troilus and Cressida* brings up similar questions of legitimacy. Two separate versions of the earliest edition of *Troilus and Cressida* exist; they offer competing accounts of the play's history, one claiming it was performed by Shakespeare's company, and the other asserting it had never been performed. Though literally and historically speaking, a play cannot have been both performed and not performed, these editions represent the problems of textually recording a performance. The textual version both is and is not the performance, making both (and neither) editions correct. In that inexactitude of representation lays the potential for the reader to interpret, creating meaning and assigning authority where he sees fit. The illegitimacy within and without the play prove Lydgate's point that power and authority can and do grow up from positions that would seem to deny it.

The conclusion examines *Mirror for Magistrates*, a work that developed out of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, the result of many different hands adding to and emending the original over time. *Mirror* completely embodies Lydgate's potter's metaphor: old vessels get broken and the pieces are reconstructed, held together in new ways and with new material, creating a work that both is the original and is not. The first print edition of *Mirror for Magistrates* includes an opening epistle in which the author directly addresses the reader, drawing the reader into the influential sphere of the work. The results of this direct address are played out over the next 150

years, as *Mirror* gets printed and reprinted, each time with new stories included to better suit its audience. Readers of the work, editors, publishers, or simply the reading public, would see how a particular tale, a shard of pottery from a different vessel, might fit into this particular pot, making it better, stronger, more useful and resilient. Thus Lydgate's invitation to readers, his assertion that they might occupy positions of power and use that power to change or even generate literary works, comes to fruition. The authority of the readership has turned readers into legitimate participants in the creation of literature.

This project aims to demonstrate not just that Lydgate is relevant. Scholars have been attempting to show that for decades. Lydgate studies, like Lydgate himself, has been caught in a seemingly unavoidable narrative that cannot escape the shadow of a looming past. For Lydgate, it is Chaucer casting that shadow; for Lydgate studies, it is Ritson and his ilk. But the time has certainly come for both Lydgate and his scholarship to emerge from that shadow. This study attempts to do that. I wish to prove that Lydgate's position of near irrelevance can be seen as running parallel to his notion of readers' significance. Lydgate the driveling monk is certainly unauthoritative, worth little more than a cursory glance. The same can be said of the reader in any configuration of literary production. But both positions hold the potential for great power. Consider the huge number of scholarly works Lydgate has garnered since the mid-twentieth century whose aim is specifically to rehabilitate him; had his reputation not been so smeared, would he have received so much attention? Readers are similarly sleeping giants, waiting for someone, perhaps someone who himself feels overshadowed, to awaken them. In this way, Lydgate's passages asking for correction read more like a call to arms, and readerly participation and intervention, like that found in Arundel 99, becomes an active, authorized response to



Lydgate's call. Literary production depends upon their involvement. Lydgate recognizes this and creates pathways to power for them, changing the dynamics of literary production.

## CHAPTER ONE – Lydgate’s *Troy Book*: An Invitation to the Reader

Readerly participation in literary creation does not occur in a vacuum, nor without provocation. Especially where Lydgate is concerned, the involvement of the reader stems from an invitation or incitement by the author. This crucial first step, this hand reaching out across a presumed literary divide between authors and readers, forms the subject of this chapter. In it, I examine both the text of one of Lydgate’s most famous works, *Troy Book*, and the manuscripts and printed editions, laying out Lydgate’s model of readership. In both word and image, in text and on the page, Lydgate’s invitation to readers calls out across the centuries, inciting active, readerly participation in the work.

I look first to presentation images, illustrations of the poet presenting his work to his patron, in manuscript and later in print, to illuminate the concept of shifts in literary authority between authors and readers. The presentation image is often the first illustration in the book (or, in the case of books containing multiple works, the image signals the beginning of a new work), and as such, it provides readers with an initial impression of the work as just that: a literary endeavor that requires the efforts of more than one person. As the first visual cue in many books, and one that represents the relationship of poet and patron (or reader), presentation images seem ripe for further investigation, especially with regards to Lydgate’s notions of readerly participation in literary creation. What I find is that these images, in concert with Lydgate’s textual inducements, present readers with an open door to the realm of literary production, and a promise of gaining authority if they walk through it.

After examining how presentation images act to invite readers into an authorial space, I then turn to a manuscript containing *Troy Book*, Morgan MS M 876, that records several instances of readers accepting that invitation and entering the physical spaces of the book and

altering it; though these readerly incursions into the manuscript appear small and insignificant, they mark an acceptance of Lydgate's request, and one that is facilitated by the material conditions of this specific book. This manuscript is particularly poised for readerly alterations and emendations because of the confluence of invitation and the book's physical state, which is one marked by incompletions and imperfections. I argue that the missing and deficient elements in Morgan MS M 876, including everything from blank spaces in the text to literal holes in the leaves, provide readers with a sense of ease regarding their own entry into its authoritative spaces.

The chapter ends by looking to a 1555 edition of *Troy Book* and its prefatory epistle, written by the edition's editor. As editor, this person occupies the roles of both reader and author, someone who has fully engaged Lydgate's call to active readership. The epistle provides evidence that the editor has internalized Lydgate's model of literary production and enacted it more than a century after *Troy Book* was completed. This chapter, then, examines Lydgate's invitation to readers as it manifests in the details of his work and its books. I explore the various aspects of the invitation and the places and ways I see readers accepting it, from hesitant or low-stakes engagement with the work all the way to complete immersion in the active reader role. The books of *Troy Book* record Lydgate's fruitful engagement with and of his readers.

As this chapter explores, this provocation of readers is not meant to be a one-way street. J. Allan Mitchell states that Lydgate's "rhetorical art [is] a means of communication," and that "rhetoric is an activity that seeks to engage audiences as potential respondents rather than...voyeurs upon whom no clear responsibility is placed" (570).<sup>57</sup> Mitchell pairs Lydgate with his near-contemporary John Gower in this approach to rhetoric, joining the two in a shared belief

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<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, J. Allan. "John Gower and John Lydgate: Forms and Norms of Rhetorical Culture." *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture: c. 1350-1500*, Edited by Peter Brown, Blackwell, 2007.

in the power of their poetry to be “improving, humanizing, civilizing,” while fostering a dialogue with readers (569). Lydgate is clearly not unique in his construction of such a communicative rhetoric; more, he is a product of his fifteenth-century context. In her monograph on poetry of the period, Lois Ebin begins by citing this century’s importance for “the profound changes in the literary process that occurred” (ix).<sup>58</sup> She elaborates on this by saying “relations among author, text, and audience changed radically” (ix). This change can be witnessed in Lydgate’s (and Gower’s) treatment of their poetry as channels of communication with their readers, turning them from receivers of literature into (to use Mitchell’s word) “respondents.” These poets not only looked forward to their readers as dynamic inheritors of the influence of literature, but also back, to their predecessors as “*auctors* and models for their own eventual assumption of that role” (Ebin xii). Thus, poets of the fifteenth century maintained, through their works, a dialogue with the past *and* the future about the nature and purpose of literature. The creation of literary works was also the creation, the definition and construction, of literature itself and the roles within it. When this continual negotiation between past, present, and future is understood, Lydgate’s focus on readers becomes clear. They are his future selves, and he, once a reader, now a poet, can become, through his readers, a source, a model, possibly an *auctor*.

For Lydgate, literature is created through the dynamic relationship between author and reader. He identifies a model of literary production in which the relationship between author, source, and reader is flexible and dynamic, continually rolling back upon itself to rearrange and destabilize the assumed roles of literary creation. When Lydgate engages a source, actively reading not only the source material, but also its author, he creates a model for his own readers to follow, inviting them to engage himself and his work. This model opens up the privileged space

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<sup>58</sup> Ebin, Lois. *Illuminator, Makar, Vatar: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century*. U of Nebraska P, 1988.

of literary production to the participation of the reader. In treating literature and authoritative literary agents as unfixed, malleable, and a source of dynamic participation, the author encourages his future readers to treat his own work in much the same way. Lydgate's *Troy Book*, along with its manuscripts and print editions, gives readers ample instruction for and invitation into its literary creation.

Lydgate demonstrates this model of literary production throughout his works, but *Troy Book* is a venue that particularly resonated with the reading English public. *Troy Book* is composed of just over 30,000 lines of rhymed couplets divided into five books, a prologue, and an epilogue.<sup>59</sup> In this vast expanse of words Lydgate covers not only the major events of the Trojan War in detail, but also those actions and sequences that lead up to and result from the war. He counts among his sources (primarily) Guido delle Colonne's 1287 *Historia destructionis Troiae*, but he also frequently references Ovid, Dares and Dictys (both of whom Lydgate records as contemporaries of the Trojan War), while also noting Homer as a disreputable source.<sup>60</sup> Guido's account is based on Benoit de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, an Old French version from c. 1160, though Lydgate does not mention Benoit's position in the literary genealogy of this work. Lydgate does admit that he is undertaking a translation of Guido, saying in the Prologue that Henry V "comaunded the dreary pitus fate | Of hem of Troye in Englysche to translate, | The sege also, and the destruccioun, | Lyche as the Latyn maketh mencion, | For to compile and after Guydo make" (Prologue, ll. 105-110). Begun in 1412 and completed in 1420, this is his second

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<sup>59</sup> The epilogue is the only section not arranged into rhymed couplets. It has fifteen stanzas of seven lines each with a rhyme scheme of A, B, A, B, B, C, C.

<sup>60</sup> Lydgate often invokes Guido with phrases such as, "As in his Latyn Guydo doth expresse" (1.1925) or "as Guydo listeth to endite" (3.4905). For references to Dares and Dictys, see the Prologue, where Lydgate says, "tofor alle Dares Frigius / Wrot moste trewly after that he fonde, / And Dytes eke of the Grekys lond. / They were present and seyden everydel" (310-313). Lydgate accuses Homer of shrouding malice with his flowery language (Prologue, ll. 259-298). These and all future quotations from *Troy Book* are from the TEAMS edition, unless otherwise noted. Lydgate, John. *Troy Book*. Edited by Robert R. Edwards. Medieval Institute Publications, 1998.

longest work.<sup>61</sup> It exists in twenty-three manuscripts and fragments and was printed in 1513 by Richard Pynson and again in 1555 by Thomas Marshe.<sup>62</sup> Many of the manuscripts include illustrations of some sort, while several contain elaborate or large images. The books containing this work reflect the prestige and popularity inherent in *Troy Book*.

This makes sense when one considers Lydgate's approach to the poem. He does not restrict himself in terms of content or style in *Troy Book*. He begins his account of the Trojan War in Thessaly with King Peleus sending Jason to retrieve the Golden Fleece in the hopes that Jason, whom Peleus worries might steal his throne, will die. Jason does not die, but accomplishes the feat with the help of Medea. The beginning of the hostilities between the Greeks and the Trojans begins almost as a side note during Jason's journey to Colchos in search of the Golden Fleece. During that outbound journey, Jason's crew lands at Troy and is treated with hostility by King Lamedon. Jason and his men leave Troy, but vow to return and seek retribution for their ill treatment. After the episode of the Golden Fleece concludes, Jason builds an army and returns to Troy; the resulting battle ends disastrously for the Trojans, who are annihilated by the Greeks. This action makes up the first of five books in Lydgate's *Troy Book*. None of it deals directly with what is generally considered the primary action of the Trojan War. It's prefatory at best, yet Lydgate devotes an entire book, over 4400 lines, just to this preliminary episode. The remaining books relate, in similar length and detail, how the first encounter between the Trojans and Greeks leads to the next and how the war progressed, including particulars of battles, speeches made by various warriors and leaders, and deaths of key figures such as Patroclus, Hector, Troilus, and Achilles. Lydgate describes the betrayal and destruction of Troy and finally concludes his work

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<sup>61</sup> The longest, at over 36,000 lines, is *Fall of Princes*.

<sup>62</sup> Pynson's edition is listed in the Short Title Catalogue (STC) as number 5579. Marshe's is STC 5580.

well after the war ends, with the death of Ulysses at the hands of his unwitting son Telegonus. *Troy Book* begins well before the action of the Trojan War, covers as much of it as possible in detail, and extends beyond its conclusion, following the last main player home again and shadowing him until his death.

This approach is typical for Lydgate, and often cause for disparagement among literary critics. In an effort to leave nothing out, he covers more than what might be considered relevant. Lydgate's style in *Troy Book* caused Derek Pearsall in 1970 to famously describe the work as, "a homily first, an encyclopedia second, and an epic nowhere" (129).<sup>63</sup> A decade on from Pearsall, C. David Benson reads criticism of *Troy Book* as unfairly prejudicial and a product of changing tastes: "Today the *Troy Book* is scorned for the same reason it was once honored: its uncompromising desire to preserve the entire factual truth of ancient history" (99).<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Lydgate was often derided for sacrificing poetics for history, with a resulting "fatal garrulity" that caused his works to grow beyond the point of sustainability (or, to some, readability).<sup>65</sup> Lydgate's insistence upon providing an excess of context and explanation indicates a dedication to his role as a historian, but this enthusiasm was rarely viewed or appreciated as such by his more recent critics. This devotion, in fact, became Lydgate's "fatal" flaw, causing critics to denounce his lack of poetic ability, believing he overcompensated for lack of quality with excess quantity.

More recently, however, scholars have viewed Lydgate's "fatal garrulity" more favorably and attempted to make sense of his early popularity by explaining those aspects of his writing

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<sup>63</sup> Pearsall, Derek. *John Lydgate*. Routledge, 1970.

<sup>64</sup> Benson, C. David. *The History of Troy in Middle English*. D. S. Brewer, 1980.

<sup>65</sup> Lewis, C. S. *The Allegory of Love*. Oxford UP, 1936. 240.

usually seen by later readers as “obstacles to pleasure” (343).<sup>66</sup> Among the ranks of Lydgate apologists are Phillipa Hardman, whose chapter on Lydgate’s syntax finds that a larger view (of the work rather than the line or sentence) allows for greater understanding of both his syntax and his goals.<sup>67</sup> In an article about the prologue to *Troy Book*, Alan S. Ambrisco and Paul Strohm find that the interruptions and breaks that abound there “resembl[e] the interrupted and resumed line of political and royal succession culminating in Henry V” (40).<sup>68</sup> Maura Nolan’s monograph similarly contends that the climate of political crisis in which Lydgate wrote caused him to seek out new and different literary forms to address and represent the reading public.<sup>69</sup> The connection between *Troy Book* and the Lancastrian throne has been a tempting line of scholarly investigation, finding ever greater levels of nuance in Lydgate’s more political and propagandistic passages and in doing so, rendering his more tedious moralizations pertinent.<sup>70</sup> Though Hardman is concerned with syntax and Ambrisco and Strohm and Nolan are engaging in historicist readings, each of these various arguments contain a common core element: they examine a previously disdained aspect of Lydgate’s poetry, attempting greater understanding, and therefore, greater acceptance, of it.

These studies are indicative of the 21<sup>st</sup> century attitude towards Lydgate; they add to our grasp of Lydgate’s poetry and attempt to rectify the poet’s maligned reputation. Each of these

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<sup>66</sup> Pearsall (1970). Pearsall here is talking about Lydgate’s “verbosity, the inflation of his diction, the uneasiness of his syntax, and the unevenness of his metre.”

<sup>67</sup> Hardman, Phillipa. “Lydgate’s Uneasy Syntax.” *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, Edited by Larry Scanlon and James Simpson, U of Notre Dame P, 2006. 12-35.

<sup>68</sup> Ambrisco, Alan S. and Paul Strohm. “Succession and Sovereignty in Lydgate’s Prologue to *The Troy Book*.” *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1995, pp. 40-57.

<sup>69</sup> Nolan, Maura. *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture*. Cambridge UP, 2005.

<sup>70</sup> See for example: Scott-Morgan Straker. “Propaganda, Intentionality and the Lancastrian Lydgate” in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*. Edited by Larry Scanlon and James Simpson. U of Notre Dame P, 2006. 98-128.



scholars participates in the recreation of Lydgate's authorial persona. In this they do as Lydgate incites his readers to do in *Troy Book*: "to correcte rather than disdeyne" (5.3482) and "[to] requ[ire] hem al that is mys to amende" (*Envoy*, l. 107). These critics, Hardmann, Ambrisco and Strohm, and Nolan, have determined that there is something amiss, or possibly missing, in assessments of Lydgate and have endeavored to correct or amend those wrongs.<sup>71</sup> Though these scholars do not change his literary works, they alter his authorial status, enacting Lydgate's model of literary reproduction with each rehabilitating article and book.

If recent critics engage in Lydgate's literary model when considering *Troy Book*, then it makes sense to look towards this poem and its books for clues to why this might be so, and whether other, perhaps earlier, readers also actively engaged with it. In an emerging English canon, Troy possessed a strong pull on the imagination; it contained the foundation story of England in the tale of Brutus' ancestor Aeneas and boasts a sustained presence in literary history. As such, it is the perfect medium for Lydgate's deployment of his model of literary creation. Readers would be familiar enough with the basics of the story that they could focus more on the details of Lydgate's account. Familiarity with different versions would also allow for readers to come to the work with opinions about which details, which versions, worked best. This sets Lydgate up with a readership that is primed to enter his work as an active, collaborative force. Such a readership would certainly meet his model of literary production, one which relies upon readerly intervention, with enthusiasm and readiness to contribute. Lydgate set *Troy Book* up as a place for the reader to enter into the privileged space of literary production.

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<sup>71</sup> These critics are part of a larger cohort who reexamine Lydgate, casting him in a new critical light. See, for example, previously mentioned works by James Simpson, Larry Scanlon, Lois Ebin, William Kuskin, and Alexandra Gillespie.

This becomes quite evident when the manuscript page is read in concert with the text of the work. Both Lesley Lawton and Kathleen L. Scott note that the manuscripts of *Troy Book* physically mimic the work's high status.<sup>72</sup> The books are large, fine, and often illustrated or illuminated. Lawton's study of the illuminated manuscripts of *Troy Book* reveals a pattern of organized illustration that indicates the popularity and prestige of this work. She finds that the eight extant manuscripts containing illustrations have enough elements in common that they point towards an illustrative scheme at work; four of these eight manuscripts have the same series of six illustrations, occurring at the beginning of each book in *Troy Book*.<sup>73</sup> Of the four remaining manuscripts, one has been mutilated for its miniatures, one was never completed, and two have the sequence of six in addition to other miniatures. When taking the state of these four into account, one could arguably presume that all eight extant *Troy Book* manuscripts were planned and designed using the same illustrative scheme. This regimen of illustration in *Troy Book* manuscripts points to both the popularity and prestige of the work and its books. It indicates that there was high enough demand for illustrated manuscripts of this work to warrant an investment of time and effort into developing and deploying such a plan. This can be seen through the lens of active readership. Those familiar with the poem's tone and content, its readers, judged certain physical characteristics more appropriate for the books containing this poem. The poem and its readers seem to require a particular material condition of the medium.

The books of *Troy Book* reflect the prestige and weightiness of the poem. One such book, a quite elaborate, highly decorated, mid-fifteenth-century manuscript of *Troy Book* held by the

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<sup>72</sup> Lawton, Lesley. "The Illustrations of Late Medieval Secular Texts." *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth Century England*, edited by Derek Pearsall. D. S. Brewer, 1983, pp. 41-69; Scott, Kathleen. *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1340-1490*. H. Miller Publishers, 1996.

<sup>73</sup> Lawton, Lesley (1983), pp. 54-55 and table, pp. 56-58.

John Rylands Library (shelfmark Rylands English MS 1), provides abundant opportunities to examine the visual impact of the book. Rylands MS 1 contains more miniatures by far than any surviving manuscript of *Troy Book*, other books having no more than a handful (usually the series of six) while Rylands English MS 1 has four half-page miniatures, one column miniature, and sixty-four miniatures in the margins.<sup>74</sup> The amount and quality of decoration in this manuscript, along with the inclusion of the coat of arms of the Carent (or Caraunt) family, indicates the prestige and luxury this book was intended to convey. While Rylands MS 1 is part of the “edition” of *Troy Book*, it contains both more illustrations and more involved illustrations, taking the idea of an illustrious container for an illustrious poem even further. This makes Rylands MS both representative of *Troy Book* manuscripts in general, and an exceptional example. For this reason, it is a good place to examine the impact of the physical book on Lydgate’s model of engaged readership.

From the planning stage, Rylands English MS 1 exhibited a high level of collaboration between various bookmakers. The inclusion of five miniatures within the space on the page normally reserved for text shows that this manuscript required a higher level of planning between the scribe and illuminator than if all the images were marginal; the scribe would have had to be aware of the intended placement of the non-marginal images and leave spaces for them. No one person would be able to just do his own part without considering the work still to be done. Though these bookmakers may not seem like usual readers, they act in a similar way to those readers Lydgate imagines. They see their own participation in the creation of this book as just a single strand that relies upon other strands to complete the weaving. Lydgate’s model of active readership similarly requires a multiplicity of makers to create the work. This collaborative

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<sup>74</sup> For a full description of the manuscript, see Scott (1996), vol. 2, pp 259-263. This manuscript is entry no. 93 in her catalogue.

process of creation, whether of the book or the work, denies a single point of origin and offers an authoritative place to those who would otherwise not have access to it.

Where Rylands English MS 1 is concerned, this level of collaboration, while requiring greater communication between all involved, and thus more time and effort and money expended, would result in a more seamless appearance.<sup>75</sup> For a manuscript, this is the desired effect. The bookmakers strive for uniformity throughout the manuscript, with, for example, the same number of lines in each column on every page, to make the visual experience smooth and uninterrupted by alterations. The result is a book that looks effortless, as though all the visual elements combined with ease, rather than competing with each other; there's very few instances, for example, of words or letters needing to be crammed onto a shortened line or illustrations that are jammed up against the text. This both conceals and reveals the dedication of each bookmaker to their collaborative effort. The result of great effort is a paradoxically effortless looking work. This same idea can be seen in Lydgate's model of active readership; the more readers who correct the work, the better, more perfect and (hopefully) effortless-seeming the work will become. Any imperfections get erased by each new collaborator. In the case of Rylands English MS 1, the bookmakers (scribes, illuminators, rubricators, etc.) have also all worked in collaboration with Lydgate's text to highlight aspects of his work that point to a flexible, reader-engaged notion of literary production.

Folio 1r, the opening page of the manuscript, provides a visual and textual touchstone for Lydgate's theory of active readership; it provides the reader entrance into the privileged space of

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<sup>75</sup> In addition, the illustrations were completed by the same master illustrator throughout. See Scott (1996) pp. 261. The cost and time associated with executing miniatures within the body of the text is alluded to by Scott when discussing another highly illustrated Lydgate manuscript, British Library Harley MS 1766. Scott says that the bookmakers responsible for Harley 1766 avoided great cost by making their miniatures marginal, thereby eliminating "the cost of painting decorative backgrounds and frames, the cost of a border, and the laborious task of planning and ruling for the insertion of miniatures within the body of the text" (303). Thus it can be assumed that to complete non-marginal miniatures would incur extra expense.

literary production (see Figure 1). In it, we are treated to a lavish but familiar scene: the author presenting his book to his patron. An elaborately detailed castle provides the setting for this transaction, and, as we will see, it invites the reader to participate in this exclusive and seemingly private exchange. Nearly the entirety of the miniature falls within the castle walls; only a small section of sky and a few tree tops in the upper left corner are not firmly inside its boundaries. The castle's size and scope assert its importance, indeed, its dominance, in this image. Furthering this notion are the fortress-like elements of this particular castle: on the left side, it's surrounded by a wall and gate and the towers appear to have crenellations designed to provide places where archers could hide and mount a defense. The castle, by its definition as such, should exclude those attempting to enter it. Indeed, even as simply a building, this structure provides definition to the concepts of inside and outside, and makes it possible for people to be either one or the other. In this image, the author and patron are inside, surrounded by castle walls that appear to separate them, and the literary authority they represent, from any unauthorized persons.

Yet the miniature's exclusions are unsuccessful. The walls and gate fail to enclose the whole image, the unenclosed area drawing attention to the inadequacies of the castle's borders. Additionally, walls cannot keep people out if gates are left open, and in this image, we see that this is the case. Two interlopers have gained admittance to the castle grounds. Scott says in her description of this image that this is a man and child who are leaving the castle and the relative sizes of the figures could support this interpretation; regardless of ages, relationship, and direction of the pair, their presence proclaims that this seemingly enclosed area is breachable. But most tellingly, an entire wall has been removed so that the reader can gain access to the interior, shattering the privacy of this privileged space. Like the open gate door through which the interlopers entered, the removed wall allows the viewer into this once-closed space. The

reader becomes privy to the important act of literary production taking place between two authoritative and powerful individuals, Lydgate and his patron, presumably Henry V.<sup>76</sup> As if paralleling the reader's presence, a third figure stands behind the poet and patron, his only purpose to witness the transaction. The privacy and privilege that appeared inherent in this scene is nothing more than a gesture, pushed firmly aside by the admittance of readers and others. The openness of this supposedly closed scene demonstrates Lydgate's model literary production in which the accessibility of literature is revealed by showing the reader that the walls closing them out, like the missing walls of the castle, were never really there.

This extra-narrative illustration fore-grounds the entire work with a sense of the fluctuations in literary authority. Those fluctuations, like the missing castle wall, are meant to provide the reader with an egress into literary production. In this image Lydgate, the creator of the work kneels before his patron and his prince in an act of humility. His dark robes blend into the dark blue curtain forming the background of the room, reinforcing his humble attitude and status while contrasting to the authority possessed by the patron. The author nearly becomes a fixture in the room, rather than one of the main figures occupying it. His bald, white head, however, pops him back into the room as the center of focus. It contrasts starkly with the dark robes and curtains that engulf him and tugs the reader's eye toward his uplifted face. And when the miniature is bisected by an X, Lydgate's strikingly white head sits at the center (see Figure 1x). Thus, despite his best efforts to robe himself into modest obscurity, Lydgate remains the center of the image, holding it together. His humble camouflage cannot over-power his importance as the poet, the figure occupying the present in the literary history of this work.

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<sup>76</sup> It is interesting to note that this is the only miniature in the book in which figures are not accompanied by labels with their names. The assumption here is that the reader is supposed to recognize these figures, but, as with the man standing behind Lydgate and Henry V, identity is not always clear.

The figure representing Henry appears to present a more authoritative force than Lydgate. He sits higher than Lydgate, on a golden throne, holds a scepter, and wears an elaborate crown and robe trimmed in ermine. With all the trappings of royalty about his person, it is easy to assume he would provide the image with a visual center and focus. And while the gold on his throne is striking, not least when considering the effort on the part of the artist who gilded it, the paleness of Henry's face fades from view against the light background of the throne. Likewise, his red robe lacks the visual distinction carried in Lydgate's clothes; the color is repeated in the dress of every other figure in the image. Henry's scepter, which should lend him distinction, is not a unique feature; its shape and position are mimicked by the sword being held by the third figure. Additionally, he faces towards the left side of the page, just as every other person in the miniature, despite Lydgate. Henry's authority, as bestowed by his historical, royal identity, gets undermined by his lack of visual specificity in this image. He may be king (a fairly unique position in reality), but visually, he is not unique, and certainly not as unique as Lydgate's figure here. Expected power dynamics, as determined by historical political positions, get undercut in this visual representation of literary authority.

The oscillation in authority finds its stride with the book. As the holder of the book, Lydgate's figure appears to establish himself as its author. However, Lydgate is in the process of handing the book to the prince, signaling a shift in power over the material. Both he and the prince have a hand on the book, neither one grasping it completely, but both sharing and supporting its weight. The image has caught the transaction in its exact midpoint.<sup>77</sup> At this

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<sup>77</sup> This feature is not exclusive to Rylands English MS 1. Indeed, it seems to be usual to represent the presentation at this precise point, both in manuscript and in print. Other manuscripts of *Troy Book* containing presentation images capture this same moment; see, for example, Bodleian Library Digby 232 folio 1r and Cambridge Trinity College MS 0.5.2 folio 138r. The 1513 edition of *Troy Book* printed by Richard Pynson (STC 5579) also shows the presentational book being held by both figures.

moment, ownership of the material (the physical book, the literary material of the Troy story, and the literary history represented) belongs to neither party completely and an action is necessary for one figure or the other to claim it. At this point, it is easy for the reader to imagine the figures progressing linearly through time, Lydgate releasing his hold on the book as Henry more fully grasps it, pulling it towards himself. But, the precision of the moment being captured acts as a fulcrum; the action could equally sway forward or backward. The reader could just as easily imagine Lydgate exerting his hold on the book while Henry loosens his grip. It is only in this point in the transaction that the book is supported by both figures and connects both figures to each other, bridging the physical, political, and literary space between them. This bridge represents a variety of relationships: Lydgate as author and the king as patron, Lydgate as author and the king as reader, Lydgate as unauthoritative and the king as powerful authority. In each case, the book spans the gap between the two disparate entities, forging a connection between the two by causing them to cooperate to support the book. Though the two figures occupy different spaces, different ranks in relation to customary literary practices, the book acts as medium through which the two may relate and draw on each other's power. It is only the imaginative power of the reader of this image that upsets this careful balance, pushing the book into the sole purview of one figure or the other. This moment portrays both the potential balance of literary authority between poet and reader, as well as the power of the reader to shift that authority through interpretation. Lydgate and Henry are presented as equal in relation to literary creation despite preconceptions about their political statuses and their physical postures and accoutrements; but it is this very equality, captured at a precise moment, that gives the reader the power to imaginatively shift the act of literary creation into one or the other's hands. Thus, we see Lydgate's model of literary production at work.



The anonymous man in red, the sword-bearer lurking in the background of this scene also appears to figure in the model of literary production.<sup>78</sup> His appearance is too bold and his likeness to Henry is too pronounced for him to remain anonymous. While he gazes down on Lydgate benignly, the sword he carries runs parallel to the staff in Henry V's hands. He visually connects to both figures, but occupies a different space than either; he stands behind them both, allowing the interaction of author and reader to take place in front of him. I would argue that this white-bearded man represents the role of source in literary production. As a source, he is pertinent and present in the work, as he is in the scene, but he is more distant from the work than either author or reader. He also bears strong visual resemblances to both Lydgate and Henry V, reinforcing the idea that the roles of literary production are bound to each other and that Lydgate, and even Henry V, could occupy his position at some point. Likewise, he is made relevant and present by his reflection in the actions of the author and reader. All three figures then, Lydgate, Henry V, and the anonymous man, are demonstrating their relationship through the shared production of *Troy Book*.

Lydgate's model of literary history and authority continues in the rubric directly below the opening miniature. The rubric of four lines spans the width of the text block on the page and is written in red ink in a clear hand. It begins, "Here begynneth the boke of the sege of Troye. compiled by Daun John lydgate monke of | Bery atte excitacioun and steryng of the moost noble

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<sup>78</sup> Scott (1996) notes that sword-bearers are not usual features in presentation scenes containing royals. Three other manuscripts of *Troy Book* do, however, contain a sword-bearer. British Library manuscripts Rawlinson C 446, Digby 232, and Cotton Augustus A IV all have a sword-bearer in their presentation miniatures, but each of these three images also depict other courtiers as well. An additional manuscript, BL MS Arundel 66, also contains a presentation image that contains a sword-bearer on folio 201r; this image also contains several other courtiers (and a bishop). Arundel 66 does not contain *Troy Book* and this miniature is much smaller than the others as it is contained in an initial (See the British Library's digitized manuscript's site: [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=arundel\\_ms\\_66\\_f201r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=arundel_ms_66_f201r)). Rylands English MS 1 is the only known manuscript that depicts a presentation with a lone sword bearer. This distinction lends itself to various interpretations of the figure's meaning. As he is not surrounded by other courtiers, who would enforce a kind of contextual meaning on him, he can be more fluid in his representation.

worthi and myghty Prynce kyng | Henry the fyfthe. [...] Under the correccioun of euery prudent reder.”<sup>79</sup> The rubric places the actions of the author and patron in the past, stating the book was “compiled” at the “excitacioun and steryng” of the king; this indicates that their participation in the text has already occurred. Their involvement is complete, which leaves space for the reader to engage the work. A brief but important mention of the reader follows this list of important components of the manuscript’s creation: “Under the correccioun of euery prudent reder.” This is the final line of the rubric before the text of the story begins, before the text changes to black and breaks into columns. This final sentence acts as a figurative and literal umbrella, covering the text of the story, directing the reader’s relation to the work. The rubric calls upon the pedagogical components inherent in reading to lead the audience to a position of “prudent” contribution. As the poet had to read in order to gain the knowledge necessary to compose this work, so too must the current readers engage thoughtfully if they are to become the next generation of poets. Authority within the text, then, is not implicit, but must be earned through prudent correction, something Lydgate has already done and the reader must still (and continually) do.

The authority granted by the rubric seems straightforward. In this manuscript, on this folio, it could not be clearer that Lydgate intends his readers to correct him, that, indeed, he leaves stewardship of this great work to them. When considered in concert with other manuscripts and early print editions, this rubric’s authority, its authorship, becomes slippery. Of the three manuscripts and two early print editions of *Troy Book* I examined, none contain these lines. Though Rylands English MS 1 is a large, *de luxe* book doubtlessly prepared for a wealthy patron, it is not Lydgate’s original, or even one of the oldest.<sup>80</sup> That begs the question of who

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<sup>79</sup> This quotation comes from the Rylands English MS 1 folio 1r; transcription is mine.

<sup>80</sup> The four oldest are Cotton Augustus A.iv (which is the most complete and used as the textual basis for both the EETS and TEAMS editions), Bristol MS 8, Digby 232, and Rawlinson C.466, all of which were copied

authored (and authorized) this rubric. It may be copied directly from the exemplar used for this manuscript, or it could be the invention of the scribe.<sup>81</sup> In any case, this rubric does more than simply state the beginning of the work; it adds to Lydgate's notion of an involved readership. And if we can assume this rubric does not descend from Lydgate's hand to this page (which seems a safe assumption, given the dating of the manuscript and wording of the rubric), then the author of these few lines is demonstrating the viability of Lydgate's idea of an engaged readership. This reader cum rubric writer, though apparently not the author of the work and thus possessing an unauthorized voice, has entered the work, entered the page, and marked it indelibly with his presence. And though this voice is not Lydgate's, or perhaps because it is not, it perfectly captures Lydgate's attitude towards readerly incursions, both in content and in deed.

Lydgate's reliance on such active readers comes through clearly in the prologue. In the first lines, he establishes himself as an author who must rely upon this model of continual literary participation and intervention by creating a persona of mediocrity and faultiness. Lydgate calls upon Mars to help him in the endeavor of writing *Troy Book*, and in the last lines of this opening folio, Lydgate pleads with the god of war saying:

So be myn help in this grete nede,  
 To do socour my stile to directe,  
 And of my penne the traces to correcte,  
 Whyche bareyn is of aureate lycour,

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independently of each other. See the introductions to the TEAMS and EETS editions for further descriptions of these manuscripts. Lesley Lawton (1983) asserts that English MS 1 is the "most lavish of the *Troy Book* manuscripts" (60).

<sup>81</sup> Lawton's (1983) concept of an "edition" of *Troy Book* theorizes that behind these remarkably similar manuscripts is a lost presentation/exemplar copy. If Rylands English MS 1 does come from this lost exemplar, the question of the rubric's origin is still in debate, as at least three of the other manuscripts in the "edition" (Digby 232, BL Royal MS 28.D.ii, and Trinity College 0.5.2) do not include the rubric. Morgan MS 876 is incomplete at the beginning, and I was unable to determine whether the remaining manuscripts included it. (52-59)

But in thi grace I fynde som favour,  
 For to conveye it with thyn influence,  
 That stumbleth ay for faute of eloquence,  
 For to reherse or writen any word (Prologue, 28-35).<sup>82</sup>

Lydgate becomes the pitiable, accessible author in these lines. He stumbles, needing correction and aid in this task. But most interestingly, he is “bareyn” – in need of enhancement and embellishment to make his words worthy of his patron. “Bareyn” characterizes the role of the author severed from source or reader. It cannot produce. The MED’s first several definitions of “bareyn” all seem relevant to Lydgate’s intent here. The first three define the word as “sterile,” “infertile,” and/or “unproductive” with reference variously to humans, plants, and land. The fourth definition is, “Intellectually or morally sterile; dull, callous.”<sup>83</sup> Although Lydgate’s most immediate sense of the word in this passage probably aligns more closely with the fifth definition (“destitute, devoid, bare”), the other meanings have bearing. Without the stimuli of the sources providing the need for the author to read, judge, and reproduce them, and without the corrective forces of the readers, reproducing the author’s own words through the refining act of reading, the author is “bareyn” – incapable of literary generation. A lone author is an infertile one. His pen becomes impotent. Lydgate’s model is one in which each person relies upon another to provide the essential seed of germination. Thus, in this passage, without the intervention of others, Lydgate’s pen is “bareyn.” Only once he can rely upon the grace and

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<sup>82</sup> This passage is transcribed from Rylands English MS 1 where possible, and checked against Edwards’ edition; centuries of wear on this particular corner of the page have rubbed the inked from the parchment. The second half of line 32 is particularly damaged. The only difference I can detect between the manuscript and the modern editions is a different spelling of “traces” (as “tracys” in the TEAMS edition).

<sup>83</sup> “barain(e (adj.).” *Middle English Dictionary*, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED3614>. Accessed 12 April 2018.

influence of another can he move forward to discuss the possibility of writing more and writing better.

Through each stage of production, Lydgate hopes for this distilling effect, one that makes the work ever better. He proposes that he does this through his own engagement with sources and he calls upon his readers to do so with him through their own correction. At various points in *Troy Book* he demonstrates this engagement. He takes offense to Homer, saying that although his “dites wer so fresche and gay, | with sugred words under hony soote | [their] gall is hidde lowe by the rote” (Prologue, ll. 276-278). Often his reproach of Homer takes on this metaphorical form. Using figurative, flowery language to denounce the use of flowery language could be seen as hypocritical. But Lydgate is being deliberate here. He has tasked his readers with correcting him and provided them with guidelines on how to do so. This becomes a test. The prudent reader, the one upon which Lydgate depends, should identify the duplicity in Lydgate’s language here and correct him. In doing so, the reader improves the work and makes Lydgate present in it. They are taking a story that has become, to use Lydgate’s words “fordirked of her hewe” (Prologue, l. 165) and “through writing thei be refresched newe” (Prologue, ll. 166). Lydgate is referring to the story of Troy and its various incarnations, but the authors themselves are indicted here. If they do not consult sources and reproduce the stories, the stories and their authors fall into darkness. They become murky and lost to the world. It is only through the regenerative act of reading that the stories and their authors can be “refresched newe” and literary production can continue its cyclical progression.

Lydgate closes the prologue with an appeal to his readers that closely mimics the opening rubric of *Rylands English MS 1*, expanding upon it and reinforcing the way his model of literary production functions in time. He says “Preynge to alle that schal it rede or se, | Wher as I erre for

to amenden me. | Of humble herte and low entencioun, | Commytyng all to her correccioun, | And thereof thanke my wille is that thei wynne, | For through her support, thus I wil begynne”

(Prologue, ll. 379-384). The first lines call to mind the humble, faulty author begging his readers pity him and correct his errors. By now this is a familiar figure. But in the last two lines Lydgate makes a subtle shift. He wishes the readers prosperity and says that through their support, he will begin. This is interesting because, of course, he’s already begun; these are lines 383 and 384 of the poem, after all. These lines also call to mind the idea that through the medium of the prudent, corrective reader, Lydgate will be capable of beginning to be reproduced. Through the reader, Lydgate does not remain fixed in the past, but pushes through to the literary present and extends into its future.

Lydgate’s desire that his readers “wynne” also signals his conception of active readership. The TEAMS edition’s note for this word is “prosper.” According to the MED, a few of the definitions of “wynne” could indicate Lydgate’s wish for his reader’s prosperity; they include descriptions of benefitting financially or non-materially, gaining territory, trophies, or prizes, and triumphing or winning.<sup>84</sup> All of these indicate a general sense of prospering. The first definition, however, is “to exert effort, strive, or struggle;” the second is “to bring something under one’s control or possession.” When taken together, these definitions of “wynne” also seem as though they could be relevant to Lydgate’s intentions here. His will is that his readers exert effort with the poem, or read it actively and with the idea of judging it in mind. Then they will take it under their control by engaging the poem, correcting it where they deem necessary; in that, the reader, the poem, and Lydgate, will gain prosperity. The fourth definition also seems pertinent here; it is to beget offspring or to give rise to a lineage. Lydgate’s model of literary

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<sup>84</sup> “winnen, (v.)” Middle English Dictionary, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=244654388&egdisplay=compact&egs=244661034&egs=244690755>. Accessed 12 April 2018.

production can be thought of in terms of genealogy, with each new active reader producing in the work an offspring that both descends from the original, but is distinct. Lydgate then wills his readers to “wynne” or engage with this work so as to create a lineage, one which future generations of readers can enter and within which they can reproduce. In this sense, Lydgate’s ability to begin only under the support of his readers makes sense. He is not beginning the poem, but rather the literary lineage of that poem, hoping that his production will be reproduced by readers for generations. Lydgate is no longer the “bareyn” poet who cried out to Mars for poetic aid, but, through the support of his readers, he has become a fertile literary producer.

This model of literary production, with its dynamic and interconnected roles, provides Lydgate with a way of remaining relevant in a time of uncertainty. He may not be the brilliant father of English poetry, like Chaucer, but he finds a way to ensure that he will not simply pass unnoticed into the “fordirked” past. By charging his readers with the responsibility of regenerating the work, by passing literary authority on to a new group, Lydgate is able to retain power for himself. This model allows room for the reading public to participate in the creation of the texts that have been produced for them to consume – but Lydgate insists that they are no longer consumers, but producers integral to the perpetuation of literary history.<sup>85</sup> The works they reproduce become a venue for sources and authors of the past to become “refresched newe” – the works themselves are better for the multiplicity of hands that participated in their creation. This resonates, of course, with the recent scholarship on authority in fifteenth-century literature.

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<sup>85</sup> Paul Strohm says that “the principle responsibility of any theory of literary history is to account for stylistic change” (3). Certainly, this model does so. This model encourages readers not just to enter the work, but to alter it so as to renew it and make it palatable to a changing audience across time. That would, of course, require stylistic changes to be made. Strohm concludes his study of fifteenth-century readers of Chaucer by saying that this later audience “regarded Chaucer’s poetry differently not because of fatigue or capriciousness, but because of real changes in its own composition and its own world” (32). If these sorts of later readers are also exhorted to become writers and change works from the past, then they will of course change them to better reflect their own positions relative to those works. Strohm, Paul. “Chaucer’s Fifteenth-Century Audience and the Narrowing of the ‘Chaucer Tradition.’” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 4, 1982, pp. 3-32.

Scanlon, Simpson, and Kuskin (among others) variously describe authority accruing methods employed by Lydgate and other fifteenth-century authors as, to some degree, committing self-authorizing acts; by writing the authority of their sources, recording (or creating) it within their own poetry, they can then glean a similar, reflected authority for themselves. These acts, of embedding and imitation, certainly help to demonstrate that the new generation of poets understand and possess some literary authority. But they also refresh, renew, and re-legitimize the previous poets. Reading of the sort Lydgate employs (both as a reader and a writer) renews both the work and the author.

Refreshing or renewing of the kind to which Lydgate aspires, relying as it does upon a multitude of readers, favors the voices of the many over the one. In his essay “Dullness and the Fifteenth Century” David Lawton claims that “the role of the dull fifteenth-century poet is to know on behalf of, together with, and as well as any man living. It is to be any man living – a supreme commonplace” (771).<sup>86</sup> Lydgate’s model of active readership makes this role feasible. By inviting readers into the work, allowing them to become writers, the fifteenth-century poet can become (nearly) any man living; each new reader refreshes the author, re-embodiment him within the work, but in a new context and time. Important here is the word “living.” It expands the role of the fifteenth-century poet beyond his immediate context. Lawton appears to not necessarily mean this phrase, “any man living,” in its broadest terms, but it captures the intentions of Lydgate’s ever renewing readership. If the fifteenth-century poet is any man living, then that role (potentially) extends into the future indefinitely, as long as an active reader can engage the work. The work, and the poet, have the capacity for immortality at the hands of “any living man” – a “supreme commonplace” indeed.

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<sup>86</sup> Lawton, David. “Dullness and the Fifteenth Century.” *ELH*, vol. 54, no. 4, 1987, pp. 761-799. DOI: 10.2307/2873098



Here we see the concept of common profit at work quite clearly. The poet is “any man living” and, in Lydgate’s model, any prudent reader may enter into the work and have a hand in its recreation. To do so, to engage in this method of literary production, is to truly work for the common profit. This happens in a couple of ways. Becoming a prudent, active reader and then entering into the space of literary creation authorizes the reader, helps them gain a new kind of literary power. That any reader can be capable of doing this certainly indicates that this model is engaged in common profit, the benefit of the community, not just the individual. Additionally, that reader will, if they fulfill the objectives of the lessons in prudent reading Lydgate hoped to impart, improve the work. An improved work also benefits the literary community at large. This method of active reading, in creating an improved work, allows for the continued survival of not only that work, but of all the authorized people who had a hand in creating it. In this way, then, each person, whether poet or prudent reader, gains a slice of (potential) immortality in the process.

This immortality can become messy, especially when considering the work. G. Thomas Tanselle says in *A Rationale of Textual Criticism* that “no edition of the text of a document can be a substitute for the original and every new edition complicates the life history of the text by releasing to the world a series of new documents” (58).<sup>87</sup> I could not agree more. But unlike Tanselle, this thought does not discourage me, nor would it discourage Lydgate. Each new edition, each time a prudent reader corrects the work, the cycle of literary production continues, and each new reader is, in a way “wynne”-ing, prospering from their efforts to both possess and reproduce the work. When the illuminators and rubricators, for example, add their work to the manuscript, they are not interfering with or detracting from the original – they are complicating

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<sup>87</sup> Tanselle, G. Thomas. *A Rationale of Textual Criticism*. U of Pennsylvania P, 1989.

the life history of the text in a way that enhances the text. Lydgate's model sees each reader as a potential enhancer of the work; with prudent, diligent reading, they may enter the work and correct, amplify, or generally improve the work making it relevant (or "newe") in its current moment. Lydgate allows for the work itself to become dynamic, to capture traces of the multiple historical contexts in which it exists. Though this model could be said to advocate for reading only the most recent, more correct version of a work, I believe that the ways in which the past becomes present through this literary reproduction speak to the fluidity of time in literary history and does not preference the recent over the past. Linear chronology collapses in upon itself here. The past is continually recalled, resurrected and redone, only to be repeated again.

The resurrected past is not, cannot be, identical to its earlier incarnation. Not only do prudent readers alter the work, as per Lydgate's request, but the historical moment changes, and subtly shifts the meanings being made. To return to the earlier example of presentation images, new incarnations of these images bring with them their old meanings, but also create new ones out of their changed contexts. The presentation image does not die with the advent of print; presentation images quite similar in structure and visual content to those in medieval manuscripts find their way into printed books throughout the sixteenth century. These images strengthen the continuity between the manuscript book and the printed one. It indicates that bookmakers found visual representation of poets and patrons valuable or desirous enough to commission woodcuts so that they might reproduce them in their printed editions. The similarity between presentation images in manuscript and those in print highlights a striking difference in their representative qualities: the image in the manuscript presumably represents the presentation of *that book specifically*, that is, the book containing the image is the one depicted in the image, whereas, because of the greater volume of (nearly identical) copies possible in print, the book containing

the image may or may not be the one represented in the image, the one given to the patron.<sup>88</sup>

This is a difference between singularity and multiplicity, specificity and generality of meaning.

The basic function of the presentation image, at least in medieval manuscripts, is to visually represent the material transition of the book from the poet to the patron. This image also demonstrates a shift in responsibility for the literary work contained by the book; the patron initially commissioned the work, thus giving the poet impetus to write it, and now the work is being given back into the hands of the patron, presumably so he can read it. The shift occurs not simply in regards to the work, but also within the function of the patron. It is within the presentation image that he becomes a reader. No longer simply the financial backer, the patron's role is now to review the work he commissioned, evaluating it and making sure it fulfilled his expectations; he has indeed become an active, engaged reader.

Of course, not all patrons necessarily were active, engaged readers of the books they commissioned. For some, simply owning the manuscript conferred enough prestige and authority. This bears out with the manuscripts of *Troy Book*. The high levels of illustration found in a great proportion of extant manuscripts, coupled with large formats, indicates that this particular book was considered a prestigious item to own, one which purchasers were willing to spend a great deal of money to embellish. Lesley Lawton (1983) notes that the physicality of many of these books precluded easy reading; "they are not readily portable volumes and were evidently intended for ostentatious display" (52). If these manuscripts were specifically constructed for display, not reading, then the point becomes the prestige, status, and authority

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<sup>88</sup> This characterization of early modern printed books as nearly identical is, of course, problematic. In theory, the printing press made possible the identical reproduction of hundreds of copies of a single work. In practice, this was not the case. Each book would have unique characteristics resulting from the inability to exactly control all the components of printing; the inker might apply more or less ink to the type from page to page or book to book, the type could wear or crack over time, or a compositor might notice a mistake halfway through a run and change it. All of these things would result in differences in books that were supposed to be identical. To take a famous example, 235 copies of Shakespeare's First Folio exist today, none of which are identical.

granted by the object itself. To be able to see oneself reflected in such an item would indeed be an authorizing event. In speaking of the potential for personalization in manuscript production, A. S. G. Edwards and Carole M. Meale use the terms “self-glorification” and “self-aggrandizement” and go on to explain that the “potential for an element of self-reflectiveness on the part of the purchaser ... gives the manuscript its distinctiveness” (96).<sup>89</sup> These personalizations begin with the purchaser, patron, or reader. The individual would commission the manuscript to contain his coats of arms or even his likeness to be represented in the presentation image, paying for the bookmakers to include these self-reflections.

While the self-reflections found in manuscript can be thought of as working in an immediate way to replicate the real situation of a patron receiving a book from a poet, the truth is more complex. In the case of *Troy Book*, of the extant illuminated manuscripts that contain presentation images (and of those that do not, but might have at one point), none have definitively been identified as Lydgate’s original copy or the book that was presented to Henry V. Each presentation image contains a representation of that exchange, of that moment and the implications carried within for identification, but none are the actual book represented by the image. It is important to note here that Kathleen Scott has postulated, based on regular reoccurrence of the set of images in these manuscripts, that there might have been an exemplar from which all originate; this lost book might have been Henry’s copy or a direct ancestor or descendant of it. Regardless, these books reproduce a representative image which is not exactly representative. The book at hand is not, necessarily, the book in the image. The relationship implied by the material production of the book, that the image represents a truth for that particular item, may not actually be accurate. As readers of the manuscript, we assume that the

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<sup>89</sup> Edwards, A. S. G and Carole M. Meale. “The Marketing of Printed Books in Late Medieval England.” *The Library*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1993, pp. 95–124.

representations found in the image relate to this book. But we must be wary and circumspect. It would seem that even in the age of manuscript production, book makers were pushing at the boundaries of what could be represented by their illustrations.

The advent of print increases this sense of misrepresentation. Edwards and Meale point out the shift in self-reflection that comes from a change in the material conditions of production: “by its nature print is obviously constrained by a form that emphasizes multiplicity, not particularity, and it is thus the exclusive nature of the relationship between producer and client – or patron – which is lost with the advent of printing” (96). Indeed, the exclusivity and particularity does dissipate with print. No longer is it feasible for a patron to commission the same kinds of self-reflections to appear in the book. It would not make sense to print hundreds of books with a particular patron represented when that patron would only require one book. The printer now must consider the multiplicity within his market. The dissipation of exclusivity means that grand books that are highly personalized begin to disappear. The authorization of a single wealthy patron fades, but this leaves room for others to enter into the spaces left behind and find authority, find themselves authorized, there.

Despite the loss of specificity, despite the seeming strangeness of producing hundreds of books that provide a prestigious self-reflection of a single person, early English printers commissioned presentation image woodcuts that closely reflect their manuscript precursors. So, what happens to this familiar yet odd moment, this specific point of transition from patron to reader, when the presentation image occurs in print? Setting, patron, and book all undergo transformations due to the material conditions of production in print. Only the poet’s role remains clearly and singularly embodied in both the manuscript and print images. In Richard

Pynson's 1513 edition of *Troy Book* the presentation image visually emphasizes the poet's centrality, mimicking the focus found in Rylands English MS 1 (see figure 2).

Though this woodcut has been inked entirely in black, it manages to draw the reader's eye to the figure of the poet more forcefully than to any other person in the room. Each figure's clothes are represented by black ink outlines indicating sleeves, hems, and such, and shorter, more dash-like lines which designate shadow, as on the figures' legs, where the dashes are all on the right-hand side, showing that the light is coming from the left, or texture, as on the sword-bearer's mantle and trim. While this technique clearly delineates figures, objects, and details, it leaves empty space between the outlines where only blank paper is visible and where the reader must imagine a variety of color in place of the creamy white of the page. This black outlining style is also used to indicate faces, hands, features of the room, etc., creating a consistency of appearance across the image. That consistency stops with the kneeling monk poet, Lydgate. While his hands and head are outlined in black, his robe is the reverse. It appears to be outlined in white (or the color of the paper), while between the edges it is black. Creating this effect would have required the woodcut carver to reverse his process. For the other objects in the image, the carver would remove the spaces between boundaries, such as the space between the edges of the sword or a figure's fingers. This carved out space would leave behind raised areas that could be inked and which, when pressed to paper, would leave an impression. Lydgate's robe, however, required the carver to remove the boundary lines and allow the interior space to remain, thus allowing the robe to be inked and make contact with the paper. In this way, more of Lydgate than any other figure, whether courtier, sword-bearer, or princely patron, remains. And Lydgate, more than any figure, is impressed fully upon the paper, upon the book. The presence

of a presentation image in a printed book, however strange in terms of its representative qualities, has renewed Lydgate's importance to and in this work.

