THE ECOLOGY OF WAR IN LATE MEDIEVAL
CHIVALRIC CULTURE

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation draws attention to a surprising and largely ignored element in several late medieval texts such as John Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes*, Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*, the Alliterative *Morte*, and *The Wars of Alexander*, and argues that several important writers of this era were concerned about warfare’s impact upon, and complex relationship with, the natural world. Although modern criticisms of warfare’s effects upon the lives of individual plants and animals or on ecosystemic health are surely sponsored by contemporary animal rights and environmentalist discourses, some medieval poets nevertheless reveal a sustained interest in the subjectivities of animals and in nonhuman capacities to take pleasure in one’s own existence in a way that makes modern discussions of nonhuman “sentience,” “interests,” and “rights” appear not so foreign from the concerns of some of these medieval writers. Throughout this project, I examine how writers respond both to ecological relationships that are a product of specifically late medieval military tactics and proto-industries (such as those related to the increasing role of archery power), as well as ones that are hallmarks of premodern and modern warfare in general (such as the use of horses for cavalry charges or the penchant for putting an enemy’s agricultural regions to the torch). In foregrounding the emphasis in several Middle English texts on the connections between medieval warfare
and nature, my project not only builds upon a growing body of scholarly work on
medieval views of nature, but also contributes to the burgeoning field of environmental
studies and offers fresh approaches to familiar works of literature such as Malory’s *Morte Darthur* and Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*. 
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It has become a standard tactic in discussions of environmental ethics to analyze the ways in which ethical sensibilities throughout human history have widened in scope to slowly, yet successfully, begin to encompass entities and subjects that formerly were excluded from the ethically protected sphere.¹ Perhaps most famously (and most poetically), the seminal American environmental writer and conservationist Aldo Leopold, in his *A Sand County Almanac*, discusses this widening of ethical circles to include formerly ignored entities. Referring to one of the foundational texts of Western culture, Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Leopold reminds us of a scene near the end of that poem in which Odysseus hangs his slave-girls because he has judged them disloyal on account of their willingness to serve the usurping males who have lived in his house during their attempts to woo Odysseus’s wife Penelope. “This hanging involved no question of propriety,” Leopold reminds us. “The girls were property…The ethical structure of that

day covered wives, but had not yet been extended to human chattels."\(^2\) The polemical thrust of Leopold’s recollection of this moment in *The Odyssey* is, of course, to make the reader recoil in indignation and to ponder how far human ethical spheres have widened in the thousands of years since the civilizations of ancient Greece dominated the Western world with their cultural, artistic, and philosophical values.

The hanging of the slave-girls in Homer’s poem might not have caused the slightest bit of alarm in a reader for hundreds of years after it was written, and therefore might not have alerted a reader that these executions were a crux or problematic moment in the text. However, with the expansion of human rights in general, and of women’s rights in particular, and therefore with refined ethical sensibilities about what constitutes morally irresponsible behavior towards slaves and women, it becomes necessary, as Leopold reminds us, to go back and perform new readings of texts in order to foreground the formerly invisible or nonexistent ethical problems in them. Leopold’s idea of slowly evolving and expanding ethical spheres may lead us to expect that the Middle Ages was a true “Dark Ages” of ethical attitudes towards animals, plants, and landscapes, and thus an era of ethical sensibilities more aligned with Homer’s time than with our own; however, this project will be interested in foregrounding textual moments in genres such as chivalric romance and animal debate poetry in which warfare’s effects upon the natural world are viewed with concern and even consternation. When we examine some of the texts from the later Middle Ages (c. 1300-1500), I do not believe that an “ethic dealing with man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it”\(^3\) was invisible or nonexistent to some medieval authors. A large part of the polemical thrust of


\(^3\) Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 238.
this project will be the assertion that medieval writers shared some of our contemporary dismay at (especially) military appropriations of, and military violence directed towards, the natural world.

The convergence of environmental history and military history has already been the focus of several scholarly works but my own project differs from them in some significant ways. Firstly, scholarship in this area deals almost entirely with 20th century conflicts and wars, and only recently has begun to discuss in detail conflicts as far back in history as the American Civil War. As often happens with novel and innovative critical approaches to literature or to history (e.g. postcolonialism, queer theory, poststructuralism, etc.), these approaches and methodologies take considerable time to trickle back and find their way into discussions and analyses of premodern texts and civilizations such as those of the Middle Ages. Also, unlike medieval armies, modern armed forces have largely distanced themselves from the direct role of nature and natural resources in maintaining the army’s existence and its continued ability to function effectively. This loss of direct contact by modern armies should not come as much of a

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5 It may come as a surprise, however, just how recently this loss of direct contact with nature by a modern army may have occurred. David Edgerton has recently pointed out that during that ostensible apogee of
surprise, for the 20th and 21st centuries have come to represent centuries that can be
defined by (among other things) practices that relegate most plant and animal life to the
margins of many human beings’ lived experience. John Berger, in his seminal essay
“Why Look at Animals?,” sums up the drastic reduction of direct experience with
animals in modern life thus:

During the 20th century, the internal combustion engine displaced draught animals in streets and factories. Cities, growing at an ever increasing rate, transformed the surrounding countryside into suburbs where field animals, wild or domesticated, became rare. The commercial exploitation of certain species (bison, tigers, reindeer) has rendered them almost extinct. Such wild life as remains is increasingly confined to national parks and game reserves.6

With most of humanity now living in cities, and therefore living in relationship mainly to
crude, glass, metal, and other human beings, our abilities to experience, understand,
and bear witness to other living, nonhuman beings has become less and less possible.

This same loss holds true for the professional soldiers of our time. A modern army’s
modes of transportation and weaponry are machines forged from metals and that are oil
(or even nuclear) driven, sources of raw material and of power which, while often coming
directly from the earth and therefore arguably as much a part of nature as any tree or

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6 John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?,” in About Looking (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 1-26. Berger argues that it is only with the loss of direct, physical contact with animals that they then begin to inhabit our culture so excessively. The rise of the modern public zoo, as well as the ubiquity of animals in children’s books and on room décor designed for children, are (Berger argues) a form of compensation for the loss of real animals in our immediate environment.
flower, are aspects of the natural world that have never been alive or have not been alive for millions of years, and thus are not beings that we can think of as having life processes that can be curtailed or ended by being appropriated into a military force.

A medieval army, on the other hand, might use sinews for bowstrings, horns for crossbows, feathers for the fletchings on arrow-shafts, animal hides for the slings on siege engines, as well as to fire-proof such machines. Warhorses were routinely ridden into battle, while vast numbers of draft animals pulled the enormous caravans that supplied an army operating out in the field. Soldiers slaughtered or pilfered an enemy populations’ livestock in order to deprive them of an essential food and economic source. Vast tracts of trees were cut down in order to fashion siege engines, barricades, and impromptu housing. Although a modern army may possess methods and weapons more conducive for inflicting large-scale damage upon the natural world, the medieval army had more direct interaction with nature during its day-to-day military operations through the types of weapons, transportation, tactics, and rudimentary machines that it relied upon to wage its distinct forms of war.

Secondly, many of these current studies that combine environmental with military history appear sorely impoverished with regards to an explicitly ethical consciousness. These works are rife with statements regarding the immense tolls that 20th century warfare has inflicted upon the nonhuman, but rarely have they self-consciously reflected upon why the realities of destruction and suffering enacted upon the nonhuman by warfare is so significant. Many of these environmental-military histories thoroughly
ignore the discussions of animal rights, land ethics, the instrumental exploitation of nature, etc., which characterize contemporary philosophical and social debates surrounding the nonhuman.

Consider, for example, the following line from an article investigating the environmental effects perpetrated by the Japanese soldiers during the Pacific theatre of World War II: “The Japanese tradition of netting and eating migratory songbirds went from being a regional curiosity to being a patriotic duty during World War II. Through gruesomely efficient methods of mist-netting and bird-liming, Japanese hunters delivered huge catches of thrushes, grosbeaks, finches, siskins, and buntings.” Although ethical revulsion is hinted at by the use of the adverb “gruesomely,” left unacknowledged or unexplored in the quote about Japanese songbirds are the ethical assumptions that make “gruesomely efficient methods” of killing birds reprehensible and deplorable. My current project attempts to remedy both these limitations in the current scholarship that combine environmental history with military history by going further back into military history than most scholars have seemed interested in going, and by keeping the concerns and insights of contemporary environmental ethics in the forefront of my discussions of late

\[\text{\textsuperscript{7}}\text{I am aware of certain problems associated with any invocation of animal “rights.” For many people, the term “rights” always come freighted with such inseparable associations with Enlightenment or Cartesian subjectivities that it makes no sense to speak of animals as having rights, for animals lack the subjectivities that could meaningfully engage in the social contract which is implied by rights discourse. As Jacques Derrida expresses it: “In general, in the European philosophical tradition, there is no conception of a (finite) subject of law [droit] who is not a subject of duty…One cannot expect ‘animals’ to be able to enter into an expressly juridical contract in which they would have duties, in an exchange of recognized rights.” From Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, “Violence Against Animals,” in For What Tomorrow…: A Dialogue, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), 74. However, in spite of its specific legal register that connotes reciprocal obligations, throughout this project I persist in using “rights” in discussions of human-nature relationships in order to gesture towards the idea that humans (in the medieval era as much as now) have ethical duties towards nonhuman beings even if those beings cannot in any way respond in kind back to us.}

\[\text{\textsuperscript{8}}\text{William T. Tsutsui, “Landscapes in a Dark Valley: Toward an Environmental History of Wartime Japan,” in Natural Enemy, Natural Ally, 205.}\]
medieval chivalric texts. Additionally, I am valuing literary texts – a practice in which many historians refuse to take part – as important and noteworthy evidence of medieval expressions of moral concern over warfare’s complex relations to the natural world.

*The eclipse of the materially existing animal*

Not only does recent environmental military history appear lacking in an awareness of the debates and concerns of contemporary environmental ethics, but even when medieval scholars have addressed issues related to the harm inflicted upon animals by the alliances and interactions between humans and animals in moments of war, some of these scholars reconfigure military reliance upon animals during medieval warfare through a distorting, and further abstracting, lens. Let me comment briefly on the work of a scholar whose work I very much admire, but whose analysis of chivalry’s utilization of animals fails to take into account the capacity for animals to suffer through such use. I am referring to the scholarship of Jeffrey J. Cohen, not in order to disparage his provocative readings of (for example) how medieval identities can slip across the species boundary; but rather to better highlight my own approach to the chivalric and literary texts I will be investigating in this chapter and beyond.

The most obvious animal incorporated into a medieval army was, of course, the horse. Not only did horses form the basis of the essential cavalry element of an army, but they also provided fundamental transportation for an army and its supplies. As Cohen has argued, it might make more sense to think of the mounted knight upon his horse not as
two distinct entities, but as one (temporarily) unified being whose distinct elements, the human and the horse, collapse into one another through the nuanced processes of an effectively performed cavalry charge.

In his “Deleuzoguattarian” reading of romances, chivalric treatises, and chansons de geste of the Middle Ages, Cohen perceives the knight as “becoming-animal” through his refined skill and knowledge involving his horse, and the horse, in turn, “becoming-human” through its own skillful performance which is intimately connected to the knight’s body via reins, shouts, and spurs.\(^9\) The two merge into an integrated, machine-like entity that fleetingly exists at that moment for the sole reason of effectively performing the shock-tactics of a cavalry charge. Cohen states: “Just as the equine body learns a new type of control through changes mediated by the technological, the human body likewise must submit to a new regimen of training and corporeal response, a reconfigured experience of embodiment.”\(^10\) Or, as Deleuze and Guattari teach Cohen to describe it, the man-horse configuration becomes an “assemblage,” a machine capable of new skills and new powers that can only arise via this unique, chivalric integration of bodily forms.

But where Cohen’s ideas and scholarship stop is where I want to pick up. What happens when the horse, that essential component of the knight-horse entity is wounded or killed in battle? How much does a postmodern, theory-laden penchant for referring to the knight mounted on his warhorse as a “machine” or an “assemblage” condition one to

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\(^9\) Cohen, in his chapter “Chevalerie” from Medieval Identity Machines, draws heavily upon the section on “becoming” from Deleuze and Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), 232-309. See Jeffrey J. Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003), 35-77.

\(^10\) Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines, 50.
read about the death of a horse in battle as merely the end of an “inhuman circuit” or of an “open-ended becoming,” and therefore as an occurrence to be no more lamented than, say, a broken bicycle? I fear that a description like Cohen’s of the man-horse “assemblage,” imbued as it is with the cant of Deleuze and Guattari, makes it harder for us to imagine the actual injured and dying horses that must have been so commonplace on a medieval battlefield.

Let us consider for a moment some of the phrases that abound in one of the most graphic Middle English poems in its depictions of the brutal nature of late medieval warfare, the Alliterative Morte Arthure. Repeatedly in that poem we are provided with images like the following: “The gome and þe grette horse at þe grounde lyggeþ,/ Full gryselyche gronande, for grefe of his woundez” (1372-73); “þey stekede stedys in stour with stelen wapyns” (1488); “With clubbeþ of clene stele clenkkede in helmes,/ Craschede doun cresteþ and craschede Brayneþ,/ Kyllede cou[r]sers and couerde stedes” (2113-15); and so forth. Most readers of the Alliterative Morte probably do not pause for very long over these repeated references to the animal slaughter that accompany the repeated references to the human carnage in the poem, or they write such references off as formulaic expressions mechanically inserted to accommodate the necessities of alliterative rhyme. However, rather than see the horse as an integral aspect of the knight-horse “assemblage,” I propose we put Cohen’s preferred term here under erasure, in order to assist us in our ability to read back into it the physical, sentient, and mortal bodies of actual horses that surely perished in numbers comparable to – if not greater than – human ones during medieval battles. To not lose sight of the actually existing horses within

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textual references, such as those scattered throughout the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, is to come that much closer to “defer[ring]…to the authority of external nonhuman reality as a criterion of accuracy and value”\(^\text{12}\) in a literary text, a criterion necessary for reading texts of any time period in a way that will assist us in a reconsideration of the prevalent anthropocentric values that so often deny anything besides economic or other utilitarian value to nature.

*The potency of late medieval warfare*

One of the reasons that people may not think to investigate the connections between medieval warfare and the destructive effects upon the nonhuman might be because it is believed that medieval warfare could only have occurred on a relatively small, and thus inconsequential, scale compared to modern military conflicts. The cavalry charge of medieval knights and the rudimentary artillery used upon castles or fortified towns during a siege might seem insignificant compared to the burning of Kuwaiti oil wells, the dropping of Agent Orange, or the detonation of atomic weapons.

\(^{12}\) Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1995), 113. Another work besides Buell’s from which I am drawing inspiration for my own project from is Steve Baker’s *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2001). Baker’s study is interested primarily in the appropriation of animals by texts such as advertisements, political cartoons, and animal rights posters. But that is not to say that he treats his images as “floating signifiers” with no relation to materially existing animals. In one of his more memorable examples, he discusses a British television ad for Anchor Butter in which the cows whose milk is turned into butter dance a jig and sing a jingle. However, what has been subsequently revealed about the commercial is that these “happy, dancing cows” were in actuality cows that were made to stand on an electrified floor which administered enough of an unpleasant electric shock to their bodies that it made them “dance.” Hence, one of the more important ideas in Baker’s book is that the textual representations of animals can never be examined in too much isolation from the historical existences of the actual animals to which they refer. I will constantly be striving to keep the actual, materially existing nature (plants, animals, etc.) of the late Middle Ages, and its role of warfare, at the center of my project, along with analyzing its representations (and the ramifications thereof) in the chivalric texts I have chosen to focus upon. See Chapter One, “From Massacred Cats to Lucky Cows,” in Baker’s book for his discussion of the Anchor Butter commercial.
Of course there is no medieval counterpart to the capacity of a hydrogen bomb for devastation, but assuming medieval warfare was devoid of large-scale destructive capabilities would be to greatly underestimate its potential to cause destruction and harm. Among medieval historians, Richard Kaeuper has perhaps most convincingly written on the acute threat posed by military forces for English and French societies, a threat that only grew as the Middle Ages waned. Around 1290 and thereafter, Kaeuper believes that important shifts in English and French political and economic life permitted dramatic changes in the scale of warfare, changes which greatly increased the destructive capabilities of late medieval armies.

It is to a discussion of three of the most important and relevant shifts in English society and military strategy that I would like now to turn. However, by discussing these particular developments, I am only selecting the ones that I see as among the most important for laying out the historical context for my broader discussion of the impact of late medieval warfare upon the natural world. Surely there are many other social and military developments I could discuss that were, in general, as significant (if not more so) than those I will discuss below, but perhaps they would not be as significant when it comes to the interactions of military forces and industries upon the animal and vegetable worlds.

One practice throughout most of the Middle Ages that inhibited an army’s potential for destruction was the fact that the majority of an army’s soldiers was traditionally raised by means of a feudal levy. Because the amount of military service that a knight owed to the crown was relatively short – usually only forty days – this meant that military operations had to be planned and conducted with the knowledge that a
military commander only had a little over a month to utilize his nobility (that is, his best equipped and most highly trained warriors). But when we consider the later centuries of the Middle Ages we find that kings had begun to experiment more and more with military forces consisting largely of paid soldiers that could be maintained out in the field for longer durations of time. Kaeuper argues that it is Henry II, a king responsible for “control[ling] a vast trans-Channel collection of territories”\(^\text{13}\) who first saw the practical need for paying soldiers to fight for him on the Continent. Because a king formerly might only be able to expect forty days of service from his knights, the time-consuming crossings (or to be more accurate, the time-consuming *waits* for crossings\(^\text{14}\)) of the English Channel could threaten to waste all of the military service owed to the king and that he planned to unleash on his Continental adversaries. “Both in England and France,” Kaeuper tells us, “a summons to the feudal host in the late thirteenth century would produce only a fraction of the number of knights expected from such a summons a century earlier.”\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Richard Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order: England and France in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 19. See the discussion on pages 19-31 of this work for more on the rise of paid, contractual armies in the later Middle Ages. Also, on the demise of feudal service and the rise of paid military service, see the following: Michael Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), 57-81; Michael Powicke, *Military Obligation in Medieval England: A Study in Liberty and Duty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). Prestwich argues that feudal service was something that the upper classes were always keen on avoiding whenever possible: “The obligation to perform service was not one which lay heavily on men in an individual sense. There was no personal duty involved, and the obligation was fully satisfied by sending substitutes. It is striking that during the reigns of Edward I and II…even when tenant-in-chiefs were present in the army, it was very rare for them to register as doing service themselves” (Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, 72).


\(^{15}\) Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, 22.
By the opening stages of the Hundred Years War, however, monarchs such as Edward III had come to rely almost entirely on a paid, contractual army in order to prosecute their wars. One scholar summarizes this watershed shift in the ways medieval monarchs raised armies thus:

The feudal system was no longer suitable for the recruitment of armed forces for the military campaigns of the king. Edward III introduced the so-called indenture system. This consisted in the enrollment of soldiers on a long-term contract basis. Individual commanders were authorized by the king to recruit mercenaries: men at arms, archers, spear fighters, miners, artisans, physicians and field chaplains. The contract was generally for one year... Even the Black Prince was on [Edward III’s] pay-roll at the rate of one pound a day.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1337, Edward III raised the first ever army that was serving entirely under a contractual obligation to the king. This new form of financing a military force heralded the increased devastation associated with the era of the Hundred Years War. No longer would knights and men-at-arms simply pack up and leave a siege or forsake a march because their forty days of feudal service had been completed. Now a commander could plan on an army staying in the field for as long as his war funds held out (or if their pay was in arrears, for as long as the soldiers still believed the commander could, and would, raise the funds at a future time).

The second hallmark of late medieval warfare that greatly expanded its capacities to spread havoc and ruin across a broader swath of land was the reliance during the era of the Hundred Years War on chevauchée tactics. These lightning-fast, mounted raids were something of a medieval forerunner of the blitzkrieg attacks that Nazi Germany perfected during the opening stages of World War II, whereby a largely mobile force overruns an

enemy’s lands before they have had time to organize themselves into a viable defensive
stance. The English received many bitter lessons at the hands of the Scottish on the cruel
efficacy of this type of attack during the latter’s many raids across England’s northern
border, raids designed to display a fierce independence from the colonialist foe intent on
subjugating them. This Scottish mode of fighting provided the prototype for the highly
mobile tactics that Edward III and the Black Prince would utilize with such success
throughout their myriad campaigns in France.17

One of the most informative records for our modern understanding of the abilities
of the English and their allies to devastate France with their chevauchées is the evidence
provided by extant petitions for exemption from taxation. These documents were sent by
citizens to the appropriate secular or papal authorities and pleaded to those authorities
that a particular region or town should be exempt from paying taxes due to the fact that
their economy and labor force had been so severely decimated or crippled by the violence
of English forces. When examined against the backdrop of chronicle evidence, these
documents provide a most harrowing picture of the ruinous potency of late medieval
warfare. Clifford J. Rogers, after analyzing some of these petitions for tax exemption,
concludes that “it seems reasonable to take the rather conservative, but commonly given,
figure of five leagues (13.4 modern miles) as the typical ‘havoc radius’” for a standard
chevauchée raiding party.18 However, at the more excessive and extraordinary end of the

17 For a discussion of the many lessons that the English learned from the ways in which the Scots waged
war against them, see Michael Prestwich, The Three Edwards: War and State in England 1272-1377
18 Clifford J. Rogers, “By Fire and Sword: Bellum Hostile and ‘Civilians’ in the Hundred Years War,” in
Civilians in the Path of War, eds. Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rogers (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press,
2002), 37. On the extent of destruction in France during the Hundred Years War, see Robert Boutruche,
“The Devastation of Rural Areas during the Hundred Years War and the Agricultural Recovery of France,”
spectrum, where we find astonishingly successful _chevauchées_ such as those led by the Black Prince in 1356 as he marched toward Vierzon, or his infamous 1355 Languedoc campaign, we find that some _chevauchées_ were capable of devastations forty miles away from the main contingent of an army, and that as much as 18,000 square miles of France could be burned, looted, and destroyed during a single swift march.¹⁹ Thus, it should come as no surprise to find that any and all facets of the natural world, from wild and domesticated animals, to crops, orchards, and the woodlands that surround remote rural villages, would be endangered by the fire- and sword-saturated havoc that was the calling card of the typical English _chevauchée_ during the Hundred Years War.

Thirdly, during the later Middle Ages, and especially after the Treaty of Brétigny brought a cessation to Anglo-French hostilities in 1360, the Continent witnessed the rise of the infamous Free Companies. These were conglomerations of professional soldiers who knew no other way of life than that of fighting and plundering, and who were not about to let a peace treaty signed by the kings of France and England stop them from making a living by means of the sword. After Edward III ordered all of his troops back to England as required by the Treaty of Brétigny, many of the battle-hardened men of war and the newly-arrived _tard venus_ (late-comers) simply stayed put, dug in, and formed themselves into massive roaming armies led by mercenary captains such as the legendary Sir John Hawkwood.²⁰ As Michael Prestwich believes, after the Treaty was signed “It

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¹⁹ See Rogers, “By Fire and Sword,” 36-7, for a discussion of some of the famous (and highly destructive) _chevauchées_ that were led by the Black Prince. See also H.J. Hewitt, _The Black Prince’s Expedition of 1355-1357_ (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1958).

must have been attractive to them [the mercenaries] to be able to fight without the constraints of discipline imposed in a royal army, and to be free of an obligation to pass a proportion of booty over to the Crown."²¹ Some of the Free Companies were reputed to reach sizes approaching 16,000 men. Although this is probably an inflated number, it surely represents the reality that many of these Companies were of a size and strength capable of resisting any attempts by a national force to subdue them. The Free Companies were notorious for their brutal treatment of the French peasantry, and made most of their profits through protection money paid out by towns or villages to ensure that the mercenaries refrained from destroying their homes and crops or carrying off their possessions.

The combination in the era of the Hundred Years War of an increasing reliance on chevauchée tactics and on mercenaries who did not react docilely to peace treaties, as well as on armies raised by means of the indenture system, increasingly brought warfare into contact with the natural world because warfare itself was growing in size and scope. Devastation itself was now more than ever being implemented as an intentional mode of waging war and such devastation was possible due to an increased ability to maintain large military forces in the field for protracted amounts of time, and by a growing awareness of the effectiveness of mounting large contingents of troops and dividing them up so that they were able to fan out and spread terror and havoc deep into the territories – and psyches – of the enemy.

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²¹ Prestwich, Armies and Warfare, 156.
The medieval ecology of war

My use of the world “ecology” in the title of this project, “The Ecology of War in Late Medieval Chivalric Culture,” is intended to be taken rather straightforwardly by the reader. I intend for “ecology” to signify a “study of the interrelationships among organisms and between organisms, and between them and all aspects, living and non-living, of their environment.”22 In this project, of course, I will only be interested in the changes and effects upon an organism or a community of organisms that likely would never have occurred had not a human army, individual soldier, or some technology or (proto-)industry of warfare (such as bow and arrow manufacturing) interacted with that organism or community of organisms.

However, given my discussion above of chevauchée tactics and the rise of the indenture system, and therefore given what I hope by now is an appreciation in the reader’s mind of the capacity of late medieval warfare for large-scale destruction, we must exercise caution regarding another fact associated with war’s interactions with the natural world: not all of warfare’s “destruction” is harmful to nature, or at least, not to all species or organisms equally. As most people are well aware, what might be catastrophic and lead to high mortality rates in one species often opens up niches that other species can then fill and within which they might flourish.23 Warfare, often so brutal and

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22 Oxford Dictionary of Ecology, ed. Michael Allaby (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), s.v. “ecology.” For a discussion of some of the attacks that have been launched against the fairly young scientific field of ecology, as well as a discussion of some potential problems associated with attempts to merge scientific ecology and literary analysis (such as that embodied by what gets called ecocriticism these days), see Dana Phillips, The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), esp. pgs. 42-82.

23 An example of this ecological truism that might leap to many reader’s minds is that of the great extinction event of the dinosaurs that occurred approximately 65 million years ago at the end of the Cretaceous period. Paleontologists hypothesize that this event led to the ability of many other species to
harrowing to the humans caught up in it, can often create environments or economic conditions that provide sanctuary for some animals or that allow their numbers to recover from pre-war depletion. For example, Simo Laakkonen discusses how the Finnish population during World War II “became more local and vegetarian” during the war and how the Finnish “Energy supply shifted from using foreign fossil fuels to domestic, renewable bio-energy.” And Edmund Russell points out at the end of his *War and Nature* that sometimes the environments most associated with the violence or toxic contamination of warfare, such as the demilitarized zone where to this day the South Korean and North Korean armies stare one another down in a war that technically has been going on for over fifty years now, can become “bountiful nature preserves… providing homes to endangered species and migratory birds.”

Therefore, when I use the phrase “ecology of war” as part of the title for my project, I am aware that it can signify the capacity for, not only medieval wars, but all wars, to create and shape ecological relationships that are *both* beneficial and deleterious for nature (and quite often, both at the same time, depending on which species or which individual plants or animals we focus our attention upon). To give substance to this abstract point about warfare’s ability to be both a positive boon and a destructive curse to the natural world, let us consider for the moment two examples of different types of ecologies that could be said to have been created by some of the specific tactics associated with late medieval warfare.

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flourish, such as the many types of mammals that existed at that time and from which modern humans are ultimately descended.


Certainly there is a habitual way of thinking about the natural world that all too often judges profound changes in an ecosystem’s flora and fauna as deplorable or inherently negative because cherished values of “harmony” and “balance” are seen as having been compromised by such changes. However, I declare from the outset of this study that I agree that stasis is (as one article describes it) “the unnatural value.” Any open system, considered over long enough of a time frame, is destined to experience disruption, decay, growth. Or, to put it in the parlance of contemporary ecological discourse: “Equilibrium, or balance, or stasis is not, therefore, a well-meshed, smoothly-working, serene system but one representing many stasis breakdowns compensated for by new inputs which keep the oscillations within certain critical limits.” And these “new inputs” into an ecosystem, even those caused by such a destructive event as war, are not always unbeneﬁcial to certain animals and plants that are affected by such changes.

One of the surest ways to manage or quickly alter a land-based ecosystem is through fire, which was also one of the most reliable tools for a medieval army intent on spreading fear and destruction in their wake. Henry V, that most venerated and feared of medieval king-warriors, memorably proclaimed: “War without fire is like sausages without mustard.” Arson, to be sure, was a cheap form of weaponry that, in an age of largely wooden structures and thatched roofs, could not easily be dispensed with by a commander in favor of always using more “noble” and expensive weapons such as swords, arrows, or cannons. One particularly vivid example of a late medieval army’s

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predilection for putting an enemy population’s lands to the torch is preserved in the chronicle of Jean de Venette. Jean, a Parisian Carmelite known for his acute sympathy for the toll of the Hundred Years War upon the civilian population, describes the destruction of the village where he was born thus:

The loss by fire of the village where I was born, Venette near Compiègne, is to be lamented, together with that of many others near by. The vines in this region, which supply that most pleasant and desirable liquor which maketh glad the heart of man, were not pruned or kept from rotting by the labors of men’s hands. The fields were not sown or plowed. There were no cattle or fowl in the fields. No cock crowed in the depths of the night to tell hours. No hen called to her chicks. It was of no use for the kite to lie in wait for the chickens in March of this year nor for the children to hunt for eggs in secret hiding places. No lambs or calves bleated after their mothers in this region. The wolf might seek its prey elsewhere and here fill his capacious gullet with green grass instead of rams. At this time rabbits and hares played freely about in the deserted fields with no fear of hunting dogs, for no one dared to go coursing through the pleasant woods and fields. Larks soared safely through the air and lifted their unending songs with no thought of whistling attacks of eyas or falcon.\textsuperscript{29}

The chevauchées of English armies, such as Jean describes here, could certainly render a once thriving village or town in an desolate area uninhabitable by humans; yet, the same attack could also free up an ecological niche that certain life forms all too ready to move into and to avail themselves of, for such a niche would now be devoid of the humans that are so often intent on keeping at bay by means of sickles, poisons, and arrows the plants and animals that are deemed “undesirable.” Jean’s portrait of his home village of Venette after an English raid is an ecologically complex one. Certainly he intends all of these details to elicit pity and outrage at the horrors of war from his readers, but when we shift

\textsuperscript{29} Jean de Venette, \textit{Chronicle}, 93-4.
our attention away from the human realm and instead focus on nonhuman communities such as those of rabbits, hares, larks, and vines, is the English raid necessarily a negative thing?

Not necessarily. Although Jean gives us the impression that obtaining sustenance will now be a little bit harder for the kites that feed on domesticated chickens and for the wolves that prey on the village’s rams, the ecological situation seems to have improved for the rabbits, hares, and larks that now need not fear the predators – the hunting dogs and falcons - that were consistently introduced into their ecosystem by the residents of Venette. For Jean, the newfound ability of formerly hunted species such as rabbits to run around with more abandon and less caution may seem perverse and a symptom of a divinely ordained order that has been ruptured by war, but for the many of the animals that lived in the vicinity of Venette, the death and migration of the *homo sapiens* in their midst might not have seemed so tragic.

But what are we to make of disruptions in certain ecological relationships that, unlike the potential benefits of, say, fire for certain tree species, are caused by human warfare and yet are not advantageous to most or all of the plants or animals that are caught up in these disruptions? Certainly these types of negative relationships fall under the title of “the ecology of war” as well, but they must be responded to with more of a sense of moral indignation. Let us look at our second example of an ecological relationship that is uniquely shaped and created by the strategies and goals of late medieval warfare which, unlike the example of the use of fire, is an example intended to highlight the detrimental effects of this newly formed ecology for the nonhuman beings involved in it.
Although most people’s minds may swell with images of bright pennons flapping in the wind and of stately knights clad in polished armor when they think of medieval warfare, the truth is that much medieval warfare, especially that of the Hundred Years War, was characterized by the tedious waging of siege warfare. Laying siege to a castle could, and often did, take many months and even more than a year’s time to see to its conclusion. Timber, water, plants and animals became the essential resources of a besieging army, and thus, not surprisingly, the thousands of soldiers that resided outside the castle or town’s fortifications could put an immense strain on the natural resources of the surrounding countryside.

But within the walls of the besieged structure, a unique ecology often developed that could mean the death of many dogs, cats, horses, rats, and mice. I am referring, of course, to the common event of siege famine, an event that was desired and created by a besieging army that often committed itself to doing anything in its power to keep supplies from making their way into the city, town, or castle that the army was attempting to starve into submission. But unlike the famine that might occur due to a crop failure or a particularly low harvest yield, this type of famine was engendered by the military commanders who ordered the siege, as well as (we should point out) by those commanders in charge of the fortifications who refused to surrender. I therefore hold that the type of ecology that siege warfare gave rise to is open to a charge of being morally reprehensible, in that it was created out of an avoidable set of circumstances and out of a human militarism that relegates all of the interests of nonhumans to the trash bin of irrelevance.
Although humans are often not predators of domesticated animals such as dogs, cats, and horses, the dire circumstances of a protracted siege often initiated a new, warfare-induced ecological relationship between these different species, and a relationship that appears to only be beneficial for the humans involved. During the siege of Melun that occurred during Henry V’s reopening of the theatre of war in France, the French garrison, while holding out for help from the dauphin, was reduced by exhausted supplies to eating any animal they could get their hands on. The chronicler Monstrelet informs us: “The garrison in Melun were aware how dangerously they were now situated…[for] they had for a long time, from famine, been forced to live on dogs, cats, horses, and other food unbecoming Christians.”

Many of the domesticated animals living in Melun that had formerly relied on humans for protection and possibly for most, if not all, of their food, now found themselves thrust into a new ecology that rendered them the eaten, rather than the eater.

Therefore, when referring to the “ecology of war,” we have to be careful to note that what might be an utterly debilitating and harrowing event for human beings, might not always be so for all of the plants and animals that have become enmeshed in the tactics and battles of late medieval warfare. However, with this word of caution having been sounded, I would now like to emphasize that the focus of this project will largely be

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30 Euguerrand de Monstrelet, The Chronicles of Enguerrand de Monstrelet, 2 vols., trans. Thomas Johnes (London, 1867), I, 449. A similar event, Jean de Venette tells us, occurred during the Siege of Calais in 1347: “When the king of France saw that the king of England was not relaxing the siege of Calais, he went thither with a great multitude of armed men, for he was told that the burgesses had no more food. They were, in fact, eating their horses, and mice and rats, and many were dying miserably of hunger.” From Jean de Venette, Chronicle, 45.

31 For some provocative musings on how domestication can be said to have improved the quality of life (and quality of death) for a great number of animals, see the subsection entitled “Animal Happiness” in Michael Pollan, The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals (New York: Penguin, 2006), 319-25.
on the deleterious effects of warfare on certain communities and on certain individual members of plant and animal species. With this caveat in mind regarding the parameters I have set for this project, we may proceed by keeping in mind an awareness that almost all types of warfare can be said to have benefited some aspects of nature in identifiable ways. Medieval warfare, despite its surprising capacities for large scale destruction of rural and urban environments, was no exception to this rule.

**Chivalric romance and the instrumental value of nature**

Even though many chivalric romances contain a great deal of technically and historically accurate depictions of medieval warfare (foremost among these, the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*), there still exists a great deal of chivalric literature that contains very little mimetic fidelity to the realities of medieval warfare. Much of the existing chivalric literature brims instead with the adventures of individual knights who have undertaken strenuous quests in order to seek out marvels, adventures, and any opportunity to prove their martial prowess upon the bodies of opponents. But the knight out on a quest, by and large, is a product of imaginative fiction, and does not adequately portray the experiences of professional warriors in the Middle Ages.

Nevertheless, we will still want to make use of this literature, and examine it where necessary for its insights into the interactions between the natural world and medieval warfare. Even though such literature might not yield much in the way of realistic depictions of (say) siege or naval warfare as it was historically fought in the era of the Hundred Years War, or of realistic depictions of how plants and animals were utilized by or entangled in such modes of warfare, this imaginative chivalric literature
still comes to us encoded with a panoply of attitudes, values, and ethical reactions to the ways in which chivalric violence engaged with the individual plants, animals and the larger biotic communities with which it habitually came in contact. Even when such literature does not present us with an image of animal death or the eradication of a plant community, it can still promote values that suggest nature exists to serve and aid humanity, and has little, if any, inherent worth in and of itself.

As we learn from several informative studies of the social role of medieval romance, the chivalric class was paying close attention to and absorbing (willingly or otherwise) the lessons such texts had to impart.\textsuperscript{32} Caxton, when translating Ramon Lull’s \textit{Llibre del l’orde de cavalleria}, ends his printed edition of the chivalric treatise with the following admonition for knights to inculcate themselves with the values imparted by romances:

O ye knyghtes of Englonde where is the custome and vsage of noble chyality that was vsed in tho dayes /...And some not wel aduyesd vse not honest and good fule ageyn alle ordre of knyghthode / leue this / leue it and rede the noble volumes of saynt graal of lancelot / of galaad / of

\textsuperscript{32} Richard Kaeuper, \textit{Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe} (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 30-36; C. Stephen Jaeger, “Courtliness and Social Change,” in \textit{Cultures of Power}, ed. Thomas N. Bison (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 287-309; Elspeth Kennedy, “The Knight as Reader of Arthurian Romance,” in \textit{Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend: Essays in Honor of Valerie Lagorio}, eds. Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 70-90; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages,” \textit{Speculum} 65:1 (1990): 59-86. Also, for discussions of the 15th century revival of interest and increased consumption of chivalric texts (including romances) by the English nobility (such as Edward IV) and upper gentry (such as John Paston), see the following: Armstrong, \textit{Gender and Chivalric Performance}, 72-85; Richard Barber, “Malory’s \textit{Le Morte Darthur} and Court Culture under Edward IV,” in \textit{Arthurian Literature XII}, eds. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 133-155; Karen Cherewatuk, “‘Gentyl’ Audiences and ‘Grete Bookes’: Chivalric Manuals and the \textit{Morte Darthur},” in \textit{Arthurian Literature XV}, eds. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 205-16. The essays by Barber and Cherewatuk, in particular, demonstrate that those who were actually fighting wars in Malory’s time were made up in large part by a readership that was growing increasingly hungry as the century passed for all things chivalric (manuals, biographies, heraldry, romances, etc.) and was therefore a group of readers that would have had their values and attitudes towards the natural world shaped by chivalric texts (including Malory’s \textit{Morte}).
Trystram / of perse forest / of percyual / of gawayn /& many mo / Ther shalle ye see manhode / curtoyse & gentylnesse.\(^{33}\)

Therefore, in addition to attempts on the part of romances and other chivalric texts to (say) reform attitudes towards women or to chasten violence against ecclesiastical institutions, we will want to consider what lessons regarding the natural world that chivalric romances might have promulgated to the professional warriors that we know were among the avid consumers of these types of texts.

With the above comments in mind about the value of analyzing chivalric imaginative literature, I would like to offer here a reading of a few sections of Malory’s *Morte Darthur* that I feel demonstrates the value of doing “ecological readings” of late medieval literature. This analysis of parts of Malory’s text will begin to acclimate my reader to my methodology, as well as to some of the discourses that I will be drawing upon in my examinations of various kinds of chivalric texts. Also, because Malory’s text foregrounds the ethos of military behavior in its individual characters’ quests, our discussion of the *Morte* will help us to begin thinking about how this text might work to lay out a recognizable ethical scheme regarding the proper or acceptable limits on military violence’s interactions with nonhuman life forms.

However, because Malory’s *Morte* is so vast, and because its composition arose from a quilting together of a broad array of Vulgate, Post-Vulgate, and native English sources, we can not and should not expect a single hegemonic discourse surrounding the natural world to emerge from Malory’s compendium of Arthuriana.\(^{34}\) Rather,

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\(^{34}\) This is similar to a point that Corinne J. Saunders makes about Malory’s use of forest imagery: “Just as different sections of the *Morte* draw on different sources and styles, so Malory’s forest draws on different
representations of plants and animals in the *Morte* often evolve and change from book to book. For example, within the very spiritual world of “The Noble Tale of the Sankgreal,” Malory’s tale that depicts the quest for the Holy Grail, a parade of animals saunter in and out of the dreams of the questing knights, often as portents of events to come or as reminders to knights of the religious convictions that should be guiding the quest. And so we have it that when Percivale is visited in his sleep by the image of two women, one riding upon a serpent and the other upon a lion, the dream is subsequently interpreted by a priest as: “She which rode upon the lyon, hit betokenyth the New Law of Holy Chirche…And she that rode on the serpente signifieth the Olde Law, and that serpente betokenyth a fynde” (528). The animals, in a way surely familiar to readers of medieval bestiaries or ecclesiastical commentaries, become obfuscated beneath a dense layer of Christian symbolism. But such allegorical appropriations of nature do not dominate Malory’s text, and are largely confined to the “Sankgreal” section.

Throughout most of the rest of the *Morte*, plants and animals are very much a part of the


36 We might recall here the following declaration by Eugène Vinaver regarding the “Sankgreal” section, a declaration that has been adopted by many scholars of Malory: “Malory’s *Tale of the Sankgreall* is the least original of his works. Apart from omissions and minor alterations, it is to all intents and purposes a translation of the French *Quese del Saint Graal.*” From *Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, vol. 3, p. 1534. Perhaps then, the depiction of animals in this section is largely a product of Malory’s more passive translating of his French sources, and that is behooves us to look elsewhere in his *Morte*, to the sections where Malory can be seen to be more actively and artistically engaged with the source material, for ideas about animals that are more personal to him as a knight and as an artist.
material world that the knights encounter when they leave a castle or that at times comes crashing into the courtly world of Camelot. And it is these types of encounters with nature, as opposed to the spiritual (and largely allegorical) encounters with it during the quest for the Holy Grail, that can teach us some useful things about how nature (and in particular, how animals) are often utilized by chivalric romances.

Malory explores in some of his tales the consequences of too often treating animals as being only signifiers that point beyond themselves to something more substantial or more important. Malory, of course, is not to be held up as a paragon of proto-animal rights sensibilities, but his text does suggest at times that he believes limitations should exist in the ways that the chivalric class interacts with the natural world. Although the examples that I will be analyzing by no means prove that a monolithic core of values regarding the natural world lurks at the heart of Malory’s sprawling narrative, and although I accept that a keen reader could surely point out many incidents of violence (either physical or ideological) against the natural world which occur absent of authorial censure in the Morte, nevertheless, I believe the incidents that I single out for analysis are still rare among medieval authors and that the passages I will discuss challenge any claim that Malory is wholly indifferent to the lives of animals (as so many of his peers and predecessors seem to have been).

What Malory offers us, and what I find to be crucial to the thematics of my dissertation, are the following: first, he calls our attention to a tendency for plants and animals to be eclipsed by the goals and values of a chivalric, warrior culture. Secondly, rather than passively endorsing this privileging of the human over and beyond nature, Malory instead actively interrogates it, and his labyrinthine narrative at times wends its
way into surprising corners where we find him articulating informal rules that strive to regulate knightly conduct towards nature (especially towards animals). And these depictions of warriors’ interactions with plants and animals is what interests me so much in many of the chivalric texts I will be looking at in this project: where the formal compendia of laws of war or where more formal chivalric handbooks may disappoint us when we scrutinize them for an awareness of a need for limits on chivalric aggression towards nature, it is often chivalric literary texts that at unexpected moments express sustained interest (and even - I will argue - outright criticism at times) of violent confrontations between medieval warriors and nature.

One of the scholars who can help us understand some of the values that undergird many chivalric romances is Erich Auerbach. In his *Mimesis*, a wide-ranging study of world literature from the age of Homer to the twentieth century, Auerbach declares in a section on the romances of Chrétien de Troyes:

> The world of knightly proving is a world of adventure. It not only contains a practically uninterrupted series of adventures; more specifically, it contains nothing but the requisites of adventure. Nothing is found in it which is not either accessory or preparatory to an adventure. *It is a world specifically created and designed to give the knight opportunity to prove himself.*

Auerbach goes on to explain that by the time Chrétien is composing his soon-to-be hugely influential poems, the feudal, aristocratic class has begun to sense that a new economic order is knocking at the door, waiting to be acknowledged in literary form: the money economy of the urban mercantile class. Chrétien himself, Auerbach reminds us, lived and worked in towns like Champagne and Flanders where the poet must have

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perceived for himself the unavoidable truth that “the feudal class was no longer the only ruling class.”³⁸ As a reaction to this threat to their political hegemony, the feudal class began to write, patronize, and consume on a vast scale courtly and chivalric romances which, instead of representing the developments in the socio-political reality of France in the late 12th century, only buried them beneath plots and a writing style that are imbued with a “feudal ethos [that] serves no political function” and which “no longer has any purpose but that of self-actualization.”³⁹

In response to such changes in the socio-political landscape, chivalric romance, that subset of the medieval romance genre devoted to issues of chivalric warfare and of violence in general, often creates (as Auerbach noticed) a world where almost everything can appear as a being-for-knightly-adventure, and hardly anything as a being-for-itself. And because a knight’s identity is based on perpetual action, it is always threatened with dissolution through a drought of adventures and deeds of martial prowess. Or, to put this idea in the parlance of Judith Butler, a knight’s identity is performative, through and through.⁴⁰ His identity requires a repetitive performing of it in order to render that identity as a professional practioner of feats of arms uncontestable and stable.

The knight in a chivalric romance goes on campaign or rides out into the countryside that is external to the castle in order to find adventures that will reinforce his identity, and hopefully solidify it just a little bit more in the eyes of his peers. Everything encountered outside the castle, from damsels to giants to other knights, is a potential

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³⁸ Auerbach, Mimesis, 138.
³⁹ Auerbach, Mimesis, 134.
⁴⁰ See Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990). For an engaging discussion of “gender performance” in Malory’s Morte, and of the value of applying feminist theorists like Butler to Malory’s text, see Dorsey Armstrong, Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory’s Morte d’Arthur (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2003), passim.
means to the end of allowing the knight to gain more prestige and more honor. The natural world stands little chance, then, when viewed through the teleology of the chivalric ethos, of being encountered as a place with inherent value or as consisting of entities with desires and needs that might be opposed to those of the chivalric class. Through the knight’s perception of the world as the proving ground of the authenticity of his chivalric identity, the desires and needs of nature can all too easily be frustrated, marginalized, or annulled by an imperious army or an individual knight.

Although Auerbach discusses the role of the external world in a knight’s “self-actualization” in conjunction with the romances of Chrétian de Troyes (and most often, specifically in conjunction with the romance Yvain), his observations are still relevant to the waning of the European Middle Ages and to that last great medieval compendium of Arthurian chivalric questing, Sir Thomas Malory’s Morte Darthur. Despite the copiousness of Malory’s encyclopedic retelling of the rise and fall of Arthur’s Round Table, and despite the incessant leaving of the court of Camelot by knights to go on quests, the natural world is given precious little stage time in Malory. However, when entities from the natural world, such as animals, intrude upon Camelot (and intrude they most surely do at significant moments), their existence and reason for being are often disciplined by the narrative in ways that make them only means-to-ends that invite the knights to persecute and pounce upon them in order to prove knightly valor and prowess

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41 As Gillian Rudd memorably states it: “In fact, given the predominance of forests in our mental image of Malory’s world, it is remarkable how little he has to say about them.” From Rudd, Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), 80.
one more time. All of the wild alterity and fascinating spontaneity that animals possess, and that can be admired and respected in their own right, are almost always negated in Malory.

In “The Tale of King Arthur” section of Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*, a lavish feast that is about to be indulged in to celebrate the marriage between Arthur and Guinevere is prefaced by Merlin’s warning to the knights of the Round Table: “none of you remeve, for ye shall se a straunge and mervailous adventure” (3.102.26-7). As prophesied by Merlin, the “marvel” occurs: “Ryght so as they sate, there com rennynge inne a whyght herte into the hall, and a whyght brachet nexte hym, and thirty couple of blacke rennynge houndis com afftir with a grete cry” (3.102.28-31). Bedlam ensues and it is as if a small menagerie has erupted into the midst of Arthur’s wedding feast. One of the knights even acquires some somatic knowledge of the hart, for at one point the “herte lope a grete lepe and overthrew a knyght that sate at the syde bourde” (3.102.34-5). This buffeted knight then picks up the brachet and inexplicably absconds with it on horseback. But this exuberant burst of nonhuman nature into the civilized halls of Camelot appears to inspire no awe or no meditations upon the animal lives that co-exist on the fringes of human experience. Instead, the knights act as mechanically as they so often do in romances: they leap up like jack-in-the-boxes and rush off after the mysterious visitors in search of adventure and glory. Gawain goes off in search of the white hart; Sir Torre goes in search of the brachet; and King Pellinor takes off after a lady who entered the room after the melee had subsided and who claimed the brachet as her own, but who herself was abducted by another knight that entered the room “all armed on a grete horse, and took the lady away with forse wyth hym” (3.103.9-10).
Arthur himself, interestingly enough, is shown to be a little obtuse about how these animals exist for him according to the chivalric point of view as ways for him and his peers to perform and reaffirm their chivalric roles. Merlin finds it necessary to scold Arthur for the latter’s inappropriately passive observation of the “marvel” that unfolded: “Nay!...ye may nat leve hit so – thys adventure – so lyghtly” (3.103.13-16). Arthur, as part of the education process depicted in these early chapters of Malory’s Morte, is here being enlightened by Merlin as to the “proper” perception of animals in the chivalric world: they are means-to-ends, existing to be consumed, not only as food, but also as objects that allow a knight to be a knight, and that provide him with essential motivations for leaving the comfort of Camelot. As Auerbach had suggested about the knights in Chrétien de Troyes, if it were not for the incessant performance of knightly identity through love or feats-of-arms, it seems that many knights in chivalric literature would become stagnant and rooted to their dining hall benches. Animals, like women and other knights, provide the supplementary component that a knight requires to perform, flesh out, and fulfill his own preconceived notions of identity. However, whereas other knights and even some cagey females in Malory can be shown to have desires and intentions of their own, the animal is often depicted as a mechanical device in the world

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42 Another example along these lines of an animal miraculously appearing to help a knight on his quest and to lead him to adventure occurs in “A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake,” where we are told that Launcelot “rode a grete whyle in a depe foreste. And as he rode he sawe a blak brochette sekying in maner as hit had bene in the feaute [on the trail] of an hurte dere” (6.278.19-21). Launcelot follows the hunting dog and eventually arrives at a manor where he learns of the death of Sir Gilbert the Bastard and is soon directed by Sir Gilbert’s sister to the adventure of the Chapel Perelus. Like the animals that interrupt Arthur’s wedding festivities, this brachet encountered by Launcelot functions like a mere deus ex machina and does not appear to be an animal that Launcelot is interested in at all for its inherent animalness, only in how it can assist him in his search for adventure and glory.

43 See Armstrong, Gender and the Chivalric Community, especially Chapter One, “Gender and the Chivalric Community: The Rise of Arthur’s Kingdom,” 27-66, for a discussion of how certain women in the Morte, such as Morgan le Fay, manipulate and take advantage of certain tenets in the chivalric code in order to express and fulfill their desires.
of Malory’s knights, and one that is not permitted to show it has drives, desires, and intentions apart from the knight’s designs and quests that are projected upon it. The knight experiences only awe and excitement for the quest, never for the animal.

