RHETORIC, TRUTH, AND LYDGATE'S <u>TROY BOOK</u>

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate

School of The Ohio State University

By

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2009

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation argues that underneath conservative poetical and political appearances, Lydgate's Troy Book casts serious doubt as to the validity of discourse, especially rhetoric, as an adequate vehicle for truth; the attainability of truth itself; the value of history writing; and the ultimate seriousness and credibility of Lydgate's own poetics of (and, by extrapolation, Henry's politics of) fame and self-representation.

In order to prove my point, I first survey in chapter 1 how Lydgate thematized language in his poem and thereby created a poetic environment that *implicitly* seems to value language. In chapter 2, I explain how in his Prologue Lydgate articulated the idea that ornate language expresses truth. However, though Lydgate insisted that his project's historical truth differed radically from poetic fiction, he sprinkled the Prologue of the Troy Book with textual elements that actually reduce the gap between *historia* and *fabula.* The interconnectedness between lies and truth, *historia* and *fabula* is further highlighted in Books I-V where ornate rhetoric is used by and is associated with a series of deceitful characters, a point that I address in chapter 3.The issue is reinforced by some statements that the narrator makes concerning several eloquent writer-figures in the Troy Book and the fact that Lydgate's poem contains many allusions to Chaucer's House of Fame, a poem that doubts the truthfulness of language. In chapter 4, I examine how Lydgate's poem actually questions the attainability of factual and moral truth. I focus on

the characters' deceit, the hinted fallibility of the chroniclers, Lydgate's *mise-en-abyme*

in which history does not have any tangible didactic effect, and the fact that prudence

becomes intermingled with deception. In chapter 5, I analyze Hector and Paris's debate in

Book II and show how Paris's eloquence contributes to concealing the fallacy of his

speech. Paris's poetical aspirations are used as yet another means to express skepticism

about the value of rhetoric, truth, and ultimately the <u>Troy Book</u>. I conclude that in his

<u>Troy Book</u>**,** Lydgate truly adopted a Chaucerian poetics of ambiguity and skepticism, and

I suggest we revisit Lydgate's corpus for possible similar lines of inquiry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

along the way and encouraged me to further my English studies. My dear friend Beverly

Sandidge always believed in me throughout the years. Above all else, Caroline Rayner

provided me with stability of life to bring this project to completion.

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PUBLICATION

Research Publication

Vankeerbergen, Bernadette. "Chaucer's House of Fame: A Journey into Skepticism."
Medieval Perspectives (1994): 158-69.

FIELD OF STUDY

Main field: English

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INTRODUCTION

John Lydgate undertook the composition of his <u>Troy Book</u> in 1412 on

commission from the future King Henry V, who wished to have the noble exploits of true

knighthood remembered in the English language (Pro.69-124). Thus, the primary focus of

Lydgate's poem is the events of the Trojan War, including numerous incidents leading up

to and following the actual conflict. As Lydgate's Prologue states, Henry, Prince of

Wales, was hoping that the availability of the story in English would encourage his

countrymen to emulate the heroic actions of ancient warriors. In addition, it seems likely,

as John H. Fisher has suggested, that a more covert aim on Prince Henry's part was to

promote the use of the English vernacular in order to buttress public support for the

Lancastrian regime (176).

Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> is a loose translation of Guido delle Colonne's <u>Historia</u>

<u>destructionis Troiae</u>, a prose narrative and self-proclaimed authentic history of the Trojan

War written in Latin in 1287. In turn, Guido maintained that he worked from the alleged

eyewitness accounts of the Phrygian Dares and the Cretan Dictys, though in actuality he

closely paraphrased Benoît de Sainte-Maure's <u>Roman de Troie</u> written in Old French c.

1160.[1] In the process of translating Guido's text into English, Lydgate not only

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[1] The <u>Roman de Troie</u> *is* actually based on Dares's <u>De excidio Troiae historia</u> and Dictys's <u>Ephemeris belli</u>
<u>Troiani</u>, but far from being *eyewitness* accounts of the Trojan conflict, Dares's and Dictys's texts are

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substituted verse for prose, but he also expanded on his source, adding emphases and

digressions in order to foreground some themes little or not present in Guido.[2] For

example, Lydgate made some important amplifications and references to the virtue of

prudence and the changeability of Fortune. Foremost, on the margins of Lydgate's

narrative of war as well as sprinkled throughout its main plot, one finds many noteworthy

discussions or passing allusions to rhetoric, textuality, and indeed language itself, so

much so that the topic actually forms a subtext of Lydgate's poem. Perhaps such an

emphasis derived, at least partially, from Prince Henry's own interest in language (that is,

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commonly understood to be late antique forgeries. Both books claim to be Latin translations of Greek texts. The Ephemeris belli Troiani was probably translated in the third or fourth century and the De excidio Troiae historia in the fifth or sixth century. For Dictys's text, two brief papyrus fragments of the Greek version survive. On the basis of those fragments as well as information contained in the prologue of Dictys's Latin text, scholars have dated the Greek text to the first or second centuries A.D. As for Dares's text, no Greek version survives and one cannot rule out the possibility that such a text never existed. However, some scholars have pointed out possible internal and external reasons that such a text might indeed have existed. One internal reason, for example, would be that the Latin phrasing carries echoes of a Greek text. As for the external reasons, there are, for example, references to a Dares, author of a pre-Homer Iliad, as far back as Ptolemy Chennos, a Greek grammarian of the first and second centuries A.D. Therefore, it is generally assumed that if a Greek version of Dares ever existed, it was probably written around the same time as the Greek Dictys. One clear implication for both the De excidio Troiae historia and the Ephemeris belli Troiani is that the Greek versions of those texts could not have been written by eyewitnesses of the Trojan conflict, since scholars who believe that a "Trojan War" took place usually date it to the thirteenth century B.C. (Frazer 3-15; Fry 71-89, 233-41; Merkle; Thomas and Conant 64; "Troy"). Classical scholar Stefan Merkle believes that Dictys's and Dares's original intentions were not necessarily to "deceive" their readers about the texts' supposed authenticity. Indeed, Merkle regards

> both works, including the translation(s), primarily as literary games, whose authors and translators enjoyed adding a new facet to the production of fiction in their times, confusing the boundaries between true and false . . . . Whether a reader could see through this game, or took the texts' claim to authenticity at face value, certainly depended on the level of his education; the *Nachleben* of the texts . . . suggests that from Late Antiquity on the readiness to believe such fabrications gradually increased. (163)

[2] Guido too made thematic, narrative, and stylistic changes to his source text in ways that are actually more substantial than what Lydgate did to Guido. Such considerations led Léopold Constans, editor of the Roman de Troie, to speculate in 1911 whether a French or Italian prose version of the Roman had actually been used by Guido (Sainte-Maure 6: 331). Picking up on this hint, in 1942, Kathleen Chesney argued that Guido had not used the Roman de Troie itself, but rather a thirteenth-century prose version of the Roman (46-60). However, with the exception of Scott-Morgan Straker in his 1998 doctoral dissertation (4), I have found no critic willing to support this claim. In fact, in his 1996 study of the Troy legend in France in the Middle Ages, Marc-René Jung explicitly notes that Chesney's argument is incorrect (La légende de Troie 485) and states that Guido's main source was Benoît's Roman (563).

the socio-political power of the vernacular). Most certainly, it was also a way for Lydgate to add his voice to a debate that had very much preoccupied Lydgate's literary predecessors (Chaucer, for example), namely the one concerned with the nature of poetry, history, language, and their ability to express epistemological truths—or not.

The idea that Lydgate's interests and themes might, at least at times, be Chaucerian was until fairly recently not even deemed worth considering. Instead, whereas most twentieth-century critics viewed Chaucer as a sophisticated poet who had deliberately included multivalence, skepticism, and instability of meaning within his poetry, Lydgate was all too often relegated to the status of a pedestrian poetaster whose work displayed poetical (and hence political and ontological) order. Fortunately, the last twenty years have witnessed a gradual change in this perception of Lydgate's oeuvre. Increasingly, critics have analyzed Lydgate's writings for the political, social, poetical, and ontological tensions they display.[3] For example, no longer is Lydgate viewed as an unambiguous mouthpiece for the Lancastrian monarchs. In addition, some critics have questioned Lydgate's apparent endorsement of poetry, rhetoric, and even language as legitimate vehicles for conveying truth. My own dissertation is a continuation of this general trend in Lydgatean scholarship and constitutes, I believe, an even more radical departure from previous interpretations of Lydgate. There is, in my view, a major impulse in Lydgate's secular work to make a particular claim (or take a particular approach) while incorporating the opposite claim (or opposite approach) in the same text. (I purposely here only refer to Lydgate's *secular* texts, for I have not studied Lydgate's religious texts

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[3] See my overview of scholarship below.

enough to make such a bold claim about them.) As Maura Nolan has observed in an essay

on the <u>Fall of Princes</u>, Lydgate is

> a poet who harnesses the energies of . . . multiplicity by subjecting them to a system of doubling, whereby a dominant discourse or logic is paired with its opposite and maintained in a state of constant and irresolvable tension. There is always a shadow narrative, always an undertow, in Lydgate's poetry. ("Now Wo, Now Gladnesse" 553)

Although at first reading Lydgate often seems to insist on monistic principles, his themes

and stylistics largely depend on dualistic attitudes. It is, in essence, ambivalence and

complexity that enable much of Lydgate's secular writing, and in that sense it is safe to

say that Lydgate provides at least some continuation to the skeptical tradition of the

fourteenth century.

In the case of the <u>Troy Book</u>, it is my deep belief that Lydgate's poem is defined

by a fundamental lack of closure, which expresses itself in various ways, all somehow

related to Lydgate's fascination with what I would call his "poetics of contraries."

Indeed, underneath rather conservative appearances (poetical, political, moral, and

ontological), Lydgate's poem recoils from epistemological certainties (for example,

stating historical truths), a move which I believe is very much linked to Lydgate's deep

skepticism as to the ability of poetry, rhetoric, history, indeed language itself, to express

truth. Though Lydgate as a wordsmith and a poet used ornate language to express his

message, though his <u>Troy Book</u> places much thematic emphasis on—and thus implicitly

expresses trust *in*—the linguistic medium, and though the poem explicitly articulates the

idea that rhetoric expresses truth, the <u>Troy Book</u> actually deconstructs the notion that

language, especially flowery language, conveys any stable truth. Time and again,

Lydgate presents himself as a plain-spoken man whose <u>Troy Book</u> purports to convey the

truth and to attack duality in its many facets, yet Lydgate's text itself betrays an

unmistakable interest in the rhetoric of antithesis (it contains contrary claims or

approaches) and the antithesis of rhetoric (it seems to doubt the validity of discourse).

What is more, the <u>Troy Book</u> muddles and deconstructs the dichotomies it initially

establishes. In a real sense, Lydgate continues Chaucer's interest in the slipperiness of

meaning in discourse. In Lydgate's poem this fundamental instability goes hand in hand

with a skepticism toward the desirability of fame, the attainability of truth, and the value

of prudence. Furthermore—largely because of those various levels of indeterminacy—the

validity of Lydgate's own poem as both an apology for Henry's (upcoming) rule and a

work of sage political advice is thereby gently but steadily undermined. As I stated

earlier, it is very likely that by ordering an English version of the Troy story (one of the

foundational stories of classical and medieval culture), Prince Henry was hoping to

solidify support for the Lancastrian dynasty.[4] Derek Pearsall is clearly of such an opinion,

for he has stated about Henry's commission of the <u>Troy Book</u> that "his general purpose

was to create a stronger sense of nationhood and, especially, to ensure that his subjects

recognized how that sense of nationhood was uniquely embodied in his own person"

("Hoccleve's <u>Regement of Princes</u>" 397). Both before Henry V's ascension to the throne

in 1413 and during the first few years of Henry V's reign (the <u>Troy Book</u>, started in 1412,

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[4] Lee Patterson has argued that the Trojan myth could provide support to insecure English monarchs. See <u>Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature</u> 201-04 for Henry II. In those few pages Patterson also mentions Lydgate and Henry V. Patterson explains that the myth of Trojan origin was still "a powerful instrument of royal propaganda" in fifteenth-century England. A perfect example was Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>, "which was commissioned by the future Henry V only a dozen or so years after his father had seized the crown—the same Henry who had earlier had made for himself a deluxe manuscript of the finest Trojan poem written in the Middle Ages, Chaucer's <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>" (203). See also Lee Patterson's <u>Chaucer and the Subject of History</u> (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991) 161-62 for Richard II.

was only completed in 1420), it would have mattered tremendously that the <u>Troy Book</u> represent Henry as an effective and virtuous ruler (which included being receptive to advice) and, more generally, that the poem appear supportive of the Lancastrian nation-building program.[5] And indeed at first sight the <u>Troy Book</u>'s politics are very much pro-Lancastrian. However, by including hints of doubt in his text, Lydgate actually manages to express coded criticism about the Lancastrian agenda he had been commissioned to uphold. Like Chaucer, Lydgate was dubious about the attainability of perfection in this world and such fundamental skepticism extended to the image of the perfect ruler that he was expected to limn in his poem. In other words, under the cover of an outwardly conservative poem, Lydgate used subtle narrative and stylistic devices to not only question the Lancastrian agenda but also cautiously undermine Henry's politics of self-representation inside the <u>Troy Book</u> itself.

As I mentioned earlier, the notion that Lydgate might be a sophisticated poet interested in ambiguities—especially when it comes to the supposed truth of eloquent rhetoric (that is, his own chosen medium) and his outward complicity with the structures

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[5] Even before the end of his father's reign, Prince Henry had proven himself an energetic and successful, if perhaps overly ambitious, ruler. Between roughly 1400 and 1410, Henry had gained useful military experience by defeating rebels in Wales. Moreover, during his father's incapacitation by illness in 1410-11, Henry found himself at the head of the king's council—that is, effectively holding the reins of power. During that period, he made good progress reforming the royal finances, which were in disarray. However, Prince Henry's policies toward France (which were at odds with his father's wishes) combined with fears that Henry IV's powers were being threatened were likely the reasons why King Henry dismissed his son's council and reasserted his authority in November 1411. Relations between Henry IV and his oldest son remained tense for several months, though it is believed that father and son eventually reconciled in the fall of 1412. Still, Prince Henry did not regain any of his earlier powers. In the context of those events, it is easy to see why the <u>Troy Book</u>, started in October 1412, would have been viewed as instrumental in restoring Henry's reputation. [The standard biography of Henry V is Christopher Allmand, <u>Henry V</u> (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992). Also of interest are Keith Dockray, <u>Henry V</u> (Stroud, Eng.: Tempus, 2004) and Desmond Seward, <u>Henry V As Warlord</u> (London: Sidgwick, 1987), which present views that are respectively more critical and very critical of Henry.]

of power in place—was utterly unheard of until fairly recently. One really had to wait until the late 1980s/early 1990s to witness some movement away from more traditional interpretations of Lydgate's poetic theory and politics—yet even those new interpretations were often still very cautious. But before getting there, let us look at the period before that. What were the predominant opinions concerning Lydgate's poetics and his relationship to power until the late 1980s/early 1990s?[6]

As far as Lydgate's views about rhetoric and truth are concerned, one has to look at Lois Ebin's work. Though she was not the first critic to write about Lydgate's poetic theory, Ebin was the first critic who firmly *established* the standard idea that for Lydgate eloquent language conveys truth and achieves political and social harmony. For a period of eleven years (from 1977 to 1988), Ebin explained in three essays and two books her views on Lydgate's poetics.[7] Ebin's ideas proved to be influential, and they are still referred to in current scholarship. The following excerpt taken from the preface to Ebin's John Lydgate best exemplifies her position:

> For Lydgate, the poet is preeminently a craftsman who illuminates and adorns his matter. His effort joins wisdom and eloquence to engender goodness and lead man to truth. The poet's language forms an integral part of this process, and his high style, a feature of Lydgate's writing that has disturbed his critics, is the medium which Lydgate envisions as the most appropriate to the noble purpose he attributes to the poet. Finally, Lydgate's vision of poetry manifests itself in specific political terms as he

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[6] The following review of Lydgatean scholarship does not claim to be comprehensive. Instead it aims to survey some highlights of Lydgatean scholarship as well as some lesser known though, in my view, significant critical interpretations of Lydgate's work.

[7] Lois Ebin, "Lydgate's Views on Poetry," Annuale Mediaevale 18 (1977): 76-105; "Chaucer, Lydgate, and the 'Myrie Tale,'" Chaucer Review 13 (1979): 316-36; "Poetics and Style in Late Medieval Literature," Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages, ed. Lois Ebin, Studies in Medieval Culture 16 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1984) 263-93; John Lydgate (Boston: Twayne, 1985); and Illuminator, Makar, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1988) especially 1-48 for a discussion of Chaucer's and Lydgate's views on poetry.

links the heightened language of poetry with the effectiveness of the order and harmony of the state.

In Ebin's view, Lydgate departs significantly from Chaucer, who was only too aware of the limits of poetry and language in general. For Ebin, Lydgate replaces Chaucer's instability, skepticism, polyvocality, and multivalence with certainty, fixed meaning, monism, and univalence.