Lydgate remains central and specific in print, but the other aspects of the image experience some distortion of meaning. The setting provided by Pynson's 1513 woodcut is far less specifically rendered than in Rylands English MS 1; where the manuscript showed a castle and detailed the rich interior and complex architecture, this woodcut merely shows an interior room, with tiled floors, a mullioned window, and a tapestry. No exterior can be discerned. The scene could be occurring in any number of buildings. The figures inside the room point to a royal setting, but the actual interior remains resolutely anonymous. The woodcut image is sending mixed messages about the specificity of its representative qualities.

In Pynson's woodcut, the patron, Henry V, is still seemingly specific, being both historical and royal. A crown and throne reinforce this royal status, creating a distinct distance between the reader and the figure. This distance would seem to make it difficult for the reader to see themselves as having anything in common with the royal reader here represented. But at the time of Pynson's printing, Henry V had been dead for 90 years. So the elements of "self-reflectiveness," "self-glorification," and "self-aggrandizement" (to use Edwards' and Meale's terms for describing manuscript personalization), are decidedly lacking the "self." In this case, Pynson's image is not as immediate as its forebears in manuscript were. What was once an image capturing a moment that was close at hand, occurring when the patron received his book, has become historical. The presentation occurred in the past, when Henry V was alive to take the book from Lydgate's hands. And because this image is then historical, not (as) present, the book in the image is not the book in the reader's hands. A reader purchasing this book in 1513 would experience a distance from this presentation image that the reader of the manuscript would not.

And here, in the book, is the important distinction. While someone other than the represented patron might pick up the manuscript and experience some distance (because she is not the person in the image) the book would remain the same; the book in the manuscript image is (or could be) the book in the reader's hands. But in print, it is not.

The distancing here is inherent in the printed presentation image. Figures and objects within the printed image do not hold a direct corollary with the real figures and objects they are meant to represent. Print's multiplicity warps the reflective representation. In the manuscript, the reader could easily identify the book in the image as the book he was holding, and himself within the figure of the patron, but only if the reader was the patron; subsequent readers could only gaze upon the figure with a sense of the distance between themselves and the image of the patron. In print, the questionable status of the book provides maneuvering room. In his study of bookish poetic works, John Burrows explains the poet's reliance on the material form to lend meaning and coherence to the literary work. He concludes by looking forward into the age of print, saying:

the new print technology...was inimical to that kind of 'book' which...encouraged the reader to feel as if he were looking over the poet's shoulder as it took shape. Although no medieval reader could have assumed that his own particular copy had in reality been touched by the poet's hand, yet the expression 'this book' was not for him, as it is for the reader of a modern printed edition, a purely abstract term, virtually equivalent to 'this literary work' (245).<sup>90</sup>

Burrows points out that thing we have all, as readers in an age of (mostly) print have done: we have talked about "this book" when we have meant "this literary work." The medieval

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<sup>90</sup> Burrow, John. "The Poet and the Book." *Genres, Themes, and Images in English Literature*, edited by Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1986.



manuscript represents its agents, poet, patron, and reader, with more nearness and singularity than the early printed book with its print run of (sometimes) hundreds of copies. In print, the book in the image can no longer represent the book containing the image.<sup>91</sup> Thus it comes to represent something more nebulous and less physical: the literary work.

In this more allegorical understanding, the book's lesser physical specificity creates a sort of gravitational pull on the rest of the image, dragging the other figures into similarly lessened specificity. The patron, then, who holds less personal meaning to the reader because of his historical distance (he's not the current king, after all) morphs, along with the book, into his category, not his specific identity. He is reader and patron. And each person who purchases this book, arguably, could be considered a patron of this publishing endeavor. Surely each person who picks up this book to examine its contents is a reader. The reader can thus imagine himself into the position occupied by the patron/reader in the image, and this imaginative reflection can occur with subsequent readers, over and over again. The boundaries of specificity warp with print and allow more readers, at more times throughout history, to look at the image and see themselves within it. No longer is the "self" glorified or aggrandized by this representation, but "selves" are.

While we can say that this is true of any presentation image in any printed book, what resonates for Lydgate is the "selves" that become represented. Lydgate's words advocate for an engaged readership. He implores his readers to become agents of literary change within his works. The advent of print and the ability to see several different selves represented within its images would be an encouragement to enact Lydgate's exhortations. Certainly, readers of a printed book, one in which the representations warp to include them (or at least do not

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<sup>91</sup> This is except, of course, in the case of the book that actually was presented to the patron, if such a book existed.

specifically exclude them) could experience a closeness to the poet that might not have been possible in a manuscript. While readers of the printed book sit at a greater chronological remove from the medieval poet, the representational flexibility found in print, and specifically in printed presentation images, allow the reader to experience a representational closeness to the poet, more easily imagining themselves within the printed image. For Lydgate's readers, print's multiplicity continues his authorizing agenda.

Presentation images in print alter literary power dynamics. The princely patron found in manuscripts becomes a less stable, less specific figure in print; non-royals are able to look at the image of the patron and see themselves, not just a prince. The distance between a specific royal person, like Henry V in the *Troy Book* images, and (more) common readers shrinks. The figure of the patron becomes multiply meaningful and, much like an allegorical character in a medieval morality play, it allows a multitude of readers to find personal meaning within it. The printed patron is no longer a single specific entity, Prince Henry, but a multiply specific figure, one which has grown general enough to tolerate a variety of individual interpretations. This woodcut figure begins to mimic the function of the personal pronoun "I." This simple word is both incredibly general and specific. Any person can use it, but it only ever refers to the speaker. The once specific and specifically royal patron has become "I" to each new reader of the book. This move collapses the power of the patron that derives from exclusivity and puts all readers into positions of authority through their nearness to Lydgate, the figure who remains steadfast throughout. Along with this collapse of the patron comes a collapse in the time represented by the miniature. What was once immediate in manuscript moves into the past in print before coming forward to be continually present, continually ready to authorize a new group of readers

in their present moment. The material conditions of print break down the privileged position of the patron and empowers readers within the process of literary creation.

The material conditions of print authorize the reader and, through that authorization, continue to extend Lydgate's invitation for active readership. That does not, however, exclude manuscript materiality from the process. Though they cannot rely upon multiplicity (to the extent of print) to create a space for readers, other features of medieval manuscripts were capable of drawing in active readers. We can see how the specific material conditions of a manuscript incite readers in a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript held by the Pierpont Morgan Library, shelfmark Morgan MS M 876, containing *Troy Book* and an anonymous romance called *Sir Generides*.<sup>92</sup> This manuscript dates from the first half of the fifteenth century (though, of course, after 1420 when the poem was completed), and is best described as incomplete. For this medieval manuscript, it is its incompleteness that calls to readers, asking them to enter into the realm of literary production.

This manuscript's interesting state of partial completion, coupled with an attempted *de luxe* status, provided readers with opportunities insert themselves into the book with little anxiety or risk. In Morgan MS M 876, the text of *Troy Book* is missing nearly 4000 lines from the beginning of the poem, but this is not the only incomplete feature. The more pages a reader turns, the more incompletions the manuscript reveals; spaces left for rubrication are blank and illustrations are left uncolored and eventually absent, leaving "holes" all over the manuscript where words, color, and ink should be. Though seemingly commissioned as a higher-end product, the manuscript remains incomplete as initially intended. Of the several spaces left in the

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<sup>92</sup> The Pierpont Morgan Library's online catalogue has links to the curatorial description and a bibliography of the manuscript. <http://corsair.morganlibrary.org/msdescr/BBM0876.htm> The romance *Sir Generides* appears in one other manuscript, Cambridge Trinity College, MS O.5.2; in that manuscript, it also accompanies *Troy Book*.

text for miniatures, only seven were drawn and, of those, only two were colored. The drawings have been called “mediocre” in the curatorial description provided by the Pierpont Morgan Library.<sup>93</sup> This contrasts with the very clear hand used throughout.<sup>94</sup> Though rubrication appears regularly at the beginning of the book to denote proper nouns, by the end, only blank spaces are left; the same is true of decorated initials. Overall, the book leaves the reader with an impression of uncertainty; the book, as it was planned, would have been a prestigious object, but as it stands, seems less clearly so. A. S. G. Edwards and Derek Pearsall consider this incompleteness as potentially “indicating a failure due to economic cause, whether it was the prospective customer or the speculation that failed, since there are no other apparent obstacles to completion” (267).<sup>95</sup>

A subtler indicator of the mixed status of the book, though, is the vellum.<sup>96</sup> The book contains numerous holes which occurred in the vellum before it was cut and written upon. These holes, the possible result of blemishes in the animal hide or over-zealous scraping during processing, had to be accounted for and worked around by the scribes. Some of these holes are small, around two to three lines high and about as wide (see Figure 3), but others were quite large. Figure 4 shows one such hole extending nearly 10 lines and irregular in shape. This hole

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<sup>93</sup> Carole M. Meale agrees, saying that the illustrations are inferior in quality and amateurish (91). Martha W. Driver describes them as “actually quite detailed and elegantly set out, with careful attention paid to the rendering of armour, weapons, and ships” (213). A. S. G. Edwards found that the Morgan library paid \$16,000 for the book in 1956, which was possibly the highest for any Lydgate manuscript at that time; he credits this high price, at least in part, to the manuscript’s “evidence of high-quality production” (214). Meale, Carole M. “The Morgan Library Copy of *Generides*,” *Romance in Medieval England*, D. S. Brewer, 1991, pp. 89-104. Edwards, A. S. G. “Selling Lydgate Manuscripts in the Twentieth Century,” *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices*, edited by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John J. Thompson, and Sarah Baechle, Notre Dame UP, 2014, pp. 65-79.

<sup>94</sup> Meale (1991) identifies the hand as “a neat, upright hand in a script which is basically secretary, but with some admixture of anglicana forms” (90).

<sup>95</sup> Edwards, A. S. G. and Derek Pearsall. “The Manuscripts of the Major English Poetic Texts.” *Book Publishing and Printing in Britain 1375-1475*, edited by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall, Cambridge UP, 1989, pp. 257-278.

<sup>96</sup> The Morgan Library’s curatorial description calls this vellum rather than parchment. According to R. Reed, “Parchment from calfskin was known as vellum...but because of its intrinsic qualities [of thinness and strength], vellum became associated with any parchment which was both thin and strong” (126). Reed, R. *Ancient Skins, Parchment and Leathers*. Seminar, 1972.

required the scribe to adjust his lines, fitting only half lines into the space usually capable of containing whole ones. The scribe's willingness to work around holes that are clearly within the boundaries of the text indicate that adjusting the lines was preferable to obtaining a new sheet of vellum without any holes, and probably a financial choice.<sup>97</sup> This accommodation, along with the several apparently inexpert and incomplete miniatures, supports Edwards' and Pearsall's theory that this book represents a desire for a *de luxe* manuscript, but a lack of funds to execute it. This theory probably also accounts for the manuscript's unfinished state.<sup>98</sup>

What was once supposed to be a *de luxe* book has turned out to be a bit shabby. But the lack of luster makes it not simply approachable, but breachable to its readers. In Morgan MS 876 the page and the text combine, blurring the lines between book and work; these holes and spaces come to represent a metaphorical egress into the literary work. If the page is viewed as a visual metaphor for the work, at first examination it appears to be a flat, even, smooth plane. The work, then, would give the cursory reader an unbroken expanse. But even the most perfectly preserved page, the one untouched by reader's wandering pen, by beetle's or moth's destructive hunger, or by the various other ravages of time, contains breaches to that supposedly uninterrupted flatness. Parchment retains the textures of the animals from which it was harvested; hair sides preserve the bumps created by hair follicles while the under sides, the smooth sides, do not, creating different textures on the same leaf.<sup>99</sup> Type was literally pressed into the pages of printed books,

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<sup>97</sup> There are a few holes that are completely and nearly completely outside the textual boundaries and thus required little to no effort to avoid on the part of the scribe.

<sup>98</sup> Meale (1991) provides a different theory for the incompleteness of the manuscript; she offers that the artist responsible for the miniatures had no reference images upon which to rely for those that were planned. Without any specific guide, the miniatures were never completed (some never even begun) which led the rest of the manuscript into a state of suspension.

<sup>99</sup> In a comprehensive examination of processed animal hides, Reed makes the following note about hair: "The sizes and distribution of the hairs may usually be detected in pelt even after unhairing has taken place since the follicles, though now empty, are still apparent" (25). He goes on to explain how the grain pattern, or pattern left by empty

creating not only the inked impressions of the letters, but also acting as a sort of embossing, disturbing the even flatness of the page's surface. Medieval manuscripts and early modern printed books may present the appearance of flat, unbroken planes, but each page, each leaf contains variations and roughness that interrupt the smoothness. As a metaphor for the work, this is particularly apt. A reader may approach a work, especially one by a venerated author like Chaucer, and perceive a smooth surface that cannot and should not be disturbed. To disturb such a lovely surface would be tantamount to destruction. But the work has already been disturbed, has already been subject to destruction. In fact, it was created out of destruction, the destruction of animals and their skins or the destruction of trees and metals. These destructions were nearly always reformed into a seemingly complete whole (pieces of parchment or paper, woodcut blocks and pieces of type, all combining to create a finished book), but Morgan MS M 876 never regained that state of seeming wholeness. The manuscript's imperfections and incompleteness make readers feel more comfortable with the idea of inserting themselves into this manuscript's spaces.

When compared to a *de luxe* manuscript such as Rylands English MS 1, then, Morgan MS M 876 shows considerably more tangible proof of active readership. The Rylands manuscript with its beautifully executed miniatures, its smooth pages, and its crisp text would almost ward readers off from marking in it. Who would dare to ruin the virgin margins or even insert a manicule to highlight a pithy couplet? But the Morgan manuscript calls out for readerly insertions. The unfinished portions require readers to at least imagine the words that are not

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follicles, can help in identifying the species of animal from which the pelt came. With regards to parchment, Reed says, "For writing purposes it is necessary to provide smooth surfaces of even appearance to which inks and colours may be applied easily without running...Although the grain pattern might be allowed to remain visible...it should not be too highly raised in the original skin, for otherwise writing with ink is rendered difficult" (125). Reed's book provides excellent descriptions of the processes needed to render animal skins into parchment.

present, if not actually physically fill them in. The step from imagining filling in a blank to actually doing it is short, and often made in this manuscript. In Figure 5 we see an instance where the rubrication of the Sir Generides tale was not completed initially, but was filled in by a later hand in black ink. The reader would have to be paying close attention to the text to fill in the correct name, as all character names, not just that of the main character, were intended for rubrication. This readerly completion allows ease of comprehension for later readers who would not have to imagine the names but could rely upon the written words to relay the meaning of the work. Morgan MS M 876's several holes and blank spaces entice its readers to become actively involved in the alteration of this work, connecting themselves to all its readers, both before and after they marked their presence.

Not every readerly insertion was correct, however; Figure 6 shows instances where the name Generides was spelled Gerenides, inverting the r and n. In Figure 7 a reader has corrected the misspelling. Thus, we see the continued progression of this book at the hands of active, engaged readers. This further correction serves as a type of evolutionary communication between the readers both past and future: the initial reader, the scribe, leaves a space blank for another reader, the rubricator; the rubricator does not fill in the space, which sends a message to the next reader about the state of completion of the book; at some point, another later reader decides that the empty space detracts more from the meaning of the text than it adds to his understanding of the book and so fills it in; a later reader makes the same determination about the misspelling of Generides and corrects it. At each point, the previous reader is communicating with the next about his relationship to the book, whether that message is "I do not do rubrication" or "I cannot spell Generides," and that communication is taken up and evaluated by the next reader who

either chooses to preserve that communication as is or change it to better help the next reader's interaction with the book and work.

Figure 8 also demonstrates this readerly insertion and communication in the abbreviation of Generides to "Ger" (an abbreviation of the misspelling, possibly). This abbreviation relies upon subsequent readers' abilities to imaginatively fill in the rest of the name. It's more helpful than the blank space, but not as helpful as the whole name. This abbreviation makes an assumption about the intellectual capacity of the next reader, and communicates not only the name to them, but that assumption as well. It implies an unspoken agreement with the reader about their ability to determine the whole word from an abbreviation. This manuscript, in its unfinished and not-so-luxe state allows readers to enter into its continued production. It provides them the space, at times literally, to mark their relationship to it and to other readers.

The finishing of unfinished portions of a manuscript is not so unusual in itself. But this type of activity unfetters the reader from any prohibitions about physically altering the book or the work. The lack of polish on Morgan MS M 876 invites readers to complete it; that action being undertaken, more creative and individual acts of altering the book appear easier. In an act not of completion, but not far from it, we see a reader drawing attention to the unfinished state in Figure 9; a manicule has been drawn in the inside margin pointing directly at an empty space where a decorated initial should be. Though not completing the intended visual element (since a small letter "w" has been written in the space to signal to the rubricator what should go there, no textual element is missing), the manicule draws attention to the incompleteness. One has to wonder why. The empty spaces for initials are very apparent from a mere glance at any open folios. But this manicule insists upon noting the absence. At the very least, it signals to future readers that absences, here, are noted and, because of the manicule, more present.



The readers of Morgan MS M 876 go further, though, bracketing passages, presumably of interest or insight to them (see Figure 10), and making notes in the margins (see Figure 11). The notes occur in a variety of hands and range from incredibly clear and legible to a scrawled mess. But it seems as though quite a few of them are meant to summarize the contents which have been bracketed. For example, in Figure 11 we see a bracketing and next to it the words “[pr]aise of Hector.” Though this marginalia appears simple, I would suggest that it indicates a relationship that the reader is assuming with both the book and the work. The reader here feels comfortable enough with the book to value his own desire to mark in it over preserving the untouched margins. He also wishes to mark this particular place, where Hector is introduced and described with high praise. Because the note summarizes the passage, rather than analyzes it, I assume that its purpose is to aid the reader (or future readers) in the quick location of this section. The reader has inserted a navigational aid. Such devices are not designed to help a reader read the book from cover to cover; that enterprise is straightforward to anyone familiar with the most basic Western reading practices (i.e. left to right, top to bottom). Navigational aids help readers who do not wish to read the entire book straight through, but instead wish to find and read a specific section out of order or on its own. This particular bracket and note helps remind the note-writer of the location of a section of text that he may wish to read again without re-reading the whole book. It also calls out to future readers, allowing them to find and read the same section. This continues the conversation between readers; it acknowledges the value one reader found in these lines while assuming that others may also find it useful.

An alternate theory of the purpose of this note, of course, is that it glosses the passage, summarizing it so that others reading it can know its content without reading it. This, too, indicates a relationship between the glosser and future readers. The glosser read this passage and,

perhaps, found Lydgate's praise for Hector excessive or hyperbolic, and possibly unnecessary to his understanding of the poem. In an effort to help future readers avoid the same quagmire of superfluousness, he summarized the contents, signaling to that next reader that they could effectively skip (or skim) this section and move on more quickly to a place where the action picked back up. Again, the active reader here assumes and then creates a material connection between himself and future readers. The goal is to make this work more accessible, more effective, and overall better to read.

The section introducing and praising Hector may seem like an innocuous point to emphasize. It merely acquaints the reader with Hector; none of the praise contained in the lines has yet been proven, none of his triumphant deeds carried out, none of his famous qualities demonstrated. This section, though, recalls the prologue in which Lydgate praises his patron Henry V for his reading:

[My lord] hath desire, sothly for to seyn,  
 Of verray kny3thod to remembre ageyn  
 The worthynes, 3if I schal nat lye,  
 And the prowesse of olde chivalrie,  
 By-cause he hath loye 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

The cursyd vice of slouthe and ydelnesse (Prologue, ll.75 – 83).

Here Lydgate praises a theory of reading presumably undertaken by Henry V in which the good and virtuous are retained and remembered while that which is not is dismissed. This type of

selective reading would lend itself easily to needing navigational aids. Praise of Hector, accounts of his bravery and chivalry would need to be accessed again and again (if we are to believe the gloss is meant to highlight rather than signal skimming) to revive the reader's own sense of chivalry and stave off "slouthe and ydelnesse" while the unvirtuous acts, such as of Jason marrying another, younger woman, may be skimmed or omitted after the initial reading. Lydgate notes that Henry V wishes to "remembre ageyn" the "worthiness" and "prowesse of olde chivalrie." The repetition in that phrase "remembre ageyn" echoes the terms "reherse" and "newe and newe." This theory of reading requires not only the discernment to sift the good material from the bad, but also a constant returning, re-reading, re-filling of one's own stock of chivalry and virtue. The navigational aid signaling to readers Hector's qualities makes sense in this scheme. It indicates that a reader at some point recognized the necessity for a return, a chance to remember again that which inspired, and that reader threw up a signpost for each later reader (including himself) so that the place could be visited and drawn upon over again.

This type of reading, of judging the material and selecting certain portions as worthy of continual review, characterizes the authorized, prudent reader that Lydgate seeks. This idea of judicious and selective reading has been explored by Minnis. He explains the "reader's freedom of choice" or *lectoris arbitrium* as a concept that relieves the compiler from responsibility in case of a reader's misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the material, or "any error or sin into which the *materia* may lead a reader" (201-202). He describes Chaucer as taking advantage of the exonerating quality of *lectoris arbitrium* in *Canterbury Tales*, not merely absolving himself from responsibility for the tales, but also making readers culpable; Minnis provides the apt quotation, "'Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys" (202). Chaucer is able to indict the reader here because the reader has the freedom to choose, to choose which tales to read, how to read

them, and what impact they can have on the reader. For Chaucer, this stems from his assumed guise of compiler, which uses a lack of authority to deny responsibility. Lydgate also champions *lectoris arbitrium* and judicious readers, but not as a way to misplace blame for his works' shortcomings. Instead, Lydgate connects responsibility for the work with authority over it. He and his readers share the responsibility, but also the attendant authority. A reader's freedom of choice, to read critically and judge the work before them, does not end with that judgement; Lydgate calls upon readers to enact their *lectoris arbitrium* to enhance the work, not merely choosing to read (or skip) certain parts, but to enter the work and make it better for future readers.

That judiciousness, that prudence, characterizes much of the action in *Troy Book*. Lydgate makes the choice, for example, to not follow his most immediate, and stated, source of Guido delle Colonne with regards to coloring Hector's death; instead he tracks Christine de Pisan's *L'Epistre Othea* (or letter to Othea, goddess of prudence), allowing that to illuminate Hector's death through the lens of recklessness and imprudence.<sup>100</sup> Lydgate deliberately chooses to depart from his source material, having Hector die because he had foolishly and in the throws of greed, slung his shield on his back so as to better carry the luxurious attire he plundered from a Greek king (see Part 3, ll. 5332-5399); C. David Benson relates that "the death [of Hector] in Guido is merely a chance of war, but Lydgate...provides Hector with a fatal flaw—and thus

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<sup>100</sup> This connection between Lydgate and Christine de Pisan through Hector's death was charted by C. David Benson in his article "Prudence, Othea and Lydgate's Death of Hector" in 1975; he explored the topic later in his book *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*. Benson, C. David. "Prudence, Othea and Lydgate's Death of Hector." *American Benedictine Review*, vol. 26, 1975. pp. 115-123. It has been further shaped and developed by others considering prudence in Lydgate and in middle English literature more generally. See, for example: Collette, Carolyn P. "Heeding the Couonsel of Prudence: A Context for the *Melibee*." *Chaucer Review*, vol. 29, 1995. pp. 416-433. Fewer, Colin. "John Lydgate's *Troy Book* and the Ideology of Prudence." *Chaucer Review*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2004, pp. 229-245.

provides the reader with an explanation of his death” (115).<sup>101</sup> I would further this by saying Lydgate’s departure from one source and adherence to another does not simply allow him to provide his readers an explanation, but also a lesson. Hector’s failure becomes a negative example, an anti-mirror, through which his readers can learn the importance and value of prudence.

This dedication to imparting the lesson of prudence permeates *Troy Book*; it causes Lydgate to veer from his primary source during a pivotal episode and it can be found in his call for divine aid in the prologue. Lydgate lists Mars, Calliope, and Clio among those he hopes will be his godly allies, but also calls upon “Othea, goddess of prudence” (Prologue, l. 38). The goal of prudence, here, is survival. Lydgate demonstrates the vital necessity of prudence with the story of Hector, but also how prudence (and those deploying and demonstrating it) works for a similar end through common profit. On a direct level, readers can take the lesson of Hector to heart and remember that imprudent (or greedy, foolish, egoist) people meet tragic ends. On a more literary level, Othea, goddess of prudence, oversees the enterprise of composing *Troy Book*, a work that is meant to instruct and invite active, engaged, prudent reading practices. The hoped-for result would be a more judicious reading community, more careful readings of works, and more improved (and thereby surviving) works. Works survive, as does the imprint left upon them by prudent, authorized readers. With each reading by a prudent reader, the work and all engaged in its (re)creation become re-recognized, reauthorized. Prudence, then, is a lesson whose reward continually returns and reflects upon those who demonstrate it.

Lydgate’s theory of prudent reading survived into the era of print. In 1555 Marshe printed an edition of *Troy Book* that contained evidence that readers saw the opportunity

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<sup>101</sup> Benson (1975).

available in being active participants in the creation and recreation of a literary work.<sup>102</sup> Robert Braham, the presumed editor or publisher of the 1555 edition, includes a letter to the reader as prefatory matter to the work. In this letter, he explores the generally held assumption that a man who simply translates or edits another man's work is less worthy of praise for the final product: "Confideryng that who fo traualethe in other mennes doynge is thought to do|nothings of him felfe" (folio B verso). It is clear here that Braham means both himself and Lydgate. He goes on to describe this man who is wrongly thought to be doing nothing as someone who "purged an ouergrowen felde of thornes, & stones, hath also fowed pe same wyth corne," and laments that this man "shulde in pe end be no partaker of pe fruytes or increafe therof" (folio B verso). It is compelling that Braham uses a metaphor that so closely echoes Lydgate's use of the word "reheresen" and its etymology. Is not every worker in the field, whether they complete the initial plowing or rake it over again, entitled to the "increase therof?" Braham, as an editor and publisher of Lydgate's works, is not only promoting it, but rehearsing it, making it new and new. He believes that this act not only benefits the work and the new readers of it, but also those who were responsible for the rehearsal. Lydgate and Braham are increased by their rehearsals. Their value lay in their contributions and continuations of the works, and they are made immortal as well by it.

Braham also recalls Lydgate's genealogical and reproductive references. When Braham wishes that the men who "fowed pe same [field] wyth corne" should be allowed to partake in the "fruytes or increafe therof," he echoes Lydgate's lament that his pen is barren. Lydgate remedies this barrenness by inviting readers to make and remake his work, and thereby himself, anew. Braham, then, completely embodies the role Lydgate set out for active readers. He not only

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<sup>102</sup> The copy I examined was in the Rylands Library, shelfmark R72R1, STC 5580.

promotes and publishes Lydgate's work in a new medium, made more readily available to a greater audience, but he propagates the idea that the seemingly unauthoritative actor in the literary arena, the translator, editor, or reader, can and should benefit from their participation within that arena. If someone clears the field and sows it anew, they deserve to enjoy the fruits of that labor. They earn literary authority.

Braham's letter gives further insight into the motivations of the editor. When describing the task of editing, he says that the editor must examine "many examplars" and "not choſe ſuch as lyketh his fantaſye, but *pe* which ſhal ſeme to come more nere to *pe* auctours meninge, and may moſt pleaſe and pleaſure the readers" (folio B verso). Here Braham gives a clear statement of the guiding principle behind editing. Clearly Braham's intends to recover something that might have been lost or changed through the negligence of other publishers or printers. He hopes to access the author through this process. However, Braham also indicates that when choosing an exemplar, he has to choose that which "may moſt pleaſe and pleaſure the readers." The desires of the reader may differ from that work the author intended. The job of the editor, according to Braham, is to balance the author's intent with the reader's pleasure, sometimes choosing one, sometimes the other (but never choosing his own "fanatasye"). The power players in this editorial process, then, are the author and the reader, both catered to and both favored at certain points. Here we can see Tanselle's consternation about editions in practice. Braham abandons the idea that a perfect, authorially-intended original is possible, let alone preferable. He admits to the vagaries of time and poor, if not simply human, stewards of literature, the hasty publisher looking to make a quick profit, the sleepy compositor working more hours than consistency and competency will allow. But the problems of deterioration over time and human fallacy do not concern Braham half as much as the needs of the reader, which he vaunts as just as worthy of

seeking as the semi-mythical authorial intent. This edition of Lydgate's *Troy Book* contains the historical artifacts of time's interference and an editor's desire to please his readers, muddying, to Tanselle's mind, the original work. It is, of course, no exact substitute for the original.

Substitution, though, defies exactitude. A substitute is never, cannot, by its definition ever be, the original. And editions are substitutions. They must always contain the stuff of substitution, the things that mark them as not the original. Even if the copy is exact, the line breaks the same, the size of the folios precisely identical, the edition is still the edition, the substitute, not the original. But where Tanselle sees the edition as a sadly nostalgic older person trying to recapture the vigor of youth, constantly beckoning backwards to an assumed state of perfection, I see progression, addition, and beauty in the non-original. Braham's epistle locates this beauty in a subtlety of manner and kind of empathetic editorship that results from his attempt to create this edition. Braham denies his own "fantasye" and "he shall be compelled to put on(as it were) theyr [the reader's] fantafye" (folio B verso). While identifying mistakes, the editor must also try to find the author's intent while simultaneously imagining himself in the capacity of reader. Here we can imagine that Braham's use of "fantasye" adheres to the usual definition, that of the mental faculty or one of the bodily wits, in which case the editor tasks himself with thinking like a reader.<sup>103</sup> This act of putting himself in the place of the reader requires a modicum of empathy, but if we look at the other definition of "fantasye" in the MED, we find a higher devotion to empathy may be required. The MED also defines "fantasye" as "preference or liking as directed by caprice rather than reason." This definition, coupled with the words "please and pleasure" indicate a deeper level of empathy that the editor must achieve. He cannot believe the readers to be reasonable in their requirements of the edition, but must try to gauge what

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<sup>103</sup> "fantasie (n.)" *Middle English Dictionary*. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=53948127&egdisplay=compact&egs=53965063>. Accessed 12 April 2018.



might please them, what turn of phrase or delicately worded metaphor might delight them. The task of the editor, to try to discover authorial intent and balance that with the fickle, capricious “fantasye” of the reader, now seems an exercise in shedding his own (at least, literary) identity and clothing himself in the persona of others. The editor, then, becomes the substitution. Never able to completely be the distantly dead author, knowing precisely his intent, and unable to match exactly the caprices and quirks of the readers’ pleasures, the editor is the substitute responsible for this new creation: the edition. He labors not to recreate perfectly a work, but rather to create a text that captures the influence of author and reader both, and even himself, the imperfect substitute. And the edition that Braham leaves for us preserves his own hand in the composition, as well as his insistence on (and model of) the reader as a significant creative force at work in this work.

Braham’s epistle marks a point where Lydgate’s vision of active readership becomes realized. In the text and its material contexts, *Troy Book* has tempted readers to enter the privileged space of literary production with both pathos (appealing to their desire to help out a poor poet) and the promise of authority. Braham, in becoming a prudent, active reader, takes up the mantle of this invitation and through it, he provides a whole generation of readers with a new version of *Troy Book* while also repeating Lydgate’s appeal and promise to them. He enacts Lydgate’s “wille” that he “wynne[s],” while also willing his own readers to do the same; in doing this, he provides for the common profit of this literary community. This mode of active readership calls for continual progression and regeneration of the work, and *Troy Book* undergoes that process, in large and small ways, at the hands of its readers.

## CHAPTER TWO – Destructive Preservation through Reading in *Fall of Princes*

*Troy Book* invites readers into the privileged space of literary production. The work and books containing it provide the readers with entryways, enticing them to enter and engage the literature and the author. This type of entry cannot go unmarked. The whole point of inviting readerly participation is to incite changes to the work. Lydgate asks his readers for their correction of his faults, after all, requiring them to mark their presence in the work. The purpose of this call to action is the improvement of the work; Lydgate eschews the supposed primacy of an authorial original in favor of a work that has undergone reading, reflection, and revision from a prudent public. The new version of the work, the one that has been improved (or interfered with), is one that, Lydgate hopes, will prove desirable, or, at least, more desirable than the version he claims to be faulty. Thus, this model of engaged reading leaves marks. Readers must leave evidence of their involvement with the work, whether that is a “corrected” final -e, the addition or redaction of material, or simply underlining a passage that appears particularly instructive.<sup>104</sup>

In many cases, these marks of involvement can be classified as destructive. On a basic level, any alteration to the work would necessarily destroy it; the “original” state decays with each readerly modification. Other incursions seem more clearly destructive, eliminating parts of the work entirely. This destructive action certainly does destroy, but it also preserves. The reader who changes the meter or removes an offending passage makes the work acceptable, if only to himself. It saves the work, protecting it against total destruction (or, at least, a fall out of favor

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<sup>104</sup> Many modern editors consider changing the final -e so as to make clearer metrical sense. For editorial discussions, see Bergen’s edition of *Troy Book* (x), Edwards’ edition of *Troy Book* (16), and for a lengthier consideration of the final -e, see Bergen’s introduction to his edition of *Fall of Princes* for the Early English Text Society. (xxx-xlvi).

and into disrepute and disregard) through smaller, sometimes violent alterations. *Troy Book*, as a prestigious work contained in (mostly) ostentatious manuscripts, retains relatively few marks of readerly incursion into its privileged spaces. Morgan MS M 876 provided the most evidence for reader engagement, and that because the book's impressive façade already had cracks which readers could widen and then enter. For greater proof that Lydgate's readers actually answered his call to action and gained the authority to destroy (and preserve) his work, one has to look to a poem that more directly incites violence: *Fall of Princes*. This chapter examines the various modes of destruction operating within *Fall of Princes* and evident in the books containing it. Every level of the work undergoes destruction. The stories that make up the work are rife with examples of the destruction of men and women at the hands of Fortune. The books containing *Fall of Princes* often illustrate those destructions with violent images. Readers continually correct, redact, and alter portions of the work, destroying its previous state and replacing it with a new one. Lydgate himself incites all of this destruction; he knows that each act is intended to preserve something greater than that which was destroyed, whether that is the book, the work, or the reader. This chapter charts the power of destruction within literary creation and demonstrates how Lydgate uses *Fall of Princes* to allow readers to harness that power.

To help illuminate the idea of destructive preservation in literary creation, I turn first to a metaphor Lydgate uses to describe the process of translation. He likens it to potters who break old vessels and reuse the resultant fragments in the creation of new pots. This description of the potter's recycling process recognizes the importance of mixing old with new. The older pieces of pottery are added to new material to strengthen the whole; when applied to literary creation, this process becomes crucial to the survival of the work through time, and, in the case of *Fall of Princes*, has the capacity to preserve or protect the readers of that work. To demonstrate that

capacity, I look to one of *Fall's* many stories of ill fortune, the account of Saul, who forgets his humble beginnings, which leads to his fall. I couple my examination of Lydgate's lines on Saul with an analysis of a woodcut image that accompanies the story in the 1527 edition of the work. When read together, word and image warn the reader against the dangers of forgetfulness and provide readers with the preventative measure of using literature as memory. As memorial literature, *Fall of Princes* has a particular advantage: violence. The violence depicted by the work leaves a more lasting imprint on its readers, especially when accompanied by violent images. To understand the impact of this violence, I examine British Library Harley MS 1766, a particularly image-rich manuscript of *Fall*. Several of the stories gain a greater level of violence, and therefore of overall impact, with the addition of illustrations. As a method for preserving readers, several stories and their miniatures in this manuscript appear quite adept. The intention here is that readers will witness the destructions depicted by word and image and preserve themselves by internalizing those destructions.

After examining the potential impact of the violence in *Fall of Princes*, both in text and image, I seek evidence of readers responding to this violence, showing signs that they have heeded its message and are using the work and/or its books as a form of memorial inoculation against Fortune. I find and examine types of readerly responses throughout several manuscripts and printed books of *Fall*, ranging from the more usual kinds of notational marginalia to violent redactions, from the inclusion of systematic navigational aids to more weighty additions to the text. This chapter demonstrates the effectiveness as violence and destruction when used as a call for active, engaged readers and it finds these readers often engaged in a form of violence themselves when entering, correcting, and ultimately preserving the work. In Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, his invitation to readers resulted in a destructive preservation.

Despite its weightiness, Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* manages to strike a delicate balance between preservation and destruction. In this 35,000+ line behemoth, Lydgate seeks to translate Giovanni Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, a dream vision in which famous but fallen, ill-fated men and women come to Boccaccio and tell him the stories of their misfortune, beginning with the story Adam and Eve, and progressing (roughly chronologically) through a series of ancient nobles, princes, and famous figures, ending with an account of King John.<sup>105</sup> Lydgate did not translate Boccaccio's work directly from Latin to English, and instead he referred to Laurence de Premierfait's French translation. In addition, Lydgate included envoys that summarized and moralized each episode, and added to, amplified, and emended the stories where he saw fit. His translation is a preservation of Boccaccio's work, rendering it in English, making it readable and relevant to a whole new group of readers, thereby ensuring its continued existence. On the other hand, Lydgate's *Fall* necessarily engages in destruction, as all translations must. The original language falls away and a new (specifically English) set of idioms, metrical patterns, rhymes, and metaphors rises up to replace it. Lydgate's actions outside the strictly circumscribed role of translator also invoke destruction; wherever he adds or amplifies, eliminates or critiques, the work undergoes an alteration that chips away at its original state. This state of destructive preservation comes to signify the whole meaning of this work. At its core, in its texts and contexts, *Fall* embodies the idea of destructive preservation in literature.

Nigel Mortimer's comprehensive study of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* is indicative of a common irony in Lydgate scholarship. Mortimer states that he is driven by a desire to rectify Lydgate's and *Fall's* poor reputation, but the book seems to be crippled by the very history from which it attempts to disassociate. Mortimer provides historical contextualizations for the poem,

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<sup>105</sup> For a complete list of the contents, see Bergen's introduction, pages xxiv-xxvii.

along with detailed examinations of its sources; he locates his motivation in writing this book in not only the lack of scholarly attention on *Fall*, but also “a desire to offer a reconsideration ...that would counteract the damaging tradition that sees its author as a talentless drudge” (1).<sup>106</sup> In the face of such a long and enthusiastic tradition of neglect, Mortimer spends much time making up for past critical wrongs by shining a bright light of scholarly attention on the poem. While attention certainly provides the first step to rectifying the poem’s reputation, it can be, and in this case is, an overwhelming task to accomplish; in the face of so much that simply needs to be detailed and catalogued, the real engagement with the work can dissipate. Mortimer suffers from the burden of a critical history of Lydgate which, overwhelmingly, was negative, and then could only find value in Lydgate through a particular historical lens.<sup>107</sup> When examined without the Lancastrian lens, *Fall*’s instructive rhetoric takes readerly intervention into literary creation to a higher level. If the manuscript and print history of *Fall* are taken into account, and the Lancastrian origins seen as part of the entire story of the work instead of the sole moment of interest, the reader’s role as forceful, and sometimes destructive, literary agent emerges. In such a context, *Fall*’s role as literary memory becomes evident as well. Ironically, it is once we separate from the (dominant) historicizations that we can more easily see how *Fall* exists within literary history.

In his introduction to the Early English Text Society edition of John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, Henry Bergen describes the work as “a collection gathered throughout the centuries

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<sup>106</sup> Mortimer, Nigel. *John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes: Narrative Tragedy in its Literary and Political Contexts*. Oxford UP, 2005.

<sup>107</sup> For a recent example of several studies of *Fall* in a Lancastrian context, see the chapters in Scanlon and Simpson’s collected edition. Scanlon, Larry and James Simpson, editors. *John Lydgate: Poetry Culture, and Lancastrian England*. U of Notre Dame P, 2006.

describing the most memorable and crushing blows dealt by fate” (x-xi).<sup>108</sup> Given that Bergen talks about Giovanni Boccaccio’s and Laurent de Premierfait’s versions as often as he discusses Lydgate’s, this statement about the work holds more truth than is immediately apparent. Though Bergen appears to be attempting a generic categorization of the work (he calls it a “history of Fortune”), his designation of this as a “collection gathered throughout the centuries” is more of a statement of procedure (x). Yes, this is a history, and it continues to be presented as such in the many editions, translations, and printings that follow into subsequent centuries. But it is a collection. Not simply a collection of stories about princes with bad luck, but the culmination of a collective effort. As I said before, Bergen spends much of his time in this introduction discussing (and praising) Boccaccio. This may be viewed as simply de rigueur background on the author whom Lydgate is translating, but it is indicative of the complexity behind the collection. Boccaccio’s *De Casibus* is translated into English, French, and Spanish. And with each translation comes additions, amplifications, modifications, even critiques and commentaries. Each work in the *De Casibus* tradition, Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* not excepted, is a collection of the work, effort, thoughts, and influences of others.

These collections, this system of literary creation as aggregation, works to preserve those who participate in it. Readers bear witness to the victims of Fortune who have come before them, using those stories to inform their own decisions, and relying upon others to bear witness to their own falls, in the event that Fortune targets them. It falls in line with the notions of prudence and common profit that we have witnessed in *Troy Book*; the system works to instruct readers in lessons of prudence, which, if followed, allow for a common profit, not simply of individual readers, but of the the entire system, including writers, sources, and even those whose

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<sup>108</sup> Bergen, Henry. “Introductory Note.” *Lydgate’s Fall of Princes*, Edited by Henry Bergen, vol 1. Early English Text Society, 1967. 4 vols.

falls inspired the stories. Lydgate cites this motivation for the work, and for his explanatory envoys (as he was directed to write them by his patron, Humfrey Duke of Gloucester), saying “Bi others fallyng [thei myth] themsilff correcte” (Book 2, l. 154).<sup>109</sup> The result is an accretion of material. Lydgate translates the stories and adds envoys to them so that readers might better understand the messages they convey. These stories and envoys inform readers who add to or augment the work to better inform future audiences. Each step in the process occurs with the intent of more fully preserving others against the violence and tragedy of Fortune. At each phase, the work changes to become better equipped to accomplish this goal. Lydgate constructs *Fall of Princes* specifically to accommodate this practice. He explains this in the opening lines of the poem saying:

Artificeres hauyng exercise  
 May change and turne bi good discrecioun  
 Shappis, formys, and newly hem deuyse,  
 Make and vnmake in many sondry wyse,  
 As potteres, which to that craft entende,  
 Breke and renew ther vesselis to a-mende. (Book 1, ll.9-14)

In this metaphor potters shatter old vessels in order to remake them; it provides a violent image with which to compare literary creation. The vessels being fragmented into a rawer state are presumably either broken, in some other way unusable, or less valuable as whole pieces than as parts. In each case, the original vessel no longer functions effectively in its environment. It must be broken in order to become renewed, a vessel that works. Medieval potteries would have kept piles of shards of both fired and un-fired clay to use in the creation of new pots. These pieces

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<sup>109</sup> All references to the text of *Fall of Princes*, unless otherwise noted, is taken from the EETS edition. Lydgate, John. *Fall of Princes*. Edited by Henry Bergen, Oxford UP, 1924.



would have been fired (if not already) and ground down so as to be added to clay; this filler or “grog” increases the workability and reduces shrinkage and cracks during firing.<sup>110</sup> Given the historical importance of clay shards, the metaphor not only conveys violence, but also efficiency and resourcefulness. The poet who resembles a potter does not preserve the work in its current state at all costs, but rather finds ways to make it better, to reuse broken pieces to improve the work. This breaking renews. Through destruction, the work is preserved.

The vessels being broken, in the case of *Fall of Princes*, are the stories of those who have suffered, and those victims of Fortune. In falling, these people have become broken, like the potters’ vessels, incapable of performing their originally intended function. Saul, for example, can no longer rule Israel effectively, as God intended for him, but his current state of prideful disobedience (and its resulting fall) can strengthen *Fall of Princes*; Saul’s story can instruct those who read it, warning them against pride, and in the context of other such stories, it gains credence and power. When several of these damaged men’s stories come together, it increases their strength, their ability to influence the lives of others. Here again we see the lesson of prudence advancing not only those that read and internalize that lesson, but others as well. The vessel, in this case *Fall of Princes*, and the pieces that have made it up both benefit from the process of unmaking and making, of damage and repair, that creates and recreates the work.

The above lines contain a recurrence of the repetitive phrasing at work in *Troy Book*. Like “newe and newe” and “remembre ageyn,” Lydgate says poets will “make and vnmake” and “breke and renew.” The phrases progress from destruction to preservation. The first phrase ends with “vnmake,” leaving the lines of poetry unmade, indicating a state of rawness. The work has

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<sup>110</sup> Kim Dickey, professor of ceramics at the University of Colorado Boulder, explained to me via email the method by which old pieces of pottery might be used in the construction of new pots. Dickey, Kim. “Re: Question about pottery production.” Received by Alaina Bupp, 30 Oct. 2013.

been taken down to its component parts. But in the second phrase, Lydgate leaves us with vessels which are renewed. The rawness is gone because the works are made again, and in that making, that creating of new out of old, the works gain strength.

The image of broken shards of pottery may also have an oblique reference to the Bible. In Job 2.7-8 God allows Satan to test Job by covering him with boils. Presumably to ease his pain, Job finds a potsherd or shard of pottery and scrapes himself with it. The Latin Vulgate says, “qui testa saniem deradebat sedens in sterquilinio [and he took a potsherd and scraped the corrupt matter, sitting on a dunghill]” (Job 2.8). So we have a picture of a horribly afflicted Job sitting on a pile of manure (“sterquilinio”), scraping the boils off of his skin.<sup>111</sup> This may not seem to fit well with the image of potters breaking their vessels and then using the fragments to remake them, let alone poets re-inventing old works, but Job’s story is one of destructive preservation. God allows Satan to test Job by taking away his property, his children, and finally his health. Job’s lowest point occurs on that pile of manure where he scrapes away at his skin. Though he does not use the scraped pieces literally to remake himself, the process of scraping signifies his reduction to his most essential self. It’s only after this that God ultimately restores that which Job lost, in greater quantity than before. The book of Job ends with an account of Job’s numerous children, his beautiful daughters, and the generations of his offspring that came after him. Job’s destruction, and his strength under duress, became the source of his restoration and preservation.

The particular manner of Job’s self-destruction may matter here. He scrapes off (deraderbat) his boils with a shard of pottery. The scraping is presumably undertaken in order to remove the boils from his skin. This seems to be a particularly unpleasant treatment for his affliction. Not only is Job sitting in a malodorous pile of manure, but he uses a sharp instrument

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<sup>111</sup> “sterquilinium n.” Simpson, D. P. *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, Macmillan, 1968, p. 570.

to scratch and rip his already painful skin away from his body. These skin scrapings fall on top of the manure, adding to the repulsive heap. Out of this foul pile of excrement, Job begins the path to his recovery. The scraping of his skin, this rough, painful process of removing the imperfections that had risen up on him, recalls the process of parchment making. In her introduction to *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* Carolyn Dinshaw identifies the action of scraping as something that connects human and literary bodies: "Literary production takes place on bodies – on the animal skin made into pages, on cursed scribes' scalps – and the rubbing and scraping that must be done to both suggests a figurative identification here between the human body and the manuscript page, the text" (4).<sup>112</sup> Dinshaw references the short poem *Chaucer's words to Adam, his own Scriveyn*, in which Chaucer describes Adam's forehead as being covered in "scalle," or a scabby, itchy skin disease, necessitating scraping similar to that required when Adam made mistakes in his transcribing of Chaucer's verse. Job's boils, animal skins being prepared as parchment, Adam's itchy head, and the mistake strewn pages of parchment all require scraping. The action renders them ready for the application of new or improved material. Ultimately, literature of the middle ages is only possible through the large-scale destruction of living beings. It is, quite literally, inscribed on their scraped skins.

Lydgate recognizes the benefits of scraping a surface clean to prepare it for new material. He alludes to the process with the potters metaphor in *Fall of Princes*, but directly references it in *Troy Book*. Just before the end of the last book, Lydgate again directs his reader to correct any mistakes or faults within.

To hym I make a direccioun

Of this boke to han inspeccioun

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<sup>112</sup> Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. U of Wisconsin P, 1989.

Besechyng hem with her prudent loke  
 To race and skrape thoroughoute al my boke  
 Voide and adde wher hem semeth nede (Book 5, ll. 3535-3539).

Lydgate's intentions could not be clearer. He asks his readers to prudently inspect the book, and then to "race and skrape" it where "hem semeth nede." Literally, readers must physically erase the mistakes, scrape any offending words or passages off the page, and add in their corrections.<sup>113</sup> This process requires the physical destruction of the book (or, at least, the book's previous state) in order to recreate it. Like Job's skin, the broken ceramic vessels, and Adam Scriveyn's plagued forehead, the book's page must submit to painful, destructive scraping to make way for improvements to the whole. The scraped and corrected book would appear to present a clean façade, one which holds no evidence of its past errors. If examined closely, however, the traces of its previous faulty state can be discerned. It becomes a (partial) palimpsest; the effaced words may no longer be represented in ink, but the furrow created by the pen, the embossing, remains in the surface of the parchment.<sup>114</sup> If Lydgate's readers were to scrape the ink from the page and fill the void with a corrected word or line, they will most probably create a layering of faults and corrections, old and new. They add to the ceramic vessel, further breaking and mending in order to create a stronger whole.

And that is indeed Lydgate's goal with his contribution to the *de casibus* tradition. In *Fall of Princes*, he strives for a collected work and his efforts can be characterized as a gathering (as Bergen puts it). Lydgate certainly uses Boccaccio for his main source. But he goes beyond Boccaccio's text, picking up ideas from other sources and binding them together with his own

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<sup>113</sup> Medieval parchment and ink was such that the ink did not soak into the page, the way it does with modern paper. Scraping off the ink was a viable method of removing any text, image, or errant drops.

<sup>114</sup> The original text of palimpsests is often more discernable under special lighting conditions, such as UV.

thoughts about the *de casibus* and its author. Successive authors continued this tradition of gathering parts and pieces together to form their own versions of the text. Later English contributors to the work used Lydgate's *Fall* and added pertinent or timely stories to their compilations; for example, a 1610 version contains the life of Elizabeth I. What's more, these later English additions are written by multiple authors. The work really becomes a gathering, created over the centuries.

This gathering type of literary production has led to criticisms that Lydgate chose quantity over quality in *Fall*. Bergen exemplifies this position saying, "Had he written less, [he] might have been an artist" (xvii).<sup>115</sup> But Lydgate's purpose in translating and amplifying Boccaccio's *De Casibus* is not artistry. It is preservation – the preservation of tragic stories of fallen men, and, through that, the preservation of his readers' fortunes. Lydgate's monumental work records the stories of nearly every unfortunate person of note from Adam to King John in an attempt to warn, instruct, heal, and finally console the reader against the destructive forces of Fortune. Now, this reading may seem simplistic and surface level; what other purpose could a book called "Fall of Princes" have, but to record said falls and act as cautionary tales to future princes? And, indeed, it could be argued, given Lydgate's position as a court poet, one often engaged in Lancastrian promotion (or propaganda), that many of Lydgate's works are mirrors for princes. His *Troy Book*, for example, certainly carries its fair share of tragic examples of how not to rule or how best to avoid tempting fortune. But *Fall of Princes* takes the exemplar form to a higher level. In his work on the medieval exemplar form, Larry Scanlon puts forth a

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<sup>115</sup> Larry Scanlon connects the textuality of translation and Lydgate's use of *translatio* in defining authority in *Fall* as the thing that "produces the encyclopedic didacticism so offensive to modern sensibility" (327). Scanlon observes here that the amplifications Lydgate employs are a deliberate means of creating authority through the act of translation. Scanlon, Larry. *Narrative, Authority, and Power: the medieval exemplum and the Chaucerian tradition*. Cambridge UP, 1994.

performative model of exemplarity, one in which “the exemplary author is one who gives moral virtue textual form; that is, who changes moral action into a moral text as a way of repeating it. The exemplary person [or reader] is one who performs the actions mandated by a moral text; that is, who changes text into action as a way of repeating it” (327). *Fall* certainly is an exemplar which fosters these changes of action into text and text into action. Its form, that of a collection, or one-volume library recording examples of Fortune’s victims, specifically enhances its exemplarity.

It is appropriate that Lydgate would shape this work to recall a library. As a monk at Bury St. Edmunds, he would have had access to one of the largest libraries in England at the time, containing over two thousand volumes.<sup>116</sup> In discussing English monastic libraries, David Knowles characterizes their development and growth as “haphazard” and dependent upon the various acquisitions undertaken by individual abbots or monks for multitudinous reasons, both personal and for the benefit of the community. Knowles says, “consequently, the monastic library, even the greatest, had something of the appearance of a heap even though the nucleus was an ordered whole; at the best, it was the sum of many collections, great and small, rather than a planned, articulated unit” (332).<sup>117</sup> This description seems particularly apt when considering Lydgate and *Fall*. The heap Knowles uses as a metaphor for the monastic library recalls the heap of pottery shards, waiting to be reclaimed and used in new pots, or the heap of dung and skin scrapings from which Job emerged with his fortunes renewed. The monastic library, with its haphazard collections based on personal tastes and public needs, would present a heap-like configuration; the works within awaited a new craftsman to find the pieces that would

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<sup>116</sup> For a description and brief history of the library at Bury, see Summit, (2008) 20-29.

