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WRITING A NATION:  
FIGURING COMMUNITY  
IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate  
School of The Ohio State University

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*****

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ABSTRACT

In “Writing a Nation” I investigate a range of strategies employed by medieval writers to construct communities. Such constructions are tentative and temporary because they operate in an environment where the social and cultural borders are constantly shifting according to various interests and power dynamics. While most theories of nationalism dealing with the modern era categorize the medieval period as devoid of national imaginings, I argue that medieval forms of nationalism are definitely present and that they change according to particular historical and cultural demands and desires. In my dissertation, I demonstrate that medieval forms of nationalism construct social solidarity and collective identity through complex strategies of writing and narration that imagine the totality of the community.

Beginning with a study of Havelok the Dane, I examine the constructed nature of its myths of ethnic origin and the boundaries of cultural identification. This first chapter demonstrates the ways in which “primordial” myths of common origin change according to historical and cultural processes. Turning to questions concerning biological and cultural constructions of race and ethnicity, I investigate, in my second chapter, the narrative quality of ethnic identification and the processes for conversion and integration in Sir Gowther. Chapter Three examines the function of the legend of St. George in the
formation of national identity. The *Tale of Gamelyn* serves as the basis for my fourth chapter, an examination of the dialectic between rural and urban communities, where country community values relate to (or figure) city values. My final chapter focuses on the notion of collective legitimacy in government by examining the dynamics between king and subject in Fortescue’s *Governance of England*. My topics do not lend themselves easily to a homogeneous, unified idea of the nation, but instead exemplify the variousness and fragmented volatility of the nation-space.
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I also would like to thank Nicholas Howe and Karen Winstead for the engaging conversations and thoughtful advice they have given to me over the past few years. Most of all, they have provided me with wonderful role models, both as teachers and professionals. I am truly indebted to their mentorship.

Lastly, I would like to thank Linda Montaño, my soul mate.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Havelok the Dane</em> and the Myths of Cultural Origin</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>Sir Gowther</em>: Imagining Race in Late Medieval England</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Saint George at the Battle of Agincourt</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Country and the City: The Social Imagination in <em>The Tale of Gamelyn</em></td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Justice in the Land: Myth, Program, and Governance</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>The Crusades in the Borgia Map</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Organa the Saracen in the Catalan Map</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>The Cynocephali</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The project of my dissertation is to examine the creative acts of writing a nation. In my dissertation I investigate a range of strategies employed by medieval writers to construct communities. Such constructions are tentative and temporary because they operate in an environment where the social and cultural borders are constantly shifting according to various interests and power dynamics. The texts chosen for this dissertation will carefully explore the idea of the nation from a variety of viewpoints. Each topic will address a central area in the study of nationalism. The first two chapters, on Havelok the Dane and Sir Gowther, respectively, treat questions of ethnicity and race in the late medieval period. I argue that the construction of ethnicity and race are subjects of importance in late medieval England. The first chapter looks at how the community creates an image of itself, while the second chapter explores how its sets malleable, fluid boundaries for admitting outsiders into the community. Chapter Three examines the function of the legend of St. George in the formation of national identity. The Tale of Gamelyn serves as the basis for my fourth chapter, an examination of the dialectic between rural and urban communities, where rural community values relate to (or figure) city values. My final chapter focuses on the notion of collective legitimacy in government by examining the dynamics between king and subject in Fortescue's
Governance of England. My topics do not lend themselves easily to a homogeneous, unified idea of the nation, but instead exemplify the variousness and fragmented volatility of the nation-space. Thus, my dissertation develops new critical approaches for understanding medieval forms of nationalism.

These issues of nation-building are evident in Havelok the Dane, where we read, "was nevere yete joye more / In all this werd than tho was thore" (2334-5),¹ at the moment when the community's leader takes the throne. An overall sense of excitement enveloped the nation when the poem's hero, Havelok, returned from abroad to assume his rightful role as leader of his people. Everywhere one turned, the community was celebrating the return of the king.

A few days earlier, Ubbe had written far and near to "alle that castels yemede, / Burwes, tunes, sibbe and fremde / That thider sholden comen swithe / Till him and heren tithandes blithe" (2276-9). In a fortnight, "in all Denemark ne was no knight, / Ne conestable, ne shireve, / That com of Adam and of Eve, / That he ne com biforn sire Ubbe" (2285-8).² Written communication, whether read to an audience or read individually, had brought the whole community together. They came to hear the good news that their proper ruler, once thought dead, had returned to deliver them from the tyrannical rule of Godard.

¹ All quotations from Havelok the Dane are from the edition of Donald B. Sands, ed., Middle English Romances (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1993) 55-129.

² While the setting for this ceremonial celebration is set in Denmark, the story and important topics are figured for an English audience. Therefore it could be argued that England and its people are the point of discussion in this passage.
In and of itself, the fact that written forms of communication were used to gather people from across the realm is important in the history of nationalism, for it signifies that people imagined themselves as part of the national network. The messages suggest that shared cultural phenomena such as language and communication were instrumental in creating a social solidarity. In a practical sense, the people were able to keep in touch with each other and could come together for events such as coronations. In a metaphorical sense, they were part of a community, held together by their imagined communion. Moreover, the people congregated to hear and witness the crowning of the legendary king. In coming together to celebrate his crowning, the people imagined themselves as part of the political process. We are to remember that before this point Havelok had only existed in their legends. Until his return, he was considered dead at the hands of the despotic usurper, Godard. As proof of their solidarity, the people took to the battlefield in support of Havelok later in the narrative. We can therefore surmise that the poet's insistence on making written forms of communication instrumental to the national gathering is clearly a reflection of the larger principle that imaginative literature constructs the nation.

Something else happens at the coronation celebration that is important to the idea of writing a nation. Along with engaging in blood sports and other modes of celebrating, the people sat down to "Romanz-reding on the book; / Ther moughte men here the gestes singe" (2327-8). They sat down to hear, and perhaps tell, shared stories and histories. Maybe they heard legends and myths of Havelok, in order to indoctrinate all the members of the community. Certainly the retelling of the history and the origins of Havelok would have brought the community together. The audience could also have heard stories of
other heroes of the community: heroes who fought for the community and the values and
ideas for which it stands. We therefore know that along with the communication
infrastructure in place, imaginative literature could and did create community,\(^3\) bringing
together its varied members. The audience hearing the romances and the histories was
physically brought together, but more importantly, the audience was brought together in
the realm of the imagination. In their minds, each had an image of their relationship to
the community, participating in the narrative of a national realm.

In this way the cultural function of reading romances is the diffusion of beliefs,
values, and ideas by associating the reader’s experience with that of the community.\(^4\)
The conscious effort of the poet to unify his readers in this way speaks volumes about the
perceived association of the text as a shared ritual experience that involves group
identification. At the same time, the audience’s identification with the hero becomes a
relationship, a way of sharing a particular history and cultural heritage (a sort of cultural
consciousness) with the fictive narrative audience. The participant at the coronation is
allowed to imagine him/herself in the creation of the nation.

\(^3\) Timothy Brennan points out that nations are "imaginary constructs that depend for their
existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a
decisive role." See Timothy Brennan, "The Nation Longing for Form," *Nation and

\(^4\) Along with the sports and competitions and the distribution of clothes and food (2336-
45), which represent the sumptuary and culinary codes, the reading of romances illustrate
the important practices of the culture. Like Clifford Geertz’s analysis of a Balinese
cockfight, the coronation celebration says much about the culture. See Clifford Geertz,
On Medieval Forms of Nationalism

I began with an anecdote from Havelok the Dane because it exemplifies certain problems facing medievalists attempting to employ modern theories of nationalism. A few years ago, the above Havelok passage might have been used to argue against modern theorists of nationalism who excluded the medieval period from participating in the discourse of the nation. In recent years, however, medievalists have persuasively argued that the medieval period was witness to the forms of nationhood. As the dialogue now stands, it is no longer necessary to argue that the medieval period should be considered as participating in the discourse of the nation for many scholars have concluded that it does.

To position my dissertation in the scholarly field, I summarize briefly the study of nationalism as it stands both in modern and medieval studies of the field.

In my dissertation I utilize works such as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, essays in Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration*, Anthony Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, and Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*. The major obstacle in using nationalism theory is its insistence on setting the eighteenth century as the birth, or dawn, of the nation. Yet, the appeal of modernist theories of

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6 According to Anderson and Bhabha the Enlightenment, the age of rationalist secularism, witnessed the ebbing of religious modes of thought and dynastic realms. The modern darkness that followed led to a transformation of affiliation from religious imaginings to national imaginings. The erosion of religious certainty and the questioning of the divine rule of kings led to a reorganization of how people viewed themselves and
nationalism is the emphasis placed on the idea that the nation is created, invented, and written. As Anderson states, "[a nation] is \textit{imagined} because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." Because nations are imaginary constructs, theorists argue that literary texts play an integral part in shaping "the image of their communion."

The production of texts, therefore, is part and parcel of the production of "nation." This suggests, then, that the presence of nationalistic texts in any period shows the process of nation formation. Consequently, while Anderson and Bhabha emphasize a fully-formed nationalism recognizable through their modernist lens (and, not incidentally, a nationalism that functions as an interpretive tool for literature), the Middle Ages offers a unique opportunity to examine how surviving literary works engage in the production of nationalism and how these works can provide a structure for interpreting culture.

those around them. In a sense, the nation was the dramatization of new ways of linking fraternity, power, and history. Anderson and Bhabha thus close off any possibility for forms of nationalism to exist before the eighteenth century. Anthony Smith's theory of nationalism would appear to be more accommodating to medievalists because it is based on the idea that shared myths, history, culture, territory, and solidarity form an ethnic community; however, it leads to problems of how to determine when a group has reached national status. Taken literally, Smith would argue that any small group could be called a nation, regardless of its political status, the heterogeneous composition of its members, or the access of its members to cultural capital. Another problem with Smith's formulations is their static nature. Nowhere in his voluminous book does he explain the transmittance of nationalist ideology across society, especially when questions arise over class, gender, or cultural boundaries.

\footnote{Anderson 6.}
Anderson's theories on nationalism have not changed in the last few years, and medievalists have responded to his exclusion of the Middle Ages. In "The Construction of the Nation in Medieval English Romance," Diane Speed takes on the issue of the exclusivity of post-medieval studies in theorizing about the discourse of the nation. Her essay makes a case for "taking the discourse back further still" by addressing medieval textual issues and concerns that parallel modern ones. Her argument, as she states, "reviews the main assumptions of the English discourse of the nation, suggests that it could reasonably be taken back to literature of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, especially to the early romances, and indicates some ways in which reference to the critical discourse can in turn throw further light on the significance of medieval texts."

Thorlac Turville-Petre's *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290-1340* draws on an extensive list of texts in his support of his argument for an English nation in the High Middle Ages. By doing close readings of a very eclectic set of texts, Turville-Petre persuasively argues that writers in the late thirteenth and early

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9 Speed 136.

10 Speed 136.
fourteenth century were conscious in their sense of England as a nation, and of themselves as participators and creators of that community.

Two other recent works have also responded to the omission of the medieval period from nationalist discourse: *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, a collection of essays edited by Lesley Johnson, and *The Construction of Nationhood* by Adrian Hastings. Lesley Johnson's opening essay, “Imagined Communities: Medieval and Modern,” effectively summarizes the dialogue in nationalism studies. Johnson, by working closely with Anderson's major theoretical structures, is able to posit that imagined communities could have existed in the medieval world. Johnson ends his essay with a series of rhetorical questions meant to elicit responses from medievalists concerning medieval imagined communities. Of the two works that address questions in modern studies of nationalism, Adrian Hastings's text contains both the best presentation of the issues and the most effectively sustained demonstration of medieval examples of nationalism. Hastings traces nationalism from the beginnings of the medieval world to late in the eighteenth century. His most inspiring and crucial idea is that the study of nationalism, at least in the ways it has been presented by Hobsbawm, Smith, and Anderson, has not necessarily been the study of the history of nationalism.

All of these works will be fundamental to my own study of nation formation in the later English Middle Ages. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly outline ways in which this dissertation furthers the study of nation building that these critics already have persuasively begun. Diane Speed's conclusions that Middle English romances illustrate a sense of nationalism are very accurate and well supported. However, it would be better to situate the discourse in its proper historical and cultural milieu, something that Speed
does not adequately do. Speed’s essay came at a critical juncture for medieval studies. While modern literary studies were enjoying a lively discussion concerning the discourse of the nation, nothing had been written confronting the exclusion of the Middle Ages. The importance of Speed’s contributions, thus, cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, because the essay’s purpose is to draw parallels between medieval and modern forms (romances and novels, respectively) and to demonstrate how modernist national theory can be used on medieval texts, it does not concern itself with an exposition of what late medieval nationalism, national identity, or nation could look like.

Thorlac Turville-Petre’s work, by contrast, rarely associates itself with the critical discourse engaged in by critics of modern periods. Unfortunately, this produces a critical lack of definition regarding key terms such as nationalism, national identity, or nation. This is, however, a small problem compared to other questions. First, there is the use of words such as “facade” and “false” to describe the construction of the nation. This would suggest that there is a correct or “true” reality as to what a nation should be. Given Hobsbawm and Ranger’s work on the invented nature of tradition and nation, the use of such loaded words is perplexing. Second, Turville-Petre’s ideas on the ideological function of the nation are problematic. His theory is based on a top-down philosophy whereby the elite, helped by their natural allies the clergy, manipulate and disseminate a falsified view of the nation in order to dominate the masses below them. Turville-Petre’s

11 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, “Introduction: Inventing Tradition,” The Invention of Tradition, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 1-14. Hobsbawm and Ranger posit that communities use ancient material to construct new nations by selecting, writing, or creating traditions out of the history of the nation. These invented traditions are formal rituals that establish social cohesion and membership by repetitively inculcating beliefs and values. As examples, they look at flags, emblems, and anthems.
model would thus limit the construction of the nation to only the upper levels of society. Given the complexity of social power dynamics and interactions between class groups, a better model would be one that derives from the idea that power is everywhere. Havelok, for example, traverses several class groups, moves between the provinces and the court, and even within two ethnic groups. I believe it is Havelok's ability to function in all these roles that gives him the mass appeal necessary to bring the nation together, as he does at the end. Third, the race theory postulated is rather disturbing. In Turville-Petre's analysis, race is determined solely by birth, and thereby blood. While this is not a novel idea (most if not all cultures, whether modern or ancient, possess something akin), it would be reductive not to consider that there are other mechanisms for inclusion or exclusion that are more malleable, such as customs, language, and law. As I demonstrate in my chapter on Sir Gowther, race was imagined in the medieval period as comprising a variety of signifiers. In fact, as I argue in the chapter, birth and blood may have been the least important racial signifiers.

Lesley Johnson's essay explains the current dialogue in nationalism studies, especially as it concerns the idea of imagined communities. The rest of the essays in the text, however, point out the limitations and problems for the study of nationalism in the medieval period. For example, in one of the essays in the text, Anthony Smith argues that nationalism could not have been possible before the eighteenth century. Smith,

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12 Johnson's essay functions as the introduction to the text. I find it troubling that Johnson invokes a line of inquiry based on the active and conscious construction of communities, à la Anderson's instrumentalist ideas, only to then present a series of essays based on primordialism and the classification of groups. It would seem to me more apt to have essays that address the ways in which nations are imagined and transformed from ethnic communities to nations.
following the same ideas of nationalism he employs in his other works, concedes that some sort of ethnic communities were present in the medieval period. To Smith, these communities were the origins of modern nations when the movement and ideology of nationalism appeared. It is not surprising, then, that the essay following Smith's is one in which the author, in effect, argues that the English considered themselves English. John Gillingham's "Henry of Huntington and the English Nation" wants to prove that the English considered themselves an ethnic group but does little to argue why that necessarily has to mean a nation. Gillingham does not show what the English do to think of themselves as ethnic, how they create their ethnicity.

Adrian Hasting takes a great deal of time and energy to argue why it is necessary to study nationalism in the medieval period. Its great importance to my work is that it clearly lays down the foundation for further studies. Hasting's text is influential for this dissertation, but more so as a stepping stone. While Hasting's work takes on critics such as Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, it does not fully develop the ways in which the medieval nation was created.

The impetus of this dissertation is to demonstrate that a nation is more than a classification. A modern nation is defined by the ways in which it is actively constructed, invented, and performed. A nation, like its people, is a living organism. In Chapter Five, for example, I examine Fortescue's theories that a nation is a living body, changing, and growing. Therefore, this dissertation demonstrates the conscious construction of the

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13 Ethnicity must have a performance aspect to it. Celebrations, parades, clothes, and food preparation are all good examples of ethnic performance. For more information on ethnicity and performance, see Barre Toelken, The Dynamics of Folklore (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1996) 117-82.
nation among the authors and audiences of medieval literary works and the use of these works to imagine the medieval nation.

Modern Tools for the Medieval Workshop: Theories

Benedict Anderson notes that “[a nation] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”

Anderson attempts to locate the nation and national identity at a level of abstraction that can only be found in the imagination. It is the imaginative nature of this community, Anderson argues, which ultimately makes possible the colossal, if not catastrophic, sacrifices which so many people are willing to make. Anderson’s investigations into the historical origins of nationalism additionally posit that the imagined community is both limited in that it “has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” and sovereign in that “nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so.”

Anderson’s conceptual model of nationalism can account for how the abstract notion of the Nation becomes the livable experience of group identification. Further, and most importantly, if the nation is imagined, then it is always in the process of articulating, or composing, its own image. As Ernest Gellner points out, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not

14 Anderson 15-6.

15 Anderson 7.
exist." Nations are thus creative inventions formed into a myth from some combination of race, tradition, geography, and language. In this mythification, imaginative literatures become complicitous in constructing the image. The discourse of the nation allows literary theorists to investigate in narratives “the nation-space in process of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are in medias res; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made.”

Since Anderson’s work appeared more than a decade ago, other theorists have begun to elaborate further on the basic premise of nationalism. Of particular importance in recent years has been the compilation of essays in Bhabha’s Nation and Narration. In the opening sentence Bhabha states that “nations, like narratives, lose their origin in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye.” As much as historians want to proclaim the certainty of the “origin” of nation, it is this metaphorical idea of the nation, Bhabha argues, which casts doubt on the “continuous narrative of national progress” and instead inscribes a much more temporal and transitional social reality. The term “nation” as we know it is continuously being recreated by our own cultural specificity. Ultimately, the nation can only emerge as a system of cultural signification: a representation of the collectivity of a way of life. Yet, in spite of the “ambivalent figure of the nation,” Bhabha states that there are “narratives and discourses


18 Bhabha 1.

19 Bhabha 1.

13
that signify a sense of 'nationness' by proclaiming a social and cultural sense of belonging. For Bhabha, as for Anderson, it is through narrative by which the nation can finally emerge.

For Timothy Brennan, the crucial interplay of nationalism and literature must be examined as the creations of "myths of the nation." Very much like Bhabha, Brennan believes that the term "nation" refers both to the present moment and to something much more "ancient and nebulous."\(^{21}\) It is imperative to return to the construction of origins in an effort to examine the immemorial past that "acts as a charter for the present-day social order [that] supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief, the function of which is to strengthen tradition, and endow it with a greater value and prestige."\(^{22}\) In this act imaginative literature has been complicitous in inventing, or mythifying, the past to give order to a constructed present. Further, nations as invented, imaginary constructs depend on cultural narratives in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role.\(^{23}\)

Writing a Nation

This dissertation examines the nation in the process of being written, and it is indebted to the insights of Anderson, Bhabha, Brennan, and others, though it also departs

\(^{20}\) Bhabha 2.

\(^{21}\) Brennan 45.


\(^{23}\) Brennan 49.
from their models at significant points. Each of the medieval texts under examination is chosen for its importance in demonstrating the complex strategies medieval writers utilize to create national solidarity. My argument explores the representations of social life in certain late medieval texts as symbolic expressions of nationalism, showing that a nation is a form whose style changes according to particular historical and cultural demands and desires.

Chapter One, entitled "Havelok the Dane and the Myths of Cultural Origin," shows that the community imagined in Havelok is extremely complicated. The myth of Havelok comes to us "strained" through two Anglo-Norman texts of the twelfth century: Geoffrei Gaimar's L'Estoires des Engles and the anonymous Lai d'Haveloc.

Havelok the Dane, however, is dramatically different from both Anglo-Norman texts. In Havelok the Dane, I examine the constructed nature of the myths of ethnic origin and the boundaries of cultural identification. This chapter demonstrates the ways in which "primordial" myths of common origin change according to historical and cultural processes. Havelok the Dane, I argue, endows the community with legitimacy and cohesion by creating a sense of Englishness in the late medieval period.

Chapter Two, which is entitled "Sir Gowther: Imagining Race in Late Medieval England," examines a text usually classified as a hagiographical romance. In this chapter, I argue that Sir Gowther can be read as a text that examines biological and cultural assumptions about race. At the heart of the narrative is a search for accommodations to—and the meanings of—the perplexities of intercultural life.

Following this analysis of race and ethnicity in late medieval England, in my third chapter, "St. George at the Battle of Agincourt," I explore the importance of saints' lives
in the creation of a national symbolic. I argue that it is not coincidental that *Havelok the Dane* achieved status as a quasi-saint’s life and that *Sir Gowther* is a narrative largely about religious conversion. While there are modern theorists, most notably Benedict Anderson, who argue that the death of religion in the eighteenth century brought about the dawn of nations, I argue that if we unpack the rhetorical nature of the nation and religion, we find that the two function in the same way and strive toward the same goals. This chapter explores the ways in which religious symbols encourage a complex interweaving of religious beliefs and communal affiliations.

The emphasis of Chapter Four, “The Country and the City: The Social Imagination in *The Tale of Gamelyn*,” is to outline the various connections, or analogous social structures, between town and country, and to demonstrate how they are being worked out in literature. I explore the social imagination shared by the town and country in a literary anomaly, *The Tale of Gamelyn*, which is a provincial tale told by an urban dweller to a heterogeneous audience in a work written by an urban poet.

I am interested in the communities in *Gamelyn*, how the country community values relate to (or figure) city values and how these common interests illustrate the tentative and temporal yet cohesive nature of communities. By analyzing these strategic communities, the chapter will show ways in which the English nation was symbolically constructed out of various groups that imagined themselves in communion. In illustrating the bonds between urban and rural worlds, this chapter will demonstrate how very different communities come together to form the nation.

The topic of Chapter Five, which is entitled “Justice in the Land: Myth, Program, and Governance,” is Sir John Fortescue’s *The Governance of England*. In many ways,
this chapter begins where the *Tale of Gamelyn* leaves off. While the previous chapter demonstrates ways in which justice and social ideas bring together seemingly disparate communities, this chapter explores the ways in which theories of government utilize forms of nationalism in the building of community. The impetus of Fortescue’s *Governance* is the idea that government, and how it is constituted, is held together by mutual faith between subject and king. Central to Fortescue’s project is the notion of collective legitimacy, whereby the government is a mixture of constitutional and regal laws, *dominium politicum et regale*. Fortescue, I argue, imagines a community upheld by subjects who exemplify moral, religious, and social fortitude.

In short, the dissertation will examine the variousness of the ways in which medieval communities are imagined. It explores the imagined boundaries of the nation in the belief that the methods by which communities erect, police, and traverse these boundaries are representative accounts of the signifying practices of people. The texts chosen are thus narrative accounts of writers participating in the project of community building. They demonstrate that there is no singular view of the totality of the nation; rather what we get are visions of the conflicts and debates that are necessary struggles in a group’s evolution toward a sense of community.
CHAPTER I

HAVELOK THE DANE AND THE MYTHS OF CULTURAL ORIGIN

I begin this project on the study of the history of nationalism by first examining the conscious creation of community identification. At the heart of this chapter is the idea that myths, memories, symbols, and values are bases for community building. In this chapter on Havelok the Dane, I examine myths of ethnic origin and the boundaries of cultural identification, demonstrating the ways in which “primordial” myths of common origin change according to historical and cultural processes. Havelok the Dane, I argue, offers a myth of common ethnic origin that endows the community with legitimacy and cohesion. As a myth of origin, Havelok the Dane writes cultural history, and by doing so, creates a wider and newly coherent sense of cultural identification for its readership. This chapter, then, explores the ways in which Havelok the Dane constructs a specifically English national identity, an identity which is defined as originating in the past but which was germane to the forms of nationhood imagined in early fourteenth-century England.

While Havelok the Dane has been the subject of recent discussions of nationalism in the Middle Ages,¹ the romance has not been examined as a myth of cultural origin.

¹ Sheila Delany examines Havelok for its representation of kingship, and Susan Crane looks at the presentation of justice and inheritance in the work. Although not explicitly
The advantages of pursuing this approach are two-fold: first, by examining the ways in which the Havelok-poet creatively manipulates his mythical material, we can identify the strategies used to construct a sense of community; and second, analyzing Havelok as a myth of cultural origin, we can determine the extent to which medieval people were aware of, and participated in, the creation of community.

The chapter begins by looking at Havelok the Dane’s textual sources. Its immediate sources are two Anglo-Norman texts, Gaimar’s Haveloc-episode in L’Estoires des Engleis and the Lai d’Haveloc, both of which come out of a cultural milieu that privileges Anglo-Norman aristocratic values. I argue that both of these texts are constructed histories that glorify an Anglo-Norman past. It is also important to take a close look at Havelok’s manuscript placement. Havelok is bound with devotional and religious matter, and this placement, I argue, shows that the story of Havelok was treated with reverence, demonstrating that nationalist sentiment was of special importance to a late medieval audience. Havelok, I argue in the next section of this chapter, constructs a

addressing the question of nationalism, both critical arguments invoke factors that are salient for studies on cultural production. Diane Speed, in an article devoted to placing medieval works within the “discourse of the nation,” finds several parallels between the romance and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century works that fueled the study of nationalism. Lastly, Thorlac Turville-Petre examines Havelok alongside Middle English chronicles. He argues that Havelok should be treated as a history of the nation. The discussion, however, leaves him at odds to explain the tremendous differences between Havelok and the chronicles. See Sheila Delany, Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Susan Crane, Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Diane Speed, “The Construction of the Nation in Medieval English Romance,” Readings in Medieval English Romance, ed. Carol M. Meale (Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 1994) 135-57; and Thorlac Turville-Petre, “Havelok and the History of the Nation,” Readings in Medieval English Romance, ed. Carol M. Meale (Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 1994) 212-34.
sense of Englishness, an encompassing English ethnic identity based on law, language, and geographical solidarity. The text illustrates this sense of Englishness by foregrounding the importance of the people of the nation. Havelok interacts with the people and values their culture. The coronation scene at the end adds to the collective solidarity shown throughout the narrative, bringing together diverse groups under a legendary king. *Havelok the Dane* figures the origin of the nation and its shared historical memories and elements of common culture. Thus, as a myth of ethnic origin, *Havelok* consciously creates a sense of community based in the past but instrumental to its present audience's sense of identity.

**Anglo-Norman *Haveloc***

Studying how the community is imagined in *Havelok* becomes extremely complicated, for the myth of Havelok comes to us “strained” through two Anglo-Norman texts of the twelfth century: Geoffrei Gaimar’s *L’Estoires des Engles* and the anonymous *Lai d’Haveloc*. These two purported sources are each informed by different purposes and each of them is trying to imagine its own notion of group identity.

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2 Hutchinson and Smith define ethnicity by six main features: “1. a common proper name, to identify and express the ‘essence’ of the community; 2. a myth of common ancestry, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin and place and that gives an ethnie a sense of fictive kinship; 3. shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration; 4. one or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language; 5. a link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnie, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora people; 6. a sense of solidarity on the part of at least some section of the ethnie’s population” (6-7). See John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, “Introduction,” *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 1-14.
Source-hunting, a problematic art in itself, is complicated even further when we recognize that *Havelok the Dane* is a cornucopia of hybridity—texts, cultures, languages, and histories. The purpose of disentangling these threads is to examine the distinctiveness of the Englishness that is being presented in *Havelok the Dane*. One of the principal signifiers of nationhood is the writing of myths of origin in order to define the present. In a way reminiscent of archeology, I argue that fourteenth-century people were looking to the past in the hope of creating an identity that made sense to their cultural, political, and psychological present.

Of the two sources, Geoffrei Gaimar’s *Haveloc*-episode in his *L’Estoires des Engleis* is clearly the earlier—dated circa 1135-40, compared to the *Lai d’Haveloc*, circa 1190-1220. Most critics believe, as does Shepherd, that the *Lai* is in fact an adaptation of Gaimar’s work. On a purely narrative level, there are many similarities, such as similar passages and an overwhelming number of almost identical lines.

There are, however, several striking textual differences between the two texts. These differences provide keys for better understanding the cultural energy of the texts. The most striking difference between the *Lai* and Gaimar’s episode is the arrangement of the events in narrative order. Whereas the *Lai* begins with Haveloc’s story, Gaimar begins with Argentille’s (Goldeboru in *Havelok the Dane*) story first and we do not meet Haveloc until half way through the narrative. Further, Gaimar, in first presenting the

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young scullion, refers to him by the name of Cuaran for a good portion of the narrative. It is only later, when his identity is revealed, that he is named Haveloc.\(^5\) Gaimar, by having Argentille’s story dominate for the first part of the text, suggests that the episode is more concerned with English politics and history. Haveloc’s Danish story is briefly told later in the text.

There is, however, a very good reason for beginning politically and geographically in England. The Haveloc-episode is a later interpolation into the text of the Estoire. It is inserted into a part in the Estoire where Gaimar is trying to make a claim for early Danish occupation of England. Alexander Bell’s comments on the matter are quite enlightening.

The intelligent reader, who has followed the narrative, arrives at the climax of the struggle between Dane and Saxon—the single combat between Canute and Edmund Ironside, arranged with due solemnity and precautions, and reminiscent of the Scandinavian ‘holm-gang.’ Then comes the claim that king Dan ruled the country long before the English arrived there. King Dan? Where was that name mentioned before? When we were told how the Danes began their invasions in

\(^5\) The story begins in England at a time when Constantine, the nephew of Arthur, was chieftain. At this time two kings ruled “Britain”: Adelbriht, who was of Danish descent, ruled Norfolk as well as four earldoms in Denmark, and Edelsi, a Briton, ruled Lincoln and Lindsey. Because the two kings were good friends, Edelsi gave his sister in marriage to King Adelbriht. The issue of this marriage was a daughter by the name of Argentille. Sometime later, King Adelbriht and his wife die. Argentille is then raised by her uncle, King Edelsi. When she reaches the age that she could inherit the kingdom, Edelsi decides to marry her inappropriately to a household dishwasher by the name of Cuaran. Cuaran takes his wife to Grimsby where they find out that Cuaran/Haveloc is actually the heir of King Gunter, who was killed when King Arthur invaded for tribute. Running a puppet government, King Arthur left the traitorous Odulf to rule. At this same time, there is a kind of guerrilla warfare being waged by Sigar Estarle. In the rest of the story Haveloc goes to Denmark, meets up with Sigar Estarle, proves he is the heir of King Gunter by blowing a special horn that nobody can blow, defeats King Odulf, and returns to England to reclaim Argentille’s inheritance. Through a ruse thought up by Argentille, Haveloc defeats Edelsi, and the rest is history.
king Egbert’s time. True it was the first occasion on which they came, but what did our author say? That they came to claim their inheritance because king Dan and his successors, Adelbriht and Haveloc, ruled the country. So he said, but did he give any proof? Yes; when the West Saxons were busy settling in the south of England, and before ever Ida and Ella appeared in the north, the Danes were in East Anglia, and had been there from the time of Haveloc...the wealth of evidence afforded by the detailed Haveloc story is placed just in the right position to corroborate the claim advanced by Canute.\(^6\)

The place of the *Haveloc* interpolation implies that the story was utilized to legitimate claims for Danish occupation.\(^7\) Haveloc provides historical proof for Gaimar’s readers that the Danes had been in England and had a legal right to it. Extending the implications a bit further, there might also have been the urge to authenticate Norman occupation, since the Normans (Northmen) were the descendants of the Danish. To corroborate this idea, the name given to Adelbriht (Danish) and Orwain’s (Briton) daughter is certainly intriguing, for her name, Argentille, is very much a Norman name. To place this name into the context of a story legitimating rulership illustrates that there is a desire to substantiate Norman, via Danish, roots in the historical past. To Gaimar, Haveloc’s story does not figuratively trace the immigration of Danes to England; the Danes in the form of Normans are already there. From the viewpoint of political legitimacy, Gaimar shows how Normans and Danes had a right to England.

From a linguistic point of view, Geoffrei Gaimar is himself Anglo-Norman and is

\(^6\) Bell 13.

\(^7\) Harald Heyman argues that Gaimar was out to illustrate an old belief that the “Danes had been rulers of Britain long before the Saxons came to the country, and that Havelok was one of the kings of these early Danes” (84). See Harald E. Heyman, *Studies on the Havelok-tale* (Upsala: Wretmans Tryckers, 1903).
writing to an Anglo-Norman audience. In examining Gaimar’s rhyming lines, Vising mentions that “many verses may be considered as ‘correct’ from an Anglo-Norman point of view, though in French they are irregular. Geffrey Gaimar is the first author whose verses are marked by such irregularities.” It thus seems that Gaimar’s linguistic particularities were following historical and cultural forms. Norman occupation of and insularity in England led to changes in the language, to where it was perceptibly different from continental French. Alongside this, Normans, as Gaimar illustrates, now placed their historical roots in the English landscape. Therefore, Gaimar’s linguistic differences show that Anglo-Normans now saw themselves as a distinct community from the continental French.

Further, it is important to examine Gaimar’s primary audience. In an epilogue only found in one extant manuscript, Gaimar relates the circumstances under which he “undertook and carried out his work and [he] refers to a certain ‘dame Custance la gentil,’ who had encouraged him in his work and had procured for him, through her husband, ‘Raul le fiz Gilebert,’ certain necessary books.” Perhaps as an expression of gratitude or as an indication of the patron/poet relationship, there are several instances where the narrative becomes self-conscious about this arrangement. In a kind of didactic way, there

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8 According to Bell, Gaimar seems to have made his home south of the Thames at the time when he was writing much of the Estoire; however, following his patroness, he later moved to the Lincolnshire area where he interpolated the Haveloc-episode. See Bell 73 and 75-6.