A few other critics had discussed, or at least touched on, the link between ornate language and truth before Ebin put it in the spotlight. For example, Joseph Marotta devoted much attention to the issue in his 1972 dissertation on Lydgate and medieval rhetoric.[8] In it, Marotta analyzed the rhetorical techniques used by Lydgate in some of his poems (in particular *amplificatio, descriptio,* and *digressio*), and he presented what he perceived to be Lydgate's view on poetry, namely that it is a moral art conveying truth and achieving political and social harmony. Marotta returned to the topic in an article published five years later.[9]

In 1980, C. David Benson published "John Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>: History as Learned Rhetoric," in which he discussed truth in relation to Lydgate's performance as a writer of history.[10] Indeed, Benson considered the <u>Troy Book</u> to be the work of a writer of history, not a writer of fiction like Chaucer. In his view, Lydgate had aimed at and had succeeded in transmitting the historical truth of the Trojan events. Lydgate's additions to

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[8] Joseph G. Marotta, "John Lydgate and the Tradition of Medieval Rhetoric," diss., The City University of New York, 1972.

[9] Joseph G. Marotta, "Amphion: The Hero as Rhetorician," <u>Centerpoint</u> 2 (1977): 63-71.

[10] C. David Benson, "John Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>: History as Learned Rhetoric," <u>The History of Troy in Middle English Literature</u> (Woodbridge, Eng.: Boydell, 1980) 97-129.

his sources were merely rhetorical embellishments, not the kind of diegetic alterations seen in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, for example.

Derek Pearsall did not mention Benson's essay in his own "Chaucer and Lydgate" published in 1990 and yet in it he discussed ideas very much related to Benson's concerns—and, for that matter, Ebin's and Marotta's.[11] For Pearsall, Lydgate had carried verbosity to such extremes that the actual link between his words and the realities they were supposed to represent had become secondary to textuality. That is, Lydgate's subject was style itself, not some external reality. Furthermore, Pearsall saw Lydgate as a hopeless generalizer removing all the delightful specifics found in Chaucer's poetry. This is what Pearsall had to say about the Troy Book:

> Systematically, in fact, and in accord with the best medieval theory and practice, Lydgate empties the story of everything but *sentence* and in so doing restores it to the world of stable truths which fiction always threatens to subvert.
> Chaucer treats his story of Troilus seriously as a story, giving to his representation of people's lives and feelings a degree of autonomy, and seeking the meaning of the story in that representation and his commentary upon it. In so doing, he contradicted, though implicitly and incompletely, the traditional medieval assumption that fictions are exemplary, and exist to demonstrate truths outside themselves. . . . [F]or Lydgate Guido's Historia Destructionis Troiae is a text. It is immovable, it has authority, it is 'true', but it exists not for the sake of its own truth but for the truth that can be drawn from it. It may be history, but it has no autonomous historical existence or importance. (47)

In sum, Benson and Pearsall both viewed Chaucer as much more poetically creative than Lydgate. However, where Benson focused on Lydgate as a true historian, Pearsall saw a true (verbose) moralist. Perhaps the main difference in their approaches was one of tone.

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[11] Derek Pearsall, "Chaucer and Lydgate," Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer, ed. R. Morse and B. Windeatt (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1990): 39-53.

When discussing Lydgate, Benson was more prone than Pearsall to credit Lydgate with a measure of success.

The early 1990s saw the publication of another couple of articles dealing with Lydgatean rhetoric and textuality. In "Lydgate, Hawes, and the Science of Rhetoric in the Late Middle Ages," Rita Copeland argued that Lydgate inherited his elevation of rhetoric from Brunetto Latini, Dante, and Gower, but unlike them he did not cultivate a Ciceronian vision of rhetoric.[12] Instead, he primarily viewed rhetoric as aureate poetics in the service of the political establishment. Tim Machan, in another essay, entitled "Textual Authority and the Works of Hoccleve, Lydgate, and Henryson," acknowledged Lydgate's widespread metatextual references but claimed that they were never fully developed to the extent they could have been.[13] In other words, though both Copeland and Machan made interesting contributions to the field of Lydgatean studies, their essays reaffirmed the prevalent view of Lydgate as an aureate yet middling poet in the service of the crown.

For indeed, when it comes to Lydgate's relationship to power, up until the late 1980s/early 1990s (and often even after that) Lydgate was deemed completely at one with Lancastrian interests. For information about Lydgate as a Lancastrian poet it is useful to look at Derek Pearsall's work.[14] Just as Lois Ebin was not the first critic to provide a conservative interpretation of Lydgate's poetics but was the first critic to secure

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[12] Rita Copeland, "Lydgate, Hawes, and the Science of Rhetoric in the Late Middle Ages," Modern Language Quarterly 53 (1992): 57-82.

[13] T. W. Machan, "Textual Authority and the Works of Hoccleve, Lydgate, and Henryson," Viator 23 (1992): 281-97.

[14] Derek Pearsall, "Laureate Lydgate," John Lydgate (London: Routledge, 1970) 160-91; "Lydgate As Innovator" Modern Language Quarterly 53 (1992): 5-22, esp. 15-16; and "Lancastrian Propagandist and Laureate Poet to Crown and Commons, 1426-32," John Lydgate (1371-1449): A Bio-bibliography (Victoria, BC: English Literary Studies, 1997) 28-32.

the view that for Lydgate poetry, truth, and politics were closely related, so too Derek

Pearsall was not the first critic to consider Lydgate as intimately associated with

Lancastrian interests, but he somehow returned to the topic often enough that his name

became associated with views of Lydgate as a Lancastrian "poet propagandist" and "poet

laureate."[15] In fact, though Pearsall in most respects was prone to view Lydgate as an

arch-medieval, retrogressive poet, in an article published in 1992 he perceived him to be

an innovator as far as his role as an English-speaking court apologist was concerned:

"Lydgate is arguably the first English poet, or at least the first poet writing in English, to

fashion his poems as instruments of royal policy" ("Lydgate As Innovator" 15).

Several critics coming before and after Pearsall also expressed their beliefs that

Lydgate was involved in solid Lancastrian propaganda. Thus, Walter Schirmer's John

Lydgate, the first monograph ever written about Lydgate, contained the chapter "Henry

VI's Coronation at Westminster and in Paris, and his Visit to Bury St Edmunds; Lydgate

as 'Poet Laureate'."[16] In 1965, J. W. McKenna used a historian's perspective to explain

how during Henry VI's minority, Lydgate's poetic skills were employed to convince the

English public of the legitimacy of Henry VI's dynastic claim in France.[17] Referring to

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[15] Critics generally use those terms to refer to Lydgate's role during the 1420s and 1430s when he was specifically writing occasional poetry for the Lancastrian court (for example, the "Title and Pedigree of Henry VI", poems written for Henry VI's coronation). When it comes to less overtly topical/political poems (for example, the Troy Book), critics still view Lydgate as a poet who put forward the interests of the Lancastrian monarchy—though they commonly leave out words like "laureate" and "propagandist."

[16] Walter F. Schirmer, John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century, trans. Ann E. Keep (Berkeley: U of California P, 1961) 130-46. The original text published in German in 1952 contained the same chapter heading: "Heinrichs VI. Krönung in Westminster und Paris und sein Besuch in Bury St. Edmunds. Lydgate 'Poeta Laureatus.'"

[17] J. W. McKenna, "Henry VI of England and the Dual Monarchy: Aspects of Royal Political Propaganda, 1422-32," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 28 (1965): 145-62, esp.151-55.

the same period, in 1971 V. J. Scattergood spoke of Lydgate's "dynastic propaganda" and "unofficial laureateship" (73).[18] In an essay published in 1989, Linne R. Mooney, focused on one of the poems composed during Henry VI's minority, "Kings of England sithen William Conqueror," and avered that the poem was actually a prototype and paragon of English propaganda:[19]

> Appealing to [a broad range] of English readers, enjoying such popularity among scribes or such demand among book owners as to have survived in [35 manuscripts], and continuing to be regarded as a legitimate vehicle for establishing figures on the throne through six reigns or eight shifts of power among English monarchs in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, we must acclaim Lydgate's "Kings of England sithin [sic] William Conqueror" not only a prototype but a paragon of English political propaganda."[20]   (263)

And in 1993, Seth Lerer called Lydgate "a vigorous propagandist for the Lancastrian house" during Henry VI's minority (14).[21] More generally, when it comes to Lydgate's poetry written outside Henry VI's minority, Lydgate continued to be viewed as broadly involved with Lancastrian interests.

So far, then, all the critics that I have discussed established and/or maintained the conception of Lydgate as a defender of poetical and political (and even ontological) order: in their various interpretations Lydgate's ideas were clear, direct, and conventional, in short, very "Lydgatean." However, the first fissures in this rather

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[18] V. J. Scattergood, Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century (London: Blandford, 1971).

[19] Linne R. Mooney, "Lydgate's 'Kings of England' and Another Verse Chronicle of the Kings," Viator 20 (1989): 255-89, esp. 255-63.

[20] Several scribes brought the poem up to date during subsequent reigns up to Henry VIII.

[21] Seth Lerer, Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

monolithic school of interpretation came about when starting in the late 1980s some

critics noticed the political ambiguities that emerge here and there in Lydgate's writing.

Thus, little by little, more nuanced interpretations of Lydgate's political allegiances

emerged.[22]

The first scholar to hint at political complexities in Lydgate and fifteenth-century

writers in general was David Lawton.[23] In 1987, he claimed that under an appearance of

dullness, many fifteenth-century poets expressed criticism of war and misgovernment.

When discussing Lydgate, Lawton focused his analysis on the <u>Fall of Princes</u>, which

contains many contemporary references and allusions. However, Lawton did not view

fifteenth-century poets as antinomous to the political establishment. On the contrary, in

his view, those poets upbraided the governing class to better solidify its hegemony over

the rest of society.

More daring than Lawton's piece was Lee Patterson's 1993 "Making Identities in

Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate."[24] In his article, Patterson looked

at the <u>Siege of Thebes</u>, among other texts; in his interpretation, the poem tried to promote

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[22] In all fairness, it should be noted that one earlier critic, David Lampe, had painted an unusual picture of Lydgate as an ambiguous poet. In his 1974 article, "Lydgate's Laughter: 'Horse, Goose, and Sheep' as Social Satire," Lampe explained how under an appearance of social conservatism, in this particular poem, Lydgate really criticized each animal-estate for failing to fulfill its social obligations because of greed and pride. For Lampe, no estate was allowed to go scot-free, as, in his view, Lydgate satirized the pretensions of knighthood, the commons, and the clergy. Surely, this was a welcome change from the usual representations of Lydgate as a pedestrian, conservative poet. However, Lampe's attempt to forage into Lydgate's layers of subtlety did not launch a critical trend. On the other hand, the more nuanced political criticism of the late eighties and nineties generated a renewed goodwill toward Lydgate's corpus. Indeed, it seems that this new political school of criticism provided the necessary impetus to uncover and then study Lydgate's ambiguities at any level.

[23] David Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," <u>ELH</u> 54 (1987): 761-99.

[24] Lee Patterson, "Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate," <u>New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History</u>, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 69-107.

"trouthe" (integrity and unity) but only resulted in "doublenesse" (duplicity and division).

Most importantly, Patterson explained the poem's anti-war message as a criticism of

Henry V's French wars. In addition, for Patterson the story of Thebes illustrated the very

opposite of a normal, linear transmission of monarchy, a subject extremely sensitive for

the anxiety-ridden Lancastrians. Patterson claimed that the Siege of Thebes showed

"Lydgate's own skepticism toward his identity as a spokesman for Lancastrian interests,

and perhaps even an acknowledgement that poetry and power can never be brought to a

perfect identity of purpose" (93). Very powerful words indeed.

In 1998, Paul Strohm implicitly reached back to Lawton and Patterson when

discussing Lydgate (and Hoccleve) in a chapter of his book England's Empty Throne.[25]

Yet, Strohm seemed to be a bit more cautious than both Lawton and Patterson. Indeed, in

his interpretation, the fissures in Lydgate's (and Hoccleve's) Lancastrian allegiance were

not presented as the conscious workings of the poets but rather as the unintended re-

emergence of the repressed (that is, the Lancastrian usurpation) in texts. In other words,

Strohm believed that "Hoccleve's and Lydgate's aspirations to full complicity were

unwavering, but the impossibility of Lancastrian requirements drove even the most

resolutely loyal texts into a morass of embarrassing half-acknowledgements and

debilitating self-contradictions" ("Hoccleve, Lydgate and the Lancastrian Court" 660). In

2000, Strohm used similar arguments in his discussion of "A Complaint for My Lady of

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[25] Paul Strohm, England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998). The chapter entitled "Advising the Lancastrian Prince" was reprinted the following year in The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature: "Hoccleve, Lydgate and the Lancastrian Court," The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1999) 640-61.

Gloucester," which he argued Lydgate meant as stern advice to help Gloucester but, much against his will, ended up a subversive text.[26]

More daring in the sense of Lee Patterson's 1993 article was Helen Barr's 2001 article on The Churl and the Bird.[27] In Barr's view, the social quietism and hierarchy present in the frame of the tale as well as in the patronizing attitude of the bird toward the churl (remindful of anti-peasant discourse) is actually undermined by several features of the tale that point toward social mobility. We learn, for example, that the churl is the owner of the beautiful garden and addresses the bird with "thou" (and not the polite "you"); a female bird instructs a male human being (subversion of sexual norms); the bird fails to morally inform the churl and instead tricks him (that is, the poem implicitly expresses skepticism toward discourse); and the bird's "language constructs social reality" (194-97). Barr suggests that Lydgate might have been "more alert to the social spillage than he lets on." Indeed, "[t]o offer moral instruction and social normativeness to the audience of a poem with linguistic performativeness at its center [the bird's invention of its own reality] might be interpreted as an elaborate literary joke" (197).

The 1990s and the early years of the current decade have also witnessed the appearance of another trend in Lydgatean political criticism, this one more influenced by rhetorical and/or semiotical concerns, and in this context increased interest has been given to analyzing the Troy Book. By far, the most revisionist readings of Lydgate are to

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[26] Paul Strohm, "John Lydgate, Jacque of Holland, and the Poetics of Complicity," Medieval Literature in Historical Inquiry: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall, ed. David Aers (Woodbridge, Eng.: Brewer, 2000) 115-32.

[27] Helen Barr, "Afterword: 'Adieu Sir Churl': Lydgate's The Churl and the Bird," Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 188-98.

be found in (part of) Richard William Fehrenbacher's doctoral dissertation written in 1992 and an article published by Lynn Shutters in 2001.

In his dissertation, "Blood and Virtue: Representing Legitimacy/ Legitimating Representation in Fifteenth-Century English Literature," Fehrenbacher aimed to "examine the representation of nobility in John Lydgate's historical works and Thomas Malory's <u>Morte Darthur</u>" (Abstract).[28] Though I have serious reservations as to the applicability of Fehrenbacher's theoretical framework (derived from R. Howard Bloch's thesis that in the French Middle Ages notions of nobility were reflected at the narrative and semiotic levels in literary texts)[29] to fifteenth-century texts written in England and though I disagree with some of the specific details of his analysis of Lydgate's poems, Fehrenbacher deserves notice when it comes to Lydgate's view of rhetoric, history, and their relationship to truth and his Lancastrian patrons. As part of his overall argument, Fehrenbacher discussed Lydgate's antifoundationalist rhetorical style. For him, Lydgate's aureate style did not illuminate the truth of a text (as Ebin had suggested earlier), but rather willingly obfuscated matters. Furthermore, although Lydgate praised rhetoric in several of his works, he was only too aware of the inability of "poetry and history—and language itself—to represent truth" (142). About the <u>Troy Book</u>, Fehrenbacher argued that

> Lydgate questions not just the truthfulness of the rhetoric of the <u>Troy Book</u>'s characters, but the truthfulness of his own rhetoric and poetry. . . . Lydgate calls into question his own works, and thus the validity of his own

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[28] Richard William Fehrenbacher, "Blood and Virtue: Representing Legitimacy/ Legitimating Representation in Fifteenth-Century English Literature," diss., Duke U, 1992.

[29] R. Howard Bloch, <u>Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages</u> (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983).

> poetic and historical project. And of course this is a project he is constrained to pursue by the Lancastrians in their propagandistic attempts to consolidate their claims to the French and English thrones, claims based on genealogical and historical precedents that did not truly exist. (149)

I wholeheartedly agree with this interpretation, though in the context of Fehrenbacher's dissertation, this is probably a hasty conclusion to make given that Fehrenbacher only devoted 11 pages to the Troy Book and based his whole argument on only one type of evidence—part of what I discuss as the "diction of rhetoric" in my chapter 3.[30] In my dissertation, I discuss the many other ways that Lydgate's poem enables us to reach such a conclusion. Besides the Troy Book, Fehrenbacher also analyzed how the same issues were treated in the Siege of Thebes. Fehrenbacher felt that in this poem "Lydgate separates rhetoric from questions of virtuous behavior and truth entirely, presenting it as wholly instrumental persuasion" (154). Also, the poem makes no effort to hide its contradictory sources, which, of course, highlights the precariousness of Lydgate's own claims to historical truth (155-56). Finally, Fehrenbacher showed how in the "Title and Pedigree of Henry VI," the "Kings of England sithen William Conqueror," and the Fall of Princes, Lydgate oscillates between claims of lineage and virtue. That is, in those three poems, Lydgate does not solely emphasize lineage and thereby reveals himself not uniquely attuned to Lancastrian interests (84-110).