This relegation of animal to unalloyed objecthood, however, does not strike me as a problem about which Malory himself is totally ignorant or unconcerned. Despite his zeal for the pageantry and pomp of chivalric culture, Malory reveals himself as too astute a writer to not recognize that the fetishization of the quest which his knights constantly enact is not a problem. King Pellinor, after he sets off on his individual quest in search of a lady who interrupted Arthur’s wedding feast but who was herself abducted by a knight, at one point rides past a woman sitting beside a well, holding the wounded body of a dying knight, and beseeching help from King Pellinor. He quickly refuses the lady any help, for his quest in search of the abducted lady has rendered anyone else’s needs and desires invisible. Yet, after completing his quest, and on his return trip back to Camelot, King Pellinor takes the same route home, and saunters by the same well where he earlier encountered the lady and her injured knight. To his horror, King Pellinor discovers that the lady and her injured knight had been “etyn with lyons other with wylde bestis – all save the hede” (3.118.32-3). In King Pellinor’s moment of realization that he is profoundly at fault for this gruesome spectacle, he admits: “I was so furyous in my queste that I wolde nat abyde – and that repentis me, and shall do dayes of my lyff” (3.119.26-7).44

44 Unlike what occurs in Malory’s source, the Suite Merlin, in the Morte’s handling of this episode the people around King Pellinor do not ameliorate his guilt for him. In the Suite Merlin, no less than three people – Arthur, Merlin, and the abducted maiden who Pellinor went in search of and who he eventually rescues – attempt to mitigate for Pellinor his keen sense of guilt at having been responsible for the lady’s gruesome death by a lion. Arthur at first censures Pellinor, but eventually tells him: “Now let us leave this
Malory’s text offers up here the cruel irony of what happens when animals are perceived as mere objects lacking in subjectivity and as existing only to enhance a knight’s reputation and sense of pride. The fetishization of the quest eclipses the subjectivity and the all-too-real physicality of the animal, and in King Pellinor’s encounter with the lions as they are dismembering and consuming the knight and the lady, there is a staging before our eyes of a shocking return of the repressed. The marginalized physicality of the animals ruptures the world of the quest, and reminds Malory’s knights that the natural world will not always so obsequiously conform to the goals of chivalric adventure. Animals have desires and appetites of their own, and here Malory has branded not only his readers’ minds, but also that of his character King Pellinor, with the harsh reminder of that fact.

As I have begun to indicate above, Malory strikes me as aware of the relationship between the ethos of chivalry and its (often failed) attempts to manipulate components of the natural world such as animals into predictable, and thus increasingly controllable, entities. But unlike modern, capitalist goals of manipulating animals into (say) raw materials that lactate when we want them to (as with cows), or that become the kind of iron-deficient meat product we want them to be (as is the case with veal), Malory has exposed the type of domination which the chivalric project attempts to perform, a project that perceives animals as inherently insignificant and as attaining their highest value only when integrated into a knight’s quest or into his deeds of martial prowess that are being

\[\text{matter…[and] let’s speak of something else and not be so grieved over death, for old and young have to pass by that way, and nobody will escape it.” See Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, 5 vols., gen. ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York: Garland, 1993-96), IV, 242. Malory, on the other hand, not only excises from his text the three speakers’ comments that attempt to assuage Pellinor’s sense of guilt at having fetishized his quest above all else, but he also adds the following harsh remark by Gwenyvere that is delivered directly to Pellinor’s face: “ye were gretly to blame that ye saved nat thys ladyes lyff.”} \]
performed by a warrior in the hope of achieving an increase in honor and reputation. Or, to state the problem in the useful language that has come down to us from that most impassioned critic of reductive perceptions of nature, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, nature in the eyes of a King Pellinor has been reduced to the *Bestand*, a word that has been translated as “standing reserve.” Heidegger describes the problem of reducing nature to mere *Bestand* as: “Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering…Whatever stands by in the sense of the standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object.”\(^{45}\) For Heidegger, rather than seeing the animal or plant as an object that has a thoroughly independent existence apart from us, we only see ourselves in such entities, and see the natural world as an extension and supplement to our human world and all of its concerns and desires.

When discussing King Pellinor’s horrific encounter with the anthropophagic lions, we might also call attention to the unforgettable moment in “The Dethe of Arthur” in which a bite by an adder unexpectedly begins the devastating war between Arthur and Mordred, and hence thwarts Arthur’s effort to postpone the battle until the potency of Launcelot can be reintegrated into Arthur’s own force. Malory writes:

> Ryght so cam oute an addir of a lytyll hethe buysshe, and hit stange a knyght in the foote. And so whan the knyght felte hym so stonge, he loked downe and saw the adder; and anone he drew hys swerde to sle the addir, and thought none othir harme. And whan the oste of bothe partyes saw that swerde drawyn, than they blewe beamys, trumpetts, and hornys, and shouted Grymmly, and so bothe ostis dressed hem togydir (21.1235.20-7).

Like the lions that consume the lady and her knight, this adder is a strikingly nonsymbolic animal. Where we might be expecting the snake to be described in a way that engenders associations in the reader’s mind with evil and satanic forces, this particular snake represents only itself. Malory again is acutely aware of a perennial problem with chivalry: as much as it tries to imbue a chaotic world with a semblance of form, ritual, and structure, there are always elements of the physical world that will disconcertingly reveal the limitations of chivalry’s attempt to tidy up the world external to the knight.\footnote{For some discussions of Malory’s investment in showing that the world his knights inhabit is a chaotic one and one that is ultimately uncontrollable by human impositions of order and coherence such as chivalric codes of conduct or legalistic trials by combat, see the following: Jacqueline Stuhmiller, “Judicium Dei, iudicium fortunae: Trial by Combat in Malory’s Le Morte Darthur,” Speculum 81:2 (2006): 427-62; Armstrong, Gender and Chivalric Community, 107-08.} Malory realizes that the existence and biological interests of animals are constantly threatening to sabotage the order that chivalric creeds attempt to project onto external nature. Because the scene with the adder appears at this moment of culmination in the six hundred-plus pages of Malory’s narrative, we can almost reflect upon the Morte Darthur as a whole as a depiction of, not only chivalry’s failure to subdue Launcelot and Guinevere’s destructive desire for one another, or of chivalry’s failure to reveal clear-cut differences between virtuous deeds and morally questionable deeds, but also of the stunning failure of chivalry to recognize fully the drives and desires of nonhuman subjects. Chivalry, as Malory depicts it, is quite often epistemologically bankrupt when it comes to the nonhuman.

Not only does Malory permit characters such as Pellinor to utter lines that reveal an awareness that festishizing the quest above all else (and to the exclusion of recognizing and respecting other subjectivities) is problematic, but there are also scenes
depicting the slaughter of animals that hint that Malory strives to articulate some need for restraint from the killing of animals by medieval men-at-arms. As becomes abundantly clear with any reading of Malory, his text often functions as a “literary chivalric handbook,” and one that encapsulates many of Malory’s own perceptions as to what constitutes admirable chivalric behavior. For example, knights are repeatedly advised to come down off of their horses in order to continue combat with another knight who has become unhorsed,\(^47\) or a knight is often admonished that no glory will be won by fighting a knight who has already become exhausted and weakened from earlier combat.\(^48\) Just as these scenes are encoded with Malory’s sense of what sorts of behavior fall under the heading of noble chivalric conduct, so too do a few interesting examples of animals being killed by knights in the *Morte* suggest that Malory saw some incidents of animal slaughter as related to the problem of defining fundamental differences between noble and praiseworthy knightly conduct, and base and ignoble conduct. In fact, it appears that Malory most often esteems the avoidable killing of animals as churlish behavior, and as a telltale sign of a degenerate knight.

\(^{47}\) For example, in “Aftir Thes Questis,” after Gawain has become unhorsed while fighting a certain Sir Marhaus, Gawain tells Marhaus to come down off his horse before the fight continues. Marhaus responds to Gawain’s command with: “Gramercy…of your jentynnes! Ye teche me curtesy, for hit is nat commendable one knyght to be on horseback and the other on foote” (98).

\(^{48}\) For an example of a knight proclaiming that no honor can come from fighting another, already exhausted knight, see the exchange between Sir Tristram and King Mark in which the nefarious Mark orders Tristram to do combat with a Launcelot already wearied from an earlier fight. Tristram replies to Mark’s suggestion with: “well I can thynke that I shall gyff hym a falle, for hit is no maystry, for my horse and Y be freysshe, and so is nat his horse and he. And wete you well that he wolle take hit for grete unkyndenes, for ever one good knyght is loth to take another at avantage” (267). However, in a move typical of Malory, he depicts Tristram as hopelessly stuck between two competing rules of the chivalric code: that of not fighting an exhausted knight versus obeying one’s lord. Tristram proceeds to engage Launcelot because, as he tells Mark, “so must I do, and obey youre commaundemente.” But Tristram (and Malory) still knows it is an action that is in violation of the chivalric code.
As Gawain and his brother Gaherys are closing in on the object of Gawain’s first quest, the white hart that had interrupted Arthur’s wedding feast, Gawain releases “thre couple of greyhoundes” that chase the hart into a castle. After pursuing it into the fortress, Gawain and Gaherys “slewe the hert” (3.105.21). Immediately following the killing of the hart, and without warning, a knight appears from a nearby chamber in the castle and kills two of Gawain’s greyhounds. The response by Gawain to this strange knight’s behavior is one of outrage: “Why have ye slayne my howndys? I wolde that ye had wrokyn youre angir uppon me rather than uppon a dome beste” (3.106.3-5). As Gawain reminds the knight, the two slain greyhounds were inappropriate recipients of chivalric violence. His reference to the animals as being “dome beste[s]” does not necessarily imply that Gawain sees them as akin to stones or as insensate objects lacking in the ability to suffer or feel pain; rather, his comments suggests that he sees them as vulnerable and defenseless entities, and therefore as having been unworthy objects of the aggression of this fully armed knight. Just as damels, children, and knights that are unhorsed or are overly exhausted should be protected from chivalric violence, so too, Gawain suggests, should animals that do not pose a serious threat to a knight’s safety.49

49 The irony of this, of course, is that Gawain himself has killed an animal that was no threat to him: the hart. Does Malory sanction Gawain’s killing of an animal in order to complete the quest? I think not. First off, we have the fact that Gawain himself can not help but be implicated in the specific charge that he levels against the strange knight: that of discharging excessive violence upon a “dombe beste.” Malory, I believe, intended the irony of Gawain’s remark to be detected readily enough by the reader. Secondly, Gawain’s decision to slay the hart (an action that is never stated prior to his incident as a necessary condition for considering the quest “completed”) sets into motion a series of actions that profoundly tarnish Gawain’s honor. Both Gawain and the strange knight, I would argue, are held up by Malory as embodiments of misplaced chivalric aggression, and as representatives of the knightly community who have not yet learned that it is dishonorable to kill animals unless it is unavoidable, such as during the melee of a battle.
In addition to Malory associating the unnecessary killing of animals with impetuous or excessive chivalric violence, he also, at one point, associates it with a base Saracen-ness. When jousting with Launcelot at the Tournament of Lonezep, Palomides at one point “thought to have put hym [Launcelot] to shame, and wyth his swerde…and smote of his horse nek that sir Launcelot rode uppon” (10.739.6-8). Palomides’s tactic here is immediately judged by the onlookers as being devious and falling outside the realm of acceptable chivalric behavior:

Than was the cry huge and grete, how sir Palomydes the Saresyn hath smyttyn downe sir Launcelots horse. Ryght so there were many knyghtes wrothe wyth sir Palomydes bycause he had done that dede, and helde there ayenste hit, and seyde hyt was unkyghtly done in a turnemente to kylle a horse wyflyfully, other ellys that hit had bene done in playne batayle lyff for lyff. (10.739.10-16, emphasis mine)\(^5\)

Palomides’s Saracen-ness is a quality that, despite Palomides’s conviction that “in my harte I am cyrstynde,” is here curiously implied as an explanation for how a knight that is often referred to as being equal in prowess and nobility to a Tristram and even a Launcelot, could sink to such unsavory depths as decapitating another knight’s horse

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\(^5\) There are ample warnings in extant ordinances and proclamations that injuring the horses of opponents during jousts or tournaments could bring economic punishment and a loss of honor to the culprit. For example, the rules proclaimed by John, Lord Tiptoft, for a joust in the reign of Edward IV, state: “Who so striketh a horse shall have no prize.” See Francis Henry Cripps-Day, *The History of the Tournament in England and France* (New York: AMS Press, 1982), Appendix IV, xxviii. Also see Appendix VI, pages 1 and 4v in the same volume, and Viscount Dillon, “On a MS. Collection of Ordinances of Chivalry of the Fifteenth Century, Belonging to Lord Hastings,” *Archaeologia* 57.1 (1900), 36, for other examples of prohibitions on harming horses and on pre-tournament precautions taken to ensure the safety of horses. Although we must acknowledge that such precautions and prohibitions were put in place in part to protect the large monetary investment that was a knight’s horse, we must also acknowledge that most knights would have felt an emotional connection to their cherished horses as well, and for this additional reason likely would not have wished to see their horses maimed or killed. For literary evidence of the knight’s ability to bond with his horse, see that offered in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when the poet describes Gawain’s deep appreciation that his horse, Gringolet, was well looked after during Gawain’s stay at Bertilak’s castle. See Fitt Four, lines 2047-52, of *SGGK* in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, eds. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, 4th ed. (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 2002).
during a tournament.\textsuperscript{51} At this moment of condemning Palomides’s actions, Malory conveys another one of his tenets of chivalry which, although not included in his “formal” definition of chivalry in the famous Pentecostal Oath, constitute his personal sense of what is permissible or impermissible behavior for a knight that is spread throughout the \textit{Morte}.\textsuperscript{52} The fact that slaying a horse during a tournament is here associated with the taint of a Saracen only maligts the behavior that much more forcefully for Malory’s readers.

In sum, like most of the sources that will be examined in this project, Malory’s \textit{Morte Darthur} addresses at times the issue of what limitations and boundaries, if any, should be erected between the natural world and the discharge of chivalric, military violence. Although Malory can be quite orthodox at times in his attitudes towards animals,\textsuperscript{53} when it comes to depicting a tournament he upholds and gives literary expression to the growing number of strictures being put in place to protect horses during dangerous melees or jousts. And when Malory is depicting knights engaged in quests to


\textsuperscript{52} The (so-called) Pentecostal Oath is the codification of “proper” knightly behavior that King Arthur creates at the end of “The Wedding of King Arthur” section and which he makes his knights reaffirm every year at the feast of Pentecost. This oath has no analogue in any of Malory’s known sources, and embodies what many take to be his most succinct articulation of what constitutes proper chivalric behavior.

\textsuperscript{53} For example, Malory has some very rhapsodic words for the chivalric leisure activity of hunting. See Malory’s “ode” to hunting and words of thanksgiving to Tristram for having invented some of hunting’s rituals in Book 10 of the \textit{Morte}, pages 682-3. For a discussion of Malory’s overall positive characterization of hunting in his Sir Tristram section, see Corinne J. Saunders, “Malory’s \textit{Book of Huntynge}: The Tristram Section of the \textit{Morte Darthur},” \textit{Medium Aevum} 62:2 (1993): 270-84.
seek out adventure, we find him more than capable of identifying a prevalent cultural tendency to relegate the vegetable and animal world to mere “standing reserve” (as Heidegger would put it), and through such identification invite his readers to contemplate if there is anything deplorable or reprehensible about this tendency. It is to other kinds of late medieval texts, including war ordinances, laws of war compendia, animal debate poetry, and chivalric treatises, as well as to chivalric romances written in earlier decades of the Hundred Years War, that we will be turning in the following chapters in order to see if Malory represents an anomaly in his attitudes towards nature, or if other texts represent more systematic or explicit developments of his ideas regarding ideological and physical abuses of the natural world by the members of the medieval military profession.

Overview of the project

In the next chapter, Chapter Two, I turn first to a discussion of some non-literary texts, such as laws of war compendia and chivalric treatises, texts whose primary function was the codification of norms for knightly behavior. What this examination will demonstrate is that in these texts where we most likely might expect a condemnation of unregulated violence against the natural world during military campaigns, such evidence is sorely lacking. What discussions there are of nature being harmed by warfare in these texts discuss the issue as primarily a personal property issue. In other words, the livestock or horses that are recognized as being frequent victims of military violence in these texts are not recognized as being sentient creatures; rather, they are mere objects for which an owner has a right to monetary compensation if that “object” is harmed or killed. The latter half of the chapter will turn to a discussion of John Lydgate’s mid-fifteenth
century animal debate poem, *The Debate of the Horse, Goose and Sheep*, in order to set up a useful contrast to the dearth of interest in warfare-nature relations in the chivalric treatises and laws of war. Lydgate’s poem, instead of representing animals as trivial or simple entities, instead offers a depiction of them as emotionally complex creatures, capable of mental and physical anguish due to their deep immersion in the tactics and technologies of late medieval warfare. Lydgate’s representation of his animal-speakers invites us to perceive them as often being insensitively victimized by their unwilling participation in human military conflicts.

Chapter Three examines the late 14th-century poem the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and argues that the author of that poem gives us an Arthur-character who descends further and further as the poem progresses into reprehensible cruelty and war-mongering, and that one way in which the poems signals this slide by Arthur into being a perpetrator of unethical displays of military violence is through an increasing number of depictions of plants, animals, and entire landscapes being victims of Arthur and his army’s aggression. Drawing upon chronicle and archeological evidence of medieval military aggression towards the dense foliage and timber of forests, as well as upon prevalent medieval theories of the value of military ambush, I will also argue that the Alliterative *Morte* is a poem highly relevant to our current environmental discussions of “the social creation of nature” and is a work intensely interested in the ways that Vegetian military tactics nourish a sense of antagonism between the natural world and the human soldier in its midst.
Shifting the discussion somewhat away from an interest in medieval warfare’s effects on material nature, Chapter Four will instead focus its investigation on the more ideological appropriations of nature by the professional military class. The first half of the chapter will examine Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale*, a poem that I argue is deeply interested in critiquing the ways in which practioners of military violence attempt to “naturalize” their own displays of violence (and consequently to defend an inalienable right to discharge violence whenever they wish) by attempting to affirm an essentialist connection between warriors and the natural world. But at the same time that knights might appear to be deeply concerned with the natural world – a concern demonstrated by the omnipresence of animals in certain facets of chivalric material culture such as heraldry – Chaucer shows us that the chivalric class’ interest in the natural world is hopelessly one-sided, fueled as it is by self-interest and a desire to protect the status quo, and that whenever possible, materially existing animals are eclipsed and treated as an expendable resource that can always be sacrificed in the name of chivalric benefit and self-glorification. Chapter Four builds on its analysis of Theban poems such as Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale* by continuing with a discussion of *The Siege of Thebes*, John Lydgate’s self-conscious continuation of, and prequel to, Chaucer’s own Theban tale. Lydgate, I argue, uses nature in his poem as way to undermine the medieval belief that violence can be the product of ineluctable impulses caused by such things as a deep-rooted and highly volatile “Theban genetics.” Instead, Lydgate demonstrates through his poem that military violence is almost always the product of debased – and avoidable – political desires, and that one of the surest indicators that a military force has lost its proper moral guidance is when animals have become the targets of martial aggression.
Chapter Five examines one of the most impressive late medieval poetic treatments of Alexander the Great, *The Wars of Alexander*, and situates the poem in relation to late medieval obsessions with exotic and wonderous forms of nature. I argue that the *Wars-* poet condemns his Alexander’s fascination with exotic nature by using figures such as the “Jewish bishop” Jaudus and Dindamus to highlight and present as deplorable Alexander’s perception of commonplace nature as being expendable and somehow less inherently valuable than more unfamiliar forms of nature. *The Wars of Alexander* also singles out for criticism such aspects of Alexander’s character as not respecting boundaries and the physical constraints that have been placed on all aspects of creation. I go on to argue that the poet’s condemnation of both Alexander’s privileging of exotic nature and of his incessant, bellicose wanderlust provide the poet with opportunities to critique the dedication by his fellow Northwestern Englishmen to fighting in wars on the Continent and to plundering the wealth of foreign kingdoms.
CHAPTER 2

Setting the Steer’s Tail on Fire: Chivalric Treatises, Laws of War, and Lydgate on the
Suffering and Death of Animals during War

The medieval period, as with almost any premodern epoch, would likelyloom in
the minds of many people as representing something of a nadir in the history of animal
rights sensibilities. What would likely stand out in any cursory reading in the history of
medieval attitudes towards animals is the proclivity of most of the leading theologians of
the time to deny rationality, and therefore ethical value, to animals.54 But does this
reluctance to deem animals rational preclude medieval writers from ever expressing
concern at the suffering and death for which humans were responsible and which they
inflicted upon animals? Was the lack of rationality an insurmountable barrier to
sympathy for the nonhuman in the medieval era? Just as many people in contemporary
American society choose to avoid framing ethical debates regarding animals using the
criteria of rationality, so too in some of the chivalric texts of the late Middle Ages other

54 For an informative overview of the (often strained) arguments used by some medieval theologians to
avoid attributing reason to animals, see Peter G. Sobol, “The Shadow of Reason: Explanations of
Intelligent Animal Behavior in the Thirteenth Century,” in The Medieval World of Nature: A Book of
Within: Animals in the Middle Ages (New York: Routledge, 1994), 5-6.
qualities of animals, such as their capacity to be subjects of physical pain, or to be subjects having “interests,” appear to have contributed to sympathetic representations of suffering or dying animals.

The most obvious cause of medieval animal death at the hands of humans was the slaughtering of them for sustenance which, given the reality and frequency of famine during this era, is, not surprisingly, of little concern to medieval writers. However, besides hunger and famine, yet another commonplace aspect of medieval life would have led to the suffering and death of many animals: warfare. As I will begin to argue below, from horses to geese to deer to sheep, animals were involved in complex ways in the conventional methods for waging war during the late Middle Ages, and such involvement often led to the injury or death of large numbers of these animals. Rather than having the deleterious effects upon animals caused by war recede so deeply into the background of textual depictions of warfare that they reach a vanishing point, various late medieval authors allowed animal death and suffering to be prominently featured within their texts.

This chapter will begin by examining what the more self-conscious codifiers and arbiters of “official” opinion concerning warfare had to declare on the topic of war’s effects upon animals. Looking at samples of chivalric treatises will grant us the opportunity to see what representatives of the aristocracy had to say about the militaristic violence of their social class and that violence’s interactions with animals, and by

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focusing on some of the compendia of laws of war we will be granted a chance to evaluate to what degree the legists of the late Middle Ages were concerned by warfare’s ability to potentially violate the rights of not only human noncombatants, but nonhuman ones as well. This chapter ends with an in-depth examination of John Lydgate’s talking-animal poem *The Debate of the Horse, Goose, and Sheep*, not only to provide a counterpoint to the relative paucity of interest in animals to be found in many of the other texts we will examine in this chapter, but also in order to highlight the struggle for a coherent articulation of indignation at war’s abuses upon animals with which one writer of this era had to contend. Lydgate’s poem will give us a broad overview of the wide-ranging effects upon the nonhuman that we are dealing with when we attempt to analyze the intersections between medieval warfare and animals. Taking my cue from leading ecocritical theorists such as Lawrence Buell, I will be concerned in this chapter with recovering and foregrounding the materially existing animal to which the textual representations I have culled from animal-debate poetry, chivalric treatises, and compendia of laws of war make reference, as well as with examining some of these same texts’ attempts to render the materially existing animal as morally inconsequent as possible.

In his ground-breaking study of the literary tradition of American nature writing that was inaugurated by Henry David Thoreau, Lawrence Buell analyzes how many readers lose sight of the physical world and its living elements (e.g. plants and animals) upon encountering symbolic descriptions of these natural elements in a text. This reminder, by Buell, that readers need not wholly suppress the materially existing signified carries singular importance for any discussion of medieval attitudes towards animals. As
a rebuff to reading strategies structured by contemporary literary theory’s privileging of the signifier over the signified, Buell argues: “The capacity of the stylized image to put the reader or viewer in touch with the environment [and its animals] is precisely what needs stressing as a counter to the assumptions that stylization must somehow work against outer mimesis or take precedence over it.” 56 In other words, a text operating in a way that harmonizes with the precepts of animal rights or other biocentric theories will work to remind readers of their dependence upon healthy ecosystems and of the fact that they share the planet with other living and sentient beings. This chapter will be interested in demonstrating how in texts keenly interested in the destructive powers of warfare some late medieval authors were quite capable (whether they were fully intending to do so or not) of educating their readers along such biocentric lines. Furthermore, when it seems that medieval authors are (re)directing the reader’s gaze from the text to the reality of actual animals that are perniciously affected by human wars, I submit that we are in the presence of techniques and mentalities similar (albeit in nascent ways) to ones valorized for their biocentric qualities by contemporary ecocritics such as Buell.

Animals in legal treatises

When it comes to policing knightly behavior or attitudes towards the nonhuman, a likely source to look for such precepts would be those texts and treatises written by the canonists and academic lawyers, or those written by professional knights in the form of chivalric handbooks. As scholars such as Maurice Keen have argued, these two types of texts dominated the collective endeavor to influence, discipline, and control by textual means the power of the military class.\footnote{57} Appealing to the chivalric class’s sense of themselves as Christian warriors in the service of the ultimate sovereign that is God, the academic lawyers accepted that war was justified according to both *jus divinum* (divine law) and *jus naturale* (natural law). However, that does not necessarily mean that these canonists perceived knights as the unimpeachable experts on how wars are to be fought and on what limitations should exist in warfare. Rather, by writing the treatises on war that they did, these authors tried to inject a healthy dose of Christian conscience into the actions of professional men-at-arms and into these warriors’ perception of their own profession. Arguably, the two most important texts by these academic lawyers were *L’Arbre des batailles* (hereafter referred to by its translated title, *The Tree of Battles*), by Honoré Bonet (sometimes spelled Bouvet), and *De bello, de represaliis et de duello* (hereafter, only *De bello*) by John of Legnano.\footnote{58} These two texts, and others that subsequently drew upon them, attempted to codify answers to such thorny issues as what sorts of wars can clergy support, what types of people are immune from conflicts, is fighting permissible on certain feast days, and so forth.

\footnote{57} See Maurice Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1965).

\footnote{58} It is widely agreed upon by scholars that Bonet’s work is heavily indebted to large sections of John of Legnano’s *De Bello*. See Coopland’s introduction in Honoré Bonet, *The Tree of Battles*, ed. and trans. G.W. Coopland (Liverpool: University Press, 1949), 25-36.
The other main body of texts responsible for articulating what constitutes, and what fails to constitute, acceptable behavior by knights were the chivalric handbooks that often were authored by other knights. Two of the most influential and widely translated of these were Ramón Lull’s *Llibre del l’orde de cavalleria* (henceforth referred to by Caxton’s translated title, *The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry*) and (amazingly, because she was neither a knight nor even a man) Christine de Pisan’s *Livre des faits d’armes et de chevalerie* (also translated by Caxton, as *The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye*). As Keen has demonstrated, in situations in which a knight has been accused of a breach of the chivalric code (i.e. the medieval “laws of war” as agreed upon by the international warrior class), often the knight’s “jury” was comprised of other knights because of the recognition that they understood the nuances of the chivalric code and its self-imposed restrictions better than anyone else.\(^{59}\) These texts authored by other knights (or in the case of Christine, by somebody whose mastery of the subject matter was obvious) were widely read and also most likely disseminated by means of oral discussion to illiterate knights, and therefore these texts must have had an immense influence over the conduct and attitude of knights. Because both the chivalric handbooks and the legal treatises were so well-known and widely translated, and because they seem to have had at least some influence over how knights regulated their own and other knight’s conduct, we will want to examine them for possible ways in which they tried to instruct knights on a need to show restraint towards the animals that are caught up in the din of war.

\(^{59}\) For an example of this trial by knights, see Keen, *Laws of War*, 34, and his discussion there of a case between Richard Le Scrope and “Carmynau de Cornwall” in which John of Gaunt assigned seven knights to give a ruling on the case.
When we turn our sights to the legal treatises on war, such as those written by John of Legnano and Honoré Bonet, we find a striking paucity of interest or concern for the animals affected by warfare. The works of these authors only seem to yield two perceptions of animals, and these occur in brief sections that comprise only a few pages at most of the overall treatises. In John of Legnano, the only discussion of animals we encounter in the entire treatise is during a brief analysis regarding a situation in which a person borrows “arma et equos” from another person and then these military accoutrements are lost (pendantur).\textsuperscript{60} Reminding his readers that the borrowed “objects” were used according to the terms in which they were lent (i.e. for military purposes), John proclaims that the lender is not entitled to compensation. The horse is here thoroughly objectified, and envisioned as on a par with other inanimate military equipment. The loss of both horse and equipment such as weaponry is perceived by John as the loss of mere expendable, and hence replaceable goods. Perhaps, given the deep immersion in the ideas of Augustine and Aquinas that a canon lawyer like John of Legnano would have received during his legal training, and an exposure to the emphasis placed upon rationality by those revered Christian philosophers, we cannot be surprised that his meditation on the death of animals would be discussed with such aloofness.

In addition to this discussion of horse-as-commodity in John of Legnano, the other perception of animals displayed in the two popular legal treatises under consideration is that of animal-as-mere-laborer which is to be found in Bonet’s \textit{Tree of Battles}. As was the case with John of Legnano, any discussion of possible issues raised

by an animal’s role in warfare is fleeting and rushed. Only borrowed horses killed in battle concerned John of Legnano; in addition to this problem, another type of animal will interest Bonet, and that is agricultural animals.

In Chapter CI of his *Tree of Battles*, Bonet bluntly refutes any notion of animals having inherent value, or a right to an existence free from the suffering or death caused by war. The only animals worthy of protection, be they ox, ass, camel, or buffalo, are those “privileged by reason of the work they do.” In fact, it is interesting that Bonet is as explicit as he is in asserting that some animals are brought into the sphere of legal protection from bodily harm because of the sole reason that they provide useful labor to humans. “[O]xen enjoy this privilege [of being protected during war],” Bonet emphatically clarifies, “only when they are performing this work, and since it is by reason of their work, *and not as oxen*, that they have this privilege.”

Curiously, we catch Bonet making an obvious effort here to negate the idea that an animal can be protected because of its status as an autonomous subject of a life, and, therefore, due to other criteria besides the sole one of its utility to humans. It is as if such ideas as animals being an “in-itself” and possessing inherent value, radical as such views would be for that time, were indeed floating around, and Bonet found it necessary to take explicit steps to ensure that his position was not to be confused with this other, more subversive one. As we shall see at the end of this chapter in our discussion of Lydgate’s *Debate*, as well as in our discussion in subsequent chapters of other Middle English texts,

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61 Bonet, *Tree of Battle*, 188.
I think we will find scenes involving animals in which the authors do seem to hold ideas—even if fleetingly—an idea to the one that animals might have the right to protection during human wars because they are subjects of their own lives.

Yet, I think we should not completely throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater in Bonet, and should realize that his argument for the protection of agricultural animals is an important statement of protection for animals. As we will see in more detail below in our discussion of Christine de Pisan, agricultural animals were a frequent target of medieval raids and of wars of attrition against an enemy. (And we will see that Christine herself is strikingly accepting of such use of animals as a military target.) Although Bonet values the agricultural animals purely for their instrumental value to the medieval economy and the livelihood of their noncombatant owners, it is still significant that the animals are brought into the sphere of legal protection no matter what the reason. The beginnings of most all moral sentiments often have undignified and unimpressive origins, but their value to an overall evolutionary schema of human morality should not be ignored.

In these codifications of legal precepts that were designed to guide a knight’s behavior out in the battlefield, we can see that there is no sustained interest in warfare’s widespread effects on animals. Most likely influenced by the relative indifference towards animals of revered Church philosophers such as Augustine and Aquinas, Bonet and John of Legano fail to have their interest overly piqued by potential ethical or legal cruxes raised by animal involvement in war. Taking the broad view of their treatises, we
can safely assert that they simply do not see animal death as a problem of any real significance. Or if they do, it is through the belief that animals merit discussion only when it is through the frame of animal-as-property or animal-as-laborer.

*Animals in chivalric treatises*

When we turn to a discussion of the chivalric handbooks, we find more interest in the involvement of animals in wars, albeit not in such a way that there is consistent agreement by the authors as to the implications of such involvement. Christine de Pisan, in her examination of chivalry quilted together from such previously existing texts as Vegetius’ *De re militari*, Valerius Maximus’ *Facta et dicta memorabiles*, and Bonet’s *Tree of Battles*, provides very detailed descriptions of the myriad ways the natural world (both plant and animal) has been and can be utilized by soldiers out in the field on campaign.63 One of Christine’s favorite narrative techniques in her *Book of Fayettes* is to make reference back to innovative and successful military strategies of famous classical generals, such as Julius Caesar or Hannibal.

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63 As Francoise Le Saux observes, Christine’s overall preference for pacifism has been discussed frequently in recent scholarship of Christine de Pisan’s oeuvre. See Le Saux, “War and Knighthood in Christine de Pizan’s *Livre des faits d’armes et de chevalerie*” in Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare, eds. Corinne Saunders, Francoise Le Saux, and Neil Thomas (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 93-105. See footnote 1 in her article for references to other scholarship discussing Christine’s pacifism. Despite what might be an overall penchant for peace, Le Saux points out that once a war can be perceived as “righteous,” then Christine embraces the tactics of war that are needed to win, even if she doesn’t glorify individual prowess to the extent that, say, someone like Froissart does. I take my cue from this argument, and assert that once Christine deems a war as “righteous” and therefore worthy of being fought, she jettisons any moral concern for the animals involved in war from her discussion of military violence. On Christine de Pisan and pacifism, see also Berenice A. Carroll, “On the Causes of War and the Quest for Peace: Christine de Pizan and Early Peace Theory,” in *Au Champ des escriptures. Ille Colloque international sur Christine de Pizan*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris: Champion, 2000), 337-58.
When we read Christine’s text for what it can teach us about attitudes towards animals during war, we might find the most startling moment to be when Christine very coolly and objectively describes a particular conflict between the Spaniards and Carthaginians during the Roman era. In order to break the formation of the Spaniards, the Carthaginians devised a way to turn common steer into devastating berserkers capable of over-running the enemy lines. After first tying a mixture of oil, pitch, wood, and fronds to the tails of the steer, the soldiers then ignited the mixture. “And whan the fyre was sette in to the sayd towre,” Christine tells us, “they chassed and droof hem fourth aynst the Cartagyens / the whyche oxen as full of rage entred and brake all theyre bataylles / and so was the said Amulcar dyscomfyted.” 64 What should stand out to the reader of this exemplum of military resourcefulness is Christine’s complete lack of censure of the Carthaginians. No indignation whatsoever colors her description of this use of animals as fiery torpedoes. It is as if, like the borrowing and losing of horses in John of Legano and Honoré Bonet, 65 Christine’s attitude towards a classical army’s practice of lighting a living animal on fire is one of complete acceptance of the idea that any nonhuman resources may be exploited in an attempt to wage righteous battle with an enemy. 66

65 Christine also discusses the issue of compensation for a borrowed horse that is killed in battle. See Section XII of Part III of her Book of Fayttes.
66 We will want to recall here that Christine is more than capable of articulating feelings of moral outrage at some aspects of military violence. For instance, she believes that poisoned weapons and “Greek fire” (a kind of proto-napalm incendiary weapon) are unacceptably cruel weapons, and thus should not be used in wars. Regarding the “Greek fire,” she calls for the recipe to make it to never be promulgated: “[I]t is not lycyte to noo crysten man,” she states, “to vse of noo suche inhumanites that namely be aienst all right of were.” Pisan, 184.
In fact, we should point out that Christine even went so far as to alter her source on this matter of using animals as improvised missiles. In Frontinus’ *Strategemata* he depicts the Spaniards not as lighting the actual animals on fire; rather, only the carts that have been hitched to them and that have been filled with flammable materials (*Hispani contra Hamilcarem boves vehiculis adiunctos in prima fonte constituerunt*). Why the discrepancy? It is difficult to say. Surely it is possible that Christine is not remembering the passage in Frontinus correctly, has erred in her own translation of it, or was using a corrupted text of Frontinus. We might, however, call to mind the fact that there were both textual and historical precedents for the burning of the animals themselves that could be sponsoring Christine’s revision of her source here. In Judges 15, there is an interesting precursor to the flaming-animal-as-weapon motif in the figure of Samson, who lights on fire three hundred foxes that have been tied together by the tails and sends them careering towards the crops of the Philistines, to the effect that “vineas quoque et oliveta flamma consumeret.” But in addition to the strategic capture of animals that I will be discussing below, were there incidents involving animals being set on fire during the Hundred Years War that could make this alteration by Christine of her source seem a little less arbitrary and fantastical? At least one chronicle provides the evidence for such

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68 Perhaps one reason Christine does not cite this specific example of Samson, and use it as a kind of biblical sanctioning for the types of deeds she depicts the Spaniards using against Hamilcar, is that commentaries on this passage do not always allegorize it favorably. For example, Peter Damian allegorizes the fox as representing heretics (“haereticos”), the flames as perverse doctrines (“ignem pravae doctrinae”), and the crops that are destroyed as the works of good men (“omnium bonorum operum”). Thus, even if Christine was aware of this biblical parallel to her own discussion of flaming animals used as weapons, it might have been risky to invoke it because of its negative treatment by biblical commentators. See the discussion by Peter Damian, see *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 145, chapter 11 of *Collectanea in Vetus Testamentum*. 

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an event taking place. Enguerrand de Monstrelet, in his continuation of Froissart’s chronicles, tells us that the Duke of Burgundy’s forces, while assaulting the town of Ham around 1411, perpetrated the following deeds:

They entered a monastery of the town, and took away all they could find, and carried to their tents many of both sexes, and children; and, on the morrow, having seized all they had, they set fire to several parts of the town, - and, to conclude all, the churches and houses, with many of the inhabitants, were burned, as well as a great quantity of cattle that had been driven thither as to a place of security.\(^{69}\)

I am not arguing that Christine knew of, and supported, specific incidents like this one, only that her overall sense of military strategy (as I will argue further below) strikes me as heavily imbued by a sense of the expendability of animals, and of animals existing as legitimate targets during war. Had it actually happened, I think Christine would not have greatly mourned Samson’s cruel use of the three hundred foxes.

Interestingly, Christine hardly makes any reference to contemporary uses of animals during war. But as mentioned above, she is quite fond of holding up examples from the classical world as models that demonstrate the uses to which animals can be put during warfare. In addition to steer, she also discusses practices devised by Hannibal, that cagey military strategist *par excellence*, involving elephants. Hannibal, who used elephants in much the same way medieval knights used horses (as both transportation and weapon), discovered, to his dismay, that elephants are exceedingly reluctant to ford streams because of a dislike for water. The solution that Hannibal devised for this

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\(^{69}\) Euguerrand de Monstrelet, *The Chronicles of Enguerrand de Monstrelet*, 2 vols., trans. Thomas Johnes (London, 1867). This quote is from vol. 1, p. 189, emphasis added. See also *Calendar of Close Rolls*, Edward III, 1346-1349, p.30. There we find an order for the taxers and collectors to desist in their collection of taxes from the county of Cumberland due to the fact that “several manors, towns, hamlets and places in the greater part of that county have been burned and totally destroyed with the corn, *animals*, and other goods therein, by hostile incursions of the king’s Scottish enemies, after Michaelmas last, wherefore they have nothing to cultivate their lands or maintain themselves” (emphasis added).
problem, Christine informs us, was to wound one of the elephants standing by the water in order to infuriate it to such an extent that it would swim across the river “for to be auenged” upon its tormentor. Once one elephant starts swimming across, it is said that “in lyke wyse all the other elephantes entred in to the ryuere after him.”

These discussions of elephants in Christine’s work seem awkwardly anachronistic. Why would an author who is adapting classical military handbooks and military histories for her own contemporary chivalric audience include such sections? She does not, for instance, include other facets of Vegetius’ text that would be inappropriate for a medieval context, such as Vegetius’ advice on the training of sling-throwers or on the use of sickle-bearing chariots. When Christine includes detailed discussions of certain facets of Roman military tactics it is often because she perceives a certain educational value for medieval audiences to reside in such discussions. For instance, Charity Cannon Willard points out that Christine’s discussions of Roman battle formations were, in fact, germane to the military situation in 15th century France. Willard notes: “There is special emphasis [in Christine’s Book of Faytes] on Roman organization and discipline, qualities too often lacking when medieval knights were striving above all for personal glory…It is noteworthy that, following Vegetius, she warns against the employment of an army too large for available space on the battlefield. This was, of course, a major cause of the French defeat at Agincourt some five years later.”

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70 Pisan, 109.
this relevance of Roman battle formations to 15\textsuperscript{th} century French military concerns, what then might be the connections we can draw between the wounding of elephants in antiquity and the use of animals in Christine’s own era?

Perhaps the lesson imbedded within this example of the intentionally wounded elephant for a contemporary audience of Christine’s work might be something like the following: during the chaos of a retreat on the battlefield, soldiers would often jump into the nearest river in order to escape the advancing enemy.\textsuperscript{72} Since animals such as horses have a natural aversion to water, we can surmise that a warrior often had to forsake his reluctant animal transportation at the banks of the river. Christine’s example of Hannibal and his elephants might be designed to educate a medieval chivalric audience on the ways in which these expensive animals can be coerced into accompanying their owners across the body of water.\textsuperscript{73} In addition to this potential problem of forcing horses to ford bodies of water during a chaotic retreat, Christine may also, in a general way, be instructing soldiers in an oblique way on how to use violence as a means for forcing obstinate animals to submit to the will of the knight while out on campaign, and to obediently traverse water under the more workaday circumstances of routine travel.\textsuperscript{74} In addition to the need to control horses, we must recall that medieval soldiers often found themselves

\textsuperscript{72} Michael Prestwich has this to say about the common occurrence of an army rushing into a river while retreating during battle: “It was normally during the rout that the bulk of casualties occurred. Drowning was a common form of death in the aftermath of battle, as those fleeing from the field attempted to cross rivers. Many of the Londoners routed by Prince Edward at Lewes were drowned in the Ouse, and after Evesham, a good many of Montfort’s infantry suffered a similar fate in the Avon…[I]t was noted that more were drowned in the Swale than were killed by the Scots at the battle of Myton in 1319.” Prestwich, \textit{Armies and Warfare}, 330.

\textsuperscript{73} For example, Monstrelet tells us that one John de Luxembourg “crossed the river Oise with a small number of men-at-arms which he had at Presy, in small boats, making their horses swim the river.” \textit{Chronicles}, vol. 1, 378.

\textsuperscript{74} See also Section X, Part I, of Christine’s \textit{Book}, where she mentions the Roman military’s reputed ability to teach horses and cattle loaded with supplies how to swim across bodies of water in order to bring provisions to a besieged fortress.
in situations in which they were attempting to coerce large herds of stolen agricultural animals to relocate themselves. It is to this possible context for Christine’s comments on the wounding of elephants that we now turn.

As has been sufficiently demonstrated by scholars, a hallmark of late medieval military strategy, and especially of the chevauchée tactics of the Scots upon the English in the former’s 14th century war of independence against the latter, and then, in turn, of the English upon the French during the Hundred Years War, were quick raids into enemy territory in order to plunder or destroy that enemy’s agricultural resources. In particular, animals such as cattle and sheep were often targeted during these chevauchée campaigns. Successfully entering an enemy’s territory and absconding with a large contingent of the citizenry’s livestock had manifold advantages: it psychologically terrorized an area’s inhabitants, making them feel vulnerable to attack at any moment; it embarrassed the king or other regional magnate who was revealed by such a raid to be unable to fulfill his solemn aristocratic role of defending his subjects from harm; and it deprived an enemy of essential resources needed to maintain a fighting spirit, while also replenishing the raiding army’s stores of essential animal products such as the meat required to feed a large army operating out in the field. The English, it is apparent, learned the value of sending mounted forces to commandeer the enemy’s livestock from some of their own humiliating encounters with the Scots during the 1320’s and 1330’s. H.J. Hewitt describes the effectiveness of Scottish raids upon livestock thus:

They [the Scots] would also round up cattle and sheep and drive them to suitable places for slaughter. Scottish forces raiding Northumberland, Cumberland and Durham almost invariably carried off cattle not solely for their immediate needs but also for the sustenance of their countrymen north of the border. Some indication of the extent of Scottish raiding may be seen in an official warning in 1345 that a Scottish invasion was imminent and that men of the northern counties should drive their cattle to the forests of Knaresborough and Galtres.  

And Walshingham, in a 1379 entry from his *Chronica maiora*, describes in the following way an attack by the Scots upon a pestilence-stricken English population: “Thinking they could do absolutely anything they liked, they [the Scots] roamed through the land, sacking towns, carrying off the wealth and driving before them animals and beasts of burden and even the very herds of pigs, although they were an animal which no Scots had ever tried to drive off before.” Walshingham withholds from us the explanation of why the Scots had never tried to drive off pigs before, but could it be because they were known to be a particularly uncooperative and unwieldy herd to make off with? If so, I would submit that Christine’s seemingly anachronistic inclusion of anecdotes involving military elephants might also be functioning as a general *exemplum* designed to assist soldiers who found themselves in a situation similar to the plundering Scots described by historians like Hewitt and chroniclers like Walsingham. In other words, Christine’s *exemplum* might be intended to instill within her audience a sense of indifference towards the practice of harming animals (be they elephants, horses or pigs) in order to make them submissive when it is advantageous to fighting men to do so. The relevance of the wounded elephant anecdote for a contemporary audience of Christine lies in the

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anecdote’s translatability to other chivalric instances in which a mastery over animals, and an indifference to their pain or discomfort is called for, as when forcing them to march against their will.

Up until now, we have not seen much evidence of pity for animals that are harmed by human warfare. Christine de Pisan represents a stance that is emphatically antithetical to any kind of commiseration for, or identification with, the animal like we will see below in a discussion of Lydgate’s *The Debate of the Horse, Goose, and Sheep*. For her, the animals of war are tantamount to the tools of war, and when they do not function like they are expected to, she exhibits no qualms against a violent coercion of the animal to make it “function correctly.”

As with Christine, Ramon Lull, in another widely circulated treatise on chivalry, *The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry*, examines the ways in which knights interact with animals through chivalric practices like hunting and warfare. However, unlike any of the legalistic or strictly chivalric texts considered above, we have in Lull a condemnation of killing animals during war which at first glance seems that it might arise out of a moral sense on Lull’s part that there are moments when certain components of the natural world do fall within protective boundaries that regulate what a knight may rightfully harm or kill. We are advised by Lull:

> Themn as þe knyghtis for to manten þer officis bene so moche prayced & alowyd þat þai be lordis of townys, castellis and cities, & of moche peple, gif þen of moche people / yf theynne they entende to destroye Castellys Cytees and Townes / Brenne howses / Hewe doune trees / slee beestes / and robbe in the hyhe wayes were the offycye of chyualrye / hit shold be disordynaunce to Chyualrye.78

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Unlike what we saw in Honeré Bonet, Lull does not qualify his prohibition on killing animals with a stern reminder that it is only because of their value to humans as a labor force or as a food product that animals are assigned the ethical status which awards them freedom from death. However, we need to take notice of the immediate surroundings in which Lull’s condemnation of hewing down trees and slaying beasts takes place. Lull’s remarks on the harm wrought upon nature by warfare would have resounded much more stringently if it had occurred in a list of prohibitions against (say) murdering ecclesiastics or raping women. However, it does not. Rather, it is bracketed by references to crimes against property (destroying castles, cities or towns) and to crimes of robbery against people. The nature of this list certainly alerts us to the fact that Lull does not see the deliberate harm done to the natural world as on a par with violent crimes against humanity.

But neither does he perceive such acts of violence to be so insignificant that they do not merit mentioning at all. Ethical sensibilities have histories and evolve out of what might at first glance appear to be inconsequential statements and ideas, but such statements and ideas are often the vital matrix for bold new ways of viewing a subject that formerly had been exiled from any and all ethical considerations. Although we know that the devastation of the land was a popular way for marauding armies to intimidate and weaken an enemy in the Middle Ages (especially during the Hundred Years War), in the above quote Lull sees such violence against the natural world as, at its core, conduct unbecoming for a knight. This strikes me as a significant moral improvement over Christine de Pisan’s text. As we saw above in our discussion of Christine, her detached descriptions of violence against animals in the classical world strongly suggest that she
sanctions almost any treatment of animals during war, even the annihilation of them in a war of attrition against the enemy. Thus, we might be tempted to see Lull functioning in the above passage as a kind of counterbalance to Christine’s indifference to animal suffering and death.

But there is a passage in Lull we need to take note of that appears only a few pages before the one referred to above in which we see him explicitly condemning the practice of “slaying beasts.” Like most knights, Lull suggests that a primary value of hunting is that it assists a knight in polishing his combat skills when not at war. Lull reminds his audience:

Knightes ought to take coursers to juste & to go to tornoyes / to holde open table / to hûte at hertes / at bores & other wyld bestes / For in doynge these thynges the knychtes excercyse them to armes / for to mayntene thordre of knighthode.\(^7\)

There seems to be an unresolvable tension here in Lull. In the above passage he offers the commonplace advice for knights to hunt animals in order to develop riding skills and skills with weapons. However, only a few pages later, in that first passage from Lull that we looked at above, he tries to implant in the minds of his readers (most likely other knights) a perception of animals that would function to curtail knightly violence against them. He tries to qualify his earlier support of hunting with a warning that animals in certain contexts (such as non-hunting ones) are not acceptable victims of a violent discharge of chivalric vigor.

What manifests itself in a consideration of these two passages from Lull is chivalry’s built-in failure mechanism for seeing animals as anything more than moving targets useful for developing martial skills. Lull attempts to organize a schema that

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\(^7\) Lull, *Book of the Ordo*, 31.
places certain animals in a “permissible to kill” category and others animals (or even the same ones perhaps, but at different times or in different circumstances) in an “impermissible to kill” category. This tidy classification scheme surely would have been greatly muddled or even rendered invisible in a knight’s world of praxis. Having it drummed into one’s head that it is advantageous to hunt and kill animals in order to keep one’s prowess sharp and at the ready must have only made it that much more difficult to refrain from the wanton killing of animals when confronted by them in the field of battle, while traveling, or in most any other non-hunting situations.