9 John Vising, Anglo-Norman Language and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923); qtd. in Bell 126.

10 Bell 75.
is a sense that the story reflects in some measure Gaimar's conception of the ideal Norman historical past for his aristocratic Norman patron. Argentille is the product of a mixed marriage, symbolically showing the union of Danes and Britons. Unlike Havelok the Dane, where the children of Havelok and Goldeboru are the hybridized byproduct of the Danish and English cultural miscegenation, Argentille is figured as a representation of that cultural contact herself. She becomes the forerunner—the type—of Gaimar's readers. The fact that Argentille is the originator of the ruse that wins back England is another example of Gaimar trying to foreground the importance of Anglo-Norman women to an Anglo-Norman audience.

Gaimar's relationship with his patron also gets worked into the narrative in the relationship between Grim and Haveloc's mother. Whereas Grim in the Lai is portrayed as a baron entrusted to take care of the Queen and Heir, Grim in Gaimar's narrative is an aristocratic companion of the Queen. Metaphorically, in the same way Grim is entrusted to take care of the Queen and protect the heir, Gaimar is taking care of his patroness by providing the myths for the next generation. By recreating the myths to fit their present realities, Gaimar presents them as the foundation needed to form an identity that is Anglo-Norman. It could very well be that by the time Gaimar wrote his L'Estoire des Engleis he was treating English history as a part of the Norman heritage. In short, Gaimar's text has community-building purposes, arguing for a collective identity among Anglo-Norman aristocrats and their families.

Courtly Haveloc
To a large extent the *Lai d’Haveloc* can be considered a literary adaptation of Gaimar’s *Haveloc*-episode. I use the word “literary” because the *Lai* very much fits within the lai tradition of Marie de France. Lais were flourishing in the second half of the twelfth century in England, and it could be that the poet saw the possibility of adapting Gaimar’s “history” to a literary medium. In typical lai fashion the *Lai* begins: “I want to tell you about him and record his destiny, because the Bretons have made a lay about it and called it by his name—both Haveloc and Cuaran.” The importation of form and language shows that the aristocratic audience of the *Lai* was probably looking toward the continent for its literary works. The fact that the theme and setting are insular, however, suggests some of the tensions of hybridization both in literary terms and in terms of its audience. There are indications that the author was from Brittany and a newcomer to England. As Bell notes, “the dialect of the poem is not very different from the French of the continent and suggests an immigrant into, rather than a native of, England.” Furthermore, the Angevin courts clearly favored imaginative literature of the continent. In this case the work, like the audience, is part Anglo and part Norman but certainly courtly and aristocratic.

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11 Fahnestock 110 and 114. Bell postulates that there is “not only a general connection with the ‘lais’ but also a special one with those of Marie, since in the prominence assigned to Argentille the author of the *Lai d’Haveloc* seems to have been influenced by the poetess’ tale of *Les dous amanz.*” See Bell 26.

12 See Weiss 141. Pur co vus voil de lui cunter, / E s’adventure remembrer / K’un lai en firent li Bretun / Si l’apellerent de sun nun / E Aveloc e Cuarant. (19-23)

13 Bell 28.

14 Crane 2-3.
The *Lai* is very concerned with portraying the life of an aristocratic and courtly hero. The *Lai*, for example, makes Grim into a baron instead of a fisherman. Also, there are several instances of feudal ritual deference to Haveloc, such as when Kelloc and Sygar pay homage to him. The example that best highlights aristocratic tastes and values is the scene where the young Haveloc is sent to the court because "he was not raised amongst the kind of people where he might learn of something and acquire instruction and wisdom" (161-4). From an aristocratic viewpoint, young men needed to be sent to court in order to gain important class values and ideas. As the prologue states, "men should gladly hear, repeat and remember the noble deeds of antiquity, both the good acts and the brave, to imitate and record them for the improvement of honourable men" (1-6). In sending the young Haveloc to court, Grim is following the basic plan for the education of noble children. At around the age of seven to nine, the young noblemen were "despatched to the courts of other nobles to be educated: to a paternal uncle, a maternal uncle, a friend of the father or his segneur." Implicit in this manner of education is the idea that the court is the center of wisdom and knowledge.

Other versions of *Havelok* provide very different reasons for sending the youth to

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15 Fahnestock 134.

16 Weiss 144. The translated verse is: / K’il n’ert norri entre tel gent / Ou il p[e]ust alques entendre / Afetement e sens aprende. (161-4)

17 Weiss 141. Volunters devreit l’um oïr / E recunter e retenir / Les nobles fez as anciens / E les pruësses e les bens / Essamples prende e remembrer / Pur les francs homes amender. (1-6)

court. In Gaimar's version of the episode, the youth leaves when Grim dies. We are not
given any other details. In *Havelok the Dane*, the youth is sent off to provide for his own
sustenance because there is not enough food. The differences among these versions tell
us something about the audience; for Gaimar and the *Lai d'Haveloc*-poet, the aristocracy
is the focus, but for the poet of *Havelok the Dane* things are different. Further, the *Lai*
explicitly notes that the story will function as an educational narrative, instructing future
aristocrats. Narratives like the *Lai* are told at court, and young aristocrats must go the
court to hear the type of stories that inform their sense of class belonging.

The *Lai* also suggests that class is a form of ethnicity. This idea is surely not new
to the poem; the upper levels of Anglo-Norman society probably saw themselves as a
different ethnic group due to language, social position, and ancestral myths. It is,
therefore, not surprising that the young Haveloc possesses all the physical features and
inner qualities of the upper classes: "he was very strong and courageous, daring, and hot­
headed" (157-8). The representation of the characters and the intended audience
suggests that the *Lai*-poet wanted very much to present a class-ethnic identity.

This courtly and aristocratic tone informs the rest of the story. The *Lai*-poet may
have faithfully transcribed Gaimar's *Haveloc*-episode, but he redirects the myth to an
aristocratic audience by changing the characters, the language, and the ideological

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19 John Armstrong notes, "the presence of very different linguistic patterns among
peasants and elites, as contrasted to minor dialect differentiation, made maintenance of a
latent but persistently strong [ethnic] identity easier." See John Armstrong, *Nations

20 Weiss 144. Mult par ert forz e vertuus / E enpernant e aîrus. (157-8)
function of the narrative. The attitudes, customs, and ideas imbued in Haveloc make him an Anglo-Norman feudal lord. As an aristocrat, he is endowed at birth with certain class/ethnic ideas that he proceeds to fulfill in his life.

_Havelok the Dane_

_Havelok the Dane_ was written in the late thirteenth or very early fourteenth century. The fact that _Havelok_ was written in the specific literary and cultural milieu of this particular period is important. By then the fully developed medieval state of England was well on its way to becoming a national state. Norman and Angevin efforts to centralize government in the previous centuries and almost constant warfare with neighboring states had produced in England a strong sense of national unity. While the centralization efforts had drawn strong baronial resistance, it was in the period of Edward I's positive mobilization against these crises in the 1290's that, according to Maurice Powicke, "nationalism was born." _Havelok the Dane_ is significantly involved in the production of nationalist imaginings.

The manuscript placement of _Havelok the Dane_ suggests the power and importance of nationalism. The only surviving manuscript of _Havelok the Dane_ (Laud

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22 Delany 61.

Misc. 108 in Bodleian Library, Oxford) dates to circa 1300-25, and its composition has been dated to circa 1300. The composite manuscript in which Havelok exists has been intact in its present form since the fifteenth century. It does, however, appear as if Havelok the Dane was part of a later addition to a late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century compilation. The first part consists of the South English Legendary and The Debate Between the Body and the Soul. The second part, interestingly enough, consists of Havelok the Dane, King Horn, the lives of saints Blasius, Cecily, and Alexius, Somer Soneday, a translation of unconnected Biblical sentences, and a collection of exempla on deceit and moral precepts; indeed, taken as a whole it does appear odd that “the matter of England” (King Horn and Havelok the Dane) would have been inserted alongside saints’ legends. It could be, as Guddat-Figge suggests, that they were mistaken for saints’ lives by an earlier owner and bound up with the South English Legendary. Havelok the Dane does in fact begin with an insertion that what is to follow is the “vita” of Havelok. This same designation is made, or rather reserved, for saints’ lives. Instead of labeling the binding a mistake, however, I want to argue that the story of Havelok had


26 Guddat-Figge 282-4. Subsequent information on the composite manuscript is also taken from this source.

deeper significance to its readers than what we to this date have given it. Rather than attributing its manuscript location to ignorance, a better approach is to examine the significance that the life of Havelok had in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England to warrant it being designated as “hagiographical” and bound up with saints’ lives.  

In direct contrast to Benedict Anderson who proposed that nationalism came about with the waning of religious hegemony, medieval English nationalism begins at the point where cultural origins are defined as sacred and where they have achieved a kind of sacred institutionalization.  

Havelok the Dane articulates the conflation of religious imaginings and national imaginings by rewriting the myths of cultural and ethnic origin. In the romance the language and rhetoric of medieval nationalism construct a formulation whereby the sacredness of saints’ lives is somehow paralleled with national heroes.  

In the Middle Ages myths of the common origin of a people served to increase social solidarity and community identity.  

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28 Sheila Delany has written that this “placement need not be coincidental for the romance presents Havelok as the worker of miracles. As rightful king, moreover—king by heredity and divine right—he is not only protected by God but becomes the instrument of divine justice. In this sense, Havelok is a figural hero.” See Delany 63.  


30 I do not, however, want to say that this romance was necessarily thought of as sacred or religious. My argument is that the binders thought highly of it and that the myth of common origin had enough importance to be compared to religious materials.  

31 Susan Reynolds notes, “from the sixth to the fourteenth century at least, people (gentes, populi, nationes) were normally thought of as social and political communities and...myths of the common origin of a people served to increase or express its sense of solidarity” (375). Susan Reynolds, “Medieval Origines Gentium and the Community of the Realm,” History 68.224 (1983): 375-90.
order to explain the present and promote its values. The significance of these identity
myths is derived from their ability to legitimize social polity, to present the "naturalness"
of the order of things, and to arouse an awareness of their "common fate." These myths,however, were used not only for political legitimacy; they describe the people as united
by a common history, descent, and culture linked to a specific geographical location that
says much about their desire to locate a common sense of national identity. They were,
in a sense, invented traditions looking to the past in order to construct the imaginary
origin of the community. Cultural myths of origin provide social, cultural, and psychological solidarity. Given their importance, it is not surprising that Havelok the
Dane would be bound with hagiographical narratives.

Havelok the Dane begins in England where the dying King Æpelwold, following
the advice of a national council, leaves his daughter and the kingdom under the
stewardship of Godrich, Earl of Cornwall. At the same time, King Birkabein of Denmark
leaves his son and two daughters as wards of Earl Godard. Godard, wanting to seize the
throne, kills the two girls and gives Havelok over to a fisherman named Grim to be killed

32 Armstrong 9.
33 In the Middle Ages, there are various creative examples of the manipulation of myth for communal solidarity. Isidore of Seville, for example, claimed that his own people, the Goths, descended from Magog the son of Japheth who was the son of Noah. A little closer to the time period covered by this study, the eleventh-century Historia Brittonum derives the British from the Trojan Brutus, shows the descent of the Trojans from Noah, and continues by tracing Noah’s ancestry to Adam and then to God. The curious thing about this genealogy is that “by the end of the thirteenth century, the English had taken over the Brutus story from the British so that Edward I could, paradoxically, use the supremacy of Brutus’s eldest son over his brothers as an argument for English supremacy over all Britain.” The Scots, against whom Edward I was trying to legitimate his claims, argued that the threefold division of Britain between Brutus’s sons justified Scottish self-rule. See Reynolds, “Medieval Origines Gentium” 376-7.
at sea. Grim, however, sees a miraculous light issuing from Havelok's mouth and a cross of light on Havelok's shoulder. He then realizes that Havelok is destined to become the king of both Denmark and England. Apparently, the legend precedes Havelok.

Grim and his family settle on the northeast of England, and Grim founds the town of Grimsby. Havelok grows up to be exceptionally strong. Because of food shortages and other social problems, Havelok is sent to Lincoln so that he will not starve. He happily becomes a kitchen helper in Godrich's castle. Havelok, a dutiful worker, soon earns the respect of the cook and other members of the staff, as well as many lower class members of the society. Because Godrich promised Æbelwold that he would marry Goldeboru (the princess) to the strongest man, Godrich attempts to remove her claim to the throne by marrying her to the kitchen scullion. Havelok in a series of sporting contests proves he is the strongest man in England and is thus married to the princess. The couple moves to Grimsby, where they find that Grim has passed away. At Grim's house, Goldeboru sees light coming out from Havelok's mouth and shoulder. An angel reassures her. Meanwhile, Havelok dreams that he will soon become the king of both Denmark and England.

Because of the dream and the vision, Havelok and Goldeboru travel to Denmark, escorted by Grim's sons. Ubbe sees the noble marks on Havelok and crowns him as the rightful king of Denmark. Havelok then takes the field and defeats Godard. Godard is captured and tortured to death. Havelok travels back to England with the Danish army. In the meantime, Godrich, hearing about the invasion, raises an English army. He convinces the English soldiers of the grave national threat that the Danish army presents.
In the battle many soldiers on both sides are killed. Havelok challenges Godrich to single combat. Godrich accepts. The two fight for a long time, but Havelok eventually prevails. In the end, Havelok is crowned King of Denmark and England.

Ethnicity and Nationalism: Kingship, Language, Law, and Geography

*Havelok* begins in England under the rulership of King Aþelwold who “in his time... gode lawes / He dede maken, and full well holden” (28-9). Thus it begins with an account of the ideal rule of the English King Aþelwold. By portraying a strong and benevolent king, the *Havelok*-poet makes a statement about the quality of English kings in the past. The romance thus opens, as it closes, with a portrait of a proper ruler: a king who punishes wrongdoers, rewards followers, and consults his people on important issues.

*Havelok* is profoundly concerned with the relationships between ruler and people. For example, knowing that he is near death, King Aþelwold calls together a council composed of people from all over England to decide the proper course to follow. The council suggests a ruler who believes that the people have an important part to play in the government and that they should be allowed to help shape political doctrine. The notion of collective legitimacy is emphasized by the poet’s assertions that all “Engelond,”

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34 Anne Scott notes that “this romance presents us with an anatomy of the good and evil behaviors of rulers, and portrays its hero’s growth...befitting a ruler’s kingly status” (141). Anne Scott, “Language as Convention, Language as Sociolect in *Havelok the Dane,*” *Studies in Philology* 89.2 (1992): 137-60.

regardless of class or age, bears a responsibility for decisions.

The positive role of kings is further illustrated by the invocation of justice and "gode lawes" present in "are dawes" (27, 28). In the context of the mercantile and peace-keeping notions that follow, the emphasis on laws and former days sets the parameters of how the nation is being imagined. The laws are not just the judicial wing of culture, they are part of the collective whole. As the narrator so wonderfully illustrates, the laws of the realm assure that traitors and robbers will be hanged (39-44). They also assert that women shall be protected (79-86), that the poor and orphans shall be taken care of (65-78), and that merchants can travel with merchandise or money with faith that they will not be robbed or unfairly taxed (45-58). That is, the type of kingship proposed is one that could "maken and ful wel holden" laws that support the cultural practices of the people.

The Havelok-poet is very careful to demonstrate ways in which the romance is addressed to the people in England who understand and share in common the English language. The political ramifications of this point are not only that England was considering itself a nation but also that group identification was primarily through language. A strong claim is being made that the language denotes Englishness.

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36 Later in the text the poet states that after Godrich takes over: "Justises dede he maken neve / All Engelond to faren þorw / Fro Dovere into Rokesborw. / Schireues he sette, bedels, and greyues,....All Engelond of his stod awe; / All Engelond was of him adrad." (263-66, 277-8)

37 The term "Engeland" is used several times in the romance. It suggests that the poet imagined a unified entity: a whole, single kingdom denoting the people, culture, and laws.
While Gaimar's episode and the *Lai* were written in Anglo-Norman, *Havelok the Dane* is importantly a Middle English work. The story is not simply a translation of the sources. If we look more closely at the narrative, it becomes evident that the poet understood the linguistic politics of his day.\(^\text{38}\)

Going back to the historical and cultural climate of the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century, we find English as a vernacular language had made several inroads, even at that time, towards becoming the language of the nation. As early as 1204, the loss of Normandy and the particular aftermaths which forced nobles to choose one or the other allegiance, isolated the vernaculars within specified geographical locations. Henceforth, there was "no reason for the nobility of England to consider itself anything but English. The most valid reason for its use of French (the double allegiance to England and France) was gone."\(^\text{39}\) With the political affiliations gone, the use of French was limited to class designatory status. Even though it would continue to be used in parliamentary and legal matters, the spoken use of French among the upper classes was starting to wane. The clearest indication that English was rising in popularity among the nobility is the manuals and handbooks which teach French to what can be referred to as a

\(^{38}\) Norman Blake writes that "English became accepted as the language of speech, but it had yet to win recognition as the best medium of written works. French and Latin were still regarded as the best languages for literary expression so that the fourteenth century and fifteenth centuries witnessed a great vogue in translation." See Norman Blake, *The English Language in Medieval Literature* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1977) 15.

non-French speaking audience.\textsuperscript{40}

In addition, the rise of the middle classes helped to accelerate the prestige of English in the mid-fourteenth century. The government's increased dependence on the financial considerations of the rural gentry and the urban mercantile class had its consequences, namely the increased correspondence and expression of customs in the English vernacular.\textsuperscript{41} Because the importance of a language is largely determined by the importance of the people who speak it, the rise of a substantial middle class changed the power dynamics.\textsuperscript{42} The upward social mobility of the gentry and mercantile classes and the increased role of the Commons in Parliament attest to the changing importance of English.\textsuperscript{43} By 1362 the power relations visible in language had changed so that the chancellor opened parliament for the first time with a speech in English.\textsuperscript{44} Along with this, in that same year parliament passed the \textit{Statute of Pleading} which changed the court system from one using French to one of "the tongue used in said realm."\textsuperscript{45}

The poet of \textit{Havelok the Dane} states that he intends the romance for all people: "gode men, / Wives, maidnes, and alle men" (1-2). There is a strong relation being assumed between the English people and their native tongue, and the author makes it a

\textsuperscript{40} Baugh and Cable 135-8.

\textsuperscript{41} Coleman 21.

\textsuperscript{42} Baugh and Cable 138.

\textsuperscript{43} See Coleman 43-57 for the changing significance of these classes and Coleman 79-84 for the role of the Commons.

\textsuperscript{44} Baugh and Cable 145-6.
point to state that he is writing his work for all those who can understand the work.

According to modern post-colonial theory, language "provides the terms by which reality may be constituted; it provides the names by which the world may be known. Its systems of values becomes the system upon which social, economic, and political discourses are grounded." Further, Eric Hobsbawm has noted that "the identification of nation with language helps us to answer such questions [about politics and language], since linguistic nationalism essentially requires control of a state or at least the winning official recognition for the language." Language can thus be associated with the concept of nation, language serving as a boundary mechanism to differentiate between groups. Language is the expression of myths and symbols understood by members of a group, and the symbolic interaction, or communication, serves as a border guard for inclusion or exclusion. In *Havelok the Dane*, language is a dominant marker of community identity. As a literary work, the *Havelok*—poet importantly chooses to place his work among a growing collection of vernacular texts. It would have been easy for him to rewrite the text in the culturally dominant language of the period, French. Instead, the choice to write in English evokes the centrality of the thesis of *Havelok*: the creation of community. Because group affiliation is centered more in the imagination than on a

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45 Baugh and Cable 145-6.


48 Armstrong 8.
map or in a political system, the significance of writing an identity myth in the vernacular legitimates the present "naturalness" of the order of things and arouses an awareness of common fate.

*Havelok* begins by demonstrating the judicial and linguistic traditions inherited from the utopian vision of the past. The romance creates a model of kingship directly responsive to and responsible for the culture and its people. Further, in choosing to write in the vernacular, the *Havelok*-poet constructs a vision of the past marked by social inclusion and political participation that leads directly to an ideal imagined community.

*Havelok the Dane* also places a great deal of importance on imaginative geography. One of the overriding concerns in *Havelok* is setting the local scenes within a national framework. The poet goes to great lengths to repeat in one way or another that the geography includes "all Engelond...fro Rokesburw all into Dovere." *Havelok* sets the imagination in a known, or named, space that conjures up meanings and signs of collectivity. The need to geographize the poem may be part of *Havelok*’s literary inheritance. Anglo-Norman works, especially lais, tended to give the locality of combats or tournaments as well as name towns and harbors. However, it is the way in which *Havelok* displays the land as part of the collective group consciousness that raises some interesting questions. Roxburgh and Dover mark the extreme points of England, thus

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49 Turville-Petre 125.

setting the contextual geography. The statement is an implicit reference to the four royal roads that in this case are under the king’s peace. The nation is where the king’s laws are in effect. Similarly, after Godrich has taken over the kingdom, the narrator states that “Al Engelond of him stod awe / Al Engelond was of him adrad” (277-8). We note that the same term is being used to denote the people, the land they live on, and the customs they display. Explicit in this statement is that the land, the people, and the culture are one.

In one of the most evocative moments in the narrative Havelok dreams that he will one day have control of all England and all Denmark.

Herkne nou what me haveth met!  
Me thoughte I was in Denemark set,  
But on the moste hill  
That evere yete cam I till.  
It was so hey, that I well moughte  
All the werd see, als me thoughte.  
Als I sat upon the lowe,  
I bigan Denemark for to awe,  
The borwes and the castles stronge;  
And mine armes weren so longe  
That I fade me all at ones,  
Denemark, with mine longe bones;  
And thanne I wolded mine armes drawe  
Till me, and hem for to haue,  
All that evere in Denemark liveden  
On mine armes faste cliveden;  
And the stronge castles alle  
On knees bigunnen for to falle;  
The keyes fellen at mine feet.  
Another drem dremede me ek:  
That ich fley over the salte se  
Till Engeland, and all with me

G. V. Smithers, “Introduction,” Havelok, ed. G. V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). Smithers also points out that Roxburgh was not always in English hands (lxiv).
That evere was in Denemark lives
But bondemen and here wives;
And that ich com till Engelond,
All closed in intill min hond. (1285-1310)

In these lines, the *Havelok*-poet incorporates the totality and completeness of the country. Havelok dreams that he will hold the land, the cities, and, just as importantly, the people. It is not only a matter of control; after all, Godrich rules England. Instead, Havelok embraces, quite benevolently, the entire kingdom in a metaphorical image of community.

Notions of kingship, language, and geography are important in and of themselves, and they inform the ways in which the nation is being imagined. These concepts are the building blocks for ethnic identity. In a sense, sharing the same land and cultural practices (laws and language) promotes solidarity among the people. Therefore, in the opening passages of *Havelok*, ethnicity, as defined by its building blocks, is the active narrative agent.

Havelok and the People

When Grim and his family flee Denmark, they settle on the mouth of the Humber. Upon landing, Grim drives the boat onto the sand and turns it upside down, constructing a little cottage out of the boat. Grim, in England, practices his trade. He fished for sturgeon, whale, turbot, salmon, seal, and eel. Grim's sons, including Havelok, took the fish to market, and the family seems to have prospered following their emigration to England. Grim provided exceptionally well for his family for about twelve years. In the meantime, Havelok grew exceptionally strong. Seeing how hard Grim has worked to
provide for the family, Havelok vows always to value work: "It is no shame forto
swinken" (799).

This colorful scene portraying the everyday lives of fishermen and their families
is but one of many in Havelok. In particular, we note the in-depth look at familial life.
The young Havelok is treated to a full view of life among the lower classes. Havelok’s
education is thus one of participation; and because he has lived as such, he truly cares for
the plight of the lower classes. More important, he values their work and their practices.

Havelok’s youth and subsequent rise through the classes has troubled many
critics. Yet, the theme of the young hero growing up in a peasant household is not
uncommon. It is the way in which Havelok goes about his peasant experience that can be
found troubling. The romance not only describes peasant/bourgeois elements, but more
importantly it highlights and revels in the milieu of the fishing village, the village games,
and the middle class ideals concerning family and work. In short, it does not apologize
for, but instead glorifies, Havelok’s experiences.

_Havelok the Dane_ has been characterized as a bourgeois tale or a peasant’s
fantasy, however, looking at the social inclusivity and the various travels of the hero,
perhaps it is necessary to review some of these claims. The common assumption behind

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52 For more information on the various narrative strategies and audience representation
and participation, see Roy Michael Liuzza, “Representation and Readership in the Middle

53 For classification of _Havelok_ as a bourgeois tale, see Sands 56. For _Havelok_ being
designated as a peasant fantasy, see John Halverson, “_Havelok the Dane_ and Society,”
the bourgeois elements create a bond between the narrator and the audience of the text,
forming a community of common interests.
classifying Havelok in terms of social class is Havelok’s model behavior as a worker. Havelok tramples over other workers in order to win a job (867-94), works tirelessly without complaining, and becomes renowned because of these things (959-61). This work ethic is best exemplified by Havelok’s creed, “It is no shame for to swinken; / Þe man þat may wel eten and drinken / þar nouht ne haue but on swink long; / To liggen at hom it is ful strong” (799-802). Later in the narrative, Havelok dresses up as a merchant, gives a ring to Ubbe in order to be allowed to trade in Denmark, and wins the burgesses’ gratitude for protecting his host’s property against a band of sixty thieves. This passage seems to imply a certain knowledge of bourgeois sensibilities.

Havelok’s movement through the social classes, when examined alongside the poem’s central theme of a nation and its rulers, suggests that there is a purpose and function to Havelok’s journey through society. First, Havelok’s rise through the social classes comes only because of the loss of his father’s property. Havelok is and will always be a person of noble birth. Furthermore, Havelok is aware of his destiny. Havelok’s awareness of his true identity and his subsequent rise through the classes point at a belief that a proper king should have knowledge of his subjects and how they lead their lives. Havelok’s experience is crucial to understanding the important role that all

54 Smithers xliv-xlvii. In order to prove his point, Smithers highlights the episode when Havelok returns to Grimsby. Upon his return, his “brothers and sisters” greet him as if he was a lord: on their knees and promising their service to him (1211). Additionally, Havelok begins his speech concerning the journey to Denmark by stating, “Louerdinges, ich wile you showe / A ping of me þat ye wel knawe” (1402-3). A destiny, by the way, of which quite a few people seem to be aware. At three points in the narrative, the shining cross on the shoulder is said to signal that Havelok will be the ruler of both England and Denmark. There seems to be some kind of predestined “true coming” cultural idea at work in the narrative.

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people play in achieving and maintaining the nation.\textsuperscript{55}

Second, class interests are drawn the wrong way. Instead of arguing that the emergent merchant and professional classes would have common interests with the lower classes, it is more fruitful to consider that the middle classes would have had more in common with the gentry or barony.\textsuperscript{56} It is, then, in terms of this “partnership” of interested parties that \textit{Havelok} should be read.\textsuperscript{37} Encoded within \textit{Havelok}, and on Havelok, is the merging of gentry and middle class ideologies. The hero, while he is endowed with very essentialized markers of nobility (strength, height, and a light that shines from his mouth), possesses a middle class sensibility concerning work and society. It is by possessing these ideals that Havelok is allowed to traverse class boundaries and to include as much of the community as possible.

Class boundaries are not broken down, however; instead, they are reinvigorated with a nationalistic sense of purpose. Havelok can be seen not so much as the hero who rises from the depths of society to become king as the hero who regains his rightful heritage. The poet tells us that Havelok

\textsuperscript{55} Crane 47.

\textsuperscript{56} Crane points out that because of “considerable mobility, both upward and downward, [this] linked the ranks of the barony to the middle class. Both groups enjoyed degrees of power and status; both were benefited by economic prosperity, sound justice, peace, and maintenance of the existing social order.” See Crane 44.

\textsuperscript{37} Delany argues that “the net result of these social forces [aristocratic centralization of government, baronial resistance to this centralization, and an extending influence of a powerful bourgeoisie] was neither an outright rejection of absolute monarchy, nor thorough repression of dissidence and ambition. Instead, a balance was eventually achieved between royal power and rights of subjects of various classes, which some scholars have called a ‘partnership’ of interested parties.” See Delany 61-2.

44
Of alle men was he mest meke,
Lauhwinde ay and blithe of speke;
Evere he was glad and blithe:
His sorwwe he couthe full well mithe.
It ne was non so litel knave,
For to leiken ne forto plawe,
That he ne wolde with him pleye;
The children that yeden in the weye
Of him, he deden all here wille,
And with him leikeden here fille.
Him loveden alle, stille and bolde,
Knightes, children, yunge and olde;
Alle him loveden that him sowen,
Bothen heye men and lowe. (945-58)

Havelok loves everyone he sees, regardless of class or station. In particular, he loves the children and even plays with them. It is interesting that the legendary future king, who is presently working as a kitchen cleaner, takes time to play with the children. In many ways, it evokes the idea that Havelok will later, as king, take time to be with his subjects. Invested within this notion is the idea that Havelok’s quest for his legal and God-given right to his inheritance will also affect the destiny of his people.

The narrative ends with Havelok crowned king of England before a crowd of “Englishe” and “Denshe” people. Havelok is made king not because of his conquest but because of his right to preserve his wife’s legal, and rightful, succession to the throne. Shortly thereafter, the Danish army that came over with Havelok goes back to Denmark. Havelok then rules for sixty years alongside his queen, Goldeboru.

The text begins with Apełwold’s mercantile and political acumen, and it ends with Havelok reigning for sixty years. Havelok reigns because he figures his kingdom along the lines set down by Apełwold. In a sense, the kingdom is returned to Apełwold’s
world. In the process, Havelok traverses the various social communities of the realm.

Race and Nation

Analyzing *Havelok* as a myth of cultural origin allows for an examination of ethnicity and integration in the making of an English national identity. The final scene of *Havelok*, I argue, constructs a national identity by endowing the community with legitimacy and cohesion. This section of the chapter analyzes the myth as it maps the figural birth of the nation.

Thorlac Turville-Petre has interpreted the coronation scene in *Havelok* as the defining moment in the history of the nation. Turville-Petre examines *Havelok* alongside Middle English chronicles, arguing that *Havelok* should be treated as a history. The discussion, however, leaves him at odds to explain the tremendous differences between *Havelok* and the chronicles. Turning to the definition of the nation, he states “the concept of the nation is fundamentally a racist one; after all, the Latin word *natio* means ‘breed’ or ‘stock’, so that the associations of race or *kynde* are built into the word in its early vernacular use.”58 He further defines nation and race in “terms of the ‘native blood of England.’”59 While I agree with some of what Turville-Petre has to say on the subject, I have to question his definitions of race and nation.

A definition of race, when it is examined at face value and in terms of blood relations or common descent, poses several problems. The construction of race in terms

58 Turville-Petre 128.

59 Turville-Petre 129.
of blood or descent is but one inscription of cultural belonging. There are other things such as language and religion—to name only two—which play a crucial part in group identification. On the question of race relations in the Middle Ages, Robert Bartlett notes that “while the language of race—*gens, natio*, stock, etc.—is biological, its medieval reality was almost entirely cultural.”60 Turville-Petre thus seems to be tuning in only to the language of race, without examining the practical side of race relations and the construction of race in the Middle Ages.

Race does exist in the medieval world, but it is constructed along various criteria, such as descent, customs, language, and law. Turville-Petre’s notion of race, based on descent, is probably similar to modern racist notions that insist on clear biological markers and in the absence of any markers will create other biological differences. In contrast, culture, religion, language, and law are the primary badges of ethnicity.61 As will be shown in Chapter Two, race can be based on historical and cultural contact. In *Sir Gowther*, religion and cultural symbols are the crucial signifiers for racial difference. In *Havelok*, race and ethnicity are constructed throughout the narrative by associating the

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61 Bartlett states, “all three are malleable. They can, indeed, with varying degrees of effect, be transformed not only from one generation to the next, but even within an individual lifetime. New languages can be mastered, new legal regimes adopted, new customs learned. To a point, therefore, medieval ethnicity was a social construct rather than a biological datum. If we define, say, ‘German’ and ‘Slav’ by custom, language, and law rather than by descent, the grandchildren of Slavs could be German, the grandchildren of Germans Slavs. When we study race relations in medieval Europe we are analysing the contact between various linguistic and cultural groups, not between breeding stocks.” See Bartlett 197.
people with a distinct law, language, and geography. The *Havelok*-poet, therefore, provides the keys for understanding race and ethnicity along various criteria.

By looking at *Havelok* as a history or chronicle, Turville-Petre’s critical lens does not open wide enough to allow us to understand the complexities of cultural contact beyond simple classification. Instead, by focusing on the construction of myths of common ethnic origin, this chapter is better able to deal with some of the events in the romance.

When analyzing the marriage of Havelok and Goldeboru, special attention should be paid to the cultural interaction that is being depicted. The fact that a marriage functions to patch over a long and violent history is important. Adrian Hastings persuasively argues that ethnicity “defines the group within which one is normally expected to marry...Every family needs to exist within a safe intermarrying society considerably wider than itself, a society sharing a common concept of marriage, its preparation, obligations and celebration.” Hastings further argues that the reason for defining ethnicity as an intermarrying society is that “then it will have common ancestors and, undoubtedly, tend to define itself in terms of its common ancestors and very often

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62 Adrian Hastings states that people’s ethnicity can be defined as “the common culture—their cloth and clothes, the style of houses, the way they relate to domestic animals and to agricultural land, the essential work which shapes the functioning of a society and how roles are divided between men and women, the way hunting is organised against threatening intruders, the way property and authority are handed on, the ritual of birth, marriage and death, the customs of courtship, the proverbs, songs, lullabies, shared history and myths, the beliefs in what follows death and in God, gods or other spirits.” See Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 168.
some specific ‘myth’ of origin or of this particular land." It is highly improbable that an intermarrying society will have a distinct or real genetic unity; instead, more important is the idea that the society believes in its mythical genetic origin, thus establishing other corresponding cultural attributes with each other.