In her "Truth, Translation, and the Troy Book Women," Lynn Shutters was mostly interested in gender as well as literary and political authority in Lydgate's poem.[31] Using somewhat similar lines of argument as Fehrenbacher did for the Troy Book,

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[30] For Fehrenbacher's use of evidence in his analysis of the Troy Book, also see my brief comment in footnote 30, page 122.

[31] Lynn Shutters, "Truth, Translation, and the Troy Book Women," Comitatus 32 (2001): 69-98.

Shutters proposed that in his poem Lydgate expressed ambivalence about the truth of rhetoric and language.[32] Furthermore, Shutters argued that the <u>Troy Book</u>—because it is a translation and because translation is associated with unreliable women in the poem— actually defined itself as contingent truth rather than immutable truth and that Katherine, Henry's future wife, was inadvertently linked to false women, all of which reflected anxiety concerning Henry's legitimacy. In short, Shutters viewed the <u>Troy Book</u> as questioning the value of truth in the "literary, linguistic, and political spheres" (83). Though here too I have some reservations about some specific points of the argument (for example, Shutters's historicizing of the duplicity of language by linking it to French double-dealing during the fifteenth century and her applying translation theory to the characters' actions), I do agree with the article's general questioning of truth in the <u>Troy Book</u>.

It is certainly no understatement that Fehrenbacher and Shutters recast Lydgate as a complex writer. And yet, neither Fehrenbacher nor Shutters has really managed to influence Lydgatean criticism. Instead the type of scholarship that has addressed issues of language and/or Lydgate's relation to power has overwhelmingly walked in David Lawton's footsteps and situated Lydgate's work in the tradition of loyal criticism to the ruler. That is, Lydgatean scholarship has strongly adopted the point of view that poet-figures inside Lydgate's poems as well as Lydgate himself as a poet are prudential, eloquent figures who have their patrons' best interests at heart and are therefore willing to express strong criticism of unfavorable policies. In this scenario, the poet/Lydgate is

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[32] See also my footnote 30, page 122.

neither a propagandist nor a detractor but a loyal critic. The major proponents of this mode of interpretation are Scott-Morgan Straker, James Simpson, and Robert J. Meyer-Lee.

Scott-Morgan Straker has discussed issues of courageous poets telling unwelcome truths to their patrons or other authority figures since the late 1990s. He first broached the topic in his doctoral dissertation completed in 1998, "Ethics, Militarism and Gender: John Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> as a Political Lesson for Henry V," which led to the subsequent publication of two articles on Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>.[33] For Straker, Lydgate expresses criticism of Henry's military and marital policies in the <u>Troy Book</u>. Furthermore, rhetoric and prudence need to be conjoined in political debate. If not, rhetoric becomes manipulative instead of being constructive.[34] It should be noted, however, that Straker never perceives Lydgate doubting the profound value of rhetoric. In Straker's opinion, though the <u>Troy Book</u> problematizes rhetoric, Lydgate still values poetry as an appropriate vehicle for truth. Similar issues are addressed by Straker in his article on Lydgate's <u>Siege of Thebes</u>, "Deference and Difference: Lydgate, Chaucer, and the <u>Siege of Thebes</u>."[35] For Straker, the poem advocates for peace, poet-figures (Lydgate included) resist political authority, and rhetoric is associated with moral truth. However, ultimately,

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[33] Scott-Morgan Straker, "Ethics, Militarism and Gender: John Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> as a Political Lesson for Henry," diss., U of Cambridge, 1998. Straker subsequently published chapter 3 of his dissertation: "Rivalry and Reciprocity in Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>," <u>New Medieval Literatures</u> 3 (1999): 119-47. He also elaborated on some of his dissertation ideas in "Dictating to Authority in Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>," <u>The Growth of Authority in the Medieval West: Selected Proceedings of the International Conference, Groningen 6-9 November 1997</u>, ed. Martin Gosman, Arjo Vanderjagt, and Jan Veenstra (Groningen, Neth.: Egbert Forsten, 1999) 285-306.

[34] Also see my footnote 30, page 122.

[35] Scott-Morgan Straker, "Deference and Difference: Lydgate, Chaucer, and the <u>Siege of Thebes</u>," <u>The Review of English Studies</u> 52 (2001): 1-21.

the Siege of Thebes illustrates the failure of rhetoric and prudent counsel, and Lydgate's

own historiographic project is thereby undermined. More recently, reaching back to ideas

that he had introduced in his dissertation, Straker has published an essay dealing

specifically with why he believes Lydgate cannot be considered a Lancastrian

propagandist.[36] To prove his point, Straker chose three poems that were written during

Henry VI's minority (the period during which critics overwhelmingly consider Lydgate

to have written Lancastrian propaganda): "On Gloucester's Approaching Marriage," "The

Title and Pedigree of Henry VI," and "King Henry VI's Triumphal Entry into London."

One of the most interesting points of the article in my view is that Straker acknowledges

that Lydgate uses irony, in this case in "On Gloucester's Approaching Marriage."[37]

James Simpson too claimed in his Reform and Cultural Revolution that Lydgate

was not a propagandist but rather an "official poet" willing to criticize his aristocratic

patrons:[38]

> [H]is *romans antiques* are consistently anti-imperialistic; his Ovidian
> Reason and Sensuality points to the ineluctable stupidity of aristocrats,
> who reproduce catastrophe; his Fall of Princes serves as a powerful
> reminder to aristocrats that their reputation is ultimately in the hands of
> random Fortune and of poets whose power will outlive that of their

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[36] Scott-Morgan Straker, "Propaganda, Intentionality, and the Lancastrian Lydgate," John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2006) 98-128.

[37] More traditional interpretations of Lydgate's work refuse to consider that Lydgate might have been an ironist. For example, see pages 203-05 of this dissertation for Robert R. Edwards's views on prudence in the Troy Book. In the present dissertation, I attribute much irony to Lydgate.

[38] James Simpson, Reform and Cultural Revolution, The Oxford Literary History Vol. 2 1350-1547 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002). The material that I quote from Simpson's book had previously been published as "Bulldozing the Middle Ages: The Case of 'John Lydgate,'" New Medieval Literatures 4 (2000): 213-42 and "The Other Book of Troy: Guido delle Colonne's Historia destructionis Troiae in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England," Speculum 73 (1998): 397-423.

masters; and the satiric Churl and the Bird quietly implies that the Churl stands in for obtuse aristocratic patronage. (65-66)

More interesting for our purposes, Simpson argues that the Troy Book criticizes "aristocratic military, marital, and bureaucratic practice." Though ultimately the prudent clerks inside the story fail, the poet's prudent voice reflecting on the poem is meant to help fifteenth-century readers avoid similar mistakes (99). Earlier, in his essay "'Dysemol daies and fatal houres': Lydgate's Destruction of Thebes and Chaucer's Knight's Tale" published in 1997, Simpson had already presented the view of a pacifist Lydgate who in his Siege of Thebes showed the Lancastrians the catastrophic consequences of militarism (here, civil war).[39] Finally, in 2006, Simpson published an essay on Lydgate's Churl and the Bird, which he considers to be a poem specifically about the relationship between poets and their aristocratic patrons.[40] Like Barr, Simpson recognizes that some elements of The Churl and the Bird disrupt the generally conservative direction of the poem. However, in Simpson's reading, those disruptions are meant to educate the poet's patron. In other words, the disruptions are neither unintentional nor a form of veiled criticism but are clearly meant to be understood by the patron (142). Simpson argues that "the poet is training the patron to recognize the impossibility of controlling court poets." Specifically, the poem teaches that "court poets are empty and light; they are vacuous liars; they have nothing inside, no lessons but the indispensable lessons of rhetoric itself" (136). Despite the fact that The Churl and the Bird contains lying court poets at its very heart, Simpson

[39] James Simpson, "'Dysemol daies and fatal houres': Lydgate's Destruction of Thebes and Chaucer's Knight's Tale," The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 15-33.

[40] James Simpson, "'For al my body . . . weieth nat an unce': Empty Poets and Rhetorical Weight in Lydgate's Churl and the Bird," John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2006) 129-46.

concludes rather surprisingly that this poem and, by extrapolation, Lydgate's longer

poems like the <u>Troy Book</u>, the <u>Siege of Thebes</u>, and the <u>Fall of Princes</u> represent "poets

or at least rhetorically practiced, prudential figures courageously addressing aristocratic

patrons and/or taking control of the reputations of those patrons" (143). It is indeed a

surprising conclusion, for it posits that a court poet can convincingly tell the truth about

lying court poets. Simpson does not acknowledge this conundrum. But, besides the fact

that I cannot agree with Simpson's conclusion, it is to be noted that his emphasis on

prudential poets who are "courageously addressing aristocratic patrons and/or taking

control of the reputations of those patrons" is nothing else than the point of view that Lois

Ebin defended a long time ago. Simpson specifically identifies his position with Ebin's in

the last footnote of his essay.[41] In fact, all three critics who currently consider Lydgate's

work to express loyal criticism to the ruler (that is, Scott-Morgan Straker, James

Simpson, and Robert J. Meyer-Lee) align themselves with Lois Ebin's positions. Straker

clearly refers several times to Ebin's ideas in his work.[42] However, the most pronounced

connection with Ebin's work is to be found in Meyer-Lee's scholarship.

In 2007, Meyer-Lee published an ambitious study of the role of the poet laureate

from the fifteenth century to Tudor times: <u>Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt</u>.[43]

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[41] See footnote 44, page 146. In his <u>Reform and Cultural Revolution</u> and "Bulldozing the Middle Ages," Simpson too refers to Ebin: see footnote 78, page 66 and footnote 73, page 241, respectively. Also see footnote 6, page 17 of his "Dysemol daies and fatal houres."

[42] See page 70 of Straker's "Ethics, Militarism and Gender" and footnotes 7 and 8, page 4 of his "Deference and Difference."

[43] Robert J. Meyer-Lee, <u>Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt</u> (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 2007). The information on Lydgate had been published earlier in "Lydgate's Laureate Pose," <u>John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England</u>, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2006) 36-60.

Meyer-Lee's thesis is that Lydgate "brought into English a laureate poetics that serves as the ground of laureate performance—now as well as then" (50). In other words, the model of poetic laureateship that Lydgate introduced in English poetry exerted an influence well into the Tudor age, and its effects can still be perceived at some level of sedimentation even to this day. For Meyer-Lee, Lydgate's poetics is mostly characterized by a unique poetic voice and an elevated rhetoric. This epideixis is such that "[n]ot only does an equivalence obtain between the praised object and the praising medium, but also the praising subject must likewise be elevated" (59). In this view, aureate poetics illuminates truth, indeed is squarely identified with truth: "Since in this sort of epideixis the gulfs collapse between speaker and spoken—between word and thing—his aureate poetry, in theory, does not merely utter truth but is the very form truth takes in a fallen world" (60). Furthermore, Meyer-Lee explains that Lydgate invents this notional English laureateship in the Troy Book, for in this poem his laureate poetics are put "into a reflexive relationship with power" (50). In his role as notional poet laureate, Lydgate must at times be willing to utter unwelcome truths since "in order to be an effective propagandist Lydgate must also be a stern critic" (82).[44] Meyer-Lee goes as far as saying

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[44] As far as the term "propagandist" is concerned, Meyer-Lee perhaps unwittingly makes an interesting point. In the quote taken from page 82, he speaks of Lydgate being a propagandist, whereas on page 80 he states that "the laureate must serve his state not as propagandist but as prophet." Though it might seem that Meyer-Lee is contradicting himself, it is more likely that he is actually using the word "propagandist" in two different ways in those two quotes. In the first quote, "propagandist" obviously refers to a person who defends the general interests of the crown but, according to the very quote, remains open to criticizing the crown. In the second quote, Meyer-Lee has in mind a less sophisticated propagandist who somewhat subserviently is only willing to lionize the monarch. Meyer-Lee's loose use of the word "propagandist" indicates that the word is indeed semantically fluid. Fiona Somerset discusses this issue in her recent essay "'Hard is with seyntis for to make affray': Lydgate the 'Poet-Propagandist' as Hagiographer." Somerset argues that in his St. Edmund and St. Fremund Lydgate defends the interests of Henry VI. She acknowledges that recently James Simpson and Scott Straker have argued that Lydgate did not produce propaganda. Somerset believes that

that, "[a]s conscious as [Lydgate] was of the mutually aggrandizing and legitimating relationship between Lancastrian politics and laureate poetics, the conviction of his orthodox sentiments suggests that he believed that his poetics was doing the work of God" (80). All of the above ideas combined with Meyer-Lee's assertion that Lydgate believed in the "civilizing power of poetry" (107) clearly indicate that Meyer-Lee walks in Lois Ebin's footsteps. Indeed, his Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt is perhaps best viewed as an elaboration and continuation of Ebin's Illuminator, Makar, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century published in 1988.[45] The drawback of Meyer-Lee's approach as well as Ebin's (and similar approaches) is that it does not dig underneath Lydgate's laureate pose to investigate the genuineness of its claims. In essence, with Meyer-Lee we have come full circle and returned to a Lydgatean scholarship that views Lydgate's poetry not for its complexity, ambivalence, and skepticism but rather its superficial conservative attributes.

In contrast, in my dissertation, I am primarily interested in the disruptions in Lydgate's seemingly conservative poetical and political agenda that he displays in the Troy Book. In that respect, my approach has probably much in common with Maura

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> Their denials that Lydgate is engaging in propaganda will be productive if they result in closer attention to and more thoughtful analysis of Lydgate's political stances. Yet the conviction they aim to produce, that Lydgate is not a propagandist, should not lead us too swiftly to a concurrent certainty that Lydgate is not an ideologue. Just because a work is not "imperialist or propagandistic" does not mean it is not political, or that it cannot at least in part further the king's interests. (260)

Obviously deeming that the word "propagandist" can be used when the interests of the crown are only partially furthered, Somerset assertively calls Lydgate a "poet-propagandist" in the title of her essay. [Fiona Somerset, "'Hard is with seyntis for to make affray': Lydgate the 'Poet-Propagandist' as Hagiographer," John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2006) 258-78.]

[45] Meyer-Lee refers to her Illuminator in various notes in his book (endnote 14, page 236 and endnote 31, page 245) and essay (endnote 20, page 57).

Nolan's investigation of the complexities and tensions that characterize many of

Lydgate's texts written during Henry VI's minority. I am here referring to Nolan's <u>John</u>

<u>Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture</u> published in 2005, in which she analyzes the

<u>Serpent of Division</u>, some mummings and disguisings, and "Henry VI's Triumphal Entry

into London."[46] Nolan's main argument is that Henry V's death brought about a level of

anxiety that prompted Lydgate to take forms of public culture that traditionally dealt with

topical issues in a straightforward, even propagandistic, manner and remake them into

densely layered literary texts that open the door for divergent interpretations, which

complicate, and sometimes plainly contradict, the texts' primary instrumental meanings.

The difference between my study of Lydgate's disruptions and Nolan's study is not only

that my dissertation obviously analyzes a different set of poetic material written in a

different decade (with its own political reality) but more importantly that I attribute

distinct intentionality to Lydgate—whereas Nolan envisages Lydgate's intentionality to

be limited by "larger historical forces" that produce "changes beyond the capacity of a

single poet to acknowledge, control, or grasp" (13).[47]

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[46] Maura Nolan, <u>John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture</u> (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 2005). Her first two chapters on the <u>Serpent of Division</u> and Lydgate's mummings were also published separately as individual journal articles: "The Art of History Writing: Lydgate's <u>Serpent of Division</u>," <u>Speculum</u> 78 (2003): 99-127 and "The Performance of the Literary: Lydgate's Mummings," <u>John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England</u>, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2006) 169-206.

[47] As my readers may have noticed, there has been a considerable "Renaissance" of Lydgate scholarship since the 1990s, a reappraisal that has truly come to a head in the last five years. Recent scholarship that does not fall within the specifc purview of the present introduction and yet bears mentioning for its revaluation of Lydgate's work includes: Nigel Mortimer, <u>John Lydgate's</u> Fall of Princes<u>: Narrative Tragedy in its Literary and Political Context</u> (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), which as the title indicates focuses on the <u>Fall of Princes</u>; Alexandra Gillespie, <u>Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books 1473-1557</u> (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), which presents important information on the early printed editions of Chaucer's and Lydgate's texts; and Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny Brown, eds., <u>Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century</u> (New York: Palgrave, 2008), which focuses on Lydgate's material references. I mention Mortimer's monograph in footnotes 24 and 25, page 169.

As I stated earlier, the aim of my dissertation is to show that through a combination of stylistic and thematic moves, in the Troy Book Lydgate casts serious doubt as to (1) the validity of discourse, especially rhetoric, as an adequate vehicle for truth, (2) the attainability of truth itself, (3) the value of history writing, and (4) the ultimate seriousness and credibility of Lydgate's own poetics of (and, by extrapolation, Henry's politics of) fame and self-representation. In my interpretation, Lydgate manages to produce a work that undermines the very principles that it also outwardly defends. Contrary to critics like David Lawton, Scott-Morgan Straker, James Simpson, and Robert J. Meyer-Lee, I believe that the type of criticism that Lydgate expressed in the Troy Book was probably more concealed criticism than "courageous" loyal criticism. While it is true that Lydgate very likely meant for his antimilitaristic stances to be understood by his patron, it is unlikely that Lydgate would have wanted his patron to fully understand the type of epistemological questioning that his poem entertains. For indeed, had this been the case, Henry would have come to realize that the Troy Book not only gently mocks poetic and princely ambitions but also deconstructs the conditions of the poem's signification—something that no patron commissioning a text (sponsored history or other) would probably gladly realize.