<sup>117</sup> Knowles, David. *The Religious Orders in England*. vol. 2, Cambridge UP, 1955.

best coalesce into a new, meaningful whole. Lydgate was just such a craftsman. *Fall* became just such a meaningful whole.

The library at Bury was not only one of the largest, but it was also one of the most cutting-edge monastic libraries. While Lydgate was there, the abbot, William Curteys, reorganized the collection, moving it from disparate, scattered locations across the buildings, to a central, single location; this allowed for multiple volumes to be accessed simultaneously and for information between and across volumes to be collated. This huge reorganization directly followed a major cataloguing effort and alphabetization by last name as well as grouping by category.<sup>118</sup> This restructuring marks a shift in monastic library organization towards ease of use that encourages a more complex engagement with sources. A translator and compiler using this library would have found his task much easier and his ability to reference, collate, and synthesize multiple sources much greater. This particular context not only lessens Lydgate's burden in creating *Fall*, but also influences him to replicate an ease of use in his work.

The library at Bury was not the only one that influenced Lydgate's construction of *Fall of Princes*. His patron, Humfrey Duke of Gloucester, had a noteworthy personal library which Lydgate accessed while working on *Fall*. Humfrey's library contained a significant holding of Italian humanist works and, through a donation, formed the initial collection of the University of Oxford's library.<sup>119</sup> Summit explores the significance of this collection to Lydgate's work, saying "Humfrey's library was a place of active literary production, which fostered not just the writing of new books such as *The Fall of Princes* but new ways of reading the old books that Humfrey collected" (49). The similarities between Summit's description of Humphrey's library

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<sup>118</sup> See Summit, 21.

<sup>119</sup> See Summit, 29.

and Lydgate's *Fall* are striking. Both are sites of active literary production; both encourage readers not simply to read the work in front of them, but reconsider what it means to read, and to read actively. Humfrey's library and Lydgate's model of readerly participation in literary production are too similar to deny an influence between the two. And *Fall*, as a work that encourages and witnesses this active readerly participation, would of course mimic the libraries of Lydgate's experiences, inciting and inviting its readers in many of the same ways the libraries did.

No wonder, then, that *Fall of Princes* becomes something of a one-book library for tragic misfortunes. The stories, though all on the same theme and bound by the frame narrative of Boccaccio dreaming, are separate, short entities that can be referenced at will by the reader. They form a whole, but do not lose their separateness in order to do so; as old shards of pottery that are used to create a new vessel, the individual pieces remain visible and identifiable within their new state. Because of this, readers need not read the whole work to get the message. Indeed, they need not even read the whole story; each one is followed by an envoy that sums up and provides the moral. Humfrey makes the formal suggestion to provide this helpful summation. The intent of the envoy is certainly to aid understanding as well as to make the work easier to quickly reference, but these two purposes seem to correlate to a more lasting, less tangible goal: the preservation of the reader against the harmful effects of Fortune. Lydgate says of Humfrey's instructions concerning the envoys, "This myhti prynce ... / Gaff me charge... / That I sholde in eueri tragedie / Afftir the processe made mencion / at the eende sette a remedie, / with a lenvoie conveied be resound / to noble pryncis lowly it directe, / bi others fallyng [thei myht] themsilff correcte" (Book 2, ll. 146-154). Having told the tragic tales, presumably translating them from his source, Lydgate will then create these "remedie[s]" so that princes can use them to correct



their own, dangerous or harmful actions. The word remedy here clearly indicates that it is not simply the story that can be used to ward off tragic misfortunes; the envoys themselves, the (relatively) concise summations with their clearly stated morals and lessons, offer a cure for tragedy. In this formulation, the envoy acts as sort of medicinal correction; by consuming it, the reader can avoid the “fallyng” that plagued the princes in the story. The ease of reference, the library-like quality of efficiency that the envoys provide, enables the reader to digest the medicine with ease.

The length and scope of *Fall*, however, makes this book vast nearly to the point of being unusable. If a reader were to sit down and try to read *Fall* from beginning to end while also attempting to make useful mirrors of each story, the task would undoubtedly overwhelm. The structure of the manuscript and printed books containing *Fall*, however, are designed specifically to deal with that; some books more thoroughly embraced this practice than others, but most include some sort of apparatus to aid navigation. A mid-fifteenth-century manuscript containing *Fall*, Morgan MS M 124, for example, includes running titles at the top of every page indicating the book number. This does not seem to be all that unusual a practice in manuscript production, but it would allow the reader to find a rough position within the text. In order to locate a particular passage or story, however, the reader would have to already be familiar enough with the organization of the entire work to know which stories were in which books.

For such a large and conglomerate work, tables of contents would be much more helpful to the uninitiated reader. Though tables of contents were not exactly common practice in later manuscript production, BL MS Harley 1766 contains what appears to be a table written at the time of the book’s creation; this table is quite extensive, so that the text of the prologue does not begin until folio 5r. The rarity of the practice of providing tables indicates how very necessary it

must have been deemed to be included here. Indeed, the necessity of some sort of navigation aid for the reader manifests in Rylands English MS 2, where a reader has inserted a table at the end of the book, and in the British Library's copy of Pynson's 1494 incunable edition, where attempts have been made to place a reader-constructed table at the end of Book I. In the case of the Rylands manuscript, the reader found the need for a navigation aid so pressing that he copied out the table for Books I and II over two full columns. The reader of the British Library's 1494 edition did not have the same amount of dedication to his task, but the intent was the same. By the time Pynson printed *Fall* again in 1527, a very full and complete table had been included. This inclusion was repeated in Tottel's 1554 edition. The practice of including an extensive table for the ease of the reader does not end in the sixteenth century. The EETS edition, first printed in 1924, includes a table that is fairly useless if the reader wishes to locate particular tales; its contents reference the books by number, not subject. Bergen must have been aware of this because at the end of his introduction he includes a table (albeit in paragraph form) that he describes as a "brief survey of the contents of the 'Fall of Princes' [in which] the references are to pages, and passages of special interest or charm are marked with asterisks." (vol. I, xxiv). Though Bergen's table's format, as in-line text rather than entries on separate lines, renders it less easily used than those found in the early print editions, its purpose remains the same: to allow the reader to jump from story to story, to read in the order and manner of his choosing. This evidence of all these aids points to the fact that *Fall's* text, on its own, lacked the apparatus necessary to make it easily readable and usable.

The inclusion of navigation aids, both by readers and book producers, also indicates that readers were engaging in a particular type of reading with *Fall*. Tables of contents, running titles, foliation/pagination, and even elements of formatting such as paragraph marks all allow the

reader to navigate the work and book in a manner other than straight through from beginning to end. With these aids, readers can skip certain passages, read stories out of order, and return to puzzling or beloved anecdotes over and over with varying degrees of ease based on the complexity and thoroughness of the aid. The structure of *Fall* as a series of stories that can, while connected on a broader level as cautionary tales, remain relatively independent of one another, suggests that this type of reading practice is not only possible, but preferable. Yes, the reader should probably read the whole work, but, he should also be free to return to the most pertinent or difficult lessons when the time called for it. The navigational aids found in the books of *Fall* complement and complete the intention of the work. They allow the reader to fully personalize his reading experience and make the book become the most useful tool for him.

The navigation aids make possible the transformation of a story into a mirror in the reader's mind. In this process, the reader does what Lydgate claims poets and potters do: they "Breke and renew ther vesselis to a-mende." Without the navigation aids, the work remains a single, large vessel, to be comprehended from beginning to end. Once the reader is provided the means to easily read stories non-sequentially, singly, and/or repeatedly, the large vessel can separate into smaller pieces which may then be used in the construction of a new, stronger piece. That construction occurs within the mind of the reader. He takes the components of the work that resonate to him, which he may have read several times over, and assembles them into a new whole. When Lydgate directs his readers to "makith off hem a merour," this is the active recreation of the text to which he refers, and it becomes much more conceivable a task with navigation aids.

As a library containing the ills of Fortune, *Fall of Princes* acts as record-keeper, or an imprint of the details of all the stories, so that the readers' minds can be freed up to interpret,

internalize, and adapt the events to act as remedies for themselves. The work serves as literary memory. It records, organizes, summarizes, and recapitulates the material so that the reader can use it more easily. It also reminds the reader to remember. It is only through the recall of the material in this literary memory that the reader can access the remedy to Fortune; forgetting the stories, forgetting those princes who have fallen before, can be disastrous, even deadly. Lydgate illustrates the repercussions of forgetting in his story of Saul. Saul, a low-born man, is raised up by God to become King of Israel. While Saul was humble and obedient to God's wishes, things went smoothly in his kingdom; but Saul began to disobey God, placing his own desires ahead of God's commands. When God showed favor to David, Saul became jealous and increasingly disobedient of God, angering him and provoking Fortune. Before his final battle, Saul sought help from a necromancer, who informed Saul that, because of his pride and defiance, he would die in the battle. After Saul's defeat, he begged his squire to kill him, so that he might avoid a torturous, shameful death at the hands of his enemies; the squire refused, so Saul planted his spear in the earth and ran the point through his heart. His enemies then dismembered and decapitated his corpse. Saul's story, through its horrific violence, provides the perfect exemplar for Lydgate's readers. It forcefully demonstrates the repercussions of pride and disobedience. As a cautionary tale, its high level of destruction (Saul's position, his life, his relationship with God, and even his body get destroyed) drives the message home quite clearly.

Although pride certainly plays a large part in Saul's downfall, that pride is born of forgetting. Saul forgets his previous lowly position, and thus does not thank God for raising him up from it. This lapse angers God and Fortune, who cast Saul back to his lowly position. Lydgate says that Saul "hadde forgetyn in his fantasie / To knowe the Lord & meekly sue his lawe" which causes "God from his [Saul's] crowne his [God's] grace [to] withdrawe" (Book 2, ll. 222-4).

Saul's "fantasie" does not simply cause him to forget the Lord or the Lord's law, but it makes him forget *to know* the Lord. This forgetfulness erases previous knowledge. The MED defines "fantasie" as a "mental faculty" or "bodily wit" such as imagination, but also gives more negative definitions, such as delusion or untruth.<sup>120</sup> Given that this "fantasie" causes Saul to forget who he was and what he had known, it seems as though the negative connotations apply here. The OED provides a similarly negative definition: "deluding oneself by imaginary perceptions."<sup>121</sup> Certainly Saul has done that; he managed to delude himself into believing that he alone was responsible for his rise in fortune, conveniently forgetting God's hand in it and thereby allowing himself to justify his defiance of God's orders. If God did not raise Saul up, then surely Saul owes him no loyalty. For this delusion to be at all believable, Saul has to erase not just God's actions, but God himself and any knowledge he had of Him. If Saul was to be reminded of God at all, he would be forced to remember that God held the responsibility for Saul's rise. So instead of confronting the truth, Saul indulges in forgetful fantasy. It seems harmless enough, but his lack of memory invokes God's (and Fortune's) wrath.

In the next stanza Lydgate amplifies the forgetfulness of Saul, saying "Thonkynde werm off foryetyllesse / In his [Saul's] herte hadde myned thourgh the wall / Whan he to God, for his kyndnesse / Gaff no laude nor no thank atall" (Book 2, ll. 225-7). This little poetic metaphor makes the act of forgetting even more sinister. This semi-allegorical worm evokes Satan in the form of the snake, tempting Eve, but here the temptation is to forget – forget one's duties, forget one's painful or humble past, forget the knowledge that certain tasks are obligatory, rather than

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<sup>120</sup> "fantasie (n.)" *Middle English Dictionary*. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=53948127&egdisplay=compact&egs=53965063>. Accessed 12 April 2018.

<sup>121</sup> "fantasy | phantasy, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/68119](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68119). Accessed 12 April 2018.

optional. Giving in to the worm of forgetfulness sounds tempting; he offers a blissful existence in the present. But, as Lydgate says, the worm is “onkynde” and that alluring offer is empty. For Saul, the result of conceding to the worm is ruin. He is reminded constantly of what he forgot because God strips him of his crown and forces him to return to his previous (and previously forgotten) position.

In the woodcut of Saul from Richard Pynson’s 1527 edition of *Fall of Princes*, the central area is occupied by King Saul astride a horse; he’s wearing armor and surrounded by soldiers on foot, all of whom are looking up at him (see Figure 12).<sup>122</sup> In the background a castle and tents are visible. Clearly this depicts Saul at the height of his glory, admired by all, the most powerful man in the image and around whom all action centers. But we are also treated to the fallen image of Saul. In the lower right corner, the same man who sits on the horse falls over onto his sword, his scabbard empty. This man has fallen so far that his crown has slipped from his head, his hands appearing to reach for it.<sup>123</sup> This Saul’s eyes are fixed on his crown. In his last moments, he looks only at the representation of what he achieved and lost; his determination to see nothing but his crown can be read as an embodiment of his fatal short-sightedness. He chooses to see nothing but the dazzling beauty of his crown. In allowing his crown, his high position and great power, to occupy his vision, he forgets what preceded it. The fortunate Saul suffers the same short-sightedness, unable to see himself, stripped of crown and impaled on his own sword,

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<sup>122</sup> The edition I examined was New York Public Library Spencer Collection Eng. 1527, STC 3176. Pynson’s edition held by the Spencer Collection has several worm holes. Note that this woodcut is the same one used by Richard Tottel for his 1554 edition, which shall be discussed later.

<sup>123</sup> The three earliest print editions of *Fall*, printed in 1494 and 1527 by Richard Pynson and 1554 by Richard Tottel all contain woodcut images that illustrate certain stories. The 1527 and 1554 editions use the same woodcuts, but that set and the one used in 1494 both illustrate Saul’s story. The content and manner of depiction are quite similar, though the arrangement is reversed (so where the fallen Saul is on the left in the 1494 image, he’s on the right in 1527). Other key details differ: in 1494, Saul retains his crown while dying, though he extends beyond the frame; in the newer woodcut, Saul loses his crown but stays within his frame. In his description of the print editions, Bergen calls the 1527 woodcuts “inferior copies in reverse” of the 1494 illustrations (vol. 4, p. 116). Though the inferiority of the images may be debatable, that they are copies of the earlier ones seems certain.

though he is right in front of him. Fallen Saul occupies his previous lowly position, and if the fortunate Saul could only remember to look at the place he had vacated, he could see himself, his past and his future, cast down by God and Fortune – and his own forgetfulness.

The worm of forgetfulness is certainly unkind or unfavorable, but he also appears to be unnatural. Lydgate describes the action of the worm, saying, “In his [Saul’s] herte hadde myned thorough the wall” (Book 2, l.226). He infiltrates Saul’s heart, mining through its wall, and it is there that the worm is able to begin the destructive campaign of erasing Saul’s knowledge. The action Lydgate ascribes to the worm is invasive and harmful. It conjures images of parasites feasting on a host or maggots infesting flesh, an unhealthy body. The phrase also suggests that the seemingly lowly worm has great power to breach a heart and great determination to mine through its walls, a task that sounds relentless, time-consuming, and exhaustive. Both the act of penetration itself and the apparent inability of such a diminutive creature to perform such an arduous task seem unnatural. By designating the heart as the seat of memory, Lydgate ties memory to life. To forget, to let the worm of forgetfulness into the heart, is to die. The importance of Lydgate’s directive to guard vociferously against forgetting becomes clear. We must remember to preserve ourselves, our lives, and, if possible, our fortunes. *Fall* attempts to help us do that by demonstrating the dangerous destruction inherent in forgetting. Here destructive preservation takes on a meaning that starts within the work and extends beyond it. Destruction occurs within the work, to those unfortunate souls like Saul, and acts as a preservative to those who would read and understand it.

The entirety of *Fall of Princes* serves this purpose. Bergen says that the stories contained within the work are some of the “most memorable” (x) of their kind; we are treated to every easily recognizable name from Adam to King John. Their stories are part of the fabric of English

literary history and known by everyone from royalty to peasants. So, why bother repeating them? Lydgate gives us the answer. They are an inoculation against the worm of forgetfulness. Yes, we know the story of Saul, but repeating it actively stimulates the heart of our memory, strengthening the walls by providing us with the opportunity to see how we can benefit from his tale. Internalizing Saul's misfortune, bringing it inside the walls of our hearts, makes us better able to repel the worm. And each new contributor to the work, over the centuries, adds more tales that are better equipped to speak to a new population of readers. Here we see how Lydgate creates not only a readership, but more importantly, an authorship with this text. Readers becomes authors of the additions to the work, but they also author themselves and their actions with reference to the inoculating stories they read.

The most memorable stories, the ones that best depict the nature of destruction and hence are most likely to incite a preservative reaction from readers, are the ones that contain the most visceral depictions of violence. The stories themselves are quite violent, but bookmakers took the opportunity to enhance the violence by depicting it visually as well as textually.<sup>124</sup> British Library Harley MS 1766 provides an example of how word and image combine to provide readers with a greater tool for remembrance.<sup>125</sup> Bergen notes in the EETS edition's description of the manuscripts of *Fall* that Harley 1766 is abridged: it contains only about three-fifths of the

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<sup>124</sup> A. S. G. Edwards notes in his description of the fragment of *Fall* held by McGill University that there are only six extant manuscripts which contain miniatures illustrating the poem: MS McGill 143, Harley 1766, Bodley 263, Rosenbach 439/16, Huntington HM 268, and Sloane 2452. Bergen notes that there were 30 total manuscripts of *Fall* known to him when he edited the work in 1927 (vol. 4, p. 1). Later work by Edwards (1983) adds 7 to that number, bringing the total to 37. That means only around 16% of the extant manuscripts of *Fall* have miniatures. Edwards, A. S. G. "The McGill Fragment of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*." *Scriptorium*, vol. 28 no. 1, 1974, pp. 75-77. ---. "Lydgate Manuscripts: Some Directions for Further Research." *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England*, edited by Derek Pearsall, D. S. Brewer, 1983, pp. 15-26. 15.

<sup>125</sup> In *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts of the British Museum*, Harley 1766 is noted as "more than ordinarily remarkable for the Pictures painted therein, in order to illustrate the whole work" (vol. II, 209). For descriptions of this manuscript, see Scott 302-304, Bergen's intro. British Museum, Department of Manuscripts. *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts of the British Museum*. G. Eyre and A. Strahan, 1808-12.



entire work.<sup>126</sup> Despite the reduction of the text, this manuscript's 266 presumably original parchment leaves contains a remarkable 157 miniatures which illustrate the stories included in *Fall*.<sup>127</sup> While I examined this manuscript for the first time, I was struck by the extreme violence of these images. Yes, the stories in *Fall* are violent, but reading the textual depiction of that violence garners a far less immediate response than seeing that violence depicted visually, graphically, on nearly every other page of the book. The frequency and extremity of the violence intrigued me, and so I created a spreadsheet to chart the incidences of violence and non-violence in each miniature, as well as to categorize the violence. The more miniatures I examined and charted, the more I came to realize the extent and variety of the violence. Violence is committed by more than just other people; animals, nature, and the self all incur destruction. This all-inclusive approach to the perpetrators of violence makes the possibility of devastation even more pervasive. The images warn even the casual peruser of the book that violence can occur at the hands of anyone or anything, and turns even oneself into a potential threat.

This pervasive sense of impending violence shows itself in the timing of the images. Miniatures depict violence at all points of the act, before the violence occurs, during the act, and afterwards. While the images of violence occurring and its aftermath are certainly graphic and impactful, those that show victims in the moments just prior to their destruction seem even more disturbing. Folio 90v provides two miniatures that demonstrate two stages of violence (see Figure 13). In the lines and folios preceding 90v, Lydgate recounts the tale of Canace, daughter

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<sup>126</sup> Bergen, vol. IV, p. 30. Edwards (1974) also notes that this version has 8, rather than 9 books, but also contains material found in no other manuscripts, as well as variable arrangement.

<sup>127</sup> The manuscript contains 8 paper fly-leaves that were most likely added later. These numbers come from my own counting of the miniatures and is confirmed by Bergen's account of them in the EETS edition, vol. IV, pp. 38-46, in Kathleen Scott's catalogue entry (302), as well as the British Library catalogue description. Edwards (1983) suggests that the abridged text and extensive decoration could be a deliberate result of a desire to abridge the text and contain it in a de luxe manuscript for a patron. He postulates that the abridgement is Lydgate's rather than a scribe's (18).

of Eolus (or Aeolus) and condemned to death by him for carrying on an incestuous relationship with her brother Machaire (or Macareus). In this account, Canace becomes pregnant and bears a child by her brother which leads to Eolus' discovery of the relationship. He becomes enraged and demands the deaths of Canace and Machaire, but Machaire manages to flee. Canace and her child are left behind to bear the brunt of Eolus' rage. Eolus delivers a sword to Canace "in tokne off deth for a remembraunce" so that she might commit suicide (Book 1, l. 6869). Lydgate then provides a letter from Canace to her brother/lover which laments her and her child's deaths, decries her father's rage, and begs for remembrance.

Folio 90v of Harley 1766 contains the concluding text of Canace's letter accompanied two images of Canace and her baby. In the upper image, Canace holds a sword in her left hand and a pen in her right while her baby rests in her lap; this depicts the moments directly before the violent act occurs. In the bottom image, the sword now pierces Canace's chest while blood pours from the wound; the baby is being eaten by dogs. Though Canace does not still grasp the sword, I classified this image as depicting the act itself; she and her child both bleed and the instruments of their death remain in their destructive positions. While the second image impresses itself on the mind of the viewer and insists that he remember the violence Canace and her child suffer, the first image amplifies the violence of the second through contrast. Though, according to the text, in the first image Canace must already be aware of her fate – she holds a pen, presumably because she is about to, is in the process of, or has just finished writing the letter to her brother and lover in which she details their father's anger and judgement of death over their incestuous relationship – the image is peaceful. Canace's expression is neutral, if not almost happy, and her baby gazes adoringly into her face from the safety of its mother's lap. The contrast could not be greater between this last, loving moment between mother and child and the utter annihilation of

that relationship seen below. Mother and child have been ripped apart as Canace, no longer sitting peacefully but standing, her expression sorrowful, stabs herself and dogs tear apart the baby's now unprotected body. The present-day reader is almost thankful for the wear to the bottom right hand corner of the page that has resulted in paint flaking away from the image of the baby being eaten. The horrific details, and the baby's expression are obscured.<sup>128</sup>

Nevertheless, the contrast in these two images, made possible by the decision to render this story at two different points in its chronology, fully imprints the dreadful and pitiful violence of Canace's story upon the reader. The images and the disparity which they depict force the reader to consider how Canace must once have been happy, but how her father and Fortune intervened brutally into her life and viciously altered her story.

Canace's death is given an equal amount of visual space to that of her life. The purpose of the illustration, then, is surely to leave the reader with a clear memory of the violence of her death, presumably with the ultimate goal of warning the reader against unnecessary vengeance (and possibly incest).<sup>129</sup> The visual spacing does not, however, align with Lydgate's textual balance. Lydgate devotes 216 lines to Canace's tale (not including the Envoy, which also references the previous tale); in those lines, he spends a mere nine lines describing the death. He says,

the sharpe suerd she took

And roof hirsself euene to the herte.

Hir child fill down, which myth[e] nat asterte,

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<sup>128</sup> One has to wonder if this pronounced wear is the result of many hands turning to this particular page over the centuries in an attempt to seek out this story and its illustrations, or if the wear has simply happened because of the miniature's placement towards the bottom corner, a place that typically experiences extra handling.

<sup>129</sup> The Envoy for this section places the blame and warning on Eolus' shoulders, calling his judgement "to vengable" and warning against "hasti cruelte" (Book 1, ll.7058-7052). It does not specifically warn the reader not to commit incest, but the message could be implied given the content of the story and Canace's lamentations.

Hauyng non helpe to socoure hym nor saue,  
 But in hir blood the silff began to bathe.  
 And thane hir fader, most cruel off entent,  
 Bad that the child sholde anon be take,  
 Off cruel houndis in haste for to be rent  
 And be deuoured for his mooder sake. (Book 1, ll. 7031-8)

This is typical of Lydgate; he tends to adjust his pace, drawing out parts that seem to be prefatory and speeding up over the dramatic parts. This can be seen in Lydgate's description of the baby's death. He says that Eolus declares "that the childe sholde anon be take, / Off cruel houndis in haste for to be rent / And be deuoured for his mooder sake" (1.7036-8). This is arguably the most action in this scene, and by far the most remarkable. Yet Lydgate becomes rather abrupt here, depicting the action in a straightforward manner with little in the way of rhetorical flourishes. The hounds will rend the child "in haste" and apparently Lydgate's description will match their ravenous pace. Interestingly, Lydgate takes this description out of the direct past tense view point with which he described Canace's death ("the sharpe suerd she took / And roof hirselff euene to the herte") and removes it from the immediate view of the reader. This description of the baby's death is all conveyed as something Eolus bids be done. It is as though the thought of a baby being ripped apart and devoured by hounds is too much for Lydgate to describe from such a close view point; he cannot bear it and so removes it to merely an order given by Eolus. This allows for the possibility that the order was never carried out. The miniature directly to the left of these lines eradicates that possibility; the visual depiction makes the baby's death a certainty in the minds of the reader.

A similar thing happens with the textual and visual depictions of Canace's death. The textual account stands in contrast to the equilibrium struck by the dual illustrations of Canace. The text focuses on the lead up, the actions that precipitated the destruction. The letter's pathos works because it foreshadows the violence, asking Machaire to remember Canace and her baby and futilely cursing Eolus' wrath. Lydgate provides us with insight into Canace, giving us her voice, her feelings of love and sorrow, and her connection to her lover and her baby. All of this allows the reader to empathize with her. Lydgate spends more time creating this empathetic persona than he does killing her. The illustrations, however, strike an awful equilibrium, weighing her death and her life equally. This visual insistence upon violence pervades the manuscript. In her catalogue entry for this manuscript, Scott briefly departs from her in-depth detailing of the facts of the manuscript to comment on the violence found in Harley 1766:

The illustrations to the *Fall of Princes* – with their hangings, stabbings, maimings, drownings, suicides, dismemberings, and incests, with particular attention to the murder and disfigurement of women and children – must have made an impact on the medieval reader which much exceeds the more matter-of-fact accounts in the text. These pictures, like some modern films, apparently pursue morality through the depiction of explicit violence (304).

The images are, indeed, more violent and presumably more impactful than the text. The text and image are not separate, though. They work in tandem to create a greater overall moral impact.

This is evident in the textual/visual depiction of Canace. The text and illustrations appear to value depiction of Canace's death differently, but they actually work in concert to produce the greatest effect. Lydgate's words create a pitiable person for whom the reader can feel sympathy, and the image of Canace's death does not appear until the end of her story. In fact, the first line

of the stanza in which her death is described occurs directly at the break between the two images of Canace; it aligns with the top of the image depicting her death. In this way, the text and image converge, allowing the reader to experience Canace's death either textually or visually or both. The violence of the image follows upon the textual representation of a pitiable woman, and thus has a greater impact than it would either on its own or with a shorter textual description of Canace.

Though Canace's story is visually represented as occurring before and during the violent acts, the images in the manuscript also depict the aftermath of violence to similar effect. The miniature showing King Arthur's battle with the Romans (on folio 218r) depicts a moment after the violence has concluded (see Figure 14). In this miniature, the violence is clearly completed. Arthur's sword is at his side, not held aloft as though he prepares to strike, nor in the body of one of his victims. The "hethyn kynges," as the caption calls them, all lie dead on the ground, their blood covering the battlefield at Arthur's feet. Though this image shows the aftermath of violence rather than the act, it still manages to convey the vehemence of the violence. The text which is being illustrated comes across as tame compared to the image; it reads, "He [Arthur] slough that day of Sarsyns kynges fyue" (Book 3, l. 3024). These few words make up the entire textual representation of Arthur slaying these men, and it is a mild description at best. To see them heaped on the ground, blood soaking the earth and their bodies broken, lying as though they are discarded dolls, provides a much more vivid impression of the tenor of the battle and the extent of Arthur's fervor in killing them. This recalls the imbalance between text and image found in Canace's section; the image draws upon the slender textual description and brings the violence more clearly into the foreground.

In the next stanza Lydgate indicates why he does not go into more detail. “The grete slauhtre, theffusioun of blood / that was that day vpon outhere side, / Ech ageyn other so furious was & wood / [...] / That yiff I sholde theron longe abide / To write the deth, the slauhtre & the maneere / Touchyng the feeld wer tedious for to heere” (Book 3, ll. 3025-3031). Lydgate finds the task of describing the battle tedious. It would not be overwhelming because of the extent of the “deth [and] slauhtre,” or too horrific to recount, like the death of Canace’s child, but rather would be wearisome. One could posit that since Arthur was a great Christian and English king, his slaughter of heathens should not merit any censorious sentiments concerning the level of violence he used. Lydgate’s words seem to nod in that direction. Another extolling of Arthur’s great blows against barbarians would be redundant at this point. The image tells a slightly different story. The illustration of Arthur’s victims elicits a sense of pity for their lost humanity. They have been utterly destroyed by the king now peacefully contemplating their ruined bodies. The aftermath of the violence wrought upon them continues to echo across the image, extending to the reader, but not to the visage of a calmly resting Arthur. The details of this miniature correspond correctly with the text: Arthur has killed five kings. But the visual depiction of those details casts a more violent tone onto the story than that set forth by the text.

This is not an unusual occurrence in Harley 1766. The miniatures, sometimes simply by their visual nature, enlarge or enhance the violence. For example, the miniature on 135v depicts King Cyrus’ dismembered body being eaten by animals, specifically two dogs, a lion, a bear and an antelope.<sup>130</sup> The text which describes what happened to Cyrus’ body after his death simply says that “his enmyes [...] / Cast out his kareyn to beestis most sauage” (Book 1, ll. 3933-4). The

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<sup>130</sup> I defer to Bergen’s identification of these animals in his description of the manuscript (vol. IV, p. 44). While the dogs’ and bear’s identities were obvious to me, I had a more difficult time with the other animals. Clearly, though, the miniature depicts four different species of animal.

“beestis” are never explicitly described or identified beyond their savagery. The artist responsible for the miniature would have presumably found it easier to draw specific beasts, ones with which he would have been familiar, had drawn before, or had an exemplar from which to copy, than to try to create general “beestis most sauage.” Thus the image contains an array of animals feasting on Cyrus’ body. There is something almost grotesque about the variety of animals here; this is not a pack of wild dogs, as the ones who devoured Canace’s child, but a strange assortment of animals that would otherwise not congregate, all with the same purpose. How troubling indeed that an antelope and a lion, in most circumstances considered a typical example of prey and predator, would put aside their natures to flee and hunt and instead share a meal of human flesh. It brings an unnatural and particularly vicious tone to the image, and thus to the story. Cyrus’ crimes must have been incredibly grave to warrant such cruel atrocities be wrought upon him even after his death. Here we see that the nature of the visual demands a specificity that can be avoided in the text. And oftentimes, that specificity lends greater vehemence to the violence being depicted, allowing the images to bring a different degree of emphasis to the stories.

To what end were the numerous violent miniatures created? Yes, they illustrate the text, but we have seen how they enhance and expand the violence to which they refer. My survey of the images found that 51 of the 157 are non-violent; the rest depict violence in some state (before, during, or after the act), against people, and by either people, selves, animals, nature, or situations.<sup>131</sup> These numbers and categories show that this book is meant to impress violence upon its readers. Though other books of *Fall* also contain violent illustrations, none that I

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<sup>131</sup> I counted six miniatures depicting violence against animals; they mainly show a hero, such as Hercules, slaying some sort of dangerous animal, like a dragon or serpent. The last category I term “other” and an example would include people falling off horses; in these images violence befalls the subject, but not through any direct interaction with a being which is intending it. I counted five such images.



examined come even remotely close to the depth and breadth of violence exhibited in Harley 1766.<sup>132</sup> Perhaps those in charge of designing this book intended that the lessons to be learned in the stories would be more effectively internalized by readers if the accompanying images fully articulated the destructive repercussions suffered by the stories' subjects. Whether that was the intention or not, the book's visuality, like the navigation aids, reinforces its use as a tool for learning and remembering. After a reader sees Canace's baby being eaten by wild dogs, for example, it becomes easier to remember the story of her incestuous love. The destructive images, then, are not actually destructive. Their intent is to preserve the stories and lessons more completely in the minds of the readers who both read and see them. Violence in Harley 1766 becomes another form of inoculation against the unkind worm of forgetfulness.

Inoculation against forgetfulness, against Fortune, is not always successful. Fortune can be provoked, as in the case of Saul, and therefore avoided, but she can also act capriciously. So, how can we protect against Fortune when sometimes she casts people down for no reason? The answer is not a remedy, but rather, a consolation – a consolation that we remember our tragedies and may be remembered by others. In *Fall*, Lydgate depicts Boccaccio as being visited by some of the men about whom he writes. At one point, Boccaccio begins to write about Theseus, but is interrupted by Thyestes, who implores that his story is more tragic and must be told before Theseus'. Thyestes begs Boccaccio “‘fro the me list nat hide / my woful cas” (Book 1, ll. 3855-6) and later says “‘I pray the take good heed my wo to write that men may it reed” (Book 1, ll. 3884-5). It could be argued that Thyestes wishes to have his tragedy written down to provide others with a cautionary tale, but he never mentions the instructive potential. In this case,

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<sup>132</sup> The other manuscripts I examined did not contain any miniatures which illustrated the text; Pynson's 1494 and 1527 editions, and of course, Tottel's 1554 edition, contain images that at times are violent, but there are far fewer of them. The result is that those books do not impress the destruction as completely into the reader's mind.

Thyestes seems less concerned with providing men with a remedy for tragedy than he is with gaining comfort in the knowledge that his story is being told; it is acknowledged as tragic and will be remembered as such. Thyestes demands not just to have his pain recorded, but to make Boccaccio bear witness to the extremity, the singularity of his situation. He claims, “I suppose that in al thi lyue, / That thou sauh neuer a thyng mor dolorous, / Mor onhappi, mor forward nor pitous / Than is, allas, my mortal auenture” (Book 1, ll. 3869-3872). This is a pretty risky supposition, given that Boccaccio has been engaged in telling the most unfortunate, most tragic tales in history. Thyestes is convinced, though, that his story is the worst. His purpose here, to be granted the pity worthy of the most tragic story of all time, is rooted in consolation. His intrusion into Boccaccio’s narrative lasts for 222 lines, during which time he relates his story in first person. This cry for recognition resonates across the centuries. He ends by asking Boccaccio “in thi writing leff me nat behynde” (Book 1, l. 4075). Thyestes finds comfort for his pain in the knowledge that his story is told and will be read and remembered. Thus, consolation becomes the memorial element; it preserves the story, acknowledging the pain of those who suffered at the hands of Fortune. There may be no total inoculation against all of Fortune’s caprices, but a remedy for the pain exists in the literary preservation of the tragedy Fortune causes.

Whether through inoculation or consolation, the work is meant to provide the reader with the opportunity to use its lessons and examples. At several points within *Fall of Princes*, Lydgate begs the reader to become involved in the creation of the text’s significance beyond the book. The readers are expected to take the lessons here to heart, to remember and internalize them, and to enact them in their own lives, thus enlarging the text’s sphere of influence beyond the materiality of its medium, and beyond even the immediacy of reading. *Fall* is particularly suited for this type of task. As though its intent was not clear, Lydgate states in the prologue that the

purpose of the work, and of the translations thereof, is “That men aftir myghte [...] haue a maner contemplacioun, / That thynges al, wher Fortune may atteyne, / Be transitory of conicioun” (Book 1, ll. 103-8). The text and translations of *Fall* are intended to provide men with the medium through which they might contemplate Fortune’s nature; this contemplation should work its way into the minds and memories of these readers so that they can bring it to bear on their lives. If this declaration of purpose in the prologue does not suffice to keep readers on track, Lydgate’s envoys recount the lesson to be learned and how the reader should apply it to themselves. Additionally, there are instances within the tales themselves that serve as reminders of the pedagogical nature of the text. For example, a particular point in the tale of Adam and Eve addresses the reader directly saying, “Takith exaumpil off Adam and off Eue, / Maikth off hem a merour in your mynde” (Book 1, ll. 651-2). This type of refrain is common throughout *Fall*. The reader not only has to take example of the tale, but also has to do something much more active and internal: make a mirror within their mind of the subjects of the tale. This requires the reader to understand the story to the point where they can recreate its main points for themselves to call upon when necessary. Though most of the lessons to be learned from *Fall* are pretty straightforward (do not be prideful, do not be disobedient, etc.), the fact remains that here the reader is commanded, not asked, to actively recreate the lessons as a tool for keeping themselves from falling prey to Fortune or God. This is not, then, merely a book to be read and enjoyed, or even studied and discussed. It’s a vast and intricate system for reading, understanding, reconstructing, and internalizing material.

The increased readability of *Fall* is evident in its readers’ marks. More than any other books of Lydgate’s works I examined, those of *Fall* contain indications of active reading. A good example is Rylands English MS 2, which bears several signs that readers were marking

passages they wished to remember or to point out to future readers.<sup>133</sup> The book contains such readerly marginalia as “note thys,” “rede this chapter and note it well,” and “rede this historye.” The reader may very well be pointing out passages for other contemporary or future readers, making sure that they pay attention to a particular section, but these may also be directed to the reader’s own future readings. In either case, the authoritative tone here should not be overlooked. The notations direct and shape future engagements with the text. If the tables allow the reader to navigate to particular sections, the marginalia makes the reader give more attention to smaller passages within those sections. It could force readers other than the note-maker to divert more attention and efforts at understanding to the noted lines, or it could be used as a further navigational aid, allowing the note-maker to find the lines of particular significance to him within a larger section of the book. Overall, the reading becomes narrower and more focused with the addition of these imperative marginal notes.

Rylands English MS 2 also contains notes that indicate readerly judgement of the text. Such phrases as, “a trewe saying,” “a good example of Zenocrates,” and “worthy to be marked” pepper the pages. In this type of marginal notation, the reader clearly evaluates the text before him. Although that same judgement is implicit in the commanding notes (the reader presumably would not have marked them if he did not find some value in them greater than those passages that were not marked), these particular notes directly address the value of the lines to which they refer. Judgement notes may not direct the readings of the text in as forceful a way as imperative notes, but they do cause any future reader to pause and consider. Do the lines really provide truth, or a good example of Zenocrates? Are they worthy of being marked? In this way, any

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<sup>133</sup> We see this same type of behavior from readers of other books of *Fall*. The New York Public Library Spencer Collection copy of Pynson’s 1527 edition (shelfmark Spencer Coll. Eng. 1527) contains several instances of readers bracketing a couplet; these couplets’ nature usually makes them able to be read on their own and containing some sort of moral, such as, “In vice nor vertu no man may god disceyue / Like their desertes their mede they receyue.”

future readers engage more fully with the lines being marked and with the reader who did the marking. Future readers evaluate not only the validity of the notes as they relate to their own impressions of the text, but also, and necessarily, the reader who made them. In this way, the text elicits a sort of communication between readers at various times. Again we can see the way Lydgate's potter metaphor and model of active reading work. In these marginal notes, readers clearly communicate with the text and with other readers. They identify which pieces of the vessel are suitable for reuse and point them out, in a way breaking the vessel to extract the useful parts, so that those shards might be reused, made applicable in the next reading, for the next reader, and possibly in their lives outside the reading.<sup>134</sup> In this way, the focused readings elicited by the marginalia actually disperses the material widely, beyond the page.

Not all reader marks were undertaken with the intention of focusing (and eventually dispersing) future readings. Some occurred with the aim of reshaping the work itself to be more palatable or acceptable in the reader's current time. The books of *Fall* would have encountered a potentially dangerous religious climate and been poised for such reader interactions and intrusions. Henry VIII broke with Rome between 1532 and 1534, making all books mentioning the Pope possible indicators of sedition and non-alignment. While specifically Catholic works were clearly under much higher scrutiny and considered the most dangerous, works like *Fall* also held a certain level of anxiety for their owners and readers. Lydgate, a monk, tells the stories of several Popes in *Fall*; most are blamed and derided, like Pope Joan and Pope Boniface VIII, but overall, the very mention of Popes as authoritative figures from whom lessons can be gleaned

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<sup>134</sup> William Kuskin argues that "the physical page...is the primary instrument of literary reproduction" (157). If we see the page as the instrument of literary reproduction, then each incursion onto that page by a reader, each marginal note, recreates the work in an altered form for the next reader. Kuskin, William. *Recursive Origins: Writing at the Transition to Modernity*. U Notre Dame P, 2013.

was perilous. In order to ease the anxiety this Popishness raised, some readers obliterated the offending words in their copies of *Fall*.

This anxiety can be seen in Harley 1766. This manuscript was created near the time Lydgate wrote *Fall*, and as such, would have been free from court-sanctioned anti-Papal movement for nearly a century.<sup>135</sup> Harley 1766 contains evidence of the severity of anti-Papal and anti-Rome sentiments; someone has attempted to erase the word “Pope” from the text. Figure 15 shows leaf 247 v from Harley 1766. Even a quick scan of the page reveals the attempts to obliterate the word “Pope” both in the main text block and in the caption of the miniature. Inset figures 15a and 15b provide magnifications of two of those occurrences. It appears as though the erasure was more effective on the red ink than the black. In both instances, rather than actually obliterating the word, the attempted removal has (ironically) highlighted the attempted erasure, creating a mass of colored ink where there was once merely text. The alteration in previously unbroken lines of letters stands out more starkly than had no erasure been attempted. Additionally, the miniature depicting Pope Boniface sitting in the tower with bloody stumps instead of hands remains untouched, as does the actual text of the tale. The efficacy of this action must be called into question; the offending word becomes more visible, more distinctive on the page, and its context, which presumably carries the taint of the Papal even if the word is removed, remains as well. It begs the question of purpose. Was this act supposed to rid the book of its Papal-ness, or was it merely a stop-gap to prevent the book, and possibly its owners and readers, from being branded as supporters of Rome?

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<sup>135</sup> Bergen’s introduction to the EETS edition claims a date of composition beginning in 1431. The manuscript dates to 1450-60, and Henry VIII broke with Rome in 1532-4. Since pro-Rome sentiments did not become seriously dangerous until the break, it can be easily assumed that the erasures found in this manuscript occur in 1532 at the earliest. Print history for *Fall* supports this supposition.

This puzzling act of obliterating the single word in question while leaving the context occurs in the print editions of *Fall* as well. A 1527 edition printed by Pynson and now held in the Spencer Collection at the New York Public Library shows similar signs of Popish anxiety.<sup>136</sup> The reader or owner of this printed edition goes further than the one responsible for Harley 1766; instead of merely erasing the word “Pope,” the person who altered this book also attempts to obliterate other Popish words, such as references to the Papal seat (see Figure 16). We can also see offending words in this book inked out even in the table of contents (see Figure 17). The erasure attempt, on the whole, is much more complete than those in Harley 1766, but not any more effective. When the book is laid open and two pages viewed at once, the violence incurred becomes quite apparent (see Figure 18). In order to save the rest of this book from the hands of zealous anti-Papists, somebody had to attempt to obliterate certain parts of it. The result, however, is perhaps not quite what the redactor intended. Erasure was not possible with printed type, so dark swathes of ink mark each spot of contention. The Popish words have been rendered even more visible than before. They no longer blend into the surrounding text when viewed from a distance or scanned; instead they practically jump off the page, announcing their presence and marking a violent confrontation. In the case of Pope Joan’s entry in the table of contents, the word was scratched out so forcefully that it penetrated the paper. Would this edition of *Fall* have been burned had a careful reader not redacted all the contentious words? It is difficult to say. But *Fall* was not printed after 1527 until 1554, a year after Mary I assumed the throne and returned England to Catholicism.<sup>137</sup> A certain amount of destruction potentially saved certain editions of

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<sup>136</sup> Shelfmark Spencer Coll. Eng 1527; STC 3176

<sup>137</sup> In 1553 Mary I issued a proclamation banning the printing of material “concerning doctrine in matters now in question and controversy touching the high points and mysteries of Christian religion” (6). This ban, intended to prevent the printing of Protestant material, indicates how the religious political climate could use authority to influence literary creation. Hughes, Paul L. and James F. Larkin, editors. *Tudor Royal Proclamations*. vol. 2, Yale UP, 1969.

*Fall* from annihilation and preserved the books, and their relationship to history, for future readers.

The religious climate asserted itself on *Fall* beyond the simple redaction of potentially seditious words. Pynson printed *Fall* in 1494 and again in 1527, during which time Henry VII and then Henry VIII reigned. For his 1494 edition Pynson used woodcuts that had previously been used in Jean du Pre's 1483 edition of Bocaccio's *De Casibus*.<sup>138</sup> When looking at his 1527 edition, it becomes clear that he did not simply dust off the old woodcuts for this new printing. Instead, he commissioned an entirely new set. This particular set of woodcuts does not appear anywhere before Pynson's 1527 edition.<sup>139</sup> The images are specific to the stories in *Fall* and would have required substantial investment of time and resources on Pynson's part, indicating his belief in the ability of the final product, a highly visual and highly navigable edition (thanks to the inclusion of an extensive table). What he did not foresee was a religious climate so altered in the five years following his publication of this edition that re-printing was not advisable, either financially or politically. Pynson died about 1529, never having to face that eventuality. His specially commissioned *Fall* woodcuts fail to turn up in any printed book in England for almost three decades. Then, in 1554, Richard Tottel, taking advantage of the turn in religious climate back to Catholicism precipitated by Mary I's ascension, prints *Fall* using Pynson's woodcuts. While readers of older copies of *Fall* were busily covering up any potentially dangerous

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<sup>138</sup> See Pollard, Alfred W. "Some Notes on English Illustrated Books." *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, vol. 6, 1900-2, pp. 29-61. 34.

<sup>139</sup> A few of the woodcuts used in this book are used by Pynson to illustrate other works; the opening presentation image, for example, is also used a 1516 edition of Fabian's *Chronicles*, a 1520 edition of Hetoum's *Lytell Cronycle*, and a 1529 edition of *Myrroure of the worlde*. The set of woodcuts specific to *Fall of Princes*, though, containing such images as Saul on his horse, is first used in this 1527 edition. See Hodnett, Edward A. *English Woodcuts, 1480-1535*. Bibliographical Society, 1973. 351.



references to the Pope, Pynson's woodcuts were stashed away somewhere, awaiting an alteration in their context that would make them viable print resources again.

The whereabouts of these woodcuts during the intervening 27 years goes unmentioned in the histories of early English printers. Most sources agree that upon Pynson's retirement, his business, including premises and supplies, was taken over by Robert Redman.<sup>140</sup> After Redman's death, his widow ran the shop until she remarried, at which point William Middleton bought the business and took on an apprentice, Richard Tottel.<sup>141</sup> When Middleton died, his widow married William Powell and together they ran the business; during their tenure, Tottel completed his apprenticeship and took ownership of a print shop belonging to Henry Smythe. The woodcuts could have simply stayed with Pynson's business, shifting ownership from Pynson to Redman to Middleton to Powell and finally going with Tottel to his new shop. The other possible route from Pynson to Tottel involves Henry Smythe, previous owner of Tottel's business; he was Robert Redman's son-in-law and named in his will. It is conceivable that the woodcuts could have been inherited by Smythe and then passed into Tottel's ownership with the rest of his supplies. In either scenario, the woodcuts changed hands (and possibly locations) a number of times, awaiting the moment when their reuse would be possible.

The investment required to produce a set of textually specific woodcuts would be significant, while the reuse of them fiscally responsible, but each venture was only viable if the

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<sup>140</sup> See the entry for Robert Redman in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Also, Hodnett makes the point (66) that Redman's business relied on woodcuts from other printers and that, while Redman had possession of Pynson's materials, he did not make use of his woodcuts. For the *Fall of Princes* set, at least, this is probably a matter of a hostile environment for such a book. Gillespie, Alexandra. "Redman, Robert (d. 1540), printer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 2004-09-23. Oxford University Press. [www.oxforddnb.com/colorado.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23261](http://www.oxforddnb.com/colorado.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23261). Accessed 17 Apr. 2018.

<sup>141</sup> Redman's widow, Elisabeth Pickering, was the first woman in England to print books under her maiden name, despite the semi-regular practice of widows continuing their husbands' businesses. See Gillespie (2004).

environment was conducive to the production of the work. Henry's break with Rome silenced *Fall* to a degree that extended beyond inked out words; but that silence preserved the work. Had some printer produced an ill-conceived and poorly-timed edition, *Fall* may have been more closely scrutinized and possibly deemed too Catholic to continue to exist.<sup>142</sup> John N. King's study of religious printing during the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I shows the profitability of being a Protestant printer during a Protestant reign, and implies what it could mean to not be so aligned. He says, "Protestant printers, publishers, and book-sellers thrived during Edward VI's reign," and provides the specific example of Edward Whitchurch, a Protestant printer who "issued the massive two-volume translation of Erasmus's *Paraphrases upon the New Testament* (1548-9) under government orders that permitted him to commandeer the workmen and equipment of other printers" (167).<sup>143</sup> Clearly, aligning one's products to match the current religious climate was not only safe, but financially beneficial. The opposite would also be true: a recusant printer or one wishing to print a book written by a monk and containing stories about popes would encounter more obstacles than the undertaking would most likely be worth. No wonder then that *Fall* went unprinted, Pynson's woodcuts unused, during the end of Henry VIII's and the entirety of Edward VI's reigns. It's interesting to note that *Troy Book* and *Siege of Thebes*, both having been printed before Henry's break with Rome, also went unpublished during these times. But though Lydgate, *Fall*, and Pynson's woodcuts went dormant, they did not

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<sup>142</sup> The potential destruction of *Fall* is not unrealistic when one considers that less than a decade before Pynson publishes it, Henry defends Catholicism so vociferously against Luther's reformation that he is inspired to write *Assertio septem sacramentorum*, a defense of the sacraments, which Pynson publishes and thus establishes himself as a faithful Catholic and subject of the King. In this same year, 1521, Cardinal Wolsey headed a massive burning of Lutheran books at St. Paul's. Destruction of offensive books, whether they be Lutheran or Catholic, was viewed as an effective means of preventing the spread of seditious sentiments. See Loades, D. M. "The Press Under the Early Tudors: A Study in Censorship and Sedition." *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1964, pp. 29-50. 31

<sup>143</sup> King, John N. "The book-trade under Edward VI and Mary I." *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain 1400-1557*, vol. 3, edited by Lotte Hellinga and L. B. Trapp, Cambridge UP, 2014, pp. 164-178.

die. As it stands, the efforts of readers and owners, both of the books and their materials of production, rendered the work innocuous for the time being and thus preserved its future reproductive potential.

If, at times, ownership of books of *Fall* was dangerous, it was also advantageous in certain contexts. Examining the Pierpont Morgan Library's mid-fifteenth-century manuscript of *Fall*, shelfmark Morgan MS M 124, reveals just how valuable this book became to its particular owners.<sup>144</sup> The manuscript was originally commissioned for the Cheyne family, probably patriarch Sir John Cheyne, a fact that can be discerned by the inclusion of the family coat of arms in the decorative borders.<sup>145</sup> This inclusion is clearly simultaneous with the production of the manuscript. The manuscript contains three instances of variations on the Cheyne coat of arms which were planned for in the initial layout of the manuscript.<sup>146</sup> Though the inclusion of coats of arms in manuscripts (or the intention to include them) was not uncommon, this particular manuscript contains an interesting variation on that practice. At some much later point in the book's history, probably the nineteenth century, another set of owners decided to reproduce two of the original coats of arms and insert them into the book along with a depiction of their own (see Figures 19-21). Each image is highly detailed, quite a bit larger than the originals, and rendered in spectacularly vibrant color that has survived to the present day. The coats of arms are

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<sup>144</sup> This manuscript's value to its owners extends to its most recent, J. P. Morgan. He purchased the book in 1902 from book dealer Quaritch's for £375, which was a 50% markup from the price they had bought it a year previously. Edwards, A. S. G. "Selling Lydgate Manuscripts in the Twentieth Century." *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices*, edited by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John J. Thompson, and Sarah Baechle, pp. 207-219. (209)

<sup>145</sup> The manuscript's provenance is well documented. The Morgan Library's catalogue entry and curatorial descriptions both affirm the Cheyne family's ownership and identification through the coats of arms, as do modern fly-leaves that have been inserted into the book. See the online catalogue entry, <http://corsair.themorgan.org/> and the curatorial description, <http://corsair.morganlibrary.org/msdescr/BBM0124a.pdf>. Also see Bergen's description of the Cheney-Lee-Morgan manuscript, vol. 4, pp. 84-6, and the bibliography

<sup>146</sup> Bergen says of these that, "an escutcheon has been inserted by a contemporary illuminator" (85).

also each designated their own leaf of parchment. Each escutcheon is surrounded by an intricate border, but not simply the border that marks out the columns of the text, as in the original; these borders give a perception of depth that is enhanced by delicate shadowing. A substantial amount of gold leaf also ensures that these coats of arms leap off the page. The overall effect is dazzling and impressive.

Beyond the visual impact, or perhaps behind it, a sense of great expenditures of time and money becomes evident. The artist hired to complete these enhanced reproductions was clearly quite skilled and spent time producing the desired effect. His materials, the boldly colored ink, the gold leaf, and the parchment, seem to be luxury items which were used in abundance. The Lee family, owners of this manuscript at the time of the newer coats of arms' inclusion, saw this manuscript as worthy enough to invest considerable resources in enhancing it. That enhancement focuses on the manuscript's prestigious provenance and specifically includes the Lee family in that line of distinguished owners. For them, to insert themselves into this book, and into its history, was well worth the expense. Their move is reminiscent of Pynson's decision to commission a set of woodcuts specific to *Fall*; both parties acted on their assessment of the text's worth, whether financial or as a status symbol, and invested their money and (intentionally or not) themselves in the book's production. In doing so, they altered the course of *Fall*; Pynson's alteration echoed through hundreds of printed copies well beyond his death, while the Lee family (and even the Cheynes) imprinted themselves in a single book. Each, however, can be seen as a reader who enters and alters the book as Lydgate desires.