The marriage in *Havelok* can thus be interpreted as a specific myth of origin carefully representing the mythic genetic unity of the nation. More important, the marriage symbolically represents the racial unity and the shared culture for a late medieval English audience. In a sense, because the romance deals with all England, the marriage illustrates the birth of the nation. The English race is mythically born out of the Havelok and Goldeboru union. Thus, the romance demonstrates the ways in which race is invented and created.

Saintly Bi-Culturalism

This chapter began by noting the quasi-sacred importance of the hero and the myth of cultural origin. In this last section, I return to examine the importance of what *Havelok* is trying to do. In writing the cultural origin of the people, the romance actually becomes a very good cultural ethnography. For example, Havelok’s early work stages are a form of cultural integration that explain why he ruled for sixty years and more importantly why he was so popular. It is not a surprise that in the narrative we get many “visual” scenes of Havelok among the people. He provides that “one in all” sense—that sense of all belonging to the English culture. *Havelok* constructs a sense of social

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63 Hastings 168.
solidarity and collective identity by having the protagonist journey through the social classes in the expressed belief that all people have an important role to play in achieving and maintaining the nation. When Godrich takes over the kingdom and changes the laws (260-79), all the good things of Aipelwold’s kingdom are lost and the nation starts to decay. It is only after Havelok regains the throne and assumes control that the nation regains some of its prior luster. In writing the origin of the nation Havelok must recover those noteworthy qualities in Aipelwold’s past kingdom.

In addition to moving through the social ranks, Havelok integrates different cultures. The greatness of Havelok as a hero is that he belongs to one culture by virtue of birth and yet can move easily in another culture because of having participated in it. In Havelok we can see how it is the destiny of two communities at work in one character. Because the hero is bi-cultural, the narrative figuratively brings these two communities together. As exemplified by Havelok’s dream, he embraces all of Denmark and England. Havelok is therefore about nation and race, with primary importance is given to law, custom, and language.

64 The poet is also very concerned with making sure that his “good” kings love, and therefore in a way are concerned about, everyone. “Him lovede yung, him lovede olde, / Erl and barun, dreng and than, / Knight, bondesman, and swain, / Widwes, maidnes, prestes and clerkes.” (30-3)
In late 1291 the news slowly filtered to the West that Acre, the last and largest Christian stronghold in the Holy Land, had been captured by the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt. The remainder then fell easily into Mamluk hands. The news of the loss of the Holy Land was met with consternation, if not horror. Western Europe's crusading spirit, which had slumbered through most of the thirteenth century, now awakened to the stark realities of Europe's precarious position. However, no recovery missions were immediately organized. Instead, the Crusades in the fourteenth century were fought with carefully prepared cultural propaganda.

Unlike their predecessors, who were usually viewed as eccentric and radical enthusiasts, crusade propagandists of the fourteenth century wrote extremely well thought-out and refined treatises that combined scholarly and literary modes of expression. The propagandists themselves were well-connected advisors of the princes of Europe. In addition, most of the propagandists had spent considerable time studying the

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enemy, by traveling throughout the regions as merchants, missionaries, or pilgrims, or by being thoroughly versed in the Moslem ways of life, mastering the Arabic tongue and reading the Koran.\(^3\)

One of the great writers and missionaries of the fourteenth century, Raymond Lull, spearheaded the effort to promote the Crusades. However, it is important to point out that unlike his predecessors' works, his treatises were not principally aimed at arousing the feelings of Christians against their enemies.\(^4\) Instead, Lull advocated the idea of converting Moslems to Christianity. Like many of his contemporaries, especially those associated with the cloth, Lull saw little benefit in killing the body and the soul therewith.\(^5\) This is not to say that his treatises advocated only pacifist missionary activity; instead, the treatises seemed to promote varied approaches dealing with economic trade embargoes, military activity for control, and missionary programs for conversion. Peter DuBois's treatise entitled *De Recuperatione Terre Sancte*, which he wrote at the court of Philip IV and dedicated to Edward I, systematically deals with the legal and administrative problems of organizing a Crusade and governing the newly conquered territory. He further adds that missionary efforts should begin immediately, starting with the teaching of Oriental languages to prospective missionaries. Once the territory is in Christian possession, the old Templar and Hospitaller priories should be

\(^3\) Atiya 7.

\(^4\) Thaddeus of Naples, an eyewitness at Acre, and Fidenzio of Padua, a Franciscan friar who writes his treatise shortly after Acre, both argue for military action against the Mamluks. See Atiya 6-7.

utilized for teaching. Similar multi-pronged efforts were underway to convert the Mongols to Christianity by John of Monte Corvino and Odoric of Pordenone. Behind the missionary activities lurked the idea formed in the thirteenth century that the Christianized Mongols could be an ally against the Saracens.

The propaganda efforts were helped immeasurably by cultural memory of another event in the late thirteenth century. On December 22, 1299, Ghazan, ruler of the Il-khanid Mongols of Iran, inflicted a crushing defeat on the Mamluk sultan. In a still depressed Europe, news of Ghazan’s victory was, perhaps naturally, over-optimistic. As Denis Sinor states, “news was abroad to the effect that Ghazan had conquered the whole of the Holy Land and even Cairo, that he had given back their former holdings to the Templars and the Hospitallers and was to entrust the Dominicans with the guard of the Holy Sepulcher.” Ghazan seems to be implicated in this public relations move, for he immediately sent several embassies to the pope, to Philip IV, and Edward I. Ghazan’s letters urged the Western European powers to assist him in the overthrow of the Egyptian sultanate. Although the letters do not detail the parceling out of land in the Mongol/European venture, European leaders such as Pope Clement V and James II of Aragon believed that the Mongols would bequeath them Outremer. Not long afterwards, “recovery treatises” began to appear with the Mongol assistance theme. Of

6 Atiya 9-10.
7 Atiya 11.
8 Sinor 535.
9 Sinor 536.
10 Sinor 539.
the more noteworthy, William Adam in 1317 submitted his *De modo Sarracenos extirpandi* to cardinal Raymond William of Farges, the nephew of Pope Clement V. In the carefully detailed memorandum, Adam assigned the Moslems a considerable part in the operation. Also of note, Raymond Étienne in 1332 sent his *Directorium ad passagium faciendum* to Philip VI of France. In the treatise Étienne advocated an assault on Egypt with the help of the Mongols. He concludes with several reasons why the Mongols hate the Mamluks and why the Mongols would ally themselves with the Christians.11

The Crusades in the fourteenth century were waged in literary works urging military unity, political alliances, and strategic religious conversions. The increased consciousness of the political and ideological necessity of the Crusades generated a bewildering assortment of carefully prepared propaganda by numerous writers.

*Sir Gowther*, I argue, fits within the literary history of crusade literature, constituting an example of both propaganda regarding the Moslem East and a vision of Christendom overcoming its non-Christian neighbors. At the heart of these narratives is a search for accommodations to—and the meanings of—the perplexities of intercultural life. The paradoxical quality of these narratives is that they are constructed methods of giving answers and yet they conceal much. The existence of these stories illustrates a desire to narrativize culture, history, and race, giving them a beginning and a definitive character.

In this chapter I argue that *Sir Gowther* is a racialist narrative that imagines what a blending of races—those of the East and those of the West—might mean for a Western

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11 Sinor 542-3.
Christian community. I will examine the representation of the hero along racial lines. My argument is that Sir Gowther is characterized as a Saracen. This chapter is concerned with biological and cultural constructions of race and ethnicity and thus the narrative quality of ethnic identification and the processes for racial conversion and integration. Given the historical and geographical circumstances of the story, I explore the various ways in which Gowther's racial identity is circumscribed, how it is made evident to the hero, and how the hero must reject that identity. Further, the process that the story lays out for the redemption of the hero will be examined. While on the surface the narrative is playing out a religious conversion, the description and attributes of the conversion can be read as cultural change. In this case, the hero can convert only by casting off the very things that determine his difference. The goal of this chapter is to examine the mechanisms used in late medieval England for drawing racial boundaries and the ways in which those boundaries were crossed.

Settings: Sources and Criticism

*Sir Gowther* is found in two fifteenth-century manuscripts and appears to have been written in the late fourteenth century in the Northeast Midlands.\(^\text{12}\) One of the extant manuscripts (National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1) is bound with an unusual mixture of texts: legends, moral verse, religious carols, a mock sermon, a mock carol, nonsense verse, the musical score of a liturgical hymn, and prognostications of...
weather. The Advocates MS contains John Lydgate's *Stans Puer ad Mensam*, a didactic work on table manners, *The Life of Our Lady*, a hagiographic piece, which includes the birth and youth of Christ, and *Sir Isumbras*. The other, British Library Royal MS 17.B.43, is bound with more visionary material such as *Sir John Mandeville's Travels*, William Staunton's *Vision of St. Patrick's Purgatory*, [and] the *Vision of Tundale*. Further, the Royal seems to imply a more refined and cultured, if not wealthier, audience. The Royal is set in vellum with the first page of *Sir Gowther* "framed by border in green, brown, red, and gold [and] first letters of lines touched in red."

While the poet of *Sir Gowther* claims that the story was supplied from a Breton lay, no extant lay can be found. Instead it is generally argued that the author probably used the late twelfth-century French romance *Robert le Diable* as his main source. It must be noted that while medieval literary studies has usually taken great pains to prove the literary lineage between written texts, the legend of Gowther/Robert "is widespread

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15 Laskaya 263.

16 Along with the presentation of the manuscript the Royal omits the more heinous acts. In contrast the Advocate tells the story in more graphic detail and with more immediate action. For further information see, Shirley Marchalonis, "*Sir Gowther: The Process of a Romance*" *Chaucer Review* 6 (1971-72): 14-29.

17 Guddat-Figge 211.

18 *Manual* 141.
and is found in forms as diverse as exemplum, ballad, drama, and even opera, in Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, and England," as well as having been published in later forms by Wynkyn de Worde ("Lyfe of the most Myscheuoust Robert the Deuyll," 1510) and Thomas Lodge (1591) in the sixteenth century.¹⁹ The popularity of the legend indicates an awareness of and concern with issues of community inclusion/exclusion which I intend to address below.

Modern critics of Sir Gowther have tended to concern themselves with the romance’s generic attributes as a hagiographical romance with penitential overtones. E. M. Bradstock, in "Sir Gowther: Secular Hagiography or Hagiographical Romance or Neither?" argues persuasively that Sir Gowther’s genre should not be assigned solely in terms of which structure it best fits—saints’ life or romance—but in terms of content and mode. As she states, “there is a group of romances dealing with the fortunes of regenerate sinners, and if the term ‘secular hagiography’ may be taken to refer to content and mode, rather than structure, then it will be a useful term for such romances...which take on many of the features of saints’ legends.”²⁰ Bradstock’s analysis can generally be considered a questioning of genre classification, but there are steps that she takes to further the study of Sir Gowther. First, by approaching the problem from a folkloristic/anthropological angle,²¹ she changes the questions from those concerning

¹⁹ Manual 142.


²¹ Bradstock’s classification system according to motifs and her invocation of Vladimir Propp’s functions of the folktale indicate that she is approaching the text from a folklore/anthropological line of inquiry.
structure and purity of form to ones in which variation and merging (and thus blurring) of form are important.\footnote{For an overview of the importance of variation (dynamism) and conservatism in folklore/cultural studies, see Barre Toelken, \textit{The Dynamics of Folklore} (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1996).} Other critics, such as Marchalonis, have pointed out that the romance is a result of increasingly complex variations and compilations of folk motifs. Marchalonis argues that the change, adaptation, and creation process of the underlying folktale structure indicate the strength of the traditional components which make up \textit{Sir Gowther}.\footnote{Marchalonis 29.} Second, Bradstock effectively argues that elements of saints’ legends inform romances. In a sense she argues what romances such as \textit{Gowther} and \textit{Havelok} have been telling us: romance heroes can be and were thought of as saints, as Andrea Hopkins points out in her study of penitential knights in Middle English romances.\footnote{Andrea Hopkins, \textit{The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romances} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).} Third, Bradstock’s analysis opens the door for further study of the heteroglossic elements that come into play in \textit{Sir Gowther}. As she states, “the subject matter, apprehended at a symbolic level, ceases to be improbable and effectively exemplifies the theme...[T]he knightly exploits...give visual expression to the process of regeneration...[T]he rise in [Gowther’s ] heroic status is dependent upon the improved state of his soul and is thus a symbolic statement of it.”\footnote{Bradstock 146. Quotation is found in Hopkins 145-6.} It is the convergence, then, of chivalric attributes and forms of piety which give Gowther in the end his saintly status.\footnote{The Royal manuscript ends with \textit{Explicit vita sancti}. For further information, see Bradstock 40.} In this chapter I wish to add
to these analyses, noting that Gowther’s representation as an Other and the performance and spectacle of his conversion into the community magnify his heroic status.

Devilish Beginnings

Sir Gowther is set in Austria, where the Duke and his wife are without children after more than ten years of marriage. Because of the lack of an heir the Duke approaches the Duchess and tells her, “Y tro thou be sum baryn, / Hit is gud that we twyn; / Y do bot wast my tyme on the, / Eireles mon owre londys bee” (53-6).

Devastated, the lady runs out and prays to God and Mary for a child “On what maner scho ne roghth” (63). She is then visited in an orchard by a figure that at first resembles her husband, but after making love to her, turns out to be an incubus. Frightened, the lady runs to her husband and tells him that an angel visited her with the good news that she should expect a child. Without waiting, the two dash off to make love. It is curious at this point that the lady does not tell her husband about the fiend, lies to him by telling him it was an angel, and then engages in intercourse under the pretext that will lead to a child.

The child born soon grows fierce, violent, and ravenous, so much that he sucks his wetnurses to death and tears the nipple off his mother. At the age of fifteen the young Gowther “made a wepon that he schuld weld, / (No nodur mon myght hit beyr): / A fachon bothe of styl and yron” (137-39) that he uses to terrorize everybody. In an effort to indoctrinate, and perhaps calm, his rebellious son, the Duke knights him with a long

27 The following quotations are from Sir Gowther, Six Middle English Romances, ed. Maldwyn Mills (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1992) 148-68.
broadsword. Unable to curb Gowther's escapades, the Duke dies of grief. The Duchess, unable to bear the guilt of her secret, flees to a nearby castle. Gowther continues his evil practices by attacking churches, terrorizing the religious, and raping women of all positions (190-201). At one point in the narrative, Gowther goes out hunting and sees a nunnery on the way (178-89). He then attacks the nunnery, rapes the nuns, and burns them in the enclosed building.

Gowther's evil actions continue until one day an old earl accuses him of being other than of Christian strain. Perturbed, Gowther forces his mother at sword's point to tell him the secret of his conception. Upon hearing the truth, the horrified Gowther goes to Rome and confesses his sins to the Pope, who instructs him, "Thy body within; / Ne no worde speke for eevyl ne gud, / Or thou reyá tokyn have fro God, / That forgyyn is thi syn" (293-7). Further, the Pope tells Gowther to leave his sword behind, but he refuses. Gowther then goes to the court of the German emperor, where he is known as Hob the Fool.

Sir Gowther begins with a genealogical question set in the outermost frontier of the Christian world. This is an important shift from Gowther's alleged antecedent, Robert le Diable, where the action is set in Normandy. The movement in a geographical and in an imaginative sense is important because the frontier is the interaction zone of cultures and societies. Thus the narrative moves into the contact zones between Christian and Islamic cultures.

To a medieval mind geographical space denoted who or what occupied that space.

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James K. Wright notes that most definitions of geography comprise “theories of the creation of the earth, of its size, shape, and movements, and of its relations to the heavenly bodies; of the zones of its atmosphere and the varied physiographic features of air, water, and land; finally, it comprises theories of the regions of the earth’s surfaces.”

Medieval geography, as exemplified in one of the most common cartographic representations of the earth, the T-O mappaemundi, was “far more a visual work of art and an expression of contemporary cosmology and theology than it was an object of utility...They are likely to be a hodgepodge of biblical, classical, and fabulous history mixed with the names of true places, cities, and peoples.” However, many of the true places, cities, and people were not exactly real; instead, they were the “alien yet real cultures existing beyond the boundaries of the European known world from antiquity through the Middle Ages. They occur with great frequency in medieval art and literature, lurking in Mandeville’s Travels, populating the outermost edges of the world maps, and resting uneasily in neat frames on the pages of the great illustrated encyclopedias.” These “monstrous races,” as they were known in the Middle Ages, lurked just beyond the boundaries of Christianity. They were iconographic representations of the Other. Therefore, when the Gowther-poet moves the setting to Austria, he in fact places the narrative in the borderlands of cultural and racial exchange, the boundary between the


31 Friedman 1.
known and the unknown.

Blood and Belonging

As to the question of genealogy, Gowther is supposedly born of an incubus and a mortal woman, and thus possesses many of the demonic traits of the fiend. In a sense, Gowther, because of his rapacious behavior and his treatment of the religious, is an incarnate version of the devil that produced him. As suggested by the old earl, all of Gowther’s evil actions are instinctively part of his demonic origins: “We howpe thou come never of Cryston stryn, / Bot art sum fendys son, we weyn, / That werkus hus this woo. / Thou dose never gud, bot ey tho ylle: / We hope thu be full syb the deyll” (205-09).

Gowther’s birth and childhood, however, have much in common with representations of Saracen and Christian marriages in the popular crusade literature of the period. The theme of the monstrous child born to racially different parents is found in the King of Tars, where a self-sacrificing Christian princess marries the Sultan as a way of bringing peace. When the offspring is born, it is a formless lump of flesh. The mother then requests that the child be baptized, and the child immediately changes into a beautiful boy. Induced by the miracle, the Sultan accepts the Christian faith and changes from black to white in the baptismal waters. A similar story is found in several chronicles where a child born of a Muslim-Christian union is a shaggy masculine

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Once the child is baptized, the child loses all his hair and becomes smooth-skinned and beautiful. The early fourteenth-century Anglo-Latin text, *Flores Historiarum*, for example, relates that the daughter of the king of Armenia married Cassanus, King of the Tartars. The child born to the couple was hairy and disfigured. The father ordered the child to be burned, but the mother interceded. After the child was immersed three times in the baptismal font, it changed into a beautiful boy. The miracle converted the whole community. A letter written to Jaime II of Aragon tells that the King of the Tartars married a Christian princess. In this case, a child was produced after a miraculous conception resulting from a prayer to the Virgin Mary. The child born was half human and half animal. After the child was baptized, however, it became totally human. In another story, a Christian woman married to the king of the Tartars bears a child that is half black and half white. Once baptized, however, the blackness disappears. The overtly visual monstrosity of the child is the direct result of the racial miscegenation. Although Gowther’s putative father is the Devil, the poet relies heavily on racial miscegenation concepts and ideas found in popular crusade literature.

These genealogical problems recall that the story begins with a very reckless wish by Gowther’s mother. In an interesting definition of ethnicity, Adrian Hastings persuasively argues that ethnicity “defines the group within which one is normally

34 Metlitzki 137-8.
35 Perryman 42-3.
36 Perryman 43.
37 Metlitzki 138.
For Hastings, "Every family needs to exist within a safe intermarrying society considerably wider than itself, a society sharing a common concept of marriage, its preparation, obligations and celebration." Hastings further argues that the reason for defining ethnicity as an intermarrying society is that "then it will have common ancestors and, undoubtedly, tends to define itself in terms of its common ancestors and very often some specific 'myth' of origin or of this particular land." It is highly improbable that an intermarrying society will have a distinct or real genetic unity; instead, more important is the idea that the society believes in its mythical genetic origins, thus establishing other corresponding cultural attributes with each other. The community demands as its easiest requirement that children come from recognized unions that exist within a cultural ethnicity. The Gowther-poet purposefully creates a dialogue centered on genealogy. While his nominal father is the Duke of Austria, the audience is told that Gowther's real ancestry is satanic. The tale explicitly relates that Gowther does not belong genetically to the community, and he is therefore Othered along conventional ideas of racial difference.

Inventing Blood

The comparisons between Christian and Saracen unions and Gowther's ancestry seem to provide clues for understanding how Gowther's racial identity is circumscribed.

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39 Hastings 168.

40 Hastings 168.
The Saracens and Gowther are alike in that both are outside the Christian community because of something occurring somewhere in their genealogy. They both have inherited their exclusion. In the case of the Saracens, they were from the line of Ishmael, the disinherited son of Abraham, and Gowther was conceived in an illicit union.41

In the eyes of medieval Christian writers, especially those of popular songs of geste, the Saracens are the offsprings of the devil. The Saracens because of their ancestry are conventionally portrayed as an “evil people; they spent their lives in hating and mocking Christ and in destroying His churches. They are the children of the author of all evil, the Devil.”42 Further, the Saracens are frequently presented as “physical monstrosities; many of them are giants, whole tribes have horns on their heads, others are black as devils. They rush into battle making weird noises comparable to the barking of dogs.”43 Gowther’s inner rapacious disposition thus illustrates the idea that he has much in common with the monstrous Saracen race.

Gowther’s racial identity requires a fuller analysis, examining the symbolic value of Gowther’s sword. Being of the aristocracy, Gowther’s identity should be shaped by the item that represents his role in society: a warrior. Since the twelfth century the social identity of the knight had changed from solely one of providing leadership and protection of society to one in which the tenets of chivalry were religiously organized and the


43 Jones 205.
primary duty was the protection of the Christian faith. For example, the dubbing of the knight, while originally performed by a knight on a novice or squire became increasingly religious and ritualized to the point where a religious figure performed the dubbing. Hence the intent of Gowther's father may have been to force Gowther into a social role in which the major function was the preservation of the cultural pillars: the Christian faith and feudal society. Because he does not change his ways once he is a knight, however, his actions, while seemingly demonic, can also be read as unknightly. Gowther's sins then can be read as a failure to follow the codes of his class. What this leaves us with is that we can interpret Gowther's actions simultaneously as both being demonic (a religious problem) and unknightly (a social problem).

Gowther does not carry an ordinary broadsword. In fact when his nominal father gives him a broadsword at the dubbing, he spurns it for his curved hand-crafted falchion. Critics have struggled with what to do with the falchion. Maldwyn Mills states that the falchion is "the outward and visible symbol of both his unbridled violence in his

Figure 1. Representation of the Crusades from the mappemundi, Borgia XVI. The Saracens, on the left, carry falchions while the Crusaders have broad swords.
unregenerate days, and his militancy in his later career.\footnote{Maldwyn Mills, "Sir Gowther," Six Middle English Romances, ed. Maldwyn Mills (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1973) 215.} To Mills, the sword is a significant symbol and talisman. Andrea Hopkins follows this approach by noting that the sword will redeem Gowther through knighthood.\footnote{Hopkins 159.} Only E. M. Bradstock acknowledges that the sword is of Oriental origin and a weapon that a Saracen would carry.\footnote{Bradstock states that the falchion is “an apt weapon for a ferocious persecutor of Christians. Further, like its Saracen creators who had ‘their dark origins in the race of Cain’ but were always reclaimable through baptism, and like Gowther himself who was born of a devil, this falchion has the potential for good or evil.” Bradstock 7, quotation found in Laskaya 300.}

Bradstock does not follow the metaphorical association any further. And yet, because the sword is an Arabic falchion and because he is so attached to it, I argue that the falchion provides an intrinsic key to Gowther’s racial identity. At the age of fifteen Gowther fashioned the weapon out of steel and iron. Because of his young age and lack of metallurgical skill, the creation of the sword means that the proclivity toward a falchion and the ability to use it by the young Gowther could only come from an innate and natural force. This kind of essentialism is a vital component of romances. Romances will frequently claim that persons are born with class

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Organa the Saracen from Catalan Map.}
\end{figure}
ideals and do not necessarily have to learn them. This usually includes strength, moral fortitude, or beauty, but it could also include natural class consciousness. For example, Florentyn in the romance *Octavian* naturally exchanges his oxen and gold for a falcon and a colt, even though at that point he appears to be the bastard son of a butcher. As shown in Chapter One, Havelok has a cross that shines light on his shoulder as a sign of his identity. In Gowther’s case, without instruction or perhaps even knowledge of the symbolic value of what he had created, he makes a weapon that was the very image that Christian Europe held of Islam and Muslims.  

Gowther’s actions for the first part of the text could thus be read as a mixture of popularly held beliefs regarding Saracens. Gowther’s representation participates in a field of knowledge that Christian Europe had about the East. His racial identity is carefully constructed out of pseudo-genetic origins and visual signifiers. The negative impulses are shown to be innate and uncontrollable urges. Gowther is essentially evil because he comes from a “strain” of beings that are themselves evil. The falchion is thus the outward and visible symbol of Gowther’s identity. Therefore, Gowther’s racial identity is constructed out of popularly held religious and secular stories, signs, and ideas about Saracens.

Up to this point, Gowther fits into the theory that figures race as being natural and traits of the individual and his community being innate as well. Those traits are in the blood, so to speak. Part of the problem of deciphering race relations in a medieval sense

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47 See Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 is a representation of the Crusades. The Saracens on the left carry falchions into battle while the Europeans carry broad swords. Figure 2 is a representation of a Saracen. True to the racial idea, Organa the Saracen has a big curved sword.
is that these biological markers are taken as the sole determiners of how race is understood. But as noted, Gowther's racial identity is constructed out of various narratives. Among these narratives is an invented origin for Saracens that defines their Otherness to the Christian community. There are also various symbols and images that outwardly signify racial difference. Thus, natural racial traits, which are supposedly biological and innate, are constructed out of narratives, visual signs, and historical and cultural contact. In a sense, blood is invented and imagined.

In addition, Robert Bartlett notes that "other criteria--custom, language, and law--emerge as the primary badges of ethnicity. In contrast to descent, they share a common characteristic: all three are malleable. They can, indeed, with varying degrees of effect, be transformed not only from one generation to the next, but even within an individual lifetime. New languages can be mastered, new legal regimes adopted, new customs learned."

In order to understand medieval race relations, then, it is necessary to acknowledge the symbolic meanings of the biological markers but, more importantly, to analyze how those markers are continually being imagined and invented. It is this

48 This is especially evident in those modern academic fields where language plays an integral part in the analytical process. Bartlett notes that "the language of race--gens, natio, 'blood,' 'stock,' etc--is biological, its medieval reality was almost entirely cultural." See Robert Bartlett, The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change 950-1350 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 197.

49 Adrian Hastings notes that the "recognition of ancestry pretends, 'imagines' if you like, a genetic origin which may not be biologically correct. It remains socially correct, however, and even morally necessary [to the community in question] to define the social mythically in terms of genetics." See Hastings 172.

50 Bartlett 197.
practical side of race relations, then, that needs to be analyzed in *Sir Gowther*. While most crusade romances represent racial difference by marking the body either black or white, the *Gowther*-poet does not follow this idea of racial difference. Instead, the poet concentrates on inward racial signifiers that are displayed visually and outwardly by the falchion and the colored armor. Thus, the hero's descent and his biological categories in the first part of the narrative foreground the transformational process of cultural conversion in the second half. In doing so, the text examines the ways in which individuals are brought into the community.

Culture and Conversion

Beginning his life of repentance, Gowther goes to the court of the Emperor of Germany where, in the public space of the dining hall, he will eat only food brought to him by dogs. Shortly thereafter, the Sultan demands as a marriage partner the Emperor's daughter, who was mute. The Emperor refuses by stating “And y wyll not, be Cryst wonde, / Gyffe hor to no hethon hownde” (388-9). It is interesting that the same word “hownde” is used in a span of less than a hundred lines to refer to two very different things: Gowther being fed by hounds and the Emperor thinking of the Saracens as hounds. This drawing together of a literal event and a metaphorical employment of the same concept forces the comparison between Gowther's identity and the Saracens even closer. In a sense, Gowther's life has been fueled by his currish impulses. The convergence of the figural animal impulses and the literal eating from dogs highlights the depravity of Gowther's previous life and provides the dynamics for his transformation. The fact that Gowther has to humiliate himself by eating from actual dogs is part of the
process of conversion. It publicly demonstrates Gowther's private connection to the Saracens. The Christian mechanisms of repentance, absolution, and contrition are here working analogically to help along Gowther's cultural conversion.

The Sultan attacks on three consecutive days. On the first day, Gowther prays for help and is given black armor and a steed of solid black. He joins the fracas but is unrecognized by all except the Emperor's daughter. On the second day, Gowther prays and is given red armor and a red horse. On both days, he wins the field and repels the invaders. It should be noted that he uses his falchion, that supposedly he has carried with him all this time, in the three battles. In fact, the narrative paints several images of Gowther's flashing sword cutting off heads and striking torsos. On the third day, Gowther receives white armor and a white horse. Again, he routs the Saracens. Near the end of the battle, however, a Saracen spears Gowther through the shoulder. Seeing this, the Emperor's daughter swoons and falls from the tower supposedly to her death. Miraculously she revives a couple of days later and is then able to speak. She tells the court that their savior is none other than Gowther. The Pope, seeing this as a sign from heaven, absolves Gowther. In the conclusion, Gowther marries the Emperor's daughter and later rules Germany.

Through these events at the end of the narrative Gowther is brought into the community. He is part of the Christian community in that he has recognized his sins, repented, and has been absolved. The fact that he was given armor by God in order to fight the enemies of Christianity is taken as a sign from heaven that Gowther has performed his good works. We also notice that Gowther's penance has been predominantly visual and public. From the first time he confessed to the Pope, to his
eating from the dogs, and finally to the fight against the Saracens in the end, Gowther casts away his sins in the public stage.

But he is also now a part of the knightly cultural—indeed Western European—community. Moreover, Gowther performs his regeneracy on the public stage of the aristocracy—the tournament field. He subscribes to the customs and systematized rituals of his class. Likewise, in Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale* when Theseus happens to come across Arcite and Palamon fighting in the orchard, he demands they stop the fight and move it to its proper staging area: the regulated public tournament. By taking part in the tournament, Gowther enacts his class’s desire for spectacle. His fulfillment of his chivalric and religious roles is complete.

Heathen Hounds

Gowther’s conversion also is apparent in the cultural sphere of race relations. In returning to the question of why Gowther is publicly humiliated by having to eat with the dogs and more importantly why the poet portrays the Saracens and Gowther as dogs, we must analyze the web of cultural assumptions on which this knowledge is based. Most critics have argued that Gowther’s humiliation is part of the penitential task.

Marchalonis notes that the three colors of Gowther’s armor are symbolic of introduction into knighthood: “In the actual ceremony of knighthood, the novice, after a purifying bath, was dressed in white garment, scarlet doublet and robe, and black shoes. The black shoes denote the earth ‘from which he came and to which he must return.’ They are, therefore, a sign of humility before God and a negation of pride. The red doublet and robe stand for nobility and for blood—specifically, the blood that the knight must be willing to shed for the Church. The white garments are signs of his freedom from sin.” Marchalonis 23.

For the best source on the penitential task of eating with dogs, see Marchalonis 28-9. She argues that the humiliation is part of specific folk motif: “Penance: Eating food
My own analysis is to situate the penitential task and the representations of Saracens and Gowther within the cultural beliefs of the Middle Ages. In this I wish to associate the Saracen and Gowther representations with the monstrous race of the Cynocephali, the dog-headed people. As stated before, medieval romances portrayed the Saracens rushing into battle "making weird noises comparable to the barking of dogs." In addition, English medieval writers often used the tag line "heathen hounds" to refer to the Saracens. The Gowther-poet's use of the phrase would appear to be a kind of alliterative shorthand. However, in the crusade literature of the period, "heathen hound" accurately draws the symbolic connotations. In the King of Tars the princess marries the Sultan in order to save her father's kingdom. Similar to Sir Gowther, when the Sultan of Damascus sends an envoy to ask for the princess's hand in marriage, he is rebuked by the "heathen hound" phrase. According to the ambassador, "he king of Tars / Of wicked wordes is nouzt scars; / Heþeh hounde he gan þe calle" (91-3). Evidently, the Saracens are aware of the implied meaning of the words. Also, in a short battle before the princess acquiesces, the narrator describes the action as thus: "þer hewe houndes on Cristen men / & feld hem doun bi nizen & ten. / So wilde þai were & wode" (169-71). In this scene, the wild and crazed Saracen hounds defeat the human Christians. Lastly, in one of the offered to dogs" (Q523.3 in the Stith Thompson folk motif index). Also in an interesting psychoanalytic perspective on the task of eating with dogs, Jeffrey Cohen argues that the task is part of the process of interpellating Gowther in the Names of the Father. See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Inhuman C. 1400," Becoming Male in the Middle Ages, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997) 227-35.

53 Jones 205.

54 The King of Tars, ed. Judith Perryman (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980).
more arresting moments of the narrative, the princess, on her marriage bed, dreams:

An hundred houndes blake, & bark on hir, lasse & more. 
& on þer was þat wald hir take; & she no durst him nouzt smite
For drede þat he wald hir bite, 
Swiche maistri he gan to make. 
& as sche wald fram hem fle, 
Sche seye þer stond devele þre, 
& ich brent as a drake...
& afterward þer com an hounde
Wip browes brod and hore;
Almost he hadde hir drawen adoun,
Ac þurth Jhesus Cristes passioun
Sche was ysaved þore. (423-44)

The princess’s dream is a representation of her predicament. The hundred hounds are the Sultan’s people, and the single hound is her husband. The constant barking paralyze her with terror, and the princess fears that hounds will bite her. In the passage, all the racial signifiers are present. We note how the Saracen language is compared to barking, and they threaten her snapping at her. Visually, the Saracens are portrayed as black and hairy. The passage illustrates that the phrase, heathen hound, was used to racially represent the Saracens.