In order to prove my point, in my dissertation, I first show to what extent Lydgate paid attention to issues of language in his Troy Book. In chapter 1, I survey how Lydgate thematized language in his Trojan narrative and thereby created a poetic environment that *implicitly* seems to value language. I show how Lydgate reinforced metanarratives and various comments on language he found in Guido's text or added discussions of and

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allusions to language to his source. Indeed, an attentive reader of Lydgate's poem cannot help but notice how much attention Lydgate devoted to speeches, books, and other linguistic concerns in the <u>Troy Book</u>. In my chapter, I focus on certain passages that showcase Lydgate's general interest in language. By "general interest," I mean an interest that is mostly neutral, or free of *explicit* value judgments. This is not to say that *every* passage I discuss or mention is altogether devoid of opinions (positive or negative) on the reliability of language—some of the passages undoubtedly express an opinion. Moreover, as already stated, because of their thematic focus on language all of the passages *implicitly* seem to express some confidence in language. But in themselves these passages neither *explicitly* reinforce nor seriously jeopardize the centrality of language as a meaningful form of communication. Rather, I perceive these passages as constituting a generally positive thematic background (with at most sometimes an emerging skeptical undertow) against which more serious doubts regarding the conditions of signification are introduced by Lydgate.

In chapter 2, I give a brief overview of the importance of rhetoric in the late Middle Ages and explain what influence rhetoric could have exerted on the development of Lydgate as a writer. I then comment on Lydgate's emphasis on both eloquent style and truth in the <u>Troy Book</u>'s Prologue and Lydgate's stated equation of eloquent style with moral and factual truth inside the Prologue. I also explain how Lydgate is similar to and also different from his acknowledged *and* unacknowledged sources in those respects. For all of Lydgate's insistence that his project's historical truth differs radically from poetic fiction, Lydgate sprinkles the Prologue of the <u>Troy Book</u> with textual elements that

actually reduce the gap between *historia* and *fabula.* These seeds of doubt are then

further developed in the five books that make up the body of Lydgate's poem, a point that

I address in chapter 3 of my dissertation. Indeed, in Books I-V, Lydgate indicates that

ornate rhetoric, which he previously claimed illuminates the truth of a text, is actually

used by and is associated with a series of deceitful characters inside the plot. The

interconnectedness between lies and truth, *fabula* and *historia* is further highlighted by

some of the statements that the narrator makes about several eloquent writer-figures in

the Troy Book. Finally, I show that Lydgate's poem contains many allusions to

Chaucer's House of Fame, a poem that questions the truthfulness of language. I argue

that Lydgate understood this central conceit of Chaucer's skeptical poem and shared it.

In chapter 4, I turn my attention to the other side of Lydgate's initial proposition

that equated eloquence with truth. Namely, I focus on Lydgate's treatment of truth, and I

show how, though in his Prologue Lydgate announces that the Troy Book will convey

both factual and moral truth, the actual poem questions the attainability of truth. Indeed,

the plot of the poem very much focuses on the characters' deceit rather than their

"trouthe" and several elements in the text indicate that chroniclers (Lydgate included)

might in fact be just as fallible as their characters. As far as the moral truth of the poem is

concerned, Lydgate reveals in a *mise-en-abyme* that history does not, after all, have any

tangible didactic effect. Furthermore, the main moral lesson of the Troy Book, the virtue

of prudence, finds itself repeatedly negated and subverted in the poem so that far from

truly acting as the poem's guiding principle prudence gets stained with a suspicion of

deception. Finally, the poem's ambiguous moral truth weakens the historiographic foundations of Lydgate's writerly project.

In my last chapter, I return to the topic of eloquence inside Lydgate's Trojan narrative and more firmly link it to Lydgate's own use of eloquence in his poem. To that effect, I first turn to the debate that opposes Hector and Paris in Book II and I analyze the differing dynamics of Hector's and Paris's respective speeches. Hector's speech comes across as structurally sound and his line of argumentation as solid. On the other hand, Paris's highly rhetorical and literary discourse though heavy on words proves to be light on content. And yet, for all its weakness, Paris's speech manages to win the approval of its audience. In my chapter, I show how Paris's amplified rhetoric and his poeticization of his subject matter contribute to diverting the attention of the audience away from the fallacy of the speech. I also show how several stylistic and thematic similarities actually link Lydgate the narrator to Paris and how Lydgate uses Paris's poetical aspirations as yet another means to express skepticism about the value of rhetoric, truth, and ultimately his own poem. I conclude that in his <u>Troy Book</u> Lydgate continued Chaucer's poetics of ambiguity and skepticism. Though I do not at all believe that such foundational questioning informs all of Lydgate's writings, I do think that its presence within Lydgate's first long poem combined with the related findings of some critics who have analyzed other Lydgate poems should encourage us to continue to investigate Lydgate's vast corpus for possible evidence of similar concerns.

CHAPTER 1

SPEECHES, BOOKS, AND OTHER LINGUISTIC CONCERNS

1.1 The Prologue

Undoubtedly, much of a reader's initial impression that the Troy Book deals, as it were, with written and oral discourse is due to the Prologue in which Lydgate justifies his writerly project. Lydgate starts off by appealing to Mars (the god of war), Othea (the goddess of prudence), Clio (the muse of history), and Calliope (the muse of eloquence) to help him write his poem before explaining that he is actually obeying Prince Henry's request to translate the story of Troy into English. Guido delle Colonne's text is presented as a true history of Troy and posited in direct contradistinction to the lies of the poets. Lydgate's reverence for the truth of Guido's text immediately acts as a springboard for a more general tribute to books as collective memories preserving the truth of history (as well as knowledge in general) and the good fame of conquerors. Among the lying poets, however, Lydgate singles out Homer (for being partial to the Greeks), Ovid (for mixing truths and lies in his writings), and Virgil (for sometimes following in Homer's footsteps). By contrast, Dares and Dictys, Lydgate asserts, produced truthful eyewitness

accounts of the events at Troy, which were translated into Latin by one Cornelius Nepos. However, because Cornelius's purpose was brevity, he omitted many of the specifics and, therefore, Guido later decided to amplify Dares's and Dictys's versions without altering the substance of their texts. At the end of the Prologue, Lydgate, the narrator, kneels in front of Guido, his "maister" (372), and determines to follow him in composing his poem.[1] Meanwhile, at regular intervals throughout the Prologue, Lydgate apologizes for his poem's shortcomings and more generally for his lack of poetical skills, and he requests that the readers of his poem amend it where necessary. Thus, the purpose of the Prologue is definitely metatextual and such a focus at the outset of the poem sets the tone for the rest of the Troy Book.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the whole Prologue was Lydgate's original creation. Indeed, the Prologue's valuation of written documents, the truth of the chroniclers versus the fables of the poets, and the bibliographic genealogy of the Trojan narrative itself going all the way back to Dares and Dictys are all components that

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[1]All references to the Troy Book are to the following edition: Lydgate's Troy Book, ed. Henry Bergen, 4 vols EETS ES 97, 103, 106, 126 (London: K. Paul, 1906-35). I have modernized the character yogh.

Lydgate found in Guido's history—who in turn found them in Benoît's romance.[2] Yet

Lydgate discusses these points in further detail and actually even inserts hints of

ambiguity within the apparent simplicity of the concepts he discusses. In chapter 2, I

analyze some of the skeptical details and nuances present in Lydgate's Prologue. Suffice

it to say at this point that, compared to Guido and Benoît, Lydgate's Prologue (and hence

its self-reflexive content) stands out due to its length: 384 decasyllabic verse lines as

opposed to Guido's 59 prose lines and Benoît's 144 octosyllabic verse lines.[3] Like any

other medieval poet who practiced the rhetorical art of *amplificatio*, Lydgate focused on

the passages that in his view merited further development and thus Lydgate's priorities

and interests can easily be detected. One only needs to look at a passage right after the

Prologue to put things in perspective. At the beginning of Book I, Lydgate completely

leaves out nine lines by Guido in which he explains that some people believe the

Myrmidons were not inhabitants of Thessaly (in Greece) but Abruzzi (in Italy) (Columnis

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[2] See Barbara Nolan's Chaucer and the Tradition of the *Roman Antique*. In this superb study, Nolan traces the influence of three twelfth-century *romans antiques*—the anonymous Roman de Thèbes, the Roman d'Eneas, and Benoît de Sainte-Maure's Roman de Troie—on Boccaccio's Filostrato and Teseida and Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and Knight's Tale. Of particular interest to us is chapter 1, "Benoît de Sainte-Maure's Roman de Troie and the Compositional Practices of the *Roman Antique*" (14-47), especially the sections in which Nolan discusses the poet's relation to his *livre* and his image of himself as author. Nolan analyzes Benoît's prologue as a medieval *accessus ad auctorem*. The *materia* is the truth about the fall of Troy; the *intentio* is historical truth and moral instruction; and the *modus tractandi* is to follow the letter of his Latin source—though Nolan recognizes that far from being a slavish translator, Benoît is actually a poetic composer. In Nolan's own words, "In the subsequent tradition of the *roman antique*, no writer will fail to identify his poem, as Benoît and his immediate predecessors had, in relation to this highly structured late-antique and medieval notion of the classical *liber*," that is, every prologue will somehow comply with the requirements of the medieval *accessus* (18). This is of no small importance for the purpose of the present study since Lydgate's Troy Book is part of the later developments of this tradition.

[3] For Guido's and Benoît's texts, I have used the following editions: Guido de Columnis, Historia destructionis Troiae, ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffin, Mediaeval Academy of America Publication 26 (Cambridge: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1936) and Benoît de Sainte-Maure, Le Roman de Troie, ed. Léopold Constans, 6 vols. Société des Anciens Textes Français (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1904-12).

5). Obviously, this particular technical discussions did not appeal to Lydgate. On the

other hand, right after that, Lydgate took a mere eight lines in Guido dealing with Ovid's

account of the Myrmidons' transformation into ants and expanded them to 81 verse lines

(Columnis 5-6). So, in a similar fashion, in the Prologue, Lydgate took over and even

amplified the metatextual discussion he found in Guido (and perhaps Benoît) and thereby

planted the seed of a theme that runs throughout his poem.[4]

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[4] We do not possess any forceful evidence indicating that Lydgate actually read and used Benoît's romance
to supplement his translation of Guido delle Colonne. There is no doubt that Lydgate knew *of* a French text
narrating the Trojan War, for indeed in the Prologue he explains that Prince Henry wanted him to write the
story in English "As in latyn and in frensche it is" (115). Of course, this allusion does not *need* to refer to
Benoît's romance, as the <u>Roman de Troie</u> was not the only Old French text dealing with the events at Troy.
The French version Lydgate mentions could, for example, have been one of the French translations of
Dares, one of the five prose versions of Benoît, or a French translation of Guido. (For information on the
different versions of the Troy legend in Old French, see Marc-René Jung, "Les manuscrits de la légende
de Troie," <u>Le Roman antique au moyen âge: Actes du colloque du Centre d'études médiévales de
l'Université de Picardie, Amiens 14-15 1989</u>, ed. Danielle Buschinger [Göppingen, Ger.: Kümmerle,
1992] 83-99 and <u>La légende de Troie en France au moyen âge: Analyse des versions françaises et
bibliographie raisonnée des manuscrits</u>, Romanica Helvetica Vol. 114 [Basel, Switz.: Francke, 1996].) A
list of the manuscripts that belonged to Bury Abbey does not help us determine what the "frensche" text
was. This list mentions two copies of Guido's <u>Historia destructionis Troiae</u> but no Old French version of
the Trojan War (James, "Bury St. Edmunds Manuscripts" 252-59; Ker 16-22; A. Watson 5-7). The five
medieval catalogues of books pertaining to Bury Abbey and reproduced in <u>English Benedictine Libraries—
The Shorter Catalogues</u> is of no use either in this respect (Sharpe et al. 43-98). However, in itself that does
not prove that Bury Abbey never owned a French version or that Lydgate did not have access to a French
copy elsewhere. (For comparison, no works by Chaucer are listed as having been included in the abbey
library, though obviously Lydgate had read Chaucer very attentively.) If one were to make an educated
guess, it would be safe to say that the French version that Lydgate claimed he knew or at least knew of *was*
likely Benoît's since the <u>Roman de Troie</u> was such a widely read text—for example, Gower used it in
<u>Confessio amantis</u>; also see footnote 2, page 32 for the <u>Roman</u>'s influence on Chaucer.
      Critics unanimously agree that Lydgate did not use Benoît in any significant, "wholesale" manner
in his <u>Troy Book</u>. There is, however, some disagreement as to whether he might have used him
sporadically. In 1938, E. Bagby Atwood rejected all notions that Lydgate might have made any substantial
use of Benoît in his poem. He took particular exception to Aristide Joly's statement that Lydgate must have
had both Benoît's and Guido's texts before him when he wrote his poem because Book I, line 115 mentions
Latin and French versions of the text (25-26, footnote 4). (See Joly I.494.) However, Atwood did not
clearly pronounce himself on the subject of minor borrowings as apparent in the ambivalence of the
following comment: "[A]fter examining *most of the passages* where the <u>Troy Book</u> differs from the
<u>Historia</u>, I was unable to find *any* definite correspondences between Lydgate and Benoit in details not
found in Guido. . . . In the absence of further evidence we are justified, I believe, in ignoring the theory that
Lydgate drew to *any appreciable extent* from the <u>Roman de Troie</u> or other Old French sources" (26-27;
italics mine). In the Introduction to her 1974 English translation of the <u>Historia</u>, Mary Elizabeth Meek
indicated that "Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> is a metrical paraphrase of the <u>Historia</u> with occasional use of the
<u>Roman</u>" (xi). A few pages later she also stated that "Chaucer and Lydgate . . . knew both the <u>Roman</u> and
the <u>Historia</u>" (xv). Meek seems to have based her claims on Joly's book and a similar statement by one

1.2 The text of the poem

Numerous allusions to books and the literariness of Lydgate's own poem abound

in the five books which follow the Prologue. Many of these references pertain to prior

texts and authors whom Lydgate mentions because they either give authority (that is,

historical credibility) to his poem or, conversely, because the fictional nature of their

writings posits them as foils to Lydgate's claimed historicity or even because they are

credible (though inaccurate) historical explanations—and a self-proclaimed historian

should make it a point to mention all the sources he is aware of. The examples literally

permeate the <u>Troy Book</u>, but most of them follow similar patterns. Here is a sample of

representative quotes: "as Guydo lyst to specefie" (I.5), "by record of writyn" (I.8), "as

Ovide maketh mencioun" (I.51), "as poetis . . . / In her bokys lyketh for to feyne" (I. 697-

98), "as þis story plainly doth devise" (I.1944), "myn auctor seiþ" (I.3634), "as somme

Egidio Gorra, who does not provide any evidence to support his statement. (See Gorra 151.) In 1987,
Margaret J. Ehrhart pointed out that, unlike Guido, both Lydgate and Benoît had included a fountain in
Paris's dream scene—see 2.2456 for <u>Troy Book</u> and 3869 for the <u>Roman</u>—but, relying on Atwood's 1938
article, she added that "Lydgate, as far as is known, did not consult Benoît directly" (59). (I discuss the
fountain passage in chapter 5, pages 235-36.)

However, after having myself examined all of the <u>Troy Book</u>, all of the <u>Historia</u>, and substantial
selections of the <u>Roman</u>, I must conclude that there are indeed odd similarities (though all at the level of
details) between the Old French and the Middle English texts, which could very well evidence occasional
borrowings on Lydgate's part. One such odd "coincidence" occurs in the Prologue. Guido starts off by
extolling books for remembering the heroic events of the past—see lines 1-10 (Columnis 3). The emphasis
lies squarely on history. This, however, is not quite what Benoît had in mind when he penned the first few
lines of his prologue. Indeed, Benoît first focuses on the value of transmitting knowledge in general and, in
this context, even mentions the seven liberal arts and philosophy. He refers to general knowledge using the
words "sen[s]" (lines 3 and 18), "saveirs" (line 14), and "sciënce" (lines 19 and 23). It is only with line 33
that Benoît's discussion shifts to a concern closer to his project at hand: history ("estoire" line 34).
Interestingly, a similar interest in books as depositories of knowledge in general as well as history is
present in Lydgate's Prologue:

> For ner[e] writers, al wer out of mynde,
> Nat story only, but of nature and kynde
> The trewe knowing schulde haue gon to wrak,
> And from science oure wittes put a-bak. (159-62)

The echo of Benoît's text is not only apparent at the content level but also at the lexical level as evinced by
Lydgate's use of the word "science" (as well as "knowing") to refer to knowledge in general. This example
is only the first in a long list of topical similarities between the <u>Troy Book</u> and the <u>Roman de Troie</u>. When
relevant, I mention such similarities in my footnotes.

bokis telle" (II.4451), "as som auctours make mencioun" (II.4847), "as I fynde"

(II.5161), "as clerkis seyn" (II.6242), "as seith Dares" (II.7822), "As in bokis is made

remembraunce" (III.3454), and "Dites maketh mencioun" (V.3341).