Marks of ownership are quite frequent in medieval and early modern books. They include everything from scribbled signatures on fly leaves and margins to bookplates inside covers to the elaborate and expensive inclusion of coats of arms found in Morgan MS M 124. They even occur

at an institutional (rather than individual) level. Libraries and other institutions that own these books often mark them to indicate ownership. The British Library, for instance, marks each of their books with an ink stamp; various colors and designs signify information about the particular book, such as green ink indicating a donation after 1944 or a particularly small stamp being used on delicate or rare items (see Figure 22).<sup>147</sup> The practice of libraries or archives using stamps or bookplates to indicate ownership is common, and so little attention gets paid them when they are encountered. Yet their presence should not be ignored. Institutions such as the British Library are dedicated to the preservation of their rare books. They have several policies in place to protect them from any kind of mishap or destruction. Access to fragile or rare items is restricted, identities and credentials of potential readers is checked, pens are forbidden in the reading rooms. And yet, these same stewards of rare books will push an inked stamp into not one, but several pages of those very manuscripts they are tasked with preserving.<sup>148</sup> The incursion might seem small, but it is actually a clear, permanent assertion of identity and ownership with regards to the book. The purpose, of course, is to assert ownership with a view towards securing the items against robbery and forgery. So, in order to secure and preserve the item, librarians routinely create these fissures in the original state of the book. They pick up the illicit ink and intrude into the normally sacrosanct space of the book, marking their presence and destroying the book, just a tiny bit, in order to preserve it.

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<sup>147</sup> For more information on the stamps used by the British Library and their significance, see the British Library's blog, <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/collectioncare/2013/09/a-guide-to-british-library-book-stamps.html>. P. R. Harris' Appendix "Identification of Printed Books Acquired by the British Museum" in *Libraries within the Library: The Origins of the British Library's Printed Collections* also provides a helpful history of the use of stamps. Harris, P. R. "Identification of Printed Books Acquired by the British Museum." *Libraries within the Library: The Origins of the British Library's Printed Collections*, edited by Giles Mandelbrote and Barry Taylor, British Library, 2009, pp. 386-428.

<sup>148</sup> The ink has been tested to meet conservation standards.  
<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/collectioncare/2013/09/a-guide-to-british-library-book-stamps.html>

The books of *Fall* contain destruction. This destruction is found at every stage: in the textual renderings of the stories themselves, which describe horrible, violent ends for those who fell afoul of Fortune; in the images that accompany and often expand the violence of the text; in the interactions of the readers with the books, including the redaction of Popish words; and even the forcible inclusion of ownership marks could be seen as destroying the original state of the book. The great irony of *Fall of Princes* is that, for this work and these books, destruction is preservation. The destruction depicted in the stories and illustrations serve to better imprint the lessons in the reader's mind. It preserves the memories of those stories and those who remember them. This preservation manifests within the reader of a certain book of *Fall*, who carries the tale with him and allows it to guide him in his life; thus the book (or story, or subject of the story, or lesson) finds life beyond its physical medium. The demand created for new and more copies and editions of *Fall* ensures its preservation into new generations of literary history and its readers and creators.

In a way, the destructive preservation at work in *Fall* lends focus to Lydgate's critical reputation. *Fall*, both its books and its text, continually invites destruction so that it may be preserved. Lydgate's literary reputation, while at first positive, grew stagnant and declined over the intervening centuries; he went from being one of the most reproduced authors in manuscript and print to being derided, ridiculed, and eventually ignored. That state of degradation in which Lydgate languished for centuries has had a remarkable effect on literary critics of late. We question it. Are the accusations of prosaicness, verbosity, and lack of poetic mastery valid? Why did people dislike Lydgate's works so much? And how is it possible for him to suffer such a great fall in popularity? These questions provoke investigation; to use Lydgate's words, they beg critics "to han inspeccioun | Besechyng hem with her prudent loke" (Book 5, ll.3536-3537). We

pick up our dusty Lydgate volumes and read them again, searching for answers. In doing so, we discover new ways of envisioning Lydgate: as a public poet, a Lancastrian, a post-Chaucerian who helped create the vernacular and Chaucerian canon; as someone whose works can help us to better understand the climate surrounding late medieval and early modern book production; even as a poet responsible for influencing other arenas of art. Lydgate studies (now a legitimate phrase to use) owes its growth to the previous generations of scholars and critics who spurned Lydgate. In fact, if you peruse articles and books on Lydgate, you will be hard-pressed to find one that does not mention his negative reputation and those responsible for it. The destruction of Lydgate's reputation has motivated many scholars to reconsider his status. In this, Lydgate's critical reputation mimics his ideas about active readership; where readers (or critics) find fault, they should act prudently and insert themselves into the narrative and to correct it. Lydgate's current resurgence in popularity and the revision of attitudes towards his work can be read as the result of scholars doing as Lydgate suggests his readers do: allowing prudent inspection to lead to a recreation of the scholarly narrative for the benefit of all.

### CHAPTER THREE – Lydgate the Prudent Reader in *Siege of Thebes*

Destructive preservation as a literary act must delicately balance both elements, the destruction and the preservation, in order to function for the good of the work, the author, and the readers, or (more broadly) for the common profit. For Lydgate, prudence is the fulcrum. Prudent readers decide what needs to be destroyed, corrected, or amended, to create a preservative effect. In *Siege of Thebes*, Lydgate explores the benefits of prudence and the disastrous destructions that can occur when prudence fails. He does this by making himself an active reader of Chaucer, and by exploring how authoritative lines of descent can become corrupt and disruptive. His goal in *Siege of Thebes* is to provide his readers with a model of prudent readership and a series of lessons in imprudence and corruption, allowing them to have both a guide and a warning in how to proceed into the realm of literary authority.

This chapter investigates Lydgate's attempts to impart lessons to his readers. It begins by examining *Siege* in print during the sixteenth century and demonstrating how Lydgate's most readerly of works gains authority (both for the work and for its author) through the intercession of editors who include it in Chaucer anthologies. This increase in authority bears witness in several different visual and textual elements of these books. I then move to a discussion of *Siege* itself, both of the frame narrative and of the content of the story, positioning it against a critical backdrop of destruction. Through close readings of the poem, in which Lydgate imbeds and explicitly states lessons, I uncover Lydgate's belief that, for the prudent reader who works for the common profit, destructions are not only destructive, but endings can be beginnings. From there the chapter moves on to discuss an important subset of those prudent readers, the editors of medieval works. I explore how textual criticism and prudent reading cooperate to form an edition



of the work that is actually a (re)creation of that work. The role of the editor requires an extensive background in prudent reading, and in order to gain that background, the reader must read imperfections, faults, corruptions, and mistakes. Without this experience, the prudent reader would be unable to identify those things, unable to correct them. To this end, Lydgate imbeds mistakes in his work, and acknowledges his own faults, to try to prepare and groom his readers to become the active, engaged readers whose purpose will be to correct, augment, and emend his works to allow for their survival and his retroactive and reflected authorizing. This chapter theorizes that Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* works as a model of readership that emphasizes prudence and common profit, but also that finds generative potential in destructions.

*Siege of Thebes* is unlike anything else that Lydgate wrote. It is an addition to the *Canterbury Tales* in which Lydgate becomes a character, narrating his meeting of the pilgrims and recounting the tale he tells on the return journey from Canterbury. It is not a large, commissioned work that delicately balances Lydgate's role as a court poet with his relationship with sources and his adherence to a moral agenda. In *Siege of Thebes* Lydgate has adopted a different persona: that of himself. That self embraces his identity as a literary creator who inevitably exists in the presence/shadow of previous authors/poets/literary creators.<sup>149</sup> In this role, he shows himself to be the inheritor of literary authority, but also in control of how and where to employ that legacy. In short, Lydgate demonstrates the power and authority inherent in his position as a reader of Chaucer.

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<sup>149</sup> Seth Lerer describes this position in *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* as having "a voice conditioned by the literary system of a father Chaucer and his children" (23). I agree with Lerer that this relationship between Chaucer and Lydgate, as well as other fifteenth-century authors such as Hoccleve, as familial. Lerer sees the authority to be gained by Lydgate and other literary children as limited; though these poets construct Chaucer's persona, they do so through a series of models established by Chaucer himself. Authority here stems from and leads to Chaucer. I see this relationship slightly differently, as one in which its indirect nature provides an opportunity for self-authorization. Lerer, Seth. *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England*. Princeton UP, 1993.

If we read Lydgate's tale as one in which literary authority moves from author to reader to author in a reflective, transtemporal system, then the books of *Siege* seem to do the same, inviting us to look back to move forward, to refresh Chaucer and Lydgate in our own literary imaginations. Lydgate's amplifying presence, his ability to regenerate and renew Chaucer, and thereby reflect authority upon himself, can be easily seen in the sixteenth-century editions of Chaucer's works. *Chaucer's Works* was printed, as a whole, for the first time in 1532. Over the course of the century, they were printed by various publishers another five times, in 1542, 1545, 1561, 1598, and 1602.<sup>150</sup> As was typical of the time, each of these editions claimed to provide the reader with more works, more correct works, and works never before in print. This claim appears on the title pages with regularity. Each edition grew larger than the previous, expanding to meet the desires of the reading public for new Chaucerian material 150 years after his death. To meet this need, publishers included material not authored by Chaucer. This occurs as early as the first printing in 1532, which includes *Complaint of the Black Knight* by Lydgate, although it is not ascribed to him. The next two editions continue to include *Complaint of the Black Knight* but in 1561, publishers add *Siege of Thebes* to the *Works* and it continues to form a significant portion of the book through the rest of the 16<sup>th</sup> century editions. As the century progresses and the demand for more Chaucerian material grows, the editors' reliance on Lydgate (and other authors) to meet that need increases. This increased reliance upon and inclusion of Lydgate in a book that literally claims to delineate the Chaucerian canon means that Lydgate experiences an increase in his authority through his inclusion in this canon. This can be seen in how the editors, the readers of Chaucer and Lydgate, treat Lydgate's contributions to the book.

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<sup>150</sup> I examined a copy of each of these editions. Their shelfmarks and STC numbers are, in chronological order, as follows. 1532: Morgan W 02 C, STC 5068; 1542: Morgan W 02 C, STC 5069; 1545: New York Public Library \*KC + 1545, STC 5074; 1561: New York Public Library \*KC + 1561, STC 5076; 1598: Morgan W 02 C, STC 5077; 1602: New York Public Library \*KC + 1602, STC 5080.

Though it is one of Lydgate's shorter major works, *Siege* takes up a substantial amount of space in the books of *Chaucer's Works*. Printers and publishers handle this weighty non-Chaucer addition by placing it at the end of the book, separated from the authentic Chaucer material by a note informing the reader that the works by Chaucer have ended. The 1598 and 1602 editions both carry Lydgate's name along with the title at the beginning of *Siege*. The printers and publishers have made it abundantly clear that *Siege* is not authored by Chaucer. But in doing so, they have also made it clear that it is by Lydgate. This is a double-edged sword of authorization, indicative of the uncertain standing in which Lydgate is held. On the one hand, by including him in the volume, the publishers are assessing his work and find it to be worthy of inclusion. It adds more to the book than its inclusion detracts from it. On the other hand, by placing *Siege* at the end and erecting a barrier (to this side lies true Chaucer and over here merely an imitator), they are ensuring that he cannot be confused with Chaucer and thereby get undue credit. The excluding inclusion nods to an anxiety that Lydgate, in finishing the *Canterbury Tales*, might be confused with Chaucer. This is an anxiety held by the sixteenth-century publishers and printers, not Lydgate himself, and nods again back to Lydgate's status.

If we look at one of the title pages to the 1561 edition, we can see how Lydgate's credit figures (see Figure 23). The lines above the unicorn shield read "The woorkes of Geffrey Chaucer, newly printed with divers addicions, whiche were never in printe before: with the Siege and destruccion of the worthy cite of Thebes, compiled by Jhon Lidgate, monke of Berie. As in the table more plainly dooeth appere." Yes, Chaucer's name is much larger than Lydgate's, and it appears first. But it does not all fit on one line; Chaucer is divided up between the first and second. Lydgate's, however, fits completely on its own line, retaining its visual unity. Granted, it seems as though the compositor who set the type for this page was probably most concerned with

the shape that this text block created, making sure that the first lines stretched from right to left to create the base of this inverted triangle. Each successive line needs to be shorter on both ends by equal lengths to form the triangle, and the line containing Lydgate's name fits the length requirements. But the compositor's decisions are not so easily explained. Line length is not simply determined by the number of words it contains; size of the type, size of particular letter forms, and empty space between words and even letters all add up to determine the length of a printed line. So, yes, the compositor probably looked at the words before him and thought about the easiest arrangement for getting the desired effect, but that required careful consideration of words, spaces, and grammatical units, followed by deliberate construction of the lines with type and spacing material. This resulted in some obvious places in this text block where spaces were manipulated to achieve the desired effect. In the third line, for example, there is more space before and after the first comma than there is around the comma in the fourth line. This procedure was used to create the line length, but also to accommodate the words.

If that line alone is read, it says "By Jhon Lydgate, Monke of Berie." Not only does it very closely recreate a line from *Siege of Thebes* that Lydgate uses to identify himself to Harry Bailey, it seems to grant Lydgate a certain amount of authority. He retains the entirety of his name and affiliation on a single line while he also gets a fair amount of space in the title; the works of Chaucer are described in sixteen words, whereas Lydgate and *Siege* get eighteen. At first glance, then, it would seem that Lydgate is clearly subordinate to Chaucer. He gets second billing. The substance and visual-grammatical elements of that second billing, however, undercut any clarity in the two authors' relative status. Chaucer comes first and largest, but Lydgate gets more words and a visual unity in the line identifying him. This is not to be taken lightly. In a book that is supposed to contain, if the title tells the truth, works by Chaucer, Lydgate's

involvement gets more textual weight than Chaucer. And Lydgate's identity is allowed to go visually unbroken, seeming to signify the unity and authority of his literary identity.

Here, in this particular book anthologizing Chaucer, the editors and compositors act as Lydgate's prudent readers and reconstruct him in a way that highlights his literary authority. Their ability to read his works and discern their value (at the least, to this project), means that they have engaged in Lydgate's project of prudent, active reading and are recreating *Siege of Thebes* and Lydgate's authorship of it. This reconstructive moment, this altering of the context of *Siege* to bind it together with *The Canterbury Tales* demonstrates their own authority, but also reflect that authority back on Lydgate. This reflected authority comes in overt acts, like simply including Lydgate's works in the book and his descriptors on the title page. It also occurs more subtly: the authorization of these readers is something for which Lydgate advocated and for which he abdicated his own authority over the work. When they activate this system, they show that it works. The prudent reader can make a work better, make it understandable, help it survive. Lydgate's concept here gains credence and, in that, he does as well. His system's enactment authorizes Lydgate.

By 1598, *Siege of Thebes* is given its own title page preceding the poem, on which Lydgate's name and relationship to the work is proclaimed (see Figure 24). Again, we have a certain amount of anxiety – the work is clearly meant to be kept separate from the material that is authored by Chaucer – but that anxiety produces a strong identification of Lydgate which grants him respect. The title page contains an elaborate border depicting the family tree of the Lancasters and Yorks, terminating in the beginning of the Tudor line and Henry VIII. The border itself with its illustration of royal progeny exudes authority. Beyond that, it is used as the title page for other major works within the book, such as the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Romance of*

*the Rose*.<sup>151</sup> So the same image, the same formal, decorative division and the same expenditure of resources (of paper, space in the book, time by the compositor to set it) is afforded to both Chaucer and Lydgate. In this way, we can see that the very thing which is meant to keep Lydgate separate, a title page that delineates the boundaries of each author, also ties Lydgate to Chaucer, putting them on a more even footing.

A closer look at the woodcut shows that it includes the major players in the two family lines and leads to Henry VIII sitting magnanimously at the top of the image. The image effaces the complications and violence between the Lancasters and Yorks, omitting any reference to the War of the Roses, and simply tells a tale of quiet, productive genealogy that leads to the establishment of the Tudors. This genealogy, though, only occurs, only produces a dynasty, through destruction. The figures depicted here hint at their violent history, as some are dressed in what appears to be military garb, including armor and weaponry. See, for instance, the figure labelled “K. HENRY V” on the left side of the image, dressed in armor and carrying a long sword, or the figure on the right labelled “K. RYCHARD III” who is also in armor and brandishing both a halberd and a shield. These figures seem to be at odds with some of the others in the image. Many, such as “GEORGE D. OF CLARENCE,” are not wearing any armor or holding weapons. The image contains three women who are clearly not meant to evoke any violence, but perhaps, especially “Qvene Elvzabeth,” indicative of the generative aspects of this

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<sup>151</sup> This particular woodcut frame border was originally made as the title page for Edward Halle’s *The Union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre & Yorke*, printed by Robert Grafton in 1550, STC 12723. This makes sense as the image clearly reflects the content of the work, showing the two families on either side, united and culminating in the figure of Henry VIII at the top. According to Robert McKerrow and Frederic Ferguson, this frame, number 75 in their catalogue, was also used to illustrate Lydgate’s *Troy Book* printed in 1555, an English chronicle by William Warner printed in 1589, 1592, and 1596, in addition to its inclusion in *Chaucer’s Works* discussed above. Its use in histories and chronicles, as well as in *Troy Book* attests to its status as an illustration of works concerned with English identity. Its use in *Chaucer’s Works* speaks to the volume’s ability to contribute to an understanding of English vernacular literature; its earlier connection to Lydgate indicate that editors thought of his works in a similar capacity McKerrow, R. B., and F. S. Ferguson. *Title-Page Borders Used in England and Scotland, 1485-1640*. Bibliographical Society, Oxford UP, 1932, pp. 78-79.

genealogy. Most interestingly, the two figures in the bottom left and right corners, “JOHN DUKE OF LANCASTRE” and “EDMUD DVKE OF YORKE” (respectively) are the only two who are portrayed in full length, and they are both laying down. Their passive positions undermine the violence and destruction that followed from them, wreaking havoc on both branches of this family tree, and on England. This genealogical title page border provides a mixed message of the progression of this family. While it hints at violence in the dress of some figures, it obscures and effaces that violence with others, and with the overall positive depiction of the establishment of the Tudor line.

As a choice for separating works in the anthology of *Chaucer's Works*, this may seem to be a strange choice. After all, the material in this book is not an English chronicle of the War of the Roses or the heredity of the English throne. It may be that its inclusion here was simply a matter of what the printer had on hand that worked. But I see this strange genealogical title page border as having a particular resonance in this context. Firstly, the story the border image tells is undoubtedly one of destruction and generation, one that, at least generally, correlates to Lydgate's ideas about destructive preservation. The image attempts to efface the destruction, but the military accoutrement hint at it. One could look at the story of the establishment of the Tudor dynasty and theorize the destruction was necessary to engender it. Secondly, and perhaps more compellingly, this image tells a bowdlerized tale of the creation of the Tudor dynasty, but any contemporary reader (and any reader thereafter who had a passing familiarity with this period in English history) would realize this. The fruitful, fecund genealogical tale being told, where nearly every figure sprouts fairytale-like from a rose bloom, would ring false, or at least seem dubious, to most readers who knew of the destruction caused by these people and their struggle for dominance. Readers would (or could) recreate the rest of this history from their own

knowledge, in their understanding of it filling in the blanks and erasures of this image to make it complete. It could be seen as an exercise in readerly correction. This also speaks to Lydgate's material and purpose in *Siege of Thebes*, where two sides of the same family struggle for power and end up causing the widespread destruction. The story in *Siege* ends with annihilation, where the border image tries to wrap things up on a positive note. The point that both try to make is that destruction can be productive. The image tries to literally demonstrate a positive, generative outcome for what was clearly a destructive past, while Lydgate's approach is to let the destruction act as a lesson, a caution for readers. Both, too, demonstrate that genealogies, like other stories of production, rely upon destruction.

Here, then, we have a title page and accompanying border image that appears to be working to separate Lydgate from Chaucer, but what it ends up accomplishing is authorizing Lydgate. It puts Lydgate on an equal footing as Chaucer and, in its matter, reflects and emphasizes some of Lydgate's most important ideas. The inclusion of this woodcut border may feel arbitrary, but upon closer inspection, its resonances with Lydgate lend him and his work here greater authority, which parallels what other elements in the book do as well.

The sixteenth-century editions of *Chaucer's Works* seem to authorize Lydgate as much as they venerate Chaucer. The 1602 edition goes so far as to include a catalogue of Lydgate's works. At this point, the works of Chaucer also contains the entire (known) works of Lydgate. Though his addition to the *Canterbury Tales* lies as far as possible from it (the *Canterbury Tales* is always the first work in the volume, while *Siege* is always the last), the separation and distinction gives Lydgate credit as a poet in his own right. By 1602, Lydgate's separation from Chaucer has manifested into a declaration of the extent of his own works. Perhaps Lydgate is guilty of writing himself into Chaucer's works. But the sixteenth-century publishers and printers



responsible for building the Chaucerian canon ultimately chose to applaud that effort rather than denigrate it.

Those sixteenth-century bookmakers are following the manuscript tradition of *Siege of Thebes*. It is extant in thirty-one manuscripts, a publication history that speaks to its overall popularity.<sup>152</sup> In five of these manuscripts, the *Canterbury Tales* also appears, indicating that early on, book producers saw the productive potential of placing *Siege* alongside the rest of the tales. In early print editions, the frequency of this relational positioning increases. Of the six editions of *Chaucer's Works* printed between 1532 and 1602, three contain *Siege* as the longest work included that is ascribed to someone other than Chaucer.<sup>153</sup> Interestingly, in each edition that contains it, *Siege* is placed at the very end of the literary works, after the last piece attributed to Chaucer. The *Canterbury Tales* is the first literary work in the book; thus, these two complementary works begin and conclude the book containing the works of Chaucer. Lydgate is not afforded the privileged space directly adjoining the *Tales*, the place that he writes himself into, but concluding the *Works of Chaucer* may be more telling about Lydgate's role in establishing the English vernacular canon. In ending the *Works* with a non-Chaucerian tale, the editors of this volume are making a statement about the direction of English poetry after Chaucer, a statement that does not really need to be told, given that this book is purported to contain the works of Chaucer, not an anthology of English poetry. Ending with Lydgate's generative conclusion of the *Canterbury Tales* suggests an expansive attitude towards what constitutes valuable English poetry.

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<sup>152</sup> See Robert R. Edwards (2001) for a description and list of these manuscripts (11-18).

<sup>153</sup> The 1532, 1542, and 1545 editions omit *Siege*, but do include Lydgate's *Complaint of the Black Knight*, though probably because it was misattributed to Chaucer. The 1561, 1598, and 1602 editions all include *Siege* and ascribe it to Lydgate.

Interestingly, not all books of *Chaucer's Works* that include *Siege* maintain its position at the very end of the literary works. The University of Colorado Boulder's Norlin Library owns what purports to be a copy of the 1602 edition of *Chaucer's Works*, shelfmark PR1850 1602. The table of contents for the 1602 edition indicates that *Siege* should be the last literary work in the book, coming after the short poem *Chaucer's Words unto Adam his own scrivener*. This table, which includes the folio numbers (in Roman numerals, though the actual number printed on the page is in Arabic) of entries so that a reader can more easily find works, lists the poem *Chaucer's Words* as being on folio cccl and *Siege* starting on folio cccli. When the reader turns to the verso side of folio 350, the poem appears. Below it are the words "Thus endeth the workes of / Geffrey Chaucer."<sup>154</sup> The book clearly indicates where Chaucer ends and Lydgate begins, making the boundaries between the two authors clear and bright. On the facing page (which is incorrectly labeled 353), *Siege* begins, a border running across the top of the page and the words "The Storie / of Thebes, / Compiled by IOHN LIDGATE, Monke / of BVRIE."<sup>155</sup> If a reader were to look up *Siege* in the Norlin copy's table, he would be sent to folio cccli. Upon turning to folio 353, the unsuspecting reader would find himself staring at Chaucer's *Court of Love*, not *Siege*. Finding *Siege* in this particular copy of *Chaucer's Works* means having to flip through the last fifty folios, paying close attention to running titles. Once located, the reader would see that in the Norlin copy, *Siege* follows *Floure and Leaf* and itself is followed by *The A B C*, and that its first folio number of is 370.<sup>156</sup> The table indicates that *Siege* should be the very last literary

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<sup>154</sup> All references to foliation in discussion of the Norlin copy use the number printed on the page rather than the actual foliation. As some numbers occur more than once, I also include the work on that page for clarification.

<sup>155</sup> The 1602 edition of *Chaucer's Works* contains a mis-foliation in which the numbers 351 and 352 are skipped. There are no missing pages, however, and the table maintains the error, indicating that *Siege* starts on folio 353; this means that the table was constructed after the book was printed and a reader would be able to find *Siege* using its entry in the table.

<sup>156</sup> In the Norlin copy, *Seige* begins on folio 370r; its signature is [Tttv].

work in this book, coming after (in order) *Floure and Leaf*, *The A B C*, *Jack Upland*, and *Chaucer's words Adam to his own scriuener*, but instead the works run *Floure and Leaf*, *Chaucer's words*, *Siege*, a catalogue of the works of Lydgate, *Jack Upland*, *Chaucer's words*, and finally a glossary of Chaucer's words. Somehow the works in this book have unmoored themselves, drifting into new locations.

Further investigation into the Norlin copy reveals that this book is not, in fact, entirely a 1602 edition. It contains elements of the 1602, especially at the beginning and at the end, but is comprised mainly of the 1598 edition.<sup>157</sup> The table is from 1602, while the section containing *Siege* is from 1598, which accounts for the discrepancy in foliation. Though ascertaining the motives behind the making of this sophisticated copy would be no more than guess work, the reality is that the combination of the two editions into this single book resulted in the movement of Lydgate's *Siege* to a closer position relative to the *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>158</sup> It could easily be argued that this movement was due to an oversight on the part of the person doing the sophistication. Such an oversight could be an indictment of Lydgate's importance to this book: if the inclusion of *Siege* was more important or noteworthy, the person responsible for its movement would have acted with more care and perhaps not have made the movement at all. If this is the case, Lydgate's insignificance is, ironically, the very thing that allowed him to increase his proximity to Chaucer. But this is not really irony, it is part of Lydgate's whole notion of

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<sup>157</sup> The book's front matter, up to and including the *General Prologue* is from the 1602 edition, as are the last few works, including *The A, B, C* (on folio 347r), *Jack Upland* (folio 348r), *Chaucer's Words* (350v), and the glossary. Every folio, starting with fol. 1, upon which the *Knight's Tale* begins, and running until folio 394v, where Lydgate's catalogue ends, comes from the 1598 edition. Note that *Chaucer's Words* appears twice in the Norlin edition.

<sup>158</sup> A reasonable motive for combining these two editions includes, but is not limited to, completing one or the other incomplete or damaged edition with another that was easily and readily available. In an informal discussion with a special collections librarian, it was theorized that this particular book was acquired during a time when the library's budget was unencumbered, possibly after World War II, and many antiquarian books were being bought by public institutions. This particular book, which was presented as a (much more valuable) 1602 edition, could be the result of someone who was taking advantage of the situation.

authority. Humility, this assumed insignificance, allows for a greater return of authority. It allows others, prudent readers (or, in the case of the Norlin copy, perhaps an imprudent or financially motivated roguish reader) to assume control and alter literary works, including their statuses. Once those readers control the work, they can alter it so as to authorize Lydgate. In this case, the new reader altered this book so that Lydgate's work grew closer to *Canterbury Tales*. The result was a copy that highlights Lydgate's position relative to Chaucer and makes the prudent reader question that relationship. The copy owned by Norlin may well be unique; the main feature of that uniqueness is Lydgate's closer position to Chaucer and the *Canterbury Tales* resulting from a certain amount of disregard, both for the preservation of the book's original state and for Lydgate's position in the Chaucerian canon.

Something similar happened to a manuscript copy of *Siege*, now held by the British Library, shelfmark Cotton MS Appendix XXVII. This book has also been subjected to a rearrangement of its contents, though, in this case, the reason is much clearer. This particular manuscript was part of Sir Robert Cotton's library bequest to the British Museum. The library was first housed in Essex House but was removed to Ashburnham House after the initial location was deemed a fire risk; unfortunately, a fire broke out in Ashburnham House on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1731, destroying and damaging around a quarter of its contents.<sup>159</sup> Included in that number is Cotton MS Appendix XXVII. This particular manuscript was rearranged (and possibly separated into two books) as a result of its damage. Though evidence of the actual fire (and water) damage

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<sup>159</sup> For a full contemporary account of the fire and the actions taken to preserve and recover the books involved, see *A Report from the Committee Appointed to View the Cottonian Library* published by Order of the House of Commons in 1732, the year after the fire. The report details the source of the fire along with immediate and later actions undertaken. (11-15). British Museum, Department of Manuscripts. *A Report from the Committee Appointed to View the Cottonian Library*. R. Williamson and W. Bowyer, 1732.

is relatively minimal, the rearranging remains apparent in the foliation.<sup>160</sup> Several different numbers have been written in the upper corners of the folios, and when considered in concert with the fire and subsequent rebinding, they show how the contents' order has changed over time. In the manuscript's current state, *Siege* is the first work in the book. The first leaf of *Siege* carries the foliations: 106, 14, 2, and finally (correctly) 3. 106 is on the original leaf, while the others are on the newer sheet to which the original has been attached. Presumably 106 indicated its most ancient position, while the others show positions it either held or was considered to hold after the fire. In this case, *Siege* moves to a place of prominence within its book. Though it is not getting any closer to Chaucer – this book does not, in its current state, contain any works by him – it does occupy the first position in the book.<sup>161</sup> Given the precedent set by early printers of *Chaucer's Works*, the most important work (in the case of Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*), commences the book; with that in mind, an eighteenth-century book preserver deemed Lydgate important enough to occupy the most significant position in this manuscript. Though this stands in opposition to the attitude of the person who created the combined 1602/1598 Norlin printed edition, the result is the same. When the original order of the book experiences a disruption, the *Siege* becomes unlocked from its terminal location, and Lydgate becomes free to move to a position of greater prominence.

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<sup>160</sup> Some leaves which have sustained damage have been attached to new leaves, presumably for greater stability and to gain some size which may have been lost; this seems to have made it easier to achieve uniformity in leaf size during rebinding.

<sup>161</sup> In his history of the Cotton Library, Colin G C Tite makes the argument that since the Old Royal Library contents were also housed at Ashburnham and suffered in the fire, the contents of this manuscript belonged to that library and were mislabeled during the confusing aftermath. It is easy to imagine how difficult the process of restoration would have been, and how easy, in such chaotic circumstances, to mislabel or even mistakenly reassemble certain books or works. Tite, Colin G C. *The Early Records of Sir Robert Cotton's Library: Formation, Cataloguing, Use*. British Library, 2003.

This point, that disruption can result in the acquisition of authority, relates to Lydgate's position as a reader of Chaucer. Lydgate uses such disruptions to create space for himself within an already authorized text or book. He takes advantage of the unfinished state of the *Canterbury Tales* to write himself into Chaucer's literary legacy; within the tale he tells, he uses destructions and death to authorize himself as a poet connected to, but separate from Chaucer. This authorization from disruption occurs again in the books containing *Siege*. At every point, Lydgate acknowledges and makes use of the paradoxical authority to be found where it is least expected to exist.

Lydgate's apparent appropriation of the *Canterbury Tales* has enjoyed a critical tradition of destruction and killing – which may be appropriate considering the substance of the tale. These critical threads have been solidified by James Simpson, who argues that *Siege of Thebes* follows a path that leads it always back to destruction, and A. C. Spearing, who claims that Lydgate kills Chaucer in this tale.<sup>162</sup> Neither of these critical positions is surprising given the content of *Siege*; Lydgate does, after all, insert himself into the frame narrative and take control over the pilgrims' return journey, telling them a tale of incest, fratricide, civil war, and destruction – the Oedipal tale. It becomes quite easy to see Lydgate in an Oedipal light, seeking to legitimate himself and then destroy his father. Given the number of times Lydgate refers to Chaucer as father throughout his corpus, this argument makes a certain amount of sense. Lydgate

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<sup>162</sup> Simpson opens his chapter on *Siege* by saying that destruction is its subject. Spearing says, "In order to live as a poet, he [Lydgate] had to kill Chaucer, first by removing him silently from among the Canterbury pilgrims, then by casting him in the role of Laius; [...] both the shortcomings and the merits of *The Siege of Thebes* can best be understood through investigation of Lydgate's intricate and uneasy relation with his precursor" (359). Simpson, James. "Dysemol daies and fatal houres': John Lydgate's *Destruction of Thebes* and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*." *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, edited by Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone, Clarendon Press, 1997, pp. 15-33. Spearing, A. C. "Lydgate's Canterbury Tale: *The Siege of Thebes* and Fifteenth-Century Chaucerianism." *Fifteenth Century Studies*, edited by Robert F. Yeager, Archon Books, 1984, pp. 333-364.

is trying to assert his literary presence, but he cannot escape the shadow of Chaucer, so he must obliterate him.

The real power of *Siege of Thebes* lies not in its ability to obliterate either its precursor or itself, however, but in its ability to create. That creative force comes from Lydgate's role here as a reader of Chaucer and forms the subject of this chapter. He actively reads *The Canterbury Tales* and, judging them to be incomplete, does the prudent readerly thing and completes them. Here Lydgate demonstrates the generative capacity of reading and readers and also the attendant authority that comes with this type of activity. And though Lydgate is clearly not Chaucer, not the original author of the work to which Lydgate appends his tale, he demonstrates that power and authority can still derive from that original position to him. This is clear from the inclusion of *Siege* in the early print history of anthologies of *Chaucer's Works*; the title pages and location of *Siege* within the book clearly authorize Lydgate while separating him from Chaucer. Lydgate does not attempt to annihilate his relationship to Chaucer, but rather seeks to grow outward from it. I argue that Lydgate uses *Siege* to produce a literary community in which authors (and active readers who would become authors) participate in sharing authority across barriers or boundaries of time. In this effort, Lydgate stands in stark contrast to Chaucer, initiating a temporal system of circularity in order to ensure that his readers and literary heirs can participate in the creation of *Siege of Thebes*.

In *Siege of Thebes* Lydgate attempts to complete Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* by creating the return journey of pilgrims back to Southwark. Lydgate writes *Siege* as a first person narrative in which he has traveled to Canterbury on pilgrimage after a long illness and, after his visit to the shrine, meets up with Chaucer's pilgrims in a local tavern. Upon discussion with the host Harry Bailey, he learns that they are all headed home in the same direction the next morning; Lydgate

is asked to join the pilgrims on their return journey and tell them a tale. He agrees and the next morning the whole company sets out, while Lydgate recounts to them the story of Edippus and later, his sons. He begins the story with Edippus' birth and proceeds through the events that lead to him killing his father and marrying his mother; Lydgate includes Edippus' realization of his incestuous marriage and his death. Edippus' story makes up part one of the work. The second and third parts concern his sons Ethiocles and Polymyte and their divided rule of Thebes. The sons disagree over who should rule Thebes and come to a compromise that each would rule for a year at a time. Though the compromise begins peacefully, it quickly turns to war when Ethiocles refuses to cede power; the result is a devastating conflict between the brothers that culminates with Thebes burning to the ground.

At this point in the story, Lydgate concludes *Siege*, condemning the envy and hatred that lead to the conflict and calling for men to instead turn to love, peace, and charity.<sup>163</sup> Lydgate leaves the story at the point where Chaucer picks it up in *The Knight's Tale*. Thus Lydgate brings the *Canterbury Tales* to a close by bringing the pilgrims and the readers back to its beginning. The pilgrims, presumably, have completed their homeward journey, and as readers we have accompanied them. At the end of *Siege*, the readers have arrived at the point just preceding the *Canterbury Tales*. This point in literary time and space is multi-layered, given the narrative frames in both *Siege* and *Canterbury Tales*; it is Southwark, but also Greece, just before (or maybe after) the pilgrims set out (or arrive home), but also directly after Theseus defeats Creon. It would be an easy dismissal to say Lydgate simply wishes to draw on Chaucer's literary

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<sup>163</sup> Scholars see his purpose in writing *Siege*, a seemingly unsolicited work with no known patron, as instruction for princes. Robert Ayers argues 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" (463) and to "provide an historical 'mirror' wherein kings and governors particularly might observe the social effects of their actions" (467). Ayers, Robert. "Medieval History, Moral Purpose, and the Structure of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*." *PMLA*, vol. 73, no. 5.1, 1958, pp. 463-474.



authority and thus creates a conclusion to his most famous work. This complex point to which Lydgate brings the reader both closes and opens the *Canterbury Tales*, looping readers into and through both works over and again.

Lydgate's tale is meant to bring the readers back to a beginning (or pre-history) and close (or open) the narrative. But *Siege of Thebes* is only 4700 lines long. *Canterbury Tales* is over 17,000. Even if the prologues and frame narrative sections were excluded, it still took over three times as many lines to get the pilgrims to Canterbury as Lydgate is expending on the way home.<sup>164</sup> This is strange indeed, coming from a poet who, as we have seen, has no problem with amplification, addition, and, even, verbosity. In addition to lacking the length to get the pilgrims back to their point of origin, Lydgate abandons his frame narrative, something which he had been paying close attention during the first third of the poem.<sup>165</sup> Even if his poem did not achieve the length needed to return the pilgrims to Southwark, he could have glossed over this fact and supplied a closing frame that described their arrival at the Tabard Inn. Lydgate leaves the poem's frame unclosed and the pilgrims, presumably, only half-way through their homeward journey. The openness here reflects the notion we have seen that the work of literary production is never done; literature abhors stasis. With that in mind, Lydgate's readings of Chaucer, his role in continuing this work, need careful consideration.

Lydgate demonstrates this kind of continuation, which is an example of the type of active readership for which he advocates in *Troy Book* and *Fall of Princes*, when discussing Chaucer's

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<sup>164</sup> Spearing (1985) suggests that Lydgate's contribution merely begins to complete the journey, saying "it is offered only as the first tale of the first day of the work's [*Canterbury Tales*] missing second half" (67).

<sup>165</sup> Pearsall (1970) says that the frame narrative's fiction is "kept up through the tale, with more realism than Chaucer ever admitted" (152). He refers to Lydgate's return to the journey between the first and second parts and the details he describes; Lydgate does not, however, maintain this "through the tale" as Pearsall claims, dropping the frame narrative completely by the beginning of the third part.

relationship to the frame narrative. In setting the scene for his meeting with the pilgrims, Lydgate describes Chaucer and his involvement with the tales thus far, saying:

The tyme in soth whan Canterbury talys  
 Complet and told at many sondry stage  
 Of estatis in the pilgrimage  
 [...] Echon ywrite and put in remembraunce  
 By hym that was, yif I shal not feyne,  
 Floure of poetes thorghout al Breteyne  
 [...] Be rehersaile of his sugrid mouth,  
 Of eche thing keeping in substaunce

The sentence hool withoute variance. (Prologue, ll. 18-54)<sup>166</sup>

Lydgate notes that Chaucer writes and “put[s] in remembraunce” *The Canterbury Tales*. Writing, for Lydgate, is memorial, an act of preservation. Here it is Chaucer’s task to imprint the tales in the memory of the reading public. He accomplishes this “Be rehersaile of his sugrid mouth / Of eche thing keeping in substaunce / The sentence hool withoute variance.” Lydgate references the narrative frame of the *Canterbury Tales* in which Chaucer is a recorder of events, ensuring that his record accurately reflects the events that occurred. Considering that Chaucer invents the pilgrimage, and Lydgate is aware of this because he invents the ending of the pilgrimage, the insistence on accuracy seems strange. If we look at the phrase “Be rehersaile of his sugrid mouth” we can see that here Lydgate is giving us a glimpse into his notion of literary production.

Earlier Lydgate characterized writing as memorial and here he uses the word “rehersaile;” both indicate repetition. On a basic, narrative level, Chaucer repeats the verbal

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<sup>166</sup> This and all further quotations come from the Medieval Institute Publications edition, unless otherwise noted. Lydgate, John. *Siege of Thebes*. Edited by Robert R. Edwards, Medieval Institute Publications, 2001.

words of the pilgrims as written text. That act of recording, however, creates the opportunity for multiple repetitions or reproductions of the words, the work; that which was ephemeral and fleeting is now available for readings and re-readings. Additionally, each reading is a new telling of the tales, an act which reinforces their place in English literary history. This recording also provides Lydgate and his literary successors access into the work. If the words were not fixed in writing, memorialized, then Lydgate would not have been able to enter into the *Canterbury Tales* and complete them. Literary history, then, preserves works so that they may be repeated or reproduced; the repetitions may be seemingly harmless, like readings and re-readings, but may also seem encroaching, like re-visions or re-writings. There could also be anxiety around these encroaching literary repeaters. Do these repetitions seek to unduly gain from another's work? Is this an instance of a reader attempting to use the repetition of a work merely to advance his own cause as a writer?

If we look at the word "rehearsaile" we can witness the repetition at work and what can be gained from it. As we have seen in Chapter 1, "rehearse" has an etymology rooted in agriculture; a hearse (or harrow) is a long rake used to on soil, breaking it into a finer consistency and readying it for planting. A hearse is used after the earth is broken by a plow, repeating the action on a smaller level, and when the prefix re- is applied, it doubles the repetition at work. When applied to Lydgate's characterization of Chaucer, "rehearsaile of his sugrid mouth" is not simply about narration or recitation. "Rehearsaile" is the act by which the words are made finer, able to produce a better yield or understanding. The repetitions here are not verbatim; they do not simply reproduce the previous state. Rather they are rehearsing, refining the work. Here we see Lydgate's active reading at work. He does not completely encapsulate or replicate Chaucer, his source. He enacts a kind of reproduction that both stems from and differs from the original.

Lydgate uses the word “rehersaile” to describe not only what Chaucer did with the pilgrims’ tales, but what *he* does to Chaucer: “as I reherce can” (Prologue, l. 63). Lydgate’s rehearsal of Chaucer’s work, his completion of the tales, makes it finer.

In using the same word to describe the literary actions of both himself and Chaucer, Lydgate is clearly drawing a link between them, noting their similar position within literary production (and, specifically, within the *Canterbury Tales*). But it’s not the same word. When speaking of Chaucer, Lydgate says “Be rehersaile of his sugrid mouth,” and when of himself, “as I reherce can.” The word is a noun for Chaucer, and a verb for Lydgate. Rehearsal is something Chaucer owns, and something Lydgate does. Here Lydgate enacts possession of the literary act of rehearsal, and through that act, authorizes himself. Rehearsal, the act of reading and returning and refining, was previously owned by Chaucer, but is actively being claimed by Lydgate here.

Lydgate’s rehearsal of the tales has him joining the pilgrims in Canterbury before they leave to go back to Southwark, effectively drawing the journey (and the larger literary work) to a close; but he chooses to offer a story whose subject matter historically precedes that of the *Knight’s Tale*. So, Lydgate at once attempts to conclude Chaucer’s larger work and inaugurate the first tale of that work. Through expansion, the end of the *Tales* leads us back to its beginning. Simpson (1997) has called this movement indicative of the overall destructive tendency of *Siege of Thebes* saying, “History, from the point of view of the Destruction of Thebes, looks bleak in both directions...and after all, to move forward into the Knight’s tale is, ultimately to move backwards” (310). Simpson’s point about the motion between *Siege of Thebes* and *Canterbury Tales* is valid; Lydgate’s move preceding the material of the Knight’s tale does move him back in literary history. But I believe that Lydgate moves backward to move forward. He engages the past, the past of Thebes, the past of the Canterbury narrative, and the past of Chaucer, in order to

move forward, to advance the vernacular literary tradition into something not destructive, but full of potential. He rehearses the material, becoming a harrow that produces a finer bed of literary soil in which others may plant, grow, and harvest their own crops. In doing these things, in rehearsing the tales, he authorizes himself to become part of their (re)production.

This rehearsal bears out in the operations of time within the narrative. The *Siege* opens with an astrological calculation of time that mimics Chaucer's general prologue. While Lydgate here adheres to Chaucer's astrological precedent, he asserts that more has happened than just the movement of the planets to mark the passage of time; he also includes a literary rendering of time here. Lydgate says it was, "The tyme in soth whan Canterbury talys / complet and told at many sondry stage of estatis in the pilgrimage" (Prologue, ll. 18-20). The tales *have been told*. In terms of the chronology of the narrative, this is true; the pilgrims have reached Canterbury, having told their tales along the way, and it is there that they meet Lydgate. However, Lydgate is also marking the literary time. He says the tales are "complet and told." While this appears to be a straightforward statement, it is actually indicative of a very complex set of overlapping literary moments. The tales are complete in that the tales that Chaucer wrote have been written and read, but that leaves an incompleteness; Lydgate, as a reader, is aware of the lack of closure and fashions himself a persona that allows him to read that incompleteness and act upon it.

Thus we get *Siege of Thebes* and with it a sense of narrative closure, both for the frame (the pilgrims return home) and for the tales (we get a back story for the first tale that lends a sense of completeness). Rosamund S. Allen argues that this narrative closure produces a closing down of the literary work and that Lydgate's tale, though it works somewhat backwards through time to complete the *Canterbury Tales* and *Knight's Tale*, is "linear rather than circular" (137).<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Allen, Rosamund S. "The *Siege of Thebes*: Lydgate's Canterbury Tale" in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, edited by Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen, Short Run Press, 1991, pp.122-142.

She concludes with a rather dark proclamation that the work lacks continuity and “is a poem of endings” (138). This dismisses the temporal complexity of Lydgate’s maneuverings. Yes, it is a tale of endings, but as told through beginnings. The idea that this is a linear tale, that it comes to a complete stop at some point (presumably at the beginning of the Knight’s Tale) seems preposterous. Allen’s assessment fails to acknowledge Lydgate’s ability to lead by example, to provide a model of literary reproduction for his readers. He managed to open the work back up, to add to and alter it, and in doing so he provided his readers with the skills, the knowledge, the prudence to do the same.

When thinking about this moment, where the *Canterbury Tales* are “complet and told,” from the perspective of the reader, another temporal complication arises. For the reader, in this moment of the text, the tales are not complete: the reader has not finished Lydgate’s completion, and thus this assurance that this work will make the tale complete is something that the reader has to take on faith at this point. They will, presumably, read on and complete the literary experience of the tales for themselves, deciding if Lydgate’s promise of completion is satisfactorily fulfilled. This completion is dependent upon the individual reader and his or her decision to interact with the tale. With each fresh completion comes another opening through which the tales can be re-completed. In this complexly simple assertion of the timing of the tales, Lydgate reaches back to Chaucer and forward to his readers to compress a multitude of literary moments into a single point in his text. In doing so, Lydgate makes it possible that nothing, no literary work is complete; that is to say, the work of the work can be done in the present, in each present, by the reader. This opens up the possibility for a shared participation in the creation of a literary work (and the attendant authority that participation brings) across time and from author to reader.

This literary-temporal complexity continues to provide space for readerly participation in Lydgate's construction and use of his frame narrative. Lydgate's frame fills up the prologue; parts one, two, and three comprise mostly his rendition of the Edippus/Thebes tale. At first, when transitioning from part to part, Lydgate moves back out to the frame narrative, reminding the reader that he is a traveling pilgrim by references to the journey back from Canterbury. Lydgate recalls the reader to the frame by referencing setting: "doune this hil" and "the lowe vale" (Part 1, ll.1044-5) in part one and, more specifically "the throp of Bowtoun on the Ble" (Part 2, l.1047) in part two. His geographical references, whether general or specific, pull the reader back into the frame and force them to envision the pilgrims travelling home over the English countryside. The movement back into the frame is not so straightforward when the temporality of the moment is considered. The last four lines of part one demonstrate this complexity. "As ye shal here of hem how it fil. / And whan we ben descendid doune this hil / And ypassed her the lowe vale, / I shal begynne the remnant of my tale" (Part 1, ll.1043-6). Lydgate could be recording his words to his fellow travelers, indicating to them that he is going to take a short break from speaking while they descend the hill in front of them, and begin again once they reach the valley. In that case, this constitutes a fairly clear instance of the narrative paralleling the work's internal structure; Lydgate will pause, draw breath, and meanwhile the text will be broken into a new section, allowing the reader to pause as well.

Consider the alternative: Lydgate could be speaking to the reader, not the pilgrims. Perhaps when he breaks with the Thebes story he does not merely extricate himself from that narrative level, but also from the frame as well. His readers could just as easily be the ones who will hear the rest of the story after a short pause.<sup>168</sup> Lydgate does something similar at the book

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<sup>168</sup> Consider how aural cues were often used by Lydgate and other writers of this time period. The prologue to *Troy Book*, for example, refers to "prudent lysters" (Prologue, ll. 64).

breaks in *Troy Book*. He takes a step back from the story, directly addresses the reader, and gives them the opportunity to pause and reflect. At the end of *Troy Book's* book two Lydgate even uses the same future tense to describe what he will do in the next section: "I wil procede to telle" (Part 2, l. 8704). *Troy Book* has no frame narrative, so he can only be referring to the reader here. If the same situation could apply to *Siege*, then Lydgate manages to bring the reader into the temporality, and maybe even geography, of the frame. Sandwiched between the "shals" at the end of part one are lines containing the geographical references and a different verb tense. So, the reader shall hear the rest of the story, which Lydgate shall begin, when the pilgrims "ben descendid [...] and ypassed" (Part 1, ll.1044-5). The future tense of the outermost levels of the work (that of Lydgate writing and the reader reading) lies uneasily alongside these other verbs. They seem to be a sort of present perfect tense – when we have descended -- but could also indicate a sense of these actions occurring in the past – when we had, or had been, descended. If it is the latter, the idea of waiting that is expressed by "shall" feels strange; the pilgrims' descent is complete, so the hearing (and beginning) of the rest of the tale should already be underway. The only way for this rendering of time and narratives to make sense is if the reader has become present in the frame narrative's temporality. The "we" that descend the hill seems to include Lydgate and the pilgrims; but if he addresses the reader here, then it is possible that "we" could encompass the reader as well. The reader must move down the hill and into the valley before he can hear the rest of the tale. And indeed, this is true. Before the reader can return to the Thebes story, he must move outward into the frame and travel a ways with the pilgrims on their journey. These small moments in which Lydgate pauses, seemingly to break his work into more digestible sections, provide the readers with an invitation to become, as Lydgate has, a persona within the literary work, one who can, and sometimes must, make it his own.



We can see something similar occur between the prologue and part one where Lydgate indicates the frame narrative by speaking directly to the other pilgrims. This occurs in the first line of part one and contrasts with the end of the prologue in which he speaks to the reader, saying that he agreed to Harry Bailey's proposal. The prologue ends, "And what I saugh it wolde be no bette, / I obeyed unto his biddyng, / So as the lawe me bonde in al thinge; / And as I coude with a pale cheere, / My tale I gan anon as ye shal here" (Prologue, ll.172-6). Here Lydgate clearly indicates to the reader that he intends to engage the pilgrims' game and tell a tale that we, the reader, shall hear if we continue to read. In contrast, the first part starts, "'Sirs,' quod I, 'sith of your curtesye / I entred am into your companye / And admitted a tale for to telle / By hym that hath power to compelle / (I mene our hoste, govenour, and guyde / Of yow echon ridyng beside)" (Part 1, ll.177-82). In this passage Lydgate undoubtedly switches his audience from the reader to the other pilgrims. In each instance he mentions Harry Bailey, but in the first part he positions himself and his audience at the same remove and holding the same relationship to the Host; Harry Bailey is "*our* hoste" etc.

This reading gets reinforced in the TEAMS edition by editor Robert R. Edwards, who inserted quotation marks into the text. He includes them in the lines directly preceding the section quoted above and in the first lines of the first part to indicate character dialogue. Since TEAMS editions are specifically meant to be used by teachers and students, this inclusion makes sense; they provide clear indicators of dialogue that are not provided (in terms of punctuation) by the medieval manuscripts which record *Siege*. In his introduction Edwards explains this: "Punctuation is editorial, and it is designed to guide the reader through the additive clauses and phrases of Lydgate's sentences" (16). This makes sense as Lydgate's aureate style can prove difficult even for those familiar with his works. The inserted quotation marks, however, provide

an interesting insight into how an editor envisions the frame narrative and reader/author discussion working. In the first quote, it reinforces that Lydgate begins addressing the reader; the quoted passage ends with an end-quote and the rest of the lines are no longer part of the dialogue between Lydgate the pilgrim and the rest of the company. In the beginning of part one Lydgate stops talking to the reader and turns back to the other pilgrims, as indicated by the inserted quotation marks beginning this passage. So, in that sense, this section break is more straightforward than the one between parts one and two. Edwards, whether intentionally or through accident, never closes this quote. At no point in the rest of the text does he provide the end quote which should accompany this initial quotation mark. There are other sets of quotation marks, usually indicating someone within the Thebes story speaking, but this quote remains open. This is, most likely, a simple editorial mistake that was never caught and perhaps does not much change the reader's understanding of the text. I believe, however, that this open-ended quote is indicative of a trend at work in this work. Lydgate addresses the pilgrims and the readers, and as the work progresses, that distinction becomes less and less clear. The open quote comes to encompass the readers into the group that is hearing Lydgate's tale, placing the readers within the tale, in the same way that Lydgate, ostensibly an outsider, placed himself within the *Canterbury Tales*.