This, however, still leaves open the question of why dogs were chosen. Reasons for the use of dogs can be found in exegetical writings. In Psalm 21:17 David cries out that “dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hand and my feet.” Following in the lead of Cassiodorus, Hugh of St. Cher explained that the dogs were the Jews who rejected the doctrine of Christ and barked against him. The idea was readily transplanted to encompass any heretics who

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55 Friedman 61.
knowingly reject the Christian doctrine. As an illustration from the German printed
edition of *Mandeville's Travels* makes clear [Figure 3], heretics were represented as a
race of dogs.\(^{56}\)

Perhaps as a result of more
than three centuries of crusades, the
connection between the race of dogs
and the Saracens became a widespread
belief. As John Block Friedman
points out, "the epithet 'dog' was used
of the Moslems literally as well as
figuratively. [Moreover] there was a
fairly widespread connection of
Saracens and Cynocephali in the Middle
Ages, in both East and West, as the
Moslems were often described by Christians as a race of dogs."\(^{57}\) One reason for these
associations was the Christian belief that Mohamet was a disgruntled Christian heretic, a
Roman cardinal who was not elected pope and later denied the divinity of Christ. As
followers of Mohamet, the Saracens themselves denied the logic of the Word and thus
lost their humanity.\(^{58}\)

\(^{56}\) Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel

\(^{57}\) Friedman 67.

\(^{58}\) Friedman 67-8.
The Cynocephali also fulfill other needs for Christian writers. As one of the monstrous races, the Cynocephali had a long history and thus an established reputation and a familiarity in medieval treatments of missionary activity. A Cynocephalus, for example, appears in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. In this story, the apostles Andrew and Bartholomew, having been sent on a proselytizing mission to the Parthians, encounter a giant man with a head of a dog. As the apostles look on, an angel sweeps down from heaven, shows the monster the differences between heaven and hell, and then promises to save him if he accepts the word of Christ. Unable to speak, the monster demurs. The angel blesses him and the Cynocephalus loses his brute nature and the monstrosity that had characterized him before. The Cynocephalus helps Andrew and Bartholomew in their mission, and the two Apostles gain fame and honor for converting such a creature into a Christian. In a quite similar story, Cynocephali assist Saint Mercurius in his battles against the pagans, where on command the Cynocephali regain their savage natures. Gowther also seemed to regain his savage nature in his battles with the Saracens. Although not fully converted, Sir Gowther does have missionary characteristics in that he represents how helpful a convert can be in the conversion or battles with the Saracens. As Friedman notes, “once Christianized, a Cynocephalus was extremely useful to the missionaries. His conversion through divine intervention showed the surpassing power of the Word in a propagandistic context. In addition, the Dog-Head became the willing helper or servant of the missionary figure, aiding him to make further

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59 The material and story are found in Friedman 69-71.

60 Friedman 71-2.
conversions among the pagans, or serving his master in military forays.\textsuperscript{61}

Finally in a story better known to medieval English and Irish audiences, Saint Christopher was thought to be a Cynocephalus.\textsuperscript{62} Both the \textit{Libar Breac} and the nearly contemporary \textit{Old English Martyrology} offer passages stating that “Christopher was one of the Dog-heads, a race that had the heads of dogs and ate human flesh.”\textsuperscript{63} Interestingly, upon conversion Christopher changes from black to white. In a tenth-century version of Christopher’s life Walter of Speyer states that after baptism Christopher’s dog head “shone whiter than milk.”\textsuperscript{64} This adds to our reading of \textit{Sir Gowther}. First, the fact that a member of the monstrous race could achieve sainthood is made available because of the extraordinary precedent set by Saint Christopher. The \textit{Gowther}-poet translates the idea from popular hagiography into one with important historical relativity. While the earlier beliefs of Saint Christopher were representing his pagan-ness by depicting him as a Dog-Head, the \textit{Gowther}-poet takes popular representations of the Cynocephali into account.

To the poet, the Cynocephali are somewhere in the East beyond the borders of

\textsuperscript{61} Friedman 69.

\textsuperscript{62} According to Friedman the story of the Cynocephalus Christopher survives in two unequivocal representations, both found in the British Isles: “In the \textit{Libar Breac} a gloss reads ‘Christopher, that is conchend’ or dog-headed. The parish Conchan on the Isle of Man may take its name from an early interest in a dog-headed Christopher, if we can judge from the number of cross slabs to be found in the parish bearing his image. One, which is possibly a lintel for an old church shows a pair of Dog-Heads on the sides of the cross shaft. The church of St. Keverne in Cornwall, not very far from the Conchan monuments, depicts in a now practically destroyed wall painting a number of scenes from Christopher’s life, surrounding the larger representation of the saint himself. In one register is an animal-headed figure with the extended snout characteristic of the dog-headed figures” (73-4).

\textsuperscript{63} Friedman 73.

\textsuperscript{64} Friedman 73.
Christianity. More importantly, according to popular representations the new Cynocephali were the Saracens. The not-so-veiled advice then is one of missionary zeal. The apocryphal story of Andrew and Bartholomew illustrates that the Cynocephali are receptive to the Word of Christ. Moreover, one of the popular saints of Christianity was himself at one point a Cynocephali. The second half of Sir Gowther can thus be read as a representation of the conversion process for the Cynocephali.

A second way that the Cynocephali add new readings to Sir Gowther is the change that they undergo once they have been baptized. Their overtly visual monstrosity which is caused by their disbelief in the Word is replaced directly after being baptized. This symbolically illustrates their acceptance into the Christian community. Importantly, though, the physical change usually is associated with some kind of color change. For most medieval writers, color polarities were a way of depicting morality or immorality, whiteness usually meaning salvation and blackness immorality. As noted above, this theme finds its way into popular crusade romances. In the King of Tars the child born undergoes a metamorphosis and changes into a beautiful boy. Likewise, the Sultan, upon accepting the Christian faith, changes from black to white in the baptismal waters. The blackness and the monstrous appearance denote Otherness to the community. Once the person is accepted into the community, racial difference seems to disappear.

The color symbolism in Sir Gowther, on the other hand, seems to be more complex in its conclusions about conversion. Gowther's parents go through the usual antidotes to right their son: baptism and knighting. Gowther should lose his inner

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65 Friedman 65.

66 Metlitzki 137.
blackness at either the baptism or the knighting. However, it is not until he has gone through his public penitential humiliation of eating with dogs that he is allowed to begin the color change. My hypothesis is that the concept of conversion represented in Sir Gowther accentuates the process of change. The change in color is metaphorically the same as in the apocryphal gospels, the life of Saint Christopher, and the King of Tars romances; however, the importance is shifted to illustrate a more complicated version of cultural conversion. By fighting in black armor on the first day of the tournament, Gowther shows his relationship with the Saracens, on a religious and cultural level. Fighting in red armor on the second day relates to an important religious idea, the blood of Christ baptizing the new convert. The white armor is the last because it represents the final stage of conversion. Gowther is now part of the moral community; he has been cleansed. The wound he receives on the last day proves that he belongs, that he is willing to make a blood sacrifice. The shedding symbolically shows that all Christians are in effect held together by the blood of Christ.

Race and Community

The Gowther-poet, following tradition, carefully demonstrates the political and religious necessity of the Crusades. In the crusading strategies of the fourteenth century, however, a great deal of attention is paid to issues surrounding race and cultural conversion. The pretext for war is that the Sultan had demanded to marry the Emperor's daughter, and the Emperor had refused to give his daughter to a heathen hound. In a sense, the battles take place not because of a religious war but because the Emperor did not want his daughter to marry into a different racial community. Questions that arise
from “unusual” unions trouble the text throughout. The narrative begins with a child being produced between a devil and a woman and almost ends with a marriage between a Saracen and a Christian. The first union produced a terror to the community. Because this first union had much in common with Saracen and Christian marriages found in popular fiction, it would seem probable that a union in the second part of the text would result in the same kind of devil-like progeny. The Gowther-poet, however, while he plays with the idea for a prolonged time, squashes the possible marriage between the Sultan and the Emperor’s daughter. Importantly Gowther plays the lead role in combating the Sultan’s forces, and thus foiling the dangerous marriage. Clearly this is not the Gowther of the first part of the narrative; instead, this is a person who has been accepted because he adheres to the laws, customs, and religion of his new community.

In addition, Gowther succeeds by keeping and quite adeptly using his falchion. The outward and visible symbol of Saracen identity is the primary instrument that he uses to reject his previous identity and be allowed in the community. Gowther does not totally lose his prior identity, but he turns to new allegiances. The text shows that although Gowther is now a complex combination of Christian and Saracen elements, he is firmly identified with a single cultural community, a Christian one. This important theme demonstrates that race in the medieval mind was imagined as composed of various malleable and fluid signifiers. Gowther marries the Emperor’s daughter because his racial identity is less determined by biological criteria and defined more according to custom, law, and religion.

*Sir Gowther* illustrates the ways in which racial boundaries were constructed out of narratives, symbols, and cultural contact. In *Sir Gowther* the community portrayed is
firmly defined and distinct, and, although permeable borders are created, it is stable. The boundaries of the community are circumscribed and defined. The story is not directly about Christian and Saracen relations, but about the importance of the boundaries between the two. More importantly, the romance demonstrates that these boundaries were malleable, fluid, and continually redrawn. Gowther, in crossing these racial boundaries, shows that medieval people were searching for accommodations to the meanings and perplexities of intercultural life.
CHAPTER 3

ST. GEORGE AT THE BATTLE OF AGINCOURT

On September 16, 1810 in Mexico, the parish priest of Dolores gave a short but dramatic speech in the marketplace of Dolores. The speech was supposed to propose ways to protect the kingdom from the French; however, most historians agree that Miguel Hidalgo was already convinced that national independence would be his ultimate goal.\(^1\) Originally planned for October 2nd in Querétaro, the speech had to be moved up when the rebels were denounced to the governmental forces. Once the speech was given, Hidalgo, perhaps in a state of exuberance but clearly also with a strategy in mind, seized a banner depicting of the Virgen de Guadalupe and waved it. Hidalgo knew that in choosing a religious symbol, he would need "one symbolizing the widest possible corporate unity and continuity to be found in Mexico."\(^2\) In choosing to display the Virgen de Guadalupe, Hidalgo was "seizing a sign of wholeness and prophetic pan-

\(^1\) Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). The speech was veiled as a spirited attempt to protect the Spanish territory from French invasion. However, most historians believe that Hidalgo’s ultimate goal was the independence of Mexico from Spain.

\(^2\) Turner 106.
Mexicanness that his opponents could not really counter, something that gave ritual power to his empirical, rational messages.”

Victor Turner’s analysis of the relationship between religious symbols and social drama provides a reference point for beginning to discuss an analogous dramatic act almost four hundred years in the past (1415 and 1810): Henry V’s victory at Agincourt. The parallels are numerous, and it is important to single out some of the more important ones. Like the Grito at Dolores, the Battle of Agincourt is shrouded in legends and myths foundational to the nation. Second, although the two protagonists are distinct from each other, Turner’s comments about Hidalgo and the Grito at Dolores can be applied to Henry and Agincourt: the Grito was a “short social drama which he [Hidalgo] recognized as a people’s uprising, and he became not only the borrower and maker of myths and symbols but also a symbol himself.” Lastly, both events serve as vivid examples of national social dramas that bring together the cumulative experiences of whole peoples.

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3 Turner 152.

4 John Keegan states it best when he says, “Agincourt is one of the most instantly and vividly visualized of all epic passages in English history, and one of the most satisfactory to contemplate. It is a victory of the weak over the strong, of the common soldier over the mounted knight, of resolution over bombast, of the desperate, cornered and far from home, over the proprietorial and cocksure. Visually it is a pre-Raphaelite, perhaps better a Medici Gallery print battle—a composition of strong verticals and horizontals and a conflict of rich dark reds and Lincoln greens against fishscale greys and arctic blues. It is a school outing to the Old Vic, Shakespeare in fun, son-et-lumiere, blank verse, Laurence Olivier in armour battle; it is an episode to quicken the interest of any schoolboy ever bored by a history lesson, a set-piece demonstration of English moral superiority and a cherished ingredient of a fading national myth.” John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (London: Penguin Books, 1976) 78.

5 Turner 99.
This chapter explores the ways in which religious symbols encourage a complex interweaving of religious beliefs and communal affiliations. Religious symbols illustrate the sacredness of communal attachments. In particular, I use Victor Turner’s analysis of the Virgen de Guadalupe to demonstrate the importance of religious symbols in the creation of a national imaginary. This chapter shows the narrative and performative aspects of national identification in late medieval England.

Throughout the dissertation I argue that nationalism is a form that changes according to particular historical and cultural demands and desires and that it was clearly visible in the medieval period. This chapter is important for the study of modern and medieval forms of nationalism because I argue that religious and national imaginings are not mutually exclusive and, more important, that forms of nationalism as defined by modern critics are evident in late medieval England. This chapter uses the analytical and critical tools of modern critics of nationalism to examine its medieval forms. By unpacking the rhetorical nature of the nation and religion, this chapter explores the function of the legend of St. George in the building of a national identity.

This chapter will focus on the function of St. George at the battle of Agincourt. I begin by examining an early fifteenth-century poem that reports that St. George was seen hovering over the king during the Battle of Agincourt. In order to elucidate further the role of St. George in late medieval England, I examine the Georgian legends in chronicles of late medieval England, the romances and chronicles of the Crusades, and the

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collections of saints’ lives. I then explore the ways in which St. George plays an integral part in the lives of people, for example, through the social function of St. George’s guild. I also look at the performative aspects of St. George in late medieval dramas and festivals and in holy processions or ridings during St. George’s day. I, therefore, argue that St. George is the religious symbol chosen by Henry to cultivate a national imaginary: the image by which each member of the nation imagines their communion with the rest of the community. The importance of St. George is underscored, in dramatic form, in the Triumph held in London after the Battle of Agincourt, where the nation was performed. St. George’s participation in the English victory of Agincourt then places the historical narrative of the battle within the larger discourse of religious narratives. In a sense, the battle moves from political to divine discourse. England the nation as a result becomes the chosen nation led by saints towards the promised land.

*Agincourt Poem*

In a poem celebrating Henry’s victory at Agincourt, it is reported that the spirit of St. George was seen hovering over the king. Written shortly after the battle, the *Agincourt Poem* is a long narrative poem containing three passus: the preparations for war and the Siege of Harfleur, the Battle of Agincourt, and the Triumph at London. The

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7 The *Agincourt Poem* is an account of Henry’s expedition into France in 1415, the battle of Agincourt, and the Triumph. The poem survives in only one manuscript, *Harley 565*. A similar poem was published in the Appendix to Hearne’s edition of the pseudo-Elmham’s *Vita et Gesta Henrici Quinti*. That poem was lost in the fire of 1731. The *Agincourt Poem* has only been printed in the Illustrations of Nicolas and Tyrrell’s *Chronicle of London*. Most critics agree that the poem was written shortly after the battle from eyewitness accounts and reports. See Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913) 238-40.
central theme of the poem is to thank God for the victory at Agincourt. Indeed, the poem is permeated by a strong religious component in which the poet prays that God will continue to aid the king and the English people. This amalgamation of religiosity and patriotism, I argue, is typical of some of the forms of nationalism present in late medieval England.

The first passus begins with an introductory prayer:

God that all this world make
And dyed for us on a tre,
Save Ingelond for Mary sake,
Sothfast God in Trynite;
And kepe oure kyng that is so free,
That is gracious and good with all,
And graunt hym evermore the gree,
Curteys Crist oure kynge ryall.

The invocation to God to save the people in the audience is a standard narrative introduction to a story. For example, *Sir Gowther* begins by asking God to “Shilde us from the fowle fende” (4). Certainly, the poet of *Sir Gowther* asks God to protect all people, and especially those in the audience, from the work of the devil. In contrast, the *Agincourt Poem* changes the dynamics of the introductory prayer from the theological to the political. God made “all” the world and died on the tree for all the people. So at this point the “us” in the line two seems to correspond to all people. However, by the time we get to line three, the “us” changes. The impetus of the prayer is to ask God to “save Ingelond.” Therefore, the “us” must necessarily be the people of England. We also note that the prayer moves from the cosmological (God made the world) to the Christian (dying on the cross) to the national (the English nation). This complements the argument of the prayer: within the larger Christian world is the English nation that requires saving.
But to save the English nation means to save it as a political and cultural entity. The point is made evident in the last four lines of the stanza. The second part of the prayer asks God to keep “oure kyng” free. Again, the “oure” and the “us” in the first stanza underscore the appeals to the English people. In addition, the individuality of the king is subsumed; the king is possessed by the nation. This metonymic relationship between king and country continues throughout the poem. For the English nation to be saved, the king must remain free and “gracious and good to all.” God must therefore grant to Henry the degree “To feel thin enemys both nyght and day.” In this case, the enemies are the French. The stanza deftly ends with a parallelism between Christ the King of Heaven and Henry the King of England. Thus, the first stanza foreshadows the fact that England the nation will be saved by divine grace.

Continuing many of the same issues presented in the first stanza, the rest of the passus is about personal affront and revenge, about youth and coming of age. In the opening scenes, Henry’s military prowess and kingly responsibility is questioned by the Dauphin, who contemptuously sends him a box of tennis balls. The Dauphin states, “Me thinke youre kyng is nought old, / No werrys for to maynteyn; / Grete well youre kyng, he seyde, so yonge / That is bothe gentill and small; / A tonne o f tenys ballys I shall hym sende, / For to pleye hym with all.” A legend in itself, the box of tennis balls is supposed to show that the young king is too immature and irresponsible to make war. The king’s character and youthful exuberance had been a point of discussion at the beginning of his

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8 In Stanza 11, the mayor of London prays that God will “graunt the evermore the degree, / To felle thin enemys bothe nyght and day.”

Several questions plagued Henry: his handling of kingly duties while his father was still alive, problems of succession brought on by his father that were political in nature, his friendship with Oldcastle in Wales, and his proclivity for wine and women in his youth. Clearly the poet was aware of these unpromising signs, for the aim in the first part of the poem is to demonstrate Henry’s coming of age as a king and leader. In an evocative passage after the Dauphin had sent the tennis balls, the young king “ordeyned with all his myght, / For to amende that is amys, / And that is all for Engelond ryght, / To geten agen that sholde ben his; / That is, al Normandie forsothe y wys, / Be right of eritage he sholde it have.” Certainly, the chivalric pretense for war illustrates that Henry understands his role as king. He must amend in battle the personal affront. The passage also, however, quickly moves from the theme of personal challenge to a discussion of feudal rights and responsibilities. The lands of Normandy belong to Henry by heritage and feudal law. The invasion of France is therefore represented not as conquest but as the legal right of the English king to claim the lands and taxes that belong to him by

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10 The Brut notes that “before he was Kyng, what tyme he regnyd Prince of Walyes, he fylle & intendyd gretly to ryot, and drew to wylde company; & dyvers lentylmen an lentylwomen folwyd his wylle & his desire at his commaundment” (594). See The Brut, or Chronicles of England, Part II, ed. Friedrich W. D. Brie (London: Early English Text Society, 1908).


heritage. But the stanza also illustrates that England itself is being figured, that its own military prowess and ability to redress insults is the subtext in the narrative. Henry must amend what is amiss for England. His right is also the right of England.

The passus proceeds to tell about the councils held to determine the course of action and about the preparations that were made. The poem narrates:

And fro thens to Suhthampton, unto that strond,
For sothe he wold no longer there dwell:
 XV hundryd shippys redy there he fond,
With riche sayles and heye topcastell.
 Lordys of this lond, our kyng gan there sell,
For a million of gold as y herd say,
 Therfore there truayle was quyte them full well,
For they wolde a mad a queynte aray.

This passage is important for the overt pride taken in the quantity and quality of the war ships. It could go without notice, due to the exaggerated sense of the passage, that the emphasis is on the spectacle of the procession. Christopher Hibbert notes that the visual presence of the scene would have been spectacular, “the Trinité Royale and the King’s other ships—the Katherine de la Toure, the Petite Trinité de la Toure and the Rude Coq de la Toure—and as far as the eye could stretch up the roadstead and east and west along the Solent were ships of every sort and size, their red waists decked with strange serpents, their bulwarks gaily painted and chequered and hung with the shields of knights and with

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13 The Brut states that Henry “hilde a counsel of alle þe lordez o f the Reme at Westmynstre; and þere he put ham þe demaunde, & prayed hem o f hir godenesse and of her gode counsel to shewe hym, as touchynge þe title & ryzt þat he hadde to Normandy, Gasquoyne & Guyenne, þe which þe King of Fraunce withilde hym wrongefully and unriztfully, þe whiche his auncestrez before hym hadde holde be trewe titill of conquest, & rizt heritage” (374).

14 After England’s great victories at Crecy (1346) and Poitier (1356), land and prestige was lost in the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth century.
red pavises as a defense against archery, their sails embroidered with swans and antelopes, snakes and birds and all the creatures of heraldry, their ensigns and standards edged with feathers that rustled in the wind. Indeed, the spectacle would have made a "quaint array."

The passus continues with Henry leaving England and invading France. Interestingly, on the way out of London, Henry "to seynt George he com in hye, / And there he offred that iche tyde, / And other lordys that weren him bye." Early that year and in preparation for the war, St. George’s Day had been made a double holiday. Great attention was therefore taken to ensure that St. George would aid the English cause. Also, in the provisions that Henry made before he left, he ordered that "every man of what estate, nacion, or condition that he be of, or partie, here a bande o f Seint George large, upon the perill that he wounded or deede in default thereof, he that hym woundeth or sleeth shal bere no peril ne Payne for his death." It would have been uncommon for medieval soldiers to wear uniforms; instead, soldiers may have worn the livery of their lord. However, the bands of St. George seem to be much more than simply uniforms. They suggest that the community of the realm is much more important than aristocratic, regional, or class differences. The bands also indicate that St. George was to play a profound role in the way that the army and the English imagined themselves as they went off to war. Religion and nationalism thus create community.

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16 Hibbert 170.

17 John Keegan states that "serving to strengthen it [the will to combat] was the endorsement of religion. The morality of killing is not something with which the professional soldier is usually thought to trouble himself, but the Christian knight,
On August 14, 1415, Henry landed in Normandy at the port town of Harfleur. Henry called forth the “Capteyn” of Harfleur and wittily informed him that he had brought “myne pleyers” to play ball with the French. When the “Capteyn” refused by swearing by St. Denys, Henry began lobbing cannon balls at the walls of Harfleur. The poet, evidently proud of his wry humor, shows that Henry was skilled in games of war. After a protracted siege in which the citizens of Harfleur waited in vain for the Dauphin to relieve them, the city was finally taken on September 22.

Upon taking Harfleur, Henry raised the banner of St. George, a white flag with a red cross, as a sign of English possession. Moreover, the king decided to colonize the town with English people. St. George’s banner unites the symbolism of nationality with the real embodiment of English people. The poem notes that Henry ordered:

Wyff no child lett non abyde,  
But have them ought bothe grete and small;  
And let stufte the toun overall,  
With Englysshmen thereinne to be.  
They left no Frenssh blod withinne the wall,  
But hadde all oute the comunalte.

whether we mean by that the ideal type as seen by the chroniclers or some at least of the historical figures of whom we have knowledge, was nevertheless exercised by it. What constituted unlawful killing in time of war was well-defined, and carried penalties under civil, military and religious law. Lawful killing, on the other hand, was an act which religious precept specifically endorsed, within the circumscription of the just war; and however dimly or marginally religious doctrine impinged on the consciousness of the simple soldier or more unthinking knight, the religious preparations which all in the English army underwent before Agincourt must be counted among the most important factors affecting its mood.” See Keegan 114-5.

18 The Gesta Henrici Quinti states “immediately after the keys had been handed over and surrendered, and when standards of St. George and royal standards had been set up over the gates of the town, and others, those of the enemy, taken down, the king delivered the keys to his illustrious uncle, the lord Thomas Beaufort, the earl of Dorset, and appointed him warden and captain of the town” (55). See Gesta Henrici Quinti, ed. and trans. Frank Taylor and John S. Roskell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
Four hundred women and children men myght se,  
Whanne they wenten out sore gon they wepe.

Casting out the citizens of Harfleur is troubling. If Henry's justification for the invasion of France was founded on feudal and hereditary laws, the citizens of Harfleur should have been considered under Henry's protection. The citizens of Harfleur should be, in a feudal sense, Henry's vassals. However, in a changing world where national affiliation is the prominent form of identification, then those outside the national community can be, and are, subject to merciless acts. The bands of St. George mentioned earlier allowed English soldiers to kill the enemy without fear of peril or pain. In this case, military dominion allows for plunder. Hence, ancient feudal laws seem to have little to do with this invasion.

What is important about this case is that the main signifier of difference is nationality. The citizens of Harfleur swear by St. Denis, the patron saint of France. On the march to Agincourt, peasants hung out of their windows cloths and flags colored red like the Oriflamme, the sacred red silk banner that was the symbol of nationalism in

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20 Spiegel notes that the flag is described in legend, history, and poetry as a gift from Pope Leo to Charlemagne, in recognition as Holy Roman Emperor. The *Chanson de Roland* describes it as an 'orie flambe' and gives 'Munnoije' as its preferred name. Throughout Carolingian times, until at least the end of the eleventh century, the banner retained something of the religious overtones of its origin, while taking on more and more of a national character" (153).
France.\textsuperscript{21} The subject of racial and ethnic identification becomes important in this context. The culture of the French is represented through their belief in St. Denis, just as English identity can be represented in St. George. The poem adds that no one of French blood was allowed within the walls of Harfleur. The two main methods of national identification are thus prominently displayed: culture and blood. The French because of the belief system (St. Denis) and their ancestry (blood) cannot be trusted to stay in Harfleur. Instead, the king commanded that English citizens should be transported to Harfleur. The Brut adds that “\textit{pan þe King sent yn to Engelonde, þat what crafti man wolde come þidir, \& ynhabit hym þere ynn þe toune, he scholde have hous and housholde to hym \& to his heyrez for evyrmore. And þidir went mony dyvers Marchauntez \& Crafti men, \& inhabited ham þere, to streyth þe toun, \& weryn welcome.”\textsuperscript{22} Nationalism is about blood and belonging. The merchants and craftsmen are not feudal vassals of Henry; they are English citizens.

The second passus, which contains the narrative of the Battle of Agincourt, regales readers with the virtue of the cause and the overwhelming odds facing the English army. The night before the combat, the French drank and boasted of the upcoming battle. The Brut notes that “\textit{þe Frenshmen, al þe nyghte before or þat the bataile was, mad muche revell, and cryeng and shoutyng, al þe nyghte, and plaiet Englishhemen at þe dyce, every archer for a blank.”\textsuperscript{23} They were extremely confident that they were going to win,

\textsuperscript{21} Hibbert 71 and 93.

\textsuperscript{22} Brut 377.

\textsuperscript{23} Brut 555.
so much that they were dividing up the prisoners and ransom money before the battle. The Duke of Brabant, in the Agincourt Poem, sarcastically adds that “Ther be so fewe of thise Inglyssmen / I have no deynte them to se; / Alas! He seyde, what nedith us alle / To day so many for to comen here / XX of us it will befalle / Of them on prisonere.” The French also boast of what they are going to do to the English once they win the battle. The overconfident Duke of Barrye states, “With wordes that were full mocchell of pryde, / Be God, he seyde, y wil not sparye, / Over the Englysshemen y thenk to ryde; / And if that they dar us abyde / We shall overthowre them all in fere, / Goo we and slee them in this tyde, / And come hom agen to oure dynere.” It is poignant to note that most of the French chroniclers blamed the soldiers’ excessive pride for the defeat.

Importantly, in their boasting the French all swear by St. Denis. The Duke of Bourbon “sware by seynt Denys, / And other lorde many on, / We will goo pleye them at dys.” Like the English, the French believed their patron saint would deliver them safely to a victory. 24 Earlier that year the Dauphin, in preparations for the English invasion, had “taken the Oriflamme...from its guardians in the Cathedral of St. Denis.”25 Yet, Keegan notes that “among the French there was a great deal of tiresome struggling,

24 The tradition of calling on St. Denis to protect the realm goes back to Merovingian times. Spiegel states, “It was in keeping with the general practice of this religious age...it was customary to turn to the saints in times of urgent necessity, of death, pestilence, and war. Under the Capetians, this general practice was, in the case of war, focused on a ritual assumption of the banner of St. Denis, accompanied by prayers for his support before the opening of military engagements” (152).

25 Hibbert 71. Taking the banner from the saint’s altar had become standard practice in times of war. Spiegel notes that “like any flag, the Oriflamme had the quality of a corporate image...[The banner] gave the monarchy a symbol of corporate unity hitherto lacking, but one which retained its distinctive association with the cult of St. Denis. As the special ensign of St. Denis, the Oriflamme represented his spiritual leadership” (153-4).
during the period of deployment, to get these banners into the leading ranks."\textsuperscript{26}

According to Henry’s medieval biographer, the “Frenchmen with all theire greate Lords and Captaines fixed there banners and standards with greate joy and mirth with the banner Royall, whereof the Countable [Boucicant] had the conduct and charge...And that night the Frenchmen made greate fyers, everie man under his banner.”\textsuperscript{27} While the English fight under the banner of St. George, the French stand under several banners. Thus individual merit is more important than community, as also illustrated in the gambling of money and prisoners. The French were more worried about what each was going to gain from the battle. While the French sense of nationalism is displayed by carrying the \textit{Oriflamme} and their oaths to St. Denis, the \textit{Poem} and chronicles suggest that knightly individuality was still the prominent form of identification in the French army.

In comparing the two forms of nationalism evident at the battle, the French still possess vestiges of aristocratic divisiveness, while the English imagine themselves in communion.

The \textit{Agincourt Poem} describes the English community. Henry tells his soldiers:

\begin{verbatim}
Go we anon to this journay,
Be the grace of God it is good tyme,
For alle the seyntes that lyn in shryne,
To God for us they be praieng;
The religious of Ingelond all benynge,
'Ora pro nobis' for us they syng

The kyng knelyd doun in that stounde,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{26} Keegan 88.

\textsuperscript{27} The \textit{Life of Henry the Fifth} is a sixteenth-century translation of Tito Livio’s mid-fifteenth-century \textit{Vita Henrici}, which was originally commissioned by the Humphrey of Gloucester. See \textit{Life of Henry the Fifth}, ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911) 52.
And Englysshmen on every syde,
And thries there kyssyd the grounde,
And on there feet gon glyde:
Crist, seyde the kyng, as y am thi knyght,
This day me save for Ingelond sake.

At stake in the English prayer is the English nation. Unlike the French who pray for personal accomplishments or rewards, the sake of England the nation is the ultimate goal of Henry and the English army. The passage demonstrates the joint effort of the battle. As the army prays together and kneels with the king, the religious in England are singing and praying for victory. Furthermore, the patron saints of England are in heaven praying for the English cause. Symbolically, there are simultaneous prayers going on in heaven, in England, and at the battlefield. The whole nation, including divine members, comes together.

At Agincourt conservative estimates state that Henry had 5,000 or 6,000 archers and about 1000 men-at-arms and the French had about 25,000 men, with a very large proportion representing armored men-at-arms. About 1,000 brought horses, but the rest were to fight on foot. In addition the English army was suffering from exhaustion due to traveling and to the effects of dysentery. It is not surprising, then, to find that the French overestimated their own ability. The battle resolved itself into twelve main episodes: “a period of waiting; an English advance; an English arrow strike; a French cavalry charge; a French infantry advance; a mêlée between the French and English men-at-arms; an intervention in the mêlée by the English archers; the flight of the French survivors from the scene of the mêlée; a second period of waiting, during which the

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28 Keegan 87.
French third line threatened, and a small party delivered another charge; a French raid on the baggage park; a massacre of the French prisoners; finally, mutual departure from the battlefield.  

While the heroics of the English and the tactical stupidity of the French are the standard explanations posited for the outcome of the battle, the Agincourt Poem stresses a further reason: the influence of St. George in the victory. The poem reports that several French and English soldiers saw St. George over the battlefield hovering directly over Henry: “Seynte George all over oure kyng they se.” The aid of St. George in the English cause was seen as a divine sign adding legitimacy to the campaign and to the English nation.

The influence of St. George in the victory is corroborated by several chronicles, most notably the Brut, or the Chronicle of England, and by other lyrical poems of the period. The Brut notes that “And þat day þe Frenche men syhe Seint George in þe eyre over þe hoste of þe Englisshe men, fyghtyng ayenst þe Frenche men; and therfor they worship & holde of Seint George, in Engelond, more than in any oþer londe. And thus Almyhti god & Seint George brouht oure enemyes to grounde, & yaf us þe victory þat day.”

The significance of the legend of St. George to the English can be analyzed in various ways. The legend of St. George, as a patron of soldiers, armies, and particular knights, had a long and distinguished tradition that was well known in England. St. George had been the patron saint of England since the thirteenth century and because of

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29 Keegan 88.

30 Brut 596.
several factors the veneration of St. George was reaching its zenith in the early fifteenth century. The legend of St. George provided the English and their writers the ability to map themselves into a divine and prophetic narrative. By transforming the legend, the community was given legitimacy and their causes and goals a divine righteousness. Further, the legend of St. George made possible a totalizing image of the community that could be rallied around by each member of the nation. In the next sections of the chapter, I will elaborate further on each of these points.

St. George and the Dragon

The origins and spread of the legend of Saint George begin in the Late Classical period. St. George came early and stayed late in the history of Western Europe. By the time of the first Christian Roman emperor, Constantine, George already had a great following. Constantine had a profound influence in the spread of the veneration of St. George. For example, he built churches in honor of George at Diospolis and Constantinople. The church at Diospolis (Lydda) was later rebuilt by Richard I after the Third Crusade.

The earliest Greek texts describing the life of St. George relate that he was a Roman soldier living in the northern kingdom of Nubia in the third century. George, 

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32 Hulst 40.

33 The earliest Georgian legendary text was found in 1965 during the construction of the High Dam in Aswan. Before the actual construction an international team of archeologists was allowed to explore and excavate the surrounding areas. Among the manuscripts found was the *Acta of St. George*, written in Greek majuscule in Nubian
the son of a wealthy and noble family, was secretly baptized by his Christian mother because the state religion, and that of her husband, was pagan. All seemed to have gone well until George's father forced him to pay homage to pagan gods. George refused and quarreled bitterly with his father. That evening, George's father fell seriously ill. George promised his recovery if he accepted the God of the Christians. George's father was baptized but died shortly thereafter.