In addition to those types of metatextual references, Lydgate constantly draws the

attention of the reader to his own activity as a writer. For example, he informs the reader

of his intention to stop a digression in order to go back to the story's main point: "But

now must I my style agein diuerte / Vn-to þe were" (III.2362-63). He shares his difficulty

in writing about certain topics—here about Hector's death:

> But now, allas! How shal I procede
> In þe story, þat for wo and drede
> Fele myn hond boþe tremble and quake
> O worþi Hector, only for þi sake,
> Of þi deth I am so loth to write. (III.5423-27)[5]

Once, he even compares his work of composition to a nautical voyage—a metaphor

dating back to the Roman poets:

> But like as he þat gynneth for to saille
> Ageyn þe wynde, whan þe mast doþ rive,
> Right so it were but in veyn to strive
> Ageyn þe fate, bitterer þanne galle,
> By highe vengaunce vp-on Troye falle,
> Nor to presvme her furies, sharpe whette,
> Ceriously in þis boke to sette. (IV.7086-92)

But Lydgate does not adhere to the metaphor, and in Book V he adopts another classical

topos, the one that compares writing to plowing one's field:

> For I shal now, lyk as I am wont,
> Sharpen my penne, boþe rude & blont,
> To descryue þe fyn of þi soiour,

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[5] The poem contains many other instances of modesty topoi of the usual sort: apologies for rudeness of speech, metrical errors, and general feelings of inadequacy.

Vp-on þe boundis set of my labour:
For almost wery, feint & waike I-now
Be þe bestes & oxes of my plow,
Þe longe day ageyn þe hil to wende.
But almost now at þe londes ende
Of Troye boke, fiche I wil a stake,
Saue I mote spende a fewe lines blake
Þe laste chapitle shortly to translate
Of al þis werke. (2923-34)[6]

There are numerous such instances in the poem where Lydgate through a single word or a

whole passage refocuses the reader's attention away from the plot and onto the writing

itself.

But here again, Lydgate did not add anything drastically new to his source text.

Many bookish and metatextual references can indeed be found in Guido's <u>Historia</u> (that

is, beyond its thoroughly self-reflexive Prologue that I have already mentioned). Thus,

one might notice examples such as these in Guido's text: "describit ystoria" (6) [the

history describes][7], "legitur" (12) [it is read], "asseruit . . . in codice sui operis" (83) [he

asserted in the book of his works], "vt in aliis codicibus inuenitur" (101) [as it is found in

other books], "ut Daretis liber pro ueritate testatur" (145) [as the book of Dares testifies

as truth], "ut scripsit Dares" (152) [as Dares wrote], "presentis hystorie stilus acuitur"

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[6] At the very end of his poem, Lydgate returns to the image of a stake/pen being used to mark a land/textual boundary, and this time he applies it to Dares:
> But now þe lanter and þe clere light
> Is wasted oute of Frigius Darete,
> Whilom of Troye wryter & poete,
> Guyde haue I noon, forþe for to passe:
> For euene here in þe silf[e] place
> He ficched hath þe boundis of his stile. (V.3326-31)

[7] The page numbers refer to the Latin text (Griffin edition). I have generally supplied Elizabeth Meek's translation—except where a more literal translation is preferable.

(269) [the pen of the present history is sharpened][8], "presenti operi" (273) [the work at hand], and "Ego . . . Guido de Columpnis . . . Ditem Grecum in omnibus sum sequtus" (275) [I, Guido delle Colonne have followed Dictys the Greek in all things].[9] So Lydgate obviously had a direct model to draw from, but it is true that such intertextual allusions seem to occur *more* frequently in Lydgate than in his Latin source.

As I already mentioned in the introduction, in a 1992 article Tim Machan downplayed the value of Lydgate's metatextual comments—though like me he noticed that they are omnipresent in Lydgate's work.[10] For Machan, Lydgate's bookish and writerly allusions too often function as mere rhyme tags and metrical fillers with no thematic purpose. There may be *some* truth to this statement. In the Troy Book many intertextual and self-reflexive references do occur in the second part of a line and create the impression that Lydgate added these to satisfy the requirements of his rhyming

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[8] Depending on where it is used, the phrase "presens hystoria" sometimes refers to the history Guido translates and sometimes to the history he is writing (Colonne xxxii, endnote 17). Here it refers to Guido's translation.

[9] Benoît too inserts many references to books and the activity of composition in the body of his poem. Here are a few examples: "Ensi com retrait l'Escriture" (710) [As is told in the book]; "si com jo truis" (730) [as I find]; "Ço dit l'estoire que fist Daires" (12440) [According to the history written by Dares]; "Ço nos recontent li Traitié / E li grant Livre Historial (23302-03) [According to what treatises and great history books tell us]; "To ço qu'en conte li Autors" (24422) [Everything that the author narrates]; and "Ço dit Ditis" (26567) [According to Dictys]. Benoît even makes use of the nautical metaphor to describe his own task: "Mout par ai ancore a sigler, / Qua rancor sui en haute mer" (14943-44) [I still have further to sail, for I am still out on the open sea] and "Ceste me doint Deus achever, / Qu'a dreit port puisse ancre geter" (14949-50) [May God enable me to bring this one to a good end so that I may enter port and cast anchor]. The page numbers refer to the Old French text (Constans edition based on all known manuscripts). The translations here provided are mine. Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Françoise Vielliard's partial translation of the Milan MS of the Roman into modern French has often been of tremendous help to me—where applicable.

    Barbara Nolan makes some perceptive observations about what she calls Benoît's outer perspectives, that is, his "moral or scribal or formal perspective[s]" (28). Though, "they are not without parallel in twelfth-century *estoires*," she finds that they are "more personalized and subtle than those of most medieval historians" (29).

[10] Machan focused on passages from the Siege of Thebes, the Fall of Princes, and several of Lydgate's minor poems, but his arguments apply to Lydgate's poetic output in general.

couplets. The following quote illustrates Lydgate's insistence on bookish topics as well

as his need to use certain phrases for rhyme's sake:

> Agamenoun, *as Guydo list endyte*,
> His lordis sent Achilles to visite
> For certeyn causes, *like as ye shal here*,
> *Whiche in þe story be rehersid here.*
> And with Vlixes and worþi Diomede,
> Duke Nestor went, pleynly, *as I rede*. (IV.1681-86, italics mine)

Undoubtedly, writing in verse often forces poets to make lexical choices based on meter

and rhyme rather than pure narrative necessity. But, I would also argue that there is never

an obligation on the poet's part to fill in his lines with metatextual allusions. When in

need of a filler or a rhyming word, the poet is always at liberty to use vocabulary

pertaining to the characters and situations in the narrative itself. Of course, for Lydgate,

adding brief comments on metatextual topics must have been a fairly obvious choice

since Guido (and Benoît) had paved the way for him.[11] In addition, so many other poets,

including Chaucer and his fifteenth-century imitators, were fond of presenting themselves

in their works as readers and writers of books.[12] Lydgate fully embraced (and, I believe,

explored the contradictions of) this bookish tradition and made it a central component of

many of his works.

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[11] It would seem that Benoît too used many metatextual references for rhyming and metrical reasons. For example, when describing king Memnon, he wrote, "Si ert, ço conte li *Escriz*, / Par les espaules bien *forniz*" (5495-96, italics mine) [According to the book, he had very broad shoulders]. A few lines further one finds, "D'Ecuba ne vueil mie *taire* / Ce que Daires en voust *retraire*" (5509-10, italics mine) [Concerning Hecuba, I do not wish to leave out what Dares wanted to say about her]. Although I have not kept a numerical count of the frequency of such allusions in Benoît's, Guido's, and Lydgate's texts, my general impression is that, like Lydgate, Benoît uses such references much more often than Guido.

[12] For example, in Troilus and Criseyde (one of the sources of the Troy Book), the narrator uses many expressions like, "as written wel I fynde" (IV.1415), "I fynde eke in stories elsewhere" (V.1044), and "as olde bokes tellen us" (V.1562).

In the Troy Book, Lydgate's interest in texts is even further emphasized by the emotional involvement that Lydgate's narrator sometimes displays vis-à-vis his own activity as a writer. A case in point would be III.5423-27, which I quoted on page 35, or the following passage where Lydgate describes his reaction to the murder of Agamemnon: "For whiche, allas! my penne I fele quake, / Þat doth myn ynke blotten on my boke" (V.1044-45). These passages are all the more remarkable because they have no equivalents in Guido or Benoît. Actually, except for Guido's occasional outbursts against the lies of the poets, Guido and Benoît present themselves as rather emotionally detached from their writings. On the other hand, Lydgate's emotional postures and phrasings here exemplified draw directly from Chaucer's subjective Troilus-narrator, who before relating Criseyde's unfaithfulness states, "And now my penne, allas, with which I write, / Quaketh for drede of that I most endite" (III.13-14). Definitely, reading and writing matter tremendously to Lydgate. These activities constitute such a recurrent motif in the Troy Book that at one point Lydgate even has one of his characters, Ajax, back up a statement by referring to books:

> And sothfastly, but if bokes lye,
> As I have red & herd by prophesye,
> Þat finally Troye þe cyte
> With-outen hym shal neuere wonne be—
> Þus bokes seyn, þat ben of olde memorie. (IV.3341-45)

Ajax is here commenting on the necessity to send for Pyrrhus, Achilles's son, who will enable the Greeks to win Troy. What is particularly interesting about this passage is that there is no such reference to a textual authority in Guido or Benoît.[13] So this passage

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[13] Guido here says, "cum ipse pro certo didicerit Grecos sine eo contra Troyanos non posse uictoriam obtinere" (208-09) [since Ajax had learned for certain that the Greeks could not obtain the victory from the

clearly drives home Lydgate's leitmotif that knowledge derives from books. Hence my

contention that Lydgate's numerous extradiegetic comments in the Troy Book contribute

to the general bookish texture of the poem and, as such, I do believe these allusions

perform a thematic function within the poem—a position that puts me at odds with

Machan's viewpoint.

1.3 Centrality of speeches

Lydgate further foregrounds his interest in discourse in the Troy Book by giving

prominence to speeches. The easiest way for him to do this is first by giving a voice to

his characters, that is, he takes many of the indirect speeches he found in Guido and

transforms them into direct speeches. Such transformations occur frequently, as the

following examples taken randomly from two middle books illustrate: III.362-75

(Hector), III.1303-22 (Theseus), III.1684-93 (Hector), III.4958-62 (Andromache),

III.4987-96 (Andromache), III.5522-27 (Trojan women), IV.3237-45 (Greeks), IV.3270-

99 (Agamemnon), IV.3328-49 (Ajax), IV.3995-4001 (Ajax), IV.5163-81 (Antenor),

IV.5244-314 (Antenor), and IV.6731-848 (Polyxena).[14] There is no question that

Trojans without Achilles' son]. As for Benoît, he tells us that all the Greeks learn from an oracle that
Pyrrhus's presence is required for them to win the battle. Thus, unlike in Guido's and Lydgate's versions,
in the Roman Ajax is not the one who informs his fellow Greeks of the urgency to get Pyrrhus on board.
On a different note, unlike Guido, both Benoît and Lydgate speak of a prophecy, which may indicate a
knowledge of the Roman on Lydgate's part.

[14] Rarely do we see the obverse with Lydgate, that is, a conversion from direct speech into indirect speech.
However, every now and then, Lydgate does make the decision to indirectly report a character's words:
e.g., IV.5080-81 (Priam) or IV.5541-47 (Ulysses)—though in the second case, Lydgate's version actually
manages to be longer than the original. On a side note, of the thirteen speeches that I list above (the ones
which are reported in direct discourse in the Troy Book though they appear in indirect discourse in the
Historia), eight also appear in direct discourse in the Roman. Indeed, another characteristic that seems to
link Benoît and Lydgate is their fondness for speeches.

Lydgate's desire to produce an amplified version of the Trojan narrative has much to do with these formal choices, since writing out direct statements usually takes up more space than reporting the gist of a statement. However, there is more to it than that, for related to the centrality of speeches within the Troy Book, the poem also (1) emphasizes the (sometimes deceitful) rhetorical abilities and preparations of many characters or (2) reveals their opinions on the uses of language or (3) somehow links them to rhetoric.

Let us first look at a few passages illustrating Lydgate's interest in his characters as speakers. Actually, the first character one encounters in the Troy Book (specifically at line 3 of Book I), Peleus, is very much described as a deceitful *speaker* by Lydgate. That is, whereas both Guido and Benoît depict Peleus as a double-faced, scheming individual, Lydgate adds a distinct rhetorical component to his character's duplicity. In the Historia, Peleus's feelings vis-à-vis Jason are well summarized in the following quote: "licet signis extrinsecis eum sibi carum esse monstraret, ardebat tamen et fluctuabat instrinsecus" (6) [even though he showed by external signs that he (Jason) was dear to him, he raged and was in turmoil inwardly]. Before him, Benoît had portrayed Peleus in a very similar way in the Roman:

> . . . mout le dotot:
> Mais ne voleit pas ne n'osot
> Mostrer ne faire aucun semblant
> Qu'il le haïst ne tant ne quant. (785-88)
> [He feared him much, but he did not wish or dare to show this, nor did he want to give the impression that he hated him in the least.]

In Lydgate, one finds comparable passages, such as:

> But inwarde brent of hate and of envie
> The hoote fyre, & yit ther was no smeke,
> So couertly the malys was y-reke,
> That no man might as by sygne espie

Toward Iason in herte he bare envie. (I.190-94)

But with Lydgate, language itself is brought to the fore, as when he adds about Peleus

that "to his herte his tonge was contrarie: / Benyngne of speche, of menyng a serpente"

(I.186-87). Then, when Lydgate explains that Peleus saw it was time to begin his

scheme, he specifies, "þei first he made it queynte, / And gan with asour & with golde to

peynte / His gay wordys in sownynge glorious" (I.383-85). Such a rhetorical analysis is

not present in Guido. A few lines later, Lydgate uses a textual metaphor to describe the

insidious speech Peleus is about to make:

> For of þe entent, of whiche he gan purpose,
> Þe tixte was hyd, but no thing þe glose,
> Whiche was conueied so with flaterye,
> Þat the peple cowed not espye
> Lytel or nought of his entent with-Inne. (I.413-17)

This passage too has no equivalent in Guido (or Benoît). When Lydgate then gets to

Peleus's actual speech, he amplifies it considerably: 81 verse lines compared to some 22

prose lines in Guido (and 38 verse lines in Benoît). Ironically, in this passage, the number

of words uttered by the character seems to be inversely proportional to this character's

degree of candor—by contrast, Jason uses "wordis fewe" (523). The issue of Peleus's

disingenuous rhetoric is all very much tied to Lydgate's use of words and phrases like

"vnder flouris fayre" (185), "under colour" (188, 208), "sugre in his face" (218), and

"hony" (516) when talking about Peleus. The significance of such expressions for

Lydgate will be dealt with in chapter 3; for now, it is only important to note Lydgate's

interest in his characters as speakers.

As far as Jason is concerned, in subsequent episodes of Book I he reveals himself

to be quite a speaker as well. Most noticeable is the passage in which he requests King

Cethes of Colchos's permission to try for the Golden Fleece. Jason's direct speech takes up some 39 lines—a substantial amplification of Guido's four lines written in indirect discourse. Moreover, the lines that immediately precede the actual speech reveal much about Jason's (and Lydgate's) mental processes. The reader here learns that, before speaking, Jason rehearses his speech in his head. Jason follows the advice of rhetoricians in order to build and deliver a skillful, persuasive speech:

> Saue Iason, or he his tale gan,
> Ful wel avised, and cherid lyche a man,
> Conceyved hath and noted wonder wel
> From point to point his mater euerydel,
> And nat for-gat a word in al his speche;
> But evene lik as rethorik doth teche,
> He gan his tale so by crafte conveie
> To make þe kyng, to þat he wolde seie,
> Condescende, and rather to encline. (I.1397-405)

In the passage quoted, one can distinguish the five canons of classical rhetoric: invention ("conceived"), arrangement ("noted . . . from point to point"), style and memory ("nat for-gat a word in al his speche"), and delivery ("gan his tale . . . conveie"). Clearly, for Lydgate, Jason is an orator and this point needs to be driven home. The speech itself is actually of less interest to us, though it does reveal Jason's desire to capture the benevolence of his audience (as any good orator should do), for Jason uses the first dozen lines to appeal to the king's goodwill.[15] Later in the poem, Lydgate draws our attention to Jason's activity as a speaker once more in the context of Medea and Jason's romantic affair. Jason's pledge to be true to Medea contains a linguistic emphasis and a

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[15] Lydgate also provides king Cethes's response in direct discourse (I.1454-508). His 54 lines correspond to one and a half lines written in indirect speech in Guido (15)! As for the Roman, there are no verbal exchanges taking place at this point between Jason and Cethes.

foregrounding of rhetorical analysis that is significantly absent from both the <u>Historia</u> and the <u>Roman</u>. Thus, Jason tells Medea: "Me list not feyne, flatre, nor delude" (I.2413) and "Myn hert[e] menyth as my tong[e] seith" (I.2592).