By the time we reach the break between books two and three, Lydgate has forgone the practice of referencing the pilgrims' journey with temporal and geographical markers. The story of Thebes has reached a high point and perhaps the description of an early-summer English countryside might be too jarring a contrast to the death and violence occurring in Thebes. Conversely, the main narrative may have no relevance to this development. The progression we see between the first break and the second indicates that Lydgate treats his readers with growing

inclusion. By this final break Lydgate has completed the assimilation. He repeats his use of “I” and “yow,” but whether he is speaking to the other pilgrims, his readers, or both, is not indicated either by the surrounding text or any editorial inclusions of punctuation. Lydgate ends the second part by saying, “I yow tolde / that biheestes trewly wern not holde -- / The first grounde and roote of this ruyne, / As the story shal clerly determyne / And my tale herafter shal yow lere, / Yif that yow list the remenaunt for to here” (Part 2, ll. 247-52). His use of “I” serves to remind us (the reader or perhaps the pilgrims) that he told us that promises made in the Thebes story would not be honored. Here Lydgate certainly pauses the Thebes narrative to provide a response to the (presumed) reaction to the events he has just recounted; we should not be so shocked because Lydgate warned us what would happen. But who is “we?” Is he speaking to the pilgrims who have gasped and shown appalled countenances to which Lydgate, the pilgrim telling the tale, could have seen, heard, and responded? Or is Lydgate also anticipating the reaction of readers of *Siege* and assuaging them as well? Given the precedent started by the other section breaks, I believe that here we can assume Lydgate speaks to the readers as part of the pilgrimage. He ends this part by indicating that the rest of his tale will be heard. Though this could be an indication of Lydgate’s address being directed towards the pilgrims who would be hearing it, we have already seen that Lydgate does not reserve hearing solely as an auditory experience. Hearing can mean reading. It can also mean being read to aloud. And if the readers of *Siege* have done as Lydgate has and inserted themselves into this tale, then the word works to reference them as well.

In *Siege*, Lydgate uses his persona of a pilgrim, and of a reader of Chaucer who can confidently enter Chaucer’s literary creation, to invite his readers to follow his precedent. Specifically, Lydgate uses his position within the narrative frame to blur the lines between *The*

*Canterbury Tales*, *Siege*, and its readers. In doing so, he draws his readers into closer contact with the work. This produces a sense that the reader can be close to the work, familiar with and to it, without violating it. Lydgate achieves a high level of intimacy with *The Canterbury Tales* through his production of *Siege* and though some would see him as breaching the sanctity of Chaucer's creation or as being a bad reader, what he manages to accomplish through this intimacy is a work of his own that encourages further, active, even altering reading.

From this it may be argued that Lydgate (or each new participant in the creation of a work) is guilty of appropriating the work for their own ends. Certainly, this position has been argued about *Siege of Thebes*. Spearing, for example, asserts that Lydgate's goal in writing *Siege* is to quell his own anxieties about existing in Chaucer's poetic shadow by trying to usurp Chaucer's authority in the tales.<sup>169</sup> Lydgate removes Chaucer from the company, essentially "killing" Chaucer, and then, according to Spearing, convinces himself that he has not done it. While Chaucer, as a character, is absent from *Siege*, Chaucer the author is decidedly present.

Lydgate does not kill Chaucer. He refreshes him, makes him new and whole. Interestingly, this stands in contrast to the way Chaucer treats his own sources. The clerk, in the prologue to his tale, tells us that his tale was taught to him by "a worthy clerk, / as preeved by his words and his werk, / He is now deed and nayled in his cheste / I prey to God so yeve his soule reste" (*The Clerk's Prologue*, ll. 27-30).<sup>170</sup> While it's admirable that the clerk sends out a short prayer for the soul of Petrarch, his description of the "worthy clerk's" current state is a bit harsh. Petrarch is not simply "deed," but also "nayled in his cheste," just in case! Although the clerk is

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<sup>169</sup> Spearing, A. C. "Lydgate's Canterbury Tale: *The Siege of Thebes* and Fifteenth-Century Chaucerianism." *Fifteenth Century Studies*, Edited by Robert F. Yeager, Archon Books, 1984, pp. 333-364.

<sup>170</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., edited by Larry D. Benson. Houghton Mifflin, 1986. All further quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from this edition.

retelling Petrarch's story, he is decidedly not allowing Petrarch to be present or participatory in this recreation. The literary past remains separate from the literary present here. But Petrarch is not the only casualty of this tale. We are told at the end that Griselda perishes, as does her patience. In these multiple deaths, it seems that even the audience of the tale dies; the clerk informs us that Petrarch's intention with this story of Griselda was not to instruct wives to follow her lead, but rather to inspire "every wight, in his degree, / shoulde be constant in adversitee, / as was Grisilde" (*The Clerk's Tale*, ll. 1145-1147). But with the death of Griselda and her patience comes the death of the intent of the tale and its audience – we are left with five stanzas imploring women to behave themselves and follow Griselda's example, the very thing that Petrarch would say is not the point of the tale. The wider impact of this tale is just as dead as Petrarch, Griselda, and patience, as unruly wives are implored not to give clerks cause to write more tales of moral instruction like Griselda's. In this collage of literary moments, death pervades, killing author, character, and audience.

Although the literary mortality of *The Clerk's Tale* is bleak, one can see how it may be preferable to the confusing, (and seemingly confusedness) of Lydgate's repetition and layering of the literary moment. After he concludes the section of the story devoted to Edippus, Lydgate reminds us of his journey with the pilgrims, describing the scenery before saying "I shale begynne the remnant of my tale" (Part 1, l.1046). Here he reinforces the idea that the tales are at once complete and incomplete. He is beginning a tale that has already been begun multiple times, by Chaucer, by himself, by prologues, by others writing about Thebes, and by various readers. He is beginning again, starting the remnant, or the final concluding piece, which, of course, this is not. It is the second of four parts that make up the work. And we know that, for Lydgate, no remnant can definitively conclude a piece as it can be begun again and again. He

claims to be beginning again, but in drawing attention to that idea, he is reminding the reader that this is most certainly not an initial moment, but a regenerative one. Once he moves into the second part, Lydgate backs out again to the landscape surrounding the journey and an explanation of how far they have come; so, though he says he is beginning, he is really delaying. This mention of passing through time and space is again meant to remind the reader of the past, how far the pilgrims have travelled, physically, temporally, and literarily – from Canterbury to Boughton, from early morning until 9AM, and from Chaucer to Lydgate. But it is impossible to reckon the progress of the pilgrims without this previous reference point – a start. Thus Lydgate uses Edippus' death as a way of continuing the tale, but also of reaffirming its ties to its creators and recreators, reinvigorating, regenerating, and reauthorizing them in this new telling. In doing so, he is signaling his readers that the act of entering a work, of retelling it, can mimic the layered beginnings and endings he had constructed here, opening the work up over and over again to the interpretation and participation of new readers who can refresh it and in doing so, authorize themselves and each past person responsible for its creation.

Finally, the tale does recommence, though, with a reiteration of beginning: “In my tale whan I gan precede, / Rehercyng forth as it was in deed, / Whan Edippus buryed was and grave” (Part 2, ll.1059-61). It is easy to see how critics may get frustrated with Lydgate. He has already told us he was going to begin the tale that has already begun, but here he is, telling us again, just in case we forgot. But this re-beginning is another way of looking at the re-completing that he plays with earlier. For Lydgate, ends are beginnings. And here, just after Edippus has died, Lydgate must remind us that in this end, we will find something new – here, it is the power struggle between Edippus' sons, Ethiocles and Polymyte, that results in the destruction of Thebes. Note the similarity between Lydgate's description of Edippus here and the description of

Petrarch: Edippus is buried and grave, Petrarch was dead and nailed in his chest. Both are definitively dead, but Petrarch's death begets more death, while Edippus' death spawns forward literary life. Lydgate uses this description of Edippus' demise to indicate time – “whan Edippus buryed was and grave...” It is a marker of an end/beginning. It provides an opportunity for the story to proceed. Yes, there is death, but it has become a generative state. It recalls the pottery metaphor, the old, broken shards of pottery finding renewed purpose in a new vessel. For Lydgate, reading and writing represent the unending, ever-renewing cycle of literary production. He represents this cycle continually within *Siege*.

This cycle, of endings or seemingly negative occurrences becoming part of a larger generative state, can be seen in Edippus' earlier interaction with the Sphinx. The story is a familiar one. Edippus encounters the mythical creature who presents him with a riddle and gives him three options: answer the riddle correctly, be allowed to kill the Sphinx and pass safely; answer the riddle incorrectly and be immediately, violently killed by the Sphinx. No outside counsel could be sought for the riddle's answer. Edippus, when presented with the riddle and the attendant situation, considered it carefully before answering. In describing this deliberation, Lydgate says, “And whan Edyppus gan this thing adverte, / Wel assured in his manly herte, / Gan in his wytt cerchen up and doun, / And of prudence cast in his resoun, / Be grete avis what thyng this may be,” (Part 1, ll. 679-683). Edippus uses prudence to search for the answer to the Sphinx's riddle. Considering the word's associations with wisdom, and the possibly fatal outcome of this encounter, prudence seems like an obvious choice to describe Edippus' thought process here. Lydgate may also have been considering the word's associations with good counsel; the Sphinx's riddle must be answered by the traveler alone, “without avys” as “ther was counsel noon” (Part 1, ll. 632, 685). Thus Edippus must be his own counsel, using his own

capacity for prudence to guide and advise him in the search for an answer to the riddle. The situation requires that external advisors be concentrated and internalized into a single person. The multiplicity of prudence, in its capacity to form good counsel and thus advise others, shrinks to a singularity in the instance of Edippus solving the riddle.

And solve the riddle he does. The Sphinx asks what creature walks on first four feet, then three, then two, and then back to three, and finally four. Edippus correctly answers: “Thilke best thow spak of hertofoorn, / Is every man in this world yborn,” (Part 1, ll. 699-700). Though Lydgate does not invent the Sphinx riddle, it fits well into Lydgate’s scheme of literary authority. When Edippus is presented with a difficult task and lack of anyone from whom he can seek help or advice, Lydgate says that he relies upon his own prudence, becoming his own good counsel to seek the answer. The answer to which prudence leads him, the key to solving the puzzle and saving his own life, is “every man in this world yborn.” There is a lovely poetic resonance in that. A multitude must contract down to the single person of Edippus, but in that contraction, that narrowing and concentration of prudence, he is guided to every man in the world. That saves him. It allows him to slay the Sphinx, which in turn saves any future traveler who would have encountered it. Edippus’ prudence leads to a common profit. And that common profit has taken the form, quite literally, of every man.

Of course, Edippus’ story does not end with him slaying the Sphinx. He then enters the city of Thebes, the city which is now devoid of a leader because Edippus has recently slain him. The lords, sufficiently impressed by Edippus’ slaying of the Sphinx, “set a parlement, / Shortly concludyng, if it myghte ben, / Prudently to trete with the quene, / Namely they that helde hemsilf most sage, / to condescende be way of mariage / She to be joined to this manly knyght, / Passing prudent and famous ek of might...The worthy cyte to kepen and governe.” (Part 1, ll.



764-772). Here we see the combination of prudence and common profit clearly at work. The lords, aware of the need for a leader, deem Edippus “passing prudent,” and thus judge him to be the best possible candidate for governing their city. These lords also will use prudence when presenting this possibility to the queen, indicating that she is someone who will understand and acknowledge their arguments if presented prudently. It would seem, then, that at each stage and in each participant, prudence is a valued and valuable commodity for governing this city. Prudence works here to provide good governance; as with the solving of the riddle, it leads to common profit.

With both these instances, Lydgate provides a road map for his readers. Prudence, wise discernment, good judgement, can benefit all. These illustrative vignettes of prudence show readers how wisdom will not only lead the wise to a more advantageous position, but how the truly prudent will use that quality to aid others. The prudent reader will do the same, correcting passages to improve the reading for future readers, but also to show them how to become correctors themselves. In this sense, the initial error, the faulty verse, for example, that needs amendment or revision, is not simply a fault, but an instigation of prudence and ultimately common profit.

Edippus’ story demonstrates how faults, errors, or destructions can be made positive. To the point where Edippus enters the city, his story has been mostly triumphant, a positive example to follow. But the prudence of the lords of Thebes (along with Edippus and Jocasta) was operating without the crucial information that Edippus was Jocasta’s son. As such, that prudence failed. It resulted in a flawed union, an incestuous marriage, that, when finally revealed, led to the death of Edippus and the destruction of Thebes. Here prudence for common profit seems to break down in a spectacular fashion. Everyone exercised prudence, from the lords to Edippus to

Jocasta, but without that key piece of information, prudence could not prevent ruin. James Simpson explores this idea in his essay “War in the Late Medieval Statian Tradition” when investigating the ways in which advice from prudent (and aged, and thereby learned) counsel is not followed. He says, “This failure of prudential wisdom from *within* the narrative points us to the function of Lydgate as a narrator outside the narrative. If the poem represents unsuccessful truth-telling, the poem itself draws attention to its own rhetorical projection, as an attempt at successful truth-telling, seeking as it does to move by narrative, and by inserting direct counsel into that narrative” (109).<sup>171</sup> Even instances where prudence failed, where, for example, a lack of information caused imprudent decisions to be made, the prudence of the narrator still holds. His ability to discern and impart the lessons to be gleaned from what might otherwise be straightforward, utterly destructive tragedies. The prudent Lydgate here makes the failures of prudence into opportunities; the prudent reader will follow his lead.

The absence of information in the case of Edippus and Jocasta allowed for a flaw, an imperfection, a corruption, to enter the system. Edippus’ lack of knowledge of his father’s identity enabled Edippus to kill him when they met; the same is true of his incestuous marriage to his mother. Their children, the literal product of their ignorance, would of course be tainted by it. In describing what happened after Edippus realized his mistake, Lydgate says:

As his [Edippus’] sones rebuke hym and dispise . . .

Out of his hede his eyen he gan race

And cast at hem, he can non other bote;

And of malice they trad hem under fote,

Fully devoide of both love and drede.

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<sup>171</sup> Simpson, James. “War in the Late Medieval Statian Tradition.” *Emotions and War: Medieval to Romantic Literature*, Edited by Stephanie Downes, Andrew Lynch, and Katrina O’Loughlin, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 98-116.

And whan Edippus for mescheif was thus dede,  
 Withinne a pytte made in the erthe lowe  
 Of cruelte his sones han hym throwe  
 Wers than serpent or eny tigre wood  
 Of cursid stok comethe unkynde blood (Part 1, ll. 1004-1014)

The image of Edippus tearing his own eyes out in horrific realization, awful though it is to try to visualize, is not as striking as what his sons do next: “of malice they trad hem [Edippus’ eyes] under fote.” Edippus has made the metaphor literal, turned his inability to see his transgressions into a real, physical act by ripping his eyes from his head, and while that is his only relief (“he can non other bote”), it cannot satisfy his sons, those products of his blind actions. They are “fully devoide of both love and drede,” cruel, and malicious; they tread on Edippus’ eyes, accomplishing no actual task other than to engage their cruel malice.

Lydgate wants us to understand that these two sons are flawed corruptions, the results of Edippus’ mistake made real and literal, just as the tearing out of his eyes was a physical manifestation of his inability to see clearly. In that case, Edippus “gan race” his eyes. This is the same word Lydgate uses in *Troy Book* to describe the actions he wants his readers to take in his books: “To race and skrape thoroughoute al my boke, / Voide and adde wher he semeth need” (5.3538-3539). The connection here is important. Edippus, like the prudent reader, has been made aware of a flaw, and attempts to correct that flaw by erasing it. His flaw was that he could not see or know his actions, so he removed the faulty organs, literally erasing them. His sons witnessed this act of attempted correction and could not let it stand; they had to turn it into something gratuitously violent and they thereby made an attempted correction into an ultimately destructive act.

The problem, of course, is that Edippus suffers from the same flaw as his parents. He cannot bring himself to destroy the things that are (or will be) the causes of wider destruction: his sons. In the same way that Jocasta and Laius could not outright kill their son, even though they knew he would be the cause of their destruction, Edippus cannot kill his own sons. He is not as certain in his knowledge of their violent futures, but he does confront their malice and cruelty when he reveals their incestuous origin to them. He erases his eyes, removing his own fault, but he should have erased his sons, the carriers and products of that fault. In this way, his erasure of his eyes is both an attempt to correct his fault and a further blindness to his faults. He refuses to see that the real target of his destruction should have been his sons.

Lydgate says “Of cursid stok comethe unkynde blood” in reference to the brothers and their maliciousness. Their blood, because of its origins in an incestuous, cursed, flawed union, is unkind, both unnatural and set against its family.<sup>172</sup> The brothers are the inevitable result of this flaw, a corruption in the blood. Their cruel stomping of Edippus’ eyes reveal that. What could they possibly gain from doing it? Edippus cannot see, cannot witness their trampling, so if they hope to inflict some vengeance or insult on him, this act fails. It would seem that this is simply their cruelty at work, evidence of their malice, of their “unkynde blood.” But the act speaks of rage, not just cruelty. It would be cruel if Edippus could see this further annihilation and humiliation, but he cannot. So there must be some other purpose in their actions. They have just learned that they are the products of incest, the physical embodiments of their parents’ sin and transgression; there is no escape from that state. They will always be “of cursid stok” and possess “unkynde blood” and the crushing of Edippus’ eyes is their reaction to that. They are taking out their rage, their impotent rage at their unalterable situation, on the things that Edippus

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<sup>172</sup> See definitions for “kind” in the OED and MED. “kind (n.)” *Middle English Dictionary*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED24248>. Accessed July 9, 2018. “kind, n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/103444](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/103444). Accessed 9 July 2018.

has identified as being at fault: his eyes. These eyes, erased and trampled, brutally destroyed, are the metaphor for the sin made literal and physical, and as such, their violent sacrifice should have helped amend and correct that sin. The problem was that the eyes were not the actual vessels of the sin; the sons were. Erasing the eyes, despite seeming like the solution, was actually a further blindness. The result was that the sons, the containers of corrupt, unkind blood, survived to cause further, wider, more terrible destruction.

In typical Lydgatean fashion, though, what seems like a destructive end is not so. Edippus' death does lead to his sons' struggle for power over the city, and Thebes' ultimate destruction, but it is important to note when Lydgate places this death. It happens at the end of the first part of *Siege of Thebes*, just before Lydgate draws us out of the story and back into the frame narrative, reminding us that he is a pilgrim, travelling with others and telling this story at a particular time, "of the clok that it drough to nyne", in a particular place, "Passed the throp of Bowtoun on the Ble" (Part 2, 1047-1050). Lydgate uses the death of Edippus as a place to pause and remove us from our immersion in this horrific story, to bring us back out into the warm sunlight of an English spring. The death and destruction of Edippus is followed and balanced by a reminder that Lydgate is writing (or telling) this story; it is an acknowledgement, in a very simple way, of how a destructive story can become generative in its telling. Lydgate writes the story of Edippus' death, and in enacting that destruction, can create a literary authority for himself.

The writing of Edippus' (and Thebes') destruction allows Lydgate to assert authority in many ways. Perhaps most obviously, it allows Lydgate to create a space for himself close to his literary predecessor, Chaucer. Lydgate writes himself into the *Canterbury Tales* with *Siege of Thebes* and in doing so asserts his right as a reader to own the story and contribute to it. Writing

this tale also allows Lydgate to impart the lesson of prudence to his readers, and thus increase the common profit of his literary community. In both these acts Lydgate provides resources to his readers. Through his writing of the tale, he presents them with the tools necessary to become authoritative, prudent readers. In doing so, he creates a group of active readers who will, ideally, follow his lead and heed his lessons to improve upon Lydgate's own work. This is the cyclical nature of literary authority in action. Lydgate prudently and actively reads, which grants him authority over the literary material at hand; with that authority, Lydgate creates a tale which at every turn attempts to create a body of prudent active readers to whom Lydgate then cedes his authority. Their enactment of his conferred authority then recreates the works, reflecting authority back upon him. Ceding authority bestows authority. And working for the common profit benefits the individual.

This seemingly paradoxical reflective cycle comes through clearly in the story of Thebes and the brothers' struggle for power. Thebes is annihilated because Ethiocles does not understand that ceding authority can be powerful. Lydgate later bids us "think how Thebes with his walles olde / Distroied was – platly this no less – / for doublnesse of Ethiocles" (Part 2, ll. 1776-8). It is duplicitous that Ethiocles would try to retain power over Thebes when his term had ended and he was contractually bound to cede power to his brother. The year of Ethiocles' rule is supposed to be complete, but he refuses to acknowledge this temporary end to his power and the beginning of his brother's time on the throne. Ethiocles cannot recognize the benefits of an equal distribution of authority. He is concerned not with the common profit, either of the city or of his family, but only with personal gain. Had he honored the agreement and waited his turn, power would have returned back to him. Ethiocles' greed, suspicion, and jealousy override his reasoning, however, and in seizing authority entirely for himself, he places that authority in

jeopardy. That is the very principle Lydgate is advocating throughout *Siege of Thebes* – share power and authority and you will gain power and authority. Operate with prudence and keep the common profit in mind, and you will be rewarded.

It makes sense, however, that Ethiocles (and, to a somewhat lesser extent, his brother Polymytes) serves as the negative example in this tale. His lineage, his imbedded corruption, makes it impossible to be anything other than an anti-model. At the climax of the story, just before the brothers engage in their last battle, Lydgate describes “Th ‘envious fyr so her hertys brente / With haate cankered of unkynde blood” (Part 3, ll. 4272-4273). The hate burning in their hearts, the all-consuming fire that urges them ever closer to self-destruction, is “cankered of unkynde blood.” Here again we see that unnatural blood, the evidence of their parents’ sin, manifesting as a corruption that exists inside the brothers. They are unable to expel this corruption, to be anything other than this unnaturalness. Of course, then, they would destroy each other; the unnatural brother is one who would destroy his brother, rather than aid, comfort, or love him. Their hate is the inescapable result of the sin that predates (and hence, is in no way their fault), and created them. It continually shapes them and precludes their own agency.

Only when Polymytes actually wounds Ethiocles does a shift occur. Lydgate says that Polymytes “thorgh platys, mayle, and shield / Roof hym [Ethiocles] thorghout and smette hym into feld” (Part 3, ll. 4277-4278). Polymytes commits an extreme act of incredible violent strength here, piercing Ethiocles through armor and shield and throwing him to the ground in the process. The violence, the intensity is necessary. It recalls and reflects the hugeness, the severity of the transgression that created the brothers, the patricide and incest committed by their parents and which has corrupted the family’s blood ever since. This violence also spills that corrupt blood. Lydgate says, “But whan he [Polymytes] saugh the stremys of his [Ethiocles’] blood /

Raylle about in maner of a flood, / Al sodeynly of compassioun / And brotherly, with pitous face,  
 / To save his [Ethiocles'] lyf gan hym to embrace, / And from his wounde of newe affecioun, /  
 Ful bysy was to pulle out the trunchoun, / Of love only handlyng hym right soft" (Part 3, ll.  
 4279-4287). The spilling of the blood marks the moment of Polymytes' change. It is as though  
 the corrupt blood flowing on the ground, although it belongs to his brother, not to him, somehow  
 cleanses Polymytes of that hate that grew and cankered out of it. Note, to, that this is a place  
 where Lydgate's use of the pronouns "he" and "his" become less clearly reflective of the specific  
 person. The reader has to be clearly following the action to know which brother inflicted the  
 injury and which is injured, which saw the blood and which bled. This seems to strengthen the  
 idea of their shared blood, the shared corruption that is flowing through both brothers. It makes  
 sense, then, that Polymytes can experience a relief from that corrupting blood when Ethiocles is  
 bleeding. Polymytes then feels pity, compassion, and affection for his brother. The hate that grew  
 from his corrupt blood prevented him from seeing his brother as a fellow human, from feeling  
 empathy and compassion for him. Now that Ethiocles bleeds out their shared corruption onto the  
 ground, Polymytes can recognize his brother's pain and attempt to rectify his own role in  
 creating it. The inescapability of this fault, this sin that created the brothers, and created their  
 hate, has at last become escapable.

Except that it is not. Ethiocles is mortally wounded. And when he witnesses Polymytes' compassion, rather than embrace his brother and heal their literal and metaphorical wounds, "Ethiocles the felle, / Of al this sorowe verraye sours and welle, / With a dagger in al his peynys smerte / His brother smoot unwarly to the herte" (Part 3, ll. 4289-4292). Polymytes attempts to right the wrongs committed by them both, but Ethiocles kills him before any reconciliation can occur. Both brothers die. Apparently the relief from the corruption that Polymytes experienced



did not occur in Ethiocles. He is the brother who refuses to cede his control of Thebes, and could thus be argued to be the cause of the strife. Lydgate even calls him the source of the sorrow. Ethiocles as source of the sorrow, source of the fighting and pain, would of course be brutal and vicious unto death. His deathbed murder of Polymytes seems in keeping with his character. But Ethiocles, of course, is not the source of the sorrow. Neither is Polymytes. They are merely the ones forced to struggle against it until it causes them to destroy themselves. The compassion and pity demonstrated by Polymytes is not ever meant to be fully realized by both brothers, never meant to hearken in a new era of love and brotherhood and common rule of Thebes. It is shown to readers as a glimpse into what could have been possible had the brothers not been the result of sin, not been corrupt in unkind blood from before their births. That brief, halcyon moment illustrates by contrast the horrors of corruption the brothers suffered. I believe that while we are meant to use the story as a guide for how not to act, how we should treat others with compassion, how we should share authority and work for the common profit, we are also unable to completely vilify the brothers.

Though Lydgate calls Ethiocles the source of the sorrow here, he is clearly not. Perhaps that term is supposed to draw our attention, as prudent readers, to its falseness. Neither Ethiocles nor Polymytes is the ultimate source of their sorrow and destruction. Lydgate has made us aware of that fact throughout the tale with his references to the corruption that exists in their unkind blood. After all, the tale begins with the unwitting act of incest between Edippus and Jocasta, which Lydgate describes by saying “Unwist of both he was of her blode” (Part 1, l.783) and then elaborating on the incest taboo with “Nor acceptable blood to touche blood” (Part 1, l.783). Both Edippus and Jocasta were unaware that he “was of her blode,” but their ignorance could not overcome the taint of incest. This produces the disastrous, devastating effect that ripples outward

from Edippus and Jocasta to disrupt their family, their city, and eventually armies and families from other regions.

As the story progresses and the destruction of the city becomes inevitable, Lydgate makes it clear that the root of this tragedy lies in blood and its corruption, not in the will of any one participant. At the beginning of the third part he states, “The cite brent and was sette afire, / As books olde wel reherce konne, / Of cruel hate rooted and begunne / And engendred, the story maketh mynde, / Oonly of blood corrupt and unkynde, / B’ynfeccioun called orygnal, / Causing a strif dredful and mortal” (Part 3, ll.2560-6). Lydgate clearly locates the cause of the tragedy here: “cruel hate” that comes from “blood corrupt and unkynde.” Setting aside for a moment the clear indication that breaking the incest taboo would be cause enough for tragedy to occur, Lydgate situates the whole passage in terms of heredity. He uses the word “engendred” to describe where the cruel hate originates. The term carries with it implications of progeny and offspring. The “blood” then produced or spawned the “cruel hate.” This makes sense given how Lydgate describes the blood; it is “corrupt and unkynde.” Such traits, of something spoiled, infected, or unnatural, would certainly carry across generations, flowing in the blood of fathers and sons.<sup>173</sup>

Lydgate further solidifies that this blood’s corruption and regeneration is at the center of the tragedy in the last line: “B’ynfeccioun called orygnal.” The infection reinforces the notion

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<sup>173</sup> The MED and OED have definitions and quotations that support this genealogical sense of “corrupt.” Both also cite legal definitions of the word whereby someone who committed a crime would have so corrupted his blood that his heirs, in addition to himself, would lose certain rights and privileges, usually of rank. See “corrupten (v).” *Middle English Dictionary*. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED9847> Accessed 12 April 2018. and “corrupt, v.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/42035](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/42035). Accessed 12 April 2018.

of a disastrous inheritance. He then calls the infection “orygynal;”<sup>174</sup> Lydgate could, of course, be obliquely referring to the original sin of Adam and Eve, or more directly to the sin of incest between Edippus and Jocasta that is original to this story. It presents the idea that there is an origin, somewhere in the past, to this infection. The story, however, contradicts this. Laius and Jocasta are given the prophecy that their son will end up killing his father, so Laius instructs Jocasta to kill the baby as soon as he is born; Jocasta delegates this task to certain men in her employ who are unable to carry it out. Lydgate describes this disobedience of royal orders saying, “In her herte they hadde grete pyte / And pleynly cast – among hem was no stryf -- / That the child shulde han his lif” (Part 1, ll. 422-424). The men acted out of pity for the child, and they were in total agreement about sparing his life. Surely their pity for an innocent newborn is meant to be understandable to Lydgate’s readers, even if we know it leads to terrible destruction. When Jocasta relates the incident to Edippus later, she says the men “hadde such compassioun” (Part 1, l. 934).

Where, then, is the infection that is original? From whence does the corruption derive? It would seem that Jocasta and Laius do what they can to prevent Edippus’ (and their own) fate but are superseded by compassion and pity. A contradiction exists here; compassion and pity seem to be the things Lydgate advocates for throughout the tale, using the hate and envy of Ethiocles and Polymytes as counter-examples, but these positive traits also appear at (or close to) the root of the destruction and corruption. The answer may lie in the brief proclamation of the soothsayers who predicted this fate. The last line of their proclamation reads, “Ther may no man helpe it or excuse” (Part 1, l. 399). Immediately after this statement is made, Laius begins planning to

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<sup>174</sup> The MED’s entry for “originale” lists this very passage as an example of the second sense of the word: “of sin;” “the original sin present in every individual;” “original sin personified.” “original(e (adj.(1)).” *Middle English Dictionary*. [www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED30903](http://www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED30903). Accessed 12 April 2018.

prevent this tragedy. Here we have nearly an inversion of common profit and prudence. Wisdom, in the form of predictions and calculations from famous experts, has been provided, but is not being heeded, by Laius. His actions are perhaps understandable – it makes sense that upon learning of his death he would try to prevent it – but ultimately not prudent. The idea that “no man” may help this situation relates to common profit. The prediction does not encompass the scope of this tragedy, of the many deaths and destructions that will occur, but only states that the son will slay his father. Laius, then, could be said to be acting not for a common profit, but for self-preservation alone. The singular man here cannot help the situation, or help himself. Despite that, Laius tries to avert disaster. Instead, his imprudence and self-preservation are met with and overwhelmed by the pity and compassion of the unnamed men who, when sent to murder the infant Edippus, choose mercy and life.

Lydgate fashions a powerful inversion here. The imprudence and selfishness (perhaps) would have spared the lives of many, but pity and compassion set events on a destructive path. This creates a paradoxical cycle spinning, one that we have encountered throughout this tale, where positive things like prudence and pity lead to destruction, but those destructions can bear positive results or lessons. It also indicates that any kind of original infection that may appear to come from a singular event or person, like Laius trying to avoid death or the henchmen showing mercy for an infant, actually grows out of multi-layered and sometimes contradictory place, one that begets more questions. Are we meant to understand Laius’ self-preservation as negative and does that make the henchmen’s pity positive? If so, why does it play such a large role in the impending tragedies? This seems deliberate to me. In *Siege*, Lydgate tells his readers over and again that endings are beginnings (are endings and so on) and he does not shut any point of

interpretation or learning in the story down fully. He intentionally wishes to provoke prudent investigation of his works, to shape and authorize his readers.

To consider this, we should return to Ethiocles at the moment of his death. Ethiocles is innocent. Lydgate has made that plain and clear throughout the story. The issue lies in the corruption of his blood, which, as we have seen, is an infection that both is his parents' incestuous sin but also stems from a multi-layered, interconnected web of causes and effects, of contradictory motivations and characteristics. So why, at the end of the story, does Lydgate lay blame for the tragedy at Ethiocles' feet, calling him the source of all this sorrow? This seems like a serious error on Lydgate's part, one where his desire to moralize overrides his memory of what he has already written and his ability to form a cohesive whole. I see this place, this accusation of Ethiocles differently. Lydgate has been using *Siege of Thebes* to instruct his readers in prudent reading and how to strive for common profit and in that context, this strong condemnation of Ethiocles appears to be a test. The language employed should alert the reader to its possible faultiness. Lydgate calls him, "Ethiocles the felle, / Of al this sorowe verraye sours and welle." The TEAMS edition glosses "felle" as "savage" and the MED provides definitions that include wrathful, ruthless, brutal, and cruel.<sup>175</sup> We know that these terms certainly apply to Ethiocles' actions throughout; he did trample his father's eyes and slay his brother in a moment of potential reconciliation, after all. We know, from what Lydgate has been trying to demonstrate to us, that such cruelty should be roundly censured. But Lydgate's words here seem cruel in themselves. They depict Ethiocles as a villain, someone at whose feet the sorrows of his family and his city (supposedly) clearly lie. Lydgate, maybe not explicitly, but implicitly, make him responsible, but this is in stark opposition to all the references to the unkind, corrupt blood running through

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<sup>175</sup> See TEAMS edition, page 139. "fel (adj.)" *Middle English Dictionary*. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED15492> accessed July 10, 2018.

Ethiocrates' veins. Is it not unjust and cruel for Lydgate to blame Ethiocrates when he has spent time explaining that the cause of all this tragedy is in the corruption, the infection? Lydgate has equipped his readers with the prudence to judge himself in this moment and find fault with both his reasoning and his vehemence.

Here Lydgate demonstrates intentionality in his faulty writing. This is not simply a line that might be mismetered or a reference to a pope that a Reformation-era reader might find objectionable. This accusation of Ethiocrates is a real, immediate moment of deliberate contradiction. Here Lydgate calls upon his readers and tests the lessons he has been teaching them to discover his fault and correct it. These disruptive few words are the final part of the lesson. His readers learn prudence by reading the work and then practice prudent reading upon that work, which becomes the enactment of their authorization as readers. This authorization, the clear identification and correction of the fault, demonstrates the prudence of the readers and reflects well on the person who taught them that prudence, Lydgate.

What we learn in this moment is not just prudent reading and correction for common profit. The reader also gets a lesson in authorial intent and the discoverability, the knowability of that intent. Through their prudent reading of the text, the cumulative impact of their lessons, the reader can understand that Lydgate's fault in this instance is an intentional fault, one that is not the result of negligence, but rather a deliberate attempt to signal the reader. The imprudent reader, or the person who approaches Lydgate's work not as a lesson in reading but instead equipped with the critical lenses through which Lydgate has been filtered through the centuries, may see, read, and interpret this fault differently and miss his intentionality here. The work of the prudent reader is to continually attempt to discover and acknowledge this kind of layering of

meanings, of faults that are intentional and therefore not ultimately faulty. To do so is to exercise judgement in close reading of the text and to make it knowable for others.

This is the task of the editor, that category of reader that perhaps most clearly engages in active reading. In *Negotiating the Past*, Lee Patterson addresses the weighty burden of the editor of medieval works and takes to task the critics who, in various degrees, lambasted George Kane's and E. Talbot Donaldson's editorial methods in their edition of the B Version of *Piers Plowman*.<sup>176</sup> Patterson takes issue with those critics who accuse Kane and Donaldson of engaging in subjectivist editing. He says that for editors, "Our methodological choices, in short, are not merely between scientific certainty (i.e., objective truth) and intuitional surmise (i.e., subjective taste) but include a *tertium quid*, careful empirical investigation that produces results that are probable" (98).<sup>177</sup> Patterson identifies in Kane and Donaldson, a third path between science and intuition, a way that sits between those points on the spectrum, engaging both and blending the subjective with the objective. It points to an editorial enterprise that seeks out the intention of the poet through close attention to the details of the manuscript evidence while infusing that attention with the judgement learned through their experiences reading the work. Patterson concludes that "the task of the editor...is to 'read' the evidence as a New Critic would

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<sup>176</sup> See Patterson's third chapter "The Logic of Textual Criticism and the Way of Genius: The Kane-Donaldson *Piers Plowman* in Historical Perspective" for a full discussion of the edition, its reception, and Patterson's perspective. See especially notes 4 and 6 (pages 78 and 79, respectively) for a list of negative critiques of the edition. Patterson, Lee. *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature*. U of Wisconsin P, 1987.

<sup>177</sup> At a practical, editorial level, what Patterson means (and, I believe Kane and Donaldson would agree) is that attestation, or the number of times a variant occurs (also called "external" evidence) cannot be the sole basis for authority in an edition. One must interpret attestation and also consider the reading, the variant itself, and thereby not rely on a historical understanding of the texts (which is produced earliest, or which descended from which copies). Kane and Donaldson use the phrases "reconstruction" and "conjecture" (or "conjectural emendation") to describe their process. See "Introduction: Editing the B Version" for a full description of their editorial method and decisions. Kane, George and E. Talbot Donaldson. *Will's Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better, and Do-Best: An Edition in the Form of Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17, Corrected and Restored From the Known Evidence, With Variant Readings*. The Athlone Press, 1975.

read a poem, and to produce as a result of his labors an interpretation that is, in fact, the poem itself” (110). Close, critical, prudent reading makes up the work of the editor. The result is an interpretation of the evidence that is a recreation of the work. In short, Patterson sees the editors of a work as (re)creating that work, as deeply engaged in and imbued with a literary authority that they gained through their (what I would call prudent) reading of the varieties of the work.

The reader must read faults, imperfections, corruptions in order to sort and sift the variations, determining which are worthy of reproduction. This is the work of the prudent reader. Here it might be helpful to return to Darwin. Darwin makes an interesting point about variety within species saying, “plants which have very wide ranges generally present varieties; and this might have been expected, as they become exposed to diverse physical conditions, and as they come into competition...with different sets of organic beings” (53).<sup>178</sup> Varieties, or differences from the original, result from these kinds of exposures, so the idea presented here makes sense. He draws this fact to its conclusion saying, “hence it is the most flourishing, or, as they may be called, the dominant species – those which range widely over the world, are the most diffused in their own country, and are the most numerous in individuals, -- which oftenest produce well-marked varieties” (53-54). The “most flourishing” might rightly also be called the most successful. When thought of in literary terms, the most popular, most successful work would be the one that also has individuals possessing the most varieties. This makes as much sense with books as it does with flowers. The work that is most successful will be present in many different manuscripts, written by a variety of scribes who all impose their own biases (ranging from dialect to attention and adherence to the exemplar) upon the work, creating new varieties of that work. A work that has fewer manuscript witnesses or was produced only in a particular region will, of course, have fewer varieties.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.



The work of the editor becomes sorting and sifting these varieties, determining which to reproduce. The reading of several copies containing multiple varieties allows the editor to better judge each instance of differentiation. Exposure to many varieties and inference into what caused them allows the reader the opportunity to become a more prudent reader and hence to reproduce the work in a more judicious manner. Reading faults, then, makes for prudent readers. It allows for the reader to discover Patterson's third path, the direction between the facts of the manuscript tradition and subjective taste, and to reproduce the work itself. The manuscript tradition of a popular, successful work will naturally create differences, varieties, and faults which the prudent editor needs to read and understand if they are to reproduce the work. If we think back to Lydgate in *Siege of Thebes*, we can see that he prepares his readers to encounter and comprehend these varieties and faults by deliberately providing them with some imbedded in the work itself. The scathing blaming of Ethiocles is one such instance. Others include his misidentification of Chaucer's pilgrims in the prologue, which critics have long used as an inroad for more general denunciation of Lydgate's skills.<sup>179</sup> Lydgate appears to be a bad reader in both these instances, in the former of himself and what he had previously written about corruption, and in the latter of one of his main sources, Chaucer. What he actually does here, what his deliberate, intentional faults do, is provide his readers with opportunities to hone their skills as prudent readers.

Kane and Donaldson present their edition with what appears to be trepidation at their ability to render the work. They say that "the authority of our text is then, like that of all edited texts, in no sense absolute" (212). After hundreds of pages of explanation of their methodology and detailed descriptions of specific choices they made, Kane and Donaldson do not assert the authority of their edition, but accede to its fallibility. They further term their edition "a theoretical structure, a complex hypothesis" that is "subject to modification by the emergence of

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<sup>179</sup> See for example Spearing (1985).

new data, or to replacement by a superior hypothesis” (212). This designation of their edition as a hypothesis could also read as an unauthoritative stance, but when considered in the light of Lydgate’s theory of active readership, this takes on a different connotation.

A hypothesis is something that must be tested by others, proven or disproven with time and rigorous attention. The OED defines it as “a provisional supposition...which serves as a starting point for further investigation.”<sup>180</sup> The idea that Kane and Donaldson invoke by using this word is not one of uncertainty about their edition, but one that is clear about the life of a literary work. They understand that their contribution is not absolute and does not conclude the work, but is a step in its continued progression. A hypothesis must be tested, must act, according to the OED, as a “starting point for further investigation.” This edition, and its methodology, are meant to be taken up, inspected, and, most importantly, to be brought to bear on future editions of this (and other medieval) texts. The implicit understanding here is that the interpretation and editing of the work should be continued by future readers of the work. By assuming humble positions relative to their editorial endeavor, Kane and Donaldson invite others to participate in this process. By admitting potential fault in their edition, they provide other readers with the opportunity to gain authority by correcting that fault. This is Lydgate’s process of active readership in action.

This sentiment is prefigured in an earlier editor occupied with a similarly complex task: Alfred Edward Housman, editor of Marcus Manilius. In the introduction to the fifth book of Manilius’ *Astronomicon* Housman concludes by saying, “the reader whose good opinion I desire and have done my utmost to secure is the next Bentley or Scalinger who may chance to occupy

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<sup>180</sup> "hypothesis, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/90588](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90588). Accessed 12 April 2018.

himself with Manilius” (xxxvii).<sup>181</sup> Bentley and Scalinger, earlier editors of Manilius whom Housman admires for their editions of this ancient work, serve as both a past and future for the work as Housman envisions it. The continual, informed reading and editing of the work are part of its life. Here it is clear that the editor sees, as an integral part of his task, the enticement of future readers to the mission of editing, to the continuation of its life as a dynamic work. Housman wishes to not only secure the good opinion of readers, but through that opinion to inspire them to also be sagacious and circumspect editors of this work. The result, of course, is a better work in the future. Housman relies upon a reader taking up the mantle of editor and improving his own work. Patterson, in reading Housman, describes the trajectory of continually improving editing described by Housman as “a laying on of hands” which “makes the corpus of Manilius whole again” (99).

This idea of continual reading, interpreting, and editing of the work, all with the purpose of correcting or improving a work, seems particularly Lydgatean. In his EETS edition of *Siege of Thebes*, Axel Erdmann recalls Lydgate’s repeated calls for readerly correction saying, “from Lydgate’s reiterated requests that his readers should kindly correct the slips and mistakes of his writings, we have cause to believe that he was conscious of having not seldom neglected to bestow proper care on the metre or the syntax of his poetical productions” (92).<sup>182</sup> Erdmann’s words here point to a very clear difference between what Kane and Donaldson (and Patterson) see as an editor’s task and how Lydgate envisions the life of a literary work. Lydgate assumes a deficient authorial original, one that always already needs revision, correction, editing. Erdmann points this out, saying that Lydgate’s request for readerly correction indicates a knowledge of the

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<sup>181</sup> Housman, Alfred Edward. “Introduction.” *Astronomicon V*, by Marcus Manilius, G. Olms, 1972, pp. v-xxxvii.

<sup>182</sup> Erdmann, Axel. “Introduction.” *Lydgate’s Siege of Thebes*, Oxford UP, 1930, pp. 1-94.

faults in his own writing. Kane and Donaldson assume that the authorial original is the version to which all editors should aspire, as the best version of the text. Both conceptualizations of the work require continued action on the part of conscientious readers and editors, but Kane and Donaldson's model imagines a point of origin, which is ultimately also their end point. For them, the work has a beginning, and that beginning is also its end. For Lydgate, the work should never be complete, but continue to evolve, grow, and change over and with time.

In Erdmann's edition for the Early English Text Society, he lists 21 extant manuscripts of *Siege*.<sup>183</sup> In the manner of a diligent, early twentieth-century bibliographer and editor, Erdmann meticulously lays out the genealogy of the manuscripts, noting errors or "faults" common to certain manuscripts and unique to others. He compares these faults to each other to establish relationships between the manuscripts; the result is to use Erdmann's words "rather complex" (62). Erdmann theorizes an authorial original, as well as a first copy, which he designates O, probably executed by a professional copyist, both of which have been lost (62-92). The remaining manuscripts he groups and charts via their relation to each other and to the lost O manuscript, but he cannot make the manuscripts fit cleanly and completely into the genealogical stemma. To take the first group of related manuscripts he discusses as an example, he says that manuscripts Ad<sub>1</sub>, Ad<sub>2</sub>, and I have many faults in common and therefore form a single group. Within that group, Ad<sub>2</sub> and I form a sub-group based on their common faults, not found in Ad<sub>1</sub>,

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<sup>183</sup> This was, we can assume, an accurate accounting of the known manuscripts of *Siege of Thebes* when Erdmann undertook his project as editor in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later investigations have uncovered more manuscripts: in 1991 A. S. G. Edwards notes that there are 29, and by the time TEAMS produces their edition, Robert R. Edwards notes 31. From this we can infer both the popularity of the poem (as attested by the number of extant manuscripts) and the period of unpopularity that Lydgate and his works suffered; if popularity had not waned, certain manuscript copies of the poem would probably not have been lost (and therefore recovered in the past 20 years or so). The relatively recent discoveries also demonstrate that the work of an editor could, at any time, be complicated or rendered null by the discovery of a new copy of the poem. Edwards, A. S. G. "Beinecke Ms 661 and Early Fifteenth-Century English Manuscript Production." *Yale University Library Gazette*, vol. 66, no. 1, 1991, pp. 181-196.

and neither Ad<sub>2</sub> nor I derive from the other, but in certain cases they derive from Ad<sub>1</sub>, possibly with one or more intermediary (but now lost) manuscripts between. But each manuscript has unique faults and each manuscript sometimes agrees with one manuscript to the exclusion of the other. This complexity, this lack of linearity and clear descent, characterizes the stemma overall. Erdmann makes sense of these confluences and divergences with explanations involving scribal error and correction and the use of multiple extant and lost manuscript exemplars, but the overall impression given by the manuscript genealogy is one of complexity and complication, and above all, corruption.<sup>184</sup> Each group of manuscripts is connected through their shared faults, their differences from (and therefore corruptions of) the imagined original. This manuscript genealogy is constructed upon corruption. There seem to be no direct lines of descent.

The exception is British Library MS Arundel 119. Erdmann uses it for the basis of the EETS edition, as does Robert R. Edwards for the TEAMS edition in 2001, because it is, as Erdmann says, the “oldest and one of the very best MSS” (91).<sup>185</sup> Erdmann’s chart of the stemma indicates an intermediary manuscript between Arundel 119 and the first copy O, but he never mentions this in his account of the genealogy. He places Arundel 119 in a category almost by

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<sup>184</sup> To add to the explanation of this complexity, I would venture to add a further conjecture, one based on the evidence of a single scribe for at least three manuscripts of *Siege of Thebes*. A. S. G. Edwards (1991) identifies a scribe named Stephen Doddesham as the scribe of Beinecke MS 661, Boston Public Library MS f. med. 94, and Cambridge University, Add. MS 3137. Edwards points out that a scribe who intended to make several copies of a single work might obtain an exemplar and work from that, so that all the copies would be the same (or very similar). This is not the case with Doddesham’s copies of *Siege*. Edwards points out that the Beinecke and Cambridge copies “are placed in widely removed branches of the textual tradition” and that the Boston Public Library copy bears a “general relationship” to the same group as the Cambridge manuscript, (188). He infers, quite logically, from this that Doddesham lacked either the organization, resources, or both, to obtain and retain his own exemplar of the poem and instead accessed an exemplar whenever he was approached to make a new copy of the poem. This results in different exemplars for different copies that are done by the same scribe. Here I would venture that these copies that descend from different exemplars might nonetheless have shared variations or faults resulting from their shared scribe. A scribe working from different exemplars might remember a previous reading that he copied and attempt to recreate that where he saw an error or gap. This could create similarities between dissimilarly descended manuscripts and complicate the genealogical tree.

<sup>185</sup> Further, Robert R. Edwards says that the manuscript was copied in 1430, which would have been about a decade after the poem was written. Edwards, Robert R. “Introduction.” *John Lydgate The Siege of Thebes*. Medieval Institute Publications, 2001. 14.

itself; he notes one descendent from it. The other three main branches of the stemma contain between six and eight manuscripts each with varying degrees of relation to each other and O. Arundel 119 has occasional relations to the other three branches, but Erdmann asserts that it “holds an independent position” (91). This manuscript, then, represents something of a Holy Grail in bibliography and editing. It is an early copy with relatively few faults, a text that is, to quote Erdmann “perfectly complete” and written in a “clear and regular” hand, whose descent from the original is unimpeded by complicated relationships to other manuscripts (38). To consider it from a Darwinian perspective, it has not been subject to (much) exposure “to diverse physical conditions...[or] competition...with different sets of organic beings” and has thus developed far fewer varieties (or faults, divergences) than other manuscript copies (53). No wonder, then, that both modern editors of the poem take Arundel 119 as the basis for their editions.

It is a strange occurrence that a medieval work with so many manuscript witnesses with such a complex set of over-lapping relationships would somehow manage to also be preserved in a manuscript wherein such a strong case can be made for its primacy and legitimacy. The project of the editor of *Siege of Thebes*, then, while admittedly having a serious task before him (as does the editor of most any medieval literary work), would presumably have an easier time than editors of works with a more complicated manuscript history with which to contend. But here is where we must pause and consider again the function of that most prudent of readers, the editor. Lydgate, as we know, would call for correction coming from the judgement of the reader. Interestingly, Sir W. W. Greg, in “The Rationale of Copy-Text” makes a similar argument. He warns against the “tyranny” and “mesmeric influence” that the use of a single copy text can hold

(382-383).<sup>186</sup> Greg points out the folly in adhering too rigidly a copy text: an over-trusting editor may include errors in their edition simply because they occur in a version of the work which has earned a certain level of authority. That authority, of course, is bestowed by the editor themselves, and should be under scrutiny. In addition, Greg says that “an editor who declines or is unable to exercise his judgment and falls back on some arbitrary canon, such as the authority of the copy-text, is in fact abdicating his editorial function” (384). To this I would add that he abdicates his authority as a reader. By allowing the text to retain full authority over the work, so that errors do not get identified or scrutinized simply because they fall within that text, the editor relinquishes his readerly authority to influence the work.

In the case of *Siege of Thebes*, it would seem that Arundel 119 is a relatively uncorrupted version of the original and therefore preferable as the copy-text or base text of any edition. The use of this edition, however, based on the idea that an authorial original is the ideal text, forecloses the possibility for continued improvement of the work stemming from active readerly involvement. This also means that any authority that comes with involvement in the creation or recreation of the work is similarly foreclosed. It begins with the author and once the editor establishes the most authoritative version of the work as the one which is closest to the author’s original, authority returns to the author.

If we look closely at the author in this case, we see that Lydgate advocates for passing authority on to his readers rather than maintaining it for himself. In *Siege of Thebes*, his approach is slightly different than in *Troy Book* and *Fall of Princes*: rather than openly inviting readers to correct him, he demonstrates what it means to be a prudent, active reader, modeling the process for his readers. He does this at every level of this complicated and complex tale. In

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<sup>186</sup> Greg, W. W. *Collected Papers*. Edited by J. C. Maxwell, Oxford UP, 1966.

the frame narrative Lydgate layers time and place in such a way as to draw the reader in, to make them a pilgrim alongside Lydgate, mimicking his own egress into this work. In this layering, and in the very choice of material, he continually reinforces that endings are beginnings and that, ideally, for literary history and creation, there is no closing down of a story or a work, only new and renewed openings. In addition to showing his readers their ability to gain entrance to the realm of literary creation, Lydgate also uses the story of Edippus and his family to demonstrate to his readers the values of prudence and common profit. These lessons allow his readers to grow into the kinds of authorized agents who may enter a work and correct or alter it, reflecting their own authority back on Lydgate who taught them how to earn it. Ultimately we can see these lessons at work in the task of the editor, for whom faults, corruptions, and divergences are all opportunities to strengthen their discernment, their prudence, and thus their ability to recreate a work for the common profit. Lydgate, at every turn in *Siege of Thebes*, creates these kinds of opportunities. He may misread, he may include faults (whether of his own creation or through his narration of the character's misdeeds), but they fall in line with his ideas about endings and beginnings. Faults, destructions, misreadings all become, to the prudent reader, an opportunity to exercise their accumulated wisdom. In *Siege*, Lydgate fosters prudence through imprudence, and creates common profit through egoism. In short, he demonstrates the power in paradox.



**Chapter Four – A Lydgatean Legacy: Authority and Paradox in Shakespeare’s  
*Troilus and Cressida***

Lydgate’s great scheme of authorizing readers so as to preserve his works and retroactively and reflectively authorize himself operates from a future-facing perspective. The readers, after all, come after Lydgate, at some point beyond the reach of his authorial hand. If they follow Lydgate’s agenda, enacting authority for themselves and entering the spaces of literary creation to alter, correct, and emend his works, they do so at a point necessarily removed from but still attached to him. Readers can be considered literary inheritors. Lydgate’s would, if they were prudent, follow his examples, learn the lessons he imparts, and operate under his methods to actively preserve his (and, possibly, other) works. The question, then, is whether this method of active prudent readership, of authorization for the common profit, exists beyond Lydgate’s immediate sphere of influence. And if so, if readers really can become writers, how does this model work outside of what scholars usually consider the middle ages? If Lydgate’s method works because of his unique position in literary history, his relationship to Chaucer and to the building of the vernacular canon, if Lydgate’s humility topos and all its accompanying complexities regarding authority is the product of his fifteenth-century context, then we must consider carefully what, if anything, happens to this whole grand scheme outside of that context.