We might recall here that another purpose of hunting animals, in addition to that of polishing one’s martial skills, was to help warriors become desensitized to not only the gore, suffering and death of animals, but also, by extension, to that of humans during battle. In a 15th century short poem called “A Squire’s Training,” the speaker inform us: “At fourtene yere they [the squires] shalle to felde I sure,/ At hunte the dere, and catch an hardynesse./ For dere to hunte and slea, and se them blede,/ Ane hardyment gyffith to his corage.” These lines strongly suggest that a knight’s ability to callously and unflinchingly kill animals such as deer was not intended to limit that ability for violence upon any one species; rather, hunting deer was intended to make the sight of any bleeding animal, be it human or nonhuman, a catalyst for as little compunction as possible. If everything went according to the design laid out in “A Squire’s Training,” the design...
whereby a knight becomes immune from any sense of shock or guilt upon seeing a bleeding animal, then we can sense how hollow Lull’s condemnation of violence upon animals might sound in a work that also expresses conventional praise for hunting.\footnote{Perhaps it is this idea that chivalric hunting always threatens to slide into a catalyst for wider displays of violence (either against other animals or against humans) that sponsors, at least in part, the scene in Passus VI of Langland’s \textit{Piers Plowman} in which Piers tells the knight to “go hunte hardiliche to hares and to foxes, / To bores and to [bukkes] hast breken myne hegges, / And [fette þe hoom] faucons foweles to kille / For [þise] comæ to my croft and croppæ my whete.” In these lines we glimpse an interesting restraint being put on the immensely popular chivalric pursuit of hunting. The hunting that is typically referred to in medieval texts as a valuable practice of martial skills or as a chivalric form of relaxation is reconfigured here by Langland in uniquely utilitarian terms. This is the only passage I know of in Middle English literature in which hunting by the upper classes is valued as a means of protecting an already existing food supply, rather than being valued as a highly ritualistic performance in which to discharge martial power. Unlike Lull, it seems Langland is aware of a cluster of problems that exists around chivalric hunting, one of which might be the use of hunting in order to acclimate knights to the sights and sounds of slaughter, for such violence threatens to expand its boundaries and to encompass new targets. Langland is here not totally negating any use-value for hunting, of course, but he is envisioning it having a much more non-militaristic, pragmatic function. See William Langland, \textit{Piers Plowman: The B Version}, ed. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson. Rev. ed. (London: Athlone Press, 1988), B.6.29-32.}

Permit me to make one further point regarding this tension in Lull, a tension that arises in that text because animal death is both glorified during hunting but also condemned during battlefield pillaging. I wish to make my point by drawing an analogy to a position in which some late medieval English or Continental knights might have found themselves. It is as if the animals deemed suitable for hunting in his treatise are analogous to the Saracens that pious knights were encouraged to seek out while on Crusade and kill because of their intolerable Muslim Otherness. Often, after having been told it is acceptable to kill certain types of human Otherness, the Christian knights of the medieval era looked around them and saw that embodiments of Otherness in the form of

and doo / The blake beer / and þe wilde Roo, / The fatte swyn / and þe tusshy boor” (lines 3595-97) being slaughtered, we are told that: “With þis kalenis [this hunting as a beginning], / as hem thanke dwe, / Grekys gan / the thebans to Salwe, / Mynistir hem / occasiones felle” (lines 3601-03). Lydgate has here envisioned an incident in which a bloodlust fueled by hunting animals turns into a frenzied urge to kill other things that bleed, such as, in this case, humans. Rather than a strategy for containing violence against animals or humans, hunting (as Lydgate here implies) can instead become a practice that incites warriors to become desensitized to death and to desire meting it out on a grander scale than a mere afternoon’s hunt can allow. Citations are from John Lydgate, \textit{Siege of Thebes}, eds. Axel Erdmann and Eilert Ekwall, 2 vol. (London: EETS, 1930).
Jews existed much more closely than the distant Saracens, so why not eradicate this Jewish Otherness first? A similar psychological event might have occurred in a knight’s mind with regards to animals. If knights are encouraged to kill certain animals during a hunt, they probably carried this cultural sanction to kill animals and to see them as expendable Otherness into enemy territory and onto the battlefield.

Although Lull tries to implode the animal/human binary by attempting to introduce a more nuanced stratification into the medieval monolithic category of “beast,” his chivalric handbook draws boundaries and sets up lines of demarcation around animals that most knights, I believe, ultimately would have ignored or found useless. Lull’s text, at the level of discourse at least, is an advancement over Christine de Pisan’s reluctance to bring any animals into the ethically protected sphere. However, as we saw with Bonet, the emphasis in Lull’s prohibition against harming trees and animals seems to be grounded mainly in property rights, and not out of a sense that animals are personal holders of an inherent right to be unaffected by war’s violence in a way that (say) a child,

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83 I am referring here, of course, to the infamous pogroms against Jews in the Middle Ages, such as those that took place at Mainz and Cologne during the Popular Crusade. See The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades, ed. and trans. Shlomo Eidelberg (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1977). For a discussion of the late medieval tendency to collapse Muslim and Jewish alterity into one monolithic category of Otherness, see Geraldine Heng, “The Romance of England: Richard Coer de Lyon, Saracens, Jews, and the Politics of Race and Nation,” in The Postcolonial Middle Ages, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 135-171. As evidence for the medieval collapsing of Jewish/Muslim difference, Heng refers to Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council, which “imagined co-identity of Christendom’s enemies” and which “assign[ed] a distinction in clothing to mark off Jews and Saracens alike, collectively and together, from Christians, as if the two infidel nations were halves of a single body of aliens” (145). Heng also draws our attention to the moment in Richard Coer de Lyon in which Richard, out on Crusade, is fed Saracen flesh when no pork is available. After learning of the substitution, Richard announces that Saracens will be eaten from now on because they are so delectable. This moment in Richard seems to further corroborate my point that all forms of Otherness threaten to collapse into one another, be they Muslim, Jew, agricultural animal, or animal deemed suitable for hunting.
clergyman, or woman might be. But most significantly, I think we must recognize that Lull’s explicit endorsement of chivalric hunting greatly complicates his desire to curtail the practice of certain forms of chivalric violence against animals.

*War’s manifold (ab)uses of the animal*

Leaving behind the genres of chivalric treatise and laws of war, I wish to turn now to poetry. Upon doing so, we will see that the ostensible experts on military violence – the knights themselves and the legal scholars – can by no means be said to have represented a monolithic medieval viewpoint on the ethical conundrums (or lack thereof) which might arise during interactions between human warfare and the nonhuman world. Taking the time to look at John Lydgate’s *The Debate of the Horse, Goose, and Sheep* will greatly assist us in seeing how much more expansive and nuanced the medieval poets’ investigations of the complex issue of warfare’s entanglement in the lives of nonhuman entities can be. Lydgate’s 659-line quarrel among three animals, a quarrel attempting to establish “[w]hich of these thre to euerly creatur/ In re pulpica availeth most to man” (33-34), directly addresses several of the essential roles animals are forced to play in the military violence of the late Middle Ages, and the degree to which Lydgate invites us to sympathize with some of his animal-speakers will likely surprise us.

Criticism on Lydgate, being relatively sparse in and of itself, has not spilled much ink on this particular poem. Alain Renoir’s *The Poetry of John Lydgate* spends hardly a complete page on the *Debate*, and succinctly concludes that the point of the poem is to allow Lydgate to “suggest the superiority of England over the rest of the world.”

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Pearsall, in his *John Lydgate*, is not much more enthusiastic about the poem. He sums up his analysis of it by asserting that the “argument is really tangled,” and that the deeper meaning of the poem seems to be: “each animal has its place…[.] All is for the best, and nature’s plan accommodates all kinds of variety and contradiction.” A much more recent work dealing with the subject of Lydgate’s fables, Edward Wheatley’s *Mastering Aesop*, spares not a word about this particular fable. Only one essay exists that examines the *Debate* in depth, and that takes it seriously as a poem worthy of aesthetic and political analysis.

Although both Renoir and Pearsall observe in their comments on the poem that Lydgate does highlight a connection between animals and warfare, neither of them (as their banal conclusions about the poem demonstrate) go into any detail about what this poem might mean to a larger discussion of ethically charged reactions by a late medieval writer to the use of animal resources by means of the processes of war. It is just such issues of the ethics of using animals during war that I wish to take up here in my analysis of the poem. Despite the fact that Lydgate seems to begin his poem by accepting the suffering and death to which warfare subjects many animals, by the end, I will argue, he has imploded this initial façade. Where most other medieval authors would only see inert, insensate beasts, or only abstract numbers on a page, the momentum of Lydgate’s *Debate* leads him to begin to articulate a view of the animals harmed by wars as being pitiful and forlorn, and thus as sympathetic victims of human aggression and violence.

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What should be noted right way about Lydgate’s *Debate* is his reluctance to allow his animal characters to slip behind any kind of screen of allegorical signification or to become mere stand-ins for humans. In many medieval fables and talking-animal poems, the animality of nonhuman characters threatens to become eclipsed by a primary use of the animal character as an embodiment of human foibles, or by the animal character’s performance within a coded critique of human social and political issues. We might compare Lydgate’s overall fidelity to the animality of his speakers with (say) Chaucer’s *The Squire’s Tale*, where reference is made in that latter poem to a male falcon falling “on his knees” (line 544) before his lover, and to the female falcon taking the male one “by the hond” (line 596).\(^{\text{87}}\) Besides the obvious fantastical element of possessing the power of human speech, Lydgate does not allow his animals to refrain from signifying actual, flesh-and-blood animals throughout the poem; rather, he forces his readers to keep in their minds the literal acts of fragmentation and exploitation of the animal through human warfare. Animal parts, from the horse’s saddled back, to a goose’s feathers, to a sheep’s wool, are the indispensable “raw materials” that allow medieval wars to be waged, every bit as much as tangible human elements such as a knight’s sword, or intangible ones such as a king’s valor or cunning, do.

As I hope to show in my analysis of the poem, Lydgate’s awareness of the myriad uses of animals during war seems inflected by certain pacifist values that are increasingly manifest as the debate proceeds, but that make their presence known almost immediately in the *Debate*. In the first stanza of the poem, the narrator valorizes the judicial “costom of antiquyte,” one in which “luges wer sett that hadde author[i]te, / The

cas conceived stondyng indifferent, / Attween parties to yeue a iugement” (lines 5-7). Even though some statements the animals make in the poem will be heavily invested in celebrating the contributions of animals to warfare, such praise must always be tempered and read against the backdrop of the poem’s overall context. These animals have not resorted to violence to resolve their quarrel; rather, they have shown faith in the fairness of the legal system, and our narrator himself legitimates this decision by calling attention to the impartiality and authority of the judges. Lydgate invites his readers to remember that the animal suffering we will soon read about in the rest of the poem must be considered in connection with the awareness that “[c]ontroueries” and “discordis / Attween persones” can always be resolved through the mediation of a nonviolent legal system. It is a lesson that perhaps Lydgate and many others wished the kings of England and France would have learned long ago in their seemingly interminable military disputes over the sovereignty of certain French territories and over the French throne.

The Horse, as a representative of the revered institution of chivalry, takes upon himself the privileged position of first speaker (perhaps in a Lydgatian nod to the Knight in The Canterbury Tales). Significantly, the horse’s opening salvo in the debate is his reminder to the Goose and the Sheep that the horse is “savacion to many a worthi knyht” (42), and thus, in an argument reminiscent of Cohen’s discussed above, the horse asserts that the horse-knight partnership is crucial to the identity of both the man and animal involved. However, the poem begins at this point to project onto the animals a suspicious assumption about their mental lives: that they positively love being the

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88 The Horse even reminds his audience that the knight and horse are intimately linked at the level of etymology. See stanza 9, which begins with the Horse stating: “Eques, ab ‘equo,’ is seid of verray riht./ And cheualer is saide of cheualrye/ In Duche, a rudder is a knyght” (57-59).
servants (even unto death) of their human guardians and owners. The Horse even asserts that members of his species “wole weep for his mastir sake” (75), in what I take is imagined as the horse’s admirable reaction to its rider being killed in battle (although we are not explicitly told that this is the context for the horse’s weeping). Thus, at this early stage of the poem, Lydgate has set up an interesting problem surrounding the animal. Although it is significant that we are provided in the Debate with representations of animals possessing subjectivities filled with emotions like desire, self-worth, and sociality, it is problematic that this representation also gives us this image of an animal that prides himself on being indentured to humans more than he craves autonomy and the freedom to pursue his own biological interests. The horse weeping over its dead rider is surely a crucial element of the larger cultural fantasy that would allow people to hitch horses to plows or ride them into ferocious battles without any troubling of the ethical waters for the humans who extract such involuntary labor from them.

Lest any of the Horse’s audience remain unconvinced that he is the most useful to humans, the Horse then proceeds to refer his listeners to the textual evidence within chronicles of how invaluable horses are to knights: “Hors in cronyclis, wo-so looke a-riht, / Hav be savacion to many a worthi knyht” (lines 41-42). But then an interesting sleight-of-hand occurs in the poem. Rather than give us any grisly examples of how many horses did indeed perish during medieval battles, the Horse garnishes his speech only with references to idealized horses from the romance tradition (lines 43-56). We

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89 I am reminded here of the curious and widespread habit in our own culture of depicting in (say) restaurant advertisements the very same animals from whom a meat product originates as also being the proud and smiling bearer of that meat (usually in the form of a waiter or a chef) to its human consumers. That is, it seems that a useful way for people to avoid thinking about the ethical dilemmas raised by subjugating animals through so many facets of our lives is simply to envision them as being joyous and selfless participants when involved in such things.
hear nothing about any famous horses of historical combatants of (say) the Hundred Years War (probably because there really weren’t any); we only hear about how horses have come to the aid of literary icons such as Alexander the Great, Hector, and Perseus.

What strikes me as so interesting about this use of “cherry-picked” examples from idealized horses’ lives on the part of Lydgate and his Horse is the way that the indulgent use of such examples from literary romance allows the Horse to marginalize the much more disturbing and graphic references to the large-scale battlefield deaths of horses that are commonplace in the writings such as those of many medieval chroniclers. Despite the Horse’s reference to “cronyclis” as his evidence for how valued horses are by their warrior-owners, there simply is not really anything in such texts like the narrative focus upon the martial deeds of equines that we find in extended literary descriptions of horses such as Alexander’s Bucephalus. As my discussion below of the chronicle written by Sir Thomas Gray will reveal, the era of the Hundred Years War did indeed involve an immense loss of life on the part of horses, and we must therefore acknowledge that the lives of the great majority of medieval warhorses were nowhere near as full of splendor and individualized attention as the romance tradition makes them out to be.

When we consider the changes that warfare was undergoing in the 14th and 15th centuries, it is not surprising that the Horse chooses to repress historical reality. As Clifford J. Rogers has persuasively argued, the “military revolutions” of late medieval warfare, as opposed to warfare of the Early- or High Middle Ages, were making military conflicts increasingly brutal and deadly.90 Because more and more commoners were

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90 The use of the term “military revolution” is one that has stirred up quite a bit of debate. Medieval military historians and early modern military historians are prone to quarrel with one another over exactly when in history the most radical transformations of armies, tactics, and weaponry have taken place. The
filling the ranks of battlefield armies, the rights to be ransomed that members of the nobility often extended to each other were having less of a presence on the battlefield, and thus a preference for capturing soldiers alive as opposed to killing them was on the wane. Replacing the transnational code of chivalric brotherhood was a fervent social antagonism, and one in which “the class differences between knight and bourgeois or peasant often encouraged extreme bloodthirstiness.”91 Also, add to this the distance and therefore relative imprecision involved in an army’s increasing reliance on heavy archery fire to vanquish an enemy, and we get more of a sense of how increased battlefield mortality could define the battles of the Hundred Years War. The horses on the field were, of course, not immune from these increased levels of aggression.

In Thomas Gray’s Scalacronica, a chronicle largely concerned with the Scottish wars of independence against the English, as well as with the opening stages of Anglo-French conflict for the crown of France, we encounter several examples of the specific ways horses were endangered by battle, and even specifically targeted during it. During one particular Anglo-Scottish battle, the English find themselves corralled by the much-

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91 Rogers, “Military Revolutions,” 256.
feared Scottish formation called a *schiltrom*, and it was by means of this formation that the Scots were able to attack “the English battles [i.e. their formations], which were crushed together so that they could not move against them, whilst their horses were being disemboweled by spears.” And at the battle of Limalonges, the English infantry set out to reduce their mounted adversaries to an equally dismounted contingent by slaughtering the horses out from underneath them: “[the French slipped] so close by the ranks of the English…that every Englishman who wished to, struck a horse dead with his lance, the French being thrown from their saddles to the ground.” And in addition to death by spear or lance, Gray informs us that merely being abandoned in a desolate land during inclement weather could, and did, kill many horses: “The weather was so tremendously bad, with rain, hail and snow, and such was the cold, that many weakened squires and horses died in the field, and many carts and pack horses were abandoned in the misfortune of the worst weather.”

Horses, in fact, were often the first ones to suffer from starvation during a campaign. Whereas soldiers were often fed both by living off the resources of the land as well as by means of supply carts traveling with the army, horses were often fed solely off the fodder that could be acquired from the villages that were overrun or from the seasonal lushness of the surrounding vegetation. Given the fact that many marches were

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92 The *schiltrom* has at times been described as resembling a “hedgehog-like” formation. The Scottish spearmen would stand shoulder to shoulder and move as one homogenous mass, thus making themselves into an impenetrable wall of spikes that the English cavalry might want to think twice about attacking.


96 See Yuval Noah Harari, “Strategy and Supply in Fourteenth-Century Western European Invasion Campaigns,” *Journal of Military History* 64:2 (2000), 297-333, esp. 318-22. Harari argues that most every late medieval military commander would have understood that a horse carrying its own food supplies
conducted in the dead of winter, such as Edward III’s 1359-60 one from Calais to
Rheims, and that often a defending city’s strategy for weakening an advancing enemy
was a scorched-earth policy that entailed the burning of everything of use to an enemy
army as it approached the city, it was often simply impossible to find enough fodder to
stave off starvation for many of the horses, especially during protracted siege campaigns.

In addition to being cut down on the battlefield, transportation of horses to the
Continent via cargo ships was an extremely stressful and treacherous endeavor for horses,
and one that called for endless ingenuity on the part of armies attempting to safely move
large numbers of horses across the Channel.\(^{97}\) In one brief chronicle passage, for
example, we are told how Edward III’s army suffered the following tragedy in 1343: “rex
ad terram applicuit, et in illa tempestate perdidit 24 naves, homines 300 et equos 200.”\(^{98}\)
And Thomas Walsingham, in his narration of Sir John Arundel’s shipwreck, informs us
that in addition to losing his life and “all his belongings and all his wardrobe, which in its
splendor was fit to be ranked above that of a king,” Sir John also lost “his horses and his
warhorses…[.]And also twenty-five other ships of his fleet met a similar fate and were
lost with men, horses, and other valuables.”\(^{99}\) Such numbers illustrate that the service to
which horses were put by the warrior class was, to perhaps understate things a bit, an
exceedingly hazardous and life-threatening one. It seems the Horse of Lydgate’s poem

\(^{97}\) For a brief discussion of the numbers of horses killed during certain types of military operations, see
Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), 72-74. Much of this paragraph
is indebted to the discussion by Ayton on these pages.

\(^{98}\) *Chronicon Monasterii de Melsa*, ed. E.A. Bonds, 3 vols, Roll Ser. (London, 1866-68), iii.52.

\(^{99}\) Walsingham, *Chronica maiora*, 100-01.
would rather believe the lives of warhorses are more often spent helping their riders “tascape many sharp[e] shours” (46) or “[make] the Grekis flee” (53).

The Horse, in short, represents Lydgate at his most commonplace and predictable with regards to his attitude towards animals. Rather than encountering any sense of indignation over the loss of life to which many medieval warhorses were routinely subjected, we only get Lydgate’s fantasizing about the perfectly grateful and obliging animal, an animal so enamored of his dependence upon his human master that he will weep when that relationship comes to an unexpected end. Sponsored by the plots and images of medieval romance, and that genre’s frequent glorification (and hence sanitization) of the brutal realities of warfare, the representation of the Horse remains curiously untouched by the knowledge that he and others of his species are likely fated to die the anonymous deaths that lurk behind the chroniclers’ succinct references to incidents in which hundreds of horses perished. Lydgate’s Horse sounds as if he believes that he too would be compensated in death by having his name memorialized in a way similar to fictional horses such as Alexander’s Bucephalus or Perseus’ Pegasus. However, although Lydgate’s Horse might lead us to believe that the entire poem will be interested primarily in the peddling of varnished representations of medieval animals’ lives, when we move on to other speakers in the debate, we see that Lydgate’s quietism towards the use of animals during war is much more unstable than it initially appears.

The Goose, who is the next to speak in the debate, knows he can not surpass the Horse as far as his direct, useful, bodily presence in human warfare goes. Still, the Goose knows the importance humans place on military conflict at this time, so he knows that if he is to stand any chance of winning the debate, he has to prove that humans rely on him
in some way too during warfare. Shrewdly, the Goose makes reference to the importance that medieval archers were accruing on the battlefield throughout the later Middle Ages, an importance that had major consequences for the cultural and military dominance that the mounted knight hitherto then enjoyed.\(^{100}\) The Goose argues that he is most revered by humans because they cherish his feathers for the manufacturing of arrows. Therefore, because archers have come to play such an essential role in medieval armies, he must be a more favored animal than both the Horse and Sheep. The Goose argues:

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\text{Th[r]ough al the lond of Brutis Albion,} \\
\text{For fetherid arwes (as I reherse can)} \\
\text{Goos is the best (as in comparison,) } \\
\text{Except fetheris of Pekok or of Swan:} \\
\text{Bi bowe & arwis sith the werr began,} \\
\text{Have Ynglyssmen, as it is red in story,} \\
\text{On her enmyes had many gret victory (211-217).}
\]

When we consider the staggering numbers of arrows that were stockpiled and used during a conflict such as the Hundred Years War, we can appreciate more fully the Goose’s claim that a part of his body that is utilized during war plays an integral role.

Christopher Allmand informs us:

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[1]\text{In the reign of Edward III, the Keeper of the King’s Arms had his base [at the Tower of London] from which he organised the work of purchasing, storing, and finally distributing arms to armies, garrisons, and ships. In 1360, the store held over 11,000 bows and some 23,600 sheaves, each holding twenty-four arrows. By 1381 there were less than 1,000}
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\(^{100}\) The literature on the significance of late medieval archery is vast. The following sources have proved invaluable to me. For a discussion of the significance and increasing numbers of archers (both mounted and on foot) within medieval English armies, see Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, 129-136. For an overview of the history and development of medieval archery, see Jim Bradbury, *The Medieval Archer* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1985). For a lively debate about the efficacy of English archery power during the Hundred Years War, see Kelly DeVries, “Catapults Are Not Atom Bombs,” *War in History* IV (1997), 454-70, which prompted a response by Clifford J. Rogers entitled “The Efficacy of the English Longbow: A Reply to Kelly DeVries,” *War in History* V (1998), 233-42.
sheaves, an indication of the need for constant replenishment of stock, above all in time of war.¹⁰¹

And a little closer to the writing of Lydgate’s *Debate*, we find that Henry VI issued on March 17th, 1435, a commission to William Crane, “citizen and ‘flecker’ of London,” to procure enough materials and labor to manufacture 4,000 sheaves of arrows (or roughly 96,000 arrows).¹⁰² Such staggering numbers of arrows being built, stored, and depleted support Lydgate’s careful analysis of the myriad ways animals were viewed as endless suppliers of the transportation, power, and natural resources required to win a war. In fact, I would like to pause here and consider just how astute Lydgate’s awareness is of the ways that the proto-industry of bow and arrow manufacturing, which the ascendancy of English archery gave rise to, could not help but draw upon vast resources of avian bodies. The bow and arrow, I hope to show, can serve as a powerful microcosm of the extensive networks that connect living animals with the goals and needs of late medieval armies in the field.¹⁰³

Let us look at the element of archery that the Goose directly connects up with the bodies of animals: feathers for the fletchings at the base of the arrow shaft. As the quote provided above from Christopher Allmand proves, stockpiles of arrows were required during the Hundred Years War on a grandiose scale. But where did the many feathers that

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¹⁰² Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry VI, 1429-36, 607.

were needed for so many arrows come from? The sheriffs of England were frequently ordered, often on behalf of the king’s artilleri (attiliator) in the Tower of London, to seek out and purchase large quantities of already manufactured bows and arrows; yet, when such prefabricated goods were scarce or impossible to find, the sheriffs were then authorized to “buy wood for bows and arrows, feathers to wing the arrows with, and iron and steel for their heads as may be required, [and] to hire makers so as to have them ready as soon as possible.” In 1417, after the devastating efficacy of English archery had again been established on the battlefield of Agincourt, and in a fascinating intersection of governmental bureaucracy and animal bodies, Henry V ordered his sheriffs to spread out across the realm and to collect six wing feathers from every goose. The urgency surrounding this mass collection of the raw materials needed for bows and arrows during the war is exemplified in the following stringent order from 1435: “Commission to Philip Parker, ‘bowyer,’ to provide 2,000 bows or wood, if required, to make bows until that number is complete…with power to arrest and set to work the necessary ‘bowyers,’ and other workmen, artificers, and labourers.” Thus, this entry from the Patent Rolls shows us, not only how animal bodies, but also how human bodies are forcefully appropriated into the medieval war machine through the tactical significance of archery. Surely, the Goose in Lydgate’s Debate is being anything

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104 Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward III, 1338-40, 124-25. Similar records of the royal need to seek out the raw materials (and labor) needed for bow and arrow manufacture are found in the following entries of the Patent Rolls: August 14th, 1360; June 20th, 1362; April 26th, 1369; June 13th, 1385; February 4th, 1396; February 28, 1430; and March 17th, 1435.

105 Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry V, 1413-19, 336.

106 Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry VI, 1429-36, p. 607 (emphasis added). We also see similar orders for the conscription of fletchers and other weapons makers in two entries from 1430. See the February 24th and April 18th entries in Cal.Pat.Rolls, Henry VI, 1429-39, 43-44.
but hyperbolic when he asserts that feathers (along with the other raw materials of bow and arrow production gathered from the natural world) are exceedingly coveted by humans.

The various entries from the Rolls often specify that the sheriffs’ task is one of seeking out and acquiring goose feathers. But as Lydgate’s own Goose points out, this specific type of feather was not universally privileged over those of other types of birds. The Goose claims his type of feathers is the best, “Except [for] fetheris of Pekok or of Swan” (214). I know of no other references outside of this one to swan feathers being used to fletch medieval arrows, but peacock ones certainly seem to have been a preference for some archers and bowyers.107 Geoffrey Chaucer, a poet whose first-hand experience of military practices is well known, provides us with the following detail regarding his Yeoman in the General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales: “A sheef of pecok arwes, bright and kene, / Under his belt he bar ful thriftyly” (lines 104-5).108

Peacocks, of course, come primarily from what today we refer to as the Asian countries of India and Java, and therefore were never native to England in the Middle Ages, but there is ample evidence to suggest that they were raised in abundance to provide some of the lavish cuisine served at royal manors. In a 1249 entry of the Close Rolls of Henry III,

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107 If we extend our mode of inquiry to encompass not only the armies of the European Middle Ages, but also those of the Middle East, we find there is evidence to suggest that Muslim archers were often partial to vulture and eagle feathers. This opens up a whole new set of problems related to exactly how the feathers were acquired, since vultures and eagles are obviously much more elusive birds than regulated populations of geese or peacocks would be. See J.D. Latham and W.F. Paterson, Saracen Archery: An English Version and Exposition of a Mameluke Work on Archery, ca. A.D. 1368 (London: Holland Press, 1970), esp. pages 26-27, 31-32.

108 For a discussion of other sources which demonstrate that Chaucer’s decision to have his archer-yeoman equipped with peacock-fletched arrows is intended non-ironically (that is, intended as a symbol of the Yeoman’s mastery of his trade and his serious commitment to its responsibilities), see the discussion of the Yeoman’s portrait in Kenneth J. Thompson, “Chaucer’s Warrior Bowman: The Roles and Equipment of the Knight’s Yeoman,” Chaucer Review 40:4 (2006), 396. See especially footnote 54 in that article. Also see George A. Test, “Archers’ Feathers in Chaucer and Ascham,” American Notes and Queries 2 (1964), 67-8.
we find several commands for “xij. pavones” and “x. pavonibus” to be sent along with other foodstuffs to provision various manors throughout the realm.\(^{109}\) Along with the use of peacocks as ostentatiously colorful status symbols and as a meat source for the aristocracy, we must also recognize how the use of their feathers for fletchings must have contributed to the continuous integration of this non-native species into England. But as both Kenneth J. Thompson and George A. Test point out, a renowned authority on archery such as Roger Ascham in his *Toxophilus* (1545) maligns peacock-fletched feathers for such faults as “seldome [keeping] vp ye shaft eyther ryght or leuel” and for being “so roughe and heuy.”\(^{110}\)

Goose feathers, for obvious reasons of convenience (and therefore for economic reasons as well), were by and large the feather of choice for people like the fletchers who, due to the staggering quantities of arrows and feathers they were ordered to make, had to give more considerations to issues of practicality and availability, as opposed to issues of refined taste such as the peacock-fletched feathers might embody. Although the details of the exact process of how the feathers moved from the body of the animal into the possession of the sheriffs or fletchers is obscure in most all of the records (e.g. were they most often plucked directly from the animal, or gathered from off the ground?), Lydgate has his Goose inform his audience: “Fethers of goos whan thei falle or mout, / To gadre hem vp heerdis hem delite, / Selle hem to fletchers, the grey with the whihte” (lines 180-82). This scenario provided by the Goose suggests that the military appropriation of feathers might be conceived as an action more along the lines of picking up someone’s


discarded trash than as an invasive procedure that caused any kind of mental or physical travail to the animal itself. But I would suggest that the view the Goose has of himself as a generous supplier of not only feathers, but also salubrious greases (stanza 26) and delectable meats (stanza 30), is one that contributes to the view that humans often have of animals and of the natural world in general: as a perennial resource to supply and fuel human enterprises.

Up to this point, it might sound like Lydgate is complicit, in problematic ways, in a cultural project of representing his animals as enamored of their roles as perpetual servants to, and suppliers for, humans. That is, when Lydgate has his Horse earlier in the poem insist that creatures like him weep when their masters are killed, how can we discern if this is a wish-fulfillment on Lydgate’s part and evidence of his own personal conviction that animals are indifferent to their status as laborers, war machines, and so forth; or whether it is a representation of an animal’s mental experience that Lydgate holds up for our consideration in order to hopefully find it uncouth and too much in harmony with anthropocentric fantasies? One of the moments in the poem that leads me to believe that Lydgate, as the *Debate* develops, begins to sense a need for humans to view animals as having desires and goals that resist being reduced to only those that humans assign to them is when he allows his Goose to express his own inherent pleasure to swim, fly, and frolic in the varied and diverse ecosystems that a goose may inhabit.

The Goose, in a point addressed directly to the Horse, declares:

\begin{verbatim}
  Where-as thou [the Horse] has vnto this pastur
  But oo place to make in thi repair,
  It is me grauntid pleynty by nature
  Tabide in thre, lond, water, & ayer;
  Now a-mong flours & grevis that been fair,
\end{verbatim}
Now bathe in rivers, swymme in many a pond,
For storme & shour as drie as on the lond. (162-68)

What we should immediately notice about this speech by the Goose is how it diverges from the point of contention that the entire debate is supposed to be focused upon: the topic of which animal is most useful and beneficial to humanity. The above argument by the Goose reveals Lydgate’s awareness that animals like the Goose can take an inherent pleasure in their own existences, and in their own multifarious biological adaptations. The Goose, in short, could not possibly score any points with his judges for being useful to humans simply because he is able to wander “a-mong flours & grevis that been fair” and can “bathe in rivers.” The tender and luxuriant nature of Lydgate’s word choices here (“bathe,” “a-mong flours,” etc.) suggests that he is more than capable of envisioning the Goose’s life to be fulfilling and pleasurable in its own way when disconnected from human projects and desires.

This description by Lydgate stands in stark contrast to one such as that which Roger Ascham provides in his own depiction of the goose that provides its feathers for the fletchings of war arrows. Instead of at any point imagining the goose enjoying its own animal existence (as Lydgate does), Ascham only tells us: “Yet welfare the gentle gouse which bringeth to a man euen to hys doore so manye excedynge commodities. For the gouse is mans comorte in war and in peace slepynge and wakynge.” Ascham here imagines the animal as being thoroughly obliging and self-sacrificing in its gift of feathers and other “commodities” that it provides for humans. The Toxophilus prefers to

111 Ascham, 130.
imagine animals abandoning their habitats of rivers, fields, and skies in order to
miraculously appear on doorsteps in order to offer up their body parts for human
consumption and use.

When we get to the last of three speakers, however, the poem takes a noticeable
shift in its investigation of the role animals play in human warfare. The Ram, arguing on
behalf of the Sheep because the latter is too “disposid to meeknesse” (289), and in a
move unique among the animals, sets out to win the debate by claiming “that pees is bet
than were” (399). Therefore, since sheep do not possess any role in wars, the judges
should proclaim the Sheep the winner of the debate. Apparently, this argument is an
appeal to some belief that an innate preference for peace resides in judges. It is an
argument that is soundly rejected by both the Horse and the Goose, for Lydgate proceeds
to use the Sheep to demonstrate his awareness of late medieval warfare’s reliance on the
large-scale selling of animal products to finance wars, and to provide the necessary funds
to pay an army and to keep them in the field or in a garrison for long periods of time.
Despite the Sheep’s claims that he is the favorite of humans because he loves peace more
than war (the implication being, just as humans do too), the Horse proceeds to condemn
the Sheep as a behind-the-scenes instigator *par excellence* of bloody conflicts. The Horse
screeches:

The Sheep is cause & hath be ful long,
Of newe striff & of mortal were...
Thi wolle was cause & gret occasion
Whi that the proude Duke of Burgo[uy]n
Cam befor Caleis with Flemynge nat a few...
Wher richesse is of wolle & sich good,
Men drawe thidir that be rek[el]les,
And soudiours that braynles been, & wood,
To gete baggage put hem silf in prees (lines 409-10, 412-14, 421-24).
The Horse has here gone on to make the case that Sheep incite men to war more than any other animal by referring to an incident during that latter half of the Hundred Years War: the failed attempt by the Duke of Burgundy to lay siege to Calais on the coast of northwest France. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, Calais was the home for the famous Fellowship of the Staple which held an almost total monopoly on regulating and overseeing the highly lucrative English wool trade.\textsuperscript{112} The Duke of Burgundy, also known as Philip the Good, had at one time been an ally of the English in their war against France. But in 1435, at a congress in Arras which was attended by the kings of England and France, as well as the Duke of Burgundy, and which was intended as a meeting in which these three powers could hopefully hash out the details that would lead to a three-way peace settlement, instead led to Burgundy’s defection to the French side. The English felt betrayed by Philip’s decision, and had begun stepping up military campaigns against Philip as an act of retribution once the Anglo-Burgundian alliance had crumbled. Philip decided that the best defense was a good offense and in the spring of 1436 had initiated plans to lay siege to Calais, and hopefully to win the city that had been a prized

\textsuperscript{112} There were only two circumstances under which wool \textit{did not} have to pass through Calais on its way to being used on the Continent. Wool did not have to be sent to Calais if it was being shipped from certain northern counties of England whose wool was judged to be of inferior quality (such as that from the counties of Northumberland, Cumberland, Westmorland and Durham) and if that “inferior” wool was being shipped directly to the Netherlands. The other exception was one extended to Italian merchants, one of the largest buyers of English wool. The Italians were frequently sold licenses by English kings that enabled the merchants to buy wool directly from suppliers in England and ship it from the country’s southern ports, thus evading the increased costs that would accrue from dealing with the Calais Staplers. Such royal actions were a constant source of complaint by the Staplers who frequently pleaded with the king to cease such practices, but for the kings it was simply too convenient of a way to raise funds to finance their wars. On the exceptions to shipping to Calais, see Eileen Power, “The Wool Trade in the Fifteenth Century,” in Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century, eds. Eileen Power and M.M. Postan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 43-45. For other studies of the English wool trade, see the following: Eileen Power, “The English Wool Trade in the Reign of Edward IV,” Cambridge Historical Journal 2:1 (1926): 17-35; Eileen Power, The Wool Trade in English Medieval History (London: Oxford UP, 1942); T.H. Lloyd, The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977).
symbol for the English of their military might ever since Edward III conquered it during his glorious *chevauchée* of 1347. And we know from a document that was likely sent to England from a spy who had infiltrated the meeting between Philip and his counsel in Gaunt, there is a definite ring of truth to the Horse’s charges that the Sheep’s wool is indeed directly related to acts of aggression. In this document sent by the spy are laid out the stipulations that Philip agreed to in order to secure assistance with the siege from several allies. The fifth such article reads:

…that the townes of flaundres have asked of the said duc to have the wolles of Callais to be distributed and departid among hem with oute ony lettting of his persone or of his officeris in cas they mowe gete hem. And so forth with the duc with his counsell granted hem the same articles after ther intent.\(^\text{113}\)

The Flemings, it seems, were only in it for the wool. The siege, however, ended up being a major debacle for the Duke of Burgundy, and it was raised after only six days, in part because the English had more than enough time to adequately fortify and supply the city due to intelligence reports like the one above alerting them well in advance to the Duke’s plans.\(^\text{114}\)


The Ram, in response to the Horse’s outburst and speaking on behalf of the bashful sheep, asks: “What is the Sheep to blame in your sight/ Whan she is shorn & of hir flessh made bare,/ Though folk of malice for hir wollis fiht?” (492-94). This reference to the Sheep being “shorn” and her flesh “made bare” has the effect of making us see the Sheep as a unfortunate victim of her unwilling role in war. The Sheep, robbed of the coat that protects her from the elements, is depicted here as injured and abject. What strikes me as so significant about Lydgate’s treatment in this poem of the siege of Calais, and about his treatment of the role of wool during warfare in general, is that he allows the physical existence of a living animal to return at a moment when it is most commonly repressed and buried beneath a veil of economic concerns.\textsuperscript{115} From the discussion of wool in Parliamentary Rolls to that in the surviving correspondences of the prosperous wool merchant family the Celys, the living animal is almost always eclipsed by its more

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\textsuperscript{115} We might recall here the skill of another fabulist whose animal characters resist becoming mere stand-ins for humans, and whose most memorable characters are often shown to be suffering because of the injuries inflicted upon their decidedly \textit{animal} bodies. I am referring to Robert Henryson, and I have in mind his fable “The Sheep and the Dog.” In that fable a sheep is shorn as restitution to a dog that has had the sheep brought to court on trumped up charges. The dog wins his falsified case, and is awarded the sheep’s coat as part of his settlement. We learn about how negatively this shearing of the sheep’s coat has affected him when the sheep himself tells us: “‘Quhen Boreas with blastes bitterlie / And frawart froistes thir flouris doun can fai’d:/ On bankis bair now may I mak na baid / . . . Lord God, quhy sleipis thow sa lang? / Walk, and discerne my cause, groundit on richt; / Se how I am, be fraud, maistrie, and slicht, / Peillit full bair’” (lines 1288-98). Robert Henryson, \textit{Moral Fables}, ed. and trans. George D. Gopen. (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 107. For a discussion of Henryson’s very physically depicted animals in his fables (and the significance thereof), see Florence H. Ridley, “The Treatment of Animals in the Poetry of Henryson and Dunbar,” \textit{Chaucer Review} 24:4 (1990), 356-66.
valued role as a provider of a raw material that the Continental cloth industry craves.\textsuperscript{116} Even the name by which a wool provider is at times called in the late Middle Ages – that of a “grower” of wool – carries with it the sense of displacing onto the human owner or laborer all autonomy and agency for the production of wool, as well as the sense of representing the animal as an inert and purely passive participant in the wool-making process.\textsuperscript{117}

We must remember that contrary to modern culinary reasons for raising sheep, sheep of medieval England were almost exclusively raised for their contributions to the wool trade. They were fattened, killed, and eaten most often only when they had either grown too old to produce new wool after a shearing, or when they had become sickened by one of the diseases that were collectively referred to as “murrain” in the Middle Ages. As Robert Trow-Smith writes: “The authors of the mediaeval treatises gave their readers no guidance as to the stage in its life that a sheep should be culled and fattened for slaughter or sale, the presumption being that so long as it had the teeth to eat and thrive [i.e. produce wool], that long did it remain worth its keep.”\textsuperscript{118} The sheep’s body as an


\textsuperscript{117} See \textit{Middle English Dictionary}, s.v. “grower.” The \textit{MED} gives the following example from 1449 that confirms a “grower” could mean one who raises wool for commercial purposes: “Not onely þe King is greely hurt in his costymes..but also þe communes of his lande, growers of þe saide wolles.” The quote is from \textit{Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England}, ed. N. H. Nicolas, vols. 1-6 (1834-37), 6.84.

\textsuperscript{118} Robert Trow-Smith, \textit{A History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700} (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 151. See also the compilation of medieval husbandry treatises published as \textit{Walter of Henley’s Husbandry: Together with An Anonymous Husbandry, Seneschachie and Robert Grosseteste’s Rules}, ed. Elizabeth Lamond, intro. by W. Cunningham (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), esp. page 97, in the \textit{Seneschachie}, which discusses under what circumstances a sheep is deemed fit for slaughter. In recent essays by Naomi Sykes and Christopher Woolgar, they both point out that by the end of the Middle Ages, the nobility were increasing their conspicuous consumption of “high-status” foods such as veal, and that dairy production from ewes was increasing as well; however, they both state that the uses for sheep for dairy and meat products were always secondary to that of wool production in the late Middle Ages. See
endless assembly line for new wool was the paradigm that by and large defined that animal’s existence. Lydgate, however, does not want us to lose sight of nonsymbolic, physical sheep that are to be found at the core of the wool industry. Whereas the Horse was problematically represented as being a proud, joyous actor in war, and the Goose as a vital contributor to it, Lydgate depicts the Sheep as a pitiful, weak animal that has been insensitively involved in the enterprise of war.

In fact, although most of Lydgate’s sense of moral indignation at the ways in which animals are controlled and physically manipulated by humans seems reserved for his emphasis on how wars are implicated in using the animal, he even begins to direct his attack against more workaday uses of animal bodies, such as those initiated by the practices of medicine and music. As is the case when the other two speakers in the debate argue their case, the Ram trots out a list of some other ways that different components of a sheep’s body are rendered into useful product for humans:

    His talwe eke seruyth for plaistres mo than on;
    For harp strynges his roppis serue echon;
    Of his hed boiled [holl] with wolle & all,
    Ther comyth a gelle, an oyneme[n]t ful roiall! (382-85)

Like the description we are given of war’s complicity in the wool trade, and of the subsequent effects of that complicity upon the bodies of actual sheep, the graphic description above of the sheep’s sinews being strung into harp strings and of the head being boiled in order to procure a medicinal balm strikes me as containing a deliberately disturbing emphasis on the dismembered parts of the animal. The use of such detail by

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Lydgate recalls the hunting scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which the breaking apart of various animals is narrated in a hyper-slowed down, cinematic fashion that forces the reader to envision the process in all its gruesome detail:

\[\text{Þen brek þay þe bale, þe bowelez out token,}
\text{Lystily for laucyng þe lere of þe knot.}
\text{þay gryped to þe gargulun and grayþely departed}
\text{þe wesaut þe wynt-hole and walt out þe gyttez.}
\text{þen scher þay out þe schulderez with her scharm knyuez,}
\text{Haled hem by a lyttele hole to haue hole sydes.}^{119}\]

Therefore, like the above description from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I see Lydgate’s descriptions of animal bodies being used by humans as containing a kind of Brechtian “alienation effect,” in which everyday uses of animals are reexamined and reconfigured in such a way as to force the reader to confront just how barbaric such uses of the animal can be. Where the sheep that has been stripped of her coat aims for the heart of the reader in order to engender a sense of moral compunction, the description of the sheep’s head being boiled to procure a medicinal balm aims for the gut of its audience, but all to the same end: to raise awareness in the reader as to just how far-ranging and brutal late medieval uses of the animal can be, in both times of war and in times of peace.

Although the lines in which the Ram depicts the Sheep’s plight at the hands of the wool industry may not totally rid our memory of earlier references in Lydgate’s *Debate* to animals like the Horse swelling with pride at being put in harm’s way by a human owner, after the Sheep appears in the poem it becomes much more difficult to see war as something that always improves the quality of life in animals and ennobles their

\[119\text{The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, 4}^{\text{th}}\text{ edition, eds. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 2002), lines 1333-38.}\]
existence. With her “flessh made bare,” the Sheep stands, in microcosm, for the increase in vulnerability and suffering that medieval warfare must have led to for a great majority of animals caught in its midst. As we will see in a discussion of The Siege of Thebes in a later chapter, Lydgate is an author who has a complex understanding of the issues involved when animals are appropriated into human warfare. He is aware not only of ways in which humanity projects unlikely desires onto animal psychology (such as the desire to be an integral component of human war), but also how it exacts a tragic physical toll upon the nonhuman animal during its military conflicts.

I have tried to argue that Lydgate has, by the debate’s end, revealed a profound awareness of the ways that war can limit the lives of animals and can lead to bodily suffering for them. The representation of the Horse in the poem strikes me as complicit with predictable medieval views of horses as creatures ennobled by their roles in chivalric combat, but, by the time we reach the Goose, Lydgate has already begun to explore the problems associated with any project that attempts to define the animal solely according to how it “availeth...to man.” And certainly when the Ram pleads the case for the Sheep, we encounter a striking emphasis on the ways that warfare (or, more specifically in this instance, a war economy) can harm or restrict the bodies of animals.

When the judges finally issue their decision (line 498ff.), they declare that none of the animals are the winner of the debate, for each is to be deemed equal due to the fact that they all “doon her office as natur hath hem wrought” (511) and because “To a good ende [God] made euer creatur” (518). But as Lydgate adeptly shows throughout his Debate, for an animal to do as “natur hath hem wrought” is not an easily accessible state for an animal to know or to attain, for more often than not it appears that human forces,
not natural or instinctual ones, are in charge of controlling in what ways an animal’s existence (such as that of a horse, goose, or sheep) manifests itself. And when Lydgate proclaims that he will no longer be ventriloquizing through his characters, and that the “Auctor [will now] makith a lenvoie vpon all the mateer be-fore said” (540), he seems to have one more card up his sleeve that he wishes to play, and that will force the reader to confront alternative possibilities for an animal’s existence, other than those possibilities that are defined by events such as the repeated shearing for wool or by dismemberment in order to acquire sinews for harp-strings. It is near the end of the poem that we are told:

Sheep in the pastur gresen with mekenesse,
Yit of ther wollis be woven riche weedis,
Of smothe doun maad pilwis for softnesse,
Fethirbeddis to sleep, whan men dresse
Toward Aurora agey[n] til thei arise. (556-60)

Strategically placed at the periphery of this list of luxury goods that the aristocracy craves is the physically existing sheep, meekly grazing in its pasture. This image of the sheep placidly enjoying its natural environment can only make the humans who will set upon it in order to render components of its body into “weedis” and “pilwis” appear all the more materialistic, greedy, and insensitive. But it is not for this serene image of the grazing sheep that the poem should be remembered or deemed important, but rather for those images like the one that forces the reader to recall what becomes of the sheep’s body after the industry of war has seized upon it. It is at such key moments in his poem that Lydgate was indeed pushing the boundaries of what medieval representations of animals are capable of, and was demonstrating a breadth of knowledge exceeding that of his peers.
about the manifold ways that the warfare of his era was appropriating, manipulating, and, at times, extinguishing the energies of a great number of the animal inhabitants of medieval Europe.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, after announcing my intention to recover the suffering and death of actual, historical animals embedded within late medieval chivalric texts, I tried to give an overview of the ways in which some late medieval writers who were interested in regulating military conduct made rare, yet significant, statements regarding what constituted acceptable behavior towards animals during warfare. Lydgate, in his *Debate of the Horse, Goose, and Sheep*, represents an impressive flourishing of awareness regarding late medieval warfare’s widespread effects upon animals. Although any interest or concern for animals often constitute a fleeting moment in most all of the other texts I have analyzed above (texts such as the legal or chivalric treatise), nonetheless, I consider any mentioning of animal suffering or death as relevant. The overwhelming message regarding animals that usually radiated from those influential arbiters of ethical sensibilities, the theologians, was that the animals that surrounded medieval people were insensate brutes, and therefore hardly worthy of any form of ethical consideration.\(^\text{120}\)

\(^{120}\) However, as some scholars have recently begun to argue, St. Thomas Aquinas has, perhaps, been inaccurately or unfairly thrust into this category of theologians who perceive animals as irrelevant when it comes to issues of morality. See Judith Barad, “A Tension in Aquinas’ Accounts Between the Ontological and Ethical Status of Animals,” in *Greek and Medieval Studies in Honor of Leo Sweeney, S.J.*, eds. William J. Carroll and John J. Furlong (New York: P. Lang, 1994), 127-44.; Jill LeBlanc, “Eco-Thomism.” *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999), 293-306.
Most of the legal and chivalric treatises I examined above appear to align themselves with this general sense of indifference over the fates of animals that are caught up in human wars.

However, in John Lydgate’s *Debate of the Horse, Goose, and Sheep* and in Ramon Lull’s *Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry* the rumblings are heard of an abandonment of the total moral aloofness regarding animal suffering and death that characterized some fellow writers like John of Legnano or Christine de Pisan. In the next chapter, we will see how several other Middle English poets allow their texts, in ways that the treatise writers and chroniclers did not, to much more expansively articulate a concern for, and interest in, war’s pernicious effects upon animals.
CHAPTER 3

The Alliterative Morte Arthure and the
Chivalric Subjugation of Nature

The Alliterative Morte Arthure, one of the greatest poetic achievements of the Alliterative School, is also one of the most divisive Middle English poems. For well over half a century now, the poem has inspired repeated attacks and counter-attacks (to use the military metaphors so apt in a discussion of this poem) by scholars as they have attempted to put to rest the vexing issue of what degree of admiration or condemnation the Morte-poet invites us to view his King Arthur. The poem has been read both as standing at the vanguard of modern pacificist attitudes towards warfare, and as

revering its hero Arthur as a strong-willed ruler who sagely knows that peace and stability can only be lastingly attained through devastating violence. ¹²² And, of course, the poem has, at times, also been read as an ambivalent and fragilely balanced combination of both the above mentioned positions. ¹²³

What has never helped the problem of determining exactly what the Morte-poet’s attitudes are regarding Arthur is that the poem has always evaded easy genre classification. The anonymous poet who composed the poem, most likely sometime in

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¹²² These more positive readings of Arthur and his wars seem to draw upon the ideas regarding warfare that are expressed by theologians such as Aquinas (ultimately deriving, however, from Augustine) and which essentially see warfare as never an evil in and of itself; rather, it is the ends to which warfare is applied that ultimately determines if a war is just or unjust, even if the war involves immense loss of life and of property on the part of noncombatants. See Aquinas’s Summa Theologica, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 40, Article 1, for his discussion of what constitutes a just war. For readings of the Alliterative Morte that see Arthur as waging a just war and as acting within his rights as a sovereign prince throughout the whole of the poem, or that see him as a constant paragon of heroism and chivalry, see the following: George R. Keiser, “Edward III and the Alliterative Morte Arthure,” Speculum 48:1 (1973): 37-51; Elizabeth Porter, “Chaucer’s Knight, the Alliterative Morte Arthure, and Medieval Laws of War: a Reconsideration,” Nottingham Medieval Studies 27 (1983): 56-78; Kateryna A. Rudnytzy Schray, “The Plot in miniature: Arthur’s Battle on Mont St. Michel in the alliterative Morte Arthure,” Studies in Philology 101:1 (2004): 1-19. Geraldine Heng also seems to perceive a largely celebratory view of warfare at work in the poem. See Chapter Three, “Warring Against Modernity,” in her Empire of Magic (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 114-79.