Apart from Peleus and Jason, Lydgate presents many other characters as speakers. Of course, whenever Guido includes descriptions that mention the rhetorical skills (or lack of rhetorical skills) of his characters, Lydgate never fails to include these in his poem. Such is the case for a long section of Book II in which Lydgate reports Dares's descriptions of the main Greek and Trojan characters (4540-5064). The descriptions focus on physical and moral features but also reveal the speech patterns of 13 of the 31 protagonists depicted. Some characters are eloquent (Agamemnon, Ulysses, Nestor, Criseyde, Aeneas, Antenor), too wordy (Ajax—son of Oileus), prone to stammering (Neoptolemus), restrained in speech (Hector, Polydamas), coarse of speech (Ajax—son of Oileus), good at lying (Ulysses), true to their word (Tantalus, Priam), bad at keeping promises (Diomede), or gentle of speech (Priam). For the most part, Lydgate here faithfully transcribed what he found in the <u>Historia</u>—which itself does not differ significantly from Benoît's version. But then later in the poem, Lydgate often reminds his readers of his characters' speech patterns, even when Guido does not focus on these. For example, when Ulysses, Diomede, and Nestor are sent to Achilles's tent to try to convince him to rejoin the fight, Lydgate puts the stress on Ulysses's getting ready for his speech: "Wyse Vlixes, ful of eloquence, / Gan his tale prudently deuyse" (IV.1698-99). Sometimes such emphases or slight alterations contribute to producing a story a bit different from the source text. I particularly have in mind a "detail" added by Lydgate in

Book V, where he describes how Telegonus (Ulysses's son by Circe) confronts the porter

outside the gate of his father's castle. In Lydgate's version, the porter verbally abuses

Telegonus:

> But proudly he denyed hym þe gate,
> And shortly seide þat he cam to late
> To entre þere in any maner wyse,
> And vngoodly gan hym to dispise,
> Frowarde of speche and malicious. (3147-51)

The porter's words touch a raw nerve in Telegonus, leading to a physical confrontation

during which Ulysses finally loses his life at the hands of his son. What matters here is

that language acts as a catalyst for a series of events with unfortunate—though limited—

consequences, and it is Lydgate's choice to give language such a prominent place at this

place in the poem. Indeed, in Guido's Historia, Telegonus encounters guards who simply

refuse him entry on the basis that they have orders not to let anybody in (260)—there is

no verbal abuse involved. The result of Lydgate's "minor" alteration is that it creates a

story in which "[t]he porter's abuse of Telegonus recalls the remote origin of the Trojan

War, when Jason feels that Lamedon treats him discourteously" (R. Edwards, Troy Book:

Selections endnote to V.3142). Or, if you will, by slightly changing the emphasis of a

short passage, Lydgate has managed to make the whole story of Troy come full circle.

Where at the beginning of the story, a contemptuous speech delivered by Lamedon's

messenger to Jason had set in motion a series of events that led to the destruction of Troy

and the deaths of thousands of Greeks and Trojans, here another discourteous speech

leads to the death of Ulysses and some of his men—though ultimately to the

reconciliation of Telegonus and Telemachus in brotherly union. In other words, language

does not only permeate the thematic texture of Lydgate's poem but is also instrumental in defining its narrative bounds.[16]

The Troy Book also features instances in which we learn how the characters themselves feel about language. Most noticeably, in Book II, Agamemnon urges Menelaus to stop lamenting the abduction of his wife, Helen, for in his opinion words and tears do not achieve as much as swords:

> With word & wepyng for to venge oure peyne,
> Be no menys to worschip to attayne;
> Lat vs with swerde & nat with wordis fight,
> Oure tonge apese, be manhod preve oure myght:
> Word is but wynde, & water þat we wepe. (4379-83)

Interesting about this statement is a certain level of generalization one does not find in Guido. Indeed, where Lydgate has Agamemnon comment on the ineffectiveness of "words" (that is, any words or language in general), Guido merely says: "Curis anxiis aut fluuiis lacrimarum honor non queritur nec uindicta. Ense igitur petenda est ulcio, non murmure querelarum" (81) [Neither honor nor vengeance is to be obtained by troubled cares or rivers of tears. Revenge is therefore to be sought with the sword, not by murmurs of complaint].[17] Another example worth noticing occurs in Book IV. Incidentally, it too reflects rather negatively on the effectiveness of language—at least in the context of the event described. Here, Achilles is being entreated to join into the fight against the Trojans (this passage actually occurs before the one focusing on Ulysses's rhetorical preparation

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[16] For a different reading of the passage, see Colin Fewer's "John Lydgate's Troy Book and the Ideology of Prudence," which suggests that this episode illustrates one of those "absurdly trivial causes" that are at the root of the tragedies of history (232-33).

[17] In Benoît, Agamemnon says that the great heroes of the past did not conquer honors "En duel, en lermes ne en plors" [by mourning and crying] (4956).

[IV.1698-99], which I mentioned above). Lydgate describes Achilles's refusal to pay

attention to the request, or indeed even to the words themselves:

> Nor onys list to geve hym audience,
> Nor vn-to hym han his aduertence—
> Þer may no word in his hert[e] myne
> To þat he seide to maken him enclyne:
> For, outerly, evene like he ferde,
> As þoughe he no maner worde ne here;
> For þorugh his eris it passed as a soun. (1527-33)

Guido too (as well as Benoît) actually reports Achilles's refusal at this point. Guido says:

"Achilles igitur nec ad uerba sui famuli applicat animum . . ., sed omnia que uidet et audit

tamquam inaudita dissimulat" (193) [Achilles did not apply his mind to his attendant's

words . . ., but he pretended that he did not hear all that he saw and heard].[18] Clearly, in

terms of basic plot, Lydgate's version does not differ from that of his source text.

However, Lydgate's passage is a bit more interesting than its equivalent in the Historia

(and the Roman) because it carries vague echoes of medieval speech theory, that is, its

reference to a "worde" and a "soun" in the last two lines. A sound is foremost

corporeal—that is, unlike a word, it does not require the ability to mean anything. Hence

Lydgate states that whereas a sound merely passes through the ear, a word is supposed to

penetrate the "herte" (heart or intellect). Discussions on sounds and/or words (and other

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[18] Benoît says the following here:
> Achillès fait chiere et semblant
> Que lui n'en seit ne tant ne quant.
> N'i respont mot ne n'i entent:
> …………………………
> Mais onc n'en leva sol la chiere
> Ne ne fist semblant des oïr. (19071-81)

[Achilles pretends that it does not matter at all to him. He neither responds nor even pays attention: . . . He never even lifted his face or pretended to hear them.]

related concepts like, for example, spoken utterances) were found in medieval grammars and commentaries, though they were basically commonly known topics.[19] Of course, taken alone, Lydgate's use of these "grammatically charged" words may be deemed rather insignificant—and their occurrence in this poem could be purely fortuitous. However, it is also true that they add to all the other logocentric and metatextual allusions we have already seen in the Troy Book and all of these together contribute to creating a poem which, at some level, concerns itself with the very nature of discourse.

A third way in which Lydgate attributes to speeches a central position in the Troy Book is by linking some of his characters to rhetoric. Lydgate's description of the god Mercury inside Paris's dream in Book II perfectly illustrates this point. This description is provided in the wider context of a council called by Priam to decide whether the Trojans should avenge Hesione's (Priam's sister) abduction by the Greeks. Several of Priam's children express their opinions on the matter. Hector's and Paris's speeches are extremely revealing and will be the subject of a detailed analysis in chapter 5. During his speech, Paris recounts a dream he had in which the god Mercury appeared to him. Although Guido and Benoît simply say that Mercury walked up accompanied by three goddesses and provide no description whatsoever of Mercury, Lydgate spends fifty-one lines on an iconographic description of Mercury and its gloss (II.2466-517).[20] In the Troy Book, Mercury appears equipped with a crooked sword, a staff with a snake going around it, a

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[19] See, for instance, Isidore of Seville's Etymologiae sive Origines or Priscian's Institutiones grammaticae (a Roman grammar still widely in circulation in the Middle Ages) and its glosses (e.g., Petrus Helias's Summa super Priscianum).

[20] Cf. the mere two lines in the Historia, page 62, and the Roman, ll. 3874-75.

cock, and pipes of rhetoric. Lydgate expressly tells us that Mercury shows himself as in

Fulgentius's Mitologiae (II.2483-87).[21] Then, Lydgate proceeds to interpret the

iconography. The crooked sword brings back those who go astray; the staff stands for

prudent governance; the serpent represents falsehood; the cock is a guide that provides

insight; and—most important for our purposes—the pipes signify "Þe sugred dites, by

gret excellence, / Of rhetoric and of eloquence, / Of whiche þis god is souereyn &

patroun" (2499-501). The point is driven home in line 2517 where Lydgate again calls

Mercury, the "god, of eloquence kyng." But the whole passage becomes even more

interesting when we compare it to what Fulgentius actually says about Mercury in his

Mitologiae. Incidentally, Fulgentius does not discuss Mercury within the context of the

judgment of Paris like he does the three accompanying goddesses (Book II.1). We have

to go to Book I.18, which is titled "The Fable of Mercury." Here, Fulgentius equips

Mercury with a cap, feathered heels, a cock, and a staff surrounded by a snake. Mercury

is the god of trading and his iconographical attributes are all somehow related to

commerce: the feathered heels give him speed; the cap represents the secrecy of

commerce; the cock stands for the watchfulness of businessmen; and the staff and snake

indicate that trade sometimes empowers and sometimes wounds. Interestingly,

commerce, theft, and perjury are all linked for Fulgentius: "Hunc etiam deum furti ac

praesulem uolunt, quod nihil intersit inter negotiantis rapinam atque periurium

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[21] Lydgate also mentions Fulgentius in line 2581 to support a detail he gives concerning Juno's nymphs, though in actuality Fulgentius's Mitologiae says nothing of nymphs that accompany Juno. Fulgentius was a fifth-sixth century Christian writer, who in his work as a mythographer summarized classical myths and rationalized them by adding strong layers of moralization.

furantisque deierationem ac raptum" (30) [They also choose this god as the patron of thieving because in trading there is no difference for a thief between pillage and perjury or between plunder and sacrilege].[22] Besides this, Fulgentius lists a few more characteristics: Mercury is the divine go-between; he is called Hermes by the Greeks for his fluency in different languages (a requirement in commerce); he is associated with a swift star (Stilbos) and a day of the week (Wednesday); and he is said to have killed the monster Argus with his curved blade. So clearly Lydgate did not slavishly adopt all of Fulgentius's iconography. He left out several details found in Fulgentius's account but, as already mentioned, he added the pipes of rhetoric.[23] And those pipes

> songe wonder merye;
> Of whiche þe soote sugred armonye
> Made in myn eris swiche a melodye,
> Þat me sempte þo in myn avis,
> I was ravisched in-to paradys. (2478-82)

In other words, whereas for Fulgentius, Mercury is foremost the god of theft/commerce (the words are almost interchangeable in Fulgentius's treatment of them), Lydgate unambiguously defines him as the god of eloquence.[24] And, of course, Lydgate also associates Mercury with prudent governance, a concept totally absent from Fulgentius's portrait so that a more ethical, more dignified Mercury appears in Lydgate's text—at least at first sight. [25]

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[22] The page number of the Latin quote refers to Helm's edition. For the English, I have relied on the very convenient translation by Leslie George Whitbread.

[23] The iconographical details that he does keep (the crooked sword, the caduceus with the snake, and the cock) are given other explanations by Lydgate.

[24] In Fulgentius, Mercury's fluency in language is presented as a by-product of commerce, not a primary attribute.

[25] As Robert R. Edwards has rightly pointed out, "Lydgate purges Fulgentius's association of Mercury with the mendacity of commerce, making him instead into an allegory of the more aristocratic virtues of good

1.4 The creative power of language

There are still other ways that Lydgate uses to put the emphasis on discourse in his Troy Book. One of them concerns what can best be called the creative power of language. Three examples nicely illustrate this point. The first one I want to look at occurs in Book IV and is actually a mere three lines at the very beginning of Polyxena's prayer to the gods, right before Pyrrhus sacrifices her at the grave of Achilles, his father. Lydgate instills a Christian component at this point in the poem, for where both Benoît and Guido have Polyxena address the Greeks—not the gods—Lydgate has her address the gods in very Christian terms.[26] The Christian component is most apparent at the beginning of the prayer where she directs her words to the "almyghti" (6731) who govern the world, are all-knowing, and especially, "By whom þis world, so huge, large, & rounde, / Boþe eyr & see, heuene & eke þe grounde / At youre devis with a word was wrought" (6733-35). Lydgate's reference here to the Judeo-Christian foundational role of the word/Word is indicative of the centrality of discourse in Lydgate's poem—though it is, of course, surprising that the allusion should occur in a prayer addressed to pagan gods.

Interestingly enough, another example illustrating the creative power of the word operates in a totally different discursive field from the one associated with the world of

and prudence." Edwards also observes that the association of Mercury with prudence comes from Vatican Mythographer 2 who refers to Mercury as "prudentie et rationis deus" (ch. 83) and "deus prudentie" (ch. 124) (Troy Book: Selections endnote to II.2486-516).

[26]To be more specific, Polyxena's speech starts out as a prayer to the gods, but after the first 49 lines, Polyxena proceeds to address a variety of individuals: the Greek folk (6780-820), then death itself (6821-29), the gods again (6830-39), all maidens (6840-45), before finally reverting to the gods (6846-48).

the Biblical Creation. Here, the narrator comments on the activity of writing as creating within texts that which is absent from experience. Or, if you will, if God's word enables the creation of reality, a poet's word enables the creation of *un*reality. It may be easier for us to understand the import of Lydgate's passage by first looking at its equivalents in Benoît and Guido. Benoît explains that during one of the truces that punctuate the Trojan conflict, Hector is treated for battle wounds in the Chamber of Beauty in Priam's castle. As its name suggests, this chamber possesses dazzling beauty and richness. Among its most intriguing features are four magnificent columns surmounted by four exquisitely beautiful statues which come to life as if by magic. And indeed the text explains that the three wise men who built them were experts in the magical arts. Benoît, who revels in lush descriptions of splendor and wealth, devotes some 300 lines to the Chamber of Beauty (14631-936). None of this is even remotely present in his source text, which would be Dares, though at some point in describing one of the statues Benoît specifies "Ce dit li livres qui ne ment" (14766) [as says the book that does not lie]. As for Guido, he must have been thoroughly perplexed when faced with this passage in Benoît. Driven by the desire to report the historical truth of the Trojan events, he seems to have been particularly dubious of the authenticity of the four sculptures, for he states, "De quibus Dares et earum aspectibus multa descripsit, que magis instar habent inanium sompniorum quam certitudinem ueritatis, licet dictus Dares fuerit professus ea uera fuisse, et ideo de eis obmissum est in hac part" (171) [Dares fully describes them and their appearance which seem to be empty dreams rather than factual truths, and therefore they are omitted in this place, although the said Dares professed that they were true.]. This quote enables

us to see Guido's mind at work: he judges the veracity of an event and then decides to

leave out a description that seems rather improbable to him. As Margaret Meek explains

in the introduction to her English translation of the Historia, it may very well be that

Guido considered it his task as a historian to remove unlikelihoods from a source which

he thought mostly reliable. That is, he believed he had to deromanticize Benoît's

paraphrase of Dares (xiv-xxiii). The quote does not give us any sense of the mental

turmoil that Guido might have experienced when faced with a fanciful passage in a work

that he deemed to be historically accurate and reliable.[27] With the Troy Book, on the

other hand, we do get an impression of unease on the part of the narrator. After Lydgate

explains how the statues look more like they were made by fairies than by men, he adds:

> For in his boke Dares bereth witnes,
> Þat it was like to rekne, siyt and al,
> In apparence a þing celestial:—
> Seth in his boke—ye gete no more of me,
> For but in writinge I myght neuere it se,
> Al-be alle oþer þat it dide excelle;
> No more þer-of I þinke now to telle. (III.4808-14)

Particularly revealing is the interrupted clause "Seth in his boke" followed by a statement

by the narrator that he wants to move on to something else—a statement repeated three

lines further. We get the sense that Lydgate is registering skepticism at this point in his

poem. Gone is Guido's clear explanation that the statues may be fictions rather than

factual truths and that, therefore, they do not justify detailed descriptions. Instead, we

here witness a befuddled narrator whose only way out is "ye gete no more of me"

followed by the admission "For but in writinge I myght neuere it se." In essence, what the

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[27] In this respect, also see my earlier comment concerning Guido's overall emotional detachment from his
work.

poet acknowledges here is that some things only exist in the world of writing, not in the world of reality. Some things are created "in writinge" and thus can only be "seen" in this medium. Most importantly, Lydgate does not express any disapproval *per se* with this fact: unlike Guido, he is not seen to judge and reject. He just seems to be filled with indecision as to how to handle the passage. Perhaps this is partly due to a downright lack of interest in the visual descriptions of the statues. But most of all, one gets the impression that Lydgate here simply wishes to acknowledge the full range of imaginative/creative possibilities afforded by writing.