To do so, in this chapter I undertake a closer examination of Lydgate’s relationship to Chaucer by examining the prologue to *Siege of Thebes* as well as his influence in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, which constitutes an instance where Lydgate’s literary position had shifted from that of poet to source. This chapter seeks to uncover how Lydgate’s interconnected theories of authority, reading, prudence, common profit, destructive preservation, and continual renewal

work outside of Lydgate himself. What I propose is that Lydgate's relationship to Chaucer speaks to those aspects of genealogy and inheritance which he brought up in *Siege*, but not in exactly the same ways. Lydgate is not a corrupt extension of Chaucer, not the Ethiocles to Chaucer's Edippus, but rather is a bastard son. This differentiation is distinct and carries many implications, but the main one is that of internal versus external identifying markers. In short, a corrupt son, one like Ethiocles who is marked from conception by the incest which created him, carries that infection, that sin, in his blood until death. The corruption lives inside him. As we have seen, it is only once that blood has been spilled that any kind of relief from its oppressive tyranny can be felt, and that is fleeting at best.

A bastard son, however, may be created from the sin of adultery, but that designation is carried not within his blood, but in the minds and judgement of the world who observes it. A bastard is only a bastard because his parents are not married; marriage is a sacrament, to be sure, but it is still a ceremony performed by a person in the service of an institution that, at the time is perhaps not thought to be created by man, but is certainly carried out by man. Bastardy, therefore, is a societally conceived condition, not an innate, inherent, genealogical flaw. This means that Lydgate's bastardy is not internal to himself, but the product of outside perceptions of his status relative to his literary inheritance. Critical reception of Lydgate marked his bastardy for centuries; what it failed to realize was the power and authority that, unlike in the case of the corrupt, can paradoxically and quite unexpectedly be found in that position. This chapter, then, explores bastardy in *Siege* and how it works as a paradoxically authorizing status for Lydgate. It then moves to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, to explore the extrapolation of literary bastardy in the seventeenth century, looking both within the play, to its characters, and without, to its early print history, to find correlatives to Lydgate.

In *Siege of Thebes*, Lydgate shows his readers a different aspect of the process of literary creation: the informed, active reading of the work. Nowhere in *Siege* does Lydgate ask his readers to correct him. Nor does he adhere to that humble attitude that appears so often in his other works. This is because Lydgate is not putting himself forward as an author, but as a reader. He actively reads *Canterbury Tales*, adding where he sees fit, amending and contextualizing. Lydgate does what he has earlier instructed the prudent reader to do – engage the source actively and critically. But what gives him the right, the ability to do so? How can Lydgate lay claim to Chaucer’s most popular work, change it where he deems fit and complete it with a narrative addition that is all his own? Lydgate’s authority comes from within and without himself. He is the inheritor, the successor to Chaucer, but he is definitely not Chaucer’s exact copy. In the case of Lydgate and Chaucer, it is often Lydgate’s differences from his literary father, his (presumed) inability to accurately reproduce and reflect Chaucer, that are most prominent and therefore most forcefully define their relationship.

To return once again to Darwin, Lydgate varies from his predecessor in a way that allows for his survival in a different environment. Darwin says all beings “are striving, it may be said, to seize on each place in the economy of nature, [and] if any one species does not become modified and improved...it will soon be exterminated” (102). To be sure, Lydgate’s modifications, the ways he differs from Chaucer, may not necessarily be viewed as improvements by all his readers, but his differences, the varieties developed in this offspring, that allow him to succeed. These varieties, when viewed through the external perception of his bastardy, can appear detrimental, like the corruption that plagued Edippus’ offspring. But that corruption was an inescapably destructive place for those whose blood it tainted and Lydgate’s varieties, his

marked differences from his literary father, do not condemn him to annihilation, but rather allow him the opportunity to flourish.

Lydgate's position relative to Chaucer, akin to that of the bastard whose conception and birth marks not a joyous occasion of continuance of a particular family line, but rather the illegitimate, and therefore undesirable, reproduction of it, can be seen as one of diminished power and authority, especially in comparison to an heir born in wedlock. The bastard lacks legitimacy as a true or sanctioned reproduction of a desirable original, and therefore gains less by his reflection of that original. Lydgate, however, refuses to accept that his imperfect reflection of Chaucer results in a lack of literary authority for himself. He draws strength from ability to both be and not be Chaucer, to have an inheritance but also possess a set of varieties distinct from that inheritance; in that liminal position, Lydgate locates room for himself to create literary works that both stand apart from and connect firmly to his predecessor.

In England in the later middle ages, the legalities of bastardy and inheritance appear to be somewhat illogical, but pertinent to Lydgate's bastardy. The medieval definition and delineation of bastard aligns with one modern sense of the word: the offspring of an unwed union; an illegitimate son or daughter.<sup>187</sup> The legality of determining a person's bastardy in a time before reliable medical paternity tests, however, proved an intricate, delicate, and complex process. Although the negative connotation of the word does not appear until several centuries later according to the OED, the law of the time considered the potential for slander real enough to make provisions for untrue or frivolous accusations.<sup>188</sup> In their comprehensive study of English

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<sup>187</sup> See definition 1a in the OED entry and definitions 1 & 2 in the MED. "bastard, n. and adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/16044](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/16044). Accessed 12 April 2018. "bastard (n.)." *Middle English Dictionary*. [www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED3752](http://www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED3752). Accessed 12 April 2018.

<sup>188</sup> See definition 1c in the OED entry, which says, "used vulgarly as a term of abuse" and notes the first instance of this negative definition as 1830. Interestingly the MED's third definition implies a certain amount of negativity

law prior to Edward I, Frederick Pollock and Frederic Maitland state that prevailing attitudes were such that “the charge of bastardy is one that imports some disgrace and it cannot be made in a direct way against one who is not alive to answer it” (vol. 2, 379-80).<sup>189</sup> Pollock and Maitland appear to hedge with their use of the vague term “some disgrace,” but the facts they present are undeniable. A dead man cannot be called a bastard because the designation is such that it would be unethical to deem a person a bastard when he is not present to defend against such a distasteful accusation. The mixed messages surrounding bastardy abound when considering the case of royal or noble bastards. Shortly after Lydgate’s death, for example, Richard III attempted to slander the upstart rebel leader Henry Tudor by publicizing the double-bastardy of his ancestry.<sup>190</sup> Richard was, of course, unsuccessful in keeping Henry Tudor from the throne, either by use of force or by slandering Henry’s ancestry; Henry Tudor seized the crown despite the illegitimacies in his family’s past and established a dynasty for his heirs. In this case, allegations of bastardy, however well-founded, did not prevent inheritance. When considering the overall connotations and implications of bastardy, this would point to a notion of illegitimacy that is neither wholly negative nor positive, but dependent upon the individuals involved. There was room within late medieval bastardy for “some disgrace,” but also for great inheritance and

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inherent in the designation of bastard, defining bastard as “something that is not genuine or pure” such as a crossbreed.

<sup>189</sup> Wilfrid Hooper also provides several examples of how this deference to the dead with regards to allegations of bastardy works (20-2). Hooper, Wilfrid. *The Law of Illegitimacy*. Sweet & Maxwell, 1911. Pollock, Frederick and Frederic Maitland. *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*. Cambridge UP, 1911.

<sup>190</sup> In a 1485 proclamation, Richard III lays out the claim that Henry’s paternal grandfather and maternal great-grandfather were both bastards. He points out the fact that Henry’s maternal great-grandfather, John Beaufort, was “born of [his mother, Katherine Swynford] in double adultery,” meaning that both his mother and father (John of Gaunt) were married to other people when he was conceived and born. Richard’s implications in this proclamation play on the negative associations of bastardy and illegitimacy, coupling Henry Tudor’s ancestry with his personal inability to rule. See David C. Douglas *English Historical Documents* vol. IV for the full proclamation. Douglas, David C., General Editor. *English Historical Documents*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., vol. 4, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953.

improvement in situation of the bastards (or their descendants). Lydgate seizes upon the possibilities in this grey area of bastardy in *Siege of Thebes*.

In the admittedly high profile and uncommon case of Henry Tudor and Richard III, issues other than bastardy and subsequent fitness to inherit were most likely at play. The political climate in England probably had more to do with Henry's accession to the throne than Richard's claim of bastardy.<sup>191</sup> Once Henry Tudor had established himself as king, however, English laws favored his position. Pollock and Maitland state that "if a bastard enters on his father's land as his father's heir and remains in un-troubled seisin all his life, and then the heir of this bastard's body enters, this heir will have a title unimpeachable by the right heir of the original tenant" (Vol. 2, p. 380)<sup>192</sup> Though, of course, succession of kings was probably not considered in the same terms as non-royal bastards, this law would have meant that even had Henry VII been a declared bastard (or descendant thereof), if he managed to hold the crown until his death, his heirs would have had the right to inherit from him. This provides an interesting set of standards for bastard inheritance. If a bastard claims what is legally not his, or pretends to be legitimate when he is not, and continues in this until his death, it is as though the bastardy gets erased. This means that, for the subsequent generations, bastardy could be a non-issue. Wilfrid Hooper goes so far as to say that "To pose successfully as heir was, it is not too much to say, next to birth in wedlock, the main test of legitimacy. [...] But unless the bastard son could show his filiation by a kind of quasi-adoption [or by continuing in seisen of the property until his death] he was out of the running for the inheritance" (24-5). Thus fortune favors the bold bastard. In posing as an heir

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<sup>191</sup> Something to consider would be that Richard's proclamation did accuse dead persons of bastardy, which the law disallows. Even if these accusations were not considered from a legal standpoint, supporters of Henry Tudor could have seen Richard's allegations as slanderous mud-slinging.

<sup>192</sup> Seisen means possession.

or simply claiming a questionable inheritance, the bastard could secure a formerly insecure position. For Lydgate, we see this boldness with regards to his literary inheritance throughout, and in the very fact of *Siege of Thebes*. The idea that bastardy is linked not solely to the bastard, but also to his descendants proves important to Lydgate. Throughout his works, as we have seen, he concerns himself with not only his sources, his ancestral roots, as it were, but also how other readers would interpret and embody his own literary legacy. The terms of this literary inheritance seem rooted in *Siege of Thebes*, where Lydgate confronts and embraces his relationship with his literary father, Chaucer.

The legal terms used to denote bastards also appear to have particular relevance to Lydgate's bastardy. The most common term used for bastards in legal parlance in medieval England was *filius nullius* or son of nobody, or more specifically, son of no man. Hooper draws out the meaning of the phrase saying, "if we substitute for *filius nullius*, *heres nullius* [heir of nobody], we emphasize this meaning and escape the danger of a misleading-sounding generality. He is the heir of no one, a stranger in blood" (25). The difference between "son" and "heir" here makes up the legal issue for Hooper; calling a bastard the "son" is not specific enough. Perhaps Hooper refers to the biological fact that every human offspring, regardless of their legal standing, has a father. In this sense, "heir" of nobody describes the situation more fully because a bastard cannot inherit. Except that he can, as we have seen. The phrase "stranger in blood" would seem to connote the duality of familiarity that exists within a bastard's status. A bastard must, biologically speaking, have a father, and therefore be in his blood. On the other hand, the shared biological bond does not override the legal sense of estrangement between father and bastard. We see again that the state of bastardy is one of near-paradox; because the biological bond could

demonstrate that a child came from an unsanctioned union, that bond becomes the very thing to make the child and parent strangers.

Blood may persist, but bastardy is defined by absence. The absence implied in the term *filius nullius* does, however, leave room for other relationships to develop. Pollock and Maitland point out that the use of the term *filius nullius* was not universal when referring to bastards: “It must be remembered that our medieval law did not consistently regard the bastard as *filius nullius*, though such phrases as ‘You are the son of the people’ might be thrown about in court” (vol. 2, p.380). In a practical sense, this could mean that the parish in which the child was born would bear responsibility for it; poor laws established in the reign of Henry VIII and amended and added to during Elizabeth I’s reign would further develop and legalize the notion that a bastard was “son of the people” or state.<sup>193</sup> Though this might be said to be a less-than-desirable state for a child, for a literary bastard, being the son of the people could be a boon.

Being technically disallowed to inherit (though, in some circumstances, practically able to do so) did have a positive effect for some. While members of the upper classes would lament any impediment to inheritance, the bastards of serfs in medieval England could find these laws helpful. Pollock and Maitland lay out the specificities of this peculiar circumstance by linking it to bastardy as a status, saying,

In our English law bastardy can not be called a status or condition. The bastard can not inherit from his parents or any one else, but this seems to be the one temporal consequence of his illegitimate birth. He is a free and lawful man; indeed, as we have said above, our law is coming to the odd conclusion that the bastard must always be a

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<sup>193</sup> See, for example, Teichman, Jenny. *Illegitimacy: An Examination of Bastardy*. Cornell UP, 1982. 60-2.



free man even though both of his parents are bond. In all respects he is the equal of any other free and lawful man, so far as the temporal law is concerned (vol. 2 p. 394).

They previously explain a bastard's free born status by saying that since the courts determined that any child's status as free or bond followed the father, and since a bastard (technically and legally) has no father, all bastards must be born free. Here again we see the strange paradox of bastardy; inability to inherit would appear to be a negative consequence of an illegitimate birth, but in some cases that very inability increases the bastard's status.

A bastard, because of his bastardy, can unshackle himself from the bonds holding his father. We see this very action at work in *Siege*. Lydgate manages to balance between the obvious fact of his descent from Chaucer with his ability to be unfettered from that relationship. Here we can see an obvious explanation for what other scholars have read as mistakes or misreadings on Lydgate's part. Beginning with the opening lines of the prologue, Lydgate has been accused of attempting to imitate Chaucer, but being unable to reign himself in.<sup>194</sup> The series of dependent clauses situate the action with regards to the temporality established by Chaucer in the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, but Lydgate's prologue exhibits excess and a lack of an independent clause to which the others might cling for grammatical security.<sup>195</sup>

Chaucer's *General Prologue* begins "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soot," and continues to establish the spring setting for the pilgrimage.<sup>196</sup> He does this with a series of dependent clauses until, in line twelve, the "when" shifts to "then" and Chaucer gives us a main

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<sup>194</sup> See, for example, Eleanor Prescott Hammond, who says "any man who carries repetition to the extent to which Lydgate carried it is a man in all respects insensitive...such a man, because he lacks perceptual power, lacks a plan; he repeats or dilutes himself because he is unclear about his next step" (86). Hammond, Eleanor Prescott. *English Verse Between Chaucer and Surrey*. Duke UP, 1927

<sup>195</sup> For the full prologues from both Chaucer and Lydgate, see appendix 2.

<sup>196</sup> This and all future references to the General Prologue will come from *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Edited by Larry D. Benson. Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

verb and subject: “longen folk.” Chaucer has been praised for his rhetorical acrobatics in this section, despite its departure from conventions of word order.<sup>197</sup> Lydgate takes up this mode to establish the setting for *Siege of Thebes* and in doing so, he also demonstrates his mastery of his literary father’s style. Lydgate’s first line hearkens clearly to Chaucer: “Whan brighte Phebus passed was the Ram” (Prologue, l. 1). In addition to beginning with the same “whan,” Lydgate calls attention to the time of the year by referencing the zodiac, mimicking Chaucer’s zodiacal referent to the Ram. This attention to the zodiac demonstrates how Lydgate uses Chaucer. The reference works on a very practical level to establish when the action happens (after the journey of Chaucer’s pilgrims to Canterbury). Lydgate’s use of the zodiac enforces his relation to Chaucer, but in typical Lydgate fashion, he does not restrict this reference to a single line, as Chaucer does. Instead Lydgate brings in the “Bole,” “Satourn,” “Virgyne,” “Lucina,” “Aurora,” “Jubiter,” and “the Crabbes” (Prologue, ll. 2-10). This excess is unnecessary.<sup>198</sup> Chaucer only mentions “Zephirus” and “the Ram” (*General Prologue*, ll. 5-7) as zodiacal positions. Lydgate takes this reference and runs wild with it. It could be argued that Lydgate’s excess is a near-hysterical (and failed) attempt to prove his ability to read, understand, and imitate Chaucer. This over-assertion is a mark of Lydgate’s lack of confidence. He cannot reproduce Chaucer’s nuance and the result is this over-the-top superfluity.

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<sup>197</sup> See Spearing (1985, p. 74) for a typical praise of this passage; C. S. Lewis identifies Chaucer’s word order in a similar passage as impossible in conversational English (195). Lewis, C. S. *The Discarded Image*. Cambridge UP, 1967.

<sup>198</sup> Johnstone Parr has theorized that Lydgate’s references in this section are meant not simply to explain when the pilgrims met up with this new monkish pilgrim, but also when Lydgate began composing the poem. He calculates, based on historical astronomical data, that the date Lydgate references in this section is April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1421, which would align precisely with the time of year (though not the actual year, clearly) when Chaucer’s pilgrims would have been preparing to start their homeward journey. Though Parr does not mention it, if Lydgate is intent here on imbedding a beginning date for his composition of this work, then his excessive zodiacal references here might be seen as thoroughness, not an uncontrollable tendency towards verbosity and an inability to gracefully mimic Chaucer. Parr, Johnstone. “Astronomical Dating for Some of Lydgate’s Poems.” *PMLA*, vol. 67, no. 2, 1952, pp. 251-258.

This is certainly the position of some of the more derisive (and earlier) scholarly positions on Lydgate and *Siege*. It is with good reason that D. Vance Smith calls this “one of the most infamous sentence fragments in English literature” (186).<sup>199</sup> Scholarly opinion on this section of *Siege* has, with the over-riding attitude towards Lydgate, shifted from derision to acceptance. Where Derek Pearsall viewed this chunk of text, in the 1970s, as indicative of Lydgate’s incompetence in comparison to Chaucer, some more recent examinations see this as Lydgate’s way of exerting his literary independence.<sup>200</sup> Maura Nolan asserts that “even Lydgate has been increasingly acknowledged as a complex and skillful practitioner of Chaucerian poetics in such works as *Troy Book*, the *Siege of Thebes*, and the *Fall of Princes*” (2). Nolan’s statement implies a recent reassessment of either Lydgate’s poetry or the qualities and characteristics of Chaucerian poetics so that the former might rest easily within the boundaries of the latter. The editor for the TEAMS edition of *Siege*, Robert R. Edwards, says of the work before him that, “some passages, such as the opening imitation of the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*, fail grammatically, but most of the syntax builds cumulatively in elaborate, complex sentences” (16). Edwards here perfectly captures the desire to rehabilitate in conflict with the decades of scholarly precedence with regards to Lydgate; Edwards bows a bit to the weight of previous criticism by stating Lydgate’s failure, but he concedes that the failure is accomplished in an

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<sup>199</sup> Smith, D. Vance. “Lydgate’s Refrain: The Open When.” *Lydgate Matters*, Edited by Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown, Palgrave, 2008, pp. 185-195.

<sup>200</sup> Spearing (1985) agrees, calling his attempt “lumbering” and indicates that Lydgate trails off, which implies a lack of intention here (75). The standard practice during the last half of the twentieth century of deriding Lydgate’s poetic abilities finds particular stride with this prologue, perhaps because of its attempted imitation of Chaucer. See, for example, John M. Bowers and Stephan Kohl. For recent assessments that revive Lydgate’s reputation and assert his independence, see, for example, C. David Benson, James Simpson (1997), and Scott-Morgan Straker. Bowers, John M. “*The Tale of Beryn and The Siege of Thebes: Alternative Ideas of The Canterbury Tales.*” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 7, 1985, pp. 23-50; Kohl, Stephan. “*The Kingis Quair and Lydgate’s Siege of Thebes as Imitations of Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale.*” *Fifteenth Century Studies*. vol. 2, 1979, pp. 119-134.; Benson, C. David. “What Lydgate and Henryson Did to Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde.*” *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 53, 1992, pp. 23-40.; Straker, Scott-Morgan. “Deference and Difference: Lydgate, Chaucer, and the *Siege of Thebes.*” *Review of English Studies*, vol. 52, 2001, pp. 1-21.

interesting manner. This desire to rehabilitate Lydgate's poetic reputation does not end with simple re-readings of Lydgate as more or less Chaucerian. Philippa Hardman, for example, asserts that Lydgate's syntax makes more sense when read with medieval punctuation practices in place, as they exist in the original manuscripts, or when heard read aloud. She goes on to point out that Lydgate's works have mostly been edited for modern audiences only once, while someone like Chaucer has benefitted from multiple editorial revisions, making the syntax more palatable to those modern audiences.<sup>201</sup> Whether finding the (previously missing or mistaken) Chaucer in Lydgate or attempting to explain the undesirable within Lydgate's poetics, modern scholars continue their attempts to rehabilitate Lydgate's reputation, especially in instances, like the prologue to *Siege*, where he is judged against Chaucer.

What none of these more accepting views takes into account is that Lydgate's bastardy provides an explanation for these deviations and excesses. To return to the zodiac references, Lydgate's over-replication could certainly be an indication of ineptness, but could also point to his bastardy. If we view this particular poetic flourish as an inherited literary trait, then Lydgate's use of it indicates his ownership of it. If he can use and, indeed, overuse this trait, then he most certainly possesses it and can manipulate it as he wishes. The overuse reads like the bastard who, in defiance of the laws of inheritance which are against him, seizes his father's property and determines to remain there until his own death so that his own heirs can inherit it. There is an undeniable boldness in this move. When read in the context of the bastard son taking possession of something others would deny him, Lydgate's excessive use of the zodiacal, his expansion from Chaucer's ram reference to encompass several zodiacal signs and figures, appears confident. Lydgate swells up with this expansion, growing to (perhaps over) fill the space left by

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<sup>201</sup> Hardman, Philippa. "Lydgate's Uneasy Syntax." *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, Edited by Larry Scanlon and James Simpson, U of Notre Dame P, 2006. 12-35.

Chaucer. This leaves no doubt that Lydgate is indeed the son of Chaucer, even if he is the bastard son.

Yes, Lydgate adopts Chaucer's style in *Siege's* prologue, as well as his topic (the temporal and geographical context of the tale-telling), but the extent to which Lydgate embodies this style demonstrates that he is not constrained by it. Beyond the inflation of the zodiac, his dependent clauses have the ability to situate himself infinitely within the literary and temporal contexts of *Canterbury Tales*. Where Chaucer opens his work with eighteen lines of dependent clauses, creating a "when/then" grammatical scenario that provides a main verb (the folk "longen"), Lydgate more than extends the string of dependent clauses into sixty-four lines and does not provide a main verb. Rosamund S. Allen praises Chaucer's opening sentence as a "*tour de force*" while condemning "Lydgate's limp-wristed metre, and his syntax, where he is apt to wobble off course and collapse like someone on a monocycle."<sup>202</sup> Allen provides an illuminating and colorful example of the type of criticism to which Lydgate was often exposed.<sup>203</sup> In short, Chaucer is brilliant and Lydgate is a hack who does not know when or how to stop. Allen goes on to state unequivocally that "the all-important missing verb in Lydgate's opening to *Siege* is an error, and not the only one in these sixty-four lines" (134). She then draws our attention from the supposedly faulty syntax to what she sees as mistakes in content. The complaint often lodged against Lydgate (as Allen demonstrates) is that he lacks control; in this instance, however, I see Lydgate's opening sixty-four line expanse of dependent clauses as his ability to tightly control Chaucer's style in a way that best befits his own work.

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<sup>202</sup> Allen, Rosamund S. "The *Siege of Thebes*: Lydgate's Canterbury Tale" in *Chaucer and Fifteenth Century Poetry*. Ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen. London: King's College London, 1991. 133.

<sup>203</sup> In speaking of the same passage, Spearing (1985) claims "the sentence finally expires from exhaustion somewhere around line 65 (the moment of death is difficult to determine)" (75).

I would also contend that the missing verb is, as Allen states, all-important, but not as an error. Lydgate deliberately omits the main verb and its independent clause. In doing so, he tells us that his lengthy string of dependent clauses is enough to constitute completion. The link to bastardy seems apparent here. The bastard, while endlessly dependent upon others, such as his mother or the state, because of his inability to inherit, can, paradoxically, find independence within that very state. This recalls the fact that a bastard is always born free regardless of the bound state of his parents. It also indicates that the state of dependency and uncertainty that accompanies bastards is not inescapable. Here we see Lydgate asserting himself and his own choices through the medium of his literary father's style. It is distinctly dependent upon Chaucer, and yet independent from him at the same time. And, of course, Lydgate chooses to represent that idea with dependent and (a lack of) independent clauses. The significance resonates through this opening passage. Each time Lydgate applies another dependent clause, he not only recalls Chaucer's style, but also asserts the dependent state of the bastard; but by omitting that final independent clause and its seemingly necessary main verb, Lydgate denies the need for it, for the independent father figure. In these clauses, he establishes his independence through repeated dependence. Here bastardy, in all its glorious paradox, is enough.

Moreover, this bastardy provides a generative literary space for Lydgate's heirs to occupy. Consider again the law that allows for the inheritance by a bastard's heirs if the bastard occupied or possessed his father's property until his (the bastard's) death. It would seem to reward the bastard who plays the long game. Perseverance within the father's property demonstrates a sufficient bond that the matter of illegitimacy falls away. If this is indeed the case, no literary bastard son can be said to dwell more firmly in his father's property than Lydgate. Lydgate actually enters the literary property which Chaucer created and exists there. It

could be inferred that he does this, like the bastard looking to obtain inheritance from his father for his heirs, so that his literary descendants can claim Chaucer's legacy as their own. When viewed in concert with his other main works, *Troy Book* and *Fall of Princes*, this does indeed seem to be the case. In those works, Lydgate provides his literary heirs with the space and instruction necessary to add their own acts of literary creation to his; with *Siege* he opens up his literary father to them as well.

Lydgate's fitness for the task of providing Chaucer to his heirs needs to be determined. Yes, he remains in seisen or possession of the inheritance, but Pollock and Maitland draw a distinction between the "rightful" bastard and someone who has no biological claim upon the inheritance. They say "the bastard who enters as his father's heir must be distinguished from the mere interloper. After all he is his father's 'natural' son, and we hardly go too far in saying that he has a 'natural' right to inherit" (Part 2, l. 380). It would seem that mere possession of the inheritance could, in some cases, need augmentation to determine the validity of the bastard. In the case of Lydgate, his validity as a descendant of Chaucer, even a bastard descendant, has been called into question by generations of literary scholars. Lydgate himself addresses his validity, not just in the amplification and alteration of Chaucer's style in the prologue of *Siege*, but in the introduction of his persona as a pilgrim within the framework for the tales.

The framework of *Siege* begins in earnest when a monk walks into a tavern and finds himself in the company of Chaucer's pilgrims and their host, Harry Bailey. When asked his name, the monk/narrator replies, "I answerede my name was Lydgate, / 'Monk of Bery, nygh fyfty yere of age, / Come to this toune to do my pilgrimage / As I have hight I ha therof no shame,'" (Prologue, ll. 93-6). For a poet who, so often in his works, presents an attitude of almost abject humility, Lydgate here asserts his identity quite forcefully. In his reply to the host's

question, Lydgate uses the personal pronoun four times in as many lines. The last half of the last line, in particular, has an air of self-legitimation. Given that Lydgate is saying that he's come to Canterbury to "do pilgrimage" as he promised (he says earlier he was ill and vowed to travel to Canterbury if he recovered), the assertion "I ha therof no shame" could be a reference to his fulfillment of that promise. In the next line, however, the dialogue passes back to the host; and since this is the last part of Lydgate's reply to the question of identity, the phrase "I ha therof no shame" could come to reflect back on his identity as a whole. He is Lydgate and has thereof no shame.

It does seem a bold proclamation. But why mention shame at all? This assertion of not having any shame makes it seem as though Lydgate, at least, believes that others will assume he should be ashamed. We also have to wonder, is this Lydgate the pilgrim or Lydgate the poet? Which one should be (but is not) ashamed? When considering this in the light of Lydgate's literary bastardy, his assertion of identity without shame makes sense. Being a bastard carried a shameful connotation.<sup>204</sup> Lydgate accepts that shame usually accompanies bastardy and proceeds to deny that shame within himself. It sets the stage for our viewing of Lydgate's persona within Chaucer's tale; Lydgate introduces himself and the notion that his presence or identity here could be shameful, but precludes that feeling from dictating the tone of the tale.

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<sup>204</sup> This would appear to be a straightforward statement, but as with the laws surrounding bastardy, the social conceptions of it were likewise far from certain. In their historical study of medieval royal bastards, Chris Given-Wilson and Alice Curteis say that, "allegations of bastardy were commonly used for political slander, particularly in the later Middle Ages [...but] that is very different than using the allegation of bastardy to cast a slur on a person's character or reputation. Medieval ears would probably have been deaf to slurs of this nature" (51). This sends a fairly mixed message in itself, but when paired with other examinations, such as Teichman's investigation (1) into the etymology of the word, in which she discovers that the suffix "-ard" carries derogatory connotations, it would appear that a clear-cut consensus on bastardy does not exist. In the absence of a social consensus, I would turn again to the law that prohibits allegations of bastardy cannot be lodged against the dead; to me, this indicates that bastardy is so repulsive that it cannot honorably be attributed to a person unable to challenge the charge. Given-Wilson, Chris and Alice Curteis. *The Royal Bastards of Medieval England*. Routledge, 1984.



In the next lines Harry Bailey says “Daun John . . . wel broke ye youre name” (Prologue 96). Broke here is defined by the Middle English Dictionary as “do credit to.”<sup>205</sup> The OED provides a bit more insight, aligning it with brook, meaning “to enjoy the use of, to make use of, or to profit by.”<sup>206</sup> It would appear that Bailey believes there is some value in Lydgate’s assertion of his identity. The MED and OED definitions, when read together, provide a kind of loop; Lydgate does credit to his name, while profiting by it. This again holds relevance to Lydgate’s bastardy. His name is Lydgate, not Chaucer, but it serves as the link to his literary father. In this way “name” could mean “reputation” as easily as the proper noun by which he is called. In this sense, Lydgate does credit to his name or reputation with the successful creation of this literary work. It follows that Lydgate also profits by this reputation; and if we see reputation as a link to Chaucer, then he too is brought into this loop of reflective repute. Lydgate benefits from being the bastard son of Chaucer as much as Chaucer benefits from having Lydgate as a bastard son, willing to embody and increase his literary inheritance. Here the shamefulness of bastardy has indeed fallen away.

When we consider the doubleness of Lydgate’s identity here, that he is both within the story and without it, pilgrim and poet, the question of where the authority lies becomes more fraught. Is Lydgate the poet an esteemed persona because of his ability to write, or is Lydgate the pilgrim the source of the authority here because he can enter the realm of the pilgrims? Robert Meyer-Lee says of *Siege* that “Lydgate’s author-figure enters his fiction as his extraliterary, historically specific self from its inception, thereby fusing the extrinsic authority of that self with

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<sup>205</sup> “brouken (v.)” *Middle English Dictionary*. [www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED5908](http://www.quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED5908). Accessed 12 April 2018.

<sup>206</sup> “brook, v.1.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/23753](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/23753). Accessed 12 April 2018.

the literary authority of his poetic forebear and investing his text with both.”<sup>207</sup> Lydgate avoids any obfuscation of or anxiety over his identity that may result from entering Chaucer’s literary arena by asserting himself as within and without it. He is Lydgate, Monk of Bury, a real person with the ability to read and judge Chaucer’s works, but also Lydgate, pilgrim, character within the literary work. This reflects the duality and paradox of bastardy as being both (legally) *fillius nullius* and (practically and biologically) the son of a particular person. The paradoxical duality of Lydgate’s identity gives him the benefit of altering his perspective and relationship to the work he is creating, as well as the freedom to alter his reproduction of that work.

These types of dualities present Lydgate with many opportunities to produce both literary works and authority for himself. As we have seen, Lydgate’s bastardy serves him well as a literary producer. He manages to use his position to both assert his connection to Chaucer (and his worthiness of that connection), and authorize himself as a creator of literary works in his own right. Lydgate sets up his readers, his literary descendants and heirs, to follow his model and become literary producers in their own rights. The question becomes, then, whether they do so. An unexpected answer arises in the form of Shakespeare and two easily overlooked characters in one of his less popular plays.

*Troilus and Cressida* provides an apt point for examining how Lydgate’s ideas about active readership play out after the fifteenth century. For a start, here Shakespeare tells a story that Lydgate (and Chaucer, and Caxton) has written before him. Shakespeare is necessarily a reader here. Beyond the obvious genealogical connections between Chaucer, Lydgate, and Shakespeare that occur in *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare provides another point of connection with Lydgate by providing his readers with two bastard characters, more than in any

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<sup>207</sup> Meyer-Lee, Robert J. *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.

other of his plays; one of these bastards even exists in Lydgate's *Troy Book*, securing the lines of relation between the two authors. Given Lydgate's bastard status, it makes sense to examine this play in terms of bastardy and inheritance. The remainder of this chapter will examine *Troilus and Cressida* through these lenses, drawing upon Lydgate's ideas about bastardy and literary inheritance. First, I consider the characterization of the play's two bastards, finding in their treatment as similar yet opposite a statement about the nature of bastardy. I then compare these characters to their literary predecessors in Lydgate's and Caxton's versions. The chapter concludes by investigating the print history of *Troilus and Cressida* and the conflicting story told by two quarto editions. In the play, its literary legacy, and its print history, Lydgate appears; his notions of literary production, as exemplified by active readers, illuminated in the pottery metaphor, color this play throughout, causing us to connect Shakespeare to this most medieval author. That Shakespeare should be indebted to Lydgate, not just for source material, but for concepts of bastardy and authority that shape this play, disrupts the more traditional characterizations of period. How medieval can Lydgate be if Shakespeare finds his ideas about authority useful? Indeed, how medieval is the medieval?

Shakespeare's treatment of the doomed love of Troilus and Cressida owes much to its literary predecessors. Chaucer told the story of the couple in *Troilus and Criseyde* nearly 225 years before Shakespeare penned his version. Lydgate's *Troy Book* and Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* cover much of the same material and all three are considered sources for Shakespeare's play.<sup>208</sup> Though the title of Shakespeare's play indicates that the focus will be on the story of the two lovers, he also pays considerable attention to the events of the Trojan War

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<sup>208</sup> See Kuskin's fourth chapter "Form: William Caxton's *Recuyell* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*" for a reading of the two works, in addition to Lydgate's, which posits that "Shakespeare's emergence as an author occurs not only through the construction of the fifteenth century, but also through the reproduction of its textual forms" (128).

that are happening simultaneously. The play picks up the action of the war in the middle, the Trojans wondering if they should return Helen to the Greeks in the hopes of ending the siege while the Greeks fret over Achilles' withdrawal from battle. In the midst of these anxieties and questions, the Trojan prince Troilus falls in love with Cressida. With the help of her uncle, Pandarus, Troilus woos Cressida, eventually setting up a clandestine meeting where the two declare their love. Cressida's father, a Trojan priest who defected to the Greeks, manages to negotiate a trade that would bring Cressida to the Greek camp. At the camp, Cressida finds herself the object of the Greek warrior Diomedes' wooing, and eventually concedes to him; the whole exchange is witnessed by Troilus, who had hidden himself nearby to spy on Cressida. Enraged, Troilus vows to kill Diomedes in battle. The next day, Hector prepares to go into battle against the wishes of his family, joined by Troilus. During the battle, Achilles' lover Patroclus is killed; when Achilles sees his body, he joins the battle and eventually manages to kill Hector, who is unarmed. The play ends with Troilus going back into Troy to report that Hector has been killed. Shakespeare's play exemplifies Lydgate's potter's metaphor well. The pieces of this story exist throughout English literary history; Shakespeare sorts through them, breaking some down and adding to others in order to create his incarnation of the story, his particular Trojan vessel.

In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare provides readers with two radically different versions of bastardy: Thersites and Margarelon.<sup>209</sup> Thersites is the sharp-tongued, quick-witted, self-pitying bastard who delights in pointing out the dullness and lechery of those he sees as his oppressors. His aggressive dialogues and hyper-critical commentaries paint him as a character that walks the line between speaking truths and revealing his own biases and poor self-image.

Thersites makes elaborately worded jokes at the expense of others, but the audience cannot

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<sup>209</sup> Throughout this chapter and for the sake of clarity, I will refer to this character by this name, spelled Margarelon, though in other works his name is spelled slightly differently.

always laugh with him. In a play that draws its energy from the conflict between two warring parties, Thersites' jaded nature and lack of allegiance marks him decidedly as an other, one who is out for himself rather than one who would act heroically or nobly out of allegiance to a community. Margarelon, on the other hand, is a good bastard. He appears very briefly in act five, scene seven, and in his three lines conveys his complete dissimilarity to Thersites. Where Thersites is the ultimate self-preservationist, Margarelon is willing to put himself in harm's way to promote the Trojan cause. Thersites' quick wit and loquaciousness contrast sharply with Margarelon's directness. Even the characters' number of lines and time on stage mark them as opposites.

In these two characters, and especially their interaction, Shakespeare shows us the two most extreme paths a bastard can take. These contrary images, however, can be conflated to form the singular idea of bastardy. The bastard state, as we have seen, is one of paradox. A bastard cannot inherit; yet he may seize his father's lands and property for himself and in so doing, make his own heirs eligible to inherit. Bastardy is an undesirable state; yet since a bastard has no father in the eyes of the law, if that father was a serf, the bastard son can avoid serfdom and be a freeman. A bastard has no father; but it is the very identity of his father that makes him a bastard. Thersites and Margarelon exemplify this paradoxical state.

Several people in the play remark upon Thersites' bastardy, including Ajax, Patroclus, Achilles, and, significantly, Thersites himself. Though Ajax' and Patroclus' use of "whoreson" to refer to Thersites could be viewed as simply a derogatory term and not actually indicative of Thersites' bastardy, when taken together with Thersites' own admission of bastardy, it becomes clear that Thersites is indeed a bastard. Achilles' remarks hold a similar mixture of derogation and reference to an actual state of bastardy. In act five, scene one Achilles calls Thersites "Thou

cruffy batch of Nature,” and “Fragment” (5.1.5-8). The first phrase seems to reference a scab, indicating that Thersites is an unseemly covering for a wound, that wound being, presumably, the sinful sexual act of his parents. Scabs are simultaneously natural and unnatural. They are a naturally occurring part of the body’s defense, but only occur when something unnatural (or external and harmful) happens to the body. This correlates to the bastard state well. Thersites’ existence would be a natural result of the wound of non-marital sex, but would also place him in an unnatural state with regards to his relationship with his father. When placed alongside Achilles’ reference to Thersites as a “Fragment,” this scab metaphor gains an air of incompleteness or deformity. A “cruffy batch” suggests something that was heaped together out of necessity rather than deliberately fashioned. The manner of the making matters here. If Thersites is this “cruffy batch,” he was not intentionally created, but made through the mounding together of material whose assembly was due more to a need to clear the area of the material, like sweeping broken glass off a floor, than a desire to form the batch. That he is both “cruffy” and a “Fragment” illustrates his inability to be a good or true reflection of his father. As a bastard Thersites would be marked as both part of but separate from his father, a fragment of a larger whole that must be always separated from the original. His crustiness is the unseemly barrier between those parts.

This derogatory descriptor of Thersites’ bastardy brings us back to metaphors we have encountered before. The term “cruffy batch” is reminiscent of Lydgate’s pottery imagery, Job’s scraped body, and Adam Sciveyn’s itchy head. The scabbiness implicit in the word “cruffy” easily reflects both Job’s and Adam’s diseased bodies; that Thersites is a “batch” gives the impression of a collection of crusty “Fragment[s]” and recalls the vessels that Lydgate says were smashed and recreated out of the broken pieces. That these images should connect across time,

place, and works should not be surprising. All of them appear negative on the surface (breaking pottery, scabs), but lead to generative growth. In short, the pottery metaphor, Job's affliction, Adam's itchy scalp, Thersites' bastardy, all indicate destructive preservation, or even destructive generation. The work, whether that word represents a literary undertaking, a person, a ceramic vessel, or even an animal skin, must undergo violence and destruction in order to be preserved and generate itself anew. Thersites identifies the possibilities in this process and its parallel state of bastardy; like Lydgate, he sees the potential for gaining power in a seemingly powerless state. Throughout *Troilus and Cressida* Thersites draws on his bastardy to preserve and promote himself. His counter-point, Margarelon, manages to also call upon his bastardy as a means of self-promotion, but in the opposite manner.

Though Thersites' bastard state is implied over and over again by many, the specific root of this state remains a mystery. In contrast, Margarelon makes his parentage known immediately, clearly, and directly when asked. "*Baft. Turne flave and fight. Ther. What art thou? Baft. A Baftard Sonne of Priams*" (5.8.13-15).<sup>210</sup> Thersites' question receives a prompt, straightforward answer: Margarelon is "A Baftard Sonne of *Priams*." This self-identifying statement holds no hints of shame and makes no attempts to disguise or hide the bastardy.<sup>211</sup> We can easily imagine the actor portraying Margarelon as saying this with a swelling pride; he wears his bastardy like a badge of honor. This could be because he is not simply a bastard, but, as Margarelon makes sure to state, the bastard son of Priam, a King, a fierce warrior, and someone to whom others show

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<sup>210</sup> Note here that the stage directions in the FF (and both quartos) refer to Margarelon as "Baft." There is no list of actors or dramatis personae in the FF edition (or either quarto edition), but based on the stage directions and dialogue assignments, we can assume that Margarelon, as he is called by later editors, would be listed according to the status conferred on him by his birth, and possibly by his relation to his father. His bastardy is his main identifying feature.

<sup>211</sup> Note the similarity of shamelessness in this self-identifying statement and Lydgate's similar declaration in *Seige of Thebes*, "My name is Lydgate, Monk of Bury, I ha therof no shame."

fealty and respect. Note Margarelon's use of "a" instead of "the" here. In identifying himself, he does not use the pronoun that would make him into a specific, singular entity. Instead he is "a" bastard son of Priam, one of many.<sup>212</sup> Though being "a" rather than "the" could easily push Margarelon into obscurity, this does not seem to be the case. For him, just being "a" bastard of Priam's is a strong enough quality to give him his identity. This also contrasts with Thersites' separateness from his father; Margarelon is not separate and specific enough to use "the." Here bastardy becomes a legitimizing state. Any bastard son of Priam gains enough authority through the relationship to be able to state his bastard affiliation with pride when confronted. This is in direct contradiction to the usual state of bastardy, which is, by definition, a delegitimization. Margarelon here demonstrates the power in the paradox of bastardy.

In the case of Margarelon, the great authority of his father overwhelms the illegitimacy of Margarelon's birth. And although the canny bastard can work around this, Margarelon's bastard legitimacy is different. The authority, the legitimacy, comes from his father, not Margarelon's actions. It is as though Priam's power is so great that it overwhelms the usual negative associations that accompany the bastard state. So Margarelon is not a usual (illegitimate, unauthoritative) bastard, or even an unusual (cannily self-legitimizing) bastard; he takes the paradox of power in bastardy further and sets himself up as a bastard who acts like a legitimately conceived son, and is not corrected or disdained for the presumption. Thersites, then, becomes the more traditional bastard, in comparison to Margarelon. His attempts to find power in his powerlessness feel more expected than Margarelon's unabashed attitude of authority. Both men find power in their states, but through completely divergent means.

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<sup>212</sup> By all accounts, Priam had several illegitimate sons with his concubines. Perhaps the sheer size of the population of Priam's bastards somehow validates their existence; through repetition and over time, the shock or shame associated with bastardy dissipates.



Margarelon's illegitimate relationship with Priam is a source of pride and strength. Thersites, however, is incomplete and separated from his parentage, a "fragment" and "crufty batch of Nature." Here we see the two sides of bastardy at work; the somehow positive outcome is placed against the more restrictive aspects. Recognized as belonging to the latter camp of bastards by others, Thersites does not bother to deny such negatively construed accusations. When confronted by Hector, who asks what he is, Thersites answers, "No, no : I am a rafcall : a scuruie railing knaue : a very filthy roague" (5.4.18-19). Hector deems him unworthy of any violent pursuit replying, "I doe beleeeue thee, liue." In an attempt to glean some sort of authority from bastardy, Thersites expounds, calling himself other names that carry adverse associations. He is a self-declared "rafcall," "knaue," and "roague." The benefit of being such a bastard is survival; Hector, hearing Thersites' identifying declaration, determines that he's not worth the trouble, and withdraws to fight others more deserving of his energy. Thersites' negatively construed identity removes the target (of being Greek) from his back. By adopting completely the undesirable qualities associated with bastardy, Thersites survives a dangerous situation. Hector, greatest Trojan warrior, cannot be bothered to kill someone like Thersites. Thersites' description of himself reinforces the distance between the two and ensures his survival. This is quite like the bastard who embraces his legal status as an heir of no one and avoids being a bonded man.<sup>213</sup> Being unable to inherit (something undesirable) or looked down upon or even overlooked, can be beneficial. Here it helps Thersites avoid a confrontation that would surely have ended in his death.

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<sup>213</sup> In *Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida and the Inns of Court Revels*, W. R. Elton lists "bastard" among the many terms central to the play that would be "of interest to and understood by a legal audience" (174). Elton makes the case here for the play being performed at one of the Inns of Court; if that is so, the legal ramifications of bastardy and the circuitous, paradoxical status they confer, would be not only relevant to the play but significant to its bastard characters and familiar to its audience. Elton, W. R. *Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida and the Inns of Court Revels*. Ashgate, 2000.

While both Thersites and Margarelon admit openly to their bastardy, Margarelon's state is tempered by his father's name ("A Bastard Sonne of *Priams*"); Thersites has to find power within his bastard state itself. During the skirmish with Margarelon, Thersites identifies himself as a bastard saying, "I am a Bastard too, I loue Bastards, I am a Ba- |ftard begot, Bastard instructed, Bastard in minde, Bastard | in valour, in euery thing illegitimate" (5.7.16-18). Thersites' declaration is intended to connect the two bastards, forging a bond which would make Margarelon balk at harming Thersites. Thersites says "One bear will not bite another" (5.7.19), and going on to say the battle will impact them, the two bastards, most adversely. The implication is that their shared bastard state has provided both men with enough crosses to bear that they should not add to each other's troubles by fighting. This strategy does not work.<sup>214</sup> Margarelon's bastardy does not, in his eyes, connect him to Thersites. There is no common experience from which Thersites can claim empathy from Margarelon, let alone enough commonality to overcome their positions on opposing sides in the war. Thersites allows his bastardy to completely define him and in doing so can, for the most part, find power in that. Margarelon treats his bastardy differently, not denying it, but not letting it to delegitimize him.

Their experiences with bastardy place them at odds with one another, but both use the paradox of bastardy to authorize themselves. Margarelon strikes out at Thersites after his self-bastardizing lines. I would suggest that the disgust Margarelon feels for Thersites stems not from the gap between their bastard states, but from Margarelon's fear that Thersites might be a too slightly distorted reflection of his own bastardy. Unable to bear the idea that his authority might be as undeservingly won as Thersites', Margarelon seeks to destroy him, and any reminders he might bring of the nature of their shared state, if not experience.

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<sup>214</sup> Though no stage direction calls for the men to fight, Margarelon does say "The devil take thee, coward" (5.3.17) and exits following Thersites.

Margarelon's reaction to Thersites' attempt at forging a connection speaks to the former's anxiety over his position. He relies on Priam's authority to override any negative associations that follow from his bastardy, but he sees in Thersites what bastardy would be like without a powerful father. Margarelon probably feels anxiety, knowing that he is relying on a connection that his state usually precludes. He calls upon the bond of blood, the presumption that he inherited some of his father's traits, to ensure that people would not judge him by his bastardy alone.

Though the tone and language of Thersites' and Margarelon's badges of bastardy imply very different attitudes about their status, together they demonstrate the multifaceted, paradoxical nature of bastardy. Margarelon, being the bastard son of a prominent man, can derive pride and legitimacy from the association. Indeed, he might just as easily be the speaker of Thersites' lines about being a "Baftard in valour." His tone, of course, would be quite different from that of the unknown bastard son who speaks them. This is one of the paradoxes of bastardy: illegitimate associations can confer legitimacy.

Lydgate's and Caxton's works on the Trojan War both get broken and reused in Shakespeare's vessel. Interestingly, the bastard with the fewest lines and shorter appearance in Shakespeare is the only one to feature in his sources. Margarelon appears in both Lydgate's and Caxton's accounts of the Trojan War, but Thersites does not.<sup>215</sup> In both these accounts, the bastard of Priam appears to play the same role and perform the same narrative functions. Margarelon is slain in battle by Achilles. This enrages Hector (his half-brother), who goes on a vengeful rampage, killing several important people. This, in turn, causes Achilles to become

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<sup>215</sup> See Horace Howard Furness' variorum of *Troilus and Cressida*, page 299, note 9. It notes that Shakespeare's spelling is unique; most probably it is a corruption or misreading. David Bevington notes in the Arden edition that a "t" to "l" error would be easy to make (364). Furness, Horace Howard. *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*. J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1953. Bevington, David. "Introduction." *Troilus and Cressida*, Arden, 2015.

aware of the extent of the threat that Hector poses, and Achilles determines that it is time to neutralize this threat. Achilles meets Hector in battle and is wounded in the thigh. While Achilles tends to his wound, Hector takes a wealthy, well-dressed Greek prisoner; in leading the prisoner away from the battlefield, Hector slings his shield over his back, leaving his breast exposed. Achilles returns at the most fortuitous moment and takes advantage of Hector's lapse, (as discussed earlier, his imprudence), killing him with a spear to the chest. Lydgate and Caxton agree on these basic elements of this narrative and Margarelon's seemingly minor role in the major event of Hector's death. In both accounts, Margarelon is at once an insignificant figure, and one of the most important characters, because of the way his death rippled outward to impact everyone involved. The paradox in that position, and its relationship to Margarelon's bastardy, deserves further inspection.

One could argue that to find the root of any single event in accounts of the Trojan War, especially Lydgate's, which continually rolls back on itself to locate multiple causes of particular events, would be folly. Looking for a true origin is an exercise in futility; the very notion promotes a linearity of narrative and of literary history that is unproductive at best. Margarelon is useful here not as a point of origination for the death of Hector, but as a very significant thread in this web, with connections and links to other threads. Once pulled, Margarelon's thread tugs on all those connected to it, altering their relationship to it and to other threads at which Margarelon sits at a supposed remove.

The search for a linear series of causes and effects does not work to center Margarelon's place in this narrative. In this case, the argument could certainly be made that Margarelon's actions were caused by previous actions which were in turn caused by others, resulting in a look backwards that becomes never-ending. Beyond that, though, there are secondary and even

tertiary events, to which Margarelon's death did not directly relate, that influence the outcome. Hector's momentary lapse concerning his shield when he allows greed to overcome prudence, for example, plays a very significant role in his death. Without this, Achilles would not have had the opportunity to strike the mortal blow. Though the two events have no linear connection, they sustain a relationship through their shared proximity and contribution to Hector's death. If thought of as a spider's web, the death of Hector sits in the middle, while his lapse in self-preservation connects closely to it (and to Achilles' blow with the spear). Margarelon's death is an outer ring that, while more distant from the epicenter, provides the grounding and stability for the web as a whole to exist.

Thinking of Margarelon as part of a web of influence could easily relate to a way of thinking about literary history more generally. Kuskin has explored the deficiencies of a linear literary history at length, and instead provides a description of a "ceaseless and ongoing process of literary reproduction in which the literary past is never sealed off by historical period but is instead continually reread and rewritten, reproduced across time through the medium of the book" (165). The process Kuskin describes resonates with Lydgate's model of active readership. When a reader enters a work and alters it, he produces another version of the work, one that both changes and preserves it for the next reader. A series of readers and readings becomes ceaseless cycle, one in which each reader moves backwards and forwards within the history of the work, seeing previous versions (and previous readings, readers, and writers) meld into a new whole. That whole, like Lydgate's broken and remade vessel, retains the pieces of its previous incarnations while forming a new work. Margarelon's story and his significance to the greater work, can similarly be viewed as part of the vessel. It relates to the whole not in a linear way, not through a simple progression, but from many sides and angles.

The connectedness and remove, the distant significance of Margarelon's role in this major event of the Trojan War, also reflects his status as a bastard son of Priam. He is important through his relationship to the king, but not as important as a legitimate son, one with a more directly discernible connection. The ability to clearly discern relationships, whether of events or fathers and sons, determines the amount of authority that can pass through those lines of connection. As is so often the case with bastards, however, Margarelon rises above the expectations of a bastard to gain influence over more than his allotted share. In Lydgate and Caxton, Margarelon manages to become significant to a major event and major players. In true (paradoxical) bastard fashion, he has to die to be important, to cease to exist in order to gain authority. This recalls the medieval law pertaining to bastards and inheritance: only if they can remain in possession of their father's property *until their death* can they legally, legitimately claim that property as their own.