¹²³ What strikes me as uniting many of these more ambivalent readings of the Alliterative Morte is that they often conform to one of the following two paradigms: 1) they perceive Arthur as starting out waging an essentially justified and beneficial war, but then he begins to overstep the boundaries of what is needed to deal with the threats to his reign and becomes overly destructive. However, by the end of the poem, Arthur has been reformed and/or has displayed a sense of guilt and repentance over his wars; or 2) they see the poem as depicting a character that is caught in the trap of trying to harmonize two irreconcilable value systems or moral codes (i.e. the Christian contempt for the world versus chivalric active engagement with it, etc.), and thus perceive Arthur as caught up in a complicated existential situation which makes delivering a final moral pronouncement upon him pointless or overly reductive. For essays that perform readings of the poem related to one of the above two types of interpretations, see the following: Larry D. Benson, “The Alliterative Morte Arthure and Medieval Tragedy,” Tennessee Studies in Literature 11 (1966): 75-87; Robert M. Lumiansky, “The Alliterative Morte Arthure, the Concept of Medieval Tragedy, and the Cardinal Virtue of Fortitude” in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ed. John M. Headley (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), 95-118; John Finlayson, “The Concept of the Hero in “Morte Arthure,”” in Chaucer und seine Zeit: Symposium fur Walter F. Schirmer, ed. Arno Esch (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1968), 249-74; George R. Keiser, “The Theme of Justice in the Alliterative Morte Arthure,” Annale Mediaevaliae 16 (1975): 94-109; Wolfgang Obst, “The Gawain-Priamus Episode in the Alliterative Morte Arthure,” Studia Neophilologica 57 (1985): 9-18.
the latter half of the fourteenth century, was an accomplished *bricoleur*, and one who reveled in his own capacity to fuse elements of romance, tragedy, *chanson de geste*, heroic epic, and even what we might refer to as proto-realism. This fusion in one poem of such disparate genres, each carrying its own preconceived values and attitudes towards such traits as rashness in battle or displays of excessive grief over fallen comrades, makes a unified reading of King Arthur and his wars all the more elusive. Yet, since this poem was most certainly composed sometime during the era of the Hundred Years War, then knowing what this poet thought about that epitome of the chivalric and militaristic lifestyle, King Arthur, becomes all the more tantalizing. For those who say the word “pacifist” should never be applied to a medieval text or author because such a word brims with careless anachronism, the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* beckons as the text that might hold the promise of finally vanquishing those skeptics who feel that it is too much to expect a medieval writer to feel moral outrage at war’s capacity to displace civilians, raze buildings and walls, ruin economies, and devastate the vegetable and animal life caught in its midst.

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124 A safe window for dating the poem’s composition is probably between 1365-1403. Earlier criticism, such as Matthew’s *Tragedy of Arthur*, tends to argue that the poem is a direct and immediate commentary on the victories of Edward III such as those that occurred at Crécy and Poitiers, whereas more recent essays and editions argue that the poem likely reflects upon Edward only when his reign is nearly over, or that the poem is a response to the Ricardian era of the Hundred Years War, and therefore might be reflecting on Richard II’s reign or back in time from a distance upon the era of Edward III. On dating the poem, see the following: Larry D. Benson, “The Date of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*,” in *Medieval Studies in Honor of Lillian Herlands Hornstein*, ed. Jess B. Bessinger, Jr. and Robert R. Raymo (New York: New York UP, 1976), 19-40; *Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition*, ed. Valerie Krishna (New York: Burt Franklin, 1976), 12; *Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition*, ed. Mary Hamel (New York: Garland, 1984), 53-58.
It is my contention that the existing criticism on the poem has worked itself into a bit of a rut regarding the sections of the poem that it isolates in order to examine this question of how supportive the poet is of Arthur’s wars against the bellicose Roman emperor Lucius and the rebellious duke of Lorraine, or of those wars Arthur subsequently undertakes in Lorraine, Tuscany, and Lombardy. These latter three conflicts are usually held by scholars to be the key examples worth scrutinizing in order to ascertain the legitimacy of Arthur’s wars, for these are the ones that potentially go well beyond what is necessary to eradicate the immediate threat posed by Lucius and his Saracen-Roman army (i.e. that threat which was Arthur’s initial reason for going to war).

What I will do in this chapter is examine the Morte-poet’s interest throughout the poem in chivalric culture’s interactions with plants and animals, and particularly his interest in how that aspect of chivalric culture that most defined its existence, warfare, relates to and impacts the natural world. Far from being marginal or insignificant aspects of the poem, the Morte-poet’s multitudinous descriptions of and references to forests, birds, vineyards, deer, peacocks, meadows, and so forth, are, I will argue, strategically used throughout the poem to comment upon the military action of the warrior class in the poem. Not only will I be analyzing the nature imagery in order to declare my own stance on the crucial issue of whether the Arthur of this poem is intended by the poet as a destructive warmonger or as an inherently benevolent ruler (albeit one who understands that violence must be used, often to excess, in order to bring about peace); but, I also want to address the poet’s interest in a distinct type of warfare that engages the natural world. In other words, the Morte-poet is interested in natural landscapes and ecosystems not only for the material effects that chivalric culture and medieval warfare might have
on such entities, but also for the psychological perceptions of nature that are engendered by different styles of warfare. Drawing in part upon recent discussions in the field of medieval military history, I hope to show that the *Morte*-poet had a keen understanding of how nature is never wholly definable by either its physical, biological existence or by the projections placed upon it by human culture; rather, it always exists in that nebulous zone somewhere in the middle that partakes of both the biological and the cultural.

*Arthur and the subjugation of nature*

After reading roughly the first five hundred lines of the poem, it is tempting to argue that most of the flaws in Arthur that will ruinously manifest themselves later in the poem are not yet present. Contrary to Arthur’s later displays of what may be construed as tyrannical behavior and the loss of control over emotions like anger and grief, this early Arthur is seen to keep his emotions in check (150-51), to entertain his visitors in the proper courtly fashion (166-230), and to take counsel from his advisors and knights before rashly deciding on a course of action to deal with the Roman Emperor Lucius’ demands for tribute from England (144-48, 243-46). But although Arthur and his men do appear able to control spontaneous eruptions of emotion and of physical violence in these early scenes with the Roman emissaries, the *Morte*-poet, in very prominent language, is already signaling to his readers that chivalric power, whether in its more courtly or more militaristic embodiments, often defines itself by its ability to appropriate and subjugate the natural world.
When Arthur’s holiday celebrations are interrupted by the Roman emissaries sent by the Emperor Lucius to exact tribute, Arthur’s initial reaction is one of anger. In his swift transition from outraged monarch to lavish host, however, scholars such as Robert M. Lumiansky perceive Arthur as quickly returning to his proper role as embodiment of “control and magnanimity” which, for Lumiansky, is “in exact accord with the exercise of Fortitude” that a medieval ruler should demonstrate.\textsuperscript{125} However, I cannot see this encounter with the Roman emissaries and the subsequent feast given for them in such an innocuous light as Lumiansky; rather, I must agree with more suspicious readings of these early lines, such as that offered by Andrew Lynch. Lynch argues that, rather than Arthur conducting himself as a paragon of restrained violence in the feasting scene, “Arthur’s spectacular hospitality to the Romans is basically another aspect of ferocious anger expressed by his countenance. As with the political display of the feast, mention of the council allows Arthur to remind the delegation just how many conquered kings, dukes, and nobles are his men.”\textsuperscript{126} The feast to which Lynch refers is the epic smorgasbord of exotic dishes served by Arthur to the Roman emissaries. I agree with Lynch that this feast is anything but benign and convivial; rather, in barely contained form, it exudes violence, aggression, and an ostentatious display of chivalric potency.\textsuperscript{127} The lavish meal contains such things as “Pacokes and plouers in platers of golde, / Pygges of porke despyne þat pasturede neuer” (182-83) [Peacocks and plovers on platters

\textsuperscript{125} Lumiansky, “Cardinal Virtue Fortitude,” 105.


\textsuperscript{127} For a more positive reading of Arthur’s feast for the Romans, see Henry L. Harder, “Feasting in the \textit{Alliterative Morte Arthure},” \textit{Studies in Medieval Culture} 14 (1980): 49-62.
of gold, piglets of porcupine that never grazed\textsuperscript{128} and “Seyne bowes of wylde bores with þe braune lechyde, / Bernakes and botures in baterde dysches, / þareby braunchers in brede” (188-90)\textsuperscript{129} [Next haunches of wild boars with the cooked meat sliced, barnacle geese and bitterns in embossed dishes, beside young birds baked in pastry].

As Carol J. Adams has argued, most meat-eating takes place under a condition in which animals are reduced to an “absent referent,” whereby animals are “made absent through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them.”\textsuperscript{130} An example of this would be our contemporary practice of refusing to refer to what we are eating as “pig,” and instead preferring to call it “bacon” or “ham.” Such a process is used, Adams argues, as a psychological mechanism in order for meat-eaters to repress the fact that they are eating dead animal bodies, and therefore to prevent any images of animal suffering to arise in the mind. Around the time that the Alliterative Morte was composed (late 14\textsuperscript{th} century), words of French derivation such as “bacon,” “beef,” and “mutton” are indeed found in Middle English. For example, the first noted occurrence of “bacoun” in the MED is around 1330, and in the romance Sir Firumbras (c. 1380) we find the line: “Wiþ motoun, & bef & bakouns and othre gode vytayle.”\textsuperscript{131} But in the case of the Morte-poet, we have a noteworthy lack of these French-derived words

\textsuperscript{128} Regarding “piglets of porcupine that never grazed,” Mary Hamel has this to say in her note to line 183: “a riddle, the solution of which is not suckling hedgehogs but rather the popular dish ‘urchins,’ pig’s maws with spiced pork stuffing, studded with slivered almonds to look like hedgehogs.” Hamel, Morte Arthure, 260.

\textsuperscript{129} All citations are from the edition of the poem by Valerie Krishna. See footnote 4 above for full bibliographic information on this edition. The translations into modern English are my own, although I have often consulted Valerie Krishna’s The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A New Verse Translation (Washington: Univ. Press of America, 1983).


\textsuperscript{131} See MED, s.v. “bacoun.” Such words are not an anomaly on the part of London-centered works, for the MED informs us they are also used in some poems of the Alliterative Revival such as Piers Plowman and Winner and Waster.
in the description of Arthur’s feast and thus a lack of a poetic diction that “contributes… to animals’ absences” in scenes of meat-eating.\textsuperscript{132} In a list comprising over twenty lines of verse, this poet grants us little opportunity to lose sight of the formerly living rabbits, peacocks, pigs, hawks, cranes, cows, and so on, that constitute the essential ingredients of the dishes laid out to astonish and chasten the Romans ambassadors. The poet is even specific enough to tell us that the herons are served in their plumage (“in hedoyne,” line 184).\textsuperscript{133} The death of the animal, in short, is never hidden from our sight. No vegetables of any kind are singled out for mention in this exhaustive list; it is only fragmented animal bodies, one after another. The Morte-poet presents us, in short, with this remarkably detailed feast in order to begin demonstrating how his Arthur, at several key moments in the narrative, will assert or attempt to recover his sense of chivalric might and dominance through his interactions with plants and animals.

Another early example of this use of nature to display power is given to us when Arthur is advising Mordred on the duties the latter will be responsible for while Arthur is away waging his wars on the Continent. During this important exchange between uncle and nephew, Arthur is very careful to remind his recently appointed steward Mordred that the vigilant regulation of the royal hunting-parks and protection of them from poachers are significant duties for which Mordred will be responsible (656-59). We should also

\textsuperscript{132} Adams, Sexual Politics, 40. One study informs us that the “French words [such as beef, mutton, and pork] primarily denoted the animal [in the late Middle Ages], as they still do, but in English these borrowed words were used from the beginning to distinguish the meat from the living beast.” From Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, A History of the English Language, 5\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 81. Thus, the Morte-poet has chosen the English words that denote the animal, rather than use the French alternatives which would technically only reference the meat from those animals.

\textsuperscript{133} Harder informs us: “It was deemed a mark of the excellence of the cook [in the late 14\textsuperscript{th} century] to be able to decorate what he prepared so as to enhance the visual appeal of the dish. Various recipes for the preparation of birds, for example, direct that they be served in their plumage, \textit{as if alive}.” Harder, “Feasting,” 54 (emphasis mine).
recall here that later in the poem, after Mordred has begun his rebellion back in England, we are told that Mordred has not only been busy robbing Arthur’s subjects and conquering his castles, but also with taking willful possession of the “holttes and the hare wode and the harde bankes” (3544) [groves and the grey woods and the rugged shores] of England. Mordred knows that to fully usurp power from his king and uncle, he should not only impregnate the queen and overtake royal fortresses, but also wrest control of material nature away from him.

As Barbara A. Hanawalt reminds us, the highly visible policing of royal parks by foresters was a constant source of animosity towards English kings throughout the later Middle Ages. Poaching of the king’s animals, by both the nobility and by peasants, “set up a struggle for male domination of the forest.”134 In response to this struggle, almost all of the medieval and early modern English kings, from William the Conquerer on, let it be known far and wide through an intricate system of laws, agents on patrol, and specially designed judicial procedures that the deer, oak trees, and other coveted entities of the forests were uncontestable symbols of the king’s unique powers and rights that were not to be appropriated without his permission. This vast and intricate bureaucratic apparatus was a dominance over nature on the part of the king that was often perceived as excessive.

134 Barbara A. Hanawalt, “Men’s Games, King’s Deer: Poaching in Medieval England,” in ‘Of Good and Ill Repute’: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 153. See also Chapter Five (“Slaughter and Romance”) of William Perry Marvin’s Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 158-73. In that chapter Marvin discusses the inception in 1390 of a game law which, unlike earlier legislation that defined and regulated topographical hunting spaces, for the first time in English law redefined the animals themselves (without reference to the type of space they resided in) as exclusively the desdui des gentils (game of the gentility). 1390, the year in which this game law was passed, is squarely within the time period in which scholars conjecture the Alliterative Morte was written. Perhaps the Morte-poet is drawing upon contemporary concerns over the general population’s loss of control over nature, such as that furthered by the 1390 game law, by making his Arthur a figure that is so zealous in the regulation of his rights and powers over the natural world. All this is not to say, however, that the Morte-poet has deep sympathies with such royalist control over nature, or with the 1390 game law for that matter, if he knew of it.
and tyrannical, and it was thus resented by many, as the following anecdote confirms:

“When news of Henry III’s death reached the West Midlands, some of the local gentlemen celebrated by taking their greyhounds and bows and arrows into the forest for the day ‘with clamor and tumult.’”\(^{135}\) As demonstrated by his explicit reminder to Mordred of the need to guard the royal hunting parks, the *Morte*’s Arthur, like his historical English counterparts, also wants his dominance over nature to be ensured at all times. But as I intend to show, the *Morte*-poet demonstrates an Arthur that ambivalently and paradoxically wants to attain an increased level of harmony with the natural world, while also using the natural world as a canvas upon which to display his power for others to behold.

The earliest example of the *Morte*-poet’s interest in how Arthur’s political dominance over other humans is equated with dominance over plants and animals is when we are told that Arthur’s initial reaction to the Roman interruption of his celebration is to greet the emissaries with a look of unprecedented rage, and one replete with eyes glowing so fiercely that it renders the Roman emissaries “[c]owchide as kenetez before þe Kyng seluyn” (122) [crouching like hounds before the King]. Arthur’s ability to dominate these intruders as if they were animals only metaphorically suggests that Arthur dominates hounds too. But we must recall that what is depicted here as a metaphorical subjugation of animals becomes literalized as the poem progresses and as Arthur begins to wage actual wars instead of relying on his feasts and countenance to do all of the work for him. After the defeat of Lucius and the Roman Emperor’s strangely Saracenized army around the middle of the poem, Arthur and his men become inflamed

with their own sense of triumph, and unleash an orgy of violence against the remnants of Lucius’ army, granting quarter to no one (2274-77). And following the massacre of the surviving pagans, wholesale pillaging ensues. Animals, perceived by Arthur more as the possessions of the vanquished than as autonomous beings, are rounded up as the spoils of war:

Thay kaire to þe karyage and tuke whate them likes,  
Kamells and cokadrisses and cofrs full riche,  
Hekes and hakkenays and horses of armes,  
Howsyng and herbergage of heythen kynge;  
They drewe owt of dromondaries dyuere lordes,  
Moyllez mylke white and meruayllous beste,  
Olfendes and arrabys and olyfauntez noble. (2282-88)

[Then they go to the baggage train and took whatever they liked: camels and crocodiles and coffers so rich, horses (garments?)\textsuperscript{136} and hackneys and war-horses, pavilions and tents of the heathen kings. They led away dromedaries of diverse lords, milk-white mules and marvelous beasts, camels and Arabian horses and noble elephants.]

What should strike us as unusual about the above catalogue of plunder is the Morte-poet’s emphasis on the diverse animals that are captured. They absolutely dominate the list and replace the mentioning of the usual treasures of war such as jewels, clothing, weapons, gold and silver plates, and so forth. Here we see the fulfillment of a subjugation over nature that was only hinted at in Arthur’s look that reduced the Roman emissaries to “crouching like hounds.” Whenever Arthur is in the position to have a direct effect upon the lives of animals, it appears that his personal ecological mindset prefers animals to be

\textsuperscript{136} See the notes to line 734 in the critical editions of both Krishna and Hamel. Krishna emends the word “huikes” found in the manuscript to “hekes” and therefore understands that word as a shortened form of a word meaning hackneys or horses. Hamel, on the other hand, perceives such an emendation as leading to a redundant emphasis on horses in the line, and therefore argues the word should be left as “huikes” and thus either refers to cloaks and garments, or to caparisons for horses or for shields. If we accept Krishna’s sense of the line, then our poet is being most emphatic (and possibly bordering on redundant) in his depiction of Arthur’s appropriation of horses by using three different words for horse in one line.
on his plate, in his possession, or underneath him in the form of transportation. Arthur never comes to embody a way of life whereby animals can be encountered in ways other than as bodies to kill or trophies to be collected (at least not in waking life, a distinction I shall discuss later on).

Arthur’s perception of animals as the spoils of the vanquisher mirrors the common medieval practice of plundering a town or a region’s livestock after they have been defeated, after they have fled in fearful anticipation of an approaching army, or merely as a means for terrorizing a defenseless population. As I demonstrated in the last chapter in a discussion related to Christine de Pisan’s *Book of Fayttes of Armes*, the era of the Hundred Years War often involved repeated incidents of vast numbers of animals being taken both as a food source for one’s own army and also as a means to deprive one’s enemy of that same food (or to humiliate the enemy’s leader by demonstrating his inefficacy in defending his own subjects from invaders). Sometimes such tactics led to the killing of large numbers of the animals solely for the purpose of keeping that resource away from the enemy. During one particularly memorable event of the Scottish-English war of the early 14th century, Edward III and his forces overtook a Scottish camp only to find that the Scots had butchered all of the animals in a panicked attempt to deprive the approaching English from benefiting from the plundered animals. The chronicler-soldier Jean Le Bel, who was a part of Edward’s army at the time, writes: “We found over 500 good, large, fat cattle, all quite dead, which the Scots had killed because they could not

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drive them in front of them, and didn’t want them alive for the English.”138 The tactic of stealing livestock was particularly necessary with the repeated English invasions of France during the 14th and 15th centuries. Since the English armies were operating so far from home and thus were essentially living off of the land during many campaigns, and were waging a war of attrition in order to convince the French people to forsake their Valois rulers and to adopt a role instead as subjects of the Plantagenet monarchy, the French people experienced frequent incidents of their animals being stolen in brash displays of chivalric power. Thus, Arthur’s thorough annexation of Lucius’ exotic animals into his own collection of spoils after the latter’s defeat would have carried echoes for a contemporary audience of events like the brazen Scottish raids into northern England or of England’s own strategies of agricultural and economic devastation in France.

Locus amoenus and the Alliterative Morte Arthure

Although the Alliterative Morte is often assumed to be a work that draws heavily from the heroic epic or the chanson de geste traditions, a thorn in many scholars’ sides has been the baroque intrusions in the poem of episodes that derive from the romance tradition. The inclusion in this heroic epic poem of scenes depicting Arthur’s battle with the Giant atop Mont St. Michel in order to rescue a captured damsel and Gawain’s one-on-one battle with Priamus are frequently cited as revealing the poet’s hybridization method of combining what are often taken to be disparate medieval genres. Also, as John Finlayson points out, there are several very prominent yet highly unexpected uses in the

138 From the Chronicle of Jean Le Bel, quoted in The Wars of Edward III: Sources and Interpretations, ed. and introduced by Clifford J. Rogers (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 17.
poem of description loci or locus amoenus tropes. Finlayson argues: “Though the description of natural scenery, and especially of spring landscape, is often generally assumed to be a typical feature of the romance, it is in fact...a feature more of the dream allegory and of the lyric.” These assertions about the role of nature in dream allegory and lyric are Finlayson’s way of declaring that the extended descriptions of plants and animals that we find in the Alliterative Morte do not, at first glance, seem to belong in this poem whose sensibilities appear to lie mostly with genres like heroic epic.

In Finlayson’s unique discussion of the Morte-poet’s use of locus amoenus tropes in the poem, he identifies four major examples of the trope (however, I will treat the second and third examples on his list as comprising only one example in my own discussion because they both occur during what is essentially the same episode in the poem). Finlayson’s list of examples of locus amoenus are as follows: the first example immediately precedes Arthur’s battle with the Giant of Mont St. Michel (920-32); the second occurs during Gawain and his retinue’s foraging for food during Arthur’s siege of Metz (2501-12); the third when Gawain returns to his retinue after having left them in order to seek “wondyrs” and after he has met and engaged in combat with Priamus (2670-77); and the final example is during Arthur’s second dream that depicts a visitation from Lady Fortune (3230-49).

Although Finlayson does scholarship of the Morte a valuable service by focusing our attention on how extraordinary these passages of nature description are, and on how they stand out in their attention to specific details of nature from a throng of other more vague and more conventional medieval descriptions of nature, Finlayson also does not

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always know quite what to make of all of these passages. For example, in his analysis of
the vivid nature scenery in Arthur’s second dream, Finlayson spends most of his time
arguing how a work such as Thomas Usk’s Testament of Love or the medieval lyric
“Mercy Passes All Things” may have provided models for the Morte-poet here; however,
in the end, he withholds from us any hazarding of an interpretation of how this use of
nature imagery fits into the poem’s larger issues, other than to declare blandly that the
nature of Arthur’s dream, which transitions from images of savage animals and to those
of blissful meadows, serves to “impress on his [the Morte-poet’s] audience the gravity of
the dream.”140

Several readers of the Morte have noticed how these locus amoenus passages
signal a transition in the narrative to prominent action sequences, such as Arthur’s one-
on-one fight with the Giant or Gawain’s one-on-one fight with Priamus, episodes that
seem much more inspired by contemporary chivalric romances than the rest of the poem.
Criticism of these sections then usually breaks down into divisive camps that interpret
these “romance interruptions” as either being ironic and as depictions of fighting that is
frivolous in nature when compared to the more important war with Lucius, or as
eamples of violence that is more legitimate and more noble than Arthur’s war because
these one-on-one battles perform “loftier” work such as, for example, converting
schismatics like Priamus to the “true faith” of Latin Christendom.141 Rather than

141 See, for example, Finlayson’s “Concept of the Hero,” pg. 265, where he describes Gawain’s fight with
Priamus as a “purposeless ritual” because it “contrasts rather vividly with Arthur’s…campaign against the
Emperor of Rome whose allies are Saracens and giants, and therefore the deadly foes of Christendom.”
Conversely, Benson, on pg. 82 of his “Medieval Tragedy” essay, perceives Gawain’s battle with Priamus
as more laudable than Arthur’s siege of Metz which is occurring at the same time because Arthur has now
begun to turn on “one of his own disloyal vassals” whereas Gawain “battles…and converts Sir Priamus” (a
much more worthy goal in Benson’s view). Adopting either of these two views on Gawain’s battle with
emphasize the thematic relationship of these *locus amoenus* sections to the types of action that follow immediately after them, I wish to consider their relationships to violence in general in the poem, and, more importantly, to examine how they engage with the poem’s other depictions of knightly interactions with the natural world. It is to the significance of the first of these *locus amoenus* descriptions which Finlayson had identified that I now turn in my analysis of the Alliterative *Morte*.

_Frolicking beasts on Mont St. Michel_

If the early scene depicting Arthur’s lavish feast for the Roman emissaries was all the evidence we had for Arthur’s attitudes towards the natural world, we might with good reason doubt whether the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* was, in fact, truly concerned with examining relationships between the chivalric community and the natural world. But when we scrutinize the lines leading up to Arthur’s famous encounter with the Giant of Mont St. Michel, we can collect further support for the claim that animals as bystanders and as actors in human wars interests this poet, and also that he strives to direct his readers to the ways in which these animals might resemble us due to animals’ inherent interest in their own mental and sensuous existences.

In the description of Arthur along with his knights Sir Bedvere and Sir Kayous making their ascent into the mountains so that Arthur can confront the Giant who is mercilessly ravaging the region, the poet pauses in his narrative and gives us the

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Priamus would surely color how seriously or ironically the *locus amoenus* passage leading up to the confrontation is read. Also, let me just clarify that I am using the term “schismatic” when referring to Priamus because, as Geraldine Heng (among others) has pointed out, Priamus, although at times “othering” himself from Gawain by saying to Gawain “for sake of thy Chryste” (2587, emphasis added), at other times swears by St. Peter (2646). Priamus, therefore, might be functioning in the poem as a representative of Eastern, Greek Christianity. See Heng, *Empire*, 155.
following description of the natural surroundings. Because this passage strikes me as being so unusually specific, and so unique for a heroic poem, I quote it in full:

Than they roode by þat ryuer þat rynnyn so swythe,
Thare þe ryndez ouerrechez with reall bowghez;
The roo and þe raynedere reklesse thare ronnen,
In ranez and in rosers, to ryotte þam seluen;¹⁴²
The frithez ware floreschte with fliorez full many,
With fawcouns and fesantez of ferlyche hewez;
All þe feulez thare fleshez that fleyez with wenzez,
Fore thare galede þe gowke one greuez full lowde:
Wyth alwyn gladchipe þay gladden þem seluen;
Of þe nyghtgale notez þe noisez was swette –
They threpide wyth the throstills, thre hundreth at ones;
That whate sowyng of watyr and syngyng of byrdez,
It myghte salue hym of sore þat sounde was neuer!

(920-32, emphasis added)

[Then they rode by that river that ran so swiftly, where the banks are overhung with magnificent boughs. The roe and the reindeer they recklessly run in thickets and in rosebushes to take pleasure. The woods flourished with many flowers, with falcons and pheasants of marvellous hues. There flashed all the birds that fly with wings and there cried loudly the cuckoo in the woods: with all manner of delight they themselves are filled with joy. Sweet was the noise of the nightingale’s notes: they competed with the song-thrushes, three hundred at once. Such murmuring of water and singing of birds might soothe him of suffering that never was sound!]

In very beautiful and serene language, the poet has depicted for us a scene in which animals are quite clearly represented as being subjects capable of inherent enjoyment in their own existences. As opposed to images of animals as emotionally destitute, these lines argue that animals are capable of mental states that are valued by humans in their own lives, such as those states of mind suffused with amusement and joy. For this poet, it is noteworthy that the value of this effusion of bodily activity and of song lies in the

¹⁴² In the TEAMS edition, the editors gloss the second half of this line as “to amuse themselves.” However, in Middle English a “-self” ending reinforces the pronoun, rather than functioning as a reflexive pronoun like the “-self” ending does in Modern English. For a discussion of the “-self” ending and how reflexive pronouns work in Middle English, see J.A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre, A Book of Middle English, 2nd ed. (London: Blackwell, 1996), 43-44.

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pleasure it brings to the animals (lines 923 and 928). We must, of course, acknowledge that the poet also perceives such sights and sounds as beneficial to humans (line 932), but that single line fails to eclipse the recognition surrounding it of animals’ inherent pleasure in their own bodies and, ultimately, their own lives. Thinking back now to Arthur’s extravagant feast for the Roman emissaries, replete as it was with the dead bodies of some of the exact same animals depicted here as joyfully frolicking in the field, we can perhaps surmise that the poet saw chivalry’s habit of asserting potency by discharging its strength upon animals as a problematic aspect of chivalric culture.

The fact that the Morte-poet may be here displaying his remarkable sensitivity to the desirous, pleasurable, and goal-oriented nature of animals should give us pause to consider how significant this attitude towards animals is. For ecofeminists like Val Plumwood, the recognition of desires, teleology, and intentionality in animals is capable of bridging the vast chasm that many people have held between human and animal existence, but without thoroughly eradicating an awareness of the distinct differences that must always be kept in mind when considering humans and various forms of animality. Plumwood argues:

> Intentionality is an umbrella under which [are sheltered] more specific criteria of mind such as sentience, choice, consciousness and goal-directedness (teleology). Thus intentionality provides a way to realize continuity [between humans and animals] without assimilation, to represent the staggering and exuberant complexity and heterogeneity of nature. It provides a complex of distinctions, a web of difference against an overall ground of continuity, and a way to reject any absolute, cosmic division or break between the human and natural spheres based on the possession of mind.143

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The description in the *Morte* of the animals enjoying their own physicality thus gives us a compelling image of animals as engaged in decidedly purposeful and directional activity, and the reader is at this point invited to consider and be mindful of the existence of animal pleasure. The prevalent emphasis by medieval theologians on the perceived lack of rational and analytical powers in animal minds has here been thoroughly evaded and replaced by a new emphasis on the emotional life of animals.

A reader may at this point be wondering if the *Morte*-poet’s representation of animals on Mont St. Michel is not just a forgettable example of anthropomorphism. In other words, might not our poet be using animals as useful stand-ins that allow him to explore or articulate something about the human characters in the poem? My first response would be to categorically deny that the *Morte*-poet is doing anything like this with his images of frolicking animals. For one thing the animals’ situation does not mirror or resemble that of any of the characters at this point in the narrative, for the emotional state of the human characters at this juncture is fear (the people who are being tormented by the Giant), in addition to whatever emotion the Arthur might be said to be experiencing (vengefulness? determination? etc., but surely not joy and pleasure). We get no suggestive alignment between animal and human actors like we get in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when the various animals are being hunted out in the park by Bertilak, while Gawain is simultaneously being “hunted” every morning in his bedroom by the lady of the castle. Thus, I fail to see how the animals’ “gladness” could be said to be representing the mental lives of any of these characters. In fact, it is the sheer superfluity
of the pause within the narrative to focus our attention upon the lives of these animals that signals that the emphasis in the description is indeed on the animals themselves, and not upon humans in some oblique, metaphorical way.

Secondly, even if this passage describing the animals on Mont St. Michel could be said to be anthropomorphic, and therefore using animals as stand-ins for humans, would that really be a poetic technique to be casually dismissed? Anthropomorphism can be said to work for the benefit of animals because it is a mental or artistic action which often elides differences between humans and animals, and posits instead that animals may be more like us in their subjectivities than we often care to admit. To assert that a poet’s use of anthropomorphism demonstrates a disinterest on that writer’s part in the lives of animals is premature, and quite possibly wrong. The poet may be attempting to bridge differences between the human and the nonhuman, and to make sense of an inherently strange entity – an animal – in a way that we humans do in our everyday lives: by drawing analogies between what we know best – our own mental lives and emotions – and what we struggle to understand adequately – such as the mental lives of other life forms. As the philosopher Mary Midgley has argued: “The degree of mutual understanding which we have, both with our own species and with others, is only made possible by attributing moods, motives and so forth to them on the rough model of our own, and constantly correcting the resulting misunderstanding.”\textsuperscript{144} However, as indicated above, I struggle to find a convincing way in which we might say that the \emph{locus amoenus} passage, replete with its joyous animals, is an attempt by the poet to comment on the main action of the narrative, or perhaps on King Arthur, by means of that passage.

\textsuperscript{144} Mary Midgley, \emph{Animals and Why They Matter} (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1983), 142-43.
Lest we seem carelessly anachronistic in thinking that our poet could possibly take seriously the desires and emotional pleasures of animals, it might be appropriate to take note here of a recent surge of interest in the complicated views of animal life in the corpus of St. Thomas Aquinas. Such a glance at Aquinas will help us better demonstrate how the *Morte*-poet may be picking up on a latent (and perhaps somewhat unintentional) defense by medieval thinkers of the rights of animals to pursue the ends of their biological intentions and drives.

St. Thomas Aquinas has often been equated with other Western philosophers, such as Rene Descartes or Immanuel Kant, who are stridently dismissive within the bulk of their writings of animals possessing anything akin to inherent rights to be free from human-inflicted suffering or death.\(^{145}\) Kant and Aquinas both condemned cruelty to animals on the grounds that such violent treatment of one type of living creature could extend to another type (namely, humans), and it is on those grounds that violence to animals should be deemed unethical.\(^{146}\) But as studies by Jill LeBlanc and Judith Barad have demonstrated, Aquinas’s views on the animal, and on proper human attitudes towards them, are vastly more complex than that.\(^{147}\) As Barad argues, although Aquinas’s ethics may disdainfully dismiss any notions of animals as having intrinsic

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\(^{145}\) It might behoove us to point out here that even the much maligned Descartes is experiencing something of an environmental reappraisal. See Cecilia Wee, “Cartesian Environmental Ethics,” *Environmental Ethics* 23 (2001), 275-86.


value or any inherent rights to be free of human-induced suffering or death, when
Aquinas’s writings on ontology and metaphysics are scrutinized, a position much more
congenial to that of certain strains of contemporary animal rights discourse emerges.

For example, in Aquinas’ *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, the Dominican
philosopher allows for the fact that animals are hardly the passive automatons that
Descartes is accused of trying to make them. Commenting on three different levels of
sensitive life, Aquinas writes:

The first level is that had by animals which have neither hearing nor
memory, and which are therefore neither capable of being taught nor of
being prudent. The second level is that of animals which have memory but
are unable to hear, and which are therefore prudent but incapable of being
taught. The third level is that of animals which have both of these faculties
and which are therefore prudent and capable of being taught.  

Animals, in the above analysis by Aquinas, can hardly be dismissed as mere creatures of
instinct. Rather, they are shown to be active beings, capable of learning new behaviors
and of responding to their environments in unique ways. And following Aristotle,

Aquinas defines “the good” as that which all beings seek: their own perfection, or at least
the actualization of the greatest number of their ontological potentialities. Thus,
although it may not make sense to speak of thwarting (say) a mussel’s potentialities
because it is a creature largely defined by its lack of locomotion, active predation,
displays of parental behavior, and so forth, from the viewpoint of Thomistic ontology, we
can, however, begin to broach the ethical issues (even if St. Thomas does not) involved in

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148 Qt d. in Barad, “A Tension in Aquinas’ Accounts,” 130-31. For the original source, see St. Thomas
1, n. 13. See also John Deely, “Animal Intelligence and Concept Formation,” *The Thomist*, vol. 35,
January 1971.

( Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1911), 151. Also see LeBlanc, “Eco-Thomism,” 305.
depriving a more complex organism than a mussel of most or all of its behaviors in which the organism strives to indulge. Barad succinctly sums up what is at stake in a careful (re)reading of Aquinas on animals:

For Aquinas must either say that animals have rights due to their intrinsic natures or that they have no rights because they are on the same ontological level as property, human artifacts, or any mere thing. To adopt the latter position entails that Aquinas would have to effect major modifications in his epistemology, metaphysics, and teleology.150

The point of this short detour into the realm of Thomistic philosophy is to contextualize within late medieval intellectual history what I take to be the Morte-poet’s rare, but by no means unheard of, awareness that the valuing of animal existence can be dependent upon more than mere proofs of rationality or self-awareness in animals. Many of the depictions of animals by the Morte-poet, like certain currents of thought in Aquinas’ ontology that LeBlanc and Barad have emphasized, open up interesting alternatives to the callous or dismissive ways in which we may think medieval writers always thought about animals.

In fact, something that we should be sure to point out in our analysis of this first long example of _locus amoenus_ is that forms of the Middle English verb “rioten” appear to be one of the most important words in the Morte-poet’s lexicon.151 In the long passage provided above, “riot” is used to refer to the animals’ capacity to amuse or enjoy themselves (line 923). Also, when animals “riot themselves,” it is a fairly benign event and we are given every indication that the Morte-poet finds this behavior admirable and

151 Most studies of the poem do not demonstrate any awareness of the importance of the various forms of the word “rioten” for the poet. One exception to this would be Matthews’ _Tragedy of Arthur_. See pages 110-111 and page 128 in that book for Matthews’ discussion of some of the uses of “rioten” in the poem. However, Matthews does not discuss the poet’s use of “rioten” to describe the behavior of some animals too, such as my own analysis is attempting to do.
pleasing to watch in animals. In other words, we don’t see our poet emphasizing that destructive things happen to humans (or to any other creatures) at moments when the animals are “rioting.” Yet, when applied to humans, that important word “riot” in the poem takes on a much more ominous register.

*Rioting men and rioting animals*

Under the search term “rioten,” the MED gives us three definitions: 1) to behave in a dissolute manner, 2) to take one’s pleasure in something, and 3) to ravage. When applied by our poet in reference to animals such as deer, “to riot” obviously means the second of those definitions: to frolic or take one’s pleasure in something. But in a great majority of the other instances in which our poet describes someone as “rioting,” it is the third and most negative sense of the term that is being used: to ravage something. Often the word is used to describe the unrestrained aggression of Lucius and his army, as when he opens the war with Arthur by invading Germany, and we are told:

He [Lucius] ayerez out with alyenez, ostes full huge
Ewyn into Almayne, þat Arthur hade wonnyn,
Rydes in by þe ryuere and ryottez hym seluen,
And ayerez with a huge wyll all þas hye landez. (617-20)

[He marches out with the aliens, with hosts very large directly into Germany, which Arthur had conquered. He rides by the river and he himself revels, and marches with great desire in all those lofty lands.]

And later in the poem, when hostilities between Lucius and Arthur have fully opened up in France, Arthur sends several knights on a diplomatic mission to Lucius to communicate Arthur’s demand that the Romans leave his lands. If they refuse to do so, then Lucius is told to do the following:
Com for his curtaisie, and countere me ones.  
Thane sall we rekken full rathe whatt ryghte þat the claymes,  
Thus to ryot þis rewme and raunsone the pople. (1274-76)

[Come out of courtesy and encounter me once. Then shall we reckon fully readily by what right he claims to ravage this realm and extort the people.]

Lest we think that Lucius and his men possess a monopoly on “rioting,” we must point out that certain members of Arthur’s own war party reveal, from almost the beginning of the poem, a keen desire for “rioting.” At the war council that Arthur summons during the visit of the Roman emissaries, Sir Ewain, in a show of support for the idea of going to war with Lucius, tells Arthur: “To ryde one yone Romaynes and ryott theire landez, / We walde schape vs therefore to schippe whene yow lykys” (341-42) [To ride against the Romans and ravage their lands, we wish to prepare ourselves for it and to sail whenever you want]. As scholars of the poem such as William Matthews have pointed out, the knights of the Round Table come off sounding not unlike vengeance-hungry warmongers themselves in this council scene.¹⁵²

Indeed, many of Arthur’s knights, such as Cador, Lancelot, and Ewain, are connected in this council scene with an urge to turn “riotous” against the Romans, and to make them pay dearly for all insults and injuries, past and present, for which the Romans are responsible. But what we must recognize is that the Morte-poet throughout the first half of the poem keeps his main protagonist Arthur free from the taint of having his behavior associated with the term “riotous.” Perhaps the fact that only Arthur’s knights, and not Arthur himself, are associated in their vows with “riotous behavior” in the

¹⁵² Matthews writes: “The speeches of Arthur’s leaders are angry, boasting vows, which, for all that they are sworn by Christ and the holy vernicle, threaten bloody revenge for Roman injuries” (Tragedy of Arthur, 128).
council scene speaks in favor of the more positive readings of Arthur’s character in these early stages of the poem such as that offered by Robert M. Lumiansky, who perceives Arthur as behaving like a “virtuous ruler” in the council scene and as a ruler who we see making decisions “based upon reason rather than passion.” But there is still a troublesome equating of Arthur’s leading knights with Lucius and his hostile army through the Morte-poet’s use of the word “riotous” to describe the behavior of both sets of warriors. But, to highlight a point made just above, Arthur himself is noticeably lacking throughout most of the poem (but not all of it, a point I will discuss later on) in any behavior that the poet suggests is, or specifically refers to as, “riotous,” and that thus would tarnish Arthur’s character.

Since the Morte-poet has used the Middle English verb “rioten” to describe both the animals on Mont St. Michel enjoying their own natural habitats and instinctual behaviors, as well as to describe Lucius’ army and Arthur’s own knights, we might be tempted to think that our poet sees human armies that are plundering and devastating a town or landscape as somehow acting “naturally” in the way that a bird singing or a deer frolicking in a meadow is behaving “naturally.” But I think such a conclusion would be a mistake, and that we need to account for the vastly different outcomes that the poet gives us for when the animals “riot” and for when humans like Lucius “riot.”

When the animals that Arthur passes on his ascent of Mont St. Michel “ryotte þam seluen” we are shown that it is a thoroughly innocuous event: the roe and the reindeer take pleasure in their uninhibited and energetic movements, and we are told that the cumulative effect of the scene is such that “[i]t myghte salue hym of sore þat sounde

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was neuere” (932). However, when representatives of the warrior class such as Lucius or Arthur’s Round Table knights begin to “riot,” the Morte-poet leaves us with the impression that only misery, discord, and death are sown. Such negative effects leave us to conclude that the poet invites us to see the wars that the Romans (and eventually the English) unleash upon Western Europe as nefarious attempts to imitate animals indulging in their instinctual urges and spontaneous desires. In a not altogether unconventional medieval reaction, the Morte-poet implies that humans are held to a higher standard than their animal counterparts. Although our poet may invite his readers at times to recognize that both humans and animals share similar capacities for suffering and for experiencing sensations of joy and pleasure, he still acknowledges differences between humans and animals that are engendered by human moral codes. The overall message that evolves in the poem, as Arthur’s wars become more and more destructive, appears to be that humans must be aware of the need to chasten and control their instinctual urges to destroy, steal, or rape through a constant exercising of their distinctively human faculties, such as their rational and ethical ones. When humans such as Lucius indulge in a desire to roam as free and as uninhibited across France and Germany as the reindeer does in his meadow, Lucius does not become “natural” (and thus removed from the domain of human morality) in the eyes of the Morte-poet: he only becomes perverse, wicked, and unnatural.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{154} If there is one thing we should fault the Morte-poet for in the poem, it is having what appears to be a one-sided and myopic view of nature. We should always sit up in alarm when anybody tries to convince us that the heterogeneity of nature is reducible to only one set of related concepts such as harmony, balance, and cooperation; or, conversely, to a set of concepts such as competition, violence, and chaos. The vast number of species and of different types of ecological relationships in the world will always make nature \textit{in toto} represent at different times and in different places \textit{all} of the above concepts. The Morte-poet, I believe, pushes us in the direction of seeing “ideal” nature or the most “authentic” nature as that represented in his \textit{locus amoenus} descriptions, and thus nature is for him largely benevolent, wholesome,
The dream of the dragon and the bear

There is, however, one other moment in the poem in which we explicitly see an animal “ryot hym seluen,” and it is during Arthur’s first prophetic dream that occurs when he falls asleep during the sea voyage to the Continent in order to confront the forces of Lucius. It is in that dream that Arthur’s sleep is greatly troubled by the vision of a mighty battle between a dragon “dredfull to beholde” and a bear that “come of ḣe oryente.” Before the actual combat begins between these two august creatures, the bear indulges in a vigorous display of his various natural behaviors:

He baltyrde, he bleryde, he braundyschte ḣerafter;
To bataile he bounnez hym with bustous clowez;
He romede, he rarede, that roogede all ḣe erthe,
So ruyedly he rappyd at to ryot hym seluen. (782-85)

[He stomped, he bellowed, then he swaggered about. To battle he bounds himself with powerful claws. He roared, he bellowed, and all the earth shook, so violently he cried out to pleasure himself.]

After the dragon and the bear fight, and the dragon uses its fire-breathing powers to reduce the bear to a pitiful floating corpse, Arthur awakens from his dream and seeks an immediate interpretation of it from the two philosophers who always travel with him. Arthur is told that the bear represents “the tyrauntes that tormentes thy pople / Or elles…some giaunt” (824-25), and that the dragon “thyselven it is” (817). But as several scholars have pointed out, the semiotics of this dream are not nearly as tidy and legible as the philosophers’ interpretation makes it appear. Karl Heinz Göller argues that the

and harmonious. It is those descriptions of nature, I am arguing, that he uses as touchstones to evaluate and ultimately criticize the “unnatural” and destructive behaviors of Lucius, and (as we shall see) eventually of Arthur himself.
Morte-poet may have intended his readers to pick up on how certain etymological roots of some of the character’s names greatly complicate things. For example, Göller tells us the Celtic word Arthur can mean “bear,” suggesting that Arthur might be represented by this potent creature. Göller also suggests that Mordred’s name may originate from the Celtic word mordraig which means “sea-dragon,” and could therefore mean that Arthur is not the only possible referent for the dragon in the dream.155 And as Christine Chism demonstrates, Lucius and some of his allies eventually display the dragon on their armor or on their banners, further complicating a clear-cut correlation between Arthur and the dragon. The poet’s possible goal behind such complications is usefully articulated by Chism: “the poet began by trying to keep the sides of the conflict distinct and then deliberately began adding things to perplex them. Both leaders [Lucius and Arthur] become dragons, figures of equivocal power that end by destroying their own people.”156 Lucius and Arthur, in short, could both be said to have become dragon-bears and bear-dragons by the end of the poem.

The reason why it has been incumbent upon us to review these interpretations of the dream of the dragon and the bear offered to us not only by Arthur’s own philosophers, but also by contemporary scholars of the poem such as Chism and Göller, is that we must acknowledge that the Morte-poet is not inviting us to see the “rioting” of the hideous bear of the Arthur’s dream in the same way as the deer’s or the bird’s. The bear, as we learn from the dream and its possible interpretations, cannot be said to signify only a naturally occurring bear; rather, it is an over-determined “dream-animal”

156 Chism, Alliterative Revivals, 209.
possessing additional associations with Lucius and Arthur. Thus, the bear’s roaring and stamping might be said to represent the blustery taunts and the threatening saber-rattling of warriors such as Lucius. And when it comes to the actual combat between the bear and the dragon, we see that the bear’s “rioting” ceases through its eventual violence and brutality to be associated with the type of natural behavior that pleases the agent performing it, and which does not harm others in the vicinity (such as the deer or bird’s behavior, which our poet seems to sanction and take great delight in); instead, the bear’s behavior morphs into a prelude to war, and one that signals the onset of unrestrained violent behavior (which, I shall continue to argue, our poet deplores).^{157}

After Arthur passes the meadow brimming with deer and birds “rioting themselves,” he comes to the top of Mont St. Michel and it is there that the fierce fight between the Giant and Arthur commences. Although we are never specifically told that the Giant “riots,” we can’t help but detect some striking verbal parallels between the Giant and the “rioting” bear in Arthur’s dream. The philosophers themselves told Arthur the bear could be “some giaunt,” and there are parallels between the behavior of the bear and that of the Giant to corroborate such an interpretation. After Arthur cleaves the Giant’s head to the brain and then castrates him, we are told the Giant still has enough vivacity left in him that “he romyed and rared, and ruydly he strykez / Full egerly at Arthur, and on the erthe hittez” (1124-25). This description echoes very closely that of the “war-cry” that the flying bear unleashed in the dream before engaging the dragon in combat. Also, when the Giant’s appearance is described to us (in its almost

^{157} As mentioned above, I think the Morte-poet has the curious habit of making ethnically normative the more benign manifestations of nature, such as those represented by his locus amoenus passages. See footnote 27 above.
unvisualizable way) as a grotesque conglomeration of animal parts, we are told those
parts derive not only from a wolf, boar, greyhound, hawk, frog, pig, flounder, and
dolphin, but also, from a bear (1089).

The Giant represents a creature that has been channeling the unrestrained instincts
and natural desires of all of his component animal parts, and has been engaged in a
prolonged spree of sexual and gastronomical feasting. He is reputed to have devoured
five hundred children (844), and most recently has abducted, raped, and killed a duchess
that was the “flour of all Fraunce” (860). In fact, we might even see the Giant’s feasting
on humans as a reflection and reminder of Arthur’s own relations to animals (line 183) in
his earlier feast for the Roman emissaries. Conquerers, be they human or giant, in this
poem enjoy engaging in displays of power focused on the young members of other
species. And when Arthur finally sees the Giant with his own eyes, the latter is busy
preparing to gorge himself on a meal of men and animals that have been roasted together
over an open flame by imprisoned maidens (1049-50). As indicated by his appearance
which is a baroque assemblage of animal parts, this Giant is a grotesque parody of nature,
a non-animal animal. His terrifying behavior, lacking in any moderation and only sowing
fear and death, is far removed from the normative conduct of animals like those in the
meadow upon his own mountain, and is behavior that resembles the nefarious type of
“rioting” which Lucius embodies. In fact, since we are explicitly told that the Giant
feasts on men and beasts (“Beerynes and bestaile,” line 1050), we are justified in thinking
the Morte-poet invites us to see his Giant as preying on the same animals we earlier saw
frolicking lower down on the mountain; thus, the Giant is an enemy of those much more
innocuous forms of animal existence.
After slaying the Giant in an inelegant fight that culminates in an unchivalric wrestling match and a tumble off the side of the mountain, Arthur stands at a point when his reputation as a champion of justice is at its apogee. But such a stance is ephemeral. Arthur has indeed rid the countryside of this debased and nefarious form of “rioting” in the form of the Giant. But Arthur and the Giant have, curiously, been equated all along as both being extravagant gourmards. When Arthur is being debriefed about the Giant by an old crone he meets on Mont St. Michel, she tells him:

He [the Giant] sowppes all his sesoun with seuen knaue childre,  
Choppid in a chargour of chalke-whytt syluer,  
With pekill and powdyre of precious spycez,  
And pyment full plenteuous of Portyngale wynes. (1025-28)

[He sups all this season on seven male children, chopped in a serving dish of chalk-white silver, with sauce and the powder of precious spices, and a plenteous posset of Portugal wines.]

After reading this description, we cannot help but recall Arthur’s own penchant for displaying power through an over-refined and ostentatious preparation of formerly living entities. Although the Morte-poet would surely perceive some difference between cannibal diets such as the Giant’s and gluttonously animal-based ones like Arthur’s, we still have to recognize that both Arthur and the Giant share the trait of conveying power through dead bodies-turned-luxurious-food items, and that the Giant’s roasting spit draws connections between human and animal bodies that suggests the Morte-poet may not see those deaths of human and animal life with quite the vast differences we expect of a medieval poet. The astonishingly detailed description of animal life that we were given in the poem’s first locus amoenus passage not only retroactively problematizes Arthur’s earlier attitudes towards animals as expressed in his feast for the Romans, but also
preemptively problematizes our learning about the Giant’s destructive attitudes towards animals in his own feasting. And therefore, as I have argued, both the Giant and Arthur are intended as targets for a critique emanating from the *locus amoenus* on Mont St. Michel, a critique directed towards behaviors that completely eclipse or destroy the independent existences of animal life. Although Arthur has vanquished this persecutor and gluttonous consumer of not only human lives, but also of animal ones like those that live on Mont St. Michel as well, Arthur himself will remain unreformed in his own attitudes towards nature, and will continue to use plant and animal lives as the canvas upon which he displays his increasingly unrestrained chivalric power.