My third example lies somewhere in between the diametrically opposed examples of the Divine Logos and the language of fiction writing. It concerns the ability of individuals within the "real world" of the Trojan War to use language rhetorically, that is, to construct arguments so as to obtain a certain effect without (really) undermining the truthfulness of their statements. The example that I have in mind occurs in Book IV at the point where Achilles, in love with Polyxena, sends a messenger to Hecuba to try to convince her husband to let Achilles marry their daughter in return for peace. Compared to the Historia, Lydgate's version makes noteworthy clarifications and slight changes to the nature of the messenger's exchanges with Hecuba and Achilles. That is, Lydgate insists on the care with which the messenger develops a convincing argument and chooses the right words to produce a desired effect. Where Guido merely says that the messenger went to see Hecuba and "legacionem sui domini fideliter pandit illi" (186) [faithfully revealed the mission of his lord], Lydgate specifies that the messenger "Craftely . . . gan to discende / To þe substaunce, and tolde clerly out, / With premises ful

wel brought about" (IV.756-58). In other words, Lydgate's messenger is an astute

rhetorician who proceeds from premises to logical conclusions in his speech to Hecuba.

The queen agrees to Achilles's proposal though she makes it clear that she will need to

seek the approval of her husband and her son Paris. She tells the messenger to come back

three days later. When the messenger reports the content of the queen's reply to Achilles,

Lydgate's reader is served a slightly different story than Guido's reader. Indeed, in

Guido, we find the straightforward: "Et nuncii sui audito responso, in suis doloribus

respirauit Achilles, dum uerborum spes eius exhylerauit animum et sub ipsius spei fiducia

requieuit quodammodo" (186-87) [After Achilles had heard the response of the

messenger, he was relieved of his grief, since the hope of the words gladdened his mind,

and in the confidence of this hope he rested a bit.]. With Lydgate, however, we witness

the messenger's rhetorical agility in *creating* a hopeful mood in Achilles:

> And home he goth to Achilles ageyn
> With ful glad chere, his lord þe mor to *plese*;
> And for to sette his hert[e] bet at ese,
> Avisely, of highe discrecioun,
> He hath so made his relacioun,
> And told his tale in so þrifti wyse,
> As he þat koude his wordis so deuyse
> To bringe in hope [in-]to his lordis herte,
> With ful reles of his peynes smert,
> Wher-by he made his sorwe to withdrawe. (IV.810-19; italics mine)

Thus, once again, we notice a centripetal move towards the theme of language in

Lydgate's poem. Between the quintessential truth of God's word and the ultimate

mendacity of pure fiction lie history, experience, indeed life itself, all of which can only

be mediated by human discourse. Yet rarely do words merely reflect meaning: they often

produce meaning—sometimes by accident and sometimes by design. The passage above

invites us to reflect on the shaping influence of language and the possibility of achieving truthfulness in human discourse.

1.5 Even at the very end

From the congeries of examples that I have accumulated so far, it should be clear that Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> is indeed very much interested in discourse (verbal and written), the authority of texts, the poem's position in a long genealogy of Trojan narratives, the poem's status as a textual object, and other such topics. As a consequence, it is likely not a coincidence that this poem, which spends so much time drawing attention to itself, ends with a couple of stanzas about its own textuality. More specifically, in the last two stanzas, Lydgate addresses his "litel boke" with the obvious intention to imitate the <u>Troilus</u> ending. In the closing stanza, Lydgate deals with eloquence and instructs his poem to plead to its detractors for stylistic correction:

> And for þou art enlumined with no floures
> Of rethorik, but with white & blak,
> Þerfore þou most abide alle showres
> Of hem þat list sette on þe a lak;
> And whan þou art most likly go to wrak,
> Ageyn[e]s hem þin errour nat diffende,
> But humblely with-drawe & go a-bak,
> Requerynge hem al þat is mys to amende. (V.100-107)

Of course, there are other medieval poems that end on a note of authorial self-analysis (for example, Chaucer's <u>Parliament of Fowls</u> or <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>). Guido and Benoît themselves end their respective accounts of the Trojan War with self-reflexive

statements.[28] Guido explains (a bit apologetically but also matter-of-factly) that he would

have used more rhetorical embellishments if it had not been for his desire to finish the

work in a timely manner (and he mentions again that his book was necessary to

counteract the lies of Homer, Ovid, and Virgil):

> Et ego hystoriam ipsam ornassem dictamine pulchriori per ampliores
> methaphoras et colores et per transgressiones occurrentes, que ipsius
> dictaminis sunt picture; sed territus ex magnitudine operis, ne dum
> occasione magis ornati dictaminis opus ipsum longa narraccione
> protraherem, infra cuius temporis longitudinem aliqua michi
> superuenissent incomoda, prout est fragilitatis humane uel mutacio
> uoluntatis, propter quod cessassem ab opere et opus ipsum suum non
> peruenisset ad finem, vtpote sui careens beneficio complementi. (275-76)
> [And I would have decorated this history with a more beautiful style by
> means of richer metaphors and figures of speech and through occasional
> digressions, which are the artistry of this style; but frightened by the
> magnitude of the task, lest I prolong this work by a long narration on the
> pretext of a more decorated style, and during this long period something
> untoward would happen to me, in accordance with human weakness or
> change of purpose, on account of which I would have desisted from the
> work and the work would not come to an end, and would lack the
> advantage of being complete.]

Guido's remarks on style are less apologetic than Lydgate's. As for Benoît, in his brief

"Epilogue," he does not mention style at all. He does refer to potential detractors of his

work though, but only to warn them to refrain from criticizing his poem—unlike in

Lydgate, there is no insecure clerkly narrator here. So, although there are some

similarities with Guido's and even Benoît's endings, Lydgate's final stanza differs in that

it strongly bewails the poem's alleged lack of verbal ornaments and begs for correction.

In other words, it reiterates the importance of rhetoric, all the while asserting the poem's

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[28] Guido's Historia actually ends with a colophon indicating the year of production (f. 130^v of P^1 Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds latin 5694, which Griffin used as the basis of his edition). We have to go to the preceding folio (f. 129^v) to find more substantial remarks on the writing of the book.

adaptability to the demands of the audience: surface matters are given a central status in the economy of the poem, yet this center is not fixed but dependant on the satisfaction of an audience.

Rhetoric is truly a key term that structures many of Lydgate's thought processes in this poem. Actually, it is my belief that the treatment of eloquence in the <u>Troy Book</u> is emblematic of Lydgate's treatment of other linguistic concerns in the poem. In the following chapter, I will discuss the importance of rhetoric in Lydgate's intellectual landscape and clarify what the art of rhetoric meant for the late Middle Ages. I will then turn to the <u>Troy Book</u> and analyze what role rhetoric plays in the poem's Prologue. This close reading of the Prologue will gradually lead us to consider whether rhetoric and even language itself can ever convey human experience truthfully or whether discourse always somehow creates its own reality.

CHAPTER 2

RHETORIC, LANGUAGE, AND TRUTH: THE PROLOGUE

2.1 Lydgate and rhetoric

Though far from overtly yielding the kind of influence it had enjoyed in the classical period, rhetoric was preserved as a discipline of some importance in the curriculum of medieval schools. Indeed, in an indirect way, it remained central to a young boy's education, for an individual's ability to read existing texts, compose new ones, and by implication develop cognitive matrices was fostered at an early age through the study of grammar, itself very much informed by principles of rhetoric from the twelfth century on.[1] That is, rhetoric was the foundation of an individual's formal education and deeply influenced the way intellectuals thought of and organized knowledge.

Lydgate must have followed the educational path of a typical young recruit to a medieval monastery. It is believed that he was recruited to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey at the age of 11 or earlier and, except for a few sojourns elsewhere, stayed there for the rest of his life. In Bury he would first have attended the almonry school where he would have

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[1] See, for example, Marjorie Curry Woods, "The Teaching of Poetic Composition in the Later Middle Ages," <u>A Short History of Writing Instruction From Ancient Greece to Modern America</u>, ed. James J. Murphy, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2001) 123-43.

spent "some years receiving instruction in Latin grammar, the Scriptures and the liturgy" (Pearsall, John Lydgate 22-23). He became a novice at age 15, which would have meant "further instruction in grammar, with some logic and rhetoric, and also training in the techniques of formal writing and illumination, as well as further study of the Scriptures, the psalmody and liturgy" (Pearsall, John Lydgate (1371-1449): A Bio-bibliography 13; John Lydgate 23). As far as Lydgate's subsequent formal education is concerned, we know that at the beginning of the fifteenth century, he spent some time at Oxford University as a student, but we neither know how long he stayed there nor what his exact program of study was.[2] We cannot rule out that he might have enjoyed some further exposure to the art of rhetoric while at Oxford, though any such teaching would have been schematic, since, of the three language-based liberal arts (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic), the main focus lay squarely on dialectic in medieval universities.[3] Back "home," at the monastery, any interest in rhetoric would have been facilitated by the availability of a good collection of works of rhetoric in the abbey library. We know that the library possessed works by Cicero and Quintilian (Pearsall, John Lydgate 32-33). The English Benedictine Libraries—The Shorter Catalogues reproduces a list of books owned by the Bury Abbey library at the end of the twelfth century (Sharpe et al. 50-87). The list, located in what is now Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 47, mentions two copies of Cicero's De inventione together with the pseudo-Ciceronian Ad Herennium, two copies

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[2] A letter written by the Prince of Wales to the abbot and chapter of Bury concerning John Lydgate's studies at Oxford makes a general reference to theology or canon law (Pearsall, John Lydgate 30).

[3] Much of the above general background information is to be found in the introduction to medieval rhetoric in Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg's The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present, 431-49.

of Quintilian's Institutes, and one copy of the pseudo-Quintilian De causis (the editor

differentiates this copy from a later Bury copy of De causis, now Cambridge, Gonville

and Caius College, MS 154). In addition, the same list refers to a copy of Oratius totus in

uno uolumine. Also of interest, in his study of the abbey library in the eleventh and

twelfth centuries, R.M. Thomson mentions a commentary on De inventione written

shortly after 1200 at the abbey. Thomson further explains that a letter of John of

Salisbury written in c. 1165 "seems to indicate that Bury had a reputation for possessing

good texts of rhetorical works." He adds, "[l]ess strictly rhetorical, although still

primarily useful as model of style, are the works of Suetonius and Sallust, represented by

copies made respectively in the scriptorium and professionally" (639). We have no

reason to believe that those manuscripts were no longer available to Lydgate during his

lifetime. So, it is obvious that Lydgate lived in an intellectual environment that would

have fostered an interest in rhetoric.[4]

But what would the word rhetoric have meant for an individual living at the

beginning of the fifteenth century? In classical Antiquity, rhetoric had primarily been the

art of persuasive oratory so crucial in the political and legal arenas. That is, rhetoric's

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[4] Of related interest, it is worth mentioning that John Bale, the sixteenth-century literary scholar/bio-bibliographer, claimed that upon Lydgate's return to Bury St. Edmunds after his studies and his travels abroad, he opened a school of rhetoric for the sons of noblemen. A few biographers after Bale repeated his assertion (for example, Thomas Warton in the eighteenth century and Henry Morley in the nineteenth century), though to my knowledge there is no evidence supporting this claim—or disproving it, for that matter. Actually, as late as the mid-twentieth century, in the first monograph ever written on John Lydgate, Walter F. Schirmer presented the school of rhetoric episode as being plausible (John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century 23). These days, scholars do not mention this element of Lydgate's biography, thereby tacitly indicating that Bale's statement is now viewed as pure biographical mythology. However, in his 2002 Reform and Cultural Revolution, James Simpson does seem to address this particular claim when he says that Bale created "for Lydgate a (wholly spurious) humanist's progress, including study periods in Padua and Paris, and a post as tutor to noble children" (39). What is noteworthy about the whole episode is that early scholars were eager to associate Lydgate with rhetorical interests.

main function had been to construct convincing arguments appealing principally to

reason (*logos*) and secondarily to the emotions (*pathos*) and the speaker's authority

(*ethos*). By contrast, in the late Middle Ages (as well as the Renaissance), due to a

combination of mostly political factors, public oratory all but disappeared—it essentially

only survived in the art of preaching. As a result, the classical emphasis on the social

situations involved in verbal exchanges gradually gave way to a greater focus on matters

of style (*elocutio*). As Rita Copeland explains:

> [I]t is the legacy of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century *artes poetriae*,
> which weighted rhetorical production in favor of style or *elocutio* and
> which imposed grammatical precepts of verbal ornamentation onto their
> treatment of rhetorical categories. It is not surprising that the late Middle
> Ages understands rhetoric largely in terms of poetic style. (72-73)

Or, if you will, under the influence of rhetorical treatises like Matthew of Vendome's Ars

versificatoria and Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Poetria nova (both of whom would actually have

thought of themselves as grammarians), rhetoric and poetics became quasi-

interchangeable words. Lydgate's understanding of rhetoric was certainly no exception to

the general late medieval understanding of it. Indeed, he perceived "rhetoric largely, or

even primarily, in terms of poetics and assimilate[d] the function of rhetoric to the power

of poetic eloquence" (Copeland 70). England at the beginning of the fifteenth century

witnessed a widespread move to establish the vernacular as a valid literary language next

to Latin, and one way to achieve this was by adorning vernacular poems with abundant

rhetorical embellishments. In his appreciation of eloquent rhetoric, Lydgate was fully a

man of his times.[5]

Given the late medieval emphasis on style and Lydgate's interest in discourse,

one may wonder why in the <u>Troy Book</u> Lydgate frequently draws the attention of his

readers to his own stylistic shortcomings, that is, his ostensible lack of "floures" and

"colours" of "rethorik" and his inferiority compared to his "maister Chaucer." Chaucer,

the rhetorician, is seen by Lydgate as the poet *par excellence*.[6] In the following passage,

Lydgate contrasts Chaucer's rhetorical ingenuity to his own lack of eloquence:

> And Chaucer now, allas! is nat alyue
> Me to reforme, or to be my rede,
> For lak of whom slougher is my spede—
> Þe noble Rethor þat alle dide excelle;
> ………………………………………
> Þough my wede be nat polymyte,
> Colourles, forþe I wil endyte. (III.550-60)

Yet his modesty is affected. Lydgate borrows the posture of an unskillful poet from

Chaucer himself. In real life, Lydgate spent much of his creative energy on matters of

style, and he was abundantly commended for his rhetorical flourishes by subsequent

poets. Lydgate praised Chaucer for his high style, and in turn Lydgate's followers praised

him as a model rhetorician. [7] The examples abound. Thus, in <u>Amoryus and Cleopes</u>, John

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[5] In addition, should Lydgate have had access to any of the contemporary Arts of the Second Rhetoric written in French (these were poetry manuals for composing fixed verse in French with an almost exclusive focus on style), he would only have found additional incentives to emphasize rhetoric in his own work.

[6] See, for example, II.4697-706.

[7] For a discussion of how the fifteenth century created the myth of father, "maister," and laureate Chaucer, a myth whose seeds were already present in Chaucer's own work, see Seth Lerer, <u>Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England</u> (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993). Interestingly enough, the fatherhood metaphor, though usually employed to describe Chaucer's influence on the poets of the next generation, was only used by Thomas Hoccleve in his <u>Regement of Princes</u>. Ethan Knapp, <u>The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England</u> (University Park, PA:

Metham mentions: "Eke, Jon Lydgate, sumtyme monke of Byry, / Hys bokys endytyd wyth termys of retoryk" (2193-94). In his Pastime of Pleasure, Stephen Hawes calls Lydgate "the moſte dulcet ſprynge / Of famous rethoryke" (1373-74) and generally considers Lydgate rhetorically superior to Chaucer and Gower. Indeed, contrary to Lydgate's seemingly self-denigrating comments, to a very large extent Lydgate focused more on verbal ornamentations than Chaucer. For example, it is Lydgate, not Chaucer, who created an aureate style—a lofty, Latinate poetic diction. As A. S. G. Edwards explains, Lydgate "locates his own apparently innovative technique within the buttress of vernacular poetic tradition—that is, Chaucer. And he attributes to Chaucer's art characteristics which are more appropriately characteristics of his own style" (179).

2.2 Style and truth in the Prologue

Once we understand that Lydgate's self-effacing comments only register the conventional modesty topos widely used by vernacular poets in the late Middle Ages, we may be tempted to believe that Lydgate actually displays a boundless admiration for rhetorical embellishments. Indeed, we may think that Lydgate's myriad apologies for allegedly not mastering the art of rhetoric constitute a way for him to emphasize the importance of eloquence (see also, for example, Pro.28-35). Lydgate says he admires the rhetorical flourishes present in Guido delle Colonne's Historia:

> he enlvmyneth by crafte & cadence
> This noble story with many fresche colour
> Of rethorik, and many riche flour

Pennsylvania State UP, 2001), shows how Hoccleve actually uses these passage to usurp Chaucer's poetic authority (chapter 4, "Eulogies and Usurpations: Father Chaucer in the Regement of Princes," 107-27).