It would make sense that Lydgate, literary bastard of Chaucer, would see the Margarelon episode as an opportunity to expand the significance of a bastard. Chaucer never mentions Margarelon, and Caxton mentions him only three times, once to say he was wounded and then to say he was dead and Hector was angry because of it. Though Lydgate only uses Margarelon's name three times, the same as Caxton, he greatly fleshes out the bastard's character and role in between. Caxton describes Margarelon simply as "one of the bastardes of kynge pryant" (II, p. 612).<sup>216</sup> Lydgate, on the other hand, reflects on his source in *Troy Book* saying, "as the story recordeth in certeyn, | That he [Margarelon] was bothe hardy and famus, | And sone also unto Kyng Priamus, | a noble knyght and of gret worthiness" (Book 3, ll. 5208-5211). Lydgate turns to his source to assure the reader that the account he is about to give of Margarelon is true: "as

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<sup>216</sup> All quotes from Caxton's *Recuyell* are from the facsimile of the 1474 edition unless otherwise noted. Caxton, William. *The recuyell of the historyes of Troy*. Facsimile editor H. Oskar Sommer, D. Nutt, 1894.

the story recordeth in certeyn.” Thus he passes the authority from his source onto Margarelon, verifying the positive characteristics he is about to list. It is important to pause here and note that Lydgate looks to a literary father of sorts, a source, to verify his account of a bastard son. This is quite typical of how Lydgate views and uses literary authority. It moves from one point in the spectrum of literary creation to another, forward and back, within and without the work and book. Here the authority passes from a previous agent, Lydgate’s source, through Lydgate who is deploying it in this poem, to finally settle on Margarelon. The authority here does not progress linearly and ends up in an unexpected place.

Lydgate also mentions Margarelon’s attributes before his relationship to Priam. Given that “famus” rhymes with “Priamus,” the lines could have easily been switched without any damage to the rhyme scheme. Lydgate chose, then, to describe Margarelon’s character before his parentage. Note also that Lydgate does not call Margarelon a bastard here. In fact, his bastardy is not revealed until twenty-seven lines after he is first mentioned. Instead Lydgate chooses to discuss Margarelon’s bravery, his anger at the losses being suffered by the Trojans, his desire to avenge those deaths, and his ability as a warrior. Lydgate further memorializes Margarelon by describing his death and funeral procession off of the battlefield. In Lydgate’s hands, the bastard Margarelon becomes a fuller, realer, more sympathetic person. Here, too, we see a typically Lydgatean practice at work. A model character is provided to the reader. His bastardy provides a paradox that seems to invert some of the models we have seen in other characters. Ethiocles, for example, is a corruption who cannot overcome that designation. Margarelon is a bastard who absolutely can escape (or maneuver within) that state. Ethiocles provides an anti-mirror, a model of how not to behave, but is ultimately not culpable for his destructive actions. Margarelon is a path to follow, but his own death, which, perhaps, can be viewed as the result of his noble, loyal

desire to fight for his fellow countrymen and thereby is at least partially his own fault, results in greater destructions. Here Lydgate appears to be telling contradictory tales. The undeniably bad son escapes some responsibility for all the negative outcomes he caused, while the good (but bastard) son is the cause of further pain and death. But each of these examples, mirror and anti-mirror, really tells a larger story, imparts a bigger lesson, one that we have seen before from Lydgate: nothing is entirely good or entirely bad, but all is an opportunity to learn and begin again. Endings are beginnings (and so on). Prudence and common profit should be continually sought, even in places from which they are absent.

While Caxton and Lydgate differ in the extent of their treatments of Margarelon, in both accounts his death fuels Hector's rage and causes him to reenter the battle with renewed vigor. The only other overlapping detail is that Hector does this without his father's knowledge or permission. Lydgate says that Hector strapped on his helmet "Unwist the kyng, or who be lefe or loth" (Book 3, l. 5243) while Caxton states more directly that Hector "dyde a-none do lafe on hys helme / and wente hym to the batayll that hys fader knewe not of" (vol. 2, p. 612). Both authors mention this detail but neither one follows it up; there is no moment when Priam learns of Hector's actions and reacts to them. The point of this detail, then, is not in its position as a cause in a chain of events, but in the detail itself. In a series of occurrences that features a bastard son of a main character, the silence between Hector and Priam holds significance as it relates to father/son relationships and authority. Hector presumably did not tell Priam of his plans for one of two reasons, both of them relating to Priam's authority: either Hector believed that Priam could and would stop him, or he did not believe that Priam needed or deserved to know of his plans. In the former case, Hector saw his father's authority as too great to overcome and circumvented it by keeping Priam in the dark. In the latter, Hector did not value any authority



Priam might have had in the matter. In each case, Hector's view of his father's authority causes him to withhold information from him. The thought left hanging in the air is that Priam might have been able to stop Hector, and the outcome, Hector's death, could have been different.

We also have an implicit lesson in prudence, here. Hector's rage at Margarelon's death may be reasonable and natural, but his side-stepping of Priam to run into the battle marks a moment when Hector allows his emotions to override his judgement in doing the right thing. It could also be seen as disrespectful to his father, the king. Here Hector flouts the accepted protocols both of a son and of a subject to engage in an imprudent rampage. Though Lydgate does not comment on Hector's lack of prudence here, it does ultimately lead to that moment of Hector's greatest lapse in prudence and judgement where he slings his shield on his back so that he can loot a wealthy king on the battlefield; as such, this moment where he fails to inform his father seems to be an incipient imprudence. And, of course, where prudence leads in Lydgate, common profit is sure to follow. Hector's silence to Priam stems from a place of self-absorption in his own emotions and foolish disregard for others. As a result, he dies, and in that the destruction of Troy is propelled inexorably forward. Hector's failure to tell his father of his plans is a failure of prudence and a massive blow to the common profit of the Trojans.

Lydgate and Caxton both include this small, seemingly unconnected detail in this weighty chain of events. The implication is that authority, perceived or otherwise, in this relationship dictates the interactions between Hector and Priam. In this case, the perception of authority contributes to Hector's death. The inclusion of Margarelon in the lead up to Hector's final battle reinforces the importance of authority in the father/son relationship. As Priam's bastard son, Margarelon's death would presumably warrant a lesser response, yet Hector allows it to fuel his rage and cause him to reenter the battle. It is not difficult to imagine that this

furious, vengeful state blinds Hector to his responsibility to his father, causing him to lace on his helmet rather than go to Priam for guidance. How appropriate that a bastard, one who lacks traditional means of gaining or imposing his authority, incites these actions. Though Margarelon is granted no voice (in the form of dialogue) by either Lydgate or Caxton, in both accounts he manages to exert influence over the course of the narrative. That his influence should end in the death of his half-brother speaks to the difficult, double-edged nature of the authority of the bastard.

Thersites and Margarelon, when seen as two parts of a whole, represent the paradox of authority available within the bastard's world. Bastardy can both grant and deny power, and the way in which the bastard views his bastardy often influences the tone of his authority. Where Margarelon sees legitimacy in his father and strives to make his actions override any negative connotations related with his birth, he manages to insert himself into a significant position in a web of major events. He ultimately must sacrifice himself in order to matter. Thersites chooses not to overcome his bastardy, but to operate within it and find his authority through its status. In doing so, he does not gain the admiration either of authors or his fellow characters, but he does survive. Authority and legitimacy can be the product of a bastard relationship, and the canny bastard will nearly always be able to draw on that power.

This is evident in even the most cursory examination of Shakespeare's other bastards. Edmund of *King Lear* and Don John of *Much Ado About Nothing* both attempt to overcome their bastardy; both fail in ways that reflect their particular genres. Edmund uses deceit to try to get his father to disinherit the legitimate brother and leave everything to him. Don John, disenfranchised and disillusioned, tries to cause as much disruption in the lives of his brother and his friends as possible. Both try to escape their bastard states, but ultimately neither one succeeds. Edmund

dies at the hand of the brother he tried to smear, lending some small resolution to the vast sweep of tragedy in this play. Don John's treachery is similarly discovered, but since his story exists in a comedy, he is merely captured and faces future punishment, rather than being killed. The failures of both bastards restore their plays to a greater or lesser measure of balance, depending on the genre. But both manage, for a time, to draw on their cannier, more cunning traits, arguably the traits associated with bastardy, if Thersites' self-portrait of bastardy (the scurvy knave, the rascal and rogue) is to be believed. Edmund and Don John embrace their bastardy and, for a while, find power within it.

When a bastard from one of Shakespeare's histories is examined, the full power of bastardy comes to light. In *King John* Shakespeare gives us a very full picture of an empowered bastard. Philip Falconbridge and his younger brother come before King John to settle a dispute about their recently deceased father's property. The younger son claims his older brother should not inherit because he is a bastard, their father being away during the time of conception. During the course of the brothers' plea, it is tacitly acknowledged by Richard the Lionhearted's mother that the elder brother is most likely the son of the former king. Now Philip has a choice: he may continue to fight to be considered a legitimate Falconbridge, or he may accept the position of bastard son of Richard I. Unsurprisingly, he chooses the latter. Though now without any property or legitimate lineage, the bastard finds himself in a position of power and authority. Perhaps because his new bastard state appeals to him more than his previous one, he at no point during the play attempts any subterfuge or deceit; unlike Edmund and Don John, this bastard is content. He exists within his bastardy completely and finds in that state sufficient inducement to remain.

This can be seen in a simple phrase this bastard employs in order to accept his position as the bastard son of Richard I: “I am I, how ere I was begot” (1.1.184).<sup>217</sup> This phrase demonstrates remarkable self-assurance and appears to indicate a level of independence from the state of his birth, legitimate or otherwise. When the words “how ere” are read as “however,” the implication is that he is himself, regardless of the circumstances of his birth.<sup>218</sup> This man would be the same if he was a legitimate son or a bastard. In a way, this makes sense as bastardy is an external qualification of a person based on the state of marriage of that person’s parents, not an internal quality, like Ethiocles’ corruption. Though the play gives no indication of what kind of man he was before his birth was questioned, he appears canny and opportunistic, traits he employs in this scene and throughout the play. Perhaps he would still be himself, the same type of man, in whatever manner his conception occurred. The point remains that he chooses bastardy. And he remains himself, “I am I,” regardless of that choice.

This stands in stark contrast to Edmund and Don John, both of whom attempt subterfuge and try to appear one way when acting another. Their attempts to successfully navigate bastardy fails, while Philip Falconbridge, bastard son of Richard I, simply exists within bastardy and finds himself prospering. In a way he resembles Thersites, who revels in bastardy. Philip does not take his identification as far as Thersites – he never calls himself a rascal or a knave, never dwells in the negative associations of the state – and also never experiences the potential backlash of that position, as Thersites does with Margarelon. The lesson here might be to exist within bastardy rather than struggling against or with it. The bastard who wants to overturn his illegitimate state

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<sup>217</sup> Shakespeare, William. “King John.” *The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare*, prepared by Charles Hinman, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., W. W. Norton & Co., 1996.

<sup>218</sup> Modern editors, including those of the Folger Shakespeare Library’s digital texts, replace “how ere” with “however.”

must heed this; after all, in order for a bastard to legally claim possession of his father's property, he must remain in possession of it until his death. This would require a certain amount of stasis. If he claimed it too stridently or railed against the unjustness of his inability to inherit, someone (legal heirs, outraged community member, law enforcers) would step in to try to remove him. The most successful bastard is the one who can inhabit his bastardy with contentedness and see the power available there.

This contented bastard must reproduce. Only his heirs can claim the property in question without fear of legal reprisals. This focus on regeneration and the authority that comes with it extends to the field of literary creation. Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and the determined scholarly interest in its quarto editions demonstrate that questions of authority remain this play's most alluring feature. The play itself, with its indeterminate genre and luke-warm central romance, appears to provoke less consideration than the mystery surrounding the sudden appearance of the letter to readers that marks the print history of the quarto. The history of the play, however, begins years before. Entered into the Stationer's Register on February 7<sup>th</sup> 1603, *Troilus and Cressida*'s print history (and, indeed, its performance history) begins then and there, with permission being granted to a James Roberts to print "when he hath gotten sufficient authority for yt" (477).<sup>219</sup> Precisely what this authority is, and how and when Roberts was supposed to have obtained it is unclear, but it can be presumed that he was unsuccessful in his pursuit of it as the first (known, surviving) printed edition of *Troilus and Cressida* was printed by George Eld. Roberts did not lack precedence with Shakespeare or his company; he had printed playbills for them as well as first editions of *Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's*

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<sup>219</sup> Evans, G. Blakemore, editor. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Houghton Mifflin, 1997, p. 477.

*Dream*, and *Titus Andronicus*.<sup>220</sup> All of these were printed at or around the time he would have been trying to get “sufficient authority” to print *Troilus and Cressida*, so the question of how or why he failed looms over the print edition of this play.<sup>221</sup>

The answer is, perhaps, a mundane one. Roberts may have dropped the ball on some paperwork or important communication or simply decided that the play’s publication was not worth pursuing.<sup>222</sup> I believe, however, that the significance of this moment rises beyond its literal circumstances. What matters here is that the physical incarnation of the play itself, the birthing of the work, depends upon authority. We are able to glimpse the work, imagine its inception, in the record kept by the Stationers, but without the necessary precursor of “sufficient authority,” this work exists only in our imaginings of it. The 1603 entry in the Stationer’s Register does go on to inform us that the play was performed – “as yt is acted by my lord Chamberlens Men” – but here, too, we must rely upon our own ability to envision such an existence for the work.<sup>223</sup>

The fleeting, ephemeral nature of stage performance means that even if a play is performed, its existence in such a medium is temporary and ended as soon as it is begun. Even if some playgoer recorded an account of the performance, the interaction between the account and

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<sup>220</sup> Arber, Edward, editor. *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London: 1554-1640*. vol. 2, privately printed, 1876.

<sup>221</sup> Others have entertained a mild speculation about Roberts’ involvement (or lack thereof) in the pre-printing history of the quarto, but most scholarship surrounding the *Troilus and Cressida* quartos seem to deal with their relationship to each other and the First Folio as well as questions of genre that arise out of these relationships. Gary Wells and Stanley Taylor sum up the problem of Roberts succinctly, saying, “Possibly Roberts never obtained sufficient authority. In any case, he appears not to have published the play” (424). This simple refrain echoes through other scholars’ brief treatment of Roberts. Kenneth Muir’s introduction to the Oxford edition nearly repeats Wells and Taylor: “Presumably Roberts did not obtain the necessary authority as he did not publish the play” (1). The disinterestedness with which scholars mention Roberts does a disservice to the problem of authority the play presents even before it gets set down in print. Wells, Gary and Stanley Taylor. *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*. Oxford UP, 1987. Shakespeare, William. *Troilus and Cressida*. Ed. Kenneth Muir, Oxford UP, 2008.

<sup>222</sup> It is worth noting that in the same year in which the Stationer’s Register marked him as the potential printer of *Troilus and Cressida*, Roberts was active; he printed *An Almanack and Prognostication* authored by Edward Gresham.

<sup>223</sup> Evans, G. Blakemore, editor. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Houghton Mifflin, 1997, p. 477.

a reader requires reconstruction that relies heavily on the reader's imaginative capabilities, and not on the authority of the author. Readers who wish to read the work itself rather than imagine a version of it must rely upon the print version of the play. If the play never gets published, never ends up printed and ready for the public's consumption, it would exist only in the memories of the people who saw (or performed in) it, and perhaps in those who were told about it. The play's survival would no doubt be greatly truncated and in a collective, aggregate form, changing depending on who remembered it. The unpublished play relies upon a set of memories and recollections that would make such a version of it non-standard, unverifiable, and thus any one version would lack authority (as it would most likely vary from many other versions).<sup>224</sup> No wonder, then, that the materialization of such an object should be surrounded with questions of authority. Roberts lacked the necessary authority to give birth to such an object. His lack of authority may have transferred to the printed play which could have resulted in the birth of a bastard version of it, one which must constantly be questioned. A bastard edition would bear the same strained relationship to its author that a bastard son bore to his father; questions of inheritance and authority would plague its existence, continually dictating the manner in which it was received. *Troilus and Cressida* escapes the fate of an illegitimate birth, but its brush with bastardy remains in the record of the Stationer's Register as a reminder of how important proper authority was to the engendering of this work.

In 1609 George Eld, presumably after having secured the "sufficient authority," printed a quarto edition of *Troilus and Cressida* for publishers Richard Bonian and Henry Walley. Did it

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<sup>224</sup> This is not to say, of course, that all memorial reconstructions of plays or other literary works are somehow untrustworthy or false. Each remembrance holds authority for the person remembering it. But as a whole, and as a public record, it lacks the authority that a more stable, more uniform print run can bring. In a way, memorial accounts would resemble the combination of several manuscripts of a work which, each having legitimacy in their own rights as representing their own particular historical context, carry with them variances resulting from things like dialect, scribal errors, and the alteration or corruption of material in an exemplar.

take six years for him to acquire the requisite authority, or did this play simply fall away from the attention of potential printers and publishers? It's unclear why such a stretch of time elapsed between the entry and the printing, but we can assume that in that period Eld acquired the necessary authority to birth an authorized, legitimate edition of the play. An examination of what he birthed, however, reveals a different story.

One version of the 1609 quarto edition, called Qa, contains a title page that aligns with the history provided by the Stationer's Register. It indicates that the play was acted by the King's Majesties Servants at the Globe theatre, along with providing Shakespeare's name as the author (see Figure 25); this type of information was quite commonly found on title pages for plays. In this version of the quarto edition, the next leaf is blank and the play starts on the following leaf with Troilus speaking to Pandarus.

There exists another version of this quarto edition, called Qb, printed and published by the same men and in the same year. This alternate version, however, includes a different title page and an epistle to the reader not found in the other (see Figure 26). This title page makes no mention of any performance history for the play and rather uses the same space once dedicated to detailing that history to praise the quality of the writing and provide a brief summary. While this type of information is not uncommon for title pages, the reason for excising the performance history becomes clear in the next pages. The newly-inserted epistle claims that this play has never been performed, proclaiming to the reader/buyer that they "have heere a new play , never ftal'd with the Stage, neuer clapper-clawd with the palmes of the vulgar." This deviates greatly from the other title page, which, with its prominent placement directly below the title and care given to details, makes of the performance history a boon. It would seem that the fact of its performance lends the printed edition authority. It links it to a specific group of actors who,



given their known association with the author, would presumably confer a certain amount of legitimacy on this physical incarnation of the play. The alternate version of this quarto calls those assumptions into question. It presumes that the play would be more desirable without any performance history; this desirability supersedes any legitimacy or authority it gains through association with the King's Men as a performance. The former version assumes that readers want an authoritative play; it provides a straightforward answer to that request through its title page. What the latter assumes is a bit more complex.

Qb forgoes the performance history at the cost of losing the association with (and thereby authority of) Shakespeare's theatre company. The epistle makes clear from the beginning that a play performed is somehow lessened, cheapened. The revision of the play's history, then, into one scrubbed of stage performance, prizes history over associations. It also attempts to create a history that flows more directly between the author and reader. By expunging the King's Men and their performance from the history of the play, the title page and epistle erase any intermediary hands (of actors, directors, and audiences) that may have shaped this work. The text that follows, then, can be assumed to be a more direct route between Shakespeare and the reader.<sup>225</sup> This direct, unsullied connection between author and reader seems to provide any authority that may have been lost with the connection to the King's Men. In terms of the birth of the play, this title page and epistle wish to provide a lineage that eliminates any question of legitimacy. Its very existence, however, indicates otherwise.

The two title pages cannot operate effectively unless they operate to the exclusion of the other. Their claims not only compete but cancel each other out. When read together, then, they

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<sup>225</sup> If both versions of the 1609 quarto are closely examined, however, it becomes clear that the text of the play itself is identical. The insertion of the different title page and epistle made no actual, discernable impact on the text of the play.

negate any assertions of authority or legitimacy. When read in concert with the rest of the play contained in the quarto, in which the text of each is identical, their claims become ludicrous. Each version of the edition contains the exact same text presented in the exact same way on the page. How can one be better, more authoritative, than the other? Wells and Taylor imagine a straightforward and, in my opinion, a bit naive explanation for the differing quartos: “As the epistle explicitly reinforces the omission of Qa’s reference to performance, it seems clear that, between the initiation and the completion of printing, the publishers came to believe that the play had never been performed. The accuracy of this belief is a matter of dispute” (424). While this would easily explain the existence of two diametrically opposed versions of the play’s history recorded by the same publishers, it essentially imagines that both versions are correct solely because the producers believe them to be so. In this case, the intended accuracy (or authority) of the edition lies first with Qa and then with Qb. As the publishers’ knowledge of the play changed, the quartos changed to reflect that. Muir’s account of the existence of Qb expresses a similar confidence in the ingenuousness of the publishers. He says, “While the edition was at press, the publishers were informed, or misinformed, that the play had not been seen at the Globe; they therefore prepared a cancel title-page...and added an Epistle to the reader implying that it was a sign of quality that the play had not been publicly acted” (1).<sup>226</sup> Muir reads in the alteration no motivation other than an attempt to accurately represent the play. He indicates that the publishers might have been misinformed, but not that they were, in turn, misinforming their readers. Wells and Taylor likewise question the belief in the veracity of the knowledge the publishers had, not that the publishers might also be less than certain with regards to the play’s history or that they could be motivated by something other than a desire to represent that history

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<sup>226</sup> See Kenneth Muir’s introduction to his edition of *Troilus and Cressida*. Muir, Kenneth, editor. Introduction. *Troilus and Cressida* by William Shakespeare. Oxford UP, 2008, pp. 1-47.

accurately. This view subsumes any reader involvement in the construction of the printed edition's authority.

If we look beyond this explanation, we can see that the title pages and accompanying texts rely upon the reader's particular desire for textual legitimacy. Here, seizing legitimacy is all that is required. In much the same way that a bastard son can claim his father's lands for his descendants by simply remaining on those lands (and thus overcoming his bastard status), the reader simply needs to acknowledge that one or the other version of the text holds legitimacy. The reader must ignore the fact that the two competing claims cannot both be true, and, in the absence of any proof to back on or the other, can and must decide for himself which title page sets up a more authoritative edition. In his study of performances of *Troilus and Cressida*, Roger Apfelbaum says, "A lesson to be learned from the instability of the early texts is that the play never seems to have existed in a stable format, and as a playtext, it includes variables that produce meanings in a variety of ways" (61).<sup>227</sup> It is up to the reader to determine how best to stabilize this unstable text and produce his or her particular meaning of the text by sorting through the variables at hand and using or discarding them. Thus the burden of legitimacy falls not upon the printer or publisher, but upon the reader. And as such, legitimacy or authority in the text becomes not a question of actuality or historical fact, but one of perception.<sup>228</sup>

Wells and Taylor locate validation for the plurality of the text and its meanings in Shakespeare. While discussing the possibility that Shakespeare revised his work, they say:

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<sup>227</sup> Apfelbaum, Roger. *Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida: Textual Problems and Performance Solutions*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004.

<sup>228</sup> This harkens back to the questions surrounding medieval bastardy and the law. The perception of bastardy could sufficiently damage a person's reputation such that a dead man could not be accused of being a bastard because he could not defend himself from the accusation. On the other hand, claims of bastardy could be overcome, indicating that the indisputable fact of a person's bastardy or legitimacy was not actually indisputable, but a more malleable status.

Editors – like other critics and readers – wish to find in literary texts both permanence and perfection. But the perfection of permanence is unattainable if the text itself was never fixed, if the author has left us only ‘bifold authority’, if we can only experience what ‘is and is not Cressid’ (or is and is not *Troilus and Cressida*). Likewise, the permanence of perfection, of a transcendental ideal, of the one true text, is denied us when we discover that even the author regarded so many of the components of the artefact as disposable or interchangeable, when we see for ourselves that the same thing can be said in so many different ways, none beyond praise or reproach. (18-19)

The sentiment here, that we should abandon any, necessarily futile, search for “permanence and perfection,” is sound. Neither Qa or Qb (or the First Folio edition, for that matter) can provide that level of ideal certainty. Their statement gives the appearance of healthy skepticism in the search for a literary origin, but it actually still relies heavily on the authority of the author’s intentions. Since Shakespeare did not leave us with one true original, then we must follow his lead and accept that there is not one, or that more than one may exist. This thinking still allows the author to maintain a high level of control over the interpretation and reproduction of his work.<sup>229</sup> It denies the possibility that the reader, any reader, could construct a valid, authoritative identity for the work. As we have seen, readers can be integral participants in the production (and reproduction) of literature and literary works. In the same way that letting go of a desire to locate “permanence and perfection” in a text frees editors, critics, and readers to see the possibilities for

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<sup>229</sup> This kind of thinking and searching leads to the type of scholarly battle that surrounds *Troilus and Cressida*. For centuries scholars have been debating the authority of each extant edition of the text, trying to determine which is more authoritative, which came first, which, in essence, is the chicken or the egg. While there is merit in this work, not the least of which is to help editors determine how to construct new editions, essentially determining in what form readers will receive the play, it remains, at its core, a search for an origin. This origin may or may not be unattainable, and, more importantly, may be nothing more than a particularly distracting chimera, drawing attention away from the possibilities that exist when the editions are not pitted against one another in a bid for origins and authority, but viewed as a whole.

meaningfulness in an “imperfect” text, abandoning the doctrine of authorial control will result in a similar freedom for meaning making in a work. We should not halt our search for “permanence and perfection” because Shakespeare somehow reaches out across the centuries to tell us so, but because all such searches, whether in texts or works, sources or authors, necessarily limits literary history and literary production. Approaching the text or work, source or author, as fluid and dynamic will allow for more readers to insert themselves into the creation and recreation of literature. The result is its survival.

Stephen Orgel also sees the problematic nature of origins in Shakespeare’s plays. He concludes his study in a turn from textual origins to authorial ones: “What we want is not the authentic play, with its unstable, infinitely revisable script, but an authentic Shakespeare, to whom every generation's version of a classic drama may be ascribed” (2).<sup>230</sup> I agree with Orgel that we do indeed desire an “authentic Shakespeare.” But where Orgel implies that this is an (at least partially) achievable goal, I would say it is folly. Authenticity in the work comes not from the work itself, or from the author, but from the reader. In discussing canonicity, Orgel uses the council of Trent’s inclusion or exclusion of books from the Bible as an example, saying the council “declared thereby that authenticity was a matter of authentication, something bestowed, not inherent” (5). If we follow Orgel’s example and apply his assessment of authenticity and the Bible to the quartos of *Troilus and Cressida*, it becomes clear that the search for an origin is unattainable. Any origin, any authentic *Troilus and Cressida*, contains an external component making it so. It is, to use Orgel’s words, “not inherent.” And in the search for literary, authorial origins, inherentness is crucial. No authentic work can exist without the validation of an external reader’s assessment. And that work cannot, by dint of the inclusion of the reader, possibly be

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<sup>230</sup> Orgel, Stephen. “The Authentic Shakespeare.” *Representations*, no. 21, 1988, pp. 1-25.

singularly authentic or an origin. Here we have the paradox of literary origins; a reader external to the work must be the party who grants authenticity, but in that act, in the inclusion of the reader to the work's meaning, the inherentness of authenticity that would establish the work as an origin is denied. We must accept this state and realize that readerly involvement in authenticating works is necessary and nullifying. Once the futile search for an origin, whether of author or work, is given up, the motives and influences of readerly authorizations becomes recognizable.

The print history of *Troilus and Cressida* appears to be both legitimate and bastard. The paradox here is multi-layered. One would expect the presence of two such opposed accounts to call them both into question; for how can someone ascertain the truth of the play's history when presented with two completely conflicting versions? The answer is that the play itself is perfectly reflected in its paradoxical print history. Both quarto versions can and do occupy positions of legitimacy and illegitimacy relative to each other. One is only (and more) legitimate (or not) in the presence of the other. In this way, they rely upon each other to inform and confirm their own identities. The play is both a fleeting, momentary performance and an imperfect yet enduring record of that performance. The two title pages, when considered with and against each other, bear witness to this troublesome nature of the play as a literary work. In that respect, neither (and both) editions are accurate representations of the play.

Both editions rely heavily upon their readers for assignments of legitimacy. The epistle's salutation contains within its few words the complex relationship between reader and author (see Figure 27). It reads, "A neuer writer , to an euer | reader. Newes." The designation of the reader (and possibly purchaser) of this quarto edition as an "euer reader" could explain the shift away from the performance history; an "euer reader" could be someone who is more interested in

reading a play than seeing it performed. This appellation implies that the reader is, most probably, a prolific one, and as such brings a certain amount of condescension to the dramatic genre. This assumption is borne out by the letter. It smears the play-going public, calling them “vulgar” and “dull and heavy-witted worldlings.” By contrast, then, the “euer reader” occupies the position of higher discernment, taste, and understanding and this never-performed play should appeal to them. The epistle’s salutation and body rely upon a particular type of reader to lend this version of the work legitimacy (rather than an association with Shakespeare’s theatre company, which the other edition uses).

The term “euer reader” can refer to this particular type of reader, but it also is capable of signaling more. If we think back to Lydgate’s model of literary history and readerly participation in literary creation, this term would seem highly applicable. The term “euer reader” in that system would refer to the notion that in order to become an author, one first had to be an active, engaged reader. The process of reading, the position of “reader” within the relationship of readers/authors/sources, would never really end, and thus would be “euer.” All participants in literary creation are, indeed must be, “euer readers.” This epistle follows that directive. It calls upon its readers to critically engage the work and think about it in the light of the information it presents. Indeed, if the reader is familiar with the other print edition of the play (or, even, its performance history), the burden of critical reading becomes greater.

An “euer reader” is not simply a single reader who must never stop reading, but also refers to the chain of readership that reaches back through the literary history of this play. The subject matter, the Trojan War and the relationship between Troilus and Cressida, carries with it a weighty anchor in English literary history. Each reader bears the material forward, and each “euer reader” who uses his readership to forge a new incarnation of the work participates in its

regeneration. The “euer reader” places himself directly within the process of procreation, deliberately facilitating it. And each “euer reader” depends upon the regenerated recreations of the work left by the “euer reader” before him. Thus, “euer reader” comes to mean the chain of readers, linked together by their particular active readership. In the case of this play, Shakespeare’s active reading of the Trojan material relies upon the versions presented by Lydgate and Chaucer before him.

Where, though, does the “Neuer writer” figure into this equation? I would argue that he occupies the place of the paradox. He claims to be a “Neuer writer,” but as the writer of the epistle, this assertion is clearly false. In fact, on an extremely literal level, the very act of writing “Neuer writer” negates his claim. The paradox established with the first two words of the epistle’s salutation creates ripples throughout the rest of the letter and its writer’s identity, reminding the reader to take nothing here at face value, to see the possibility for several, sometimes contradictory meanings in everything. The letter writer’s slippery self-identification is followed by the call to the “euer reader,” which, as we have seen, is an equally multifarious designation. He then confidently condemns stage performances and stresses the lack of any such history for this work, which we know, judging by the alternate print edition, has as much likelihood of being true as it does of being false. By the end of the epistle, the “Neuer writer” has proven himself to not only be a writer, but one who can confidently turn his reading experiences into well-expressed opinions about other readers. This, too, is paradoxical. The phrase “Neuer writer” carries with it a sense of humility and self-abnegation, recalling the humility topos so often found in Lydgate’s works; and yet this person writes from a position of confidence. In other words, the “Neuer writer” is precisely the type of “euer reader” that Lydgate so often exhorts to participate in literary creation and recreation. He occupies the positions both of reader



and writer, while claiming to distance himself from both. In this respect, his literary position seems to mimic that of the bastard: his self-identification is a statement of paradox.

The epistle itself occupies a similarly troublesome position in regards to its writer. Its claims are, as we have seen, historically unsustainable and unprovable in light of the other quarto edition of *Troilus and Cressida*. Beyond that more obvious difficulty lays the problem of specificity, or lack thereof. If someone were looking to verify the accuracy of the epistle's assertions about the play's performance, the epistle itself provides very little confidence therein. A historical claim should provide a satisfactory amount of detail to corroborate the larger points, but this epistle has a startling lack of detail. In the first sentence the reader is told they, "have heere a new | play," but the title of the play is not mentioned once in the whole letter. The writer talks later of "this authors Commedies" and "his Commedies," though he does not call any of them by name. Of Shakespeare himself, the letter writer uses only "his," "hee," and "this author" as referents. The only people who are granted the privilege of proper names are Terence and Plautus, to whose work the author favorably compares this play. If the reader of the letter is looking for signs that this letter is accurate, he will not find any comforting details on hand to ease his mind. What, then, is the purpose of the vagueness here? Why is the only specificity granted to such distant authors?

I would argue that the lack of specificity here is deliberate. Pragmatically speaking, this could be a form letter of sorts that could be inserted at the beginning of any edition of a comedy in order to make it seem more appealing. Since this quarto edition of *Troilus and Cressida* seems to contain the only occurrence of the letter, either that was not the case or it was unsuccessful enough to repeat. When looking at the letter from a less pragmatic point of view, the lack of specificity seems to repeat the sentiment expressed by the salutation in "euer reader." The "euer

reader” is any reader, all readers, and ultimately a chain of active readership. The word “author” has a similar reach. It moves beyond that incredibly specific point in literary history, Shakespeare, and references all authors and, indeed, authorship itself. This sits uneasily aside the description of “this authors Commedies” as ones that possess “fuch a dexteritie, and power of witte, that the most displeas'd with Playes, are pleas'd with his Commedies.” This description attempts to set these works and this author apart from others as being more sophisticated and complex, and therefore more pleasing. The very point of this statement, to mark this author and his comedies (including the one that follows) as better, relies upon the author being specific, because without specificity, without difference, no qualitative comparisons can be drawn. And yet, the “Neuer writer” insists upon the author remaining unnamed. Would not the inclusion of a proper name help his cause in marking this author’s works as superior? Therein lays the paradox. A proper name and the specificity it confers allows the reader to make a clear, personal connection with that author. Once that connection is made, once the reader remembers the author as someone whose works he’s read or plays he’s seen, the epistle writer has no control over the image of the author he’s trying to convey. Each reader’s view of this author may be different and would certainly be influenced by their own interactions with him. By keeping the author unnamed, the letter writer ensures that he retains control over the impression being formed of the author, over his identity. Specificity, here, allows the writer to confer that (paradoxically specific) position of superiority.

And yet it is hard to believe that anyone reading the epistle would be unaware of Shakespeare’s authorship of the play that follows. It is prominently proclaimed on the title page and unless they were reading an incomplete copy, the title page is hard to miss. Anyone purchasing the book would most likely be basing their decision, at least somewhat, on the fact

that Shakespeare authored the play. So it would seem that the attempts at anonymity on the part of the epistle writer would be unsuccessful. The reader of this epistolary edition is asked to first acknowledge Shakespeare as the author of *Troilus and Cressida*, to assign value to him as an author, then forget that fact, and finally to acknowledge the value assigned to the author by the letter writer. It would be impossible for the reader to fully complete this strange oscillation.

Rather, the juxtaposition of the epistle and the title page recreate the tension found between the specific and the general, the singular and the many presented by print. It hearkens back to the presentation images found in print editions of books. In those cases, the specificity allegedly represented by the image was directly contradicted by the print conditions of the book's creation. The objects and figures in the image could not possibly be as specific as they appeared to claim because several (sometimes hundred) copies of the work were printed. The tension between the image and the reality of the work's materialization in print allowed for room to open up in which multiple readers could infer multiple meanings and senses of identity within the creation of the work. In the case of the epistolary quarto edition of *Troilus and Cressida*, the title page and epistle create a similar tension resulting in a similar opening up of the work. The identities of the literary participants become fluid. The "Neuer writer," the "euer reader," and the "author" are deliberately constructed to lack any fixity. The anonymity of those designations allows any reader of the epistle (and, indeed, the rest of the play) to see themselves reflected in those positions. Additionally, paradoxes established within those designations (the "Neuer writer" is, of course, a writer; the "euer reader" is both a single and multiple entity; the "author" is both Shakespeare and not any particular person) further extends the fluidity of literary creation and its participants. The epistle, then, strives to reinforce the idea of fluidity among and between

the seemingly specific poles of literary creation. Readers are writers are authors. Each of those positions is accessible to anyone who can identify the spaces created by paradox in the work.

In *Recursive Origins* William Kuskin also reads the epistle's significance as relating to the identities of literary creators. He says, "In its slippery way, then, the epistle suggests that textual transformation organizes individuals – reader, writer, author, censor, audience – into a collectivity" (136). I would further describe this collectivity as one in which individuals and identities can and do elide, but also retain specificity within the generalization of the collective; so, where a reader once existed, now an author emerges, carrying its former readership within it. This system encourages entry into and active participation (or movement) within literary creation. This collective of specificities is the paradox of literary creation. Kuskin notes that "the possibility of transformation is within the epistle;" (136) I would argue that the epistle demands that anyone who identifies themselves by the literary designations presented must transform, must accept the reality that each of the designations contain the other, and to be any of them means being all of them.

In the quarto editions' print history, we can see Lydgate's model of readerly participation in literary creation at work. The printer and/or publishers of this quarto edition have seen fit to critically read their own additions to the work (the title-page) and find within it a question sufficient to necessitate a revision. That's what the changes to the title page and the addition of the epistle really are: a revision. It revises or re-envisions not simply the prefatory material, but the history conveyed therein. The goal of the revision is to make the work more suitable, more desirable to its readers. This is precisely what Lydgate advocates of his own readers when he invites their engagement in the recreation of literature. The result, here, is that the quarto edition of *Troilus and Cressida* reveals the knotty problems of authority that surround readerly revisions.

Readerly revisions disrupt the notion of singular authorial control over the work. The epistle edition of *Troilus and Cressida* demonstrates how a reader can enter the work, recreate its history, and in doing so engender an entirely different reproduction of the original. The reader, a “Neuer writer” by name, but in reality an active participant in literary recreation, uses the possibilities afforded him by that position to not only alter the course of the work’s progeny, but also, through that alteration, to gain authority for himself and the position of the reader. The epistle edition is a prime example of the shifting nature of authority over literary works.

The Qa and Qb editions reflect the potter’s metaphor used by Lydgate in *Fall of Princes*. He says that translators “make and unmake in sundry wise | as potters which that to that craft emend | breke and renewe their vessels to amend” (Book 2, ll. 12-14). The broken pieces of pottery would either form patches or repairs or be ground down and added to new material to create a new vessel. The translated vessel is one that mixes old and new material to form a whole. It is both made and unmade, the source torn apart in order that the piece might be put together. The paradox in this process speaks to Lydgate’s mode of literary production, in which destruction occurs in order that preservation can be accomplished. The title pages and the epistle combine with the other pieces of this “vessel” to create new works. Though the shape of the main body (the play itself) remains the same, the addition of these new pieces changes the overall function of the work, changes our perception of it. Genre shifts, as do expectations, and the preconceptions we bring to the text.

The Qa edition’s epistle expresses Lydgate’s potter metaphor, as well. The “euer reader” becomes a writer because his careful reading of the text allows him to collect pieces, fragments of pottery, with which he can construct and reconstruct works of literature. In this way, the “euer reader” becomes an “euer” writer, in which the “euer”-ness is the sustained presence of certain of

those fragments. In the case of *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare himself is an “euer” writer, using, as he does, pieces and portions of stories that he read, evaluated, and then kept. The Troy story itself can be envisioned as a large urn. When each new writer approaches the urn, he examines it and decides which sections appeal to him and would best suit the end result he wishes to accomplish. Then he cracks the urn apart, salvaging some pieces and discarding others. He then adds his own materials to the old pieces, creating a new work that sits atop the pile of castoffs. Soon another writer comes to the urn and the process repeats. Occasionally old, discarded pieces get picked up and reused, and prominent pieces get rejected. The “euer” writers keep the urn from crumbling with age by breaking it and adding new material, new form, to the old pieces. The Troy story is quite a large urn, destroyed and preserved in turn by Chaucer, Lydgate, Caxton, and Shakespeare, each one seeing different possible reincarnations in the material. Where Lydgate expands, Shakespeare contracts. Both recreate the story, prolonging its survival and displaying its potential to become something new while maintaining (at least a portion of) its identity.

The potter metaphor also recalls the paradoxical history presented by the quartos of *Troilus and Cressida*. It is both performed by a particular company in a specific place, and never before performed. If a person is searching for the historical fact of this play’s performance, the quarto editions provide no solid answer. If, however, one is looking at the play from a literary historical angle, the Qa and Qb editions perfectly express the apparent contradiction of any textual representation of a play. The physical embodiment of a play in a book, with ink on paper, cannot completely convey the performance of the play. The aspects of performance are, of course, present; dialogue and stage directions are recorded by the words on the page and the reader can imaginatively reconstruct the performance from this. The actual performance, with its

fleeting and dynamic nature, however, remains elusive. Paper and ink cannot wholly record it. The Qa and Qb editions of *Troilus and Cressida*, when taken as parts of a whole representation, convey this. Qb states that *this play*, the one the reader holds in his hands, was acted at the Globe by Shakespeare's company. Qa refutes that. Of course, this play, the one recorded on paper with ink, the one bound not only in the form of a book, but by the restrictions of its physicality, cannot have ever been performed. The textual representation and the performance are not the same. And they are. The paradox presented by the Qa and Qb editions, perhaps inadvertently, capture the problem of recorded performances. This recalls the phenomenon of presentation images in print. The images of an author presenting his book to a patron, an aspect of manuscript production, when present in print provide the reader with a strange reality. The book in the presentation image both is and is not the book the reader holds in his hand. It is the same book in that it purports to physically represent the same work in a nearly identical way. It is, of course, not the same individual book from the image.

This paradoxical singularity of multitudes is one we have assimilated neatly into our understanding of recorded (or represented) works. If, in discussing a literary work, one person asks another, "have you read that book," they do not mean, of course, the same physical book which they read. The possibility of multiple copies means that one person may own, read, write in, or even destroy a book without it altering another person's book or, indeed, the idea of the book. It is not until the reader becomes a writer and recreates the work, in part or in whole, that the idea of the work changes.

The question that prompted this chapter, the question of whether and how Lydgate's literary economy works outside of the fifteenth century, seems to have a multitude of answers. Lydgate knows his status as a bastard son of Chaucer, but also realizes the powerlessness of that

designation to completely undermine his authority. He knows that bastardy exists through an external judgement, not an internal quality, and in that knowledge, he is able to assert his actual qualities and characteristics, his differences from Chaucer, to establish his own literary identity, his authority as a poet. He does this by becoming a reader of Chaucer in *Siege of Thebes* and modelling the role of active, prudent reader for his own readers. As always, Lydgate teaches with implicit and explicit lessons, showing and telling his readers the best paths. In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare harnesses the power and energy of the bastard, deploying Margarelon and Thersites as two sides of the bastard coin. In this, he demonstrates that concept of paradox that Lydgate so often sets forth. Lydgate's own depiction of Margarelon shows this paradox beautifully in marking the bastard's importance to, but simultaneous removal from the epicenter of the story. Margarelon's contrast to Hector's (admittedly fleeting, but still fatal) imprudence, the paradox of bastardy, its inability to be singularly negative and its capacity for generative potential, comes through clearly. The textual history of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* reinforces the idea that Lydgate's concepts of paradoxical authority persist into the seventeenth century. Throughout we see that authority flows through unexpected channels, and never in a direct path. Lydgate's notions of literary authority, of prudence and common profit, remain pertinent beyond his immediate context.



### Conclusion – *A Mirror for Magistrates* and its Writing Readers

At some point we have to ask when the work is no longer the work. When does reproduction, in a variety of forms and at the hands of a variety of readers/writers, result not in another representation of the work, but in a new work itself? A possible answer lies in *A Mirror for Magistrates*. This literary scrap quilt grew out of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* and took on its own life in the sixteenth century. The idea behind *Mirror* was an extension of *Fall* into times and places nearer to its audience; when printer John Wayland took over Edward Whitchurch's print shop in 1553/4, he planned an edition of *Fall* that would include more recent stories of Englishmen.<sup>231</sup> William Baldwin, an acquisition of Wayland's accompanying the printing house, directed the construction of the addition. Baldwin's (and his associates') Protestant leanings kept the new stories from being published with Lydgate's *Fall*; once the monarch and the religious climate shifted back towards Protestantism with Elizabeth I's ascension in 1558, Baldwin's stories found a more favorable environment.<sup>232</sup> They were printed in 1559 by Thomas Marshe as a standalone piece titled *A Mirror for Magistrates*. This work, then, is not by Lydgate. Nor does it contain elements originally written by Lydgate but which have been revised or emended by a later hand. It is something entirely different. But it also is not. It was written out of a desire to bring Lydgate's work closer to the present time and reading audience. The fact that its originally intended printed state (the combination of Lydgate's *Fall* with Baldwin's stories) did not occur has more to do with the political and religious climate than with the works themselves. If

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<sup>231</sup> Whitchurch, a printer of evangelical literature, retired soon after Edward VI died and the more Catholic Mary assumed the throne. See Lucas, Scott C. *A Mirror for Magistrates and the Politics of the English Reformation*. U of Massachusetts P, 2009, p. 18.

<sup>232</sup> See Lucas' first chapter "Creation and Contexts" for a detailed discussion of the ways the political and religious climate impacted the printing and suppression of Baldwin's work. See also Budra, Paul. *A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition*. U of Toronto P, 2000, pp. 3-4.

Wayland had published Baldwin's additions alongside Lydgate's *Fall* in a single volume, would we see the two as inextricably linked? Would Baldwin's work be subsumed by its proximity to its Lydgatean predecessor (as Lydgate's *Siege* often is with relation to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*)? Or do the vagaries of context and physicality impress upon this work its status as something separate?

Baldwin included two prefatory pieces as accompaniment to *Mirror*, an epistle and a memorial. Both situate the work with regards to Lydgate's work and provide details of the construction of *Mirror*. The epistle sends readers to *Fall of Princes* for stories about ancient and foreign people: "Howe he [God] hath plaged euill rulers from time to time, in other nacions, you may see gathered in Boccas booke intituled the fall of Princes, translated into Englishe by Lydgate:" (¶iii r).<sup>233</sup> This small reference to Lydgate is easily overlooked, but it acts to bridge the two works together. It functions much as a navigational aid for a single volume would, directing readers where they might find specific information. That this information is contained in a different book, a presumably different work contained in a separate physical space, seems not to matter to Baldwin. His concern here is giving the reader looking for stories about "euill rulers...in other nacions" accurate directions to find what they seek. This move connects the two works and their respective authors. Baldwin views his audience as potentially overlapping with Lydgate's and reinforces this shared community sense with this brief directive. His attitude draws these two authors, two works, and two books into symbiosis across significant gaps in time and space.

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<sup>233</sup> Lydgate, John. *A Mirror for Magistrates*. Thomas Marshe, 1559. *Early English Books Online*, [www.gateway.proquest.com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:99840257](http://www.gateway.proquest.com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99840257). Accessed 12 April 2018. All further quotations are from this edition unless otherwise noted.

Baldwin follows this reference to Lydgate with the specifics of his own project: “Howe he hath delt with sum of our countrey men your auncestors, for sundrye vices not yet lest, this booke named A Myrroure for Magistrates, can shew:” (¶iii r). The connection is clear; Lydgate deals with ancient and mostly foreign rulers, while Baldwin focuses on the more present time and place. Baldwin posits his work as a continuation of Lydgate’s, drawing closer to the audience’s own context. This continues to be the case for *Mirror* as, throughout the sixteenth century it is published with ever more stories, the last edition folding Elizabeth I into its repertoire. Baldwin goes so far as to bring the reading audience into the sphere of impact, saying that the stories are about “your auncestors.” He directly addresses the reader and makes their involvement in the work clear.

The wording of this statement draws the two works more clearly together, both descriptions citing God (“he”) as the principle actor upon these “euill rulers” and “countrymen.” Regardless of time and place, the ways in which God deals with the vices of men remains the central action of both Lydgate’s and Baldwin’s narratives. Subject matter and purpose unite these works. God unites them. As does the (often bad) fortunes of the principle characters, their culpability in their fortunes, and the pedagogical imperative of the stories. These connective tissues stretch across the chasms of centuries and individuality of authorship to create a work that resembles a unit of parts that operate together with a singular goal. This literary system does not stop with Baldwin, but attempts to draw more parts and participants into itself. It draws the reader close to the stories by promising to talk about “your auncestors,” but also places the author together with those readers in referencing “our countrey men.” The reader, then, is not only related to the subjects of these stories, but also to the authors of them. Baldwin takes Lydgate’s example of drawing the reader into a more generative, authorial role. He attempts to

banish the specter of authorial hierarchy in literary creation. Of course, the work is meant to be instructive for the reader, to provide cautionary tales which can serve to augment their sense of morality, but Baldwin, like Lydgate before him, allows for the reader to become more involved in generation. The reader can create or recreate themselves and their actions with regards to the stories, but they can also author outside of themselves. They can author this work.

The readers do just that. *A Mirror for Magistrates* gets printed and reprinted several times over the next half century with each successive undertaking including new stories and omitting old ones, changing shapes and preserving the valuable fragments.<sup>234</sup> Here again we see Lydgate's potters' metaphor in action. Each new hand reshapes the work, adding new elements and discarding old ones where they see fit. And in doing so, each authorial endeavor imprints that person's preferences, tendencies, ideologies, and context onto the work, preserving themselves as surely as a ceramic vessel records the fingerprints of its potter on its clay surface. This literary vessel, broken and remade so many times by so many different hands, records the overlapping fingerprints of an authorial multitude. Its origin cannot be clearly or linearly traced. Though the various makers are known, they present such a chaotic impression of generation that it becomes easier to dismiss their roles than untangle them.

In this, *A Mirror for Magistrates*, resembles the bastard. The known father is acknowledged, but the circumstances surrounding the conception make it easier, even necessary, to negate his relationship to his offspring. As we have seen, the bastard child can suffer or benefit from this status conferred by their (non-)father. *A Mirror for Magistrates* sits at the same

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<sup>234</sup> Lucas provides a description of the genesis and regeneration of *Mirror* in his appendix, but he is careful to note that this literary history is "one of the most confused, controversial, and error-filled subjects in all of Tudor literary studies" (237). Despite this, he attempts to untangle the myriad threads that untidily combine to make up *Mirror's* history. Though there is value in being able to impose coherence on such chaos, the chaos can also be meaningful. In this case, the tangled apparent mess attests to *Mirror's* non-linear origins and lack of a singular authorial creative entity.

intersection of opportunity and risk. On the one hand, the looser definitions of authority that Lydgate creates in *Fall of Princes* allows for Baldwin and others to build out from the work, not just preserving it, but refusing its stagnation and causing its dynamic growth for a century and a half after Lydgate's death. On the other hand, the lack of a clear, singular author and easily discernable history makes *Mirror* easy for scholars to ignore. It lacks clear definition, coherence, and unity. Lucas makes the point that this incoherence confounds scholars and causes them to try to impose order and agreement between parts where they find none. This perhaps leads to the reaction which Budra identifies as "almost uniformly apologetic" (xi). The multiplicity of authors leads to a variety within the work that causes productive scholarship to balk at it. If the multiplicity, the bastardy of the work, can be acknowledged, it becomes an understandable literary work. The beauty occurs within its apparent flaws. This system of dependently independent literary works demonstrates the benefits of existing outside of the realm of the traditionally acceptable. The fringe, the venue of the bastard, can free one from the restrictions that hold back those who adhere to the rules and ideals of legitimacy.

The bastard authority of *Mirror*, its chaotic literary generation at the hands of readers who have become writers, clearly identifies it as belonging to new media. It is recombinant, networked, interactive.<sup>235</sup> Readers took Lydgate's *Fall* and used it to help them create a new, more relevant work, one that responds dynamically to its context. It denies a static origin point, instead providing its readers/writers with several points of interaction and interpretation. Recombinant media "resist stabilization...[and] are the product of people's ideas, decisions, and actions, as they merge old and new technologies, uses and purposes" (474). In this, *Mirror* most clearly demonstrates its status as new media. This work's ever-evolving state, its inclusion of

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<sup>235</sup> See Lievrouw's definition on page 477.

new stories by new writers to appeal to a new set of readers, comes from its recombination.

*Mirror*, as an example of fifteenth- (and sixteenth-) century new media, demonstrates the period's relevance today. Now, more than at any point in the intervening seven hundred years, Lydgate and the fifteenth century which he exemplified, is knowable and relevant.

Lydgate was a poet of the in-between spaces. He identified them in seemingly closed off places, in his sources, in his literary predecessors, in his own works, and, like water finding cracks in cement and then turning to ice, filled those spaces with his own amplifications, digressions, moralizations – his own work – and broke the spaces open, allowing others to more easily find, enter, and fill them. Alain Renoir, in speaking of Lydgate's career says, "John Lydgate was *the* poet of the transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and, conversely, if we admit that he ever lived and wrote, we must also admit the existence of such a transition" (19).<sup>236</sup> Lydgate filled the space between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in much the same way he filled and over-filled the similar in-between spaces in literature: with the broken shards of the previous, re-formed into a new, yet old, a strange, yet recognizable whole. He filled that space with the intention of making a model of himself, of creating a pathway to self-authorization that others could follow. In doing so, he created more than a bridge between the medieval and Renaissance.<sup>237</sup> He created centuries of readers who followed his path, who authorized themselves through their active reading, through their transformation into writers.

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<sup>236</sup> Renoir, Alain. "John Lydgate: Poet of Transition." *English Miscellany*, vol. 11, 1960, pp. 9-19.

<sup>237</sup> Kuskin says that "reading and writing occur in a dynamic circuit of literary reproduction that transcends any simple notion of historical break" (53). In this way, Lydgate and his readers, with their continual reading and writing, do not bridge the medieval and the Renaissance, they merge them.