A second detail we are given (and one much more widely noticed by scholars) which begins to undermine a perception of Arthur as an unequivocal paradigm of justice after he vanquishes the Giant is the fact that Arthur requests only to keep the Giant’s club and kirtle fashioned from the shaven beards of chastened kings. Arthur decrees that the rest of the Giant’s vast horde of treasure is to be distributed fairly to his knights and to the commoners of the land. But Arthur’s desire for the accoutrements that have so prominently designated the Giant as an unchivalric warrior (the club) and as a conquerer infatuated with empire and hyper-masculine displays of power (the kirtle lined with men’s beards) suggests that Arthur has now assumed for himself a role as the inheritor of the Giant’s unsavory legacy. It is to these more ominous changes in Arthur’s behavior as the poem progresses that we now turn.
Arthur and the vineyards of Tuscany

Although there has been much debate regarding how the Morte-poet wishes us to view his Arthur throughout the poem, there has been little disagreement that an emphatic shift occurs roughly half-way through the poem in the way that the poet describes Arthur’s battles and their immediate effects. In other words, scholars may not always agree on how the poet may want his audience to react to the descriptions of Arthur’s military exploits, but most all scholars agree that a change in emphasis and in the stylistics of describing Arthur’s battles does indeed occur. In the early stages of Arthur’s war against Lucius, the narrative withholds from the reader much description of how the battles between the armies of Lucius and Arthur impinge upon the lives and communities of noncombatants caught up in the midst of this international feud. But after defeating Lucius, Arthur then unleashes his chivalric power upon the regions of Lorraine, Tuscany, and Lombardy, and the poet subsequently begins to give us more grim and unvarnished descriptions of war’s pernicious effects upon the native populations of those areas, descriptions such as the following:

Than boldy þay [Arthur and his army] buske and bendz engynes,
Payses in pylotes and proues thair caste;
Mynsteris and mansonewes they malle to þe erthe,
Chirches and chapels chalke-whitte blawnchede.
Stone [s]trepells full styff in þe street ligges,
Chawmbyrs with chynnés and many cheefe inns;
Paysede and pelid down playsterede wallés-
The pyne of þe pople was pete for to here. (3036-43)

[Then boldly they make preparations and draw down their siege engines. They load in stone balls and test the range. Monasteries and hospitals they beat down to the earth, and churches and chapels painted chalk-white. Sturdy stone steeples in the street lie, chambers with chimneys and many excellent inns. They battered and struck down plastered walls – the distress of the people was pitiful to hear.]
As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, criticism of a passage such as this one often becomes divisive on the point of whether or not the poet has now transitioned to a way of describing Arthur’s wars that critiques him for being prideful and lacking in appropriate moderation, or whether the poet is only slowly beginning to acknowledge the tremendous costs of righteous wars like that led by Arthur in order to illustrate the complicated realities that even glorious warriors like Arthur have to face when attempting to rectify the wrongs of an inherently fallen and corrupt world.¹⁵⁸

One of the words in the poem that supports an interpretation of the poem as a work that slowly builds up to an indictment of Arthur’s wars in Lorraine, Tuscany, and Lombardy, is the one that I have suggested expresses the poet’s moral outrage when applied to humans: “rioter.” Eventually, even the mighty and illustrious Arthur is associated with the taint of this term. We first hear of Arthur’s behavior described as “riotous” when he is at the apex of his power and dominance in the poem: right before a Cardinal dispatched from Rome appears to kneel before Arthur and offer the “scepter and swerde” that will acknowledge Arthur’s new title of Roman Emperor. Just before this scene with the Cardinal occurs, Arthur conquers Tuscany, and he is indulgently celebrating this latest victory when our narrator tells us:

\[
\text{Thare suggeournes this souerayne with solace in herte,} \\
\text{To see when the senatours sent any wordes.} \\
\text{Reuell with riche wyne, } \textit{riotes hym selfen,} \\
\text{This roy with his ryall men of } \textit{be Rownde Table,} \\
\text{With myrthis and melodye and manykyn gannes –} \\
\text{Was neuer meriere men made on this erthe. (3170-75, emphasis added)}
\]

[There sojourns the sovereign with solace in his heart, to see if the senators would send any words. He revels with rich wine, \textit{and he himself experiences joy}, this

¹⁵⁸ See footnotes 1-3 at the beginning of this chapter for a review of the various “camps” of criticism on the Alliterative \textit{Morte}.]
king with his royal men of the Round Table, with mirth and with music and all kinds of games – there were never merrier men made on this earth.]

“Rioting” behavior in this passage is explicitly associated with a descent into debauchery on the part of Arthur, but there are other developments in Arthur’s character around this time which also sponsor the poet’s sudden application of the word “riot” to Arthur himself.

After Arthur defeats the Tuscans, and just before he is drawn back to England to confront the threat-from-within of Mordred, we are told that Arthur and his men “sprivgen and spreden and sparis bo lytill, / Spoylles dispetouslye and spyllis theire [the Tuscans’] vynes, / Spendis vnsparely þat sparede was lange” (3158-60) [dispersed and spread out and spared but little, plundered without pity and ravaged their vines, wasted unsparingly what had been long stored up]. For the first time in the poem, Arthur and his men are described as ravagers of the land and as destroyers of plant life in the form of cultivated vines in what I take to be an ironic depiction by our poet of a “livery of seisin” ceremony run amok. Such a ceremony appears to have been most commonly employed in the High Middle Ages to mark the change of ownership of land, and usually involved the breaking off of a twig or the digging up of a little bit of turf with a knife to symbolize

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159 Harder has this to say about the decline of feasting in the Morte: “The moral significance of the feast in the poem thus reinforces the treatment of Arthur in his martial activities; as Arthur declines in the justice of his war and its conduct, so does the imitation of heavenly decorum at his banquets decline.” From Harder, “Feasting,” 61.

160 For a discussion of this ceremony, see the discussion of “conveyance” in Sir Frederick Pollock, The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I, 2nd edition, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1911), ii, 84-85. Also, see the discussion of “livery of seisin” in Robert C. Palmer, The Whilton Dispute, 1264-1380: A Social-Legal Study of Dispute Settlement in Medieval England (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), 31-32. In Palmer’s study we are told that some components of the ritual of “livery of seisin” were for the old and new owner to exchange “a branch of a cherry tree…signifying…new possession of the fruits of the land,” as well as having the new owner engage in fishing and burning wood on the land for fifteen days in order to show “actual…not merely symbolic” possession of the land.
the vow by the new owner to protect the land and to acknowledge an intention to work it. Arthur’s destruction of the vineyards is a grotesque distortion of ceremonies such as this, for not only does he just take the land instead of having another party ceremoniously present it to him, but he also decimates that land rather than merely snap off a symbolic twig.

Given the fact that we are explicitly told that after defeating the Tuscans Arthur and his men “revel with rich wine” (line 3172), we can detect a further irony on the part of our poet in Arthur’s destruction of the Tuscan vineyards: his behavior has come so completely to embody a “destruction for destruction’s sake” ethos, that he doesn’t even realize – or care – that by destroying the vines from which wine comes, he is destroying the very source of those things he so indulgently savor. This aggressive attitude towards the vegetable world complements his earlier overbearing actions towards the exotic animals that he commandeered from the recently defeated Lucius. As the poem progresses, Arthur’s victories are slowly depicted as not only ones that “torment the people” (3153), but that also lead to the destruction or incarceration of parts of the natural world. We should keep in mind that Lucius, always a reliable compass for what our poet deems immoral behavior, was explicitly depicted earlier in the poem as a destroyer of plant life. When Arthur first learns that Lucius has invaded France, two messengers sent by the Marshal there inform Arthur of the details of Lucius’ invasion, and one detail they do not fail to mention is that Lucius “fellez forestez fele” (1247) [destroys many forests]. Lucius’ strategy of military deforestation is reflected in Arthur’s own transition into a commander leading his troops in the destruction of the Tuscan vineyards.
Hence, it is not only Arthur’s excessive indulgence in wine and music after the subjugation of Tuscany that seems to have suddenly earned him the charge of being “riotous,” but it is also, I believe, the fact that Arthur’s battles begin to be waged more and more unrepentantly against civilian populations. And, significantly for my own interests in the poem, Arthur’s wars begin not only to decimate hospitals and churches, but also vineyards as well. But would not contemporary readers of the Alliterative Morte Arthure have just stolidly glided over the reference to Arthur and his men “destroying the vines” because it was, to them, an action so commonplace in war as to be unworthy of consideration as contemptible behavior? A brief consideration of some sources from around the time of our poem’s composition prove that contemporary readers might not have been so indifferent to this development in Arthur’s character.

The practice by an invading army of destroying a region’s agricultural plants is well-known in chronicle depictions of medieval warfare, and the chronicles from the era of the Hundred Years War are no exception. But this is not to say the practice was beyond reproach. Thomas Hoccleve, writing only one generation after the Morte-poet, displays an astonishing outspokenness in his Regement of Princes (c.1410-13) about the toll that the Hundred Years War has had, not only on his native England, but on its French foe as well. At one point, in a section of the Regement called “De pace,” Hoccleve laments:

Allas! what peple haþ your were slayn!
What cornes wast, and doune trode and schent!
How many a wif and maide haþ be by layn!
Castels doun bette, and timbered houses brent,
And drawen downe, and al to-torne and rent! (5335-39, emphasis added)\textsuperscript{161}

Hoccleve here expresses outrage at the destruction of cereal crops at almost the same moment when he is decrying the rape of women during war. Christine Chism, in her analysis of Arthur’s destructive behavior in Tuscany, suggests that Arthur’s actions might have carried overtones for the Morte’s readers of the unsavory Wastoure in the poem Winnere and Wastoure. In Arthur’s destroying of the vines, we see that his wars have “become a self-feeding process with its own economy of display and waste” and a process that essentially becomes “the aristocrats’ industry, with its own rules and timings, accruing them profit at the people’s loss.”

Also, when we examine some of the extant ordinances of war that were issued during the Hundred Years War, we perceive a growing awareness of the need to protect agricultural plants from the systematic devastation wrought upon them during military conflicts. One of the most important ordinances from around the time that the Alliterative Morte is believed to have been composed, that issued by Richard II at Durham in 1385, does not contain any explicit prohibitions for his army regarding trees or plants. However, from then on, many of ordinances that were issued and which survive contain a warning to the soldiers to refrain from harming certain kinds of trees and plants. For example, John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, delivered ordinances around 1425 to the soldiers under his command that forbade destroying “Vines and other Tres beringe frute…upon payne to lose their saide beastes and theim self in warde unto the tyme that

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162 Chism, Alliterative Revivals, 194.
163 Richard II’s ordinances are provided in a Middle English translation of the French original as an Appendix to The Battle of Agincourt, ed. Nicholas Harris Nicolas (London, 1827), 107-12.
he have made a fine with the Counstable or Marishall for the defalte.”

And in war ordinances issued by Charles VII at Orléans in 1439 and that have been referred to as “the most comprehensive and impressive royal ordinance aimed at preventing the abuses of the soldiery and protecting the population,” extensive prohibitions were put in place that protected corn, vines and fruit-trees.

The Earl of Shrewsbury and Charles VII’s ordinances were, of course, issued at a time just beyond the period in which most scholars speculate that the Morte was composed; however, I think we are safe to assume that those ordinances did not arise out of a concern that swiftly and suddenly appeared in the consciousness of military leaders. As is the case with most laws, we should assume that the actual writing down of these battlefield prohibitions that outlawed destroying vines, crops, and fruit-trees reflects what would have been a steadily growing sense of unease at the wanton destruction of agricultural plants in the decades leading up to the composition of the ordinances. And although I am aware that these ordinances were not in all likelihood issued out of any sense of acknowledgment for any kinds of “inherent rights to existence” on the part of the plants normally destroyed by soldiers, we must still acknowledge the seminal importance of these restrictions in laying down important groundwork for placing certain kinds of entities beyond the realm of what is legally or morally permissible to attack, destroy, or kill during warfare.

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164 The Earl of Shrewsbury’s ordinances are found in Excerpta historica, or, Illustrations of English History, ed. Samuel Bentley (London: S. Bentley, 1831), 40-43.
166 Charles VII’s ordinances are found in Ordonnances des rois de France de la troisième race, ed. Louis Guillaume de Vilevaut and Louis G.O.F. de Bréquigny (Paris, 1782), xiii, 306-313. See Items 9-12 for the ordinances dealing with attacks on trees and plants.
There is, therefore, abundant historical and literary evidence to support the argument that Arthur’s destruction of the Tuscan vineyards would have stood out to a contemporary audience as yet another sign of the moral degeneration of Arthur’s character in the poem, and also of his growing fondness for exhibiting his potency upon plants and animals in order for others to behold and be intimidated by.

*The demilitarization of men by nature*

As demonstrated by Arthur’s appropriation of Lucius’ animals and by his destruction of the Tuscan vineyards, mastery over nature is what Arthur feels compelled to exhibit in order to prove more definitively his supremacy as masculine warrior and as unquestionable victor over his enemies. But in this poem that so eloquently, even if fleetingly, gives expression to the joy and satisfaction that animals might experience when left to pursue their own biological existences unimpeded by human projects (as we saw in the *locus amoenus* description embedded within Arthur’s ascent of Mont St. Michel), is there no exploration of an alternative way in which warriors and the natural world can encounter one another? Do we get no model in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* of a more benign interaction between medieval men-at-arms and the plants and animals they encounter when on campaign?

I think we do. When Arthur sends a small retinue of troops, led by Gawain, into the mountains to forage for supplies while he himself is engaged in a protracted siege at the town of Metz, those warriors encounter nature in a way that Arthur appears utterly incapable of doing throughout the poem. Rather than hastily plunder it, or destroy it as a form of aggression against the enemy, the poet tells us how the men-at-arms led by
Gawain bask in this natural environment that is so far removed from the din of war raging below the mountains. Here again, the poet of the Alliterative Morte displays his skill for composing arresting descriptions of natural scenery:

Now ferkes to þe fyrthe thees fresche men of armes,
To þe fell so fewe, theis fresclyche byernes,
Thorowe hopes and hymland, hillys and oþer,
Holtis and hare woddes with heslyn schawes [hazel copses],
Thorowe marasse and mosse and montes so heghe;
And in the myste [of] mornyng on a mede falles,
Mawen and vnmade, maynoyrede bott lyttyll,
In swathes sweppen down, full of swete floures.
Thare vnbryillls theis bolde and baytes þeire horses,
To þe grygynge of þe daye, þat byrdez gan synge,
Whylls the suris of þe sonne, þat sonde es of Cryste,
That solaces all synfull þat syghte has in erthe. (2501-2512)

[Now these bold men of arms travel hastily to the forest, to the streaked hill, these vigorous men, through valleys and highlands, hills and other, holts and grey woods with thickets of hazel, through morass and marsh and mountains so high. And in the mist of morning they come upon a meadow, mown but unmade\textsuperscript{167}, cultivated but little, swept down in swaths, full of sweet flowers. There these bold men unsaddle and pasture their horses, at the dawning of the day, when birds begin to sing, during the rising of the sun, that messenger is of Christ, that solaces all the sinful who have sight on earth.]

Although Arthur’s soldiers are clearly in some kind of managed tract of land, the poet here affirms the significance of nature beyond its agricultural or technological value as raw material. The smell of flowers, the song of birds, the sight of mist over a morning meadow: all of these are extolled as a healing counterpoint to Arthur’s wars that allow only misery and death to flourish.

\textsuperscript{167} Mary Hamel, citing the OED, defines “unmade” hay as that which has not yet been turned over and exposed to the sun. See the note to line 2507 in Hamel, Morte Arthure, 336.
For our poet, it is not necessary to find an Edenic locale within nature that is wholly pristine and untouched by human labor in order to experience the “solace” of plants and animals.\textsuperscript{168} It is sufficient to encounter this meadow that has been visibly altered by humans (“Mawen and vnmade /...In swathes swepen down”) as long as it is through a mental framework that perceives it in a way vastly different from that of a warrior, that is, different from a militaristic mental framework in which birdsong and sweet flowers would be worthless because you can not eat them out on campaign, and in which the temptation might exist to set a torch to the plants that you see because of their potential to aid an enemy population in the vicinity. What I would like to suggest is that another use by the Morte-poet of his locus amoenus descriptions, such as this one we are given when Gawain and his troops are out foraging, is to create a dichotomy between nature as it appears when soldiers are expecting lethal enemies to burst out from its cover at any moment, and nature as it appears when soldiers have left the immediate vicinity of open hostilities with an enemy.

To the careful reader of the poem, it should be abundantly clear that the poet is quite often very conscientious about describing the type of landscape in which the battles between Arthur and his enemies take place. And, more often than not, the battles take place in dense forest with decidedly Vegetian, ambush-style tactics being used.\textsuperscript{169} For

\textsuperscript{168} For a stimulating essay on the need to celebrate a nature or “wilderness” that has been transformed by human labor, and on the need to rid ourselves of the fantasy that pure, Edenic nature still exists (or ever has existed in the past couple thousand years of human history), see William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” in Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69-90.

\textsuperscript{169} That is to say, open field or pitched battles, with armies assembled in carefully planned formations, do not much interest this poet. The word “Vegetian” comes from the late Roman theorist on military strategy, Vegetius. Stephen Morillo defines an important part of Vegetian-style warfare as “shadowing the invading army closely enough [so] as to prevent their foraging. Short of supplies and frustrated by a lack of booty from plundering, the invaders, it is hoped, will go home” (23). Thus, the use of ambush and of deception, as
example, when Sir Cador is giving orders to three of his peers on how to proceed in their march, he makes sure that they carefully search every upcoming shrub for attackers concealed within them, “[f]or na skomfitoure in skoulkery is skomfite euern” (1644) [for no attack from stealth (i.e. ambush) is ever defeated]. Shortly after this dispensing of advice to his fellow knights, Cador indeed hears of “[f]ifty thousand…fers men of armes” (1710) lurking in the forest up ahead in order to ambush Cador and his men. The Morte-poet is quite interested in this potential for the forest to be both a place of beauty and one of danger to the soldier marching through it, for within the space of only ten lines our narrator can give us the awestruck “schawes ware scheen vndyr þe schire eyuez” (1760) [the shrubs were shining under the noble eaves (of the forest)], only to quickly follow up such a description with “[t]hane schotte owtte of þe schawe schiltronis many, / With scharpe wapynns of were schotand at ones” (1765-66) [then shot out of the shrubs many troops, shooting at once with sharp weapons of war]. In this example of the forest’s foliage being deceptively innocuous, and then suddenly erupting with a throng of enemies, we see that the Morte-poet is quite aware of how medieval warfare creates the conditions in which it would be impossible, or dangerously foolish, for a warrior to become overly lost in contemplation of the forest’s intrinsic beauty.

What comes out of these repeated scenarios in the poem of ambush in thick vegetation is the suggestion that the commonplace Vegetian tactics of medieval warfare contribute to a perception by soldiers of “wild places” like forests as dangerous and

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threatening because those places have poor visibility and myriad hiding places for large contingents of enemy forces.\textsuperscript{170} Or, to put this idea another way, the Alliterative \textit{Morte}-poet’s forests are not those of Malory’s \textit{Morte}, for in the latter’s work forests can often come to typify spaces of rejuvenation or of the potential for adventure and chivalric self-fashioning.\textsuperscript{171} The poet of the Alliterative \textit{Morte}, on the other hand, appears much more interested in creating a “reality effect” with his forests and one that registers the psychological state of most soldiers marching through a forest in enemy territory who might have seen those forests, with their obstructed visibility, as anxious places darkened by the frequent threat of ambush.

As we know from several examples culled from medieval history, the impeded visibility and the potentiality for ambush of a forest or wooded area could have very real material repercussions for the plants and trees of such areas. Henry II, while waging war in Wales against the native population in 1165, found his army at one point separated from the enemy Welsh army by the wooded Vale of Ceiriog. “A standoff ensued,” John D. Hosler informs us, “with neither side moving to approach the other through the difficult and potentially dangerous forest...[Eventually Henry] ordered his men into the

\textsuperscript{170} We should also recall here, especially considering the above discussion of Arthur’s destruction of the Tuscan vineyards, that when Arthur is speaking with Sir Craddock, the Round Table knight-turned-pilgrim who provides Arthur with the news of Mordred’s rebellion back home, Arthur is at first amazed that this pilgrim dares to walk through the “war zone” created by Arthur’s war with the Tuscans, and incredulously says to Craddock: “Whedire wilne thou, wye, wolkande thyn one? / Qwhyylls þe werdale es o werre, a wawhte I it hold. / Here es an enmye with oste \textit{vndire yone vynes}” (3479-81, emphasis added). This encounter, significantly, occurs after we are told Arthur has destroyed the vineyards of Tuscany. Maybe we are here provided by the poet with additional motivation for why Arthur performed that act of aggression upon the vines: not only were they an agricultural resource of the Tuscan civilian population, but they also provided concealment and a place from which to wage ambushes for Arthur’s enemies. This would provide additional evidence of the \textit{Morte}-poet’s awareness of the intersections between medieval military tactics, human perceptions of the natural world, and the material effects of those tactics and perceptions upon plants and animals.

woods to cut down the trees that separated the opposing armies.\textsuperscript{172} And in recent archaeological studies of Montgomery Castle, an English fortification from the later medieval period that was built in Wales, evidence of deforestation around the castle’s perimeter has come to light. Such widespread removal of the surrounding vegetation was presumably used as a means to facilitate visibility around the castle and to ensure that enemies could not approach the structure too closely without being detected by the watchmen upon the walls.\textsuperscript{173}

Just as these brief considerations of Montgomery Castle and of the Welsh campaigns of Henry II reveal late medieval warfare’s effects on some soldiers’s perceptions of the wooded areas in the British Isles, the Morte-poet is also keenly aware of the ways that the conditions and goals of certain types of warfare can lead to the perception of the forest as a dangerous place, a place that ought perhaps to be encountered more with a sense of suspicion and fear, than awe or aesthetic admiration. But returning now to our analysis of the pastoral scene that Gawain and his foraging troops stumble upon, the Morte-poet employs his several, unique \textit{locus amoenus} descriptions, I believe, to highlight the contingent and socially constructed nature of perceptions of the forest as ominous and threatening. The purpose of the lavish


descriptions of natural beauty like that of the meadow Gawain and his troops discover is that it shows that when soldiers are removed from the immediate vicinity of war and of the constant threat of ambush (as Gawain’s troops are when they leave the siege of Metz to forage), nature is then free to be encountered and perceived in a vastly different way by warriors.

Interestingly, most of the knights that accompany Gawain into the mountains are reluctant to return to the battlefield or to the siege outside Metz. Gawain, after straying from the pastoral meadow to pursue the mounted warrior Priamus that he had spotted riding nearby, and after doing battle nearly to the death with Priamus, returns to his fellow soldiers reclining in the meadow only to find them bewitched by the meadow:

Lordes lenande lowe on lemand scheldes,
With lowde laghttirs on lofté for lykyng of byrdez,
Of larkes, of lynkwhyttez, þat lufflyche songen;
And some was sleghé on slepe with sleyghe of þe pople,
þat sange in þe seson in the schenne schawes,
So lawe in þe lawndez so lykand notes. (2672-77)

[There noblemen lie down on gleaming shields, with loud laughter lifting high for delight of the birds, of larks, of linnets, that beautifully sang. And some had fallen asleep because of the skillful singing of the creatures, who sang in that season in the shining thickets, their pleasant notes so gentle in the glades of the forest.]

Nature has here rid these formerly bellicose men of their desire to fight, instilling in them instead a desire to envelop themselves in the “lykand notes” of the birds. As Finlayson points out in his analysis of this passage, the particularity of the types of birds (“larkes” and “lynkwhyttez”) singing in the meadow makes this passage stand apart from the

174 For this line, I follow the TEAMS edition which offers the following gloss for line 2675: “And some had fallen asleep because of the skillful singing of the creatures.” King Arthur’s Death: The Middle English Stanzic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure, ed. Larry D. Benson, rev. ed. Edward E. Foster. (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1994), 212. In her edition of the poem, Krishna provides this note for line 2675: “þopple. For this word used of animals see OED people sb 1 c.”
plethora of overly generic nature descriptions we find in medieval poetry, and is a particularity which contributes to the Morte-poet creating a “spring landscape…[that] is neither completely formal and idealized nor without sensuous vividness.” At this point, the landscape of the meadow represents the antithesis of the many forest landscapes that are depicted in the middle section of the poem: the meadow has high levels of visibility, a lack of dense foliage that an enemy can use for an ambush, and is located at a distance from where the most gruesome and vigorous fighting of Arthur’s wars occurs. When Gawain rides off from this meadow, abandoning his men in order to seek “wonders” (2514) and eventually to duel with Priamus, it shows his rejection of the pacifist values that the meadow embodies, and his zealous (re)embracing of the life of the romance knight which constantly requires violence to perform and sustain chivalric identity. But when Gawain’s men stay behind to listen to birdsong while lying down upon one of the most distinct symbols of the military community, their shields, it provides an indelible image for the sensuous attractiveness of peace, and for the Morte-poet’s awareness that benign encounters between warriors and nature are possible once the former can succeed in extracting themselves from their military projects and identities.

Arthur and the dream of Lady Fortune

We might be tempted to think that the poet holds up the image of Gawain’s retinue being intoxicated by birdsong in order to malign nature by demonstrating its power to “feminize” or attenuate a warrior’s spirit, but even Arthur himself, the very embodiment of masculine aggression and the chivalric love of war in the poem, reveals in

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one of his dreams that he also craves nature’s soothing power. In this dream, the second
of the poem and one in which Lady Fortune will eventually descend and visit Arthur, he
at first envisions a horrific inversion of the usual natural order, an inversion in which,
instead of animals being killed for food or existing as the collateral damage of war,
Arthur’s own Round Table knights are killed and ravenously consumed. Arthur, when
narrating his dream to the philosophers who accompany him, describes one particularly
troubling detail of his “shewing”\(^{176}\) (3401) thus:

\[
\text{Fore wylene and whilde swynne and wykkyde bestez} \\
\text{Walked in that wasterne, wathes to seche;} \\
\text{Thare lyouns full lothely lykkde þeire tuskes,} \\
\text{All fore laynge of blude of my lele knyghtez! (3232-35)} \\
\]

[For wolves and wild swine and wicked beasts walked in that wasteland, seeking
prey. There loathsome lions licked their tusks, in anticipation of lapping the blood
of my loyal knights!]

This image of aggression and disharmony between humans and animals sends Arthur
frantically scurrying within the dream-world to escape the nightmarish scene unfolding
before him:

\[
\text{Thrughe þat foreste I flede, thare floures whare heghe,} \\
\text{For to fele me for ferde of tha foule thyngez,} \\
\text{Merkede to a medowe with montayngnes enclosyde,} \\
\text{The meryeste of medillerthe that men myghte beholde.} \\
\text{The close was in compass castyn all abowte} \\
\text{With clauer and clereworte cled euen ouer;} \\
\text{The vale was enuerownde with vynes of siluer,} \\
\text{All with grapis of golde, gretter ware neuer. (3236-43)} \\
\]

[Through that forest I fled, to where the flowers were so high, in order to hide me
from those foul things. I came to a meadow, enclosed by mountains, the merriest
of middle-earth that men might behold. The valley was covered and clad all about

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\(^{176}\) The philosopher who interprets the dream to Arthur refers to the dream as a “shewing,” which of
course calls to mind the mystical and divine visions of people like Julian of Norwich. Therefore, the Morte-
poet may be inviting us to see this dream of Arthur’s as an absolutely authentic warning and vision that has
been sent by God Himself.
with clover and flowering plants. The vale was surrounded by vines of silver, all hung with grapes of gold, greater was there never.]

This is the fourth and final example of a *locus amoenus* description that Finlayson singles out for discussion in his article, and similar to the details of some of the other *locus amoenus* passages, this one includes a noteworthy specificity about the types of flora ("clauer" and "clereworte") that Arthur encounters. But when Arthur dreams of nature it is, appropriately, a landscape coated in gold and silver, details that harmonize with his own avaricious and materialistic valuation of nature. Resembling at times other dream vision landscapes in medieval English literature, such as that found in *Pearl*, this description of the enchanting landscape to which Arthur flees in his dream should also remind us of the actual sanctuary Gawain and his small retinue of warriors stumbled upon while foraging in the mountains. In other words, Arthur’s dream of an idealized natural landscape has a counterpart in the world of waking life, although he appears sadly ignorant of this fact in the poem. And much to our surprise, even a battle-hardened and grizzled warrior like Arthur finds solace within the dream when he escapes a world of fierce competition between the human and the nonhuman (a competition represented by the wild animals devouring his knights), and instead finds a way to value nature more for its psychologically restorative properties than in an aggressive way that is deleterious to the natural world.

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177 Finlayson includes a discussion in his article of possible sources for this unique image of ferocious animals frightening the dreamer within what is otherwise a vision of a placid, enchanting spring landscape. Some of the possible candidates Finlayson submits are Guillaume de Machaut’s *Le Dit dou Lyon* and Thomas Usk’s *Testament of Love*. However, in the end, Finlayson admits “none of the examples” he himself offers seem “close enough to *Morte Arthure* to be called a direct source” (10). See Finlayson, “Rhetorical ‘Descriprio,’” 7-10, for his discussion of this fourth example of *locus amoenus* in the poem.
But Arthur’s comfort in a radically different way of engaging with the natural world, and one which does not attempt to subdue, destroy, or take possession of nature, is not to last. After Lady Fortune descends from the clouds in the dream, she at first coddles Arthur, combing his hair and giving him luxurious gifts such as a sword and a scepter. Lady Fortune then tacitly reminds Arthur that the proper relationship between nature and a conquerer like himself is one in which nature is subservient to human dominion:

Scho [Fortune] bad þe bewes scholde bewe down and bryng to my hondes
Of þe beste that they bare one brawntes so heghe; Than they helde to hir heste all holly at ones, The hegheste of iche a hirste, I hette yow forsothe. Scho bade me fyrthe noghte þe fruyte, bot fonde whills me likede... And reche to þe ripeste and rytte thy seluen. (3366-70, 3372)

[She bade the boughs to bow down and bring to my hands the best that they bore on branches so high. Then they submitted to her command, all together and at once. The tallest of each grove, I tell you the truth, she bade of me not to spare, but to try whatever I liked...And to reach for the ripest and revel myself.]

Consuming nature with abandon (“reche to þe ripeste and rytte thy seluen,” 3372) is explicitly advised by Lady Fortune, and that suggestion subsequently eclipses Arthur’s earlier and more passive pleasure within the dream of finding himself in the meadow after the horrific vision of the lions devouring his knights. Then, inexplicably, Lady Fortune’s mood suddenly changes at “myddaye full ewyn” (3382). She spins her wheel, crushing Arthur’s limbs and chopping his “chyne...in sondire” (3390).
When Arthur awakens, he is understandably disturbed by this “shewing” of Lady Fortune. He summons his philosophers to interpret the dream, and they conclude that the vision is a dire warning to Arthur for the need to repent for his deeds, and to seek mercy for his soul (3452-55). Additionally, the philosophers interpret the wolves and wild beasts that were attacking the knights in the dream as wicked men that now attack Arthur’s realms, an obvious reference to Mordred’s rebellion back in England (a rebellion of which Arthur is at this point in the poem still unaware). But given the sustained interest the *Morte*-poet has shown in chivalry’s interactions with nature, we are certainly justified in seeing the vision of the lions attacking the knights as commenting on the warriors in the poem’s own interactions with nature, in addition to seeing the image, like the philosophers do, as signifying current attacks on Arthur’s lands back in England.

Arthur does not welcome the philosophers’ advice to repent and to “[f]ownde abbayes in Fraunce” (3403) instead of continuing his wars that have sown so much destruction and that have brought him to the brink of assuming the crown of Roman Emperor. Instead of transitioning to any kind of behavior suffused with a newfound sense of humility and penitence, Arthur has a rather different reaction. He abruptly takes his leave of the philosophers and retires to a place where he can change into a sumptuous hunting outfit, one replete with a hat decorated with Oriental pearls and gloves encrusted with rubies (3460-63). Many scholars have pointed out how this donning of lavish
hunting gear suggests Arthur has learned nothing from his dream vision, nor from the philosophers’ interpretation of it; rather, he reacts to his dream in a way that reaffirms his chivalric identity and power.\textsuperscript{178}

But nobody, so far as I am aware, has commented on the interesting connection between the \textit{details} of the dream and the \textit{specific performance} that Arthur, upon waking, embarks upon in order to reaffirm his chivalric identity. In other words, I do not think it is a coincidence that the dream shows Arthur an unsettling inversion of the animal-human hierarchy, and one in which animals now prey upon knights, and then Arthur, in his reassertion of pride and potency after the dream, takes his “grehownde and his bronde ande no byerne ells, / And bownnes ouer a brode mede, with breth at his herte; / Furth he stalkis a stye by ū pa still euys” (3464-66) [greyhound and his sword and no one else, and bounds over a broad meadow, with anger in his heart. He stalks a path by the still eaves of the wood]. Arthur’s decision to go hunting reveals a need to reassert a chivalric supremacy over the natural world, a supremacy that had been disturbingly negated in the vision of the lions attacking and slaughtering his knights. Arthur, in short, appears recalcitrant after his dream of Lady Fortune. He has neither adopted, as the philosophers advised him to do, an attitude of repentance for the costly and grisly wars he has waged all over Western Europe, nor has he learned to adopt less destructive attitudes towards the plants and animals that are caught up in the performances of chivalric identity such as those of military campaigning or of hunting. Arthur’s decision to go hunting is, of course, interrupted when Arthur encounters out in the field one of his own Round Table knights,

\textsuperscript{178} For discussions of this donning of hunting attire, see the following: Matthews, \textit{Tragedy of Arthur}, 136; Keiser, “Theme of Justice,” 103; Obst, “Gawain-Priamus Episode,” 15; Ziolkowski, “Narrative Structure,” 239. For a curiously positive reading of Arthur’s dressing in courtly attire to go hunting, see Lumiansky, “Cardinal Virtue Fortitude,” 113-14.
Sir Craddock, who has abandoned the military life in order to complete a pilgrimage to Rome. It is from Sir Craddock that Arthur learns the shocking news of Mordred’s rebellion back in England, and of the infidelity of his wife Gaynor who has joined Mordred and is now carrying his child.

Near the end of the poem, when Arthur’s civil war with Mordred has begun to take its tragic toll upon the knights of the Round Table who fight on Arthur’s side, Arthur at one point embraces the corpse of his beloved and recently killed nephew, Gawain. The narrator describes one detail of the scene thus: “his [Arthur’s] burliche berde was blody berown, / Alls he had bestes birtenden and broghte owt of life” (3971-72) [his handsome beard was drenched in blood, as if he had beaten down beasts and brought them out of life]. In this scene of Arthur’s most heartbreaking loss in the poem, and one in which he begins “to wepe als a woman” (3978), the poet describes the blood smeared upon Arthur’s face in a way that refocuses our attention, at least in part, on the violence that has been perpetrated towards nature throughout this poem. From the abundance of animal bodies in the feast for the Romans, to the incarceration of Lucius’s exotic menagerie, to the destruction of the Tuscan vineyards: all of these are subtly invoked at the moment of Gawain’s death to remind us that Arthur’s slowly expanding wars of aggression have profoundly affected, not only human communities such as those of the Round Table knights or of the civilian populations of Lombardy and Tuscany, but also nonhuman communities as well.
‘a beest may al his lust fulfille’: Theban Violence and Medieval Nature

The ancient city of Thebes represented for many medieval writers the typological and tropological antithesis of the revered city of Athens. Whereas the latter city embodied the Apollonian forces of order, civilization, and law, the city of Thebes was perceived as a successor to the civitas terrena of Babylon that Augustine described in his De civitate Dei, and thus as a city that embodied the darker forces of greed, murder, and internecine strife. In fact, it would have been difficult for late medieval poets and writers to completely jettison Thebes from their minds, for that city (unlike Troy) was still very much in existence at the time they were writing: “Boccaccio and Chaucer might easily have located on a map the Thebes and Athens where they set their narratives...[and] Boccaccio would have known many details of the city’s current affairs...since possession of Thebes and Athens was contested by the Angevin rulers of Naples, in whose capital he lived in the late 1330’s.”

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179 See Books XV-XVIII of De civitate Dei for Saint Augustine’s discussion of the heavenly versus the earthly cities.
180 David Anderson, “Mythography or Historiography? The Interpretation of Theban Myths in Late Medieval Literature,” Florilegium 8 (1986), 114-15. For additional discussions of medieval views on the ancient city of Thebes, and on Theban references in Chaucer and Lydgate, see the following: Dominique
In addition to poets using Thebes as a conceptual device that allowed them to engage in or to interrogate historiography as laid out by Augustine, a historiography which saw Babylon, Thebes, and Rome as fallen, earthly cities found along the successive stages of universal history that separated the Fall from the Last Judgment, Thebes and its legacy also allowed writers to investigate the divide between humans and animals, and the possibility of humans becoming essentially akin to animals through the malignant influence of Thebes. As I will argue, Chaucer, in his *Knight’s Tale*, uses the Theban characters of Palamon and Arcite to raise the specter of late medieval chivalry’s deleterious relationship to the natural world, and in order to give us a compelling representation of the ideological maneuvers by which his Knight, *The Canterbury Tales*’ sole spokesman for the military class, tries to whitewash over this detrimental human-nature relationship and to convince his audience (and perhaps himself in the process) that both humans and animals mutually benefit from the intimate relationships between the two that arise out of the material and ideological practices of chivalry.

John Lydgate, in *The Siege of Thebes*, the other text with which this chapter will be concerned, also relies on images involving nature which, far from being superfluous details or set-pieces in the poems, are essential articulators of the poem’s larger political concerns. Like Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*, Lydgate’s *Siege* investigates the ramifications of

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unrestrained chivalric violence, and Lydgate uses his imaginative scenes of warriors interacting with tigers and snakes to encode the poem with a strong criticism of forms of chivalric aggression that have become misguided about what should be legitimate and purposeful goals or targets of its violence. In this chapter, I will be interested in examining the complex ways in which both Lydgate and Chaucer employ images of nature being harmed by warfare in order to allow them to articulate sustained critiques of feckless kingship or of the late medieval cult of chivalry that was currently fueling the Hundred Years War, a war between France and England that was threatening to achieve nothing of enduring political value at the expense of a great deal of carnage and economic ruin for both nations.

As with most of the other texts discussed earlier in this project (e.g. Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, Christine de Pisan’s *Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyvalrye*, etc.), we find in the *Siege of Thebes* and *The Knight’s Tale* that most of the violence against nature is depicted in decidedly imaginative and coded ways. In other words, as opposed to the historical realism of (say) Arthur’s devastation of the Tuscan vineyards in the Alliterative

\[\text{References}\]


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Morte, Chaucer and Lydgate provide us with much more fanciful images such as those of slain tigers and chariot-pulling bulls. Although there is little by way of a historical counterpart in late medieval Europe to most of these images, my interpretation of such images is similar to that conducted in earlier chapters. These representations of subjugated or suffering nature, I have been arguing, provide powerful symbols for the chivalric violence that in the later Middle Ages was threatening the stability and public order of medieval civilization itself.\textsuperscript{182} Yet, they also signify and draw the reader’s attention to acts of violence and aggression against the natural world that were commonplace in the era of the Hundred Years War: the theft or killing of herds of an enemy’s domestic animals; the large-scale deaths of horses during battle; the intentional burning of an enemy’s crops, orchards, and vineyards; and so forth. It is these historical manifestations of unrestrained chivalric power, as well as knightly violence in general, that the scenes of harried and harmed nature allude to in Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale and Lydgate’s Siege of Thebes and expose as in dire need of improved social and political control.

Theban violence, nature, and The Knight’s Tale

In most of the recent scholarly discussions of Chaucer and nature, it is usually that poet’s interest in the more abstract and philosophical meanings of nature that are singled out for scrutiny. Rather than talk about any concerns Chaucer may have had for actual horses, birds, trees, rivers, or ecosystems in the world around him, the discussions tend to

\textsuperscript{182} On the threat of chivalric violence to the political, economic, and social stability of medieval Europe, see the following pair of insightful studies by Richard W. Kaeuper: Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999); War, Justice, and Public Order: England and France in the Later Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
favor an emphasis on what this London poet thought about the ways in which the forces of nature manipulate and “prick” us, or how these suspect forces are responsible for a devolution of the human condition down to its most primal and instinctual appetites. Even in an article with as promising a title as “Chivalry and Nature in The Knight’s Tale,” we get almost no discussion of the many references to animals and plants which abound in that Canterbury Tale; rather, we get a preponderance of analysis of the highly abstract forces of “nature,” this time in the form of an analysis of the celestial planets and their potent influence upon many of the main characters in the poem. In this section, I would like to argue for the sustained interest of The Knight’s Tale in the existence of vegetable and animal life, and in the calamitous effects that chivalric culture and warfare can have on that existence. Although previous scholars writing on nature in Chaucer have been absolutely correct to point out the sophisticated ways in which Chaucer employs the animal to think about human identity or to engage in rigorous metaphysical speculation, I wish to build upon those previous discussions by also showing how Chaucer uses nature to critique the excesses of war and to gesture towards the violence that medieval warfare unleashes upon materially existing nature.

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183 For discussion of Chaucer and nature along these more abstract and philosophical lines, see the following: Sarah Stanbury, “EcoChaucer: Green Ethics and Medieval Nature,” Chaucer Review 39:1 (2004), 1-16; Hugh White, Nature, Sex, and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 220-55. For a notable exception to the trend of focusing on Chaucer’s abstract interest in nature, see Lisa J. Kiser, “Chaucer and the Politics of Nature,” in Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism, eds. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2001): 41-56. Kiser, unlike Stanbury or White, is interested in her essay in discussing how humans construct external nature within political and social discourses, and how such social constructions occlude the unmediated existence of plants and animals. Thus, when Chaucer allows his goose, cuckoo, and duck to speak in an unmediated fashion in the poem (“Kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!”), Kiser argues that Chaucer does indeed have his eye on the physically existing animals of his world, and on the problem of how ideological appropriations of nature often eclipse such actual animals.

In an insightful discussion of the use of animal imagery in The Knight’s Tale, Dorothy Yamamoto asserts that Chaucer is deeply committed in that tale to breaking down the human-animal divide by showing the ability of war to reveal humanity’s essential kinship to animals. “Arcite and Palamon,,” Yamamoto asserts, “problematize the normative view of man’s status as a ‘divyne beest’ qualitatively distinct from animal creation.”\(^{185}\) According to this line of argument, Chaucer is very much a thinker of his time in that he perceives human identity as porous and interacting with animal identity.\(^{186}\) The two, for Chaucer, simply cannot be consistently separated. Thus, the accumulated effect of Chaucer’s repeated references to Palamon and Arcite as being like wolves or boars, or even to more minor characters such as Lygurge and Emetreus being compared to bears or lions, is an implicit assertion on the part of Chaucer that his knights “remain ‘in the gap’ [between human and animal],” and “their identities [are] deeply complicit with the animals to which they have previously been compared.”\(^{187}\) Rather than collapse Chaucer the poet into his Knight-narrator as Yamamoto seems to do, and rather than agree with her that Chaucer perceives deep connections between animals and humans, I wish to examine the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the ways in which the poem depicts how the warrior class constructs its identity through a sense of kinship with the


\(^{186}\) I am referring here to one of main arguments made by Joyce E. Salisbury in The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages (New York: Routledge, 1994). The overarching argument found there is that in the early medieval period, many of the writers and thinkers appear to exhibit a reassuring belief that animal and human identities are firmly separated. However, in the late Middle Ages, the explosion of texts depicting unsettling human-animal hybrids (such as fables and many of the bestiaries) provide evidence of, Salisbury argues, a growing sense of anxiety that perhaps human and animal identities are not as distinct as was once widely believed.

\(^{187}\) For a discussion of the different animals Palamon and Arcite are equated with, see Yamamoto, Boundaries, 139; for a discussion of minor characters such as Lygurge and Emetreus being equated with animals, see Yamamoto, Boundaries, 135.
animal world; and, on the other hand, the ways in which the poem artfully reveals how materially existing nature is rarely better off for having been appropriated into a chivalric mythos. Being the astute observer and commentator on chivalric culture that he is, Chaucer is well aware that the warrior class cherishes the assumption that they acquire their potency and innate rights to violence through a totemic identification with animals, yet, I think we see evidence in a poem like the *Knight’s Tale* that Chaucer is aware of how this sense of identification unfortunately does not award animals any protection from chivalric violence. The advantages of this sense of kinship are a one-way street: when we trace the benefits of affirming an animal-human connection, they inevitably lead only to the human sphere.

One of the earliest affirmations in the *Knight’s Tale* of a kinship between animals and humans is the lament delivered in prison by Palamon after Arcite has been released:

> For slayn is man right as another beest,  
> And dwelleth eek in prison and arreest,  
> And hath siknesse and greet adversitie,  
> And ofte tymes milteles, pardee. (1309-12)

The syntax and semantics of this passage are tricky, yet extremely important to unravel. The “eek” in line 1310 could be interpreted in at least two different ways, and therefore could lead to the following divergent meanings for the entire line. Line 1310 could mean either “And *in addition* (to being slain like a beast), man dwells in prison and restraint”; or, it could mean “And *also* (like a beast), man dwells in prison and restraint.”

Chaucer, I believe, is very skillfully keeping in play the ambiguity as to which of these two meanings we are to embrace. Witnessing Palamon in this moment of histrionic self-

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189 See *Middle English Dictionary*, definitions (b) and (c), s.v. “eke.”

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pitying, we can sense that he avers that certainly no creature could suffer as acutely as humans do. And, we could go on to argue, the purpose of Palamon’s lament is it allows him to express the self-indulgent belief that nobody suffers as much as he personally does at that moment as he wastes away in prison. Getting back to the interpretative crux of the passage above, we can say Palamon himself perceives humans as suffering “in prison and restraint” in addition to, and above and beyond, the suffering animals experience in their own existences. Such a reading is supported by the following lines delivered by Palamon a little later during this same prison lament:

And yet encresseth this al my penaunce,  
That man is bounde to his observaunce,  
For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille,  
Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille. (1315-18)

Further affirming a distance between human and animal existence, Palamon tacitly admits here his desire to become more animal-like because of his belief that animals live much more liberated (and hence satisfying) lives.

However, I think Chaucer does not want us to lose sight of a fundamental fallacy lurking behind Palamon’s view of animals, and therefore Chaucer also does not want us to forget about the second possible interpretation for the couplet “For slayn is man right as another beest, / And dwelleth eek in prison and arreest.” That is, several scenes that occur later in the poem (which I will discuss below) reveal that Chaucer is well aware that the military class’ encounters with animals often directly contribute to animals dwelling also “in prison and arreest” and in “greet adversitee,” just as humans are said to do by Palamon. Palamon performs a standard maneuver, popular in our own time as well, of romanticizing and whitewashing the lives of animals, and of being overly reductive
towards the complexity of an animal’s lived experience. But even more important for the
discussion here, Palamon’s view of animals problematically sees them as being able to
“al [their] lust fulfille” despite the poem’s obvious recognition that chivalric actions are
responsible in several ways for thwarting and negating the desires of animals. The
significance of accepting the second of the two interpretations offered above for line
1310 is that it means Chaucer recognizes some continuity between human and animal
existence, and is quite capable of seeing the suffering of animals as being comparable to
events in which humans are victims of “greet adversitee,” and that animals are frequently
made to suffer too even though they are “ofte tymes giltelees.”

In might behoove us at this moment to quickly turn our attention to the moment
when Emelye is first described at length in the poem. Such a divergence from our main
topic of the interconnections between knights and animals in the poem will help us better
unpack Chaucer’s overall interest in the ideological susceptibility of nature in chivalric
culture. As many scholars have been quick to point out, the description of Emelye by
means of emphasizing her resemblances and affinities to nature (lines 1033-39) suggests
that for the Knight, Emelye is a surrogate for nature. One such scholar notes: “Lacking
almost every individualizing feature [we only hear of her ‘yelow hair’], Emelye is seen in
terms of the garden itself, with its plenitude of flowers, and its associations of freshness
and grace.”

Our introduction to the exquisite beauty of Emelye is presented to us in a
way that gives us a reenactment of the optical experience of Palamon and Arcite as they

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watch her from the circumscribed vantage point of their prison tower. But it is not
immediately clear, given the fact that neither Palamon nor Arcite ever really speak with
Emelye, what it is about her that makes her so ardently desired by the two knights.

As V.A. Kolve has pointed out, there is, around this moment in the text, a curious
repetition of phrases such as “romynge to and fro” and “rometh in the yonder place” that
are used by Palamon and Arcite, as well as the Knight, to describe Emelye’s actions in
the garden. Given the fact that Emelye seems synonymous with the natural world, and
also given that Emelye is characterized as much by her mobility (that is, her penchant for
“romynge”) as she is by her beauty, we might say that what makes her so desirous is that,
like the “beest” in Palamon’s speech, she represents the “freedom” of the natural world
that, at present, stands in stark opposition to the imprisoned status of Palamon.

However, it is obviously a dubious state of freedom that both Emelye and the
nature of the garden possess. Emelye, as is apparent by Theseus’s later declaration that
she will be the prize for the winner of the tournament, possesses no discernable autonomy
in the world of the poem. And the nature of the pleasure garden in which Emelye roams
is, of course, a highly artful and humanly manipulated entity, as well as being an
embodiment of aristocratic control over the natural world that likely would include (at
least in its real-world counterparts) grafted trees, turfed benches, and trellised vines.

Significantly, we are told by the Knight that the catalyst for Emelye’s May

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191 See V.A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1984), 88-89. Kolve points out that the prison and the garden are “evene joynant,” suggesting (as I am interested in doing) that they are not as distinct and separate as they could be. Palamon and Arcite do seem to perceive the garden, however, within a framework that sees the garden as signifying freedom and “wele.” Chaucer invites us to see their view of the garden as too neatly cleansed of any status as a constrained or “imprisoned” entity. That is, Palamon and Arcite do not seem to take notice of how “evene joynant” their prison is to the garden; rather, they seem to desire it so completely because for them it stands for something diametrically opposed to, and wholly aloof from, their own present state and present space.
“observaunce” is the fact that “The season priketh every gentil herte, / And maketh it out of his slep to sterte” (1043-44). As will happen throughout this poem, images of nature’s potency that are offered up by our narrator (“The season priketh”) are problematically juxtaposed with images of nature, and particularly, animals, under duress (such as with the enclosed and manipulated pleasure garden).

Thus, if Emelye and the garden are associated in Palamon and Arcite’s minds with the freedom that they so painfully lack in their state of perpetual incarceration, and if it is this perceived “freedom” which makes Emelye so desirable, then it appears that this investigation by Chaucer into the mechanics of desire operating in Palamon and Arcite reaffirms the point Chaucer wants to make with regards to Palamon’s prison lament: that the chivalric class habitually blind to or represses their own role in the constrained physical and biological existences of certain elements of the natural world. Before the narration leaves “prima pars” behind, we will already have been invited by Chaucer to ponder the insidious fantasies with regards to gardens and animals by representatives of the military, aristocratic class; fantasies characterized by the problematic attribution of a distorted degree of freedom and autonomy to the natural world.