At a young age, perhaps because of the death of his father, George entered the imperial service and quickly rose through the ranks. He decided to go to the king's court in Diospolis in Lydda to apply for the rank of comes. Upon entering the court, the young George was horrified by the heathen temples and idols. Meanwhile the Emperor had issued a decree to the effect that anyone who worshipped Christ would be punished by death. At this point, George challenged the Emperor, and in an act common among early martyrlogies, George was put through several tortures. Miraculously, George survived the tortures, at one point being saved by the Archangel Michael. The passion and martyrdom of the saint led to mass conversions.

The legend of Saint George became an early favorite of the Western church. As early as 491 Clotilda, wife of Clovis, the first great Christian king of the Franks, dedicated to his honor a nunnery at Chelles, not far from Paris.\^34 Clovis himself founded

a cloister at Cambrai in the name of Saint George. By the sixth century Venantius Fortunatus, bishop of Poitiers, speaks of the praises of the church of St. George at Mayence, and Gregory of Tours talks about the relics of the saint and dedicates a church in his honor in Astoux in the diocese of Dax. In the middle of the sixth century Childebert, son of Clovis, placed a relic of St. George in a monastery he founded near Paris in honor of St. Vincent, one of St. George’s converts. Another relic of St. George was given to the church of this monastery by St. Germain, who had received the gift from Emperor Justinian on his return from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In the seventh and eighth century, other relics of the saint made their way to western Europe: Charlemagne presented a relic of an arm of St. George to the church of St. Dionysius and in 751 Pope Zacharias discovered the head of St. George and gave it to the church of San Giorgio in Velabro, where it was kept encased in silver.

In the British Isles, Saint George is first mentioned by Adamnan, bishop of Hy in Scotland in 679, who related a miracle of Saint George in his book, De Situ Terrae Sanctae, which he had heard from Arculf, the early traveler. Mentioned in Bede’s Lives

55 Matzke, “Contributions” 147.

56 Hulst 45.

57 Hulst 46. See also Capgrave’s Ye Solace of Pilgrimes. Capgrave notes that the head is placed in a tabernacle so that pilgrims may lift a certain part and kiss the skull of St. George. See John Capgrave, Ye Solace of Pilgrimes, ed. C. A. Mills (London: Oxford University Press, 1911) 88.

58 Matzke, “Contributions” 149. The story relates that “a certain man, who seems to have been a soldier, having come to Diospolis on horseback to join a perilous expedition, vowed his horse to the saint in the building associated with his memory, before the marble column bearing his image, if he would protect him and grant him safe return. When he came back, he wished to commute the offering for the payment of a sum of money. Thereupon the saint showed his deep displeasure by causing the animal to
of Saints, St. George had a place in an Anglo-Saxon ritual of Durham usually assigned to
the ninth century. In the reign of Canute, a monastery was dedicated to St. George at
Thatford.

The literary tradition of St. George seems also to have arrived quite early. As
mentioned above, the life of St. George was told by Adamnan as early as 679. In the Old
English Martyrology from the last half of the ninth century, April 23 is designated as the
liturgical day of celebration for St. George.39 In the eleventh century Ælfric gives a full
poetic account of the martyrdom and passion of St. George. Ælfric’s version, following
quite closely the Latin tradition of western Europe, tells that George, a rich Christian
noble, refused to acquiesce to the heathen beliefs of the emperor Datian. George was
brought before the Emperor and after a long discussion of why the Christian god was
better than Apollo, the long, detailed and glorified torture of George began. The
Martyrology version is quite short and does not list the various tortures. Instead, the
author includes the powers or miracles of the saint. The passage ends by telling that “se
wæs wiô his feondum gescilded betweoh micle frecennisse se þe to geþingunge sohte.”40
Apparently, George, even by this time, had acquired the special talent of helping people
in dire need. This short passage will become very important as the legend of St. George
is used in the Crusades and later battles.


39 The Martyrology states, “and he who sought it for the sake of intercession was
protected against his foes in the midst of great peril” (60-1).
For the late classical and early medieval periods, the legend of St. George consisted largely of the passion, the conversion of the non-believers to Christianity, and the miracles of George. The passion usually was a long drawn out affair with a variety of scenes in which the saint was cut up in pieces but recuperated, was forced to drink poison but did not die, was confessed to by idols, was boiled in a cauldron, was smashed by rocks or squeezed by pincers, was beaten by iron rods, was roasted on a crate, or was placed on a wheel made of razors. With the help of God, George quickly healed from the tortures. The long scene ends when the saint is decapitated and finally dies. However, several key witnesses, including the empress Alexandra, were converted by the devotion of George. The narrative ends with a long list of miracles from the tomb.

As venerated as the saint was in the late classical and early medieval periods, George was extraordinarily popular especially in the centuries following the Crusades. The Crusaders gave new impetus to the worship of St. George. They were, after all, constantly reminded of his presence in the churches of St. George in Constantinople, the passage to Asia over the Bosphorus, then called the Arm of St. George, and as they wound to Jerusalem, in the countless localized areas that were the home of the legends. It would have been natural for noble soldiers to place themselves in the protection of a warrior saint who had been a soldier, a nobleman, and a martyr.

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41 Frend posits that the cult of St. George, as described in the *Acta* of St. George, flourished in the Middle East during the Crusades. See Frend 55-6.

42 As reasons for the particular association with St. George by the Crusaders, Matzke points out that “it is not difficult to see why the crusaders should have given a new impetus to the worship of Saint George. Setting out to face the perils of war, as the crusaders were doing, it was natural for them to place themselves under the protection of those saints whose aid was accepted as a particular efficacy under such conditions, and to...
And by the time of the Crusades, a new and improved George legend now included the slaying of the dragon.\(^3\) In this romance-like version, which was popularized in England by Jacques de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, English translations of the *Legenda* such as the *Gilte Legende*, and Caxton’s later translation of it, and poetical works by John Lydgate, a lone knight pricking on the plain comes across a damsel in distress. The young noble soon finds out that the lady is a princess, chosen to be sacrificed to a dragon terrorizing her kingdom. When the dragon first appeared, it was appeased by lambs; but later, only young virgins could be used. After all the other young people of her kingdom had been sacrificed, the lot fell to the princess. Unafraid, George vows to fight this evil menace.

When the dragon appears, George, clad in full chivalric armor and riding a white horse, drives his lance into the monster’s mouth. With the dragon wounded, George ties the maiden’s girdle around the dragon’s neck and leads it back to town, where the dragon is officially slain. The king and all the people, at the sight of this miracle, convert to Christianity and are baptized.

Among the long list of miracles that St. George performed after his death, the most important is his help during times of crisis.\(^4\) Following a tradition from the two single out for that purpose the martyrs who had themselves been soldiers during their lives.” See Matzke, “Contributions” 150.

\(^3\) For a complete overview of the legend of St. George in Latin, English, Anglo-Saxon, German, and French sources, see Matzke’s essay “Contribution to the History of the Legend of St. George.”

\(^4\) A thirteenth-century French version of the passion of St. George notes the power of George as a protector in time of war: “C’est la vie et lai passion monsignour Saint Gorge, commant il fut martiriés. Et que cheseun hons d’armes lai doit porte sor lui bataille et en autres leus perillous.” Passage found in Matzke, “Contributions” 151.
Coptic encomiums on the Passion of St. George by Theodisius, bishop of Jerusalem, and Theodotus, bishop of Ancyra, both written in the fifth century, it was believed that St. George came to the aid of those in need. This legend told that when Constantine began his struggle for the throne, his rival used wizardry against him. Constantine prayed to George and the saint came down from heaven, overturned the throne, and presented it to Constantine.

This tradition would become the figural basis for later interpreters. At the Siege of Antioch in 1098 during the First Crusade, St. George appeared in person and assisted the Crusaders. William of Malmesbury states that “they [the Crusaders] were convinced they saw those ancient martyrs who had been knights in their own day, and who by their deaths had purchased the crown of life, St. George and St. Demetrius, with flying banners come charging from the hill-country, showering missiles on the enemy, and aid upon themselves.”

The warrior saint also aided in the siege of Jerusalem. During the attack on the city, St. George appeared to them dressed in white armor with a red cross. Under his leadership, the Crusaders scaled the walls and drove out the Saracens. These legends

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46 The *Conquête de Jérusalem* describes the appearance of St. George at the head of an army of 30,000 men on white horse. “Li vesques de Maltran a sorestre gardé, / Et voit une compaigne que chevalchent serré, / Et voit bien qu’il estoient plu de C mil armé; / Plus sont blanc que la flors, quant ele naist el pré. / Sains Jorges fu devant, qui l’ensaigne a porté, / Et li ber Sains Morisses, le gonfanon fremé.” See Matzke, “Contributions” 154.
appear in several chronicles and romances of the period, including the *Gilte Legende* and the *Legende Aurea*, and John Capgrave's *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes.*

By the Third Crusade, the prestige of the saint was greater than ever. It is during the Third Crusade that the English accepted George as their special guardian. While the French were accustomed to charge to the cry of “Montjoie St. Denis,” several descriptions of the battles, in *Estoire de la Guerre Sainte* written by Ambroise in 1196 and *Roman de l’Escouffle* written by a Norman jongleur around 1204, state that the English charged to the cry of St. George. Richard I, the English captain in the Third Crusade, had a particular attachment to St. George. During his stay in Diopolis (Lydda), he rebuilt the church originally constructed by Constantine. St. George had encouraged and helped Richard in his famous attack on Acre. Also, a version appearing in the metrical romance, *Richard Coer de Lion*, states that in a battle after the capture of Acre, St. George aided the English army. The romance narrates:

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Kyng Richard was almoost ateynt,
And in the smoke nygh adreynt.
On his knees he gan doun falle;
Help! to Jesu he gan calle,
For love of his modyr Mary;
And as I fynde in hys story,
He seygh come St. George, the knyght,
Upon a stede good and lyght,
In armes whyte as the flour,
With a croys off red colour.
Alle that he mette in that stounde,
Hors and man, wente to grounde; (4847-58)
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47 Matzke adds that the “manner in which the appearance of Saint George and his companions is related in the story of the capture of Antioch and Jerusalem became the model for a few similar scenes in Old French literature.” See Matzke, “Contributions” 156. See also Capgrave 89.
While the early Church saw George as a heroic figure fighting against the pagan state, later interpreters of the Georgian legends turned their attention to George’s saintly talent to assist against a foreign enemy. Following a tradition that George helped in times of need, as he did for the Princess against the dragon, writers of the Crusades enlisted George in the fight against the Muslims. This figurai interpretation of the Georgian legendary, I argue, is the basis for St. George’s appearance at Agincourt.

The Nation Identified

St. George was officially named the patron saint of England because of Richard I’s special attachment to him, in 1222 at Oxford. In the next centuries, the cult of St. George spread rapidly throughout England. The popularity of the *Legenda Aurea* and translations of the *Legenda* promoted an extraordinary growth in the literary field.

In the social field, the foundation of the Order of the Garter in the mid-fourteenth century by Edward III institutionalized the importance of the saint for kingly and national power. The Order stressed the importance of community and thus loyalty for

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49 For a modern critical approach to the function of the Royal Order of the Garter in the formation of English nationalism, see Bengston “Saint George and the Formation of English Nationalism.” Bengtson’s analysis is largely concerned with the influence of George as a model of aristocratic and monarchical values. Certainly, by examining the Order of the Garter, Bengtson circumscribes his idea of the nation along aristocratic lines. It is also noteworthy to mention that England was not the only community to have aristocratic orders devoted to St. George. Before the institution of the Order of the Garter, in 1201, the King of Aragon created the Spanish Equestrian Order of St. George. In 1317 this order was united with the Order of Our Lady and St. George in Valencia. In
promoting the English cause. St. George, the patron saint of the Order, represented "a
particular 'Englishness' which gave the Crown the potential to go beyond the traditional
associations of regal power and claim a much wider appeal."  The royal cult of St.
George envisaged much more than chivalric ideals; the Order linked the popular appeal
of George with kingly power. For the Order, the close identification with the patron saint
secured its place in the social hierarchy while at the same time expressing its own ideas
of kingship and the nation. The chivalric George provided late medieval kings with a
religious symbol that was both popular in mass appeal and yet reproduced the aristocratic
pathos of war and conquest.

Because of St. George's extraordinary popularity throughout Europe, the
emphasis of this section is on the importance of St. George to the total community. The
Royal Order of the Garter appears to be weighted toward an aristocratic notion of society.
Yet, it would limit the scope of nationalism to examine only one part of society and let
that analysis stand for the rest of the community. Kathleen Ashley and Pamela
Sheingorn's study of St. Anne is here exemplary. Ashley and Sheingorn describe their
project as bridging "divisions between popular and elite cultures, between sacred and
secular concerns, between politics and religion, and between folklore and theology."

the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, orders devoted to St. George were instituted in
Austria, Burgundy, Venice, Genoa, and Rome, to name a few. See Hulst 59-88

50 Bengtson 321.

51 Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, "Introduction," Interpreting Cultural
Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society (Athens: University of Georgia Press,
1990) 1-68.

52 Ashley and Sheingorn 2.
Indeed, their work demonstrates how “the figure of St. Anne functioned symbolically for a wide range of social groups in their cultural practice.” The impetus of this section is to examine a wide range of social groups in order to illustrate the ways in which St. George functions to create a national community. St. George, more than any other saint, embodied ideas of national community; in the following section, I will explore the variety of practices in which St. George was socially employed.

In the area of popular fiction, the cult of George spread because of his attachment to romance heroes. The dragonless legend of St. George in its original form was known in Western Europe. It was, however, the Crusades that introduced and popularized the tradition of St. George’s fight with the dragon. Alongside the spread of the romance-like version of the dragon slaying, the narrative of St. George developed into a regular roman d’aventure. As John Matzke points out, in this romance

We have here the appearance of the saint at the city in the heathen land, the daring deed of which the king’s daughter and the whole country reap the benefit, and his imprisonment and persecution at the hands of disbelievers. The first steps in the direction of a secularization of the story are easily imagined. It was natural to have the king promise the hand of his daughter to any one brave enough to slay the dragon, to have the princess fall in love with her liberator.

The story of St. George developed in the direction of a romance until it was absorbed by the story of Sir Beves of Hamtoun. The Beves romance in turn strongly suggests that

53 Ashley and Sheingorn 2.
56 Matzke, “The Legend of St. George” 453.
because of Beves’s attachment and fusion with St. George, Beves’s “crusading fervor against the pagans and his imprisonment in Damascus, as they recall St. George’s exploits, reflect the gradual development of England’s national identity through the impact of the Crusades, the loss of Normandy in 1204 and the Angevin territories by 1243, and the increasing centralization of rule.” At the same time, the importance of Beves in the English romance canon demonstrates the multiple ways in which George is influencing the creation of a national imaginary.

The importance of St. George to the Crusaders was kept alive in popular romances like Richard Coerdelyoun. As previously mentioned, St. George appeared to Richard during the Crusades. His aid to Richard and the Crusaders is represented as instrumental in the war against the Muslim forces. In at least two other romances that can be tied to the Crusader tradition popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, St. George also aids the protagonist to overcome Muslim forces. In Robert le Diable, St. George supplies the hero with the needed armor. In the process of helping out Robert, St. George is also responding to the conversion of Robert to Christian society. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Robert le Diable is the putative source of Sir Gowther. Although Gowther does not state that St. George was present, it could be inferred that the saint was significantly important to Gowther’s transformation from “Saracen” to saint. It should also be noted that Gowther, like George in the Crusade chronicles and romances, fights the Muslims while dressed in white armor and riding a white horse.

57 Crane 59.

58 Matzke, “The Legend of St. George” 449.
Illustrative of the popularity of St. George in fiction, the Carol of St. George, a short mid-fifteenth-century lyric, links St. George’s assistance at Agincourt to the Crusades. The Carol states:

To worship Georg than have we ned,
Whych is our sovereyn Ladys knyght

He kepyd the mad from dragon dred
And fraid al Fraunce and put the flight
At Agyncourt, the crownecl ye red:
The French hym se formest in fyght.

In hys vertu he wol us led
Agayns the fend, the ful wyght,
And with hys banner us oversprede
Yf we hym love with all our myght.

Obviously playing on the idea that St. George was responsible for the English victory at Agincourt, the Carol describes the various levels of interpreting the Georgian legendary. The need to worship St. George is of foremost importance. If the people love him, George will lead them against the fiend by protecting them with his banner. The fiend, in this case, can be both the devil, here represented as the dragon, and the French. The “us” in the carol, just like in the Agincourt Poem, are the English people. Thus, the Carol unites the religious with the political. George saves the maid from the dragon, literally saving the community from actual harm and figuratively saving them by baptism. In the same way, George can save the English nation from the fiend-like French. In praying to


George, people are therefore praying both on a theological and national level. In a literary sense, the *Carol* also joins the religiously sanctioned saints' life of St. George with the chronicle history of Agincourt. Religious and political narratives are enjoined for the same purpose, to evoke England the nation.

In other fields, the cult of St. George grew because of folk dramas. Widely spread throughout the British Isles, mummers's plays including St. George in the leading role seemed to be quite popular. The performance in these plays can be broken down into three parts: the presentation, the drama, and the *quête*. The presentation is a general prologue in which the leading characters are introduced. Along with St. George, the cast also includes a Turkish Knight usually in blackened face, who may be called Prince of Paradine, or Palestine, and another character named Slasher or Captain Slasher. The drama consists of a fight in which St. George duels with the other characters. One or more of the characters is killed or maimed. By the intervention of the doctor, the slain characters are revived. In some versions St. George is slain, while in others he is victorious. In the last part of the play, other characters enter and a collection is taken up. The variety and extant number of these plays testifies to the integral position St. George had in the collective imagination of the people.

Another kind of drama took the form of a "riding" or procession, probably analogous to the Corpus Christi pageants. The ridings were held on April 23rd as part of

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62 Chambers 213.

63 Chambers 222.
the festival honoring St. George. The fullest accounts of the formal process of the riding are best preserved in the accounts of the Norwich guild of St. George. For the procession the brothers and sisters gathered at a predetermined place. The guild procession was headed by a man bearing an ancient wooden, gilded sword with a dragon’s head carved on the handle. St. George, the central figure in the procession, followed. The man playing George would wear a coat of armor beaten with silver and carried a silver shield with the arms of St. George emblazoned on it. The George figure always rode on horseback. The horse was adorned with ribbons and laces and its harness was gilded. Alongside George would have been a various assembly of standard-bearers and cross-bearers displaying the banners and standards of St. George. The Norfolk guild owned several highly ornamented and tasseled banners. The dragon figure was played by a man inside a painted model of a dragon. The dragon costume was probably made of canvas and crafted in supposed likeness of the monster. Throughout the procession, St. George was to keep in conflict with the dragon. Following the George procession would be the nobility and elected members of the town. Directly after them would come the common members of the guild dressed in red gowns and hoods. The whole procession marched to the cathedral for a mass in honor of St. George, the King, and the whole guild. Once the mass was over, the whole fraternity would assemble for its annual feast.

These processions could also take other performative forms. One of the most important of these “processions” was held in early 1416. The Feast of St. George at Windsor was to commemorate the visit of Emperor Sigismund. The *Gregory Chronicle* states:

Ande thys yere com the Emperowre of Almayne in to London be-fore the Feste of Synt Gorge. Ande the feste was deferryde unto hys commynge, and that was done solempny at the castylle of Wyndesore. And at the prosessyon the kynge went a-pone the upper-moste syde of the emperowre, and soo alle the masse tyme he stode a-bove the emperoure...And the fyrste sotellete of the fyrste cours was howe Oure Lady armyd Syn Gorge and a aungylle doyng on hys sporys. And the secunde sotellete was Syn Gorge rydyng and fyghtyng whythe a dragon whythe hys spere in hys honde. And the iii sotellete was a castelle, and Syn Gorge and the kynge s daughter ledyng the lambe in at the castelle gateys. And all the sotelleteys were servyd be-fore the emperoure and the kynge.

The feast was held the spring after Agincourt. Clearly it was Henry’s intention to impress the Emperor, and thus produce an alliance against the French. As another token of English nationalism, “the king yaf him [Sigismund] the liverey of the garter.” Both cases of nationalism underscore the importance of George to English identity. Later that year at the council of Constance that was called to heal problems in the Church, “be assent of alle nacionys it was ordeyned in this counsel, that Engelond sholde be callid an nacion.”

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65 Although not a procession, John Capgrave gives a vivid look at the station at the Church of St. George in Velabro. For more information on this act of devotion and community-building, see Capgrave 87-9.


68 *An English Chronicle* 44.
St. George’s feast day of April 23rd became a day for festivals, carolings, and pageants. While the religious guilds were responsible for sponsoring many of the events at festivals and ceremonies, the guild ceremonies allowed various social levels of the community to come together and put aside their differences long enough to share a communal meal, engage with other members, and march through the streets. The overtly public demonstrations were supposed to rekindle communal feelings of fraternity and renew their sense of identification. In a sense, guild ceremonies, like all ceremonies, perform ritualistically and symbolically the values and hopes of the community. Because of the national importance of St. George, the ceremonies of the guilds of St. George must have expressed publicly the ideas of national identity.

Guilds in late medieval England served very important functions within society. In all guilds the economic and political aspects were just as important as the religious and social.69 People joined religious guilds for communal purposes, as a way of paying their social obligations to their saint. Guild members were bound by common ties of loyalty, usually expressed through symbolic and ritual activities.70 Usually members had to swear an oath to be admitted. Because the oaths and membership gave priority to horizontal rather than vertical loyalties, guilds evoked great fears among authorities.71 Guilds were open to men and women of all social classes. Although women gained many of the same spiritual and economic benefits as men, full participation in the devotional


70 Bainbridge 16-7.

71 Bainbridge 18.
and decision-making process of the guild was limited.\textsuperscript{72} There is evidence that husbands and wives and the rest of the extended family joined at once. Sometimes even deceased members of the family were enrolled. The inclusionary nature of the guilds could serve as a microcosm of the nation. The guildhall would be one of the very few places that genders and classes could easily intermingle.

Other noteworthy aspects of guilds were that they regularly held “charity drives” for less fortunate members. Some of these poorer members were also allowed to supplement their incomes by small sums granted in alms. Of course that poor members of society would be allowed to join could be considered a great measure in itself. Guilds also offered insurance against calamity for its members. In most cases, if a member suffered because of some sort of economic catastrophe, the guild would help out monetarily or otherwise. The Norwich Guild of St. George, for example, notes, “it is ordeynede, yat what brother or sister of yis fraternité falle in povert, every brother and sister shal payen, in ye woke, to ye kepers o f yis fraternite, a ferthyng.”\textsuperscript{73}

Probably most important is the fact that guilds would pay, or give, prayers for brothers and sisters living and dead.\textsuperscript{74} Members attended the funerals of departed members, as well as ceremonies commemorating the dead and their benefactors. At a time when only the wealthiest of society could pay for prayers, the guild made sure that departed brothers and sisters would be given prayers. Guilds were able to hire perpetual chaplains to assist in the services and religious life of the guild. With all these different

\textsuperscript{72} Bainbridge 46-50.


\textsuperscript{74} See Bainbridge’s chapter, “Gild Life and Religious Practice” 51-78.
social functions, the guild provides a unique look at how medieval communities imagined themselves in communion.

The Theater of the Nation

The third passus of the *Agincourt Poem* gives special attention to the ceremonial ritual display of communal attachments and the veneration of St. George. In dramatic form the Triumph was held on November 23. As the king prepared to enter London, a delegation dressed in red gowns with hoods of red and white welcomed the king. The poem states that “The Mayr of London was redy bown, / With alle the craftes of that cite, / Alle clothyd in red thorugh out the town, / A semely sight it was to se.” The fact that all the people were dressed in red indicates that the spectacle that was to unfold would proceed much like the St. George’s Day festivals. An eyewitness writes that upon entering London, “over the foot of the bridge and spanning the route had been raised a tower...and half-way up it, in a canopied niche richly fashioned, there stood a most beautiful statue of St. George, in armour save for his head which was adorned with laurel studded with gems sparkling like precious stones.” The *Agincourt Poem* confirms this visual representation of power: “at the drawe brigge, that is faste by, / To toures there were upright; / An antelope and a lyon stondyng hym by, / Above them seynt George our lady knyght, / Besyde hym many an angell bright.” As the procession entered London, they beheld on the two towers the emblems of the king, the antelope and the lion. Above the arms of the king stood the figural symbol of kingly power; Saint George was the

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75 *Gesta Henrici Quinti* 103.
76 *Gesta Henrici Quinti* 105.
special patron of England and of Henry. The spectacle reproduced the narratives of the victory at Agincourt. As in the battle, St. George is hovering over the king.

The banner and arms of St. George adorned the top of the castle as well as other important buildings. The poet notes that “It was gret joy it for to beholde; / It was arrayed full reverent, / With a castell right as God wolde, / With baners brighte beten with gold.” The castle was arrayed as God would have it, paying full reverence to Him. The poet gives special attention to the presence that is supposed to be elicited by the spectacle of the Triumph. The reader is supposed to feel the overwhelming communal joy: “Now all Ingelond may say and syng.”

Henry also seems to have paid deference to the patron saint as he walked the route of the Triumph. As the dense crowd of people sang a carol giving thanks to God for the victory at Agincourt, Henry, “wearing a gown of purple, proceeded, not in exalted pride and with an imposing escort or impressively large retinue, but with an impassive countenance and at a dignified pace...From his quiet demeanor, gentle pace, and sober progress, it might have been gathered that the king, silently pondering the matter in his heart, was rendering thanks and glory to God.” The Triumph was therefore a performance enacting the symbols of the nation.

Narrative Quality of Nationalism

By the early fifteenth century, the importance of the saint as the patron of England was well established. It was the setting as Henry embarked on a campaign to regain land

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77 Gesta Henrici Quinti 109.
78 Gesta Henrici Quinti 113.
and prestige both won and lost during the Hundred Years’ War. In this we see that the whole Agincourt campaign was under the patronage of St. George. In early 1415 Henry had ordered that St. George’s day be considered a double holiday, and in his war decrees before leaving, Henry made sure all men were uniformed to bear a sign of Saint George. Further, upon taking Harfleur in late September, Henry raised the banner of St. George, a white flag with a red cross, as a sign of English possession.

Prayers to St. George for his aid in the battle were plentiful. An eyewitness writes, “I who am writing, and many of the rest of the army, looked up in bitterness to Heaven, seeking the clemency of Providence, and called up the Glorious Virgin and the Blessed George, under whose protection the most invincible crown of England has flourished from of old, to intercede between God and His people, that the Judge Supreme, Who foresees all things, might take pity on the grief all England would feel at the price we would pay with our blood and, in His infinite mercy, deliver from the swords of the French our king and us his people.” Similarly, Henry, before he charged into battle, was heard to say, “Nowe is gode tyme, for alle Engelond prayeth for us; and perfore be of gode chere, & lette us go to our iorney...In þe name of Almyzti God and Saynt George, avaunt banarer! and Saynt George, þis day þyn help!”

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79 “Also that every man of what estate, nacion, or condition that he be of, or partie, here a bande of Seint George large, upon the perill that he wounded or deede in default thereof.” See Hibbert 170.

80 Nicolas 68.

81 *Gesta Henrici Quinti* 67.

82 *Brut* 378.
As the king and his soldiers stood before the battlefield, they understood the importance of the war to the viability of the nation. The prayers were appeals for aid to the nation and its people. The invocation of St. George, directly in prayers and just before the battle in the war-cry, illustrates that George crystalized important communal attachments. Fighting under the arms and banner of St. George allowed for the display of the symbols of the collectivity. The community imagined itself through its patronage of St. George. The various symbols and prayers suggest that in the minds of the soldiers each had an image that defined his relationship to the army and the army's attachment to England the nation. Further, the prayers before the battle indicate that the king and the soldiers understood their roles both in that scene and in the national drama. Quite importantly, the prayers are for the safety of the nation.

The appearance of St. George at Agincourt made visible the symbolic attachments between the saint and his people. In a sense, it had the singular ability to sum up and simplify the more complex issues.

On a different level, the appearance of St. George placed England and the English cause in a ready and available narrative. The legendary states that George appears in times of dire need. This part of the legend is the least discussed by historians and critics. And yet, the appearance of St. George figurally writes the history of Agincourt into the legend of St. George. The battle thus becomes one of his divinely sanctioned miracles.

Thus transformed, the narrative states that George appeared to the English, in the tradition of Constantine, the Crusaders, and later Richard I, as the divine agent righting wrongs and defending true causes. It is an irony of history that the French so responsible for launching the Crusades now stood to become the Saracens, the infidel, in this sacred
war. Through the agency of St. George, the Battle of Agincourt was transformed into a narrative of divine history. Unlike Acre or Jerusalem, however, Agincourt was fought for the nation. The legend of St. George at the battle of Agincourt brought together a complex interweaving of religious beliefs and national affiliations that illustrates the sacredness of communal attachments. St. George thus provides the narrative by which the nation was written.
CHAPTER 4

THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY: THE SOCIAL IMAGINATION IN

THE TALE OF GAMELYN

Raymond Williams, in writing about English literature in general, observes: "[I]t is a critical fact that English attitudes to the country, and to ideas of rural life, persisted with extraordinary power, so that even after the society was predominantly urban its literature, for a generation, was still predominantly rural."¹

Williams's remark about the urban readership for rural fiction is relevant to this study, for the task of examining the connections, especially those forged by the extraordinary power of the social imagination, between the medieval city and its surrounding countryside, has been limited. All too often the general view has been that while the medieval English town was consolidated by social, political, and legal development throughout the high and later Middle Ages, rural England was a feudal society still fueled by a natural agrarian economy. The great division between town and country has always been preserved by the observation that towns had charters, which

guaranteed their citizens a legal identity defined by judicial independence and privilege.  
That much of the legal privilege of charters was aimed at economic growth and diversity only added to the polar views concerning town and country. Alongside this legal definition of towns exists the idea of towns as reflecting a social model of organization that has produced such phenomena as industrialization, capitalism, and social segregation. Yet all these phenomena are hardly exclusively urban. Instead, town and country were much more closely interdependent, the town usually serving as the site for exchange. Constant immigration and change, for example, ensure that ideas and structures moved back and forth.

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2 The history of urban history was defined by the town charter. F. W. Maitland’s monumentally influential study gave the field a specifically legal direction. For more on the early history of urban studies see Richard Holt and Gervase Rosser, “Introduction: The English Town in the Middle Ages,” The English Medieval Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1200-1540, ed. Richard Holt and Gervase Rosser (New York: Longman, 1990) 3. There are several wonderful essays in that text and I will not take space to list them all, though quite a few will be cited in the rest of the chapter. Also of interest to studies of urban history are Susan Reynolds, An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) and Colin Platt, The English Medieval Town (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976).


5 Hilton 24-5. Hilton goes on to argue that all the special facets of towns, especially economic factors, had analogues in rural society.

6 Hilton suggests that “the constant flow of rural immigrants who sustained the demographically vulnerable urban populations would not by any means be entering an
The goal of this chapter is to outline the various connections, or analogous social structures, between town and country, and to demonstrate how they are worked out in literature. I will explore the social imagination shared by the town and country in a literary anomaly, The Tale of Gamelyn, which is a provincial tale told by an urban dweller to a heterogeneous audience in a work written by an urban poet.

I am interested in the “communities” in Gamelyn, how the rural community values relate to (or figure) city values and how these common interests illustrate the tentative and temporal yet cohesive nature of communities. By analyzing these strategic communities, the chapter will show ways in which the English nation was symbolically constructed out of various groups that imagined themselves in communion. In illustrating the bonds between urban and rural worlds, this chapter will demonstrate how very different communities come together to form the nation.

I begin by placing the tale within its textual, social, and cultural context. The textual placement of the tale demonstrates the intertwined social bonds between the city and the country. The relevance of the textual placement is further illustrated in the narrative by the mercantile aspirations of the country gentry in late medieval England. Gamelyn, I argue, is the embodiment of these “merchant knights,” whose goals are closely tied to urban merchants. The mercantile language and images presented in the unfamiliar world as they stepped through the gates in the city” (25). A further point could be made that immigrants did not have to go all the way into town; many of the poorer and most recent immigrants would live in the suburbs. See D. J. Keene, “Suburban Growth,” The English Medieval Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1200-1540, ed. Richard Holt and Gervase Rosser (New York: Longman, 1990) 97-118; and John Scattergood, “Chaucer in the Suburbs,” Reading the Past: Essays in Medieval and Renaissance Literature (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996) 128-45.
The *Tale of Gamelyn* suggest that the text meant to address novel economic connections between the city and the country. In the next section I address questions of violence and heroism in the tale. Because of the importance of these social, cultural, and economic bonds, I argue that the hero is authorized to employ certain modes of violence. These forms of violence, ranging from murder to highway robbery to rebellion, are contained within the narrative through careful argumentation based on law and justice. Gamelyn is thus heroic because he fights for what is right. Because he is represented as the righter of wrongs, the people of the community follow Gamelyn. Lastly, I explore what it means for the people in the narrative and the audience of the text to follow a hero like Gamelyn. This last section examines the intertwined aspirations of rural and urban readers. My argument is that while the storyline does contain a rural background, the narrative's concerns over inheritance, law and justice, and class issues are extremely relevant to a fourteenth-century English urban audience. The textual placement and readership of the *Tale of Gamelyn* underscore the narrative of the text by demonstrating various connections between supposedly different communities. Thus the *Tale of Gamelyn* effectively illustrates ways in which the nation was imagined.