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Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS English 1 (*Troy Book*)

Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS English 2 (*Fall of Princes*)

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.4 (*Siege of Thebes*)

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.124 (*Fall of Princes*)

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.876 (*Troy Book*)

### Printed Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Editions

Boulder, Norlin Library, PR 1850 1602 (*Chaucer's Works*)

Manchester, John Rylands Library, Incunable Collection 15407, STC 3175 (*Fall of Princes*)

Manchester, John Rylands Library, STC 5580 (*Troy Book*)

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, W 02 C, STC 5068 (*Chaucer's Works*)

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, W 02 C, STC 5069 (*Chaucer's Works*)

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, W 02 C, STC 5077 (*Chaucer's Works*)

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<sup>238</sup> For this project I examined both manuscripts and early printed books. The manuscripts are listed first in this bibliography, arranged by location and then alphabetically by shelfmark. For each manuscript I listed the title of the work which I was examining in that book; some manuscripts, such as Rylands English MS 1, only contained a single work (in this case, *Troy Book*), but others, like Morgan MS M.124, contained works other than the one I examined. The print editions are arranged in the same manner as the manuscripts, but I included call numbers where there was no shelfmark, as well as the (shortened) title of the work. For each printed book I also included the Short Title Catalogue (or STC) number, as further identification. Since the Norlin Library copy of *Chaucer's Works* is neither a 1598 nor a 1602, since it is non-standard and probably unique, there is no correlating STC number.

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, W 14 B, STC 5579 (*Troy Book*)

New York, New York Public Library, Spencer Collection Eng. 1527, STC 3176 (*Fall of Princes*)

New York, New York Public Library, Spencer Collection Eng. 1545+, STC 3177 (*Fall of Princes*)

New York, New York Public Library, \*KC+ 1545, STC 5074 (*Chaucer's Works*)

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Appendix 1 Figures



Figure 1 Rylands English MS 1 Folio 1r

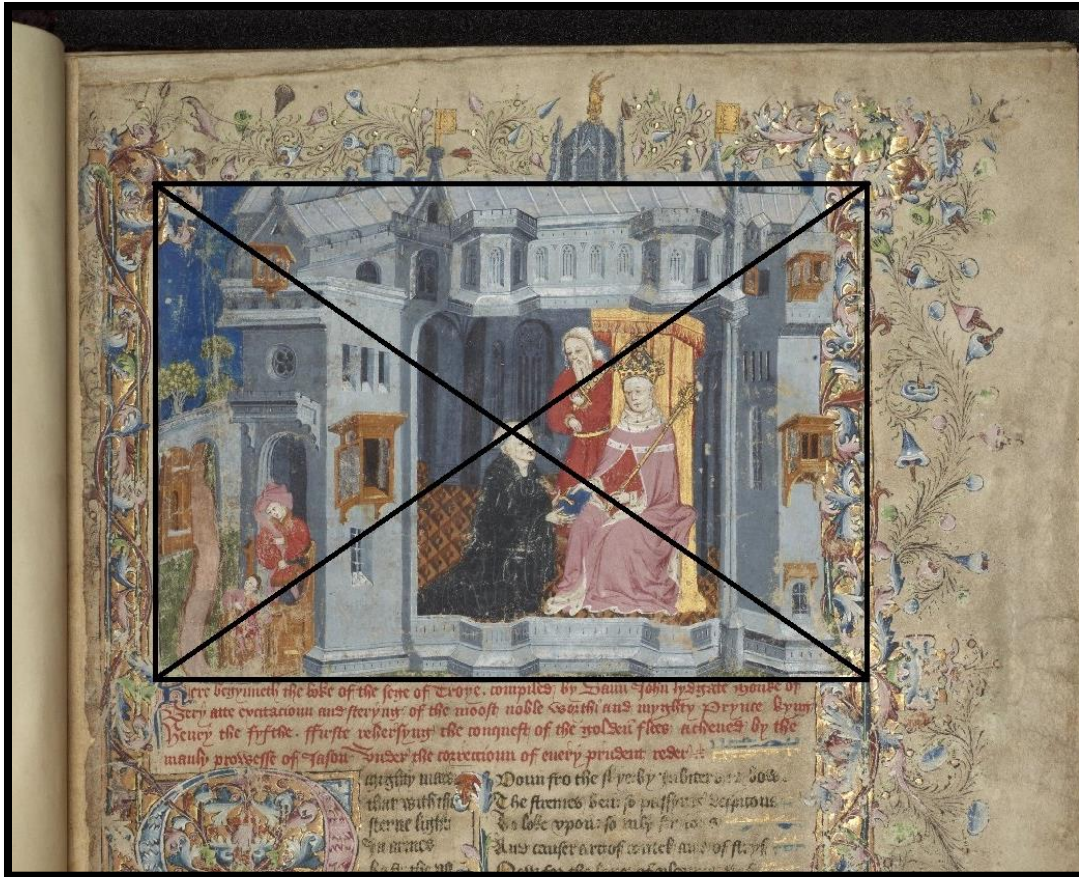


Figure 1x





Figure 2 Richard Pynson's 1513 Troy Book STC 5579, Morgan Library W 14 B

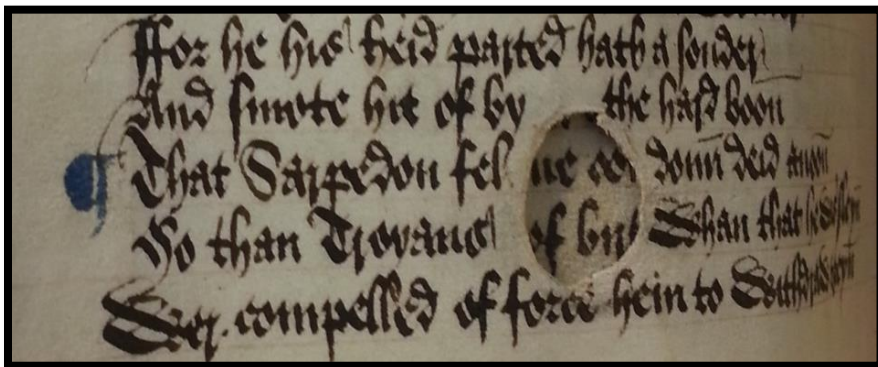


Figure 3 Morgan MS M 876

To sight of man fouding as of  
 By sotel gaff as he seere libing  
 Of face and chere and quik loking  
 And of his nat at colom sothlic of hed  
 e remembre on the **W**erms ay frogh  
 noble king called **W**rote as any sose hed  
 sty next if I shal nat fey And like in al  
 thu he parted den in tē as by supposale  
 eke among bo' euey as he lined  
 he nat eke the **S**ort in his appaule  
 and also **P**rothom **A**ffor on his head  
 like as it is told  
**T**hough smale pyes  
**S**roght e' made of gold  
 That by mesure **S**teps embosed dome  
 To an entre make in his godn  
 By sote adyse and sotelte  
 To ech parte and extremitie  
 Of his bodie smallie porject  
 Though next and fyned **I**nben e' dyet  
 Wherby the licom' might dome defend

Figure 4 Morgan MS M 876

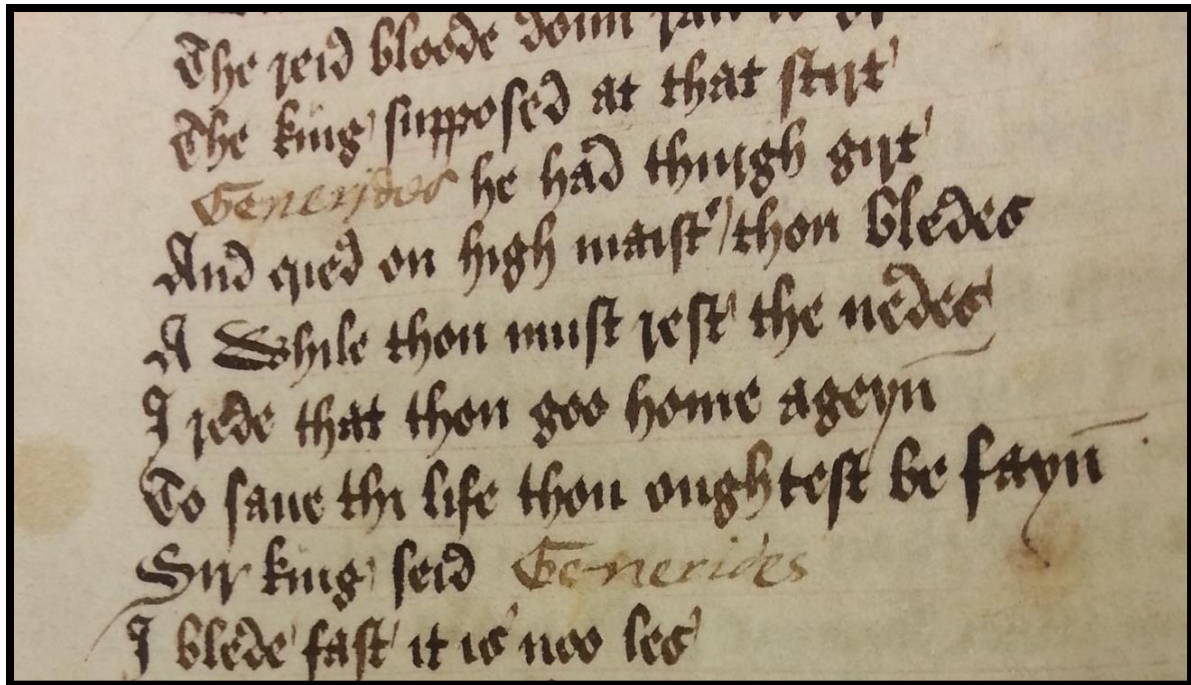


Figure 5 Morgan MS M 876

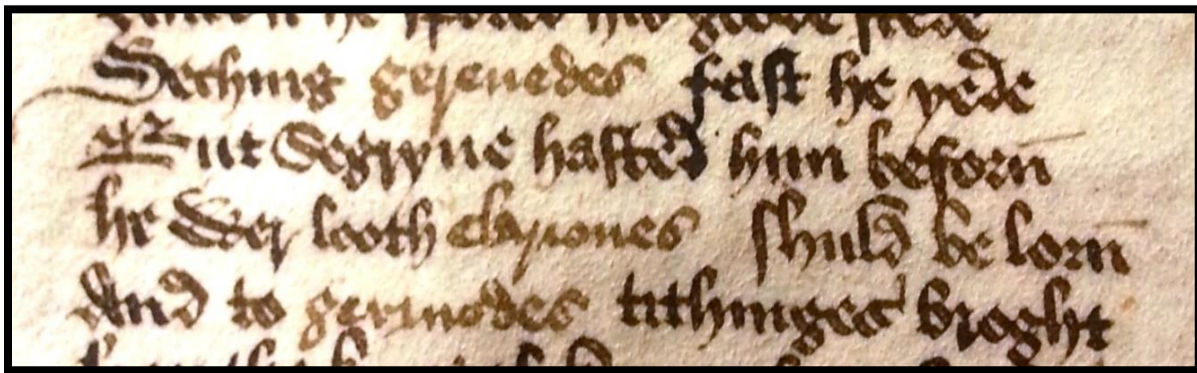


Figure 6 Morgan MS M 876

Ther were but feds in al here route  
 Therof Anazaree had grete doute  
 And fed ~~gynepdoo~~ I von rede  
 Vrad See us to oure felowede  
 For oure men begun to lese  
 Goddard oure ost I rede See these  
~~gynepdoo~~ seid nod graunt I me  
 To gedre ther gedred here meigne

Figure 7 Morgan MS M 876

Vnto ~~Goy~~ anon ther fed  
 And prayed him for Chantie  
 That he sold entye into the Citie  
 See the hole ost cometh on us here  
~~Goy~~ seid let hem come nere  
 Dure usual hath to day be

Figure 8 Morgan MS M 876

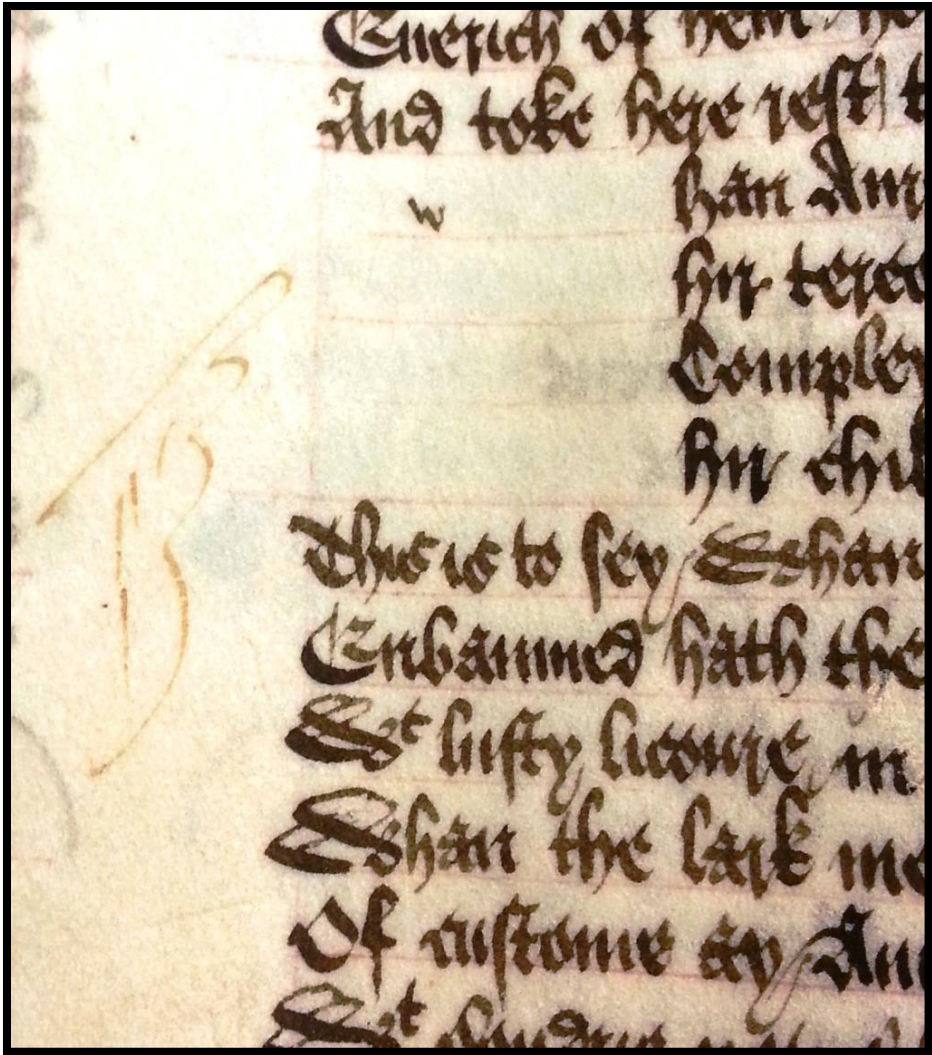


Figure 9 Morgan MS M 876



and by his wife Cruba was called  
 This name had full worth of degree  
 So famous and young daughters the  
 Of which the eldest Hector called was  
 Which also for as Phebus in compass  
 A natural way both his tale about  
 So for of him withouten any doute  
 Reported was the renown and the fame  
 The worthinesse and the noble name  
 For such as books of him speak  
 He was the joye and folk of chivalrie  
 And of knightthode every souerayn floure  
 The souer and well of worship and honoure  
 And of manhod I say it sele expresse  
 Example and mynour and of high proesse  
 Gymnyng and grounde set al this I feye  
 Soudre benigne and loshe of his cheye  
 Discret also prudent and deytuous  
 Of whom the dedes and actes mycellous  
 Remembred ben of so long agoon

aise of Hector.

Figure 11 Morgan MS M 876



Figure 12 New York Public Library Spencer Collection Eng. 1527 (STC 3176)

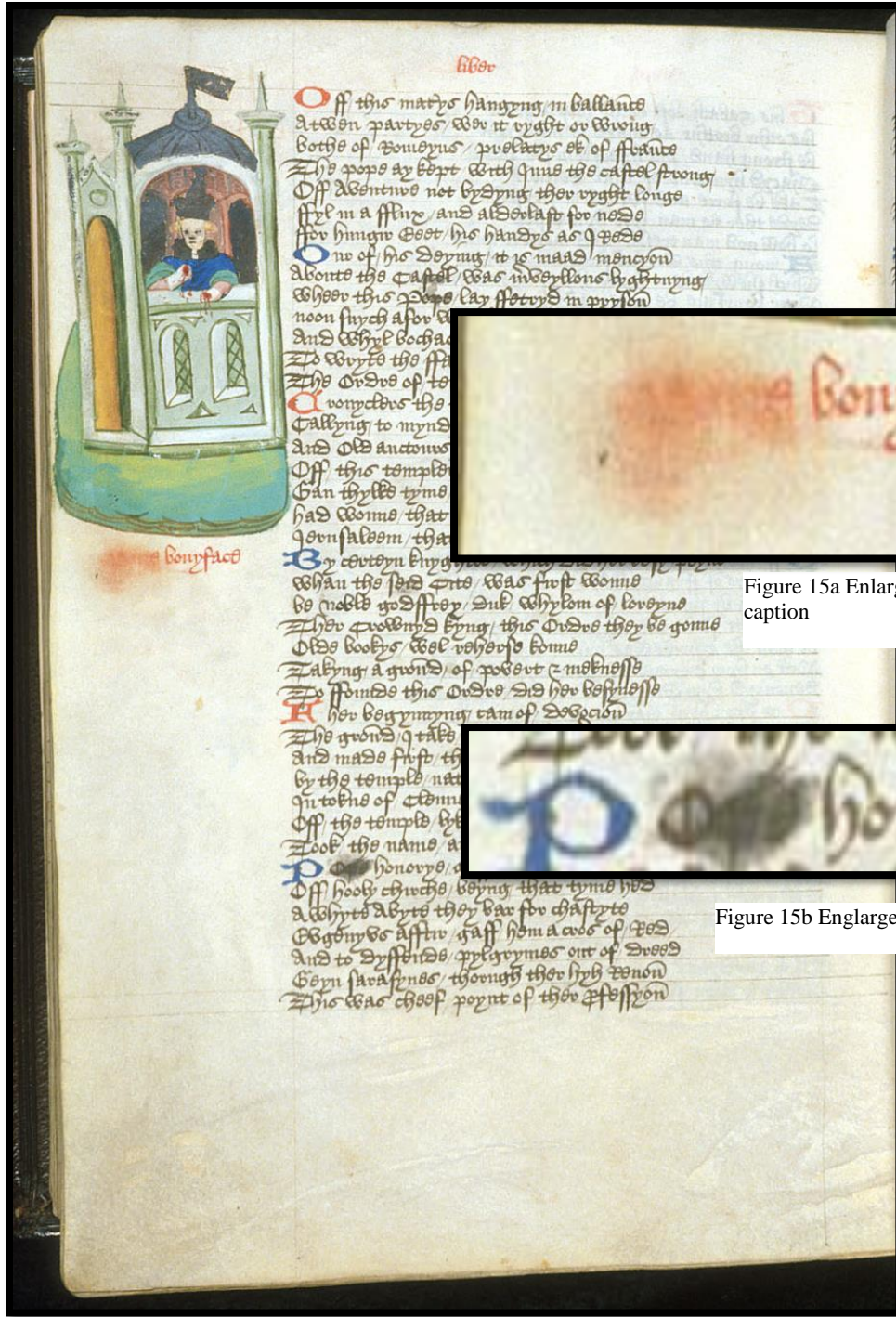




Figure 13 British Library MS Harley 1766 folio 90v



Figure 14 British Library MS Harley 1766 folio 218r



liber

**O**ff this martyrs hanging in ballants  
 At wch partyes wch it vyght or bowing  
 Bothe of bonyfact / proclarys ok of ffraunce  
 The poynt by wher wth quns the castel strong  
 Off wchertwo not bydynyng ther vyght longe  
 ffyl in a ffyre / and alderlast for nede  
 For hynge boot / his handys as q podes  
**O**ne of his doryng / it is maad mencon  
 Aboute the castel / was inderllons byghtnyng  
 Wher this podes lay ffeturd in pyrson  
 noon hynch after  
 And whyl bocha  
 To wryte the ff  
 The Ordys of to  
**A**nyctores the  
 Calling to mynd  
 And old antowys  
 Off this temple  
 Gan thylde tyme  
 had wouns that  
 Jernsalem that  
**B**y certeyn bygh  
 whan the fad ptes was first wouns  
 by noble godffroy / duk whylom of lowayne  
 Ther quodens byng / this Ordys ther be gouns  
 Olds lookys / wel vsherys founs  
 Falyng a gound / of podesert / r mshness  
 To founde this Ordys / and her beffless  
**R**her begynnyng / cam of dorecion  
 The ground / q take  
 and made ffir / th  
 by the temple nat  
 in tohns of edmu  
 Off the temple by  
 Took the name / a  
**P**ope honovys /  
 Off hocky church / byng / what tyme hys  
 a whyle abys / they bar for chafte  
 Bgonybe affir / gaff him a croce of red  
 And to dyffonds / pylgrymes out of dreed  
 Seyn sacrafys / thourgh ther hys woun  
 This was ches / poynt of ther pffesson

Bonyfact

Bonyfact

Figure 15a Enlargement of miniature caption

Pope honovys

Figure 15b Enlargement of "Pope"

Figure 15 British Library MS Harley 1766 folio 247 v

Costly luyng / in the churche appalled  
 Caused grekes / withdraue the in sentence  
 from the pope / in Peters place stalled  
 And lyst to him / do none obedyence  
 false auarice / caused this offence  
 That the grekes / dyd them selve deuyde  
 fro the romayns / for their great pryde

Figure 16 New York Public Library Spencer Collection Eng. 1527

his rychelle. The. xii. cha.  
 ¶ Howe Dedyre / by pope Adrian and  
 Charles of Fraunce was put to syght /  
 and dyed at myschefe. The. xiii. cha.  
 ¶ Of pene Johan a woman / and howe  
 she was put downe. The fourtene cha.  
 ...

Figure 17 New York Public Library Spencer Collection Eng. 1527

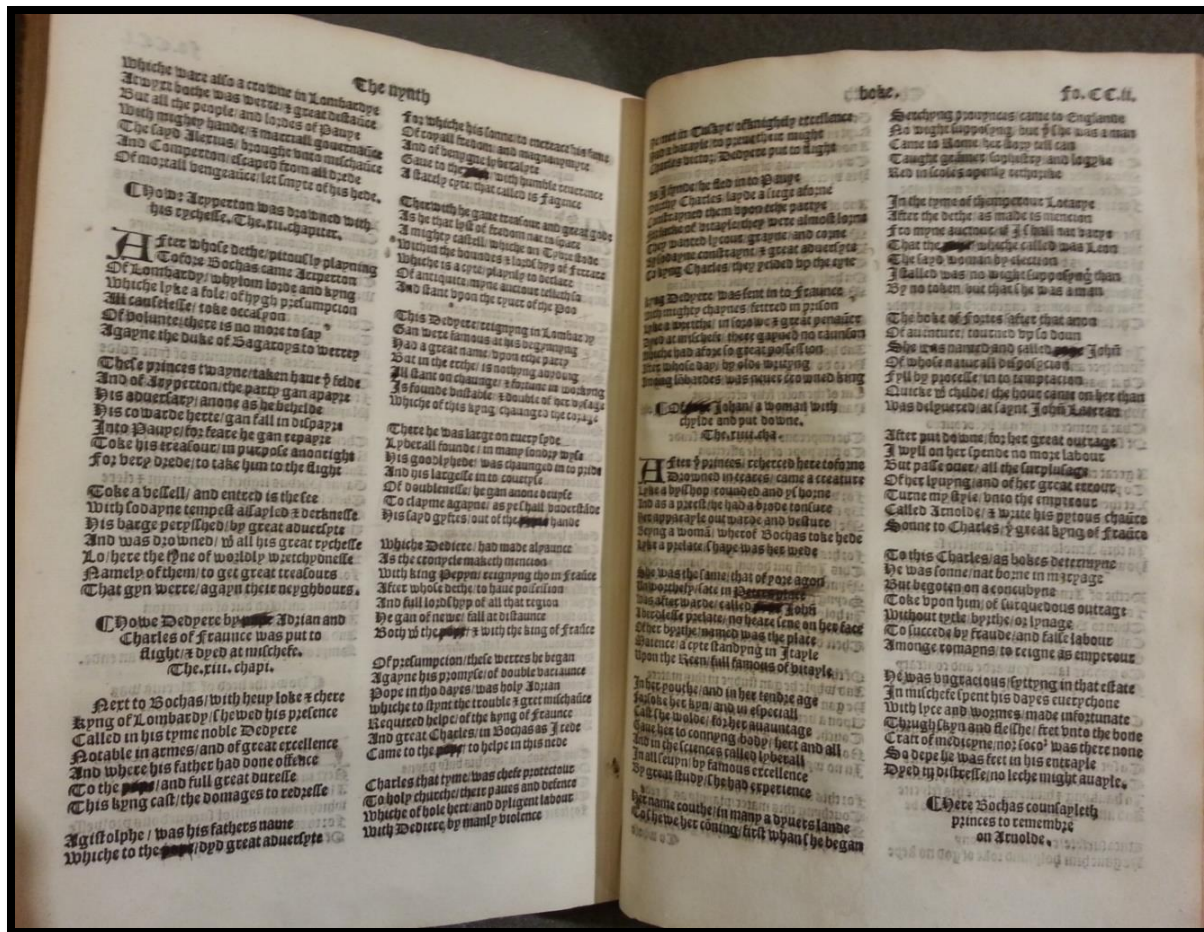


Figure 18 New York Public Library Spencer Collection Eng. 1527

**The mynth**

Whiche were also a crowne in Lombardy  
 In wyche boche was were a great dethaite  
 But all the people and lordes of Bayre  
 Whiche myght hande a marciall gouernour  
 The sayd Hieron broughte him mischaunce  
 And Comperon broughte him mischaunce  
 And Comperon escaped from all orde  
 Of moztall demerance let foyre of his hede.

**C**hilde Agapen was drowned with  
 his cyphell. The. xii. chapter.

**A**fter whose deth the pitouly playnyng  
 Of Lombardy whyloun loyde and kyng  
 Whiche lyke a fole of the gy presumption  
 All canstefle toke occasioun  
 Of dolour there is no more to say  
 Agapen the duke of Sagapens to werrey

**T**he princes swayne taken haue f fide  
 And of Agapen the party gan apayre  
 Whiche lyke a fole of the gy presumption  
 His aduersarye anone as he behyde  
 His co warder here gan fall in dyspayre  
 Into Bayre for feare he gan repayre  
 Toke his treaoune in purpose anone right  
 For beyr dyede to take him to the flight

**T**oke a beffell and entred in the see  
 With too apne tempell all apayed a verbanesse  
 His barges persylled by great aduersite  
 And was drowned in all his great rychesse  
 No here the fone of woildly wretchednesse  
 A myll of them to get great treaoures  
 That gon were agayn these neyghbours.

**C**hilde Dedere by wyche Adrian and  
 Charles of fraunce was put to  
 fight & dyed at mischefe.  
 The. xiii. chapi.

**N**ext to Bochas with heuy loke & there  
 Kyng of Lombardy shewed his presence  
 Called in his tyme noble Dedere  
 Notable in armes and of great excellence  
 And where his father had done offence  
 To the pape and full great duelle  
 This kyng cast the domages to redresse  
 Agist golphe / was his fathers name  
 Whiche to the pape dyd great aduersite

For whiche his sonne to merchaunce  
 Of copall fraunce and maganarye  
 Came to the pape with humble reverence  
 A flately cyphell that called is fraunce

**T**he mynth he gane fraunce and great gude  
 As he that is of freedom and gude  
 I mighte castell whiche in the pape  
 Whiche in the honours a lord of fraunce  
 Whiche is a cyphell playly to be late  
 Of antiquite myne anone redress  
 And stant upon the tyme of the pape

**T**his Dedere reynyng in Lombardy  
 Gan were famous at his begynnyng  
 Had a great name upon every party  
 But in the end he is nothing any way  
 All stant on charyng a fortune as woorthyng  
 Is founde durable a myll of our wylde  
 Whiche of this kyng charyng to the colde

**T**here he was large on every tyme  
 A pbeall founde in many londy tyme  
 His goodly chere was charyng in to pryde  
 And his largesse in to charyng  
 Of doubtlesse he gan anone benefe  
 To clayne agayne as yet shall poverthide  
 His sayd gyfes out of the pape hande

**W**hiche Dedere had made al pance  
 As the crouthe maketh mencions  
 With kyng Agapen reynyng the in fraunce  
 After whose deth to have possession  
 And full lordshyp of all that region  
 He gan of newe fall at distance  
 Both in the pape & with the kyng of fraunce

**O**f presumption these werres began  
 Agapen his promysse of double vantage  
 As the crouthe maketh mencions  
 Hope in the dayes was holy Boan  
 Whiche to hym the trouble & grete mischaunce  
 Requered helpe of the kyng of fraunce  
 And great Charles in Bochas as frede  
 Came to the pape to helpe in this neede

**C**hildes that tyme was chepe protectour  
 To holy church there paues and defence  
 Whiche of hole here and diligent labour  
 With Dedere by manly violence

**boke**

fo. CCII.

Whiche was also a crowne in Lombardy  
 In wyche boche was were a great dethaite  
 But all the people and lordes of Bayre  
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 And where his father had done offence  
 To the pape and full great duelle  
 This kyng cast the domages to redresse  
 Agist golphe / was his fathers name  
 Whiche to the pape dyd great aduersite

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 A flately cyphell that called is fraunce

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 As he that is of freedom and gude  
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 Whiche in the honours a lord of fraunce  
 Whiche is a cyphell playly to be late  
 Of antiquite myne anone redress  
 And stant upon the tyme of the pape

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 All stant on charyng a fortune as woorthyng  
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 To clayne agayne as yet shall poverthide  
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 As the crouthe maketh mencions  
 With kyng Agapen reynyng the in fraunce  
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 Toke his treaoune in purpose anone right  
 For beyr dyede to take him to the flight

**T**oke a beffell and entred in the see  
 With too apne tempell all apayed a verbanesse  
 His barges persylled by great aduersite  
 And was drowned in all his great rychesse  
 No here the fone of woildly wretchednesse  
 A myll of them to get great treaoures  
 That gon were agayn these neyghbours.

**C**hilde Dedere by wyche Adrian and  
 Charles of fraunce was put to  
 fight & dyed at mischefe.  
 The. xiii. chapi.

**N**ext to Bochas with heuy loke & there  
 Kyng of Lombardy shewed his presence  
 Called in his tyme noble Dedere  
 Notable in armes and of great excellence  
 And where his father had done offence  
 To the pape and full great duelle  
 This kyng cast the domages to redresse  
 Agist golphe / was his fathers name  
 Whiche to the pape dyd great aduersite

For whiche his sonne to merchaunce  
 Of copall fraunce and maganarye  
 Came to the pape with humble reverence  
 A flately cyphell that called is fraunce

**T**he mynth he gane fraunce and great gude  
 As he that is of freedom and gude  
 I mighte castell whiche in the pape  
 Whiche in the honours a lord of fraunce  
 Whiche is a cyphell playly to be late  
 Of antiquite myne anone redress  
 And stant upon the tyme of the pape

**T**his Dedere reynyng in Lombardy  
 Gan were famous at his begynnyng  
 Had a great name upon every party  
 But in the end he is nothing any way  
 All stant on charyng a fortune as woorthyng  
 Is founde durable a myll of our wylde  
 Whiche of this kyng charyng to the colde

**T**here he was large on every tyme  
 A pbeall founde in many londy tyme  
 His goodly chere was charyng in to pryde  
 And his largesse in to charyng  
 Of doubtlesse he gan anone benefe  
 To clayne agayne as yet shall poverthide  
 His sayd gyfes out of the pape hande

**W**hiche Dedere had made al pance  
 As the crouthe maketh mencions  
 With kyng Agapen reynyng the in fraunce  
 After whose deth to have possession  
 And full lordshyp of all that region  
 He gan of newe fall at distance  
 Both in the pape & with the kyng of fraunce

**O**f presumption these werres began  
 Agapen his promysse of double vantage  
 As the crouthe maketh mencions  
 Hope in the dayes was holy Boan  
 Whiche to hym the trouble & grete mischaunce  
 Requered helpe of the kyng of fraunce  
 And great Charles in Bochas as frede  
 Came to the pape to helpe in this neede

**C**hildes that tyme was chepe protectour  
 To holy church there paues and defence  
 Whiche of hole here and diligent labour  
 With Dedere by manly violence



Figure 19 Morgan MS M 124 Cheyne Coat of Arms



Figure 20 Morgan MS M 124 Cheyne Bohun Coat of Arms

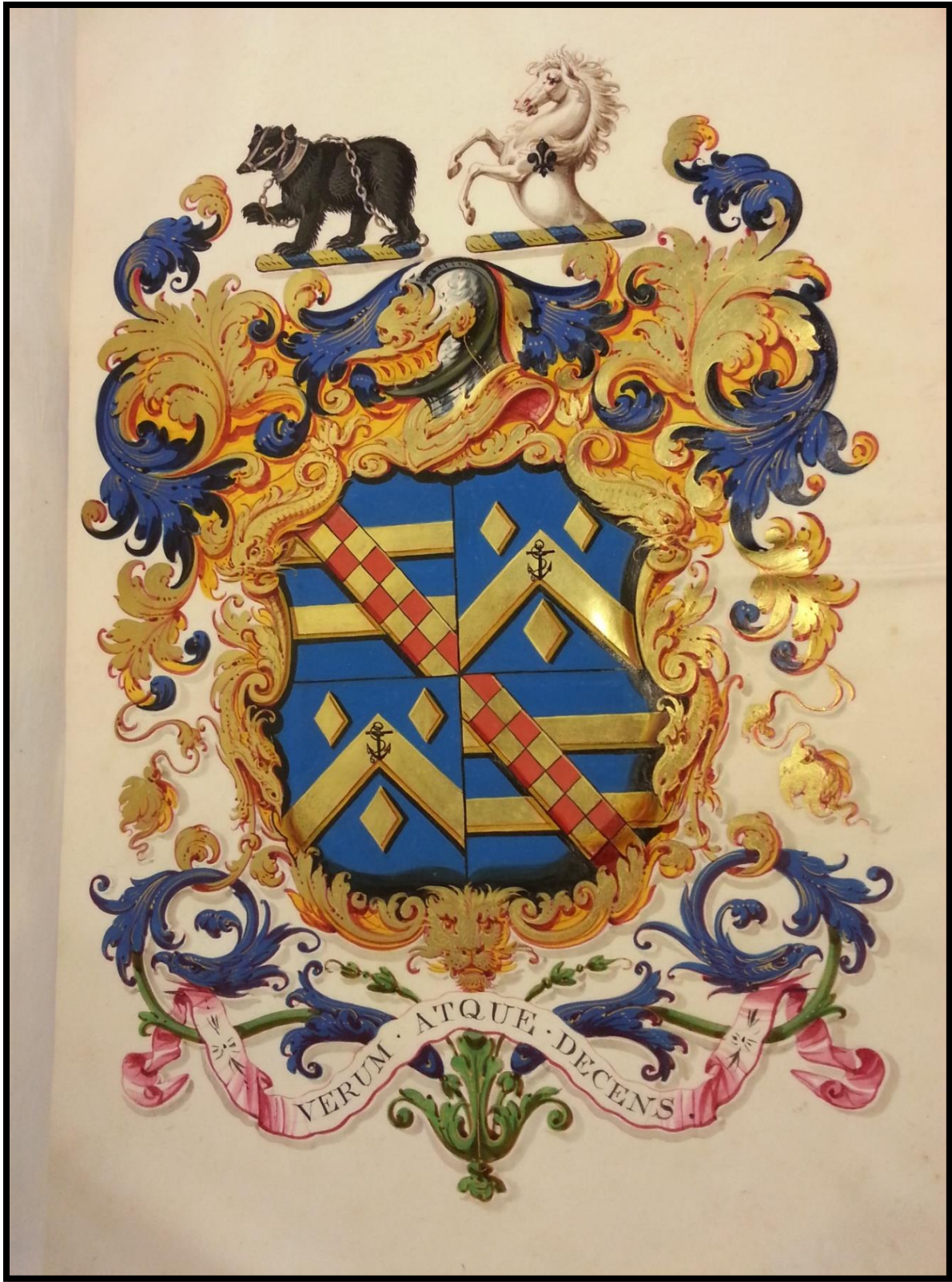


Figure 21 Morgan MS M 124 Lee Coat of Arms



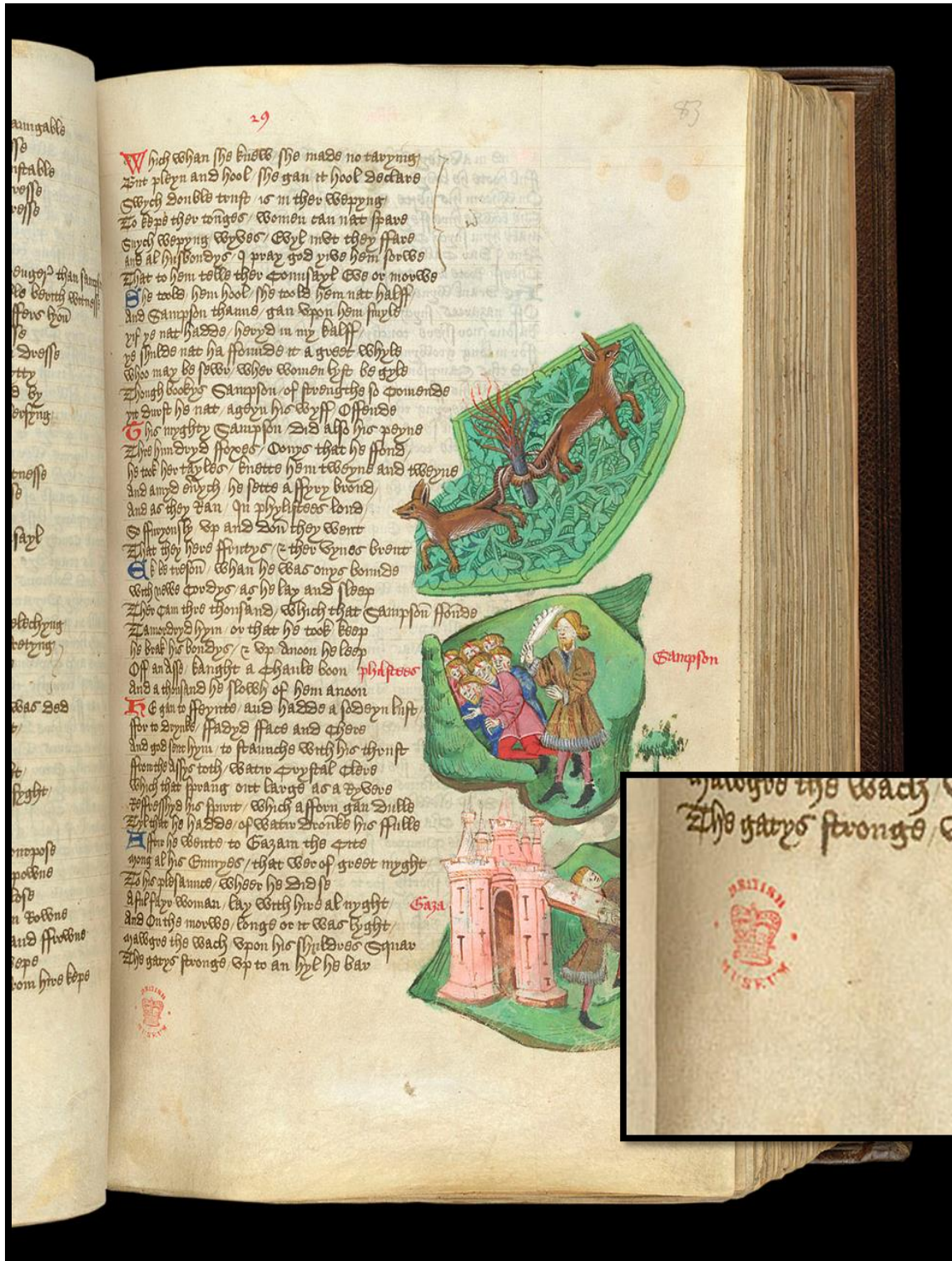


Figure 22 Harley 1766 Showing Magnification of British Library Stamp

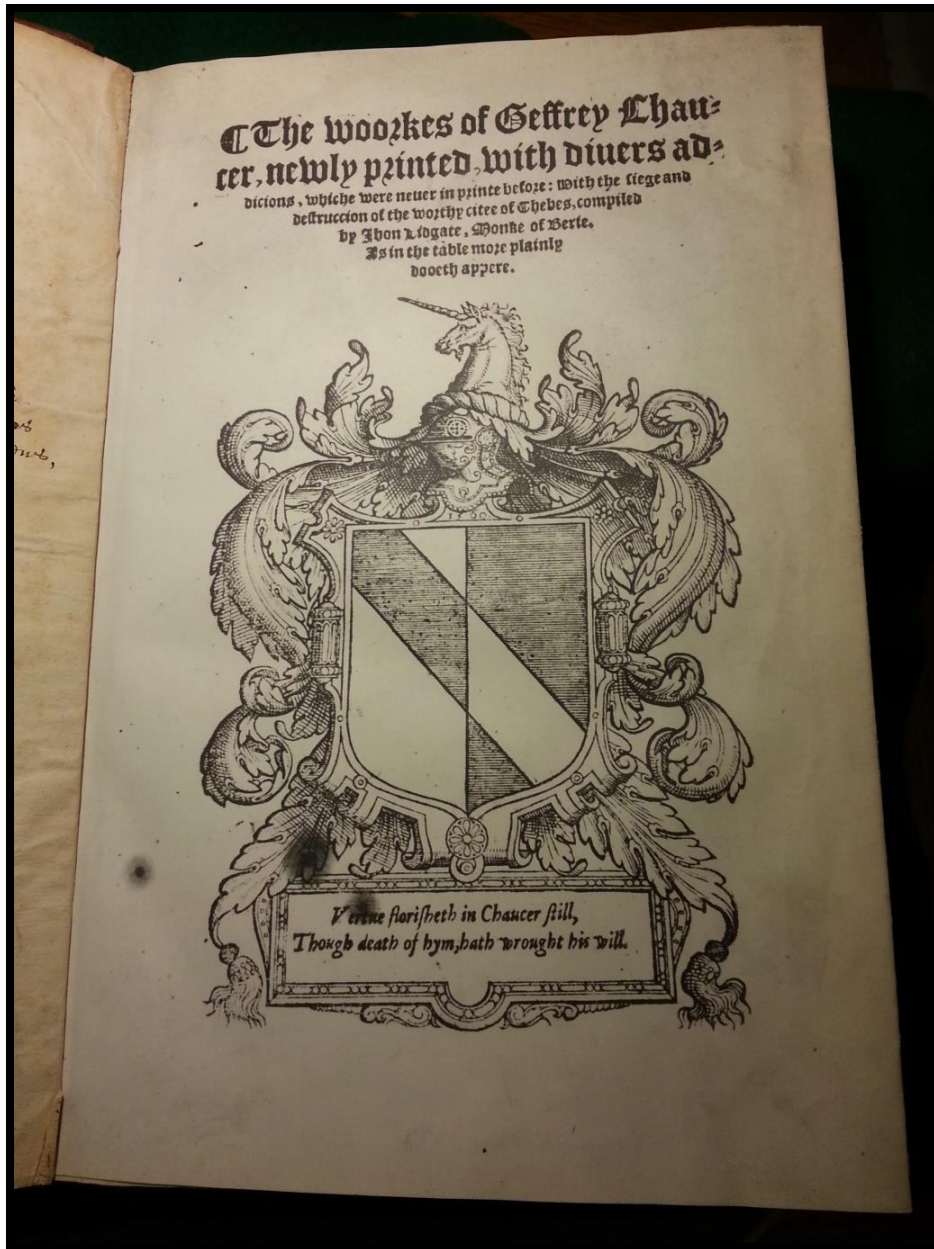


Figure 23 New York Public Library \*KC + 1561 Title Page to *Chaucer's Works*

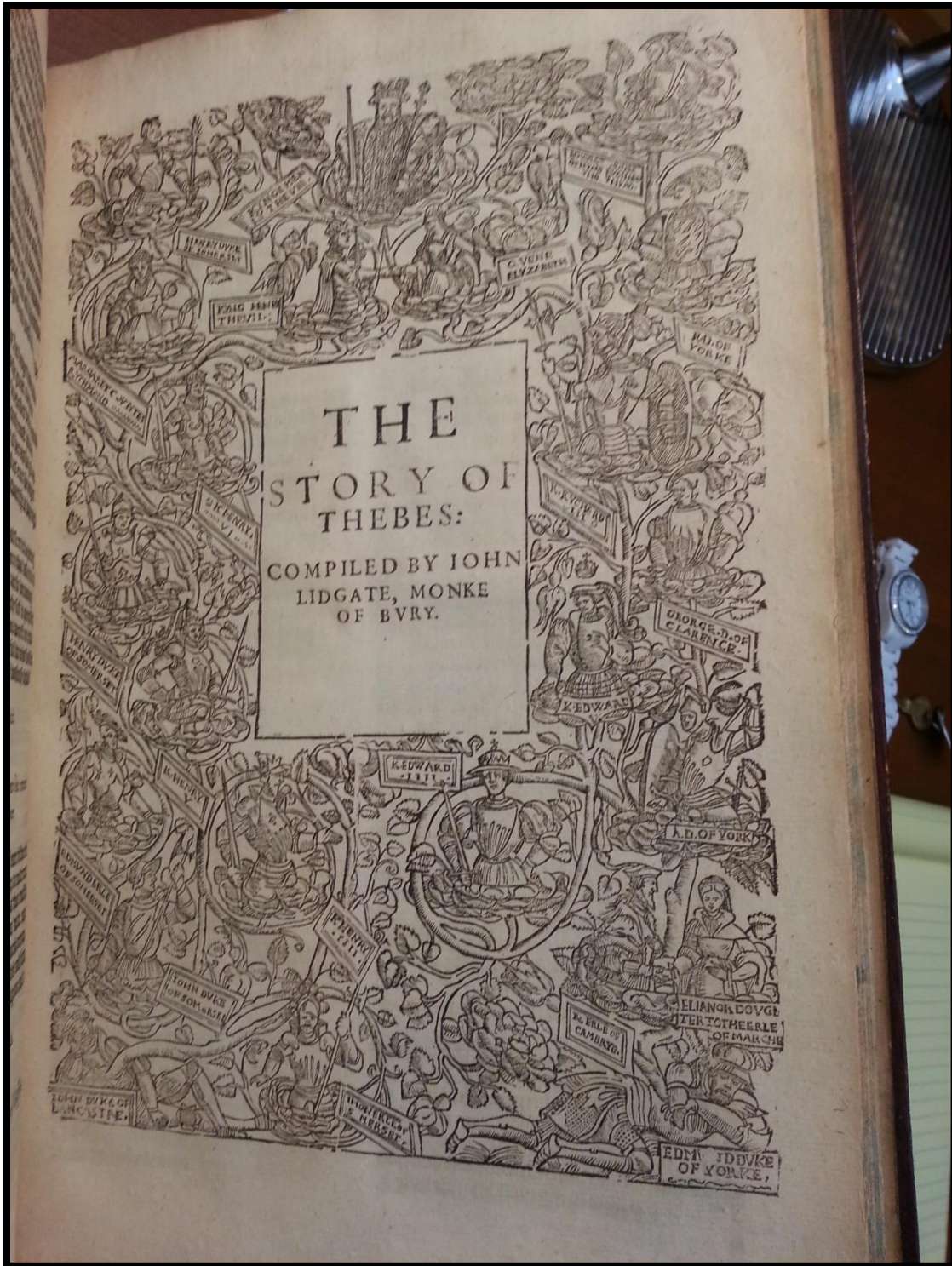


Figure 24 Morgan W 02 C Title Page for *Siege of Thebes* in 1598 edition of *Chaucer's Works*

THE  
Historie of Troylus  
and Cresseida.

*Ann: Dyson*  
As it was acted by the Kings Maiesties  
seruants at the Globe.

*Altered  
perfect.*  
Written by William Shakespeare.  
*by Thomas Heywood*



*First Edition*

LONDON  
Imprinted by G. Eld for R. Bonian and H. Walley, and  
are to be sold at the spread Eagle in Paules  
Church-yard, ouer against the  
great North doore.  
1609.

Figure 25 *Troilus and Cressida* Qa Title Page (image from EEBO)

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THE  
Famous Historie of  
Troylus and Cresseid.

*Excellently expressing the beginning  
of their loues, with the conceited wooing  
of Pandarus Prince of Licia.*

*Written by William Shakespeare.*



LONDON  
Imprinted by G. Eld for R. Bonian and H. Walley, and  
are to be sold at the spread Eagle in Paules  
Church-yard, ouer against the  
great North doore.  
1609.

Figure 26 *Troilus and Cressida* Qb Title Page (image from EEBO)

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## A neuer writer, to an euer reader. Newes.



*E*ternall reader, you haue heere a new  
play, neuer stal'd with the Stage,  
neuer clapper-clawd with the palmes  
of the vulger, and yet passing full of  
the palme comically; for it is a birth of  
your braine, that neuer under-tooke  
any thing commicall, vainely: And  
were but the vaine names of commedies change for the  
titles of Commodities, or of Playes for Pleas; you should  
see all those grand censors, that now stile them such  
vanities, flock to them for the maine grace of their  
grauities: especially this authors Commedies, that are  
so fram'd to the life, that they serue for the most com-  
mon Commentaries, of all the actions of our liues. shew-  
ing such a dexteritie, and power of wisse, that the most  
displeas'd with Playes, are pleas'd with his Commedies.  
And all such dull and heavy-witted worl'dings, as were  
neuer capable of the wisse of a Commedie, comming by  
report of them to his representations, haue found that  
wisse there, that they neuer found in them-selues, and  
haue parted better wittied than they came: feeling an  
edge of wisse set vpon them, more then euer they  
dream'd they had braine to grinde it on. So much and  
such saoured salt of wisse is in his Commedies, that they  
seeme (for their height of pleasure) to be borne in that  
sea that brought forth Venus. Amongst all there is  
none more wissy then this: And had I time I would  
comment vpon it, though I know it needs not, (for so  
much

Figure 27 *Troilus and Cressida* Qb Epistle (image from EEBO)

## Appendix 2 Prologues

Prologues to *The Canterbury Tales* (taken from *The Riverside Chaucer* edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987.) and *Siege of Thebes* (taken from the TEAMS edition edited by Robert R. Edwards, Medieval Institutes Publications, 2001.)

### *Canterbury Tales*

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote  
 The droughte of March hath perced to the roote  
 And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
 Of which vertu engendered is the flour;  
 What Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth  
 Inspired hath in croppes, and the Yonge sonne  
 Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,  
 And smale foweles maken melodye,  
 That slepen al the nyght with open ye  
 (So Priketh hem Nature in hir corages),  
 Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages  
 And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,  
 To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;

### *Siege of Thebes*

Whan brighte Phebus passed was the Ram  
 Myd of Aprille and into Bole cam,  
 And Satourn old with his frosty face  
 In Virgyne taken had his place,  
 Malencolik and slowgh of mocioun, 5  
 And was also in th'oposicioun  
 Of Lucina the mone moyst and pale,  
 That many shour fro hevene made avale;  
 Whan Aurora was in the morowe red,  
 And Jubiter in the Crabbes hed 10  
 Hath take his paleys and his mansioun;  
 The lusty tyme and joly fressh sesoun  
 Whan that Flora the noble myghty quene  
 The soyl hath clad in newe tendre grene,  
 With her floures craftyly ymeynt, 15  
 Braunch and bough with red and whit depeynt,  
 Fletinge the bawme on hillis and on valys;  
 The tyme in soth whan Canterbury talys  
 Complet and told at many sondry stage  
 Of estatis in the pilgrimage, 20  
 Everich man lik to his degré,  
 Some of desport, some of moralité,  
 Some of knyghthode, love, and gentillesse,  
 And some also of parfit holynesse,  
 And some also in soth of ribaudye 25  
 To make laughter in the companye  
 (Ech admitted, for non wold other greve)  
 Lich as the Cook, the Millere, and the Reve  
 Aquytte hemsilf, shortly to conclude,  
 Boystously in her teermes rude, 30  
 Whan thei hadde wel dronken of the bolle,  
 And ek also with his pyllled nolle  
 The Pardowner beardlees al his chyn,  
 Glasy-eyed and face of cherubyn,  
 Tellyng a tale to angre with the frere, 35  
 As opynly the storie kan yow lere

Word for word with every circumstance,  
 Echon ywrite and put in remembraunce  
 By hym that was, yif I shal not feyne,  
 Floure of poetes thorghout al Breteyne,      40  
 Which sothly hadde most of excellence  
 In rethorike and in eloquence  
 (Rede his making who list the trouthe fynde)  
 Which never shal appallen in my mynde  
 But alwey fressh ben in my memoyré,      45  
 To whom be gove pris, honure, and gloyré  
 Of wel seyinge first in oure language,  
 Chief registrer of this pilgrimage,  
 Al that was tolde forgetting nocht at al,  
 Feyned talis nor thing historial,      50  
 With many proverbe divers and unkouth,  
 Be rehersaile of his sugrid mouth,  
 Of eche thyng keping in substaunce  
 The sentence hool withoute variance,  
 Voyding the chaf sothly for to seyn,      55  
 Enlumynyng the trewe piked greyn  
 Be crafty writinge of his sawes swete,  
 Fro the tyme that thei deden mete  
 First the pylgrimes sothly everichon,  
 At the Tabbard assembled on be on,      60  
 And fro Suthwerk shortly forto seye  
 To Canterbury ridyng on her weie,  
 Tellynge a tale as I reherce can,  
 Lich as the hoste assigned every man,  
 None so hardy his biddyng disobeye.      65