One of the moments in the poem that begins to undermine Palamon’s belief that animals live unimpeded existences in which they are free to fulfill all their desires is when Lygurge and Emetreus, the two kings who come to support Palamon and Arcite in the tournament, are introduced in the poem. As Charles Muscatine long ago noted: “many passages [in the Knight’s Tale] appear to be irrelevant and detachable. To take a well-known instance, we have sixty-one lines of description of Emetreus and Lygurge; yet so
far as the action of the poem is concerned, these two worthies do practically nothing.\textsuperscript{192} And as Muscatine will go on to say, by way of a qualification to the above statement, although those two kings serve little function in the plot of the tale, they do exemplify the Knight’s overall concern with “the general tenor of the noble life, the pomp and ceremony, the dignity and power [of nobility].”\textsuperscript{193} I would want to argue, however, that the text places more emphasis on the two kings’ role as embodiments of power than on their role as embodiments of those other components of nobility in Muscatine’s list such as dignity and ceremony. As we shall discuss below, these kings arrive at Theseus’s tournament ostentatiously adorned with a multitude of animal captives. Yamamoto herself recognizes that Emetreus and Lygurge do not function here to assert any sense of benign kinship between human and animal; rather, they function as powerful reminders of the warrior class’s role as “rulers, as wielders of power through their ascendancy over the animal kingdom.”\textsuperscript{194}

When Lygurge, “the gret kyng of Trace,” arrives to support Palamon, his lavish entourage includes “foure white boles in the trays [harness]” (2139) pulling his chariot, as well as a personal collection of hunting dogs consisting of “white alauntz, / Twenty or mo” (2148-49). Arcite’s ally, a certain “kyng of Inde” named Emetreus, can count among his personal traveling menagerie an “egle tame” (2178) and “many a tame leon and leopard” (2186) which scurry about him on every side. Emetreus also rides upon “a steede bay trapped in steel” (2157), a phrase which should give us pause to consider the potential semantic instability of its main verb “trapped.” The \textit{Middle English Dictionary}

\textsuperscript{192} Charles Muscatine, “Form, Texture, and Meaning in Chaucer’s \textit{Knight’s Tale},” \textit{PMLA} 65:5 (1950), 917.
\textsuperscript{193} Muscatine, “Form, Texture, and Meaning,” 919.
\textsuperscript{194} Yamamoto, \textit{Boundaries}, 137 (emphasis in the original).
tells us it can mean to provide an animal such as a horse with ceremonial or military regalia, but it can also mean to ensnare an animal. In a passage brimming with so many images of animals under the duress of humans, perhaps Chaucer is well aware of that second, more violent, meaning to the verb, and intends for us to pick up on this darker resonance within the line describing Emetreus’ horse.

Thus, if we subscribe to Palamon’s belief in animals’ enviable ability to “al [their] lust fulfille,” it should give us cause for concern that the lives of many animals we see in the poem are a far cry from supporting Palamon’s point of view. Instead of animals as healthy, happy bundles of emancipated Freudian Id (or the animal counterpart thereof), we see a preponderance of animals that are shackled, domesticated, and coerced into the service of fulfilling human “lust,” rather than their own.

If we remind ourselves of Yamamoto’s central thesis regarding most of the animal imagery in The Knight’s Tale, namely, that Chaucer is employing such imagery in order to assert a fundamentally essentialist connection between human and animal, I would submit that a revision of that argument is called for. Chaucer, it seems to me, only asserts that humans and animals resemble one another in their similar existential situations of living out lives that are always already circumscribed by biological, environmental, and social factors; hence the fallacy of Palamon’s idealized perception of animals while delivering his lament in prison. Thus, contra Yamamoto, I do not think Chaucer is overly interested in metaphysical investigations of human or animal identity in this tale; rather,

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See Middle English Dictionary, definitions (1) and (2), s.v. “trappen.”
he is more interested in investigating ideological appropriations of the animal and in investigating the repercussions such appropriations have for the human political sphere, as well as for materially existing nature.

When Chaucer gives us the extended metaphors involving warriors like Palamon and Arcite (d)evolving into animals during combat, such as the famous ones occurring in lines 1655-1660 in which the two warriors are said to fight like “wild boores” and a “cruel tigre” during their battle in the grove, this is Chaucer revealing the military class’ appropriation of the animal world in order to validate their own monopoly on violence, and to “naturalize” such outpourings of violence as an unavoidable act of biological necessity. In other words, when we see Palamon behaving like a “wood leon” or Arcite like a “cruel tigre” during their bloody brawl, we see them as the Knight shamelessly wants us to see other members of his warrior class. Although these comparisons to animals might seem unflattering metaphors on the Knight’s part, we will see that the Knight repeats these animal metaphors during the tournament battle organized by Theseus, but that there the animal metaphors are slightly altered in order to take on more reverent and ennobling overtones.

We know from Palamon’s prison lament that he yearns to attain the animal’s freedom to spontaneously act out primal urges without fear of being punished or censured in any way. And, as we know from certain aspects of chivalric material culture such as heraldry, it is not a source of shame or embarrassment for warriors to see themselves as akin to lions, tigers, and boars. Knights positively draped themselves in the insignia which celebrated such connections. As Caroline Shenton has argued, the aristocratic penchant for embracing animal symbols, and flaunting those symbols on a wide variety
of surfaces such as coins, banners, livery, and royal seals, was reaching its apogee of medieval popularity and prevalence in the mid- to late fourteenth century. A particularly noteworthy example of this zeal for animal symbolism is Edward III’s adoption of the symbol of the leopard. Shenton informs us:

But the frequency and variety of leopard symbols used by Edward III suggests that there was a concerted attempt on his part to use the image as a personal symbol in a far more sophisticated and imaginative way than that used by his predecessors. Henry III and Edward I’s usage [of the leopard symbol during their reigns] was almost unwitting. Edward III’s was obviously deliberate.  

The connection between Edward III and his leopard symbol was seen to be so intimate that Edward even began surrounding himself with actual physical leopards as an additional way of asserting essential connections between himself and this fierce predator. Shenton suggests that Edward possibly even took his collection of living leopards with him on campaign into Scotland in order to ensure that “the king was personally associated…in some people’s minds with the exotic and dangerous animals,” and we have evidence that in 1365 the Black Prince sent his father a live leopard and lion to add to the King’s personal menagerie. Thus, similar to what Chaucer shows us

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197 Shenton discusses in her article how at first glance the leopard may seem an inappropriate symbol for a king to willingly adopt, for the bestiary tradition has often maligned the leopard as being “a symbol of the anti-Christ” and it “was believed that the leopard represented corruption and sin, because the animal was the result of the unnatural mating of a lion with a pard” (73). Shenton believes, however, that there was an alternative tradition of what the leopard signified: “Leopard’ meant not only a pard cross-breed, but also the heraldic lion ‘passant gardant’. A lion walking about and looking around him was thought to be behaving like a leopard and so was known as a lion-leopard” (73). It was this latter, nobler symbolism that Shenton feels Edward’s leopards were intended to invoke.
through characters such as Emetreus and Lygurge who travel with their own personal menageries, materially existing nature is often adversely affected by human ideological systems that are built around the scaffolding of medieval cultural beliefs about animals.

A strong sense of identification with the animal symbolism that was promoted by a king or a powerful magnate could indeed have negative repercussions for public order and social stability. Retainers often felt emboldened by the conspicuous displays of their lord’s animal symbols and consequently often behaved as if those animal badges allowed them to act as spontaneously in their displays of power as the animals themselves are wont to do. Adrian Ailes discusses how this flourishing of animal symbols (and of the behavior to which they contributed) led to attempts to regulate the abundant display of those symbols:

In the regions and shires, bands of ruffians, local mafias who believed their lord’s badges granted them immunity, assaulted enemies and damaged property. In February 1468 John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, distributed his badge of a white (talbot) dog to a gang of nineteen or more local youths recruited specifically to attack Lord Grey of Codnor. Such excesses resulted in a series of parliamentary statutes and ordinances from 1390 onwards attempting to curb and sometimes abolish the granting and receiving of livery.199

What Chaucer might be slyly referring to in his references to Palamon and Arcite becoming more animal-like as they fight, and in references to Palamon’s desire to be as “free” as animals, is this newfangled lust on the part of late medieval aristocrats or gentry to surround themselves with material symbols of boars, eagles, lions, leopards, harts, swans,200 and so forth (and even to surround themselves with the actual animals

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200 For a discussion of the late medieval popularity of claiming descent from the Knight of the Swan, a mythic figured depicted in medieval French and English narratives who was able to transform himself
themselves), and then to often behave in bellicose or unruly ways that suggest that they see themselves as authorized to act in such a manner because of an affinity with the animal kingdom.\textsuperscript{201} The monarch or the aristocrats themselves often felt that the animal symbol with which they chose to identify ennobled the warrior’s reputation and linked him fundamentally to cultural meanings assigned to the animal such as a harbinger of justice, as illustrated in the poem \textit{An Invective Against France} (1346):

\begin{quote}
Tertius Edwardus, aper Anglicus et leopardus  
Rex tuus est verus; veniens tibi dente severus  
Cor tibi confregit, tua legit, multa subegit,  
Bella peregit, forta fregit, jura redegit.\textsuperscript{202}
\end{quote}

Although a medieval warrior (and his propagandists) might want to suggest that in a warrior’s affinity with a boar or leopard that he is a “bringer of laws” (\textit{jura redegit}), Chaucer is using his own animal-imagery in \textit{The Knight’s Tale} to expose the forms of animal imagery, such as that deployed in \textit{An Invective Against France}, as a sham. Chaucer shows us that more often than not, the zealous adoption of – and identification with – animal imagery could be divisive, as opposed to restorative and conducive to peace.

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\textsuperscript{201} Although heraldry had been a part of medieval aristocratic material culture, it bears repeating that heraldry really began to reach its zenith and increasing ubiquity only in the reign of Edward III. Peter Cross tells us: “But it was not only in churches and on sepulchral monuments that heraldry was increasingly found. It was prominent on buildings, on seals, and in manuscripts. It was to be found on dress, on domestic plate, on caskets and chests, on wall paintings and on tiled pavements. Within all these media, antecedents of one sort or another are to be found during the mid thirteenth century or, indeed, earlier. It was in Edwardian England, however, that they coalesced to form a remarkably coherent and extraordinarily inventive display of heraldic art; one which reached an increasingly wide spectrum of the elite.” From Peter Cross, “Knighthood, Heraldry and Social Exclusion in Edwardian England,” \textit{Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display}, 39.

To take one further example of animal imagery’s contribution to public instability from around the time Chaucer was working on his *Canterbury Tales*, we might recall the growing unease in the 1390’s by Richard II’s magnates over the king’s practice of distributing the badge of the white hart to his most loyal subjects, particularly to his Cheshire soldiers. During the parliament of 1397, as Richard was carrying out his purge of the nobles who were responsible for his humiliation during the Merciless Parliament of 1388, Richard’s personal bodyguards, the Cheshire archers, appear to have felt on edge around their fellow Englishmen during this particular parliamentary session. At one point, as the country waited with bated breath over the course of a few days to see how ruthlessly Richard would deal with his enemies, the “Cheshire archers…surrounded the building, [and] believing some dissension had broken out, drew their bows and, to the terror of all, actually unleashed some arrows until the king himself quieted them down.”

Just as Edward III’s adoption of the leopard symbol leads to propagandistic poems like *An Invective Against France* which suggest Edward, as bringer of law and justice, has the same right to discharge his violence against the French as the leopard has to discharge its violence against its prey, so too does Richard’s widespread use of the white hart symbol lead to an increase in violence on a large scale, and an increase that

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203 Michael Bennett, *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 100. Consider also this 1398 entry in the chronicle of Adam Usk in which Usk complains: “The king, meanwhile, ever hastening to his fall, among the many burdens which he inflicted upon his realm also kept about him in his following four hundred supernumeraries [excessinos uiros] from the county of Cheshire, men of the utmost depravity who went about doing as they wished, assaulting, beating, and plundering his subjects with impunity; wherever the king went, night and day, they stood guard over him, armed as if for war, committing adulteries, murders, and countless other crimes; yet so inordinately did the king favour them that he would not listen to anyone who complained about them, indeed he regarded such people with loathing; and this was the chief cause of his ruin.” *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377-1421*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 48-49.
threatens to splinter the country. Chaucer, I would argue, is drawing upon these problematic identifications with animal symbols by powerful nobles and their retainers, and is pointing out that these aristocratic affinities with animals often only lead to humans behaving as aggressively as animals: towards humans and nonhumans alike. Reluctant to contribute to the chorus of voices that touted the ability of famous warrior-kings like Edward III to embody the noble qualities that were popularly attributed to animals such as lions or leopards, Chaucer instead suggests throughout *The Knight’s Tale* that if proud warriors do show kinship with animals, it is unfortunately, and all too often, in their selfish acting out of destructive urges and in their disregard for morality and law.

As we saw above, Chaucer has taken obvious steps in his characterizations of Emetreus and Lygurje to reveal that animals are not the utterly free entities about which Palamon fantasizes. Rather, animals are shown to be more often victimized or subjugated by the military class, a class that is at the same time (and hence paradoxically) fond of idealizing animals as capable of acting out all of their passions and their drives. A warrior like Palamon needs to continuously assert the fantasy of completely free animals in order to emulate such behavior, and thus be able to validate the spontaneous acting out of aggression that serves his own interests. All of this is more preferable for Palamon and Arcite than being obligated to embrace “more human” codes of behavior such as the “brother-in-arms” vow the text implies that they had previously exchanged and which would limit their freedom to try to attain Emyle through violent means.⁴

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In his investigation of Chaucer’s engagement with the Theban tradition in *The Knight’s Tale*, Dominique Battles argues that what Chaucer is interested in with his tale of Arcite and Palamon is investigating whether the violence, aggression, and self-destructive character of Thebes is a product of nature or of nurture. Chaucer, Battles writes, “allows us to observe the evolution of a Theban-style conflict from conception to maturity in the same way that we might observe wild animals living and breeding in captivity…Arcite and Palamon instinctively turn to conflict even once they are removed from their native conflict-ridden home.”

For Battles, Chaucer asserts through his characterizations of Palamon and Arcite that their penchant for violence is so deeply embedded in the genetics of their being that no matter how far they were to flee from the destroyed city of Thebes, the Theban urge for destruction and fratricide would manifest itself. However, by having his narrator, the Knight, repeatedly reference Palamon and Arcite’s similarity to wild beasts, I wonder if Chaucer is not instead demonstrating how fond warriors are of ideologically “naturalizing” their violence by attempting to argue that it is as unavoidable and deep-rooted as an animal’s urge to hunt. Chaucer’s perception of a suspicious distance between an animal’s instinctual urge to fight and a human “Theban-caused” urge to fight is most apparent in the following lines describing Palamon and Arcite’s encounter during the “hundred versus hundred” battle arranged by Theseus to determine who wins the hand of Emelye in marriage:

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Ther nas no tygre in the vale of Galogopheye,  
Whan that hir whelp is stole whan it is lite,  
So crueel on the hunte as is Arcite  
For jelous herte upon this Palamon.  
Ne in Belmarye ther nys so fell leon,  
That hunted is, or for his hunger wood,
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Battles, *Medieval Tradition*, 112,
Ne of his praye desireth so the blood,
As Palamon to slean his foo Arcite. (2626-33)

Jeffrey Helterman has interpreted these lines as demonstrating Palamon and Arcite’s ability to become “more cruel and unreasonable than the most savage beast.” But I think Chaucer wants us to see something very different in this passage. The way the Knight constructs his analogies by means of negations in the above passage (“The nas no tygre in the vale…”) suggests that, in the Knight’s eyes, the two warriors in their moment of intense combat have achieved a state of instinctual purity that exceeds and surpasses that of an animal engaged in its own irreproachable behavior such as killing in order to eat. Or, to put it another way, the Knight suggests that Palamon and Arcite out-animal the animals.

As a member of the same cult of chivalry as his main characters, the Knight is exposed here as trying to situate his class’ monopoly on, and penchant for, violence within the realm of the moral absolute by connecting such violence to the animal world. But the Knight’s specious connection between, for example, a tigress defending her cub and Arcite with “jelous herte” defending his claim over Emeyle should alert us to the fact that Chaucer does not see both actions as equally “natural.” Palamon and Arcite’s human, all too human, reasons for feuding demonstrate the human warrior’s lack of a motive as “natural” and amoral as an animal defending its offspring or killing prey in order to acquire life-sustaining food, although the Knight slyly attempts to condition us to see his warriors as just that: perfectly natural. And thus, the idea of a spontaneously and naturally

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occurring Theban-induced violence appears more like an ideologically contrived defense of aggression, an aggression that is instead more a product of nurture (the cult of chivalry) than of nature (Theban genetics).

We should point out at this moment that the comparisons mentioned above between animals defending their young or killing prey and human warriors are not unique to Chaucer. They are found as well in the source for Chaucer’s Tale, Boccaccio’s Teseida delle Nozze d’Emilia, but with some telling divergences. In Book 8 of the Teseida, which depicts Boccaccio’s version of the grand tournament battle arranged by Theseus, there is a much larger cast of characters which the narration focuses on while they are engaged in the throes of battle. Additionally, rather than describe Palaemon or Arcita as being like a tiger attempting to recover stolen whelps or as a lion hunting to stave off maddening hunger, Boccaccio’s narrative instead describes more peripheral characters, Diomedes and Peleus, in such ways. Interestingly, Chaucer has transplanted these metaphors that ideologically “naturalize” human violence in amoral ways, and applied them anew to his warriors fighting over the coveted love-object Emelye. Another noteworthy emendation Chaucer makes to Boccaccio’s original metaphors is that whereas the lion in Boccaccio’s analogy is described as: “E quale, degli armenti ancor bramoso, / sol pien di sangue rimane il leone” (standing alone covered with blood, yet still craving for cattle), Chaucer’s metaphor depicts a lion that is insane with hunger, which implies that it has not eaten in quite some time. The point here is that Chaucer, by not depicting his lion as already glazed with the blood of a recent kill and yet still craving more prey, has

\[\text{207} \text{ See Book 8, stanza 26 for a description of Diomede and stanza 49 for that of Peleus in the } \text{Teseida.}\]

\[\text{208} \text{ Giovanni Boccaccio, } \text{Teseida} \text{ (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1938), 243.}\]
evacuated from Boccaccio’s original metaphor any overtones of excess or greed. The Knight’s deployment of his own version of Boccaccio’s metaphor seems much more invested in legitimizing the violence that the Knight describes.

After considering the above passage in which the Knight compares Palamon and Arcite to violent animals, it becomes much more pressing to address the issue of what the Knight thinks about Theseus as an embodiment of chivalry. Some scholars have argued that the Knight’s deepest admiration is directed towards Theseus, a man who is able to harness the wayward energies of the military ethos and to redirect them in less destructive ways. As Lee Patterson explains it: “The Knight means his narrative to record the disarming of an aboriginal Theban ferocity by Athenian civilization, the replacement of a regressive Theban repetitiveness with the purposive linearity of the Athenian mission civilisatrice.” Conversely, in Terry Jones’ revisionist work Chaucer’s Knight, Jones argues that the Knight is a stand-in for late medieval mercenaries, such as the famous Sir John Hawkwood who served under a medley of notoriously cruel tyrants, and thus (according to Jones) the Knight must admire the “tyrant” Theseus because he realizes that his own “sword-for-hire” way of life is dependent upon the contracts that were often meted out by despots like Theseus. As much as I sympathize with Jones’ nuanced assessment of Theseus as being a very cagey tyrant who knows how to consolidate his power, I am reluctant to go as far as Jones does when he consistently refers to Theseus as

209 See, for example, Winthrop Wetherbee, “Romance and Epic in Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale,” Exemplaria 2:1 (1990), 303-328. Wetherbee’s discussion of Theseus throughout this article is an example of the critical point of view that perceives Theseus as essentially an admirable and noble character.
the Knight’s “hero.”\textsuperscript{211} When the Knight draws the parallels that he does between the chivalric fighting of Palamon and Arcite, and the animals that are engaged in their most unimpeachable actions such as defending their young or hunting to survive, I sense that the Knight’s sympathies do not unequivocally lie with Theseus’ “taming” of raw chivalric violence (as scholars like Patterson and Jones seem to suggest, albeit for radically different reasons). Rather, it might be necessary to acknowledge that such comparisons between knights and animals constitute evidence for, at the least, a deep-rooted \textit{ambivalence} that the Knight has with regard to these intrusions by Theseus into the spontaneous expressions of force by the Theban warriors Palamon and Arcite. The Knight might deplore the constraints placed upon the ability of other warriors like himself to be as “purely instinctual” in their meting out of violence as the tiger and the lion are.

We have ample textual and historical evidence to back up a reading of the Knight as a figure who would be resentful of intrusions by a figure of centralized authority like Theseus upon chivalric displays of violence.\textsuperscript{212} For instance, in a very influential chivalric handbook that circulated around the time of the Hundred Years War, it is not altogether clear that a “civilizing” of brutal swordplay or hand-to-hand combat would always be cheerfully welcomed by a member of the professional military elite, as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{211} See, for example, the section entitled \textit{“The Knight’s Tale as a Hymn to Tyranny”} in Jones, \textit{Chaucer’s Knight}, 212-16.
\item \textsuperscript{212} We might pause here to allude to what might be taken as another key example of Theseus’s penchant for attempting to control private passions and emotions and to bring them under his surveillance. I am referring here to the arrangement by Theseus near the end of the \textit{Tale} of the very political wedding between Palamon and Emelye: “Thanne seaned me ther was a parlement / At Atthenes, upon certain pointz and caas; / Among the whiche pointz yspoken was, / To have with certain contrees alliaunce, / And have fully of Thebans obeisaunce” (2970-74). Thus, just as Theseus might be seen as a figure attempting to bring individual displays of force under his dominion (as in the case of Palamon and Arcite), he is also seen at the end of the poem to be attempting to bring individual displays of love under his control in order to harness the power of such private emotions for political ends.
\end{itemize}
suggested by Patterson’s reading of the Knight as a figure who venerates Theseus. The chivalric handbook I am referring to is Geoffroi de Charny’s *Livre de Chevalerie*.\textsuperscript{213} Geoffroi was an impassioned defender of chivalry and of the austere lifestyle that an existence devoted to all things military demanded. He himself died at the battle of Poitiers, dutifully fighting along side his lord, King Jean of France.

What immediately leaps out to any reader of Geoffroi’s text is the author’s sense of disdain for anything that might make the knight’s existence less dangerous or less rigorous. At one point, Geoffroi alludes to the fact that the development of knights often conforms (and necessarily should conform) to the linear trajectory of jousting, tourneying, and then battlefield warfare. Geoffroi writes:

> Then they [knights] set out to bear arms in tournaments as often as they can. And when, by God’s grace, they perform well there, joyfully, gladly, and openly, then it seems to them that tournaments contribute more to their renown and their status than jousting had done; so they no longer take part in jousts as often as they were wont to do, and go to tournaments instead. Their knowledge increases until they see and recognize that the men-at-arms who are good in war are more highly prized and honored than other men-at-arms. It therefore seems to them from their own observation that they should immediately take up the practice of arms in war in order to achieve the highest honor in prowess, for they cannot attain this by any other form of armed combat.\textsuperscript{214}

For chivalric theorists like Geoffroi, to go from armed combat to the much more tame combat of a late medieval tournament is a regression and one that, as the passage above suggests, would be a detriment to one’s honor. Although people on the outside of chivalry looking in, such as the non-aristocratic Chaucer, may have seen the chastening elements of a tournament as a “civilizing” advance over raw battlefield combat,

\textsuperscript{213} Geoffroi de Charny’s text has been partially translated as *A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry*, trans. Elspeth Kennedy, intro. Richard W. Kaeuper (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). All quotes will be from this edition.

\textsuperscript{214} Charny, *Book of Chivalry*, 56-57.
Geoffroi’s text gives us incentive to not assume that Chaucer, if he wanted his knight character to be convincing for a contemporary audience, intends for his Knight to be read as judging Theseus’ interventions in chivalric violence in quite so appreciative terms. For a warrior devoted to his own elite lifestyle, the knight, Geoffroi argues, should perceive the bodily hardships and the risk of death that medieval warfare carries as irrefutable evidence of the singularity and sanctity of the knight’s calling in this world. To rob combat of the threat of death, such as Theseus attempts to do with his tournament, would be to deprive a knight of that aspect of his existence which in Geoffroi’s eyes makes the professional man-of-arms as cherished a vocation in the eyes of God as that of a priest:

For, whoever might want to consider the hardships, pains, discomforts, fears, perils, broken bones, and wounds which the good knights who uphold the order of knighthood as they should endure and have to suffer frequently, there is no religious order in which as much is suffered as has to be endured by these good knights who go in search of deeds of arms in the right way as has been set forth above.215

As scholars such as Richard W. Kaeuper and Patricia DeMarco have convincingly demonstrated, attempts to rein in a knight’s freedom and to bring his martial energies within the domain of centralized authority were often met with stiff resistance of both a political and literary kind.216 Thus, we could say that the Knight’s defense of Palamon and Arcite’s combat by means of parallels to noble animals function as a more abbreviated and microcosmic version of what DeMarco argues is taking place in the

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215 Charny, Book of Chivalry, 95.
216 See Kaeuper, Chivalry and Violence, 19-22 and 93-121. Kaeuper discusses here the tensions between an increasingly powerful monarchy and the individualistic tendencies of the members of the warrior class, and he discusses the disruptive energies that the ethos of chivalry created for internal peace and for emerging notions of national statehood. In Patricia DeMarco, “An Arthur for the Ricardian Age: Crown, Nobility, and the Alliterative Morte Arthure,” Speculum 80:2 (2005), 464-493, she discusses the possibility that the Morte registers a keen sense of anxiety over Richard II’s increasing attempts to curtail the traditional rights and powers of the nobility.
Alliterative Morte: “The Morte [or read here, The Knight] highlights the conflicts and crises of the late fourteenth century, a period during which the transformation of military practice in England fundamentally enhanced the monarch’s ability to effect a monopoly of violence and challenged the traditional military practice and ethos of the chivalric aristocracy.”217 We need to allow for a more nuanced understanding of what is revealed about the Knight’s values when he comments upon violence in his tale than what we get in a critical observation such as the following: “from the Knight’s perspective, they [Palamon and Arcite] embody an irrationality that Theseus must chasten into civilization.”218

As writers such as Geoffroi de Charny demonstrate, there is a type of fundamental “irrationality” at the core of chivalry, for it can be seen to revel in the types of physical deprivations and devotion to a life of peril that a “rational” person knows they would do better to avoid. Chaucer may perceive the two Thebans as embodying irrationality, but I persist in my belief that the Knight-narrator, as Chaucer intends us to read him, is unable or unwilling to wholly dismiss Palamon and Arcite as excessively violent warriors. The Knight has the same admiration at times for their displays of energy and aggression that he does when he draws our attention to “the fomy stedes on the golden brydel / Gnawyne” (2506-07) as they await the commencement of Theseus’s tournament. As with Theseus’s interferences in the private warfare between Palamon and Arcite, the Knight betrays at least a little sympathy for these horses whose raw instincts have been chastened by the “golden brydel” of civilization.

218 Patterson, Subject of History, 200.
As we approach the closing of the poem, we see Chaucer’s most memorable display of the discrepancy between chivalric culture’s own representations of animals and the reality of chivalric warfare’s effects upon them. Before the tournament between Palamon and Arcite (and their respective armies), several of the main characters enter the temples of Venus, Mars, and Diana in order to pray to their patron deities. In Arcite’s visit to the temple of Mars, we see a building inscribed with “a catalogue of malign violence and ghastly, undignified death” and one in which “nowhere is there an image of heroic, martial death.”

Although the representations of war that we are given in the temple of Mars are often hailed as the moment when the Knight allows the chivalric whitewashing of his own military vocation to fall to the wayside, the Knight is not unequivocally disillusioned about warfare. More importantly for our interests here, Chaucer, in the description of the temple of Mars, gives us several noteworthy depictions of animals, and ones that seemingly align themselves with Palamon’s fantasy of animals as those beings which can “al [their] lust fulfille.”

Depicted on the walls of Mars’ temple are frightful images such as the “hunte [hunter] strangel with the wilde beres; / The sowe freten [devouring] the child right in the cradel” (2018-19). And the overall depiction of Mars and his temple ends with: “A wolf ther stood biforn hym at his [Mars’] feet / With eyen rede, and of a man he eet” (2046-48). In this temple we have a horrific fulfillment of Palamon’s perception of animals as the creatures that can indulge in their every desire, even such perverse desires as the consuming of human babies or the corpses of adult men. But again, the depiction

of animals that Chaucer gives us at other moments in the poem problematizes these images in Mars’ temple that grant a robust amount of agency and potency to the animals caught up in the world of chivalry.

After Arcite’s famously unchivalric death due to an internal infection caused by a throw from his horse, the dead knight is memorialized by an epic funeral pyre. And after the detailed catalogue of deforestation that went into the building of the pyre (2919-24), we are told of the adverse effects upon the other living things caught up in this display of chivalric mourning:

…the goddes ronnen up and doun,  
Disinherited of hire habitacioun, 
In which they woneden in reste and pees,  
Nymphes, fawnes and amadrides [wood nymphs];  
…the beestes and the brides all  
Fledden for fere, whan the wode was falle. (2925-30)

If Theseus’ interventions in the rivalry between Palamon and Arcite are supposed to represent the apogee (as many scholars aver) of chivalry’s ability to temper the raw violence of which the military class is capable, this funeral ceremony and its preparations also represent chivalry’s inability to avoid adversely affecting the lives of animals.220 Arcite’s funeral shows us that animals have much more to fear from the warrior class, than warriors have to fear from animals, unlike what the images in the temple of Mars would have us believe. Although we do get a brief reference to the eating of corpses by

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220 Gillian Rudd points out that there are potentially two problems with the inclusion by Chaucer of these details depicting gods that are displaced by the felling of the forest. One is that it might be said to remove the “very real destruction [of the forest] into the safer realms of epic,” and secondly, that it might remove this scene of forest destruction into “a space of unreality and [be] rendered comfortable, even comic, by that distance.” See Rudd’s Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), 63. However, despite such potential problems, I, like Rudd, feel that when the forest’s destruction and the displacement of its deities are read ecocritically (which I, contra Rudd, believe is the effect Chaucer intended with his depiction) “this passage is rather less detached or humorous” (67).
dogs earlier in the poem (938-47) when Creon refuses to allow the Argive widows to bury their dead, the accumulated effect of showing Lygurje and Emetreus’ subjugation of animals, and of Theseus’ destruction of a forest ecosystem in order to build Arcite’s ostentatious funeral pyre, reveal that Chaucer was well aware that the chivalric way of life was much more one-sidedly detrimental for the animals involved.  

As Barbara Nolan as amply documented, *The Knight’s Tale* consistently undermines its own philosophical attempts to discover the deep structures and underlying causalities of human happiness and woe by the repetitious use of phrases such as “And so it bifel” and “Til it fil ones.” Nolan asserts: “So slight a signal as ‘til it fil ones’ might not call attention to itself were it not that this formula or variations of it reappear regularly as frames for most of the...significant actions of the poem. In most cases, these frames replace careful, hypotactic, causal explanations of motivation and action [such as we see] in the *Teseida.*” For Nolan, as for many other readers of the poem, the lack of a clearly discernible hierarchy of explanations for events such as Arcite’s death leads us to believe that Chaucer’s intention with the *Tale* is to humbly acknowledge the limitations of human understanding, and that understanding’s inability to know or intuit the larger forces that shape our existence. Whether we find Nolan’s argument about Chaucer’s belief in the

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221 I should point out here that my perception of Theseus as a chivalric “deforester” and as an enemy of the natural world aligns itself with an argument found in Rudd’s *Greenery*, pgs. 61-67, a text published after I had written this chapter. However, where my argument differs from Rudd’s is that she perceives Chaucer to be in ideological cahoots with Theseus. Thus, Rudd writes at the end of her discussion of *The Knight’s Tale*: “We are arriving at the point where it is possible to say that for Chaucer trees are primarily a resource, whether literally as timber or in literary terms, as the raw material for rhetorical display” (67). I, on the other hand, think Chaucer is more aware of the problem than Rudd gives him credit for, and believe that Chaucer holds up Theseus’ environmental practices for our disdain.


223 For a rejection of a reading like Nolan’s, and one that instead posits that Chaucer was using *The Knight’s Tale* to point out the ways in which political leaders such as Theseus deliberately use tactics of
inscrutability of the causality at work in the universe convincing, what does seem beyond doubt is that in *The Knight’s Tale* Chaucer shows us *the clear existence of a causal connection* between chivalric values and practices, and animal suffering. In his representation of animals, Chaucer does not postulate any notion that chance, inexplicable causality, or transcendent deities are to blame for the subjugation or death of the animals that appear in the poem; rather, it is clearly identifiable human agents such as Theseus, Lygurje, or Emetreus that are to blame for the less than perfectly free conditions in which we see so many animals in the poem.

As I hope to have convincingly argued by now, in *The Knight’s Tale*, whenever we encounter a scene that takes us to one further representational remove from the “real” animals in the tale (such us that which occurs in Palamon’s speech about animals or in the images of Mars’ temple), we encounter an oddly consistent need to see animals as much freer than humans. In the case of Mars’ temple, such freedom is even seen as constituting a dangerous threat to the physical safety of humans. But such representations of animals often represent ideological appropriations of the animal. In the case of Mars’ temple, which can inspire even a sow to be watched with suspicion as a potential murderer of human children, we glimpse the ideological preparations that would make it much easier for warriors to not be overly guilt-ridden about the animals killed during their wars. Why would a soldier worry about the excessive deaths of farm animals that he witnessed while on campaign, if the temple of Mars has essentially taught him through its images that “animals would kill you or your family if they had the chance”? And with the Knight’s penchant for describing Palamon and Arcite as fighting like

metaphysical or religious obfuscation to conceal their own power and control over the lives of their subjects, see Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination*, 174-195.
animals I believe that, rather than seeing it as a process of degeneration, the Knight himself perceives the process of humans becoming animals as the ultimate defense of military violence, because it places such violence in the irreproachable realm of the “natural.” As we saw with the Knight’s comparisons between chivalric violence and a tiger trying to defend her cubs or a lion hunting for its sustenance, our narrator also looks upon Palamon and Arcite’s battles as equally noble and legitimate as those of the animals.

In fact, it seems that Chaucer performs in The Knight’s Tale an intellectual move that has immense significance for the ways in which we can talk about (or have ever been able to talk about) the existence of essentially distinct spheres such as the natural realm (on one hand) and the cultural, human realm (on the other hand). Even in some contemporary discourses that surround the animal or nature, it is often acceptable to cling to some stalwart belief in the notion of a pure entity known as nature, i.e. an entity that has been spared the “contaminating” taint of human institutions or of human techne. But what Chaucer has given us in his Knight’s Tale is a deconstruction of any notion that the medieval wilderness “out there” is safe from its own era’s cultural practices (in particular, from those of the aristocratic, chivalric classes). Rejecting in the Knight’s Tale a medieval literary heritage that churned out depictions of vast tracts of wilderness leading to a Grail Castle and of a Sherwood Forest whose untrammeled expanses protected Robin Hood and his cadre of outlaws, Chaucer gives us a forest that is never so

224 This belief in our own time of an uncontaminated nature most often applies to a great many people’s beliefs in the large national parks of the United States as being “preservation sites” for the primal nature that existed before European colonization. For an examination of how even cherished places such as Yosemite and Niagara Falls are “quasi-built environments” (and thus from their origins have never been free from the effects of culture and civilization) see Anne Whiston Spirn, “Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted,” in Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 91-113.
wild, distant, and primitive as to be fully protected from the power and breadth of military violence. The late medieval forest, just like its counterpart in our own era, is always already a product and often a victim of human materialist and intellectual projects. As William Cronon states: “one of the most striking proofs of the cultural invention of wilderness is its thoroughgoing erasure of the history from which it sprang. In virtually all of its manifestations, wilderness represents a flight from history…a place outside time, from which human beings had to be ejected before the fallen world of history could properly begin.”

In our current academic discussions of Chaucer, he is often revered as the poet who was a postmodernist before his time. His mastery of ironic distance and his deep suspicion of hegemonic narratives often make him seem more congenially modern to us than his contemporaries and near-contemporaries such as Lydgate or Gower. But perhaps in an age when the global rise of greenhouse gases, and those gases’ subsequent effects upon world weather patterns, illustrates the degree to which even a nature that only a handful of people may have laid eyes on can be altered by human practices, what might make Chaucer seem even more urgent to modern readers are images like that in The Knight’s Tale of a wilderness that, despite its distance from the civilization of Athens, can still never be wholly separated from human economic needs and ideological values. Chaucer (along with modern environmental historians such as William Cronon) recognizes that there is not, and never has been, a “wilderness” that can be wholly distinct from the human realm.

225 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 79.
226 The (now) classic argument for global warming’s abilities to transform every bit of what many of us used to think of as distinct, wild “nature” into a human artifact and into a product of civilization, is Bill McKibben’s The End of Nature (New York: Random House, 1989).
The ignoble aims of chivalric violence and Lydgate’s Siege of Thebes

John Lydgate, the Benedictine monk from the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds and prolific poet of the 15th century, received patronage and support from some of the most notorious English warmongers of the latter part of the Hundred Years War. Henry V commissioned the massive Troy Book, in all likelihood as a means for that monarch to appropriate some of the power of the medieval concept of translatio imperii, and thus to help to shore up support for the Lancastrian usurpation of the throne that occurred at the end of the 14th century. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who will go on to lead a devastating chevauchée in west Flanders after the failed siege of Calais by the Duke of Burgundy in 1436, was the patron for the Fall of Princes, a work every bit as monumental and ambitious as the Troy Book. But the Siege of Thebes, Lydgate’s self-conscious continuation of The Canterbury Tales, as well as his contribution to the medieval obsession with the doomed ancient city of Thebes, has proven somewhat of a conundrum for scholars. Unlike some of Lydgate’s other long poems mentioned above, it comes down to us with no explicit patron.\textsuperscript{227}

A scholarly approach to the Siege, therefore, might revolve around investigations of to what degree we can declare that any defense of Lancastrian war policies and bellicose values, such as those that might be said to imbue the Troy Book, have been

sheared away from the (possibly) non-commissioned *Siege of Thebes*.\textsuperscript{228} Several scholars, such as James Simpson and David Lawton, have interpreted Lydgate’s poem on Thebes as one that laments the grisly costs of war, and a work which affirms that nothing of lasting importance can be reaped from the destruction and suffering that wars sow in their wake.\textsuperscript{229} Lawton points out that the 15\textsuperscript{th} century “offered a uniquely inauspicious set of circumstances in which to announce the preeminence of peace and patience as public values”\textsuperscript{230} due to such events as the reigniting of the Hundred Years War with France in the second decade of that century, as well as to the deposition of Richard II in 1399 who was, in all likelihood, murdered by his usurpers after a forced abdication of the throne. It simply was not in accord with prevailing Lancastrian values to promote peace and diplomacy towards foreign powers, unlike how fashionable it had been for writers such as Chaucer and Gower during the largely peace-seeking reign of Richard II. Yet, Lydgate, in his *Siege*, appears to do just that: promote peace. Drawing upon interpretations of Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes* such as those articulated by Lawton and Simpson, I wish to take a closer look in this section at how Lydgate’s use of animal imagery in this poem functions to further the pacifist values that underpin the poem as a whole.

\textsuperscript{228} Of course, attempts to read the *Troy Book* as having implicit criticisms of the war policies of its patron, Henry V, are not unheard of. For a recent discussion of the *Troy Book* along these lines, see Straker, “Rivalry and Reciprocity.”

\textsuperscript{229} David Lawton, “Dullness in the Fifteenth Century,” *English Literary History* 54:4 (1987): 761-799; Simpson, ““Dysemol daies,” 15-33. See also Battles, *Medieval Tradition*, 151-52, in which she addresses the question of why Lydgate would have chosen an Old French version of the Thebes story, instead of going back to the authoritative Latin version of Statius. Battles concludes that what was so appealing to Lydgate about the Old French prose redaction of the *Roman de Thebes* was that “the redactor presents scene after scene of the diplomatic process at work (councils, speeches, debates),” all of which “offered a model for the peace process in the way that Statius did not” (151).

\textsuperscript{230} Lawton, “Dullness,” 781.
In addition to contributing to the body of literary works begun by classical authors such as Statius and Ovid that detail the origins and the destruction of Thebes, Lydgate’s retelling of the Thebes-material has long been read as a commentary upon Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale*. Dominique Battles, in an analysis of Lydgate’s alterations to the Theban narrative, characterizes the dialogue between these two English poets in perhaps the most polemical way when she states: “Lydgate’s revised Theban genealogy means that Chaucer’s heroes, Arcite and Palaemon, cannot be who they say they are…Lydgate’s omission of any mention of Cadmus’ offspring leaves a gaping hole in the line of descent between Cadmus and Chaucer’s heroes.” For Battles, when Lydgate decides to make Amphioun the founder of Thebes (and not Cadmus, as had so often been done), the monk from Bury robs Chaucer’s “continuation” of the Theban narrative of its ability to confidently assert that Thebes and its citizens were eternally inflicted by “an incurable disease that controls its victims unbeknownst to them.”

I intend to situate part of my own discussion of Lydgate’s *Siege* by continuing to explore the dialogue between *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Siege of Thebes*. In particular, I will be analyzing how the latter poem critiques The Knight’s tendency to divorce his chivalric heroes from direct responsibility for violence through the Knight’s habit of connecting human bellicosity to a static conception of animals. In my reading of the *Siege*, Lydgate’s poem quarrels with the ideological screens through which the warrior class insists on viewing the animals it encounters. Although I do not, of course, think that the ethical quandaries surrounding violence towards flesh-and-blood animals are

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231 See especially James Simpson’s “Dysemol daies and fatal houres.”
Lydgate’s primary concern in his poem, a reading of the poem which foregrounds the role of animals in the narrative reveals (as Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale does) the ways in which a fundamental failure by the warrior class to respect animals as independent creatures capable of manifesting their own drives and desires often leads to violence towards those animals.

After the Prologue to The Siege of Thebes, the section of the poem that most explicitly displays Lydgate’s ongoing poetic confrontations with his predecessor Chaucer, we find upon entering the tale proper that Lydgate’s choice for progenitor for the city of Thebes is a most noteworthy one. We are told that Amphion founds the new city and creates its civic grandeur not through violence and conquest, but rather through the explicitly stated means of rhetoric and music: “And thus the wallis / made of lym and stoon / Were Reysëd first / be syngyng of this kyng” (241-42). The stone and other inanimate raw materials of the city magically yield to the non-coercive desires of Amphion’s song. From the beginning of the poem, in this section pertaining to the origins of the city, Lydgate gestures towards a sense of competing values concerning the natural world. Cadmus, the literary tradition’s more commonly accepted founder of Thebes, is introduced into the poem only to be quickly swept beneath the rug of irrelevance. However, before he disappears from the poem, we catch a fleeting glimpse of

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the ways “olde auctours” have depicted Cadmus’ building methods, methods not only more systematic and rationalized than those of Amphioun, but also as entailing a vastly different use of the nonhuman realm. Lydgate writes:

And the boundës / be compas [Cadmus] out-mette
With thong out-korve / of a boolys hyde,
Whych envyroun / streche myghtë wyde
To get Inne londe / a ful largë space
Wher-vp-on to byld / a dwellyng place,
And callëd was the Soyle / ëus geten Inne
Whylom Boece / of the bolys skynne.
The name after / into Thebës turned. (298-305)

The naming of the town “Boece” after the use of the bull’s skin creates a most intriguing etymological link between Cadmus’ mythical founding of the city and his use of animal bodies to perform the building of Thebes. This stands in stark contrast to Amphioun’s building process which is completely free of any kind of imagery of denuding a landscape or utilizing the bodies of animals to accomplish his work, for in Amphioun’s case, there is only the melodious sound of his harp or of his singing to perform the necessary labor.

If we accept the assessment of Robert W. Ayers, who argues that Amphioun represents “the type of the ideal king,” and therefore one that is “exempt from mortal imperfections,” then we should pay close attention to exactly what types of interactions Amphioun’s idealized building process has with the natural world. From the comparison that we are given to Cadmus, it appears that Amphioun’s processes (no matter how unrealistic they seem to us) involve much less of a direct appropriation of animal bodies or animal energies, and instead depend solely upon the resources of human

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artistry acting upon inanimate matter such as that of stone. Amphioun’s creation through the “swetnesse / and melodious soun…made / in Mercuries harpe” (202, 206) is bereft of a forceful laying of hands on the natural world, whereas Mars, who is equipped with sword “whettyd…so kene” and who “shal his hauberk shake” (4696-7), represents the fratricidal Thebes founded by Cadmus, as well as the violent attitudes towards snakes and tigers that we will examine in detail below.\textsuperscript{236} Although Amphioun founds Thebes in Lydgate’s version of the story, Amphioun’s descendents will fail to display the less violent ways of interacting with the natural world embodied by Amphioun’s musical building with stone, much to their tragic demise.

But this substitution of one founder for another, and consequently of one building method for another as well, has a larger significance for the poem. For a scholar like Dominique Battles, the importance of Lydgate’s drastic, yet all-too-often unacknowledged, change to the Theban story of substituting Amphioun in the place typically reserved for Cadmus, is that a change like this allows Lydgate to use his poem to critique a problem that all systems of governance face, and not just that of “cursed Thebes.” Thus, the destruction of the famous city of Thebes and the mutual annihilation of both the Greek and Theban armies are not due to an inherent, primal taint that ensures the Thebans will be the vanquished; rather, \textit{The Siege of Thebes} will very explicitly show the Theban leader Ethioles as vulnerable to poor advice from his advisors, and of letting his own personal sense of pride and lust for power interfere with his ability to make wise political decisions. As Lydgate’s narrator tells us: “But lefte trouthe / and sette his

\textsuperscript{236} For a discussion of \textit{The Siege of Thebes} structured along the lines of a Mercury vs. Mars binary, see Lois A. Ebin, \textit{Illuminator, Makar, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century} (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1988), 42-44.
[Ethiocles’] fantasye / To be gouerned / by fals flattery” (1783-84). The ramifications of the above-mentioned changes by Lydgate for a comparison between his own Siege and Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale is that it foregrounds how much Chaucer’s poem had evacuated from its narrative any clear sense of human fallibility as lying behind particularly virulent and destructive wars. Chaucer, at the expense of emphasizing the role of human agency, instead adds to his Knight’s Tale a complex, and often bewildering, web of celestial forces at work behind the actions of his characters (but not to such an extent, as I argued in the above section on The Knight’s Tale, that causal connections between animal suffering and human agency are completely obfuscated).

On the surface, Lydgate seems to have accepted the Knight’s belief that animal and human identities are murky admixtures of one another. Like The Knight’s Tale, The Siege of Thebes is liberally sprinkled with poetic tags that describe fighting warriors, such as Polymyte and Tydeus, as “[i]n her fury lik tygres or lyouns” (1356), or that describe the action by the warriors Polymyte and Ethioeles of burying their father Edippus as “wers than serpent or eny tigre wood” (1013). But as Battles has called for in her own analysis of the Siege, we need to be aware of “signs of poetic defiance on Lydgate’s part with respect to Chaucer.” It is with Lydgate’s own deployment of comparisons between animals and his warriors that he defies the Knight and that narrator’s views on the connections between human warriors and the animal realm.

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238 Battles, Medieval Tradition, 171.
One of the most frequent comparisons Lydgate uses in his poem is that of describing a warrior as like a “tigre wood.” If, like the Knight, Lydgate was arguing for an essential overlap between a human and a tiger, then we would be forced to see these metaphors as attempts to “naturalize” human violence and aggression by equating a tiger’s inability to refrain from predatory aggression with a chivalric warrior’s inability to refrain from the violence and aggression that characterize his own specialized role in medieval culture. And if Lydgate was indeed performing this collapse of identities, we might also see it as comparable to most of the rest of the Theban tradition’s belief that an entire race of warriors, such as that from Thebes, can at the core be violent, self-destructive beings. Or, to put this line of argument in slightly different terms, just as Chaucer’s Thebans cannot escape the curse of Thebes, so too Lydgate’s (and Chaucer’s) knights cannot escape their tiger-like, predatory natures. But just as Battles demonstrates that Lydgate retells his own story of Thebes in a way that stresses the role of individual choice and politics over tainted genealogy in the destruction of Thebes, so too does Lydgate tell it in a way that reveals as flawed any attempt (by the Knight or any one else) to mitigate human responsibility for violence by assuming it is caused by a shared identity with certain animals.

What reveals the ironic nature of Lydgate’s comparisons between chivalric violence and tigerish fury is the appearance (carried over from his sources) of a flesh-and-blood tiger near the end of the poem. This tiger that we see, however, is a far cry

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239 The issue of Lydgate’s source for the Siege of Thebes is one that is fraught with contention. The idea that Lydgate had used a prose redaction version of the Roman de Thèbes, instead of the OF poem itself, dates to 1884 when Emil Koeppel became the first scholar to make such a claim. See his Lydgate’s Story of Thebes (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1884), 52. Axel Erdmann, in his EETS edition, agrees with Koeppel’s claim, but asserts that it was short prose work known as the Roman de Edipus (and not a prose redaction known
from the creature inflamed with malice and aggression to which Lydgate’s repeated references to a “tigre wood” condition us to expect. Instead of being unavoidably pugnacious, the tiger we encounter in this poem is a pet of the Theban king, one “lik a lombe” (3847) and that can “playe / and make good disport, / lik a whelp / that is but yong of age, / And to no wight dide no damage” (3852-54). Thus, any references we encountered earlier in the poem leading us to assume that a tiger (and by extension, a knight) is always-already tantamount to violence and aggression are exposed as chivalric ideological appropriations of the tiger. By the poem’s end, Lydgate has deftly revealed any reference to a static essence in an animal like the tiger as a fantasy, a monolithic conceptualization on the part of humans who choose to perceive the animal in such limited ways. Furthermore, we might say that Lydgate is here performing preliminary moves towards deconstructing the entire discourse of heraldry which is based in large part on static appropriations of totemic animals.

by the name Roman de Thèbes) that had been Lydgate’s source. See Lydgate’s Siege of Thebes, eds. Erdmann and Ekwall, vol. 2, 6-7. Alain Renoir has accepted the views of Koeppel and Erdmann, and thinks the Edipus is Lydgate’s source. See his “The Immediate Source of Lydgate’s Siege of Thèbes,” Studia Neophilologica 33 (1961): 86-95; and his The Poetry of John Lydgate (London: Routledge, 1967), 119-29. However, in 1890 Léopold Constans had claimed that it was indeed a prose redaction of the Roman de Thèbes (and not the Edipus) which is the source text for Lydgate. See his Le Roman de Thèbes, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et Cie, 1890), II, clxii. Dominique Battles, in her Medieval Tradition of Thèbes, supports Constans’ claim, and uses a modern edition of a prose Thèbes as the basis for all of her comparisons between Lydgate and his (possible) source. Derek Pearsall takes much more of an agnostic approach to this debate about sources, and seems to just accept we really do not know what text Lydgate was consulting when writing his Siege. See Pearsall, John Lydgate, 153-4. Battles can be quite convincing in her argument for a prose Thèbes as Lydgate’s source, as when she writes: “Alan Renoir has argued in support of Erdmann’s claim for the Edipus, but his case in unconvincing, especially on the matter of the qualitative changes that Lydgate allegedly brought to the story, since these features also appear in the longer version of the prose Thèbes as well as in the OF Thèbes” (endnote 14, p. 212). I agree with Battles and Constans, and have therefore decided to base any comparisons between Lydgate and a potential source on an edition of the prose Thèbes published as an appendix in Molly Lynde-Recchia, Prose, Verse, and Truth-Telling in the Thirteenth Century (Lexington: French Forum Publishers, 2001), Appendix, 127-93. However, Pearsall’s warnings about our lack of certainty surrounding the source of Lydgate’s Siege of Thèbes stalks the edges of all my comparative claims regarding Lydgate and his sources.
But does the danger involved in such ideological appropriations only lie at the level of human epistemology? Is there any threat to the animal itself that is the object of such one-dimensional projections by humans? In *The Siege of Thebes* the actual animal is, indeed, under threat. The Theban tiger that is “like a lombe” escapes from its captivity and “wildly out ran /...as doth a tame roo” (3866, 3868); however, the Greeks think “this tigre hadde be savage” and therefore “gan hym to enchace / Til he was ded / and slayen in the feld” (3870, 3872-73). The Greeks assume the tiger must be aggressive because that is what discourses like heraldry assert. Unexpectedly encountering this tiger, the young Greek soldiers show themselves to be incapable of the spontaneity and flexibility which any mind must demonstrate when encountering the vertiginous multiplicity of living animals.240 To use the language of Lawrence Buell, we might argue that most of the characters in the *Siege* (especially the young Greeks) suffer from “environmental illiteracy,” an inability to “read” the natural world in a way that pays close attention to the nuances and singularity of its myriad phenomena.241 Unable to “read” what a tame tiger looks like, the Greeks see only what the prominent social discourses have conditioned them to see: a tiger as ferocious beast.