The *Tale of Gamelyn* and the Manuscript Tradition

The *Tale of Gamelyn* was written down between 1350 and 1375 in the Midlands, somewhat to the north of London but not very far. Although critics have argued

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vehemently about the matter, no French source can be found. It thus appears as if 
Gamelyn is of native English origin and “presumably stems from the same tradition 
which gave rise to Robin Hood ballads.” The Tale of Gamelyn is the bastard tale of 
Chaucerian studies. There are twenty-five extant versions, all found in surviving 
manuscripts of the Canterbury Tales, usually in the space left open by the Cook’s 
uncompleted tale. The general assumption is that Chaucer left the tale in that particular 
slot with thoughts of rewriting it later. Upon his death, scribes or friends found the 
spurious tale, believed it to be by Chaucer, and included it in the Canterbury Tales. 
This, in particular, was an artful way of skirting the issue of why the tale can be found in 
the earliest manuscripts, such as Harley 7334, which was written within the first decade 
of the fifteenth century somewhere in the London/Westminster area. Recent manuscript 
studies have shifted the emphasis from authorial selection to the scribal/editorial nature of 
the manuscript trade in the fifteenth century. In these studies, the text belongs to Chaucer

8 Skeat in particular argues that “the Tale is not wholly due to the invention of its author, 
but is derived, like the Lay of Havelok [Havelok the Dane], from some Anglo-French 
original; whilst there are, at the same time, some traces (as in that poem) of Scandanavian 

9 Dunn 32. For further information on Gamelyn’s connection to the Robin Hood oral 
stories, see Nancy Mason Bradbury, Writing Aloud: Storytelling in Late Medieval 


11 Norman F. Blake, The Textual Tradition of the Canterbury Tales (London: Edward 
Arnold, 1985) 104.

12 Blake 68.
but the collection of exemplars is left to the interactions between scribes, illuminators, and editors on the one hand and patrons and owners on the other hand.\textsuperscript{13} The large number of manuscripts produced in the early fifteenth century testifies to the demand for the poem and at the same time suggests a knowledge on both the parts of the scribes and supervisors and the buying public of the \textit{Canterbury Tales} as to what should be included in the Chaucerian canon. Charles Owen states that the manuscript tradition tells us that the \textit{Canterbury Tales} was "a collection of fragments, tales and groups of tales, reflecting the different stages of a developing plan for the whole work. After 1400, and to some extent even before, these fragments circulated among relatives and friends and on out into a fairly wide reading public."\textsuperscript{14} Evidently, somewhere in the manuscript tradition of the \textit{Canterbury Tales}, the \textit{Tale of Gamelyn} was inserted as the second tale told by the Cook after the disastrous tale of Perkyn Revelour. Perhaps astute Chaucerians or members of Chaucer's close circle of readers believed it important to place the \textit{Tale of Gamelyn} in with the \textit{Canterbury Tales}. Certainly the supervisor of Harley 7334, who wrote an instruction in French, "Icy commencera la fable de Gamelyn," indicates that \textit{Gamelyn} was known and presumed to follow the failed fragment of the Cook.\textsuperscript{15} Somewhat later in the manuscript tradition, links develop to fully incorporate the tale into the larger narrative of the \textit{Canterbury Tales}. Of these, the Lansdowne’s moral judgement is


\textsuperscript{14} Owen 4.

\textsuperscript{15} Blake 68.
perhaps the most interesting because it lends credence to the idea that moral Chaucer
could not finish the Perkyn Revelour tale and decided instead to tell a tale of a knight and
his three sons. The Lansdowne begins the tale by noting, “Fye þer one it is so soule I wil
nowe tell no forþere / For shame of þe harlotrie þat seweþ after / a velany it were þare of
more to spell / Bot of a knyhte and his sonnes My tale I wil forþe tell.”

This scribal action also lets us know that to medieval readers Gamelyn had a
function to fulfill in the Canterbury Tales, in this case as an antidote to the harlotry of the
Cook’s Tale. This idea can perhaps be shown by the differing opinions of the Cook by
Chaucerian manuscript illustrators. The Ellesmere Cook is depicted with “his fleshhook,
soiled apron, torn slippers, and bandaged shin” which suggest “the livery... of labor and
poverty and disease.” The Cambridge Cook, however, is “a prosperous, fur-trimmed
citizen holding a large, elaborate whip; his legs are covered.” Perhaps the illumination in
the Cambridge reflects the influence of the Tale of Gamelyn. After all, Gamelyn presents
a world where trade and communication between the country and the city is emphasized.

Perhaps most important to this discussion on Gamelyn’s presence in the
Canterbury Tales is the necessary move away from speculating about how it was
introduced and towards examining the tale as it concerned early readers of Chaucer and
perhaps even Chaucer himself. The Tale of Gamelyn regales in the violent and corrupt


17 Ironically, the tale that Chaucer did not write gives us one of the best views of Chaucer
the reader. After being associated with the chaos and noise of London for most of his
nature of justice in the provinces. Perhaps Chaucer and his readers saw law and order in the provinces as an unchecked surge for power by the local gentry and leading burgesses.

At the same time Chaucer and his readers must have witnessed the inextricable ties between the court and the provinces, the gentry and the burgesses, and the city and country in ways that modern medieval studies have neglected. Although the Cook is the

life, Chaucer left the customshouse for a wardship of two Kentish heirs, William Soles and Edmund Staplegate, sometime in the middle to late 1380's. In October of 1385 Chaucer was appointed justice of the peace. The office of justice of the peace had, by the late fourteenth century, become "a device for linking the power of the Crown to the interests of the local gentry for the benefit of both in keeping the country under control" (Brewer 158). The significance of the office was the amount of control that was exercised. In a sense the local community would be run by gentry or leading burgesses for whom the position "would place the royal stamp of legitimacy on an authority in the counties and boroughs which they saw as their natural right...But since the number of ambitious and contentious gentlemen greatly exceed the number of offices, chance would inconveniently place one's enemies occasionally in a position of power as justice under one sort of commission or another. If all the means to sway sheriffs or their subordinates, to bribe or intimidate inquest or trial jurors failed—or if they simply felt haste or hot temper—the gentlemen of England turned to force. Amid the dry records of court proceedings any researcher finds striking accounts of the murder or maiming of opponents, the pillaging of his house or devastation of his fields or flocks." See Derek Brewer, Chaucer and His World (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1992) and Richard W. Kaeuper, War, Justice, and Public Order: England and France in the Later Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 181-2.


After all, Chaucer's main role as justice would have been to ensure that money and power flowed to the metropole. On the peace commission with Chaucer were numerous men who had done the state a great service and now were richly rewarded. Simon Burley, a career courtier who had served on numerous missions as a soldier, was the chief magnate in the peace commission. Hugh Fastolf, in particular, stands out because of his various connections. He was a rich landowner in Kent, a rich citizen in London where he made his money as a fishmonger, and served as a Knight of the Shire. Later Fastolf would also serve as mayor of London. Of course, a primary example of the various connections between the city and the country would have to be Chaucer himself. Like other enterprising men, Chaucer had risen being from the son of a rich merchant to a Knight of the Shire for Kent in 1386. He would serve in the House of Commons during
only one of Chaucer’s pilgrims to be identified as a Londoner, the Cook “identifies himself as originating not from London but from Ware, a town in Hertfordshire thirty miles due north of the city.”20 David Wallace points out that the town of Ware “had been a notorious trouble spot since the 1350’s...The name of Ware, then, comes freighted with suggestions of unruliness or violence imported to the city from the provinces.”21 Therefore, the Cook, like the Tale of Gamelyn, seems to be an importation, illustrating the personal and literary connections between town and country.

The Tale of Gamelyn is about the third son of a wealthy knight. Sir Johan of Boundys before death calls together the knights of the shire in order to divide up his property between his three sons. Although the knights disagree at first with Sir Johan’s wishes, they eventually split up the property. As a minor, Gamelyn is unable to take care of his property, and his eldest brother, Johan, soon appropriates Gamelyn’s share. When Gamelyn comes of age, he worries that his property is not productive. Gamelyn, now strong and able to defend himself, is able to intimidate his brother into restitution.

After winning a wrestling match, in which Gamelyn defends the honor of a frightened Franklin, Gamelyn returns home to find himself locked out. Angry at the situation and the broken promise of his brother’s restitution, Gamelyn breaks down the door, breaks the neck of the porter, and throws the porter down a well. With a group of the Merciless Parliament of 1388. More important he fulfilled the dream of countless people who had done well in life—he moved to the country to live and rule.

20 Wallace 70.

21 Wallace 70.
companions that have followed him from the wrestling match, Gamelyn holds a
weeklong party that consumes all the wine and food in the house. When the people leave,
Johan tricks Gamelyn into allowing himself to be bound. With Gamelyn bound in clear
view, Johan then entertains his own friends. His guests are all members of religious
orders. With the help of Adam Spenser, Gamelyn gains his freedom and punishes the
guests for not helping him. To escape the wrath of Johan and the law, Gamelyn and
Adam take refuge in a forest, where they join a band of outlaws. Eventually, Gamelyn
becomes the king of the outlaws but robs only members of religious orders.

In the meantime, Johan is appointed as a sheriff and declares Gamelyn an outlaw.
Sir Ote, the second son of Sir Johan of Boundys, offers himself as bail for Gamelyn. On
the day of the trial, since Gamelyn has not appeared, Sir Ote is condemned to death by
Johan in collusion with twelve jurors who have previously been bribed. Gamelyn arrives
in time, overthrows the court, and sentences Johan and the jurors to be hanged. Gamelyn
and Sir Ote then take their case to the King. The King makes Sir Ote a justice and
appoints Gamelyn as chief justice of the free forest. The tale ends with Gamelyn happily
taking possession of his property and marrying.

Merchant Knights and Gamelyn

The story of the Tale of Gamelyn places great importance on the justification of
inheritance rights. Gamelyn is about the process of justifying the right. Throughout the
narrative the reader is asked to participate in the processes of justice as it is meted out in
violent and dramatic forms. In the meantime, the presentation of social and legal values
demonstrates that the audience is a willing participant in the institutionalization of violence. The violent methods through which the hero goes about gaining his inheritance and the community that is constructed in the process articulate important social ideologies and ideas held in late medieval England. The impetus of this section is to examine the social ideologies and ideas that Gamelyn fights for and that the narrative promotes.

The poem raises interesting conceptions of multi-ethnic community-building. Earlier, I stated that *Gamelyn* appeared to be an English work. Here, as before, I use the term “English” to encompass the various cultures implied in the word. For instance, Gamelyn’s father’s name, Sir Johan of Boundys, is a French name. In the early part of the narrative Sir Johan is portrayed as an Anglo-Norman knight. This fact, along with a small proportion of French words, could suggest that *Gamelyn* had an Anglo-Norman origin. And yet, the name “Gamelyn is of Scandinavian origin, answering to a form of Gamel-in, from the Norse word for ‘old,’ as seen in Icel. gamall, Swed. gammal, Dan. gammel.” Further, there is a large proportion of Scandinavian words in the poem.

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23 Skeat states that E. Lindner tried to connect the tale with the time of Fulke Fitz Warin (403). Lindner’s theories were derived partly through the form and theme of the tale and partly on such evidence as the description of Gamelyn’s brother’s house, with its hall door, outer gate, postern-gate, and bower, suits the description of Anglo-Norman houses of the thirteenth century (404). See Skeat, *Complete Works of Chaucer*, vol. 3 403-4.


From a cultural standpoint, the mixing and redefining of origins that played such a big part in *Havelok the Dane* is again evident in *Gamelyn*. In this case, the author shows a keen awareness of the multiple cultural heritage of England that can be observed in the usage of names and the choices of words. The French and Scandinavian influences, while articulating the complicated heterogeneity of “English” origins, are a stepping stone to analyzing the nature of the cultural identity that is eventually proposed by the *Tale of Gamelyn*.

Like *Havelok the Dane*, *Gamelyn* begins with a dying father bequeathing his property to his heirs. However, while *Havelok* was clearly entitled to the kingdom under the statutes of primogeniture, *Gamelyn* is the third son. Sir Johan of Boundys, as he is dying, writes down how he wants his property divided. He calls together other knights of the area and tells them: “I biseke you, knightes, for the love of me, / Goth and dresseth my lond among my sones three. / And, sires, for the love of God, deleth hem nat amiss, / And forgetith nat Gamelin, my yonge sone that is” (35-8). It is important that Sir Johan is particularly interested in dividing his property among his three sons. If the tale is measured, as it often has been, against the standard late medieval concept of inheritance based on the law of primogeniture, the oldest son should inherit the family seat and the younger son should be sent off to learn a trade or join the clergy.\(^{27}\) However, at this historical and cultural point in time, the law of primogeniture did not completely hold

\(^{26}\) Skeat, *Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, vol. 3 400.

\(^{27}\) For an overview of questions of inheritance based on primogeniture, see Crane 73-4.
The Tale of Gamelyn demonstrates perfectly that concepts of inheritance were changing. If a landowner wanted and was able to do so in his lifetime, he could divide his property as he wished. Given this social practice, we can understand Sir Johan’s urgency in writing down the will before he died. The social principle behind this is “that to leave any son unprovided for was a sign of failure.” After all, in a social system


29 McFarlane states that “when a landowner died his heir inherited; if he wanted to benefit his younger children he had to do it in his own lifetime” (63). There are at least two principles that guided this action: “the tradition that distinguished between inheritance and conquest, that laid down what a man received from his father ought to go undiminished to his eldest son, but that what he acquired by purchase, marriage, or the like he might distribute how he thought best...The other principle was scarcely less ancient: that to leave any son unprovided for was a sign of failure” (71). See McFarlane 62-3 and 71.

30 The legal device that Sir Johan is enacting is known as the “enfeoffment to use.” By this “a man who held land in primogeniture could during his own lifetime make it over by a written legal act to a group of trustees. These trustees then held the land in common-law estate, but in actuality to the ‘use’ of the original owner, so that during his lifetime he in fact lost nothing. Before his death such a man would execute a document called a ‘last will’ (ultima voluntas) in which he expressed his wishes for the distribution of this estate after his death...In this way, the transference of land after the death of its holder became more flexible, and younger brothers and even daughters could have their needs catered for...Enfeoffments to use played their part in the changing class-structure of the country by allowing a more flexible and wider distribution of property, depriving the king and feudal lords of some income and seigniorial rights, and making the special character of feudal tenure less important.” See F. R. H. Du Boulay, An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Late Middle Ages (London: Nelson, 1970) 63.

31 McFarlane also notes that both Edward I and Edward III created earldoms and duchies for their younger sons. See McFarlane 71-2.
that continually stresses upward mobility, the more opportunities that are possible, the better the chances of such social advancement.  

Sir Johan’s quest to leave all his sons provided for illustrates the aspirations and affiliations that the gentry class possessed. The tale thus produces a working model for defining and understanding this very amorphous class.  

Sir Johan of Boundys, we are told, “coude of norture y-nough and mochil of game” (4). The line should be interpreted as reading “He was sufficiently instructed by right bringing up, and knew much about sport.” Nurture, Skeat tells us, “is the old phrase for a ‘genteel education’...[and by] game is meant what is now called sport; The Master of the Game is the name of an old treatise on hunting.” In other words, Sir Johan has all the qualities and education of a

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32 Reynolds points out that “the institutions of kinship and marriage, which lie at the very heart of social structure, were modified in towns, at least for the property-owning classes, by customs of inheritance which varied more or less from those outside. Freedom to bequeath land; a tendency to partible inheritance; different systems of guardianship for orphans, with wardship by near kin increasingly supervised by the municipal authorities; varying, but often fairly generous, provision for widows, who might even be allowed to carry on their husbands’ businesses, all seem characteristic of towns and must have conditioned the structure and mobility of urban society” (88). Interestingly, we find most of these structures in a “rural” tale. See Susan Reynolds, English Medieval Towns 88.

33 The term “gentry” is usually associated with the three-fold grouping in the peerage hierarchy of knights, esquires, and gentlemen. For a fuller explication, see D. A. L. Morgan, “The Individual Style of the English Gentleman,” Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe, ed. Michael Jones (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986) 15-35; and Nigel Saul 1-35.


proper knight. We are also told that Sir Johan “hadde been wide-wher, but non housbond he was; / All the lond that he had it was verrey purchas” (13-4). Except for five ploughs that Sir Johan inherited from his father, the rest of his property appears to have been purchased or earned through service (57-62). It certainly could be that the property was acquired through service and entrepreneurship. When he divides his lands, Sir Johan separates his “fadres heritage” (58) from that which “I halp for to gete with my right hond” (60) and “all min other purchas of londes and leedes [tenants]” (61). In his will Sir Johan divides up the property according to his acquisition of it. He provides the audience with a descriptive passage of land acquisition and economic ventures found in late medieval England.

This small portrait of medieval rural life is illustrative of the social ideas prevalent among the medieval gentry. It is clear that by his name and portrayal, Sir Johan is represented as a chivalric knight. The association with Anglo-Norman and French values suggests that Sir Johan can be compared to any of his knightly literary predecessors. Yet, there are also suggestions that Sir Johan had to climb the social ladder to get where he ends up. The fact that he inherited only five ploughs from his father means that Sir Johan started out on the lower side of the knightly class. Through service and investments, however, Sir Johan was able to provide an inheritance to all of his sons.37 This portrait

36 When the lords come to the dying Sir Boundys for the last time, he prays to them to give an equal share to his youngest son, Gamelyn. Interestingly, Sir Boundys makes them swear by Saint Martin, the patron saint of knighthood. See Skeat, Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, vol. 5 478.

37 May McKisack notes that “not only landlords of the magnate class, but knights with an income from land of perhaps £10 or £20, free peasants with incomes of about 20s.
illustrates Lee Patterson's thesis that "lay and ecclesiastical landlords were engaged in sophisticated techniques of estate management and in the calculative pursuit of profit maximization; many members of the seigneurial class were deeply involved in the world of international trade, and even the quintessential noble activity of warfare was pervaded with the values of the cash nexus." In this sense, the fact that Sir Johan was not a "housbond" probably meant that he was not a farmer of the soil as much as he was the manager of the estate. Likewise, the statement that he "hadde been wide-wher" could mean that he was off fighting in a foreign country, or it could mean that he was off on national or international trade. Further, the fact that he was in the service of the king does not simply imply warfare; membership in the royal retinue was a safer and probably a more strategic way of gaining rewards for service. Certainly Sir Johan of Boundys illustrates the changing concept of knighthood in late medieval England as it evolved from a warrior class to an economically based class.

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even villeins, were also striving to consolidate and enlarge their holdings, to increase their flocks and herds, to acquire rents, to farm for the market.” See May McKisack, The Fourteenth Century 1307-1399 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 323-4. See also Nigel Saul’s chapter, “The Income of the Nobility,” for a clearer picture of the “entrepreneurial” skills of the gentry, 203-53.


Further, the use of enfeoffment illustrates the community networks that the provincial gentry possessed. While the enfeoffment created a source of economic profit for those using them—by allowing them to escape the burdens of feudal incidents—of more importance are the social interactions and relationships that enfeoffments ensured. Inside the local shire, entrusting neighbors as enfeoffees was not uncommon, especially if they were used as a way of brokering any family competitions. *Gamelyn* makes this point clear: neighbors and knights of the shire are brought in to handle the distribution of wealth. However, it was also not uncommon to have members of other local communities in the committee. As Eric Acheson points out, “it need not be the case that the gentry saw themselves as members of one community rather than another; they were not either narrowly parochial or members of a wider shire community; they were both.”

The money and land that is willed to Gamelyn by his father is “all min purchas and londes and leedes” (61). Sir Johan wills his “fadres heritage,” the land that Sir Johan inherited, to his eldest son. To the middle son, Sir Ote, is given the land that was won through his “right hond” (60): this is the land that he gained through some kind of service. The property gained through keen economic investments and management of the estate is willed to Gamelyn. This puts Gamelyn in an odd position. Though he has acquired land the old-fashioned way, through inheritance, the overt economic means of acquisition throws more light on the problematic matter of defining the gentry class. The narrative underscores Gamelyn’s ties both to the changing knightly structure based on

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40 For more on the communities of the gentry, see Acheson 77-106.

41 Acheson 92.

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estate management and the merchant class that amassed their wealth through economic ventures. In a sense, Gamelyn’s inherited social status is both as merchant and knight. This point is further foregrounded in the rest of the tale.

Through the use of enfeoffees, Gamelyn is allowed to inherit the property that his father gained by economic entrepreneurship. Gamelyn’s destiny as a merchant knight is clarified in his moment of social and cultural awakening. After his father’s death Gamelyn is under the wardship of his eldest brother, Johan. Johan, however, does little to take care of Gamelyn’s inheritance. While the lands still belong to Gamelyn, “his faire okes that doun were y-drawe; / His parkes were y-broken and his deer bireeved; / Of alle his goode steedes noon was him bileved; / His houses were unhiled and ful ivel dight” (84-7). Gamelyn is significantly shown to have come of age by stroking his beard, symbolically illustrating Gamelyn’s acceptance of his social position. He then confronts his older brother. After an unsatisfactory response, Gamelyn swears by the good book not to be Johan’s cook any longer. Johan sends his servants to beat up Gamelyn, who grabs a pestle from the wall and staves off the men.

The Tale of Gamelyn defines the values and behaviors of the large amorphous social class by highlighting the importance of the overt commercial and bourgeois elements in the beginning of the text. These economic elements attest to the growing need to locate the text in the world of negotium—the world of business, exchange, and commerce. Sir Johan desperately trying to divvy up his property among his three sons

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is but one indication that late medieval social structures were changing. If *Gamelyn* is a tale of inheritance, it is interesting that Gamelyn does receive his inheritance from the beginning of the narrative. He has property. However, the property is not being properly managed. Rural economy in this case is not a natural economy innocent of urban markets and capitalism; instead, the deer and oaks are exchange goods and the dilapidated houses constitute lost rent. Gamelyn, as he comes of age, possesses the “mental habits associated with capitalism—calculative and calibratory attitudes toward space, time, and labor, a concern with profit maximization, familiarity with financial transactions, and a general rationalization of economic life.”

Furthermore, Gamelyn’s first test, the rescuing of a Franklin in distress, foregrounds his merchant knight identity. Whereas another romance might make Gamelyn’s first trial the rescue of a damsel and set up the amorous intrigues of courtly love, the *Tale of Gamelyn* redirects those forces towards what it believes is truly of importance in the narrative, namely commerce. To underscore the capitalist economy visible in the tale, in a punning joke after the wrestling bout, Gamelyn states, “So mot I well fare, / I have nought yet halvendel sold up my ware” (271-2). The champion wryly

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43 Patterson states that “landholding nobility was more than a little familiar with commerce, the world of money, and the cash nexus. Landowners throughout the medieval period imposed a daunting array of money payments upon their tenants and showed, in the management of their estates, a shrewd alertness to the economic requirements of their changed circumstances.” See Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* 327.

44 Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* 327.
comments that Gamelyn’s “wares” are “to good cheep that thou hast i-bought” (278).

Gamelyn has more wares to sell, but to the champion the wares are too dearly sold.

The mercantile substratum of the *Tale of Gamelyn* evident in the heroic rescue of the Franklin shows the intertwined nature of the hero. After finding a distressed Franklin whose two sons have been killed by the local wrestling champion, Gamelyn enters the ring and beats the local champion through a series of wrestling techniques. Attention has been given to the fact that a knightly hero of a romance participates in a lower class sport. Maurice Keen writes that “for all their peasant disguises, one would not find Hereward or Fulk Fitzwarin challenging, like Gamelyn, the wrestling champion at a wayside fair.”

The reasons for Gamelyn challenging and defeating the wrestling champion are of great importance for interpreting the narrative. The wrestling match provides the poet with a chance to illustrate Gamelyn’s physical superiority in a social context. As is the case with Havelok, physical prowess is indicative of leadership qualities. After the wrestling match, the people at the fair follow Gamelyn to his house. Figuratively, the people follow their new leader. The wrestling contest is thus Gamelyn’s right of passage—his first tournament.

The cause for the wrestling scene in the first place, however, is that Gamelyn must prove himself to his brother. The tale gives a great deal of care and attention to Gamelyn’s nobility. In fact Gamelyn does not begin his violent escapade against Johan’s men until Gamelyn’s paternity and nobility are questioned by the punning Johan who calls Gamelyn a “gadeling” (102). Gamelyn responds by stating, “Christes curs mot he

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43 Keen 79-80.
have that clepeth me gadeling! / I am no worse gadeling ne no worse wight, / But born of a lady and geten of a knight” (106-8). Gamelyn’s violent response illustrates the measures taken by the poet to foreground Gamelyn’s birthright as a knight. The curse is both directed at Johan and any one who dares question Gamelyn’s nobility. Hence, the poet is able to show that Gamelyn is physically and morally superior to his brother; Gamelyn must therefore be of noble birth.

Wrestling as a violent sport will be addressed in the next section. For now, it is pertinent to address class questions that arise when a knightly hero wrestles. From the portrait of the Miller in the General Prologue in the Canterbury Tales, we note that an association with wrestling is seen as a distinguishing marker of lower-class alliances. However, the ability to mediate class differences is imperative to nationalistic heroes. Havelok’s venture through the classes is evidence of his natural ability to lead a whole nation. Gamelyn’s class mediations are meant to function as community building. The narrative suggests that wrestling should be read as part of Gamelyn’s nature. By participating in a lower class sport, Gamelyn symbolically brings together various classes. From the viewpoint that Gamelyn must become the leader of the people, it is understandable that he wrestles. In a sense, Gamelyn fights for prestige and honor on a common person’s ground rules. Because of his popularity and inclusion of the people, Gamelyn takes attributes that are considered inferior and recasts them in a heroic new way.

Heroics and Violence
The wrestling match also provides a good model for understanding violence in the text. Wrestling as a sport has several rules that allow the expression of violence but that direct it in certain ways. It is only through the proper rules of the sport that violence is allowed. Deviation from those rules could disqualify or penalize the individual.

Violence, in the act of wrestling, is thus contained through the rules of the sport. When violence is expressed outside of the wrestling ring, Gamelyn is considered outside the law. It is the mastery of the sport’s rules, the “holds,” that allows Gamelyn to defeat the Champion. In a sense, expression of violence in the correct (socially sanctioned) way is the key to winning. Gamelyn thus is keenly aware of how to wrestle and is extremely adept at it. The same can be said for Gamelyn’s sense of violence and the use of it.

Moreover, the need for Gamelyn to defeat the Champion is imperative. The Champion has either hurt or killed the sons of the Franklin. Franklins in late medieval England were the lowest members of the landed minor gentry, with a long-standing stake in the land. Like Gamelyn’s social class, franklins often held offices of knights of the shire and justices of the peace and were important members administering society. In chivalric literature, franklins were often portrayed as assistants to knightly errands by providing hospitality. Unlike Gamelyn’s landed knightly class, franklins were rarely granted knighthood. Chaucer’s Franklin, although wealthy enough to purchase knighthood and be defined accordingly, does not have a knightly title. Instead, franklins

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47 Cooper 45.
were able to participate in local administration without the need to serve in armed struggles. Chaucer’s Franklin is figured as a wealthy landowner who probably purchased his way into the lower gentry-class. As is the case with Chaucer’s Franklin, franklins throughout post-Black Death England were doing extremely well for themselves, as is indicated by the large number of franklins throughout the countryside. As Nigel Saul observes, “perhaps most striking is the preponderance of franklins…Most vills had a franklin or firmarius, even when there was a resident lord of the manor too. The importance of the franklins, then, cannot be under-estimated: they were present in great numbers even in a county which was not amongst the richest in medieval England.”

Gamelyn saves the Franklin because franklins represent the vitality of the economic system. Because the Champion is hurting or killing the sons of the Franklin, mercantile activity is therefore symbolically killed or maimed. The ability to carry out commerce is seriously impeded. Gamelyn must fight the Champion in order for the Franklin and what he stands for to symbolically carry forth their activities. The narrative thus positions Gamelyn to right a wrong that can have a devastating impact on society. In defeating the Champion, Gamelyn figures himself as a savior of mercantilism. The model constructed from this scene is one in which violence is allowed expression but only when it is socially sanctioned and contained.

By winning the wrestling match, Gamelyn is able to show his superiority as a “righter” of wrongs: a champion avenger. A great crowd of fair revelers follows him to

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48 Saul 19.

49 Saul 242.
his brother’s house, where they proceed to throw a party that lasts seven days and seven nights. This will not be the only time that Gamelyn leads a group of men. But it is important that they follow. Eric Hobsbawm notes that the image of the noble robber “defines both his social role and his relationship with the common peasants. His role is that of the champion, the righter of wrongs, and the bringer of justice and social equity. His relationship with the peasants is that of total solidarity and identity.”

In order to get into the house, Gamelyn breaks the porter’s neck and throws him in a well. As he lets the crowd in, he says, “For we wiln be maistress heer and aske no man leve” (314). This plot element follows the typical outlaw theme, foreshadowing Gamelyn’s later tenure as king of the outlaws. The community that Gamelyn creates by allowing the crowd into the household parallels the community that Gamelyn will create later in the forest. Both communities are outlaw in nature, this first one by the fact that Gamelyn had to kill the gatekeeper. Similarly, the revelry and gaiety of this scene reflects and comments on the potential pastoral fantasy represented later in the narrative. Both communities exemplify a sense of freedom and happiness.

Further, the symbolic act of destroying the apparatus (both man and door) meant to keep the status quo demonstrates a way in which the narrative allows these potentially very disturbing acts to occur and yet contain them with a strong belief system. The scene has a carnival and topsy-turvy quality to it. The outlaw is made the leader, and the lowest of society are allowed full participation in a murder and the looting of Johan’s estate. In order for the scene not to be interpreted as a mob breaking into a household and stealing,

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the audience must believe that Gamelyn has a right to act as he does. This means that readers must see Gamelyn as a hero, one who has superior moral and heroic qualities. The audience also must have intimate knowledge of the divestiture system in place during the later Middle Ages. They must believe that Sir Boundys has the legal and social right to leave land and money to Gamelyn, and that Gamelyn has the right to demand what is rightfully his. The narrative thus demonstrates the communally shared belief system, and the ways in which that belief system has the power to make a right out of a wrong. The power of enfeoffments, implied as a right and true system, allowed Gamelyn to break into the estate and kill the porter.

After the party, Johan concocts a story whereby he has to bind Gamelyn to observe a promise he had made earlier. Gamelyn complies and is fettered. It is only later, with the help of Adam Spenser, that Gamelyn is able to get out of the fetters. While Gamelyn wants to escape, Adam puts it off until Sunday when a banquet is being held for abbots and priors. The logic of Adam Spenser’s argument for putting off Gamelyn’s escape is to see if Gamelyn has any friends among the clergy by testing them. Once the banquet begins as the clergy are eating, the first thing that Gamelyn asks for is food. He states: “it is nought wel served, by God that al made! / That I sitte fasting and other men make glade” (469-70). In this statement there is a commonplace anti-clerical message that people are starving while the clergy is feasting. More than that, however, there is

51 In an interesting way this passage smacks of Wyclifism. As Justice points out, Wyclif’s charges were not meant solely to alleviate poverty as much as they were a concerted effort to promulgate the desires of “a government that wished to seize the goods of the clergy [but] would not have to take responsibility for the action” (Justice 87). By having a two pronged attack based on ostentation and nationalism, Wyclif meant
also the suggestion that things are not fairly distributed, even by local economic
standards.

While most late medieval tracts that rail against the abuses of the clergy largely
condemn corrupt practices, *Gamelyn* goes a step further by actually beating the
clergymen themselves. However, the beatings did not have to take place. Gamelyn and
Adam could have left from the outset. Instead, a strongly social message needed to be
made. The two wait until they know that the clergy will not aid them in their pursuit of
justice. When the monks and bishops refuse to help, Adam and Gamelyn proceed to beat
the clergy with staves.

It is curious to note that there are no parish priests in the mix, suggesting that the
anti-clerical statement is selective. Steven Justice’s comments on rebel clerics could
perhaps shed some light on the subject. He states that the local priest was identified as a
villager: “his crimes were like other villagers’ crimes, his encroachments like their
encroachments, he took part in the same fights, held plots in the same fields, sought the
same exemptions. He was often local, or child of a family whose other children farmed
the local fields.” Gamelyn and Adam, therefore, beat only the higher orders of the
to justify the taking of church property. However, once the rhetoric was in the public
sphere, it could be used by anyone. In a sense, we can see how Wyclif’s preachings are
starting to become ingrained into popular theology and politics. Justice notes that “the
rebels refused to remain merely the authenticating symbol for Wyclif’s polemic; they
made themselves its audience and agent” (90). It is not surprising that the “lewd men”
and outlaws choose a type of government based on Gamelyn’s beliefs rather than his
brother’s. See Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1994).

52 Justice 54.
clergy, the abstract symbols of a remote Church. Symbolically, the beating of the clergy is local resistance against a larger system of injustice. Gamelyn’s injustice, then, is seen by the community of layfolk as the righting of wrongs. This idea is underscored when the poem notes,

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\begin{align*}
\text{Ther was no lewede man that in the halle stood} \\
\text{That wolde do Gamelyn any thing but good,} \\
\text{But stood beside and let hem bothe werche,} \\
\text{For they hadde no rewthe of men of holy cherche. (505-8)}
\end{align*}
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Once again, Gamelyn is on the side of the common man. He is fighting for them, and they support him.

In the narrative this is the second incident in which large cultural and social injustices are addressed through violence. In the first, Gamelyn was allowed to break into the household through force because of the perceived injustices by his brother. In this case, Gamelyn and Spenser beat the clergymen once the monks and bishops do not help. To most critics, this is a provincial form of vigilante justice meted out with clubs and staves; however, both cases present readers with justified moral and social values. As the

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53 Skeat, quoting Mr. Jephson, notes that “the hatred of churchmen, of holy water, and of everything connected with the church, observable in all ballads of this class, is probably owing to the fact that William the Conquerer and his immediate successors systematically removed the Saxon bishops and abbots, and intruded Normans in their stead into all the valuable preferments in England. But there were also other grounds for the odium in which these foreign prelates were held. Sharing the duties of the common law judges, they participated in the aversion with which the functionaries of the law were naturally regarded by outlaws and robbers, &c.” (485). Skeat illustrates his point by looking at the *Gest of Robin Hood*: “These bysshopes and these archebyshoppes, / Ye shall them beete and bynde; / The high sheryfe of Notynghame, / Hym holde ye in your mynde.” See Skeat, *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, vol. 5 485.
tale notes, no man in the hall would have wished anything but good to Gamelyn. Thus violence is figured as the acceptable means to an end.

In *Gamelyn* justice and law, however crude and basic, are the prominent topics of discussion. While it could appear that violence is the precursor to chaos, the *Tale of Gamelyn* uses a great deal of narrative energy to make sure that violence is contained and directed in the right ways. Gamelyn kills the porter and wastes his brother’s food and drink only because Johan has wasted Gamelyn’s inheritance. Gamelyn and Adam beat the clergy with wooden staves only after the clergy refuse to help. Importantly, the clergy refuse to give Gamelyn food, the most basic of human necessities. Thus *Gamelyn* narratively allows the expression of the most rudimentary and basic forms of violence, but they are carefully directed and contained.

The historical situation of the poem becomes important in that many of the issues current during the time period become inscribed within the poem. As Richard Kaeuper has shown, the historical records of the provinces point to a world filled with violence and revenge. To this he adds that the “oaken staves, the beatings, the broken bones so prominent in the tale appear again and again in the petitions, reproducing its [the tale’s] atmosphere in striking fashion.” Speaking on this subject of justice, Susan Crane states that *Gamelyn* presents the idea of justice as “elusive and problematic.” The tale, she continues, “enacts the social and political unease of the later fourteenth century.” This

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55 Crane 74.

56 Crane 74.
concept has in fact been very well documented. Kaeuper, for example, notes that during the middle fourteenth century there were sizable gangs constantly forming and disbanding. In the 1330’s “Wendesley’s gang, a sizable one, engaged in robbery and extortion on a fairly broad scale.” The intimidation of jurors apparently was also a common practice as various court records attest. Sheriffs were in many cases the sources of corruption. The modern critical response can be summed up in Scattergood’s thesis that “Gamelyn’s actions are proposed as constituting a kind of necessary counter-violence to the violence inflicted by those who are formally within the law.” He argues that Gamelyn would be the perfect “role-model” for the gentry class in that Gamelyn “is a local landowner and knight who defends his property rights and status.” The tale “validates lawlessness and the use of violence as ways of maintaining the traditional

57 Edgar F. Shannon, Jr. notes that “the Tale of Gamelyn seems filled with force and disorder. Yet it is clear from the forgoing discussion that the author was well versed in the law of his day and that the poem mirrors accurately and in some detail the uncertain, though gradually developing, processes of justice in the fourteenth century” (463). See Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., “Mediaeval Law in the Tale of Gamelyn,” Speculum 26 (1951): 458-64.


62 Scattergood 178.
order of things.” For Scattergood, noble robbers, such as Gamelyn, are “revolutionary traditionalists.”

And yet when we get to the end of *Gamelyn*, the perverse form of “justice” that Gamelyn literally and symbolically overthrows is supposed to end. The point is that if we see historical reality as the true exemplar for this tale, then Gamelyn’s actions seem like merely a drop in a sea of judicial and political corruption, namely because the justice system in Gamelyn is not changed—what is changed is only the personnel. It could be argued, however, that the moral of *Gamelyn* is that if the correct people get in office, the justice system will in fact change. Indeed, the question for most critics of the *Tale of Gamelyn* has always been what to do with the unchecked violence carried out by the hero and valorized by the narrative.

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63 Scattergood later states that Gamelyn “no doubt gave back to its original audiences a view of themselves they could cherish. It articulates for them a set of problems, rooted in their own sense of reality, and a set of attitudes by means of which it is possible to overcome these problems.” See Scattergood 189.

64 Scattergood goes on to argue that these noble robbers, unlike the rebels of 1381, are reformers and not revolutionaries. Quoting from the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, Scattergood restates some of the more radical demands of the rebels, some of which include changing the system of land-tenure and social stratification. I belabor Scattergood’s explanation somewhat because, in view of Steven Justice’s wonderful study of the Rebellion of 1381, it seems somewhat of a tenuous argument to completely rely on the chronicles. As Justice states, “all written records of the rebellion serve large and distorting ideological interests;...the chronicles and the judicial records emerged from the very institutions that the insurgents set out to capture and revise” (255). The rebels knew that the chronicles and judicial records (the law) commanded and constrained them. It was then the aim of the rebel to control and rewrite the medium through which the institutions operated. Justice points out that the rebels “aimed not to destroy the documentary culture of feudal tenure and royal government, but to re-create it; they recognized the written document as something powerful yet malleable” (48).
As the king of the outlaws and later as the Chief Justice of the Forest, Gamelyn creates communities in which law and justice are carried out. This is most evident in his concern for the well being of the people. As has been pointed out above, Gamelyn is gravely concerned with the common people. Shortly after Gamelyn was “crouned” the king of outlaws, he was visited by the farm hands of his property: “Tho were his bonde-men sorry and nothing glade / Whan Gamelyn, her lord, wolves-heed was cried and made; / And sent out of his men wher they might him finde / For to seeke Gamelyn under woode-linde / To telle him tidinges how the wind was went / And all his good reved and his men shent” (699-704). After he was officially declared an outlaw, Gamelyn’s property was taken and his renters were exposed to plunder. Because his people are the ones suffering, he goes to the next shire assembly. While his brother makes the people suffer in order to get what he wants, Gamelyn is responsive to their needs. Similarly, Gamelyn decides to leave Ote’s custody and go back into the forest “to loke how my yonge men leden here lif, / Whether they liven in joye or elles in strif” (757-8). Gamelyn is concerned that his “merry men” will suffer without his guidance. In addition, while an outlaw, Gamelyn only attacks the clergy: “Whil Gamelyn was outlawed had he no cors; / There was no man that for him ferde the wors / But abbots and priours, monk and chanoun; / Of hem left he nothing whan he might hem nom” (779-83). Clearly this is seen as a way of stripping the church of its ill-gotten possessions. Importantly, the people were never harmed. Lastly, as king of the outlaws Gamelyn enacts his role as leader in a world turned upside down. From this position as an outlaw, Gamelyn launches the
campaign that ultimately rights society. Dramatically, Gamelyn’s last act of violence is to turn the courtroom upside down.

The direction of the violence in *Gamelyn* is thus targeted at older systems and social structures that have taken a heavy toll on both the commons and the gentry. The first system that is targeted is the rule of primogeniture. The second is the institution of the corrupt Church. The last act of violence, and perhaps the most important, is the attack on the legal system. From the very beginning of the narrative, people have had to fight against these systems, as is the case with Sir Johan of Boundys himself. By the end, only the complete overturning of the system will suffice.

In the last scene, Johan has been “fast about bothe day and other, / For to hire the quest to hangen his brother” (785-6). Although he does not have Gamelyn in custody, Johan “foryat he nat that / To huire the men on his quest to hangen his brother; / Though he hadde nought that oon [Gamelyn], he wolde have that other [Ote]” (800-2). The fact that the narrative spells it out twice that Johan has bribed the inquest magnifies the importance of the injustice. Gamelyn’s response to the ill-use of the law is: “We will slee the giltif and lat the other go. / I will into the halle and with the justice speke; / On hem that been giltif I will been awreke. / Lat non skape at the dore; take, yonge men, yeme; / For I will be justice this day domes to deme” (822-26). Symbolically, Gamelyn asks his “merry men” to surround the building and not let anyone escape. Previously the merry men carried out justice by robbing the Church; now they contain injustice within the building by surrounding it. In unison they answer Gamelyn, “And if thou to us have neede, thou shalt find us prest; / We wiln stande with thee whil that we may dure” (830-
1). Because of the young men, “Durste non to Gamelyn saye but good, / Forfered of the company that withoute stood” (853-4). In many ways, the merry men and the people are a moral and social barometer indicating what forms of violence are allowed. They support Gamelyn because Gamelyn has done everything he could to help out the common people by attacking the institutions of injustice and oppression. The fact that the people follow Gamelyn at this critical juncture in his own quest to regain his inheritance speaks to the importance of securing popular support. Gamelyn’s quest thus brings the whole community together.

True to his word, Gamelyn enters the building and becomes the Justice. With the community behind him, Gamelyn “clevede his [the Justice’s] cheeke boon” and “threw him over the barre and his arm tobrak” (850, 852). Gamelyn thus strikes at the mouth that is the apparatus for sentencing and the arm that carries out that sentence. By throwing the Justice over the bar, Gamelyn figuratively overthrows the system of injustice. Sitting in the Justice’s seat, Gamelyn sentences his brother Johan, the jurors, and the justice to death by hanging. Like all the forms of violence in the narrative, the hangings are socially and publically sanctioned.

Because violence is allowed expression against these three structural forms of social control, I argue that Gamelyn is very interested in demonstrating both the consequences of these systems and ways in which they need to be overhauled. At the heart of this analysis is the idea that Gamelyn presents a good illustration of the concept of proper rule. The narrative posits that if the correct people are put in office, the judicial and political system will change for the better. As we saw in Havelok, it was with the
appointments of Godrich and Godard that the laws were changed for the worse. With the coming of Havelok the laws were changed for the better. In a sense, whoever has control of the institutions has command over the lives of the collectivity. The violence found in both Havelok and Gamelyn attest to the fervor and the desperation of the people to have control of these institutions.

Furthermore, Gamelyn is a direct message about communities. Gamelyn defeats the champion who is symbolically impeding commerce, and hundreds follow him. He beats up the clergy that are stealing from the community, and the people wish him nothing but good. He becomes an outlaw and ultimately is made king of the outlaws. Lastly, he overturns a corrupt justice system and the king rewards him. Most important, the Tale of Gamelyn ultimately validates the final will of Sir Johan of Boundys. Because of his service Sir Johan prospered. In his last will he wanted to provide for all his sons. The older brother, perhaps enacting the law of primogeniture, took the inheritance for himself and refused to manage Gamelyn’s share. Johan, therefore, went against the wishes of his father and the decrees and values of the gentry community. Further, by communing with the clergy, Johan alienated the rest of the community, both the common people and the outlaws. In the final scene Johan is hanged in a manner not of his class. Sir Ote, however, becomes a Knight of the Shire and Gamelyn is made Chief Justice of the Forest.\(^6^5\)

In England’s political and economic history, the communally held values of the Tale of Gamelyn were displayed in a very similar manner. The social ideas of commerce,

\(^6^5\) Interestingly, Chaucer served as both a forester and as a knight of the shire.
law, and justice were manifested in the growing political independence of the gentry. By
the middle of the fourteenth century, the Commons was able to exact several changes—
one of them was a change in the composition and power of the peace commissions. This
power base in the Commons provided the gentry with what perhaps was their ultimate
ambition: self-rule in the shires. During the 1350's and 1360's the Commons were able
to push through several provisions which "guaranteed that the landed interest would
prevail in the administration of the shires." In particular, most of these provisions had
to do with the administration of justice. Given the number of injustices cited by Richard
Kaeuper, the shires needed justice. But, as Ormrod notes, "they wanted justice on their
own terms: and by the 1350's it was clear that this meant nothing less than local control
of the commissions of the peace." If we look at Gamelyn from this vantagepoint, the
impetus of the tale is clearly about the use of violence aimed at proper rule. The
appointment of Sir Ote and Gamelyn to chief justice and justice does not, then, come as a
surprise.

The important question is what to do with a charismatic but violent leader who
appeals to society and who works to right what is perceived as wrong. Violence is

66 Nigel Saul notes that "the Commons in parliament persistently sought to exclude from
local office men who owed their prominence to magnate favour rather than to their
standing in the county community...Stewards and lesser retainers gradually disappeared
from the more important local offices...Whereas in 1300 a knight or esquire would be
appointed to any county where he held land and sometimes to a county where he held
none, in 1400 he held office almost invariably in the shire where he resided" (258-9).

67 Ormrod 156.

68 Ormrod 159.
neither random nor is it unleashed against the innocent, in ways that it would be if a gang
or band of outlaws were the main heroic figures. As noted throughout this chapter,
violence in the narrative is contained within a legal and moral system of beliefs. In the
*Tale of Gamelyn* violence is both valorized but harnessed through creative narrative
choices.

Reading Across the Nation

If we simply conclude our argument by problematizing the rural aspects of the
tale alone, we would be falling into the trap of reinscribing a dichotomy between rural
and urban centers. What is presented in the tale has far-reaching effects, not only for
those in the country but for the merchant classes as well. The country life had, for a long
time, a special place in the imagination of the merchant classes. To the merchant classes,
the country provided a sense of nostalgia, economic opportunities, and most important
the opportunity to gain social status. First, men who left the country to become
apprentices in the cities “sometimes never became habituated to city life and established
themselves in country houses near London as soon as was feasible.”^69 Likewise, family
ties between urban merchants and their rural relatives remained quite close.^70 More
importantly, the idea of country life carried with it many connotations of ease, comfort,
and good living. Mingled among these interests is also a certain amount of display and

^69 Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500* (Ann Arbor:

^70 Thrupp 228.
extravagance. One of the main hobbies of the wealthier merchants was the sport of
hunting. It would be hard to argue that the pursuit of a gentleman’s sport could not
implicitly be associated with aristocratic pretensions. Secondly, the country provided
economic opportunities for the merchant classes. In some instances, merchants,
especially of the lower strata, would find better business opportunities for their trade in
the provinces. As was often the case in times of trade depression, the merchants might
turn their backs on city life and return to life in the provinces, sometimes eking out an
existence on their London property. More often, however, the country provided
wealthier merchant families with the opportunities to diversify their economic holdings.
By this time, merchant families found it important to establish the senior branch on the
country estate and the junior branch in the city to continue the family trade. This in fact
leads to a third way in which the country functioned in the imagination of the merchant
classes. By moving to the country, merchants were able to enter social circles closed to
them in the city. As Sylvia Thrupp notes,

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71 Along with hunting, wealthy merchants, like Chaucer’s Franklin, would have lengthy
dinner parties as a means of entertaining important dinner guests: “it was characteristic
of the merchant to be appreciative of food and drink and to have a fine sense of
hospitality” (150). Thrupp notes that another way of displaying wealth would be in the
extravagance of clothing and in the number of attendants. See Thrupp 148-54.

72 Thrupp 226-7.

73 Thrupp 228-9.

74 Thrupp 230.

75 Nigel Saul states that “to a greater extent than ever before merchants and burgesses like
Pointer, Cosyn, Adynet and Grevel were taking advantage of the fall in the value of land
to assume the status of landed proprietors. They may not have seen land as primarily an
By settling down on their manors they stood to gain in status, not to lose, for the head of the family was before long likely to be drawn into the influential circle that controlled the administration of the county. The strategic steps that assured a son's entry into the leisured landowning class required a patient watching of the land and marriage markets and were probably all more or less motivated by social ambition. An extreme instance in point is that of a member of the grocers' company, under Richard II, who acquired land in Essex...[and] retained the property, bought an heiress' marriage for his son, and settled him there.76

This move to place the family among the local gentry allowed the merchant class to interact with the gentry; marrying into the local gentry allowed them to gain a foothold in the realm of gentle society. In this way merchants were entering into speculations built on marriages.77

It is this dream of rising into gentle society that could have fueled merchants' aspirations for the country life. In Gamelyn many of these same features are apparent. While the hero of the story is not, strictly speaking, a merchant, he is part of the lesser nobility of the country society. His subsequent rise to a high local position in many ways paralleled that of merchant families. Further, Gamelyn's marriage at the end of the tale presents many of the possibilities available to those wishing to rise socially.

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76 Thrupp 230.

Moreover, the merchants also had a taste of self-rule. Economic ascendancy by the fourteenth-century merchant class had translated into political power. While those of the highest economic levels would reserve for themselves the highest political offices, numerous other offices at lower positions would also be available. Kowaleski notes that "politically active citizens received preferential treatment in both financial assessment and in the allocation of borough business to private contractors. Second, such citizens were appointed ministers of the king both in the commercial sphere and in the political sphere. Third, they benefited from personal and business relationships with the king’s officials, the local gentry, and the leading merchants of other towns." Also of note, membership into the ruling groups was not closed off; on the contrary rising families were constantly being recruited to replace failed ones. Like their provincial cousins, there was social and factional violence in the struggle for power. However, in like manner, there was an awareness of communal interests that could bring together the


79 Kowaleski notes that although the highest offices went to the wealthiest, "Rank B [generally craftsmen] men voted in the electoral process, could hold lower-level offices such as bridge warden, and were always members of the freedom, they had some political power and must be counted as members of the ‘oligarchy.’” See Kowaleski 192.

80 Kowaleski 193.

81 Kowaleski 190-215.
diverse body. The point is that the urban merchants possessed communities analogous to gentry communities and that in many cases, the two communities would have similar social interests. The struggle for achievements in economics and politics, especially as it concerned the Commons, encouraged people to associate the merchants and gentry together, with certain similar functions.

Modern critics have identified the *Gamelyn* audience as being made up of those represented in the tale. Following an old, and rather stale, argument that people only create and want to hear stories about themselves, the audience is said to comprise "the amorphous social level of minor landowners, lesser knights and retainers—those who might at most hobnob with the prior of a nearby religious house or know the sheriff, but whose horizons are essentially local." While this statement could in fact be true, trying to categorize who belonged to the gentry class is an almost impossible task. Along with this, social mobility and interaction between city and province would have provided an

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83 Thrupp 293.

84 Kaeuper, "An Historian's Reading of the *Tale of Gamelyn*" 52-3.
even greater market for this type of tale.\textsuperscript{85} It must be remembered that the fourteenth century was witness to a great dislocation of people and shifts in social standings.\textsuperscript{86}

Trying to categorize the audience of *Gamelyn* as simply provincial seems contradictory in that all known versions are found in a work having very much a metropolitan readership. Apparently early readers of the *Canterbury Tales* had no problem relating to a setting different from that of the city. Given the fact that burgesses and knights were collaborating together in the Commons, perhaps urban people could sympathize, if not envy, the drive for proper rule in the provinces.

I would even go as far as to say that an urban audience would have been particularly interested in the legal and political issues of the tale. Modern critics have postulated that Chaucer probably meant to write the *Tale of Gamelyn* for the character of the Yeoman. However, there may not have been a big ideological difference between the Yeoman and the Cook. Richard Tardif has persuasively argued that Robin Hood can best

\textsuperscript{85} Peter Coss writes that “urban administrators were often men of the same type, background and ambition [as the gentry]. Some perhaps, like some of the merchants, were drawn from established gentry families; many aspired to and achieved the life of the country gentleman. The elite of some at least of the major towns tended to be an amalgam of administrators, renters and merchants. These strands are not always separable, and we should not attempt to separate them culturally...To a degree and especially at certain levels it was a mobile and aspirant society, both in town and in country” (49). See P. R. Coss, “Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood,” *Past and Present* 108 (1984): 35-79.

\textsuperscript{86} There are various theories about the widespread social mobility and mass migrations of people. Certainly increased mercantilism could be seen as a possibility. The Hundred Years’ War and the Black Death are also responsible for the large upheavals.
be understood as a myth woven out of urban fantasies of rural freedom. He argues that
“the concept of ‘yeomanry’ provides the most important link between the ballads and the
social formation which produced them.” The term “yeoman,” while having agrarian
roots, was also used to classify the middling urban class and journeyman artisans. Because guilds structured their framework on the pyramidal manorial manor, the values
and beliefs of this class closely paralleled their rural cousins. The issues relevant to this
urban working class could only be expressed “in the terms of an already-available value-
system from the land (and this is perhaps one reason why historians persist in reading

87 Richard Tardif, “The ‘Mystery’ of Robin Hood: A New Social Context for the Texts,”
Words and Worlds, ed. Stephen Knight and S. N. Mukherjee (Sydney: Association for

88 Tardif 132.

89 “It is by no means certain that all the men who were classified as yeoman or
husbandmen derived their livelihood only from the land; indeed, when they gave town
addresses, they may have been much more closely connected with trade or industry.
Clerks attempting to set down a man’s status or occupation often fell back on the label
‘yeoman’ when they were in doubt as to his main occupation but estimated that he was of
middling rank... Townsmen of the merchant class, even Londoners, could on occasion be
described as yeoman.” See Thrupp 217-18.

90 On the structure of guilds, Tardif writes that the model was of “a small minority
[holding] political and economic power over a mass of workers without political status in
the organisation, but whose rights are theoretically guaranteed by their masters, with the
whole forming a hierarchical totality unified within each particular industry” (132-3). On
the fluidity of the yeoman social consciousness, he writes: “At the time of the earliest
recorded Robin Hood ballads, then, the term had an ambiguous and shifting significaton
within the rather static hierarchy of medieval social status, which enabled it to move
fairly freely between the different contexts of town and land. This is perhaps partly due
to the fact that the newly-emergent towns naturally tended to adopt the ill-fitting
ideological structures of the dominant feudal mode of production, an ideological version
of culture-lag.” See Tardiff 132-3.
them in rural terms)."91 If we follow Tardif's example, we can argue that the ideological construction of *Gamelyn* should be inherently pleasing to an urban audience. Perhaps as an indication that *Gamelyn* is not solely interested in keeping the status quo, the character of Adam Spenser did not become an outlaw when he released Gamelyn or beat the visiting clergy; he became an outlaw when he promised to join Gamelyn, thus breaking the *Statute of Labourers* of 1349. As Tardif notes, "in accepting or seeking better wages workers place themselves outside that economic and social framework that wages provide— they become out-laws, thieves."92 Thus, texts such as *Gamelyn* provide urban craftsmen with a way to express and handle their new and troublesome socio-economic status.

Conclusion

The *Tale of Gamelyn* is about justice and law in late medieval England. It provides a very good portrait of economic and social life in the provinces. While medieval studies have often thought of rural life as solely based on agricultural production, *Gamelyn* makes evident the fact that economic development and mercantilism were important concepts to merchant knights such as Gamelyn. Gamelyn is thus the representative for novel ways of structuring society. As a member of the knightly gentry class, Gamelyn fights and wrestles with problems facing society. When his land and property are in disrepair, Gamelyn proves his worth by beating the local

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91 Tardif 133.

92 Tardif 135.
wrestling champion. By beating the champion and rescuing the franklin, Gamelyn addresses the wrongs in society: his own lands are nonproductive and the agent for economy is distressed. In one violent act, Gamelyn directs the course of the economy. When the systems of law and justice are menaced by men like Johan, Gamelyn with the help of the people overthrows the parties of injustice. By righting wrongs, Gamelyn brings the community together.

Instead of limiting the influence of *Gamelyn* to the provinces, the textual placement of the tale argues that *Gamelyn* was read by urban audiences. To some late medieval English readers of Chaucer, the fact that the Cook “told” the Tale of Gamelyn was important. In the words of John Urry, an eighteenth century Chaucerian editor, “because I find it in so many MSS, I have no doubt of it, and therefore make it publick, and call it the Fifth Tale. In all the MSS it is called the Cooke’s Tale, and therefore I call it so in like manner.” To medieval readers the choice of the Cook as the teller of this tale made sense. The Cook is, after all, the intermediary between agricultural production and aristocratic consumption, the center of exchange. The Cook turns raw products into palatable, even perhaps artistic, products for the aristocracy, not unlike a medieval poet. But most importantly, because of his central position, the Cook highlights the

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94 This is based on Hilton’s idea that cash generated from rural produce facilitated the payment of rent to lords and the acquisition of manufactured products from urban areas. See Hilton 19-28.
interdependence between the country and the city. It is not surprising then that an urban
dweller might tell a provincial tale.

As the last section of this chapter demonstrates, the *Tale of Gamelyn* was socially
and ideologically important to urban readers. Certainly, the audiences of *Gamelyn* could
easily have found a perspective from which to interpret and enjoy the tale. *Gamelyn* is
filled with powerful scenes in which the values of the community are displayed. These
collective dreams are indicative of the ways in which different communities can imagine
themselves as a collectivity. We find many analogous issues in the social imagination of
a various mix of people; this testifies to the overwhelming sense of collectivity in the
national scene of late medieval England. The sense of economic mobility and social
ascension created a horizontal comradeship between the country and the city. The way to
protect those feelings, I argue, is through a strong nation. Those imagined connections
are nationalistic in tone, promoting a collective community.
CHAPTER 5

JUSTICE IN THE LAND: MYTH, PROGRAM, AND GOVERNANCE

At the end of the Tale of Gamelyn, Gamelyn splits the cheek of the Justice of the Peace, throws him over the “barre” thereby breaking his arm, and proceeds to “sette him [Gamelyn] doun in the justices sete” (855). In the previous chapter, on the Tale of Gamelyn, I have demonstrated that violence is contained and justice is exercised with calculated precision. Gamelyn’s overthrow of the court seems to show the corrupt nature of the legal system in late medieval England, but the fact that Gamelyn’s forms of violence and justice are supported by the narrative and the people represented in the narrative demonstrates that officials like Johan are responsible for corruption and injustice. Gamelyn, now the judge, “lette fettre the justice and his fals brother / And dede hem come to the barre, than oon with that other” (859-60). After listening to the case, Gamelyn sentences the Justice and the twelve jurors to be “hanged this day” (872) because they have “y-yeve domes of the wors assise” (870). The Tale of Gamelyn argues that officials of the justice system are corrupt but that the system, when organized by a person such as Gamelyn, is responsive to the needs and desires of the community. As further proof the narrative states that Sir Ote is made the Justice of the Peace and
Gamelyn is made the Chief Justice of the Free Forest. In their quest for justice, Gamelyn and Sir Ote have the support of the people.

In many ways this chapter begins where the *Tale of Gamelyn* leaves off. While the previous chapter demonstrated ways in which justice and social ideas brought together seemingly disparate communities, this chapter explores the ways in which theories of government utilize forms of nationalism in the building of community. At the heart of both chapters is a discussion of the relationship between the people and the law. In the *Tale of Gamelyn*, the support of the people legitimated Gamelyn’s forms of law and justice. The impetus of Fortescue’s *Governance* is the idea that government, and how it is constituted, is held together by mutual faith between subject and king. Central to Fortescue’s project is the notion of collective legitimacy, whereby the government is a mixture of constitutional and regal laws, *dominium politicum et regale*. Fortescue, I argue, imagines a community upheld by subjects who exemplify moral, religious, and social fortitude.¹

¹ Fortescue’s writings have been largely examined for their comments on the constitutional history of England, the limitations on kings, and the role of Lancastrian government during the fifteenth century. Fortescue’s early biographers took great care to portray Fortescue as the great champion of constitutionalism in the midst of civil war. Charles Plummer, in particular, maintains that much of Fortescue’s theories derive directly from governmental concerns arising from the wars and from Lancastrian ideas of government. Plummer, in a sense, reads Fortescue’s work as a reaction to all that was wrong, implying, of course, that constitutional government was the proper course. S. B. Chrimes sees Fortescue more as a reformer standing up for constitutional principles. In some ways, Fortescue, to Chrimes, is a nationalist, a leading spokesman for native law and justice. Much work has been done in political history, governmental history, and legal history as it concerns Fortescue’s works. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Fortescue creates a national program out of legends and myths of the people. For more information on Fortescue, see Charles Plummer, “Introduction,” *The Governance of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926) 1-105; S. B. Chrimes, “Introduction,” *De Laudibus Legum Anglie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942) lxix-cviii; S. B. Chrimes, *English Constitutional Ideas in the Fifteen Century* (New York: }
Nationalism comes in many forms. For Benedict Anderson, the newspaper was central to understanding the ways in which people imagined themselves in a historical and social community. Hence, in the Introduction, I argued that imaginative literature, as portrayed in the coronation of Havelok, was instrumental in gathering together people of various classes and regions. To Anthony Smith, ethnicity plays an integral part in how communities are made. Thus, in Chapter One, I demonstrated the ways in which Havelok the Dane can be read as an ethnic myth of origin. The romance created a sense of Englishness in the late Middle Ages.

However, if we leave off at this point, we would fall into what Eric Hobsbawm terms “proto-nationalism.” To Hobsbawm these are actual communities or collectivities that are held together by history, culture, and ethnicity. They have all the necessary components of imagined communities. These communities, however, lack the strong central government that Hobsbawm argues is the decisive criterion for modern forms of nationhood. In most cases, the state or government of these early communities (most exist before the eighteenth century) “is not understood to include more than a small fraction of the inhabitants of a state, namely the privileged elite, or the nobility and gentry.” This “nationalism of the nobility” did not associate themselves with the rest of the populace. Because of this, the country’s inhabitants did not identify with the country that consisted of the community of the lords.


Hobsbawn's argument is that nations developed after 1780 because of governmental programs. Hobsbawn notes:

the characteristic modern state...was novel in a number of respects. It was defined as a (preferably continuous and unbroken) territory over all of whose inhabitants it ruled, and separated by clearly distinct frontiers and borders from other such territories. Politically it ruled over and administered these inhabitants directly, and not through intermediate systems of rulers and autonomous corporations. It sought, if at all possible, to impose the same institutional and administrative arrangements and laws all over its territory, though after the Age of Revolution, no longer the same religious or secular-ideological ones. And increasingly it found itself having to take notice of the opinions of its subjects or citizens, because its political arrangements gave them a voice—generally through various kinds of elected representatives—and/or because the state needed their practical consent or activity in other ways, e.g. as tax-payers or as potential conscript soldiers. In short, the state ruled over a territorially defined 'people' and did so as the supreme 'national' agency of rule over its territory, its agents increasingly reaching down to the humblest inhabitants of the least of its villages.3

To Hobsbawn the state creates nationalistic programs that construct communities. This in turn leads to "citizen loyalty to, and identification with, the state and ruling system."

A community is a nation when the people identify with the state, and the state with the people.

In this chapter I argue that Fortescue imagined a government much akin to Hobsbawn's modern state. I begin this chapter by briefly describing Fortescue's life and times. I examine Fortescue's sources and influences. Along with the biblical and classical sources, Fortescue had a keen sense of ethnography. Much like a cultural historian, Fortescue examines the ways in which law and justice effect society. The next section looks at the Governance of England. I explore the governmental theory that Fortescue maps out. I then examine the ethnic myth used by Fortescue to anglcize the governmental system. To Fortescue, governments are a rich mixture of myths and

3 Hobsbawn 80.
programs that create community. In the last section I explore the role of the people in Fortescue's system. I argue that the people, as envisioned in the Governance, identify with the national government. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that government and law are instrumental forms of nationalism in late medieval England.

Life and Times of Fortescue

Born between 1385 and 1400 in Norris in Devon, John Fortescue was the second son of Sir John Fortescue of Winstone, who figured prominently as one of Henry V's knights at Agincourt and who later became governor of the fortress of Meaux in La Brie upon its capture in 1422. Fortescue was admitted to membership in Lincoln's Inn by 1420 and was made a Governor in 1425, 1426, and 1429. By 1437 Fortescue had been elected a Member of Parliament eight times. In the 1430's Fortescue was also made a Sergeant at Arms. One of his biographers notes of Fortescue's early career: "Already a man of substance and trust, he was now and for many years to come in considerable demand as trustee or feoffe to uses, and surety of various kinds, and participated in numerous transfers of property....[Fortescue] had entered upon a remarkable career of public service outside parliament...He was to become a Justice of the Peace thirty-five times in seventeen counties or boroughs at one time or another, and in the course of twenty-five years he was to receive no fewer than seventy commissions of oyer and

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5 S. B. Chrimes, Introduction to De Laudibus lxxi.

170
terminer, of assize, of gaol-delivery, or of special inquisition of various sorts. In 1442 Fortescue was advanced directly to the chief justice of the king’s bench and knighted soon afterwards.

In the early part of his life Fortescue also accumulated a great deal of land. His second marriage, to Elizabeth, heiress of John Jamyss, brought him property in both Somerset and Wiltshire. He had previously acquired part of his father’s property in Devonshire. Later in life Fortescue acquired the manor of Geddyngalle and other lands in Suffolk, the manor of Ebrington, properties in Wilts, Herts, and Middlesex, and land at Efford in Devonshire. Thus, by the 1450’s, Fortescue was a considerable landowner.

Fortescue’s rise in legal and political circles is paralleled by his accumulation of wealth. Max Adams Shepard states that Fortescue’s “importance lies primarily in the fact that he represents the solid, or average, views of a very successful judge of the landed gentry class.” Fortescue, as a gentry-lawyer, epitomizes the moderate and conservative inclination towards a stable government that conforms to traditional forms and rules. In many ways, Fortescue illustrates the social ideas and ambitions of the Tale of Gamelyn. Like Sir Ote and Gamelyn, Fortescue “espouses the form of government and the social class (the landed, middle-class gentry) most likely to have brought true peace to England

6 Chrimes lxxi.
7 Plummer 43.
8 Plummer 43.
9 Plummer 43-4.
10 Shepard 209-1.
at that time and to have reconciled conflicting economic interests. Fortescue was in an important position to construct a governmental theory based on justice and economics according to the goals of the landed gentry.

Tumultuous fifteenth-century politics, however, were to hand Chief Justice Fortescue a very different fate. He risked all for the Lancastrian cause. Fortescue last presided over the Court of King's Bench in 1460; by 1461 he joined the war and was present at the battle of Wakefield; at the second battle of St. Alban's, and later at the disastrous battle of Towton on March 29, 1461. From there on Fortescue followed the royal family as they made their exile in Scotland and later in France. During this period of exile in France, Fortescue wrote several propagandist works arguing against the House of York. Fortescue finally ended his wandering after the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1471, where he was captured and made a prisoner. He seems to have capitulated to the enemy's threats, and he was granted a pardon later that year. Shortly thereafter, Fortescue sat down to write the Governance of England.

Fortescue died in 1476. His work had a lasting influence in the Tudor years and well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Perhaps this was due to Fortescue's nationalistic dream of harmony and community.

11 Shepard 296.
12 Plummer 54-5.
Governance of England

The Governance of England was written between 1471 and 1476. The text survives in ten manuscripts. As the Chief Justice of England Fortescue was well acquainted with Civil Law and Canon Law, and he has been held in high regard for his knowledge of the system of jurisprudence. Fortescue, in his writings, quotes freely from Thomas Aquinas, Boethius, St. Augustine, Aristotle, as well as many other classical and ecclesiastical writers.