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240 In several prominent sections of Lydgate’s *Siege*, the narrator contrasts the ignorance and folly of youth with the wisdom and experience of old age (see especially the interruption on this theme that occurs at lines 2941-64). Throughout the poem, Lydgate privileges elder statesmen and prophets who exercise caution with regards to starting wars such as Amphiorax and Jocasta. Therefore, it is interesting that when the tame tiger is attacked and killed we are explicitly told by our narrator that the Greeks who mistake it for a savage tiger “wer yong of age” (3869). The ability to “read” and interpret nature accurately is here shown to be an important, vital skill that impestous youths have yet to acquire.

241 “Environmental literacy” is a phrase that Buell uses in a dual sense (although I am only using it in the first one): First, it refers to the ability of “nature writers” (such as Henry David Thoreau or Annie Dillard) to train their minds and senses to notice the minute details of the natural world around them, and therefore to appreciate the singularity of each animal, plant, landscape, etc. that is encountered, rather than always conceptualizing such things according to broader preconceived and static categories (taxonomic, mythic, etc.). Second, it refers to the ability to know exactly what is being referred to when a text uses imagery from or references to the natural world. By way of discussing this second usage of “environmental literacy,” Buell discusses how few modern readers of the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem “Aftermath”
The death of the tiger is anything but insignificant in the poem. It ignites the battle that will lead to the destruction of the legendary city of Thebes. Significantly, we are told by our narrator that once the Thebans rush out to meet the Greeks head-on in battle it is not because of the quarrel between Ethioicles and Polymyte, a quarrel that we know from earlier in the poem is the primary reason for the laying siege to Thebes by the Greeks; rather, it is for the reason of the “tigres dethe t’avengen” (3880). Lydgate is very emphatic on this point, and states it in several different ways, including the following:

The Tigres deth / so dere they [the Greeks] aboughte,
So mortally the Thebans on hem wroghte
That al the host, in the feld ligging,
Was astounyd / of this sodden thing. (3889-92)

I do not think that such lines as these invite us to champion Lydgate as any kind of heroic proto-animal rights advocate. In fact, I would not be willing to say that he particularly cares about the death of a tiger. Nevertheless, these scenes involving the tiger demonstrate that he is aware of the ways a chivalric or heraldic code (or other prominent social discourse) can predispose humans to perceive animals only in rigid ways that grant no authority to the animal itself (instead of to the discourse) as the privileged site of the essential reality of the animal. Let us recall Buell’s words, quoted in an earlier chapter, regarding how an environmentally responsible text, discourse, person, etc., should always likely would understand the precise agricultural meaning of the title’s term. Thus, such readers may be hopelessly cut off from understanding the poem as Longfellow would have wanted us to due to our modern alienation from rural nature and the agricultural practices traditionally most associated with it. For a discussion of both meanings of the phrase, see Lawrence Buell, *Environmental Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1995), 103-114.
be ready to “defer…to the authority of external nonhuman reality as a criterion of accuracy and value.” Such deference is noticeably lacking in Lydgate’s characters, and the effects are catastrophic.

But the site of criticism in the poem is not only to be found in relation to the Greeks. The excessive indignation that the Thebans express over the death of their beloved tiger also, I believe, draws Lydgate’s critique. Just as the Greeks were unable to accept the tiger “as it is,” and instead insisted upon their own static chivalric interpretation of a tiger as necessarily being violent and dangerous, so too the Thebans in their own way have insisted on remaking the animal in a way more pleasing to their own minds. Like Arthur’s enslavement of captured animals in the *Alliterative Morte*, the Thebans have annexed the tiger as a status symbol, and one unable to live out a relatively unimpeded biological existence. In short, the Thebans have insisted on their own refashioning of the tiger by making of it what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “an Oedipal animal.” The unpredictable wildness of the tiger has been traded in by the Thebans for a more docile version. In fact, the tiger does not even resemble a tiger any more, for even its coat looks like “a panter conversant in Ynde” (3840), its muzzle and head like that of a greyhound (3837), and its eyes are now red “as eny fyret” (3838). The

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243 Deleuze and Guattari describe the Oedipal animal in the following paragraph worth quoting at length: “We must distinguish between three kinds of animals. First, individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, ‘my’ cat, ‘my’ dog. These animals invite us to regress, draw us into narcissistic contemplation, and they are the only kind of animal psychoanalysis understands. And then there is a second kind: animals with characteristics or attributes; genus, classification or State animals; animals as they are treated in the great divine myths, in such ways as to extract from them series or structures, archetypes or models…Finally there are more demonic animals, pack or affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), 241.
domestication process has significantly altered both the physical characteristics and behavior patterns of the tiger, which makes the Greeks army’s inability to recognize that this as no ordinary tiger all the more astonishing.

Rather than be outraged at their king Ethiocles’ lack of “trouthe,” and at his immoral refusal to abide by the pact made with his brother Polymyte to take turns ruling Thebes, the majority of the citizens of the doomed city are instead filled only with the indignation engendered by the death of a cherished royal pet. This indignation, as demonstrated above, has eclipsed any other motive the Theban people might have for engaging in battle with the Greeks. Lydgate, I believe, would not approve of where the Theban population’s ethical priorities are here.

If we examine an incident earlier in the poem, we find further evidence that Lydgate finds the projections that the warrior class make upon animals as dangerous, not only to the animals, but also to the humans involved. While marching on their way to lay siege to Thebes, the Greek army finds itself stranded in the inclement environment of a sun-scorched desert. Tydeus, while desperately attempting to locate water, discovers a refreshing arbor inhabited by a woman named Isyphile. Hearing about the life-threatening situation Tydeus and his fellow soldiers are in, Isyphile agrees to lead the dying army to water. However, in order to do so, she must leave the young child who has been placed in her charge alone long enough to show the army the way to the water. Upon her return, and to her horror, she discovers “among the floures / her litil child / turned vp þe face, / Slayn of a serpent” (3216-18).

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244 I specify the “majority of the citizens” here because we are actually told that some of the Thebans do indeed defect to the Greek side because they are so outraged by Ethiocele’s immorality. See lines 2636-48 for this.
After witnessing the emotional devastation the young boy’s death inflicts on his father Lygurgus (3372ff.), the Greeks decide it is necessary to mete out harsh justice upon the snake, no matter how arduous or time-consuming such an enterprise proves to be:

And gan [the Greeks] to ryde / envyron þe contré,
By hilles, vales, / Roches, and ek Çaues,
In dychis dirk / and in olde gravis,
By every cooste / cerching vp and doun:
Til at the last / ful famous of renoun,
The worthy knyght / parthonolopé
Was the first / that happed for to Se
This hydous Serpent / by a Ryver-side,
Gret and horrible / stern and ful of pride. (3482-3490)

The Greeks immediately begin assaulting the snake with arrows and swords, and eventually cut off its head. However, despite the one quasi-Satanic reference in the above quote to the snake being “ful of pride,” we get no indication elsewhere that the snake is anything other than an ordinary snake. In Lydgate’s description of the exorbitant lengths to which the Greek army goes in order to enact vengeance on the snake, I cannot help but sense that for Lydgate this is an excessive waste of time and energy, and a superfluous diversion from the army’s primary task of rectifying the dire political situation between Ethioctes and Polymyte.

When describing the snake’s death, Lydgate subtly embellished his source, a prose redaction version of the Roman de Thèbes. Although we are not sure exactly which particular version of the prose Thèbes Lydgate may have been consulting, at least one version that we have does not emphasize the brutality and the wrath with which the snake is killed to the degree that Lydgate does. In this prose version, we are told only the following about the serpent’s demise:

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Adonc s’esmut li os por le serpent quere. Tant cercherent par la forest, valees e montaignes qu’il jouste la riviere en un lue mout en vermin d’apres un grant perron gisant le troverent, e la l’ocist Parthonopeus li rois d’Arcade d’une saiète.\textsuperscript{245}

Killed only by a single arrow shot (\textit{d’une saite}), in the prose \textit{Thèbes} there is no gory beheading of the snake and subsequent presenting of that “trophy” to the bereaved mother like we get in Lydgate. Also, in Lydgate’s version when it is described how Parthonolopé launches an arrow at the snake, the act of using the bow and arrow with such devastating effect is reported by the Lydgatean narrator as one that is done “Full myghtily” (3495). Compared to, for example, Tydeus’ heroic battle against the fifty knights sent by Ethoicles to ambush him (a battle in which in which all but one of the fifty are killed by Tydeus), this deed of slaying one lone snake and then describing such retribution as performed “full mightily” is rife with a deflating sense of irony.

In Lydgate’s \textit{Siege}, on their way to remedy the more egregious crime of Ethiocles’ tyrannical usurpation of Thebes from his brother, the Greeks get bogged down in a protracted search for a creature that was merely acting out its natural predatory inclinations. As opposed to lending credence to a view of the snake as something of a devil incarnate, as snakes commonly represent in the biblical or bestiary traditions, Lydgate presents the snake’s bite only as an unfortunate and haphazard (yet nonetheless tragic) attack by a wild animal. It is the Greeks who have engaged in ideological overdetermination by treating the attack as if it was much more evil-inflected than it is. As Ebin argues, King Lygurgus, after the killing of the snake and in an example meant to illustrate Lydgate’s interest in showing his readers the more dignified power of words over swords, forgives the woman who had left his child unattended and thus vulnerable to

\textsuperscript{245} Lynde-Recchia, \textit{Truth-Telling}, Appendix, 178.
the snake’s attack: “rather than seek revenge by means of the sword as the queen at first
would have him do, [Lygurgus] is moved by Adrastus’s ‘sweet words’ to avoid strife and
forgive Hypsipyle.” But when it comes to the role of the snake in all of this, Lydgate
shows us that for the Greeks the power of the sword (and of an arrow) still reign supreme
over that of words.

In the original verse Roman de Thèbes (which we cannot know for sure Lydgate
read) the snake is infused with many more supernatural and demonic attributes. The Old
French poem describes the snake as follows:

...de male part
Eissi del bos, si entre el jart.
Par les narilles giête fors
Et fou et flambe de son cors:
N’encontre rien que trestot n’arde. (3753-57)247

In this verse version, the attack upon the child is structured much more along the
typological lines of Satanic evil versus Christ-like innocence. But for Lydgate, and for
the prose redactor whom he likely consulted, the snake is a much more commonplace
animal, albeit an exceedingly dangerous one due to its venomous sting. Nevertheless, the
attack by Parthnonolopé is described as a “full myghtily” one performed against a single
snake by a knight out on campaign in full armor. Such an event simply lacks the chivalric
splendor that we expect within medieval poetry, which more often celebrates epic fights
between a knight and a monstrous dragon, or between a single knight and a vast horde of
enemy combatants. Moreover, Lydgate hints at how ineffectual this retribution upon the
“hydous serpent” has been in alleviating the bereaved mother’s sorrow. After being

246 Ebin, Illuminat. r, 43.
247 Le Roman de Thèbes, Publié d’après tous les Manuscrits, ed. Léopold Constans. Société des Anciens
presented with the snake’s decapitated body we are initially told the queen’s “sorowe parcel [somewhat] gan aswage” (3499, emphasis added), in what I take to be a very ironic “parcel.” The snake’s death, and the monumental waste of time and energy consumed to locate the elusive animal, has in Lydgate’s version been for little, if any, perceptible gain to anyone.

In my analyses of the scenes involving the tiger and snake in The Siege of Thebes, two important (and ultimately related) ideas regarding the poem manifest themselves. First, the chivalric ethos has a tendency to appropriate the living animal in a way that marginalizes the actually existing animal, and instead prefers to project onto the animal human discourses and desires ranging from ones that perceive an animal as Oedipalized pet or status symbol, to perceptions of it as embodiment of evil and catalyst for warriors to rush gallantly to a grieving mother’s aid. No matter which of these are in effect, the biological drives and needs of the animal are, if not demonized, radically eclipsed.

Second, Lydgate employs these ideological distortions of the animal as symptoms of his characters’ recurring failure to keep their attention focused on much more reprehensible moral and political problems in the poem: problems such as the abandonment of fair governance by Ethiocles, or the failure to heed wise counsel such as the Greeks’ decision to ignore the warnings of Amphiorax. Rather than strive to rectify problems that have far-reaching implications for a large number of people, Lydgate instead gives us flawed Greeks and Thebans who insist on fighting “righteous” battles that are incited by pet tigers being murdered or by snakes acting out natural urges to attack prey.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that two late medieval English poets, Geoffrey Chaucer and John Lydgate, were much more willing to draw the attention of their readers to chivalry’s destructive effects upon nature than were their peers writing on the Continent in such genres as those of legal compendium and chivalric treatise. Perhaps one reason for this varying level of interest between the different genres would be that for French writers such as Christine de Pisan or Geoffroi de Charny, writers who I have discussed as being quasi-apologists for the use of animals in war (Christine) or as seeing the chivalric way of life as wholly venerable (Geoffroi), the Hundred Years War was a conflict that may have appeared much more about defending the French homeland against a horde of English invaders from across the Channel, than about seizing a foreign throne and plundering a foreign nation’s wealth, as it may have appeared to the war-weary English by the time that Chaucer and Lydgate were writing.

The two English poets, neither of them aristocrats and thus born into the martial ethos, drew upon their country’s growing sense of revulsion for drawn-out military conflict, a revulsion that only flourished after the first glorious phase of the Hundred Years War that culminated in King Jean’s capture at Poitiers in 1356 became a distant memory, and English defeats began to accumulate in the 1370s and beyond. As I have argued in this chapter, Chaucer and Lydgate not only refashioned the Theban material into somber critiques of chivalric culture’s ability to destabilize the polity, but they also foregrounded within that Theban material imagery of animals and plants under duress and distress in order to create a reflection of warfare that has become unbounded and that has lost its sense of being grounded in morally justifiable goals. Chaucer and Lydgate
would have left it up to their readers to draw the appropriate connections between their own literary representations of a world thrown into disorder by warfare and the seemingly interminable and increasingly tangled affair that was the Hundred Years War.

However, I have also tried to avoid making any claims that might lead my own readers to mistakenly think that I perceive either Chaucer or Lydgate as being tantamount to anything resembling a modern day animal rights activist. Instead, I have set out to show the complex ways in which these poets highlight the detrimental effects wrought upon nature by warfare in a way that assists them in articulating their critiques of flaws and excesses in kingship or chivalry. What is impressive about the *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Siege of Thebes* is the remarkable weaving together of human, political concerns with the biological ones of plant and animal life that these poets are able to perform with their depictions of razed forests, shackled leopards, and butchered snakes.
CHAPTER 5

In Defense of the Common: The Marvels of Nature, Hierarchical Binaries, and

*The Wars of Alexander*

The history of cultural conceptions of nature has all too often been centered on
dualistic thinking. Wild versus domestic animals, human versus animal forms of life,
harmonious versus exploitative modes of interacting with nature, useless versus
resourceful landscapes: these are a few of the binaries that have often structured the ways
in which people have perceived and categorized nature. As Val Plumwood informs us at
the beginning of her ecofeminist analysis of the role of dualistic thinking in establishing
power relations:

A dualism is an intense, established and developed cultural expression of...a hierarchical relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and
identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable.
Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and
naturalised in culture and characterised by radical exclusion, distancing
and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled.²⁴⁸

As is implied by the above passage from Plumwood, binaries and dualistic thinking are
not in and of themselves wrong. But dualisms, unfortunately, often come to be
underwritten by regimes of violence, control and power. And although we might

question the validity of Plumwood’s claims about hierarchical dualism for non-Western cultures and modes of thought. John Berger provides a concrete example of the type of hierarchical dualism that Plumwood describes in his highly influential “Why Look at Animals?” In that essay, Berger argues that there is a fundamental dualism between the urban pet and the rural agricultural animal. Human interactions with the latter were, for Berger, more authentic because although people raised their agricultural animals to be slaughtered and eaten, nevertheless, people “worshipped” the animals with which they lived in such daily and close proximity, and they knew in profoundly grateful ways that they relied for survival upon those animals. The urban pet, on the other hand, is an animal that Berger condescendingly refers to as “mementoes from the outside world.”

The domestic owner does not revere the pet as a true and dignified Other; rather, it is an extension of human social identity and merely another accessory of the urban dweller’s habitat and lifestyle. But as Steve Baker points out in a criticism of Berger, for the latter, the urban pet (in contrast to the rural barnyard animal) “is not a real animal” and thus “the urban pet is somehow inherently less worthy than the wild animal or the field animal.”

Binary oppositions such as Berger’s urban pet/rural animal are far from benign and often have very real physical effects upon the entities that find themselves relegated to the inferior side of the dualistic opposition. For example, in some contemporary environmental programs, attempts are underway to restore an ecosystem to its “original”

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249 I am thinking here, of course, of non-Western philosophies such as Taoism. But it could still be argued that even if non-Western thought is non-hierarchical in its dualisms, that does not necessarily mean that its cultural and political embodiments succeed in being non-hierarchical.


251 Steve Baker, Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2001), 14, emphasis in the original.
and “pristine” state (a state that, of course, if considered carefully, is likely to be fraught with competing interpretations). Such programs often entail ridding an ecosystem of its invasive and exotic animal species, and protecting and promoting the native species of that ecosystem. An assumption pervading these programs is that original and pristine ecosystemic relationships are somehow “better” than newer, humanly created ones, and that so-called invasive and exotic species are devoid of any rights to be protected from extermination when encountered in their non-native environments.252

What I should make clear from the outset here is that I am not questioning binary thinking per se. In fact, I am not absolutely convinced that human minds in general can necessarily operate without projecting dualistic structurations upon the dizzying flux of the material world and of our sensory and mental interactions with such a world. Rather, it is only when what Karen J. Warren calls “the logic of domination” is injected into a binary opposition (or should we call it a binary complementation?) that some very serious ethical problems arise. Warren writes:

In order for differences to make a moral difference in how a group is treated or in the opportunities available to it, other moral promises (such as the logic of domination) must be accepted. The logic of domination is necessary both to turn diversity (or difference) into domination and to justify that domination.253

This logic of domination, once revealed as such, almost always reveals that the reasons for oppressing one side or one group of the binary equation are irrationally and

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252 For some examples of privileging so-called “original” animal inhabitants, even to the extent of promoting lethal exclusion of “non-original” elements, see the article “Horse Sense” by Ted Williams on the controversy surrounding attempts to re-populate the American West with wild mustangs in Audubon (Sept/Oct 2006), 36-43. Also see Judy Irving’s film The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill (2005) which documents one man’s attempt to protect and care for a population of parrots in the San Francisco area, despite attempts by naturalists to eradicate the non-native birds.

indefensibly prejudiced. A classic example of such an indefensible prejudice would be what Peter Singer calls “speciesism,” the human predilection for privileging human needs and desires over those of nonhuman animals. Similarly, in my discussion below of The Wars of Alexander, I am not quarrelling with that poem or its Alexander-character’s perception of nature being divisible into common versus exotic nature. Rather, what I and the Wars-poet (I will argue below) find problematic is Alexander’s penchant for privileging exotic nature to such an extent that he becomes callous and completely unconcerned about more commonplace forms of nature.

What I will be doing in this chapter is highlight how The Wars of Alexander, a poem from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century that was a part of the Alliterative School of poetry (also – and problematically – referred to as the Alliterative Revival), is also interested in the human schemata employed to structure and organize


\[255\] The poem’s most recent editors write the following about dating the poem: “The date is...indeterminate. The poem could not have been written before the mid-fourteenth century in view of references to the noble which was first minted then. The date of the Ashmole manuscript (c. 1450) provides a terminus ad quem, but the poem could have been composed at almost any point within the intervening century. Dates have been suggested from as early as 1361 to shortly before the date of the Ashmole text, but on no grounds beyond conjecture.” Eds. Hoyt N. Duggan and Thorlac Turville-Petre, The Wars of Alexander (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), xlii.

\[256\] From about 1967 on, due in large part to a pair of influential articles by Elizabeth Salter, many scholars have stressed a need to see the poems of the “Alliterative Revival” as having more dissimilarities than similarities, and to see that such dissimilarities undermine the ability to believe that anything like a cohesive and self-conscious literary movement or revival existed. I therefore have rejected the phrase “Alliterative Revival” and instead use the phrase “Alliterative School” as my referent to a body of poems, most of which – but likely not all – came from the Northwest Midlands and were composed largely in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, while recognizing that those poems can often be vastly different from one another in temperament, theme, etc. For a short summary of this debate surrounding the notion of a cohesive “Revival,” see Christine Chism, Alliterative Revivals (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 16-20. For Elizabeth Salter’s argument, see her “Alliterative Revival I,” Modern Philology 64:2 (1966): 146-50; and her “Alliterative Revival II,” Modern Philology 64:3 (1966): 233-37. See also: Norman Blake, “Middle English Alliterative Revivals,” Review 1 (1979): 205-14; Ralph Hanna, “Alliterative Poetry,” in The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999): 488-512. Although some scholars wish to stress the dissimilarities among the poems that make up the canon of the School, others nonetheless still perceive shared concerns, tones, and narrative strategies among many of the poems, even if they reject that these poems were written in the same geographical area and within the same half century or so (as many supporters of the “Revival”
the natural world into classifications that reduce the heterogeneity of nature into binary, and thus more easily comprehensible, categories. However, unlike environmental programs that attempt to restore ecosystemic “purity” by maligning – and even eradicating – exotic species, we find in the Alexander of the Wars the inverse: a conqueror who instead privileges the marvelous and the exotic forms of nature to such an extent that he considers more commonplace forms to be expendable. Quotidian nature, in short, is for this Alexander the Great that which is valueless and useful only as a means to the end of assisting him in his quest to conquer the known world and beyond.

As with many of the other authors already discussed in this dissertation, the Wars-poet foregrounds his character’s attitudes towards nature as a way of signaling forms of military violence that have overstepped the boundaries of what is just and acceptable. In other words, the anonymous author of The Wars of Alexander draws our attention at certain moments to Alexander’s own attitudes towards nature in order to further critique the insatiable lust for conquest that Alexander exhibits over and over again in the poem. Although an admirable bearer of law and order in some versions of the Alexander legend, such as the Middle English Kyng Alisaunder (c. 1250-1330), the


\[\text{257 My argument that the Wars-poet critiques Alexander’s grandiose, martial ambitions – even if the poet may show occasional admiration for that warrior’s courage and wisdom – aligns itself with comments that scholars such as David Lawton and Ralph Hanna have made about alliterative poetry’s overall perception of worldly power and ambition. Hanna, for example, writes: “Alliterative poems are always concerned with the social disruptions potentially inherent in every exercise of lordship. Yet at the same time they worry and lament the burden of that consciousness, for they are oppressively aware of the futility of efforts at pursuing justice. Alliterative lords may conquer gloriously, but they never vanquish their own failure to operate without exploitation. For them, history is a longing for a new beginning, but a beginning which can never be disentangled from the preceding end, the tyranny inherent in rule.” From Hanna, “Alliterative Poetry,” 511, emphasis mine. See also Lawton, “Unity,” passim.}\]

\[\text{258 See for example, lines 1421-22 in Kyng Alisaunder where we are told that, after conquering Thrace, Alexander “sette his owen assises. / And made bailiffs and justises.” We are also told that Alexander performs similar post-conquest operations after subjugating Tyre (lines 1770ff.). All quotes from Kyng}\]
Alexander depicted in the alliterative Wars of Alexander is one who subdues and
conquers only as an end in itself and, furthermore, as an end that brings no perceptible
sense of fulfillment for Alexander. As the Indian Brahmans at one point say to
Alexander: “ye with wodnes of weris all the werd fretis, / and yit forfeghtils youre face,
all fasting it semes” (4529-30) [with the madness of wars you devour the world and yet
your face grows lean as if you were fasting].

What is all the more remarkable in the case of the Wars-poet is that we are likely
dealing with a cleric who uses his poem to chasten the martial energies of an audience
whose members were among the most zealous and reliable soldiers of the Hundred Years
War, as well as of some of the era’s smaller, but often closely related, conflicts.

Pinpointing with accuracy exactly where our poet came from is impossible, but the
provenance of the poet is likely the Northwest region of England which included counties
such as Cheshire or Lancashire, counties which likely gave rise to most of the poems of
the Alliterative School. Although there is often an implied aristocratic audience for
many poems of the Alliterative School, as demonstrated by the fiction of oral
performance before a courtly audience with which most of these poems open, scholars

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Alisaunder are from the following edition: Kyng Alisaunder, ed. G.V. Smithers, 2 vols., EETS 227, 237
(1952-7). Smithers’ text is an edition of three existing manuscripts of the poem, and I will be quoting from
what Smithers calls the “B” text, edited from MS Laud Misc. 622. On dating the poem, see Smithers, II, 44.
259 All citations are from the Duggan and Turville-Petre edition of The Wars of Alexander. All
translations are my own.
260 The assumption that we are dealing with a member of the clergy hinges on the Latinity of the poet. He
certainly knew the Latin source text for his own poem, the so-called 1-3 recension of the Historia de preliis
Alexandri Magni. But it has also been argued that the Wars-poet draws upon Isidore of Seville, the
encyclopedia of Bartholomaeus Anglicus or Vincent of Beauvais, and perhaps even Virgil. On the poet’s
use of Latin source materials, see Duggan and Turville-Petre, Wars, xiii-xvii. For further evidence of
clerics being authors of some of the poems of the Alliterative School, see Thorlac Turville-Petre, “The
Author of The Destruction of Troy,” Medium Aevum 57 (1988): 264-69. In that article, Turville-Petre
argues that a certain John Clerk, who most likely had been a clerk in secular orders at Whalley Abbey in
Lancashire, was the author of The “Gest Hystoriale” of the Destruction of Troy.
261 On attempts to perceive the provenance of the poem through the dialects of the various scribes, see
Duggan and Turville-Petre, Wars, xxxvi-xlii.
such as Chism have argued that the most likely audience of these poems were provincial knights and well-to-do members of the gentry. These knights and barons provided many of the kings and greater magnates of late medieval England with a reliable pool from which to recruit soldiers for their various campaigns, a feat made all the easier due to the fact that many of these kings and magnates, such as the Black Prince, John of Gaunt, and Henry V, held the earldoms of Cheshire or Lancashire. Even before the rise of contract armies and the opening stages of the Hundred Years War, the Northwest counties were populated with men who had cut their military teeth by defending their county’s frontiers from border raids by Scottish and Welsh soldiers. But perhaps nothing shows how committed the men of this region were to the material and honorific benefits of a military lifestyle than the armed uprising in 1393 by a Cheshire populace that was outraged by the ongoing peace negotiations between France and England, negotiations which threatened to curtail their ability to move up in the world by means of vigorous campaigning on the Continent.

When our poet critiques the military excesses of his Alexander the Great, we have to recognize that he is also criticizing the military values which so heavily imbued his own society. And one of the specific strategies through which he rebukes his audiences’

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262 See Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, 37-38. For an informative summary of the challenges associated with declaring anything definitive about the anonymous authors or intended audiences of many poems of the Alliterative School, see Derek Pearsall, “The Alliterative Revival: Origins and Social Background” in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background: Seven Essays*, ed. David Lawton (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982), 44-54. Turville-Petre summarizes his own findings on the audience of most poems of the School thus: “It is likely that the wide-ranging audience for alliterative verse included the gentry (such as Robert Thornton), knights, franklins, and the clergy, the educated men often with positions of local authority. Many of them might have served the great lords in their retinues, and attended upon them in their castles and on their estates.” From Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1977), 46.

zeal for social advancement and material gain by means of campaigning is to criticize Alexander’s infatuation with exotic nature. As we shall see below, the era in which *The Wars of Alexander* was written was also an era of growing passion for collecting marvelous and strange forms of nature, for to have the means to possess and conspicuously show off these exotic forms of nature was to demonstrate power and social prestige to one’s peers and one’s enemies. But one of the underlying messages of the *Wars*-poet is that commonplace nature is worthy of adoration and respect as well, and therefore devotion to a soldiering lifestyle for reasons of traveling to strange, new lands and plundering some of its exotic riches (including its flora and fauna), smacks of the worst kinds of pride and subversion of boundaries with which the medieval Alexander was typically identified.264

One other goal of this chapter, it should be mentioned, will be to make some comparisons between the Alexander depicted in the *Wars* with the representations of the Macedonian conqueror to be found in another Middle English version of the Alexander legend, the earlier *Kyng Alisaunnder*.265 Such a comparison will allow me to highlight my point that the *Wars*-poet takes a distinctly harsher and more moralistic view of his Alexander, and one method by which the poet condemns the chivalric way of life is through the poem’s depictions of the Alexander’s attitudes towards, and treatment of,

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265 The other major Middle English treatment of the Alexander legend is *The Prose Life of Alexander* (also referred to as the Thornton *Alexander*, due to its inclusion in the famous 15th century miscellany compiled by Robert Thornton). However, like the *Wars of Alexander*, it too is a translation of the 1-3 recension of the *Historia de prelis*, but whereas the *Wars* expands on its source at several interesting places (as I discuss in this chapter), the *Prose Alexander* usually attenuates its source and, in my reading of that text, does little of interest with regards to its depictions of the natural world. Therefore, this chapter limits itself primarily to a discussion of the Middle English *Wars*, and to a lesser extent, *Kyng Alisaunnder*. 

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animals. The Kyng Alisaunter-poet, it is generally agreed, does not find his Alexander worthy of as much opprobrium as the Wars-poet does, but, interestingly, where we do find the two Middle English poets aligning themselves with one another is in their agreement that Alexander the Great’s bellicose values threaten to eclipse the significance for humans of the natural world. Although the Alexander in Kyng Alisaunter is certainly no embodiment of righteous or generous behavior towards nonhuman entities, for this Alexander is depicted as killing the dogs of a captured city (2876-77), chopping down forests (5231-34), and beating hogs and enslaving elephants (5729-36); still, such actions do not elicit the intricate condemnation which is (I will be arguing) a function of characters such as Jaudus or Dindimus in The Wars of Alexander. Rather, it is mainly in the famous “lyrical headpieces” in Kyng Alisaunter (discussed below) where we will find that poem’s censuring of Alexander’s relentless quest to rule the world and censuring of that quest’s marginalization of the natural world.

Anectanabus and the magical powers of commonplace nature

Perhaps the most useful point of departure for our discussion of the role of nature in the Wars would be to consider the character of Anectanabus. When we first meet Anectanabus, he is the ruler of Egypt, a land renowned far and wide for its inhabitants’ vast knowledge of “the pasage of the planettis, the poyntis and the sygnes” (32) and of “the iapis of all gemetri” (43). Rather than being revered for their expertise in the chivalric arts of sword-fighting or jousting, the Egyptians are recognized as an exceedingly learned people, and their country is, as Christine Chism describes it, “less a
monarchy than an epistematocracy.”266 When a threat to Egypt appears in the form of a vast Persian armada, we see that Anectanabus can – or is only willing – to employ his magic (magic that, as we shall see, is often dependent upon a manipulation of nature for its efficacy) by passively divining that the Persian fleet will be completely successful in its conquest of Egypt.

Up until this moment in the poem, a keen understanding of the natural world, such as that for which the Egyptians are renowned,267 appears to have precious little going for it. At this, the Egyptians’ greatest hour of need, when a vast horde of hostile enemies is knocking at their proverbial door, intimate knowledge of the natural world translates into very little authentic potency in the sphere of realpolitik. As Chism describes Anectanabus’ practice of merely forseeing Persian victory, and not of actively working to thwart it, “Egyptian magic can only discover fate not change it.”268 However, I would submit, contra Chism, that in this prophesying of Persian victory we are learning less about the potentialities of Egyptian magic in general, and more about Anectanabus’ personal approach to that magic.

In other words, it is far from clear in the poem whether or not Anectanabus’ magic could have effectively confronted, and possibly thwarted, the Perisan advance. But what we do learn beyond a doubt is that Anectanabus would rather flee, and that he would rather (as I point out below) use his magic and its attendant manipulations of the natural world for personal conquests, to breach boundaries, and to invade the territories

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266 Chism, Alliterative Revivals, 131.
267 For example, at one point in the poem, we are told that Anectanabus and his fellow Egyptians are legendary for their abilities to “vnderstandis in a stounde the steuen of the briddis, / To say the by thar sapience quat thar sange menys” (252-52) [understand in a moment the voice of the birds, to say by means of their wisdom what the birds’ song means].
268 Chism, Alliterative Revivals, 133.
of others, all actions for which the *Wars*-poet will condemn his Alexander. Try as Alexander might throughout the poem to deny his true paternity, we can still see that Anectanabus has left his genetic mark on his son, for both father and son are guilty in the poem of misusing nature, and of appropriating its most exotic manifestations to further their own personal (i.e. not communal or societal) goals.

After Anectanabus flees Egypt to escape the Persian menace and has arrived in the court of King Philip and Queen Olympados of Macedonia, we see an Anectanabus who can be quite proactive with his magic and can accomplish some truly impressive feats by means of his understanding of the natural world. For example, after Anectanabus falls ardently in love with the captivating Queen Olympados, he is determined to sleep with her despite her married status, and the method by which he goes about fulfilling his sexual desire is to manipulate Olympados’ dreams so that she will be expecting the sun-god Amon (who will really be Anectanabus in disguise) in her bedchamber. In his preparation for creating the dream that Olympados will experience in order for Anectanabus’ plan to come to fruition, we are told that Anectanabus “Drafe [rushed] into a depe dissert & drawis vp herbis, / the chosest for enchantment at he chese couthe” (336-37). And in order to make a truly grand entrance into Olympados’ bedchamber, Anectanabus “changid by enchantmentis his chere alltogedire. / Thare worthid he by his wichecraft into a wild dragon, / And to the ladi lere [to the lady’s face] he lendid [went] in haste” (377-79). Anectanabus’ manipulation of the botanical species located around the Macedonian countryside, as well as his proclivity for shape-

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269 A more impressive transformation into a dragon by Anectanabus occurs at line 486ff. This time it is not only Queen Olympados who witnesses the event, for this incident involves Philip and an entire hall of spectators bearing frightful witness to the dragon.
shifting between human and exotic nonhuman identities, signals that, like Alexander, Anectanabus perceives nature as a resource that allows him to invade territory belonging to others. Anectanabus utilizes the potency of plants and the forms of dragons to invade King Philip’s bed and wife. Although Chism argues that Anectanabus could only passively watch the Persian fleet approach Egypt, Anectanabus’ displays of magic which he performs in Macedonia lead us to believe that he was exercising unnecessary and inappropriate restraint in Egypt. He simply was not inspired to use his magic to protect his fellow Egyptians from an attack. But when it comes to violating a married woman who has enchanted him, then Anectanabus performs some truly outstanding displays of magic.

The most impressive of these displays of Anectanabus’ magic is surely the scene in which he prepares to hijack King Philip’s dreams and to convince the latter by these means that the child with which his wife Olympados is now pregnant is the offspring of the venerable sun-god Amon. Once again, we find Anectanabus’ drawing upon the hidden powers of the plants found outside the city walls of Macedonia:

Airis on all him aene out of the cite,
Yede him furtre eftirsons herbis to seche,
Reft him vp be the rotes & radly tham stamhis.
The iuse for his gemetry that iogeloure takis,
A sythen a brid of the see himseluyn him fangis,
Clairs to hyre coynte thingis, kely enrichantis,
And with the wose of the wede hire wengis anoyntis.
And all this demerlayke he did bot be the deyll craftis,
How he myght compas & kast the kynge to begyle. (407-15)

[He goes by himself out of the city, walking forth again to seek herbs, rips them up by the roots and soon pounds them. The juggler takes that juice for his geomancy, and afterwards he catches a sea-bird, mutters to it strange things and keenly enchantats it, and with the juice of the weed anoints its wings; and all of this]
magic he did by the devil’s craft, and knew how he might contrive and cast a spell to beguile the king.

The *Wars*-poet sprinkles the passage with words that lay negative overtones upon this scene of magic: “Reft him vp” and “radly tham stampis” imbue the magical process and transformation of nature with violence, and the use of words such as “enchantis,” “deuyll craftis,” and “begyle” all associate Aneconatus’ magic with the dark arts that were outlawed in the Middle Ages due to their perceived connections to satanic forces.²⁷⁰

The significance of Aneconatus as a potent manipulator of the natural world lies in the way that this figure, Alexander’s natural father, foreshadows Alexander’s own, much more large-scale use of nature (horses, griffins, etc.) to achieve his personal objectives. Just as Aneconatus employs nature for questionable ends (sexual conquest), so too does Alexander’s interminable and globe-trotting campaign of “conquest for conquest’s sake” appear to be an enterprise that the *Wars*-poet perceives as unable to justify the loss of so much animal life or justify the festishization of so many forms of exotic nature to the exclusion of more commonplace forms.

In fact, I want to argue in this chapter that one of the ways in which Alexander differentiates himself from some of his Eastern counterparts, such as the Brahman Dindimus, is to refute the value and potency of commonplace nature. The trap that Alexander keeps falling prey to is that he cannot help but be captivated by exotic manifestations of nature, such as those he often encounters in the East and at the ends of the known world. Try as Alexander might to live a life completely unencumbered by a

need to recognize the natural world and natural processes like death in order to complete his worldwide conquest, he cannot help but be arrested by sights such as that of a phoenix during his visit to the Trees of the Sun and of Moon or that of the elephant-powered revolving closet of Queen Candace. This Alexander who belittles his own men for caring about the welfare of their horses or who condemns Dindimus and his fellow Brahmans for living too intimately with mundane nature reveals that he can’t help but be engaged with the exotic nature that he encounters during his distant travels. Alexander’s penchant for privileging Eastern nature over that which is more familiar to him and his countrymen sets up a hierarchical binary in the poem whereby he relegates commonplace nature to the category of “that which taints by living too closely to it” or to “that which is inherently expendable.” However, exotic nature, of which Alexander’s freakishly unhorse-like horse Bucephalus is perhaps the primary example, is that which Alexander does indeed find worthy of intense interest and even of a surprising degree of affectionate concern.

Exotic versus commonplace animals

When we turn to The Wars of Alexander, we might be expecting to encounter an Alexander who, due to his reputation as a student of that greatest of empiricists, Aristotle, is consistently intrigued by all facets of the natural world and who desires to examine any plant or animal that crosses his path to satisfy his intellectual curiosity. This is not the case. This Alexander dismisses everything but the most strange and unfamiliar forms of nature as unworthy of his attention. The earliest indicator of Alexander’s curiosity for exotic nature is his reaction during his youth to the arrival of the monstrous horse Bucephalus that is incarcerated in King Philip’s stables. Bucephalus is no normal horse
complacently nibbling grass in the field; rather, he is carnivorous, and fed a steady diet of criminals, upon whom Bucephalus had “Som hanchyd of the heued, som the handez etyn, / Som thair riggez owt rytte, & som thair ribbez rent” (774-75) [some of the head gnawed, some the hands eaten, some their backs torn out, and some broken their ribs]. However, rather than being fearful of this ferocious horse and his eating habits, we are told that Alexander “Of this wonder he hed & so he wele burd” (776, emphasis mine) [had wonder of this, and so he well ought].

Discussions of animals in the Alexander romances have often emphasized Alexander’s intrepid visit to see Bucephalus, a visit in which the man-eating Bucephalus meekly licks Alexander’s hand (778-79), as one of the poet’s devices for signaling to his readers that Alexander’s innate power and majesty is so palpable that even the natural world acknowledges it. As David Salter states: “the romance version of the story [of Alexander and Bucephalus] describes a miracle performed by a figure of such superhuman stature, that his status is comparable to that of a god.”

Although this encounter with Bucephalus might indeed be deployed in order to show Alexander’s superhuman supremacy over nature, we need to remain aware of how the pattern that commences with scenes such as this one with Bucephalus is that Alexander is a person who is only interested in and concerned with unfamiliar and singular forms of nature, a fact that associates Alexander with some of the most powerful men in Europe around the time when the Wars was written.

271 The Ashmole manuscript, the only other existing manuscript of this poem, has the following at line 776: “Of this hym wonders iwys, & so he wele burd.”
In the latter half of the fourteenth century, “wonder” at exotic forms of nature was growing as “the numbers and types of collections [of marvels] grew and diversified.”

From the French royal abbey of Saint-Denis to the legendary 15th century collections of Phillip the Good and John, duke of Berry, an increasing number of urban elites and wealthy nobles began collecting such marvelous objects as elephant tusks, shark teeth, coconuts, coral, griffin eggs, and unicorn horns (the last two being in reality ostrich eggs and narwhal tusks, respectively). And what was the trade-off for all of the time and money spent on procuring such exotic items? Daston and Park argue that possession and control of wonders represented…the wealth and power of those who owned them; on a more abstract level, their rarity or uniqueness reflected the rarity and uniqueness of their proprietors, conceived in terms of nobility and cultivation…More than anything else, wonders were nature’s noblest creations, and they enveloped those around them with an aura of nobility and might.

Not only were animal parts commonly collected and exhibited, but living animals were, too. John, duke of Berry’s legendary menagerie contained an ostrich, dromedary, monkey, and twelve peacocks, and the Tower of London served as an increasingly well-stocked menagerie in the Middle Ages, containing at different times an elephant, a bear, and lions and leopards. Bucephalus, being a horse unlike any other, most certainly qualifies as a marvel and as a form of nature worthy of the equally singular Alexander’s

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274 And if we turn our sights from material culture to literary culture, we find that the astonishing popularity of exotic narratives such as *Mandeville’s Travels*, which survives in over three hundred manuscripts and some version of which was available by 1400 in every major European language, attests to the unquenchable late medieval thirst for marvels. On the popularity of the *Travels*, see C.W.R.D. Moseley’s “Introduction” in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (New York: Penguin, 2005).
275 Daston and Park, *Order of Nature*, 68.
276 On John, Duke of Berry, see Daston and Park, *Order of Nature*, 86-88; on the Tower of London, and other medieval menageries, see Lisa J. Kiser, “Animals in Medieval Sports, Entertainment, and
attention. Like Edward III with his leopards or Frederick II of Germany with his elephant, Bucephalus represents Alexander’s need to associate himself with only the most novel and strange forms of nature.

As I will argue in more detail below, particularly in a discussion of Alexander’s encounter with the Brahmans, our poet perceives Alexander’s privileging of exotic nature as misguided and ignorant at best, but prideful at worst. Such a critical stance puts our poet in respectable company, for beginning in the 13th century, philosophers and theologians such as Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas, began condemning their culture’s privileging of marvels and exotic forms of nature. Albertus Magnus, for example, expunged from his scientific writings the vocabulary and tone associated with writings on the wonders of the natural world, and instead adopted a more “dispassionate tone.”²⁷⁷ This rejection of valuing only exotic nature as worthy of awe has its roots in Book XXI of St. Augustine’s De civitate Dei, where Augustine expresses concern that people who focus on exotic nature and singular events in the natural world lose sight of the miraculous nature of all Creation, for everything in the universe is the product of the divine will. The head of the Brahmans, Dindamus, will articulate ideas very similar to those of St. Augustine in the former’s withering attack on the values of Alexander.

Although it is unlikely that any of the powerful magnates of the Northwest counties of England had menageries or collections of marvels to rival those of the French and English nobility, the gentry and knights of this region must have known of their

²⁷⁷ Daston and Park, Order of Nature, 117.
existence and perhaps even seen components of them, for it was not uncommon for urban nobles to travel the countryside and abroad with exotic animals or miraculous objects in order to promulgate their own power through such items. And because the region that gave rise to *The Wars of Alexander* was known for a citizenry eager to rise up in the social ranks through successful campaigning, the *Wars*-poet utilizes Alexander and that conqueror’s fascination with exotic nature as proxies through which the poet can attack the desire of many of his fellow citizens for the social mobility, reputation, and material wealth that could be gained by a life devoted to military travel, service, and conquest. Just as one of the didactic targets of the poem is Alexander’s flagrant disregard for boundaries and his drive to experience exotic forms of nature, so too is the military careerism and the wholesale adoption of courtly tastes and interests of the poet’s wealthy neighbors.

When Bucephalus dies near the end of the *Wars*, we see that Alexander is willing to give his cherished horse a funeral and memorial that does anything but gracefully accept the death of his horse. After Bucephalus succumbs to his “infirmite” (5707), Alexander laments “Sall now thi flesch here be freten with fowlis & with wormes, / hat has so doghtyly done? Nay, drightin forbede!” (5715-16). In order to protect Bucephalus’ corpse from the birds and the worms, we learn that Alexander:

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    Than bilds he thare a berynes this beste in to ligg,
    Of schene schemenand gold as it a scharne ware,
    A tombe as a tabernacle & tildis vp a cite
    In reuerence of that riche stede & eftir him it callis. (5717-20)
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[Then he builds there a tomb of beautiful shimmering gold as if it was a shrine in which to place this beast, a tomb like a tabernacle, and erects a city in reverence of that rich steed and names the city after him.]
As opposed to identifying with and showing concern for all of the horses that his vast army relies upon, Alexander’s bond with Bucephalus is a suspiciously isolated case of Alexander giving himself over to feelings of interspecies kinship. Elsewhere in the poem, Alexander conveys an emphatically indifferent attitude towards the death of less exoticized horses.

For example, during Alexander’s campaign to defeat the Persian leader Darius, and after having subdued the city of Abandra, Alexander and his men find themselves in an inclement landscape which ravages their horses as they begin to die of starvation. The reaction to this mass dying of the horses by Alexander’s soldiers is strikingly visceral and selfless. Our narrator tells us: “thai [Alexander’s men] pleyne more the pouerte & pite of thaire blonkis / than the soroghe of thamselfe by the seynt dele” (2282-83) [they lament more the poverty and the pity of their horses seven times as much as they feel sorry for themselves]. Alexander, on the other hand, reprimands his men for this display of concern for ordinary (i.e. non-Bucephalian) horses:

Mi barons & my baratours, the biggest in erth,
That has the angwisch of armes ay to now suffird,
Quethire euire youre hertis, I hope, for horsys abatis?
May vs noght limp, if any life lenge in oure brestit,
To couir be cas at a cleke courseris a thousand? (2285-89)

[My barons and my bold fighters, the strongest on earth, who have the anguish of arms up until now suffered; will ever your feelings, I hope, for horses diminish? May it not happen, if any life lingers in our breast, that we will with luck recover in the twinkling of an eye a thousand coursers?]

The warhorse that most of Alexander’s men ride is much too expendable and commonplace of a commodity in the eyes of Alexander to be worthy of mourning, and although Alexander himself indulges in deep personal affection for his own horse, when
he glimpses such “maudlin” displays for animals in his own men, he can only perceive it as a most unwarrior-like weakness. In fact, the operative word in 2163 appears to be “courseris,” a technical term for a type of horse that by the time in which *The Wars of Alexander* was likely written had become associated with a rare and superior type of horse. As Andrew Ayton argues in his discussion of the surviving horse inventories and *restauro equorum* accounts from the era of Edward III’s reign:

The other category of warhorse [beside destrier] to be found regularly in the inventories of Edward III’s reign is the ‘courser’ (or *cursarius*). This is often characterized as a horse for the chase or the tournament field, but the inventories show quite clearly that it was also regarded as a high quality warhorse, clearly a cut above the ordinary *equus* and second only to the destrier in value.²⁷⁸

In other words, Ayton shows us that by the latter half of the fourteenth century “courser” has come to represent within the military lexicon a highly prized animal, for in the inventories the technical term courser embodies a singularity which, if not equal to the freakishness of a Bucephalus, nevertheless puts this horse in a category above the great majority of other European horses.²⁷⁹ Nonetheless, Alexander perceives the mass death of his soldiers’s very powerful and noble coursers as nothing for them to be distraught about for, in Alexander’s view, there are always many more coursers to be obtained. He looks down his nose at the type of warhorse that many knights of the poet’s time would be exceedingly pleased to own and to ride into battle. As the poem progresses, the *Wars-

²⁷⁹ Ayton goes on to specify: “That the term ‘courser’…was not used consistently in the horse inventories of the 1330s is probably due in part to the fact that it had only recently been admitted to the practical vocabulary of the horse appraiser. It does not appear at all in the inventories of the first two Edwards…Then coursers appear quite suddenly in the inventories drawn-up during the late spring of 1336. They immediately become a favoured type of warhorse amongst the upper echelons of the aristocracy and, indeed, remain so until the early 1360s, when the inventory evidence dries up.” Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses*, 66. Ayton’s comments here suggest further that the *Wars*-poet is giving us an image of an Alexander who aligns himself with the elitist tastes of the late 14th century English military class.
poet increasingly maligns this habit of privileging the exotic and rare forms of nature, and demonstrates that Alexander’s preference for the exotic threatens to cross over into complete contempt and moral indifference for those facets of nature which exist for the Macedonian warrior in the category of “commonplace.”

We might usefully compare the Alexander found in the *Wars* with that found in one of the other major Middle English contributions to the Alexander legends, *Kyng Alisaunder*. In the latter poem, rather than encountering an Alexander who is completely indifferent to any form of animal death but that of his beloved Bucephalus, we find in *Alisaunder* an Alexander who is keenly attuned to the suffering of *all of the animals* that are marching with his massive army:

> He and all his noble men,  
> Als hij ridden from Facen,  
> Days and oþer and þrid vpon  
> Mightten hij fynde water non,  
> Bot wildernesse and non oþere þing.  
> Wel sore anoyed was þe kyng,  
> For he seigh his stedes honestes,  
> Dromedaries, and oþer bestes,  
> Toforne his eighen steruen for þurst.  
> Of all pyne þat was hym werst. (5041-50)

The *Alisaunder*-poet implicitly equates nobility with a capacity to cross the species boundary and to empathize with forms of suffering other than those of one’s own species. The Alexander of the *Wars* is noticeably lacking in this grandeur of spirit, and is only moved by the death of singular beasts such as his cherished Bucephalus.

However, the *Alisaunder*-poet does not leave us with the impression that his Alexander is completely innocent of the mass suffering by animals, for the narrator does imply that Alexander is somewhat responsible:
Jt nas no wonder [that the animals suffered so much], als J fynde,  
For of olyfaunz two ðousynde  
Þæ kynges golde and siluer bare.  
Þat was a riche chaffere [i.e. a mass of wealth]! (5091-94)

What the poet gives with one hand he quickly takes with the other. He identifies the  
paradox that Alexander cares so intensely for his suffering animals and yet he is  
ultimately responsible for such suffering by leading the animals into an arid, inhospitable  
environment while being mercilessly loaded down with, not only gold and silver, but also  
with Alexander’s siege engines and catapults (lines 5095-96). By and large, however,  
_Kyng Alisaundre_, unlike _The Wars of Alexander_, is not as interested in critiquing the  
excesses or lapses in moral judgment of its Alexander, and, also unlike the _Wars_, is not as  
interested in critiquing Alexander’s attitudes and behavior towards the natural world.

_The march on Jerusalem_

After a successful yet arduous siege of the city of Tyre, Alexander marches upon  
Jerusalem in an act of retribution against that city for not coming to his aid when he had  
requested it during the siege of Tyre. This incident has stood out for _Wars_-scholars for  
some time because it is the poet’s most expansively original divergence from his Latin  
source. It is a moment that is often read as signaling Alexander’s innate recognition of the  
sanctity of a monotheistic God, for at one point Alexander warns his men on pain of  
death not to approach the Jewish “bishop,” Jaudus, who has on his mitre the  
tetragramaton, or sacred name of God (1712-19). And in another incident during  
Alexander’s journey into Jerusalem, Jaudus shows Alexander a book of Daniel’s  
prophecy in which it is prophesied how the Greeks will destroy the Persians, a textual
reference in the War which invites that the poem’s audience to perceive Alexander as a divinely sanctified fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy. However, despite the Jerusalem episode’s purpose as one which emphasizes Alexander’s status as a virtuous pagan who possesses innate understandings of Christian doctrine, the scene also further contributes to the characterization of Alexander as somebody who is easily captivated by lavish and ornate manifestations of nature.

As readers familiar with the Wars will recall, Alexander does not carry out the swift vengeance upon Jerusalem that he initially proclaims he will mete out. Instead, the city is spared such a fate by the fact that the bishop of the city, Jaudus, is visited in a dream by an angel before Alexander arrives and is told by the heavenly messenger that in order to save the city, the inhabitants must “aray all the cite, / the streitis & in all stedis, stoutly & faire, / that it be onest [splendid] all ouire, & open vp the gatis” (1617-19). In short, the city of Jerusalem is admonished by the angel that it needs to forsake any idea of active resistance and must instead welcome Alexander in a way that reflects back at him the image he has already constructed of himself: that of a (semi-)divine conqueror. In addition to raising awnings to keep the streets protected from the searing heat of the sun and the donning of impressive white robes by the town’s people, part of the ambitious plan to welcome Alexander as a conqueror involves the bishop Jaudus putting on “riche wedis” in order to dazzle Alexander, “wedis” that are described as follows:

Fulle of bridis & of bestis of bise & of purpre,
And that was garnest full gay with golden skirtis,
Store starand stanes strenkild all ouire,
Saudid full of safirs & othire sere gemmes,
And poudird with perry, was purer & othire.
And sithen he castis on a cape of kastand hewes,
With riche rybans of gold railed bi the hemmes,
A vestoure to vise on of violet floures,  
Wroght full of wodwose & othir wild bestis. (1655-63)

[Full of birds and beasts of a blue and purple color; and that was adorned full gaily with golden skirts, with large gleaming stones sprinkled all over, set full of sapphires and other diverse gems, and was dusted with precious stones and other kinds. And then he put on a cape of a chestnut hue, with rich borders of gold covering the hems, a garment to look upon with violet flowers, fully decorated with wild men and other wild beasts.]

What interests me about the bishop’s luxurious garments, and our poet’s luxurious description of them, is their emphasis on plants, animals, and mythological human-animal hybrids like “wodewose” (i.e. the famous “wildmen” of medieval lore). As demonstrated earlier in my discussion of Alexander’s attitudes towards horses (both exotic and commonplace), Alexander is a man easily captivated by the more exoticized manifestations of nonhuman entities. The Jewish bishop (an odd configuration in and of itself) who leads the city in its preparations knows that the splendor of the city in combination with the inhabitants’ obsequious posturing must distract Alexander from his wrathful intention to raze the city to the ground. But why does the poet emphasize in particular the birds, animals, and flowers to be found on the bishop’s garments? I submit that this peculiar mode of dress is actually a subtle literary reference that many well-read and educated readers of the poem would have picked up on, and that the bishop’s sumptuous outfit in fact allows him to masquerade as the Goddess Nature, a figure that was institutionalized by Alain de Lille in his popular work *De planctu naturae.*

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280 It is also possible that, in addition to Alain de Lille’s *De planctu*, when the Wars-poet is so richly describing for us Jaudus’ garb he may have in mind some writings on Jewish vestments. For example, in a 13th century interpretation of the significance of Jewish vestments, Guilielmus Durandus writes: “The High Priest…did represent as in a picture the whole of Creation. For the Breeches of fine linen did meetly signify the earth, because fine linen cometh from the earth. The Girdle, with its laces and strings, denoted the ocean that windeth round it. The blue Tunic, by its hue, was the firmament…The Ephod, with its many hues, was a picture of the starry heaven; the gold interwove with the colours, the warmth of life which
In Prose One, Meter Two of Alain’s *De planctu*, we get an in-depth description of Nature’s garments which we are told contain an abundance of birds, mammals, and fish, and of her shoes which we are told exhibit images of a variety of herbs and flowering plants. In the bishop’s own choice of an outfit, he appears to be masquerading as a kind of Goddess Nature-figure in order to chasten Alexander’s martial energies, for an overly indulgent interest in exotic nature and overly active sense of “wonder,” in effect, proves again and again to be Alexander’s Achilles’ heel. For example, when Alexander is on route to visit the Trees of the Sun and of the Moon, he is momentarily arrested in his walking by the sight of a strange bird which he had never seen before, one

….with sike a proude crest,
With bathe the chekus & þe chauyls as a chykin brid,
And all gilden was hire gorge with golden fethirs.
All hire hames behind was hewid as a purpure,
And all the body & the brest & on the bely vndire
Was finely florisch & faire with frekild pennys,
Of gold graynes & of goules, full of gray mascles. (5110-16)

[with such a proud crest, with both the cheeks and the jaws of a young bird, and all golden was her neck with golden feathers, all her plumage in the back was of a purple hue. And all the body and the breast and the belly underneath were finely adorned and fair with speckled feathers, of gold spots and of red ones full of gray spots.]

It is not insignificant that Alexander is on his way to hear a prophecy from the Trees of the Sun and the Moon when he sees this gorgeous bird, for he knows that the prophecy will be related to his fate and his eventual death. But even such urgent information as that does not stop him from being completely captivated by the strange animal perched upon a

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penetrateth all things; and the two onyx-stones were the sun and moon.” From Guilielmus Durandus, *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum: The Foundational Symbolism of the Early Church, its Structure, Decoration, Sacraments and Vestments*, trans. Rev. T.H. Passmore (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2007), 222. In his own depiction of Jaudus, the *Wars*-poet may be saying, in effect, that the Jews had it right, and may be engaged in some form of “literalization” of the symbolism of the Jewish vestments such as that articulated by Guilielmus Durandus, a symbolism which argues that Creation is unified and harmonious, and that all aspects of the natural world have their proper place in the natural order.
branch. Such distraction by Alexander even prompts his guide to impatiently exclaim: “Quat loke ye?...do lendis on forthire; / Yone is a ferelis foule a Fenix we calle” (5119-20). Such vulnerability to “wonder” is also a weakness of Alexander’s which several characters in the poem take advantage of in order to manipulate the Macedonian conqueror. When Alexander visits the female ruler Candace, we see a moment in which Alexander, who so often is depicted in the poem as a wily and powerful warrior, falls prey to the snare of a “mervall” (5418), which this time happens to be Candace’s moving closet that is turned by “Twenti tamed olifants” (5419). So outraged is Alexander at the letting down of his guard within this marvelous space that he declares to Candace if he had a sword “I suld the slaa…. & than my-selfe eftir!” (5456). Similarly, when our poet has the Jewish bishop Jaudus don his ornate costume replete with luxurious birds and beasts upon it, it is our poet signaling again that Alexander can all too often be mesmerized by exotic nature in a way that allows more cagey, but less physically powerful, people to manipulate Alexander for their own ends.

One reason why we can be confident in affirming that the Goddess Nature is lurking in the background of the bishop’s robes is that she had already made a memorable appearance in one of the more influential and popular medieval versions of the Alexander legend: Walter of Châtillon’s 12th century epic, the Alexandris. The influence of that poem, “a work of undisputed preeminence,” is apparent in the fact that over two hundred manuscripts survive, with a great number of them dating from the era in which the Wars of Alexander was composed. In the Alexandris, Nature herself steps in to thwart

Alexander’s conquest of the world, for “Nature with a mindful grief/ recalled how both
the world and she herself/ had suffered insult from the prince [Alexander], who’d called/
the earth too narrow and prepared armed throngs/ to lay open her secret parts” (X.6-10).
The Alexander in Walter of Châtillon’s poem exhibits the sin of pride in his constant
disrespect for physical boundaries, a disrespect that Nature fears will lead Alexander to
“seek the Nile’s source, and lay siege to Paradise” and march upon “the hidden reaches of
the Antipodes, / or deep Chaos itself” (X.110-13). The Alexander created by the Wars-
poet is similarly accused of being exceedingly dismissive of boundaries, as when Darius
compares Alexander in a letter to vermin such as “ratons” and “myse” that are running
loose “in a rowme chambre, / Aboute in beddis or in bernys [barns]” (1886-87) and when
the high priest of the Brahmans, Dindimus, tells Alexander that “þe soile ne þe foure sees
suffice yowe nouthire, / Bot if ye might ken þe costis of þe clere heuen” (4536-37).282

The bishop’s robes are attempting not only to distract Alexander from his
vengeful state of mind, but also to wordlessly admonish him that the constant drive to
push further and further into the unknown parts of the world, and the desire to seek out

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282 One might be tempted to dismiss Darius’ words here as having nothing to do with the poet’s own
perception of Alexander’s conquests. However, like Christine Chism, I perceive Darius as functioning as a
kind of doppelganger to Alexander. For example, in the moments leading up to his death, Darius compares
his own life to Alexander’s and issues a stern warning to Alexander against pride and a belief in one’s own
invincibility (lines 3408ff.), a warning that scholars like Chism take as a sincere critique by the poet of
Alexander’s own flaws. See Chism, Alliterative Revivals, 141. I am merely proposing here that we consider
some of Darius’ earlier comments, such as his comparison between Alexander and vermin such as mice, as
also reflective of criticisms that the Wars-poet has of his Alexander. Also see Hanna, “Alliterative Poetry,”
505, where, in the midst of a discussion of the Alliterative School’s ambivalent – and often outright cynical
– perception of worldly power (as embodied by Arthur or Alexander), he writes: “exemplarism in
alliterative poems...is always problematic. For in that history, glory always coexists with limit and loss,
and heroes repeat the errors of those overtly faulted figures whom they destroy and supersede. At the very
midpoint of The Wars of Alexander (3380-435), for example, Alexander’s triumph over Darius is qualified
by the dying Persian’s deathbed speech, a speech which implicates Alexander in a future fall which will
mirror Darius’s own.”
more and more marvels, is a violation of the physical boundaries which ought to regulate all forms of life – even human ones. Such a lesson, however, is lost on Alexander. Near the end of the poem, after Alexander has reached the limit of as far as he can possibly travel on land, he decides to overcome terrestrial boundaries by building a griffin-powered flying machine to carry him into the heavens and then a glass orb lowered on a chain to explore the depths of the ocean (5633ff.). Although Alexander is explicitly described as being unhurt by both endeavors (5656, 5680), he does not succeed in his quest to reach the upper heavens and is sent back to earth by the “vertu of the verray god” (5653) [the power of the true God].

Obviously, God Himself finds something objectionable in Alexander’s explorations and is willing to engage in a little divine intervention in order to remind Alexander of what the proper environments are for human beings. And once Alexander has descended into the ocean, our narrator highlights the fact that it was only the novel and strange fish with “fourmes diuere” and “so qwaynt hewis” (5673-74) that captivated Alexander during his underwater explorations.

In addition to the bishop Jaudus’ robes being didactic by reminding Alexander of the existence of proper physical boundaries and environments, his garments are meant to rebuke Alexander by instructing him that all of nature, common and exotic alike, is marvelous because all entities in nature come from the same miraculous source, be it God or his vice-regent on earth, the Goddess Nature. Purple flowers, the rhetoric of the garments seem to say, should strike Alexander as being as inherently interesting as wild

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283 Victor M. Schmidt discusses the significance of both Alexander being uninjured and the intervention by God during Alexander’s Flight in his *A Legend and its Image: The Aerial Flight of Alexander the Great in Medieval Art* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995). Although this book deals largely with visual representations of Alexander’s Flight, many of Schmidt’s observations about the various ways in which the Flight was depicted (and the significance of them) can usefully be employed in interpretations of literary depictions of the Flight and, by extension, the underwater journey in the glass orb.
men. It is a lesson that Alexander, regrettably, does not learn, for instead of turning around his forces and heading for home, he leads them further into the marvelous lands of the East. But the bishop Jaudus will not be the last one to try to educate Alexander on the ignorance and danger of mental categories that divide up the natural world into commonplace versus exotic and then excessively privilege the latter.

The bishop Jaudus’ robes, with their depiction of a natural harmony that encompasses plants, animals, and even the oft-maligned wild-men, is a vision of a balance in nature which we also find gestured towards in Kyng Alisaunder. In that other major Middle English retelling of the life of Alexander, the poem is liberally (and famously) sprinkled with what have come to be referred to as its “lyrical headpieces” which often include intertwined images of the courtly and natural world and which often have tenuous links to the main events occurring around them in the poem.\(^{284}\) I will argue that several of these headpieces, like Jaudus’ robes, chastise Alexander by reminding the reader about the degree to which Alexander’s wars threaten to occlude the existence of more commonplace and less Eastern-ized forms of nature. Let us consider a first example of these lyrical headpieces:

In tyme of heruest mery it is ynoough –
Peres and apples hongeb on bough,

The hayward bloweth mery his horne,
In everychfe felde ripe is corne,
The grapes hongen on the vyne.
Swete is trewe loue and fyn! (5745-50)

What is interesting about the placement in Kyng Alissaunder of this headpiece is that it occurs during Alexander’s travels in the East and in the midst of the harrowing scenes involving attacks by ferocious animals and the suffering by Alexander’s troops and animals caused by intense thirst and heat. There is something quite ironic about this headpiece, for just as we are being shown cruel manifestations of nature in the form of inclement desert landscapes and dangerous beasts in the East, the poet reminds his readers of more homely forms of nature (corn, apples, pears) that exist right outside their own castle, town, or manor walls. And the specific mention of a “hayward,” an official in charge of a village’s hays and grasses, at line 5747 reminds us of medieval occupations that are more intertwined with homely forms of nature than is Alexander’s career as conqueror. Like the Wars-poet, the Alissaunder-poet reminds his readers that one does not have to travel to India to experience pleasing or interesting forms of nature. In fact, the irony of Alexander traveling so far to experience the marvels of the East is brought home when we are told a couple dozen lines after the above headpiece that:

For þe went þe kyng and al his folk apert
Wonderes to seen in þe desert,
And entreden toward þe west
In to a swipe fair forest,
And founden appel-trowes and fygeres,
Peryes, cypres, and olyuers,
Dat weren þre hundreþ feet longe.
þere was mery foules songe. (5771-78)

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285 See Bradbury’s discussion of this particular headpiece in her Writing Aloud, 171-72.
This passage suggests that at times Alexander finds in the East exactly what he has left behind: pear and apple trees, songbirds, and forests (albeit at times on a larger scale, as the three hundred foot trees attest to). This strategic placement of a lyrical headpiece is designed to reveal the folly of Alexander’s unyielding desire to see, experience, and conquer every corner of the world. Such uses as this of the headpiece by the Alisaunder-poet are as close to outright ridicule of Alexander’s grand enterprise as this poet is willing to go.

Let us examine a second example of these lyrical headpieces:

Whan corn ripeþ in heruest-tyde,
Mery it is in felde and hyde,
Synne it is and shame to chide,
For shameful dedes springeþ wyde.
Knighttes willeþ on huntyng ride –
Þe dere galpeþ by wode-syde. (457-62)

As commentators such as Chism and Scattergood have pointed out, one intended function of the lyrical headpieces such as the one above seems to be that they force the reader to consider the larger environment and world in which Alexander’s campaign of world conquest occurs. In other words, although Alexander may solipsistically believe that his own life and goals constitute the center of the world, the headpieces at times force a “zooming-out” on the part of the reader’s attention which reminds them of different worlds and different sets of values than those embodied by Alexander and which exist back home in the courts or in the forests. As Scattergood expresses it: “generally…they [the lyrical headpieces] posit an experiential alternative to the argument of heroism that this sort of romance posits.”

However, where I think Kyng Alisaunder and The Wars

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286 Scattergood, “Validating the High Life,” 346. Chism supports Scattergood’s assessment of the role of the lyrical headpieces when she writes that due to the headpieces “the poem ensures we cannot forget that
of Alexander part company is the degree to which their visions of a world in harmony with itself includes, or at least tolerates, chivalric violence and such masculine projects as military campaigns and tournaments. Whereas the Alisauder-poet confines most of his critiques of Alexander to the lyrical headpieces (and even there criticism can hardly be said to leap off the page), the Wars-poet scatters his criticisms of Alexander’s dedication to militaristic values much more freely throughout the poem, including, as we will now consider, in the section in which Alexander encounters the famous holy men of India, the Brahmans.

Alexander and the Brahmans

The encounter of Alexander the Great with the Brahmans and the Gymnosophists of India has often been read as a confrontation by Alexander with a people that are essentially Christian saints dressed up in Hindu or Buddhist garb. In other words, many readers of these fascinating encounters between Alexander and Indian holy men do not cherish them as precious classical or medieval ethnographic studies of non-European culture. As Thomas Hahn states, the “idealization of the Indians [in the Alexander romances] clearly reflects Christian values, and it does not provide very much reliable information about Eastern life.”287 Beverly Berg, writing on some of the Alexander material that circulated around the second century A.D., concludes that the various ideas

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of which the Indian ascetics speak in these early versions of the Alexander romances “are unified by a religious fervor and a complete negation of life on earth which we associate with early Christianity…I think that of the manifold intellectual and religious systems of the period, Dandamis’ [the philosopher king who communicates with Alexander] speech best fits Christianity.”

In fact, not only many modern scholars, but a great number of medieval ones as well, identified the Brahmans and Gymnosophists as being stand-ins for Christians and as proof that Christian truths can be attained in the absence of Scripture and simply by living in accord with the natural law created by God. The momentum of Christian typological readings from St. Jerome onwards of the Indian sages perceived these holy men as related doctrinally to the purest and most revered of Christian truths, and assumed these encounters between Alexander and the Brahmans were authored by a devout, orthodox Christian with little or no knowledge of actual Indian religious ideas. However, such traditional ways of reading the Dindimus-Alexander encounter marginalize the very important discussions of nature that undergird almost all of their epistolary dialogue with one another. Although his study is sorely lacking in historical contextualization, David Salter throws out an important observation that I intend to build upon: “the

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289 Medieval writers and scholars as diverse as St. Jerome, Peter Abelard, Dante, John of Salisbury, Phillipe de Mézières, and the author of the Middle English Mandeville’s Travels all extolled the Indian sages depicted in the Alexander material as proto-Christians or as superior holy men to the “failed” Christians of the author’s own time. For discussions of some of these medieval thinkers’s views on the Indian sages, see Hahn, “Indian Traditio,” and George Cary, “A Note on the Medieval History of the Collatio Alexandri cum Dindimo,” Classica et Mediaevalia 15 (1954), 124-29.
correspondance [between Alexander and Dindimus] is not exclusively concerned with narrowly religious issues, for it can also be seen as a debate between two fundamentally different ways of thinking about the natural world, and humanity’s place within it.”

One of the most significant facets of the Alexander-Dindimus exchange that has led scholars to perceive the Brahmans as proto-Christians is that, in contrast to Alexander’s explicit polytheism, the Brahmans evince a faith in a single, transcendent Being. At one point Dindimus tells Alexander: “In all oure dizans on daies that duke we comend, / Wele wenand in anothire werd to won ay o lyue” (4436-37) [In all our sayings for many days now we have commended that duke, well expecting in another world to dwell alive forever]. And if that wasn’t enough to establish the Brahmans as virtuous pagans with a miraculous foreknowledge of Christian revelation, Dindimus continues during another moment of his speech to declare the saving power of God’s Son (4607-10). However, despite these Brahman beliefs in a monotheistic God and in the redemptive power of His Son, when we examine further some of Dindimus’ comments regarding the natural world, the Brahman form of proto-Christianity that Dindimus embodies begins to sound a lot less familiar (at least according to late medieval orthodox Christianity), and a lot more critical of Alexander’s own attitudes towards nature in the poem.

One of the more astonishing passages on nature in the Wars of Alexander is a section of the Alexander-Dindimus exchange in which Dindimus dilates upon the Brahman reverence for the natural world:

Anothire mirthe is in May that vs maste ioyes,
the faire floryscht filds of floures & of herbys,

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Quareof the breth as of bawme blawis in oure noose,
That ilk sensitife saule\textsuperscript{291} mast sauorly delyte
As in the woddis for to walde vndire wale schawis,
Quen all is lokin ouire with leuys, as it ware fittill heuen. (4507-12)

[Another mirth is in May which is the greatest of joys, the lovely fields
overgrown with flowers and herbs, whereof their breath is like a balm blowing in
our noses, and which delights most savorly each sensitive soul, as is also the case
when we walk in the woods under the lovely thickets, when all is covered over
with leaves as if it were a little heaven.]

This passage by Dindimus echoes sentiments of reverence for nature that we find in other
medieval texts, such as the description of Middle-earth in Passus XI of Langland’s \textit{Piers
Plowman} (B-Text) or the “odes to spring” so often found in the love poems of the
Goliard poets. Langland’s narrator, Will, like Dindimus, is more than capable of
marveling at some of the more pedestrian aspects of nature, such as how “Briddles…in
buskes made nestes” and how the magpie “Lerned to legge the stikkes in whiche she
leyeth and bredeth.” (XI. 344, 347). But Will, unlike what Dindamis appears capable of
doing, cannot remain in a state of affective awe over the world of common nature for
long, for such reverent meditations quickly come to a screeching halt in Will’s rational
analysis of how Reason seemingly fails to watch over humans with the same solicitude he
does the rest of nature.\textsuperscript{292} Dindimus, rather than extracting humans from nature like
Langland’s Will does, and rather than seeing nature’s ultimate use-value in its capacities

\textsuperscript{291} The phrase “sensitive soul” here might be a reference to Aristotle’s influential tripartition of the soul.
According to this belief, there are three types of souls: vegetative, sensitive, and rational. The sensitive soul
is that which humans share with animals (but which plants do not possess), and which is responsible for
shared sensory and physical characteristics between animals and humans. Thus, the \textit{War}-poet may be
saying here that animals experience and enjoy the beauty of the natural world as much as humans. For more
on the three types of souls, see Pieter De Leemans and Matthew Klemm, “Animals and Anthropology in

\textsuperscript{292} For a discussion of the tensions created by Will’s oscillations between affective and rational responses
to the nature of “Middle-earth” in Passus XI of the B-Text, see Gillian Rudd, \textit{Greenery: Ecocritical
Readings of Late Medieval English Literature} (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), 185-201.
for allowing humans to glimpse the majesty and skill of God behind beautiful manifestations of nature such as a field erupting in flowers, instead reveres nature for its own intrinsic beauty and for its ability to “solace our hertis” (4500). Whereas Alexander and his men sacrifice to their gods the lives of myriad boars, goats, peacocks, and swans, Dindimus and his fellow Brahmans occupy themselves with passive observation of daily scenes in nature, such as the “rede son” which “ryses & rynnys in his sercle” and the “playne purperyn see full of prode fischis” (4502-04).

We might go on to usefully compare Dindimus’ attitude towards nature with that of another famous nature poet, St. Francis of Assisi. Although St. Francis is today held up as a paragon of biocentric values by many members of the environmental movement, when some of the depictions of what St. Francis was like are examined, we see that St. Francis often had an overwhelming preference for those animals and facets of nature that reminded him of God and of Jesus Christ. As Lisa J. Kiser has explained it: “what is unusual about Francis’s method is that he identifies with Christ by identifying with, and trying to come to the aid of, the animals that traditionally symbolize him.” Thus, in one example discussed by Kiser, she calls our attention to a passage in Thomas of Celano’s Vita Prima in which this earliest of Francis’ biographers writes: “Even for worms he had a warm love, since he had read this text about the Savior: ‘I am a worm and not a man.’ That is why he used to pick them up from the road and put them in a safe place so that they would not be crushed by the footsteps of passersbys.”293 Of course, St. Francis lived a

couple of centuries before *The Wars of Alexander* was composed, but St. Francis’ privileging of nature for its capacities to allow humanity to fathom religious truths and to be reminded of Christ’s importance in our lives were benefits of nature that were also cherished by texts that were still actively being composed and consulted when the *Wars* was being written, such as the perennially popular bestiaries. To sum up then, if we are in fact dealing with a representation of Indian spirituality that is intended by our poet to resonate with echoes of Christian monotheism, asceticism, voluntary poverty, and so forth, we must also acknowledge, however, that in their valuing of the natural world, the Brahmans are anything but in accord with conventional Christian viewpoints such as those espoused in some of the biographies of St. Francis or in bestiaries. In opposition to St. Francis or the bestiary tradition’s valuing of nature for its teleological or typological uses, Dindimus articulates a view of nature rarely embraced by a clerical poet (as is likely the case with the *Wars*-poet) and instead values nature as an “in-itself” and as an entity that possesses an uncommodifiable aesthetic beauty equal to “heuen” itself.

*Conclusion*

In this chapter I have set out to show how the *Wars*-poet condemns the lust for rare and exotic forms of nature which his Alexander character exhibits again and again during his travels to conquer the known world. By means of this critique of Alexander, our poet is able to launch a sustained critique of the values that fueled many of the conflicts of our poet’s era, especially that of the Hundred Years War. Writing most likely for the landed gentry from the Northwest counties who had aspirations of becoming socially important knights through the conquest and plunder of materially wealthy lands
such as France, the *Wars*-poet exposes his society’s infatuation with greyhounds, coursers, falcons, parrots, bears, and leopards – an infatuation that played such a large role in signifying the boundaries between wealthy and poor and between powerful and impotent – as myopic, dangerous, prideful, and (quite possibly) as blasphemous to the God who created all things, mundane and exotic alike. Not only is late medieval warfare depicted in *The Wars of Alexander* an event that lends itself to a reprehensible privileging of forms of nature that are spatially distant and difficult to access, but warfare is also something that contributes to a brazen disregard for spatial and physical boundaries. Thus I have tried to argue that the *Wars*-poet is engaged in proto-ecological thinking when he engages in his political critiques of Alexander. For our poet, all creatures, even extraordinary humans like Alexander the Great, must acknowledge and respect the physical limitations which regulate the existence of all entities.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

As a way of concluding this dissertation, I wish to offer up some thoughts on what I perceive to be my dissertation’s relationship to three academic disciplines at the intersection of which this project is situated: ecocriticism, medieval studies, and military history. I not only want to discuss the ways in which I envision my project contributing to those disciplines and to the directions in which they appear to be heading at present, but also how my project challenges and calls for a reconsideration of some of their current trends.

Throughout this project, I have attempted to be interdisciplinary, holding the belief that to get at something as far removed as what medieval people thought about nature requires using various lenses and drawing upon a range of critical methodologies. Not only can the Middle Ages overall be quite alien to us due to the fact that so many of its political, religious, cultural, and economic practices and institutions were so different from our own, but medieval nature also specifically threatens to be especially evasive because the great majority of medieval writers (especially when compared to the writers and thinkers who came after Romanticism) were not particularly interested in nature. One
often has to catch the medieval authors “off their guard” or one has to read medieval texts “against the grain” in order to catch those authors and texts saying something revealing about their society’s views on nature.²⁹⁴

Hence, in this dissertation it has never been my desire to make it appear as if The Knight’s Tale or The Wars of Alexander is, first and foremost, a text about animals, plants, and ecosystems. To be sure, their primary intellectual and rhetorical interests lie elsewhere. But what I have argued is that when the texts I examine are discussing issues related to war, we often – and surprisingly – find them talking about nature as well, and in ways that I have suggested are encoded with what, for lack of a better term, we may call proto-pacifist sentiments. And because these texts are not talking about nature explicitly, I have found it necessary to approach the issue of medieval warfare’s relationship to the natural world from a number of angles and to situate my project within the concerns, methodologies, and problems posed by the diverse fields of ecocriticism, medieval studies, and military history.

Ecocriticism

The field of ecocriticism, which Cheryl Glotfelty has usefully and succinctly defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” and as “an earth-centered approach to literary studies,”²⁹⁵ has, I believe, lately seen its greatest challenges to a well-defined, cohesive sense of its own identity coming from sub-

fields within literary and cultural studies such as posthumanism and urban ecocritical studies. Although both of these sub-fields are academic areas very much in vogue at the time of writing this conclusion, I submit that their interests should not be allowed to completely eclipse those that came from what we might refer to as first-wave ecocritical studies (i.e. those that originated in analyses of canonical “nature authors” such as Henry David Thoreau, William Wordsworth, and so forth).

Posthumanism, which shares with ecocriticism a serious interest in the problems posed by nonhuman entities and which may be said to locate its fullest flowering in cyborg theorists and cyber-punk authors such as Donna Haraway and Philip K. Dick, is primarily interested in destabilizing, often at the site of the material body, the crisp divide that has often been perceived to exist between human and nonhuman entities. The fervor for all things posthuman is perhaps best represented in medieval literary studies in the work of Caroline Walker Bynum and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, particularly in studies by the latter such as *Medieval Identity Machines* and *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain*. Cohen summarizes the fascination of medieval writers with the breakdown of the divide between human-nonhuman identities thus:

> The Middle Ages were fascinated by composite monsters like centaurs and griffins, as well as by corporal transformations like the Irish werewolves that intrigued Giraldus Cambrensis, the princess imprisoned in dragon’s flesh described by Mandeville, the snake-woman Mélusine in the romance

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Huon de Bordeaux. Such metamorphoses find inspiration in Ovid, the Roman poet of mutability who was obsessed by what might be called possible bodies, bodies whose seeming solidity melts, flows, resubstantiates into unexpected configurations that violate the sacred integrity of human form.\footnote{297}

And Bynum argues that “Both [metamorphosis and hybridity] suggest that the world…is disordered and fluid, with the horror and wonder of uncontrolled potency or violated boundaries. Both Gerald [of Wale’s] werewolf and his bearded lady shake our assumptions about the boundaries between the sexes and between species.”\footnote{298} But what threatens to get lost, I would argue, in many posthumanist readings of texts, and in those readings’ emphasis on representations of animals that posthumanist scholars argue are deployed in order to challenge human-animal categories, is the component of singular otherness in nonhuman entities.\footnote{299} For example, in Cohen’s reading of the Middle English Octavian, a 14\textsuperscript{th}-century poem in which (Cohen argues) an aristocratic male named Florent finds his “identity…glid[ing] along…overlapping trajectories” and conjoining with those of aristocratic animals such as falcons and warhorses, I think we find a balance tipping in such readings too much in favor of privileging the degrees to which human and animal subjectivity or corporeality might be similar to one another. We would be wise to recall here Val Plumwood’s calls for a perception of and engagement with the natural world that “affirm[s] the difference and independence of the other,” for,

\footnote{297} Jeffrey J. Cohen, \textit{Medieval Identity Machines} (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003), xviii.  
\footnote{299} For a (now) classic argument about the “otherness” of animals that can never be breached by human imagination or other modes of cognition, see Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” in \textit{Mortal Questions} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), 165-80. Speaking of bats’ unique experience of the world, Nagel writes: “Their brains are designed to correlate the outgoing [sonar] impulses with the subsequent echoes, and the information thus acquired enables bats to make precise discriminations of distance, size, shape, motion, and texture comparable to those we make by vision. But bat sonar, though clearly a form of perception, is not similar in its operation to any sense that we possess, and there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine. This appears to create difficulties for the notion of what it is like to be a bat” (168).
according to Plumwood, the “resolution of dualism requires, not just recognition of difference, but recognition of a complex, interacting pattern of both continuity and difference.”

Posthumanism, in its frequent quest to articulate how boundaries can be broken down between human and animal, or between human and machine, does not preserve enough awareness of the singularity of the entities it investigates. When posthumanists talk of human-horse assemblages or of werewolves, I think they lose too much of their interest in what it is that makes a horse or a wolf an entity that we may never know in its particularity because most all animals might be said to possess some element of otherness that can never be reducible to a trait they share with other creatures. My project has set out to be something of a counterbalance to posthumanist readings of medieval texts such as those performed by Jeffrey Cohen by examining medieval texts that keep nonhuman entities such as animals in sharp focus but without those animals’ nonhuman identities becoming compromised by insinuations of a breakdown in their ontology. In other words, the animals in the texts I have examined remain animals, and some of the authors I have singled out for investigation embody to a considerable degree Plumwood’s call for recognizing both continuity and difference between humans and animals. Poets such as Lydgate and the Alliterative Morte-poet, I have argued, recognize that animals possess capacities for taking pleasure in their existence and capacities to suffer due to human curtailments of their freedom. To be sure, such capacities allow animals to bridge some of the chasm that undeniably yawns between human and animal forms of life, but such

interest by the poets I have examined in an animal’s mental experience never threaten to completely become investigations of human identity as does so much of the literature upon which posthumanist theory focuses.

Perhaps what is needed in scholarly investigations of nonhuman entities is a turn away from the “identity politics” that sponsor so much posthumanist (or even queer\(^{301}\)) readings of plants and animals, and instead we need a shift in focus towards the relationships which humans and animals, or humans and plants (or plants and other animals, for that matter) partake in. Thinking through issues of identity has too excessively privileged the human side of the equation and, as I suggest above, has been too often focused on breaking down and erasing distinctions between humans and nonhumans. But thinking about plants and animals in terms of relationships leaves the door more open for investigations of alterity and of the irreducible differences that each party in the relationship possesses. The work of medieval environmental historians, such as Oliver Rackham and Richard Hoffman, and of medieval zooarchaeologists, such as Aleksander Pluskowski and Naomi Sykes, can provide essential historical information for the literary critic about the material nature of the Middle Ages and the kinds of relationships that existed between humans and nonhumans in the medieval era.\(^{302}\)

Grounding our literary analyses in the data of historical analyses such as those carried out

\(^{301}\) See Queering the Non/Human, eds. Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

\(^{302}\) See, for example, the following: Richard Hoffmann, “Medieval Fishing,” in Working with Water in Medieval Europe, ed. Paolo Squatriti (Boston: Brill, 2000): 331-94; Oliver Rackham, The History of the Countryside (London: J.M. Dent, 1986); for essays by Pluskowski and Sykes, see Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals as Material Culture in the Middle Ages, ed. Aleksander Pluskowski (Oxford: Oxbow, 2007).
by environmental historians and zooarchaeologists will assist us in never losing sight of
the materially existing nature of bygone epochs that we are trying to catch sight of and
comprehend.

In addition to resisting the posthumanist trend in literary and cultural studies, my
dissertation has also resisted the declaration by some scholars that environmental
criticism needs to move away from investigations of how a culture values and depicts
plants, animals, and natural ecosystems like forests, mountains, and tide pools, and needs
to concern itself more with the problems posed by built environments such as cities or
towns, and by “toxified landscapes” such as garbage dumps or pesticide-polluted
suburbs. As Lawrence Buell, one of the leading spokespersons of American ecocriticism,
proclaims:

   The city as environment, both the built and the “natural” spaces, generally
   presents itself in pieces to literary and critical imagination. But at least we
   are starting to see the beginning of incorporation of urban and other
   severely altered, damaged landscapes – “brownfields” as well as
   greenfields – into ecocriticism’s accounts of placeness and place-
   attachment. For ecocriticism to recognize “the city” as something other
   than non-place is itself a great and necessary advance.303

But admonitions such as this one by Buell for ecocritics to concern themselves less with
animal lives and more with the inchoate and nearly ineffable experience that Buell refers
to above as “place-attachment” is a move in the wrong direction for ecocriticism. Trying

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303 Lawrence Buell, The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary
Imagination (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 88. See also the following: Lawrence Buell, Writing for an
Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond (Cambridge: Belknap
Bennett and David T. Teague (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1999); Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding
the Boundaries of Ecocriticism, eds. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: UP of
Virginia, 2001). See also Patricia Yaeger, “Editor’s Column: The Death of Nature and the Apotheosis of
with garbage in contemporary American art and fiction, declares that “postmodern detritus has
unexpectedly taken on the sublimity that was once associated with nature” (327).
to pin down what, ontologically speaking, separates a “place” from a “space” is a project that has pushed literary analysis towards a hazy metaphysics.\textsuperscript{304} Ecocriticism risks becoming diffused and losing sight of what was – and is – its newfangled areas of interest by treating representations of landfills, skyscrapers, and castles as being as necessary to its theoretical interests as depictions of hunting, factory farming, or rampant deforestation. To back away from issues related to animal subjectivity or the potential rights of plants, soils, and ecosystem, and instead to re-fashion ecocritical inquiries into investigations of what allows a human mind to grasp an environment as a “place” instead of a “space” returns us too much to the object of inquiry that ecocriticism dared us in such a transgressive and thrilling way to turn away from in the first place: humans, and the centrality of the human mind.

Thus, I have tried to keep the focus of my project upon the entities that most often are marginalized or eclipsed entirely within not only medieval literature itself but in critical discussions of medieval and other literatures. An abundance of important and insightful work has already been done on representations of nature within medieval hagiography, hunting manuals, encyclopedias, bestiaries, and so forth, but one of the reasons why my project is significant is because it implicitly argues that there still exists areas of literature (such as chivalric treatises, chronicles, laws of war, and chivalric romances) that can offer us vital historical insights into people’s views on the

\textsuperscript{304} Buell gestures towards his perception of the difference between “place” and “space” when he writes: “Those who feel a stake in their community think of it as their place. My residence is ‘my place’ rather than ‘my space,’ unlike how an unfamiliar hotel room would feel. Place is associatively thick, space thin, except for sublime ‘spaces’ set apart as ‘sacred’ and therefore both infinitely resonant and at one remove from the quotidian idiosyncratic intimacies that go with ‘place.’” From Buell, \textit{Environmental Criticism}, 63. The attempt to define essential differences between “space” and “place,” such as Buell does here, often draws heavily upon the theories of French phenomenologists such as Gaston Bachelard and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and of the humanist geographer Yi-Fi Tuan.
relationships between warfare and the physical flora and fauna of medieval Western Europe. Therefore, I think insinuations by scholars such as Buell that it is imperative that ecocriticism expand to include analyses of the built structures of urban environments or of the psychological and social processes by which “space” is transformed into “place” are premature or even misguided. There still exists a lot of important work to be done on the historical uses and abuses of animals that leave their traces upon literary texts and other cultural artifacts.

When scholars such as Jonathan Levin announce, as he did in a review essay of recent work in ecocriticism, that “Ecocritics are now quick to insist that their focus exceeds mere ‘nature writing’ and reflection on the value of wilderness and wildness,” I lament such a negation by ecocritics that their work centers around “nature writing,” and I perceive it as quite possibly a symptom of ecocritics cowering in the face of criticism of their specialty. It is difficult to deny the fact that ecocriticism still struggles to gain the respect within English Departments that other critical methodologies inspired by liberationist politics do, such as feminist, queer, postcolonial, and African-American critical discourses. Ecocriticism, it seems, still struggles to shake off its association with caricatured images of “tree huggers” and “whale lovers.” But what has always seemed distinctive about ecocriticism, particularly at its advent in the early and mid-nineties, is that it takes seriously nature, and particularly animals, not first and foremost as vehicles through which to return to discussions of human politics or human culture, but to take seriously and as a primary focus the lives, experiences, and interests of the nonhuman others in the midst of which humans have always lived. I have tried to avoid in this

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dissertation getting so immersed in discussions of nature’s cultural or ideological roles in
the chivalric culture of the later Middle Ages that I neglect to return to a consideration of
those roles’ potential effects upon the physically existing plants and animals of the late
medieval era.

*Medieval Studies*

When I had a chance to present part of my chapter on the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* in a conference presentation I called “The Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and the Suffering of Animals During War” at the 42nd International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, during a session devoted to Middle English treatments of Arthuriana, I encountered quite a bit of resistance from several members of the audience to my argument that the *Morte*-poet might actually be inviting his readers to perceive the violence against nature that is unleashed by Arthur’s wars as a deplorable event. One scholar in particular, during the Q&A session, asked of me something to the effect of: “How can you claim that this poet was concerned about animals when the people of the Middle Ages loved hunting so much? How can you say that? And what about all of the dismissive things people like Aquinas wrote about animals?” It was then that I realized that some of the old orthodoxies of medieval studies were not going to go down without a fight, and that even for some medievalist scholars, when it comes to the topic of the ethical status of animals, the Middle Ages still represented very much something of a “Dark Ages.”
As I mentioned in my introductory chapter to this dissertation, I think that we have allowed too many stagnant, ready-to-hand examples to constitute the total range of medieval attitudes towards the natural world, such as those examples culled from literary and visual culture which attest to the medieval zeal for hunting or those contemptuous passages from theologians such as Aquinas and Augustine that reject ethical considerations of animals. It is no surprise that when people are asked to consider medieval views of nature, aristocratic hunting or perhaps poaching by peasants leaps immediately into their minds, for such events have provided the raw material for many of the most vivid and unforgettable scenes of medieval people interacting with nature in, if not medieval literature in general, certainly Middle English literature, as the enduring fame of Fitt Three of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight or the Prologue to The Parlement of Three Ages demonstrate. But the astonishing realism of those Middle English poems should not allow those scenes to become stand-ins or a form of short-hand for the full range of medieval views on nature that were held by various social classes in a variety of social, political, and economic situations. Allowing well-known (and highly anthologized and thus conspicuous) theologians such as Saints Augustine and Aquinas to represent the totality of philosophical considerations of nonhuman beings, we do so at our peril, for we then lose sight of truly maverick and lesser known theologians such as Adelard of Bath (12th C.) who, shockingly for his time, attributed immortal souls to animals.\(^\text{306}\) This dissertation has aimed to help provide a much-needed corrective to the stance that what

\(^{306}\) See Question Thirteen, “Whether brute animals have souls,” in Adelard of Bath’s Questiones naturales, found in Adelard of Bath, Conversations with his Nephew, ed. and trans. by Charles Burnett (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998).
the people of the Middle Ages thought about the nonhuman others in their midst can be reducible to what a hunting tapestry illustrates or what a lionized Church Father such as Augustine wrote.

Perhaps one of the things that has contributed to a sense of resistance by some scholars to a project like my own, a project which argues that medieval writers manifested an ethical conscience about human-caused animal death, is that there is not enough awareness by those scholars that an animal is often not always the same ethical subject in all scenarios and all circumstances. This is one of the central paradoxes of human attitudes towards animals in general, a paradox represented most forcefully in our modern culture by the pet. When animals such as dogs or cats are feral and not associated with any particular human household, the repercussions for injuring or killing one of these animals is often negligible. But once they have been brought into the home, and made a type of official, albeit subaltern, member of a family, then their legal status is enhanced and it can be more reprehensible and punishable to harm them. Similarly, as in my discussion of Ramon Lull’s *Book of the Orde of Chyvalry* in Chapter Two, I have argued that the ethical status of some animals might have been altered and have shifted on the battlefield or in the midst of a *chevauchée* raid, and that the category “animal” was capable of not being perceived in the same static, uniform way during a hunt as it was during military campaigns. Although most medieval people probably thought very little about the death of animals during a ritualized hunt in an aristocratic hunting park or during the slaughtering practices that rendered an animal into a highly valued food source, my contention has been that during the escalating violence of late medieval military conflicts, an escalation epitomized by the Hundred Years War, the intermingling
of enhanced military violence and the lives of a great many animals led to deeper, more prominent reflections by writers upon animal beings and their capacities for suffering and for pleasure.

But to reiterate, I am not issuing a call for such a radical revision of the Middle Ages that we should now see medieval people in general, or medieval poets such as Chaucer and Lydgate in particular, as being at the vanguard of proto-animal rights or biocentric environmental sensibilities. The situation is always more complicated than that, and even today, in cultures that surely see themselves as existing in the midst of well-articulated and perfectly acceptable animal rights viewpoints, we can still find examples of the meat-eater who mourns the death of the family pet or of the anti-fur person who defends animal experimentation. All of this is to say, as Erica Fudge so forcefully puts it, “Few of us can speak from a truly ‘pure’ position,”\(^\text{307}\) and that even if we do locate other passages in different texts (or even in the same texts) by the authors I have discussed in this dissertation which show a striking approval, or at least indifference, to other manifestations of animal suffering or of environmental destruction, that does not mean that the harm wrought by military violence upon plants, animals, and ecosystems did not inspire the condemnation with which I have argued certain passages in the works of some Middle English writers and poets are encoded.

Military History

In the field of military history, a shift has occurred within the work of the latest generation of scholars towards focusing less on the significance of certain battles or of conspicuous figures upon the outcome of a war or military campaign, and more towards a focus upon logistics (which we might define as “how war was prepared and supplied as opposed to why it was fought, what battles and campaigns were fought, and why they were won or lost”). Historians for too long were guilty of a tunnel-vision similar to that which narrows the value of a chronicler like Froissart, for the latter’s chronicle all too often gives incommensurate attention to the splendor of a knight’s armor or of a horse’s trappings. What is rarely acknowledged in chronicles, and for a long time rarely in the work of historians too, are the massive contributions to premodern warfare made by less aristocratic – and therefore less captivating – figures like miners, carpenters, engineers, saddlers, fletchers, bowmen, washerwomen, and cooks. My project contributes to this scholarly shift of focus away from the role of mounted cavalry and their horses by drawing attention to less glamorous animals such as geese, sheep, and other livestock. A poet like Lydgate, in his *Debate of the Horse, Goose, and Sheep*, provides an astonishing alternative to a writer like Froissart, for whereas the French chronicler only seems

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308 Feeding Mars: Logistics in Western Warfare from the Middle Ages to the Present, ed. John A. Lynn (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 5, emphasis in the original. A work that is often singled out as a watershed study with regards to shifting focus from battles to logistics, is H.J. Hewitt’s *The Organization of War Under Edward III*, 1338-62 (Manchester: Barnes and Noble, 1966).

interested in the role of horses in warfare, the monk from Bury, on the other hand, provides us with a prolonged poetic meditation upon how warfare extends down to and greatly affects the lives of more workaday animals that were largely “invisible” to aristocratic writers and warriors.

In addition to a revisionary emphasis on the roles of non-combat laborers within armies, military historians have also recently shifted focus away from the mounted knight by considering the significance of siege warfare in more detail. In an article in which he analyzes the importance of several recent studies devoted solely to medieval sieges, Bernard S. Bachrach writes:

The failure of military historians to pursue the study of medieval siege warfare can be rather simply, if not simplistically, explained as a result of ‘presentism.’ During the later nineteenth and throughout much of the twentieth, military planners cleaved to the doctrine which is often styled ‘the strategy of overthrow.’ This emphasized ‘the importance of battle to such a degree that they regarded it as the only important act of war.’

Although many military historians in the past have been lax in investigating the details of how medieval sieges were conducted, I have demonstrated in my own project that some medieval writers were not oblivious to the significance of this form of warfare and to the effects of these sieges upon the nonhuman world. A siege, in many ways, could be the most stressful component of medieval warfare upon animals or upon ecosystems, for it was at such moments that each side competed to deprive the other side of any plant or animal that could provide sustenance, while also working vigorously to maintain control

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over any useful plant or animal for one’s own side. The siege was a situation whose connection to widespread destruction of the environment around it is memorably captured in the following 12th century metrical advice to a leader:

   Destroy your foes and lay waste their country
   By fire and burning let all be set alight
   That nothing be left for them, either in wood or meadow
   Of which in the morning they could have a meal.
   Then with his united force let him besiege their castles…
   Thus should war be begun: such is my advice.
   First lay waste the land.  

I have drawn upon these recent studies by military historians on medieval sieges in my consideration of such poems as the Alliterative Morte Arthure, for I have argued that in that poem the Morte-poet is keenly aware of the threat to nature posed by a prolonged siege, such as Arthur’s siege of Metz, to the surrounding countryside, and I have gone on to posit that our poet deploys his fascinating “pastoral interludes” in order to present an alternative way of interacting with the natural world than the typical military one of plundering it for forage or destroying it in order to force starvation upon the enemy.

   To sum up, just as military historians are shifting their scholarly gazes to sieges and logistics in order to complement and expand upon the volumes of work that have already been done on spectacular battles such as Crécy, Poitiers, and Agincourt, so too is my own project seeking to consider not only the large scale battlefield deaths of warhorses, but also medieval warfare’s less visible effects upon, and contributions by, other animals and other natural entities such as plants. Furthermore, one of my primary arguments has been that although modern historians may have neglected the role of these

less aristocratic and glamorous forms of nature, some of the authors I have studied in this dissertation did not.

Conclusion

On a day that I am working to finish this concluding chapter, there is an article floating around on several of the online news pages called “Environmentally Friendly Bomb Planned.” Replacing the reliance on TNT- and RDX-explosives that conventional bombs have used and which release toxic gasses that harm the health of plant and animal life in the vicinity of a bomb’s blast, these new bombs, the article informs us, utilize a “recently explored class of materials called tetrazoles” which “derive most of their explosive energy from nitrogen instead of carbon,” and consequently produce fewer toxic byproducts when detonated. Similar concerns to those which I have argued motivate Chaucer’s poignant depiction of the wildlife bolting in fear from the ravaged forest in The Knight’s Tale, and concerns similar to those which sponsor Malory’s sense of a need to see nature as having value independent of human chivalric and military projects, surely are at work in the minds of the scientists and politicians who have perceived a need for a new type of bomb such as the one the Germans are said to have created.

And yet, the same paradoxes and tensions that someone like Lydgate is so aware of might surround this “environmentally friendly bomb.” Even if the bomb’s invention was inspired by some feeling of concern for the lives and the continued healthy existence of the plants, animals, and ecosystems that are affected by the immediate effects of the

bomb’s detonation, we have to wonder about the processes which are employed to create the bomb. Lydgate, in his *Debate*, taught us to keep our eyes not only on the horses slaughtered in vast numbers on the battlefield, but also to watch out for how warfare extracts resources from the bodies of animals in order to manufacture its weapons and to fund the wars themselves. Is the “environmentally friendly bomb” another instance of such contradictory and multi-faceted ways in which warfare interacts with nature? Are its raw materials extracted by the same or perhaps only slightly different large-scale mining practices than conventional bombs? Does its manufacturing process pollute nearby watersheds? Are the military forces that will use the new bomb still funded by other state-owned industries – say, for example, unsustainable logging – that do as much, if not more, harm than would a conventional bomb blast?

Although I certainly welcome the shift in consciousness that would seem to accompany any large, modern, industrial nation taking into consideration the effects of its weaponry upon the environment, my dissertation has shown that, even with the relatively limited military capacities (compared to our own era) of the proto-national armies of the late Middle Ages, the tentacles of a military force can stretch very far and wide indeed. It is truly difficult for the mind to take in all of the ways in which warfare, both medieval and modern, assimilate and alter the natural world. But I have argued that writers such as Malory, Chaucer, Lydgate, and the Alliterative *Morte-* and *Wars of Alexander*-poets did not shy away from the complexity of the issues raised by the relationship between warfare and nature. For the most part, they dealt with such issues with a formidable complexity of their own.
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