But it was not from books alone that Fortescue derived his political theories. In particular, Fortescue had a penchant for ethnography. There are many indications that Fortescue studied attentively the institutions and conditions of other countries, particularly during his exile in France and Scotland. Also, Fortescue used his vast experience to explain the nature of legal principles, or the need for reform. For example, in De Laudibus Legum Angliae Fortescue notes that in France the law is not content to convict the accused in capital cases by witnesses [jury system], lest innocent blood be condemned by the testimony of liars. But that law prefers the accused to be racked with tortures until they themselves confess to their guilt, than to proceed by the deposition of witnesses who are often provoked to perjury.

16 Plummer 98.
17 Plummer 99.
18 The application of personal observation to criticism of the affairs of intellectual, social, political, and legal life is an important feature in Fortescue’s writings. Along with the idea of comparing legal institutions, Fortescue is known as a pioneer in legal literature. His methods of inquiry in the fields of law and politics were a starting point for a long line of lawyers in later centuries. See Chrimes, Introduction to De Laudibus xlii-liii.
by wicked passions and sometimes by the subornation of evil persons. By such craft and cunning, criminals and suspected criminals are afflicted with so many kinds of tortures in that kingdom that the pen shrinks from putting them in writing.  

Fortescue does begin to put some of the tortures into writing, but stops abruptly and states, “The pen, alas! is ashamed to narrate the enormities of the tortures.”

Fortescue goes on to say that in England, sheriffs are appointed, and they in turn choose twelve jurors who are sworn to adjudicate according to evidence and witnesses. He adds that he “should, indeed, prefer twenty guilty men to escape death through mercy, than one innocent to be condemned unjustly.”

In another example of how Fortescue’s personal experience and ethnographic experience influence his legal and political ideas, he writes that delays in the legal system are sometimes necessary. As in many passages, Fortescue begins by describing the French legal system. He notes that in the “high court of France...[there are] certain actions which have been pending for more than thirty years. I myself know one case of appeal which was begun in that court, between Richard Heron (an English merchant) and other merchants, of trespass done within the jurisdiction of that court, and has now been adjourned these ten years, and very likely cannot be decided within another ten years.”

He adds that the English system is considerably speedier. While this may sound like a

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20 Praise 32.

21 Praise 41.

22 Praise 76.
great attribute, Fortescue gives a personal account of how it does not always deliver justice. He states,

I once saw in the city of Salisbury, before a certain judge a gaol-delivery, with clerk assigned to him, a woman convicted and burnt for the death of her husband within a year of his murder. In this case the judge could have respited the charge or proof against the woman until after that year. And, when the year was over, I saw a servant of the dead man convicted of the murder of his master before the same justice, a servant who then publicly confessed that he alone killed his master, and that his mistress, the wife, who had been burnt, had been entirely innocent of his death, he mourned his burnt mistress, who had been innocent of that crime. O what sort of pang of conscience and remorse we must imagine, because of his deed, to have come to this so hasty judge, who could have rightly stayed execution! Often alas! he has told me, that never in his life would he purge his mind of that deed of his.23

These two examples note the prominent role that Fortescue gave experience. They also demonstrate how remarkably interested Fortescue was in pursuing justice, but from a humane perspective. His case against torture is startling and horrific in detail. Like Gamelyn, Fortescue is interested in justice being served. The case for torture hinges on the concept that socially legitimated violence must be employed in order to arrive at the truth. This could, then, be a case where violence should be allowed, as is the case in much of Gamelyn. After all, it is the welfare of the community that is at stake.

Fortescue, however, argues that the best interests of the community are not served by torture. In this sense, torture does not lead to justice. Justice can only be arrived at when twelve jurors are sworn to base their conclusion on evidence and witnesses. The people must be allowed participation in the deliberation of justice.

It is also interesting that Fortescue bases his case against torture and for a jury system on the overall wealth, population, demographics, and fertility of England.

23 Praise 77.
Fortescue states that England “is indeed so fertile that, compared area to area, it surpasses almost all other lands in abundance of its produce.” In addition, the “land is so well stocked and replete with possessors of land and fields that in it no hamlet, however small, can be found in which there is no knight, esquire, or householder of the sort commonly called a franklin, well-off in possessions; nor numerous other free tenants, and many yeomen, sufficiently in patrimony to make a jury in the form described above.” Hence, like in *Gamelyn*, justice and the economy go hand in hand. In *Gamelyn* the state of the economy, which was symbolized by Gamelyn’s land being unproductive, and thereby contributing to the Franklin’s losses, and the state of the legal system, which was illustrated by Johan’s illegal acts, conveyed the negative effect of both systems on the community. Fortescue argues that the general well-being of the economy will necessarily lead to a better legal system. Thus, the praise for England’s laws is also praise for other institutions.

The example concerning the young wife who was unjustly put to death reveals problems in the legal system. The passage is supposed to exemplify a judicial problem: delays by the court system. However, instead of addressing the question with the use of complicated legal theories, Fortescue presents the issue in a very personal fashion. His account deals with the pains of the young woman who was unfairly tried and more important with the grief of the justice who had to live with the fact that he had acted too hastily. More than other exempla, this one demonstrates the ultimate penalty for injustice: one member of the community is dead and the other has to live with the guilt.

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24 *Praise* 42.

25 *Praise* 43.

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These two examples from Fortescue’s writings allow us to better understand the complexity of his argument. While tracts on political and governmental theories largely concern themselves with classical, ecclesiastical, and legal exempla and precedents, Fortescue also places a great deal of importance on lived human experience. In dealing with the founding of England or the constitution of the government, it is important that Fortescue is always thinking about its practical application and its personal and communal consequences.

The *Governance of England* begins with descriptions of the two different forms of government. The French system is based on regal law, *dominium regale*. In contradistinction, the English practice a mixed form of government called *jus politicum et regale*. Under the French system the king “mey rule his peple by suche lawes as he makyth hym self. And therfore he mey sette uppon thaim tayles and other imposicions, such as he wol hym self, with owt thair assent” (I). In the English system of governance the king “may not mle his peple by other lawes than such as thay assented unto. And therfore he mey sett upon thaim non imposicions with owt thair assent” (I).

Fortescue goes on to argue that the reason for different forms of government can be found in the works of writers such as Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, and others. When the children of Israel were first chosen as the people of God, they were ruled by Him under Judges “political and regal.” In the beginnings of biblical history, the people were ruled with a mixed form of government akin to that of the English. As time went by, the people of Israel desired to have a government like that of the gentiles, based only on regal law. God was greatly offended and showed them, through the prophet Samuel, the inherent foolishness of their wishes. Under the regal system of government the king
“wolde take from thaim thair lande and gyf it to his servantes, and sett thair childeryn in his cartis, and do to thaim such o^er many harmeful thinges” (I). Samuel also showed the Israelites that under a political and regal system “it was not lefull to any man for to take from thaim any of thaire godis, or to greve thair children pat hade not offendid” (I). In this Biblical scene, Fortescue finds a precedent that demonstrates “that it was bettir to the peple to be ruled politekely and roialy” (I).

Fortescue thus finds a biblical precedent that powerfully illustrates the religious and historical sanctity of the English form of government. He goes to the very foundation of Christianity to discover the roots of a political and regal system of government. Also, Fortescue suggests that there is an inherent connection between religion and government. God ordains, and seems to practice, a regal and political government. In contrast, the pagans who believe in the wrong gods also believe in the wrong system of government.

Even more interesting, Fortescue explains that the prophet Samuel described the two systems by adducing the example of the kings being able to take away property unjustly from their subjects. To Fortescue, the difference between the systems of government has an economic basis. In this case, the argument is centered on the king’s right to take away properties and children. As discussed in Chapter Four, the English landed gentry and merchant classes were deeply interested in the connections between property and children. That one should be able to bequeath property to all sons is, after all, the main thesis in *Gamelyn*. Chapter Four also noted the importance of the Franklin’s sons to the general economy, where the sad state of the economy is suggested by the Franklin’s sons being taken away. Like *Gamelyn*, Fortescue thus uses insecurities about
inheritance to establish his point. Fortescue posits that an effective governmental system will ensure the economic well-being of the community.

Further, as in a political and regal system, Fortescue emphatically denies that kings have the royal right to take property and children away without the consent of the people. This important concept in Fortescue’s political theories eternalizes, by Biblical reasoning, the importance of laws concerning private property. He provides model laws concerning private property and adduces sacred and eternal precedents. In this way, we notice that Fortescue is not simply describing political systems but also creatively writing them into existence. Fortescue is positing that the English government exists to perpetuate and guarantee private property, but not to take it away. In a sense, England’s business is England’s business. This means that the king is not the aristocratic overlord of the realm. Instead, Fortescue’s theories suggest that the king is responsible for the economic well-being of the country. By an indirect route, the nation itself is the target of Fortescue’s thrust. The well-being of the national community is entrusted to a king who must selectively and wisely act on possible troubles from without and from within. Because the state of the nation is to be judged by its economic success, the king must carry out justice in the land.

In the next chapter of the Governance, Fortescue discusses why there are two different forms of government. The royal system of government was first instituted by Nimrod “be myght for his owne glorie made and incorperate the first realme, and subdued it to hymself bi tyrannye, he wolde not have it governyd bi any ojer rule or

\[26\] For further information on the immutability of private property and the responsibilities of government, see Shepard 299-305.
lawe, but bi his owne wille” (II). However, when mankind reached a better disposition to virtue, and perhaps greater political self-awareness, a government based on the principles of political and regal rule was instituted. Fortescue further notes that in England it began when Brutus and his fellowship first reached the English shores. As this time, “the fellowshippe that came in to this lande with Brute, willynge to beunate and made a body pollitike callid a reawme, havynge an hed to governe it...than they chese the same Brute to be yer kyng” (II). The government that Brutus and his men constituted was called political, because it “ordeyned the same reaume to be ruled and justified by suche lawes as thai all wolde assent upon,” and regal, “bi cause it is ministrid bi a kyng” (II). In effect, Fortescue was attempting to limit the rights of kings.27 The collective legitimacy, and constitutionality, of the theory rests on the idea that the king can only make laws and taxes that are consented to by the people.

The third chapter of the Governance, entitled “Here Bien Shewed the Fruytes of Jus Regale and the Fruytes of Jus Politicum et Regale,” demonstrates the very different effects of both governmental systems. In France, the kings rule under regal law. Under good kings such as Saint Louis everything went well and the three estates were consulted on governmental matters. But recent French kings “have yerely sithyn sette such charges upon them, and so augmented the same charges, as the same commons be so

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impoverysshid and distroyed, pat thai move unneth leve” (III). Fortescue then describes the horrible effects of the devastating taxes and governmental strategies.

[The people] drinken water, thai eyten apples, with brede right browne made of rye; thai eyten no flesshe but yf it be right seldon a little larde, or of the entrales and heydes of bestis slayn for the nobles and marchauntes of the lande. Thai weren no wolen, but yf it be a povere cote under thair uttermest garnement, made of grete cavnaus, and passyn not thair kne, wher fore thai beth gartered and ther theis bare. (III)

The effects of the royal system of government yield extreme poverty for the people. Because they have to work incessantly just to pay their taxes, their labor is wasted and their children are brought to nought. Fortescue suggests that over taxation is a waste of humanity. Certainly, Fortescue presents the dilemma of the French people with a certain sadness and compassion. Although Fortescue’s writings are highly theoretical arguments about political and legal matters, Fortescue illustrates the resulting tragedy of certain political systems.

In contrast, the English system is “blessyd be God, [and] this lande is rulid undir a bettir lawe” (III). In England

the peple therof be not in such peynurie, not therby hurt in thair persons, but thai bith welthe, and have all thinges necessarie to the sustenance of nature. Wherfore thai ben myghty, and able to resiste the adversarie of this reaume, and to beete oper reaumes that do, or wolde do them wronge. (III)

The English system of government does not punish its citizens by high taxes or take away their property. This governmental system translates into more wealth for its citizens. In turn this means that the English are able to defend themselves, or resist, local adversaries.

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28 Fortescue mentions that the reason for the high taxes and impositions is directly related to English invasion.
Also, because of their communal might, the English are able to defend the realm against external threats. Fortescue thus posits that the correct system of government founded on political and regal law is the best course for the nation. While this form of government limits the power of the king, in truth, strengthening the nation means that the king will be well protected. It is therefore in the best interest of the king to keep political and regal law because under such a system, the people would deal with internal and external threats. Therefore, the effects of *dominium politicum et regale* is that the whole organism of the nation will profit.

Having provided proof of the virtues of a political and regal form of government, Fortescue discusses ways in which the system can be made better, namely by monetarily endowing the king and establishing and choosing the king’s council. The reason for endowing the king is to protect him from poverty or financial need that would place him in jeopardy against his wealthier subjects. Fortescue knew that part of the failure of Lancastrian rule was due to the poverty of the kings and the wealth of over-mighty subjects. In a sense, these over-mighty subjects, because of their wealth and power, could dictate orders to the king. Concerning the king’s council, Fortescue also wants to limit the access to the king that powerful men can have in the realm. He states that because these great men always have estates to govern anyway and other matters to deal with, they rarely have time to provide wise council to the king. Fortescue instead argues that a king’s council, consisting of twelve spiritual men and twelve temporal men, should be instituted. A salary should also be in place to guard against undue pressures from bribes and gifts.
Fortescue begins the *Governance* by clearly demonstrating the history and tradition of the political and regal system of government in England that was brought to England by Brutus and his followers. Fortescue then contrasts this system with the French form of government and proves that the English system is qualitatively better for the nation. Under this form of government the commons thrive, and because the nation prospers, the king also profits. This in turn allows Fortescue to offer several measures that could further benefit the nation. By endowing the king and setting up a council, the collective intentions of the nation can best be served. Fortescue wishes to place power in the hands of the king and professional advisors. In a sense, Fortescue wants to return power to the heart, the people. By starting the text at the moment of collective legitimacy, Fortescue states that the nation began by common assent; the *Governance* develops how the collective intentions of the people might be realized through the king and their government.

The Ethnic Political Body

To Fortescue, the origin of this constituted government begins in the mythical landing of Brutus in England. At that point, the English chose their form of government. They willed themselves to be a body politic and, in so doing, incorporated themselves. At stake in the invocation of Brutus is therefore the origin of the body politic. In order to better understand Fortescue’s allusion to Brutus, it is instructive to compare it to Fortescue’s theories on the body politic.
In *De Laudibus*, Fortescue describes his analogy regarding the workings of this body politic. Fortescue argues that

[A] people that wills to erect itself into a kingdom or any other body politic must always set up one man for the government of all that body, who, by analogy with a kingdom, is, from “ruling”, usually called a king. Just as in this way the physical body grows out of the embryo, regulated by one head, so the kingdom issues from the people, and exists as a body mystical, governed by one man as head. And just as in the body natural, as the Philosopher [Augustine] said, the heart is the first living thing, having in it the blood which it sends forth to all the members, whereby they are quickened and live, so in the body politic the intention of the people is the first living thing, having in it the blood, namely, political provision for the interest of the people, which it transmits to the head and all the members of the body, by which the body is nourished and quickened.

While the king rules as the head, it is the intentions of the people which are the prime motivation in setting up the governmental system. These intentions, like the heart in a body, are the first living thing. The desires of the people are transmitted to the rest of the body by the blood, or political provisions, and nourish the body politic. Thus, the body politic is first constituted by the will of the people. In the process of incorporation, the body politic chooses, or grows, a head. Because the body politic is born and nourished by the intentions of the people, the head should protect those intentions.

Since 1308, at the coronation of Edward II, a fourth question had been added to the oath sworn by the king. This question asked the king, “Sire, will you grant to hold

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30 *Praise* 20-1.
and preserve the laws and righteous customs which the community of your realm shall have chosen and defend and strengthen them to the honour of God, according to your power? In effect, Fortescue posited in the Governance that the king should keep his oaths.

Because those intentions of the people must be protected, law and justice must be administered. In Fortescue’s analogy,

The law, indeed, by which a group of men is made into a people, resembles the sinews of the physical body, for, just as the body is held together by the sinews, so this body mystical is bound together and preserved as one by the law...And just as the head of the physical body is unable to change its sinews, or to deny its members proper strength and due nourishment of blood, so a king who is head of the body politic is unable to change the laws of that body, or to deprive that same people of their own substance uninvited or against their wills.

Fortescue’s schema calls for power to flow from the heart to the head, and the head then to administer, and be administered by, the law. Laws bind the community as one by protecting its interests and well-being. Under a political and regal system, the king is responsible for the protection of the law, the subjects, and their property. In addition, the king is not permitted to rule by any other law than that which is assented to by the people; the heart, after all, is nourishing the sinews. Interestingly, in Fortescue’s analogy, to change the law against the will of the people amounts to the head cutting off a limb. The body politic thus works like a single organism.

Fortescue derives his analogy of the body and political systems from political commentaries by Aquinas and Salisbury. The originality and ingenuity of the metaphor,


32 Praise 21.
however, is in the ways that Fortescue uses it. By correspondingly attaching it to the founding myth of England, Fortescue racializes the body politic. In the following, I will examine how Fortescue utilizes English ethnicity, history, and culture to imagine a political system. In doing so, Fortescue turns the English people into conscious citizens that are allowed a voice in the state. The people thus are part of the system; they identify with the program.

At the forefront is the idea that the myths of the people are important mechanisms for structuring the community. As discussed in Chapter One on Havelok the Dane, myths of origin endow the community with legitimacy and cohesion. In the case of Havelok the Dane, the romance rewrites cultural history, and by doing so, creates a wider and newly coherent sense of cultural identification for its readership. Havelok the Dane constructs an English national identity, which is defined as originating in the past but which articulates issues germane to the forms of nationhood imagined in early fourteenth-century England.

The myth of Trojan descent was first popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth in Historia regum Britanniae. The story tells of the exploits of Brutus, grandson of Aeneas and founder of Rome. After wandering throughout Europe, Brutus and his faithful followers land on the island of Albion, which he renames Britain. Brutus kills the few giants that inhabited the island and founds a city called New Troy.

The Trojan story served as England’s racial myth for several centuries.\(^{33}\) The Trojan myth was extremely important during the later Middle Ages, serving as the basis for more information on the use of the Trojan story as a racial myth, see Hugh A. MacDougall, Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1982). MacDougall’s chapter, “The
for the most popular of medieval literary figures, Arthur.\textsuperscript{34} The Trojan myth provided writers and historians from Geoffrey's time to when Fortescue was writing the ability to create in the noblest style the story of a noble destiny. R. W. Southern points out that the rise of Trojan descent myth can be traced to "a desire for a past, and a sense of awe at the providential steps which had brought them out of barbarism."\textsuperscript{35} The Trojan myth was utilized as a fixed point for the beginnings of English civilization, a historical moment that could be used to highlight the nobility of their heritage and culture. The myth turns chance into divine destiny. As a morally didactic story, the myth demonstrates that after ruin and hopeless wandering, eventually the people reach a final period of peace and splendor. As Southern points out, "Geoffrey's history here joined hands with prophesy and opened up the promise of a still greater future for this people predestined by God for universal rule."\textsuperscript{36}

Britons as Trojans: The Legendary Worlds of Geoffrey of Monmouth," is especially helpful.

\textsuperscript{34} Arthuriana makes its way into much of late medieval English culture. The large body of Arthurian legendary narratives testifies to the importance of the myth. Indeed, Arthurian chivalric concepts can be interpreted as the precepts for aristocratic identity. And as shown in Chapter Four, Arthuriana and its chivalric ideals are at the heart of the founding of the Royal Order of the Garter. In literature, the Trojan myth can be found in important works such as Lydgate's \textit{Troy Book}, Chaucer's \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}, and the Pearl-poet's \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight} and \textit{Saint Erkenwald}, to name a very few. The cultural circulation of the Trojan myth in medieval England cannot be overemphasized. For more information on the cultural and historical value of the Trojan myth, see Lee Patterson, \textit{Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature} (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) 157-230.


\textsuperscript{36} Southern 194.
Given this fact, it is useful to examine the ways in which the Trojan ethnic/racial myth becomes interwoven in theorizing about the government of the realm. As illustrated in Chapter One, ethnic myths of common descent fostered unity and collective identity that can be attributed to the distant past. These myths were used to promote present values and norms by identifying them as time tested traditions. In a sense, these myths created social solidarity by linking common customs to common descent. Further, Susan Reynolds argues that ethnic myths can also be used to interpret medieval political thought. Reynolds states that medieval political thought “was founded on the supremacy of law and custom. Because law and custom prescribed order and hierarchy, they sanctified authority at the same time as limiting its exercise...A king’s government rested, de jure as well as de facto, on the advice and consent of his subjects.” In a sense, these myths provided the framework of governments and political ideas by legitimizing them. Hence, as the ethnic myth gained force, it provided a firmer base for political and legal ideas and the practice of the government. Thus, the union between ethnic myths and political ideas bound together the community by its ties to ethnic identity and lawful order.

This is the point of entry for Fortescue. Fortescue’s argument that a political and regal form of government is better for England is predicated on the history and power of the Brutus myths. After giving a Biblical precedent for the institution of the monarchy, Fortescue states:

But aftirwarde, whan mankynde was more mansuete, and bettir disposid to vertu, grete comunaltes, as was the felowshippe that came in to this lande with Brute, willynge to be unite and made a body pollitike callid a reawme, havynge an hed to

37 Reynolds 380-1.
As discussed above, by incorporating themselves, Brutus and his followers created a nation based on political and regal law. This type of government established a reciprocal relationship between the king and his subjects. Both the king and the subjects were bound by law; in turn this meant that the whole organism of the nation would prosper.

Scholars of Fortescue have often questioned why Fortescue chose to place such emphasis on the Brutus myth. Fortescue’s earliest modern biographers and editors in most instances chose to simply note that Fortescue probably obtained the Brutus myth from Geoffrey via Richard Rede and Vincent de Beauvais. At the same time, Plummer is incredulous about Fortescue’s emphasis on Brutus. He states, “[the] way in which the fables of Geoffrey carried everything before them is one of the most curious facts in literary history.” Most of Fortescue’s critics have followed suit and have relegated the Brutus myth to a footnote in the history of political theory. In most cases, the common answer to the question of why Fortescue chose Brutus has been that the myth simply shows up as the originary founding narrative of Britain. And yet, given the influence of the Trojan myth in late medieval England and the importance of ethnic myths to governmental theories, there is much more to say.

38 Plummer 185-6 and Chrimes 158.

39 Plummer 185.
In *De Laudibus* Fortescue gives an account of the history of the customs of England. He notes that “the kingdom of England was first inhabited by Britons, then ruled by Romans, then again by Britons and then it was possessed by Saxons, who changed its name from Britain to England. Then for a short time the kingdom was dominated by Danes, and then again by Saxons, but finally by Normans, whose posterity hold the realm at the present time” (XVII). Fortescue adds that

> Throughout the period of these nations and their kings, the realm has been continuously regulated by the same customs as it is now...Indeed, neither the civil laws of Romans, so deeply rooted by the usage of so many ages, nor the laws of the Venetians, which are renowned above others for their antiquity—though their island was uninhabited, and Rome unbuilt at the time of the origin of the Britons—nor the laws of any Christian kingdom, are so rooted in antiquity. Hence there is no gainsaying nor legitimate doubt but that the customs of the English are not only good but the best. (XVIII)

Thus, Fortescue’s primary argument is that English common law has withstood the tests of time. Certainly by comparing it to its important historical precedents, Fortescue is able to argue the overall quality of the customs. However, he is definitely not comparing the various laws across time. He is instead arguing that English common law is best suited to the current realm of England. The antiquity of the laws thus testifies that they are the best and most just for England.

Fortescue’s theory concerning the antiquity and viability of English customs comments on the inaugural constitution of the English government. Like common law, political and royal government is rooted in antiquity. In comparison with other forms of government, England’s government can be shown to be the best for the nation. Legitimacy of tradition becomes a strong force in the argument. In tracing the history of
cultural practices Fortescue demonstrates the suitability of political and regal government for the English people.

By placing the origin of English political and regal government in the past, Fortescue demonstrates how ethnic myths of origin foster united and cohesive communities. Fortescue's invocation of Brutus shows that the myths of the past based on common descent and custom play a significant part in the actual practices of the government. The myth of Brutus creates a connection between fifteenth-century English forms of government and the mythical origin of the nation.

The Role of the People

One of the rhetorical strategies most strongly evident in the Governance is the infinitely superior system of government that the English possess. While the French system is based on archaic Roman laws, the English political and legal institutions are based on common law rights of personal liberty and of private property. As stated above, Fortescue based his opinions on the origin of the nation, the landing of Brutus and the government constituted. The French had never enjoyed the right to govern themselves because the king of France had come by conquest. When Brutus and the fellowship decided to constitute themselves into a realm, they established a political society founded on the premise of collective legitimacy. In effect, the English people "were continuing to govern themselves with only the reservation that they could not do

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40 Shepard 311.

41 Hinton 413.
things to which the king refused to agree, just as the king could not do things to which they refused to agree.\textsuperscript{42}

Of course, considering Fortescue's class ideology, one of the prominent features of political and regal law is that the king does not possess the right to arbitrarily take away the goods of his subjects and oppress them. Of the French, in his travels throughout France, Fortescue noted the abject poverty of the French subjects. He states, "And sithyn it is a synne to gyve not meyte, drynke, clothynge or other almes to hem that have nede, as shall be declared in the day off dome; how muche a greter synne is it to take from the pore man is meyte, is drinke, his clothynge, and all that he hath nede off. Wich werely doth the Ffrench kynge to mony a thowsande of his subjectes" (IV). In other words, the king has a responsibility for the economic welfare of his subjects. Fortescue states it is the responsibility of the king to protect his people from outward "swerdes" and "in an other that he defende his peple ayenst wronge doers inwarde bi justice, as hit apperith bi the said first boke of kynges; wich he Ffrench kynge dothe not" (IV). The French king "rulith his reaume only to his owne profit" (IV). Even though the revenues of the French king are much greater than those of the English king, the French realm and commons are being "nerande destroyed ther by" (IV).

Fortescue has a great concern for the welfare of the realm and the commons. He argues against those who would state that "pat the commons of Englande were made pore...Ffor than thai wolde not rebelle, as now thai done oftentymes" (XII). Apparently there must have been support for impoverishing the commons. Most likely, those ideas

\textsuperscript{42} Hinton 413.
would have gained steam after uprisings, such as Cade’s rebellion in 1450. Against these critics, Fortescue notes that “Poverte is not the cause, whi the commons off Ffrounce rise not ayen thair soverayn lorde. Ffor þer were never people in þat lande more povere, than were in owre tyme the commons off the contre off Caux, wich was tho almost diserete ffor lakke off tillers; as it now well apperith be the new husbandry þat is done þer, namely in grobbyng and stokkyng of treis, busses, groves, growen whill we were ther lordes off the contray. And yet the said commons of Caux made a meruelous gret rysinge, and toke owre townis, castelles, and ffortresses, and slowe owre capitans and soudiours” (XIII).

To Fortescue, poverty seems to engender uprisings. Fortescue suggests that the sad state of conditions in the English colony of Caux was the reason that the poor rose up against their masters. As for the French system of rebellion control, Fortescue argues that “it is not poverte þat kepith Ffrenchmen ffor rysinge, but it is cowardisse and lakke off hertes and corage, wich no Ffrenchman hath like unto a Englysh man” (XIII). That is, the French are cowards in not making clear their common intentions and needs.

Fortescue begins by looking outward at the possible repercussions of making the commons poor. He argues that “Ffor soth theis ffolke [critics who argue for impoverishing the commons] consideren litill the good off the reaume off Englund,

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44 The uprising in Caux took place in 1435.
wheroff the myght stondith most uppon archers, wich be no ryche men. And yff thai
were made more povere than thai be, thai shulde not have wherwith to bie hem bowes,
arroes, jakkes, or any oþer armour off defence, wherby thai myght be able to resiste owre
enymes” (XII). Fortescue then turns to the English realm for reasons against
impoverishing the commons. He argues that poor men would become thieves and
eventually would rise up against their oppressors. More important, if the commons were
poor, the king would have a hard time dealing with uprising by the nobility. Lastly, the
honor of the king is based on how the nation is doing. Fortescue notes that “hit is the
kyngis honour, and also is office, to make is reaume riche; and it is dishonour whan he
hath but a povere reaume” (XII). Because the king has a responsibility to nourish his
subjects, it would be shameful to have a nation of beggars and thieves. In Fortescue’s
eyes, the nation would fall apart if the commons were impoverished. Fortescue promotes
the well-being of the commons. A strong commons assures that external enemies can be
dealt with. Perhaps startling is the further observation that a strong people would help the
king by fighting against potential internal noble rebellions. It is therefore interesting that
Fortescue seeks remedy for rebellion in a strong and able commons. In an age of civil
war, Fortescue imagined a strong state and government identified with the people. It is
that nationalistic dream which made Fortescue so influential thereafter.

The Nation as a Political Reality

Fortescue consciously regards England as a unified national realm. The rhetorical
strategy of contrasting the superiority of the English political and legal institutions with
the decrepit French system heightens the ages-long struggle between the two nations. As
mentioned in Chapter Three, English national identity is most evident when it is contrasted with the French, as after the Battle of Agincourt. Fortescue was alive when Agincourt took place, and his father actually took an active role in the battle. The French nation thus provides Fortescue an easy vehicle by which to contrast the superiority of the English nation. The French at this point in time were constructing their own sense of nationalism. The French, like the English, based their nation on religious symbolism. The *Oriflamme* and the battle prayers to St. Denis exemplify the importance of symbols in constructing French national identity. Further, citizenship to the nation was based on a complex mixture of culture and race. As demonstrated in my chapter on *Sir Gowther*, race in the medieval period was imagined as composed of a variety of cultural (i.e. religion, language, heritage, and history to name a few) and biological signifiers. As such, after the Siege of Harfleur, the French were expelled and replaced by Englishmen.

Fortescue imagined the two communities as fully formed nations with particular symbols, cultures, and peoples.

To Fortescue, however, the French form of government economically and politically handicapped its people. Because of the governmental system, the French people toiled endlessly and suffered miserably. Moreover, the French people did not possess the rich history, customs, and ethnic myth for collective legitimacy. Because of this, Fortescue notes, the French did not have the heart to rise up against oppression. Given the importance of the heart to the body politic, Fortescue suggests that the French did not have the wherewithal to form a nation based on their desires and intentions. The French nation is a head ruling a politically absent body. In some ways, the Battle of Agincourt also proved this point; the French knights were too interested in their own
fame and fortune to fully participate in the collective enterprise. In contrast, the English nation is primarily based on the desires of its people. While both nations have active forms of nationalism, the English nation is actually constituted according to the intentions of its people. To Fortescue, the English form of government based on political and regal law allowed its citizens full participation in the nation. The Governance of England thus demonstrates that a strong and wealthy body politic can construct the best possible nation.

Thus, Fortescue invokes a traditional enmity between the two nations and peoples in order to discuss the superiority of the English system of government. Building on ethnic myths of origin, Fortescue creates a historical and cultural bond between the past and the present. By locating the superiority of the English realm in the founding moments of the political body, the Trojan ethnic myth provides Fortescue with a venue for building a national community. The Governance of England illustrates that political systems could cultivate and nurture national identity. Fortescue's examples, again and again, show the fruits of a political and regal system of government. In the process, he argues fervently for the health and welfare of the whole nation. More than many writers, Fortescue imagines the government as an instrument for promoting the values and desires of the people.
CONCLUSION

Throughout my dissertation, I demonstrate that medieval forms of nationalism construct social solidarity and collective identity through complex strategies of writing and narration that imagine the totality of the community. The impetus has been to investigate the wide range of strategies employed by medieval writers to construct communities.

As such, I began my dissertation by placing the reader directly at the celebration of Havelok’s coronation. At the celebration, among the other cultural events, the crowds gathered to hear romances being read. This, I argued, testified to the importance of writing and narration in the process of nation building. In a moment that witnessed the legendary king take office and the figural rebirth of the nation, the people came from all over the country to hear about the heroes of the nation. I noted the important circular movement of nationalism: a nationalistic text describing the process of national integration by the reading of romances.

In many ways, this last chapter brings us back to the celebration of nation making. Fortescue rewrites the Trojan myth of ethnic origin in order to celebrate the importance of collective legitimacy in government: the national community is constructed through the utilization of ethnic myths of origin. In Chapter One, I examined the constructed nature of myths of ethnic origin and the boundaries of cultural identification in Havelok.
the Dane. Likewise, the Governance of England demonstrates that “primordial” myths of common origin change according to historical and cultural processes. Fortescue shows how an important myth of origin can be used in political and governmental theories. Fortescue’s aim is to create a form of collective government reflective of the desires and intentions of the people. Fortescue goes to great lengths to incorporate the commons in the process of building a nation. Akin to Havelok traversing the various social classes and different cultures, Fortescue argues strongly that the people, and their welfare, are the most important elements of the nation. Fortescue imagines the whole community in his theories of political and regal government. Thus, while the audience of Havelok the Dane hears and reads the values and history of the nation, the Governance asks its audience to reenact these ideas in the proceedings of its government. To Fortescue a political and regal government, because it is based on the people, figures the nation in late medieval England.

The writing of a nation is thus about celebration. The Governance celebrates English myths and customs. The Tale of Gamelyn and the Agincourt Poem celebrate the victory of right over wrong, and the triumph of justice. At the end of the Agincourt Poem, the nation celebrates by holding a Triumph. As the procession makes it way to the castle, the people dance and sing and give thanks for their community.

Sir Gowther asks its audience to celebrate the marriage scene that brings together communities. Of all the texts, Gowther is probably the most memorable to me. If we are to celebrate the ways in which people come together to form community, Gowther provides a very good description of how racial difference is overcome. Medieval studies
and nationalism studies need many more examples of societies allowing outsiders into the community.

The texts chosen for this dissertation approach the study of the history of nationalism from very different angles. The goal of the dissertation has been to examine the ways that medieval people imagined their community. This means that we have taken a look at how communities figure their own history and culture, how they see other communities, and how the nation composes itself out of various smaller communities. I would like to end by noting that all these texts ask their audience to participate in the celebration of the nation, the gathering of community.
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