Of eloquence to make it sownde bet. (Pro.362-65)

More generally, as early as the Prologue, Lydgate recognizes that if it were not for

writing ornamented through rhetoric, the heroic exploits of the past would have slipped

into oblivion. Thus, Lydgate says the following about the relationship of "clerkis" with

lords in days of old:

> . . . for her writing trewe
> Thei cherisched werne of lordes þat hem knewe,
> And honoured gretly in tho dawes;
> For they enacted and gilte with her sawes
> Her hyghe renoun, her manhood and prowes,
> Her knyghthood eke and her worthynes,
> Her tryvmphes also and victories,
> Her famous conquest and her songe glories,
> From poynt to poynt rehersyng al þe trouthe,
> With-out[e] fraude, necligence, or slowthe
> Thei dide her labour and her besynesse.
> For elles certeyn the grete worthynesse
> Of her dedis hadde ben in veyn;
> For-dirked age elles wolde haue slayn
> By lenthe of yeris þe noble worthi fame
> Of conquerours, and pleynly of her name
> For-dymmed eke the lettris aureat,
> And diffaced the palme laureate
> Whiche þat þei wan by knyghthod in her dayes,
> Whos fretyng rust newe and newe assayes
> For to eclipse the honour and the glorie
> Of highe prowes, whiche clerkis in memorie
> Han trewly set thorugh diligent labour,
> And enlumyned with many corious flour
> Of rethorik, to make vs comprehende
> The trouthe of al, as it was in kende;
> Besied hem and feythfully travaylled
> Agayn al that þat age wolde assaylled,
> In her bokes euery thyng I-set,
> And with the keye of remembraunce it schet,
> Whiche lasteth yet, and dureth euer in oon. (195-225)

This passage is extremely revealing and warrants detailed analysis, but first I wish to

point out another noteworthy passage which, as it were, complements the one just quoted.

A few lines later, Lydgate applies the general principle of writers as preservers of cultural memories specifically to those clerks who wrote about the history of Troy, and as if to clarify what types of writers he means when he uses the word "clerkis," he also uses the word "cronyc[u]leris":

> Of Troye also, þat was of latter yeres,
> By dillygence of cronyc[u]leris
> Ye may beholde in her wrytyng wel
> The stryfe, the werre, þe sege and euerydel,
> Ryghte as it was, so many yeres passyd.
> Whos story yit age hath nought diffaced,
> Nor cruel deth, with his mortal strokys;
> For maugre deth, ye may beholde in bokys
> The story fully rehersed new and newe,
> And freschely floure of colour and of hewe
> From day to day, quyk & no thyng feynt.
> For clerkys han this story so depeynt,
> That deth nor age, by no maner weye,
> The trouthe may not maken for to deye. (245-58)

Notice that in both passages flowers of rhetoric are specifically said to have either shed light on or preserved the truth of a text. This is no small acknowledgement of the power of eloquence, and it is passages that like these that have led some critics to claim that for Lydgate rhetoric is an unequivocally favorable term. For example, in her monograph John Lydgate, Lois Ebin explains that Lydgate links together truthfulness and eloquent style "as the basis for the poet's reworking of the past. As he reminds his reader, good poets work to direct the audience's attention to the underlying truth of their sources, thereby preserving valuable sentence from destruction." She further notes that "[t]he poet's eloquence illuminates old stories so that man may comprehend their 'sentence'" (that is, moral truth) and specifically quotes lines 217-20 of the Prologue to illustrate her

claim (41-42). I have already quoted these lines above, but since they are so important, I

here transcribe them one more time. Speaking of clerks, Lydgate explains that they

> Han trewly set thorugh diligent labour,
> And enlumyned with many corious flour
> Of rethorik, to make vs comprehende
> The trouthe of al, as it was in kende. (Pro.217-20)

Lydgate's quote and Ebin's interpretation of it are in complete consonance with

vernacular literary deliberations of the late Middle Ages. Indeed, at the time, the aesthetic

appeal of a text was meant to persuade the audience of an ultimate truth, albeit sometimes

via an illusory tale, and thus increasingly in the fifteenth century, "[t]he role of rhetoric . .

. [came to be] seen as one of 'refreshing' and 'enlumynyng' the stable sentence of poetic

matter" (Brownlee et al. 448). This is actually very similar to what over 40 years ago

Robert O. Payne said about late-medieval aesthetics and "fabula":

> [T]he surface materials of poetry are lies and illusions, its effect emotional
> rather than rational. In medieval academic theory only the ends of
> poetry—the service of truth—could justify its imaginative and irrational
> means . . . . In much of the medieval discussion of poetry, there is a clear
> (sometimes quite puritanical) implication that if men were as reasonable
> and clear-sighted as they ought to be, logic would be the only necessary
> means of persuasion. . . . [I]n general [the medieval schoolmen]
> considered poetry and most other non-logical forms of persuasion as kinds
> of *rhetorica*. Outside the academy and among the poets, Dante defined a
> poem as a piece of rhetoric set to music, and he called 'regular poets'
> those who wrote by the rule of the school treatises on rhetoric; Chaucer
> praised Petrarch, and was in turn praised by Deschamps and Lydgate, as a
> greater "rhetor." ("Chaucer" 43)[8]

Poetry was supposed to persuade the audience of a moral truth or insight that the poet had

discovered while reading an existing authorial text. Unlike in classical rhetoric,

persuasion was not primarily achieved through logical appeal but through emotional

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[8] Also see page 88 of this dissertation for more information on Dante and the "regular poets."

arousal obtained by the use of stylistic ornamentations (Payne 45-46). So to tie all this to

our earlier definition of rhetoric in the late Middle Ages, rhetoric was mainly understood

in terms of style, and the aesthetic appeal of (mostly literary but often also historical)

texts helped to carry across a didactic truth, hence an increasing importance of surface

matters in the fifteenth century.

The notions of truthfulness and eloquent style constitute key concepts in

Lydgate's hermeneutic. Actually, the ethical valuation of rhetoric as expressed in the

Troy Book's Prologue reflects Lydgate's own interests, for Guido delle Colonne included

no such information in his Prologue. This does not mean, however, that Guido did not

value ornate style in his writing, for the Historia destructionis Troiae is filled with

flowery rhetoric. And this, in turn, did not prevent him from commenting on his

supposedly terse style at the end of his text, as I mentioned above. Obviously, Guido

appreciated highly ornamented writing, but nowhere in his Prologue (or in the rest of the

text for that matter) did he explicitly articulate a stylistic theory necessary for a text to be

taken seriously. In the Historia, accounts of the past are said to be truthful on the basis of

their content only. The same observation can be made for Benoît de Sainte-Maure's

Roman de Troie. Though Benoît employs ornate language in his Roman, the Prologue

only refers to surface matters once, and neither it nor the actual poem tie aesthetic

considerations to matters of truth. So the insistence on style and its link with truth in the

Troy Book is definitely Lydgate's addition—not a stated hermeneutic principle that he

might have borrowed from his source text(s).

It is, I suggest, along identical lines that we need to consider Lydgate's emphasis on truth in his Prologue. Arguably, in this case, Lydgate did not add anything totally new to his source. Instead, Lydgate here followed in Guido's footsteps. Indeed, the purpose of the <u>Historia</u>'s Prologue is to stress the credibility of Guido's project by distinguishing truthful accounts of the Trojan War from fictional renderings of the same events. And Guido's Prologue is itself deeply influenced by Benoît's Prologue. Yet Lydgate's Prologue differs from Guido's and Benoît's Prologues in two ways. The first way is Lydgate's sheer *insistence* on the whole notion of truth. Where in Guido and Benoît, truth constitutes the thematic underpinning of the Prologues, in Lydgate truth has become an omnipresent lexical leitmotif. The proof here simply lies in the numbers. In his Prologue, Benoît uses six words that mean "truth" or refer to the semantic field of "truth": "veirement" (11), "verté" (44), "veir" (51), "verté" (112), "veir" (116), and "veire" (124). Guido almost doubles this number. He uses eleven words that mean "truth" or refer to the semantic field of "truth": "fidelia," "fideli," "ueritatem," "uera," "ueritatem," "ueritatem," "ueritatis," "fidelium," "uera," "uerum," and "fidelissimi" (3-4). With Lydgate, the number of such words and expressions increases to an exponential *39*: "sothly" (75), "verray" (76), "sothefastnesse" (101), "trouth[e]" (116), "sothely" (123), "verreie trewe" (150), "trouthe" (153), "trouth" (158), "trewe" (161), "sothefast" (164), "trewly" (169), "With-out[e] feynynge" (179), "trouthe" (180), "sothe" (182), "trouthe" (186), "trouthe" (194), "trewe" (195), "trouthe" (203), "With-out[e] fraude" (204), "trewly" (217), "trouthe" (220), "feythfully" (221), "right as it was in dede" (229), "in verray sothe" (243), "Ryghte as it was" (249), "no thyng feynt" (255), "trouthe" (258),

"trouth[e]" (259), "So as it was" (261), "faithfully" (261), "trouthe" (265), "sothe" (266), "trouþe" (271), "trouthe" (288), "trouthe" (300), "trewe" (306), "trewly" (311), "as it fel" (314), and "trewe" (314).[9]

The second way by which Lydgate's Prologue differs from its source(s) in its treatment of "truth" has to do with the *meaning* Lydgate attributes to the word compared to his predecessors. "Truth" in Guido's Prologue is used in the context of establishing the historical veracity of the upcoming text as opposed to the fanciful accounts of the poets. Guido basically inherits this focus from his textual predecessors. To a large extent, Lydgate's intention is no different from what Guido accomplishes in his Prologue. However, with Lydgate the Prologue acquires a distinctly moral content as well and the meaning of "truth" becomes a little harder to pinpoint. Indeed, in Lydgate's Prologue, words that pertain to "true" books and/or knowledge sometimes seem to refer to "factual truth," sometimes "moral truth," and sometimes a little bit of both.

To fully understand how Lydgate's Prologue resembles but also differs from his predecessors' Prologues, it is appropriate to have a look at how these textual predecessors dealt with the issue of truth in their Prologues. The distinction between

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[9] Lydgate continues his lexical insistence on truth, albeit at a reduced rate, beyond the Prologue into the actual poem. See, for example, I.373, I.448, I.2087, I.2336, I.3367, II.5829, II.6916, II.6168, II.7982, II.7987, II.7989, II.8181, III.2296, III.2354, III.3251, III.3544, III.3688, III.3696, IV.985, IV.996, IV.1064, IV.1815, IV.1858, V.571, V.696, V.1227, V.1513, and V.2701. A complete list would undoubtedly fill up several pages. Benoît and Guido too make references to truth in the body of their texts. In the <u>Roman</u>, see, for example, 399, 2957, 5176, 5704, 5809, 5868, 8997, 10099, 16497, 18231, 18708, 18917, 21663, 23837, 23965, 26989, 27641, 28040, 28244, 28592, 29593, 29719, and 29993. In the <u>Historia</u>, see, for example, pages 7, 8, 9, 62, 145, and 171. Incidentally, Guido, Lydgate's acknowledged source, makes far fewer references to truth than Benoît and Lydgate. Indeed, it is fair to say that Guido employs much moderation in his use of words and phrases belonging to this semantic field. The only place (apart from the Prologue) where he really seems to insist on the concept of truth is, as I mentioned earlier, at the very end of the <u>Historia</u> (276). Neither Benoît nor Lydgate discusses truth at the very end of his poem.

historically/factually truthful and *historically/factually* inaccurate accounts of the Trojan War was already present in Dictys's text. First, the Latin translator of the text, Lucius Septimius, explains in a prefatory letter that when he got hold of the text of the Greek Dictys "avidos *verae historiae* cupido incessit ea, uti errant, Latine disserere" (1; italics mine) [I, as a student of *true history*, was seized with the desire of making a free translation into Latin].[10] Then, the Preface of the actual work, likely written by the Greek Dictys, says that since Nero "cognosset antiqui viri, qui apud Ilium fuerat, haec esse *monumenta*, iussit in Graecum sermonem ista transferri, e quibus Troiani belli *verior textus* cunctis innotuit" (3; italics mine) [realized that these were the *records* of an ancient man who had been at Troy, he had them translated into Greek; thus a *more accurate text* of the Trojan War was made known to all].[11] Dares's De excidio Troiae historia, or more specifically Cornelius Nepos's prefatory letter, too deals with historical truth, not moral

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[10] The page number refers to the Latin text (Eisenhut edition). The translation supplied is by R. M. Frazer, Jr.

[11] The Preface states that Dictys originally wrote his account in Phoenician, which account was subsequently translated into Greek (hence the terminology "Greek Dictys") and later Latin. However, the prefatory letter and the end of Book V indicate that the language of composition was Greek. Only the alphabet was Phoenician. See also pages 1-2, footnote 1, for further information regarding Dictys's Ephemeris belli Troiani.
       Latin scholar Gérard Fry has the following to say about the use of words referring to truth in the prefatory letter and the actual Preface of Dictys's Ephemeris:
> On sait bien qu'il est de règle chez les historiens anciens de cacher un mensonge en l'affirmant véridique, cependant, ce qui motive chez l'auteur de l'Éphéméride une semblable revendication est moins le désir de cacher le caractère globalement suspect de son récit, que l'ambition de disqualifier Homère, et avec lui tous les poètes du Cycle troyen. C'est cette ambition qui, avant toute autre, fait la raison d'être, non seulement de l'Éphéméride, mais encore de l'Histoire de la destruction de Troie de Darès le Phrygien. (81)
> [It is well known that in classical Antiquity, historians used to hide an untruth by claiming its authenticity. However, the author of the Ephemeris seems less motivated by a desire to conceal the dubious authenticity of his account than by an ambitious program to discredit Homer, and with him all the poets of the Trojan Cycle. It is this writerly ambition that constitutes the main *raison d'être* not only of the Ephemeris, but also of the De excidio Troiae historia of Dares, the Phrygian (trans. mine).]

truth. In this letter, Cornelius, the alleged translator of Dares's account into Latin,

presents his text to Sallustius Crispus. The following passage is most revealing of

Cornelius's intentions in translating Dares:

> [U]t legentes cognoscere possent, quomodo res gestae essent: utrum
> verum magis esse existiment, quod Dares Phrygius memoriae
> commendavit, qui per id ipsum tempus vixit et militavit, cum Graeci
> Troianos obpugnarent, anne Homero credendum, qui post multos annos
> natus est, quam bellum hoc gestum est. [D]e qua re Athenis iudicium fuit,
> cum pro insano haberetur, quod deos cum hominibus belligerasse
> scripserit. (1)
> [Thus my readers can know exactly what happened according to this
> account and judge for themselves whether Dares the Phrygian or Homer
> wrote the more truthfully—Dares, who lived and fought at the time the
> Greeks stormed Troy, or Homer, who was born long after the War was
> over. When the Athenians judged this matter, they found Homer insane for
> describing gods battling with mortals.][12]

Benoît de Sainte-Maure's Prologue is a bit more willing to address matters of

moral truth—at least at the very beginning of the Prologue. In the first three lines we are

told that "Salemon nos enseigne e dit, / E sil list om en son escrit, / Que nus ne deit son

sen celer" [Solomon teaches us and tells us—one can read it in his book—that nobody

should hide his knowledge]. The word "sen" used in this context—that is, particularly

because it applies to Solomon—means knowledge in the sense of "wisdom, reason,

common sense" (in other words, it is really synonymous to "sentence" or moral truth). A

few lines later, Benoît adds, "De bien ne puet nus trop oïr / Ne trop saveir ne retenir" (27-

28) [Nobody can hear too many good things, nor too many learn or retain]. It is for this

reason that he wants to put all his efforts into writing a history ("E por ço me vueil

travaillier / En une estoire comencier" [33-34]). So, obviously Benoît perceives his

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[12] The page number refers to the Latin text (Meister edition). The translation supplied is by R. M. Frazer, Jr.

account of the Trojan conflict to fulfill a distinctly moral purpose. *However*, when he

takes up the issue of the truth of his version, he clearly articulates it along the lines of

historical truth versus historical inaccuracy. He broaches the topic by recognizing that the

story of Troy has been told in various ways, but he immediately adds that the truth has

rarely been heard ("En maint sen avra l'om retrait, / Saveir com Troie fu perie, / Mais la

verté est poi oïe" [42-44]). He turns to Homer and explains that his book could not be

true because he *was not present* during the Trojan War:

> Mais ne dist pas sis livres *veir*,
> Quar bien savons senz nul espier
> Qu'il ne fu puis de cent anz nez
> Que li granz oz fu assemblez:
> N'est merveille s'il i faillit,
> Qui unc n'i fut ne rien n'en vit. (51-56; italics mine)
> [But his book does not say the *truth*, for we know well without any doubt
> that he was born more than 100 years after the great expedition was
> assembled. Therefore, it is not surprising that he made mistakes since he
> was not there, since he did not see anything.]

Clearly, truth is synonymous with "factual accuracy" in this context. Indeed, had Benoît

meant "moral insight," he would not have dwelled so much on the notion of eyewitness

account—since one does not really need to be present at an event to write a morally

insightful story about it. In contrast to Homer's dubious account, Benoît presents Dares

as his reliable source: "Mout en devons mieuz celui creire / E plus tenir s'estoire a *veire*

(123-24; italics mine). [We must trust him much more and believe in his historical

account.] Dares can be trusted because he wrote about the events every night after they

occurred and recorded them impartially. Benoît specifies:

> Onc por amor ne s'en voust taire
> De la *verté* dire e retraire.
> Por ço, s'il ert des Troïens,
> Ne s'en pendié plus vers les suens,

Ne mais que vers les Grezeis fist:
De l'estoire le *veir* escrist. (111-16; italics mine)
[Never did his love for his countrymen prevent him from saying and
reporting the truth. Indeed, though he was a Trojan, he did not favor his
own people any more than the Greeks: he wrote the truth about history.]

As for Guido, his Prologue bespeaks little interest in addressing matters of moral

truth but unambiguously presents the Historia as a factually accurate account of the

Trojan War.[13] This is not to say that the body of the work does not contain moral

comments (it undoubtedly does), but the Prologue does not indicate as much. In other

words, when Guido uses words like "veritas" and "fidelis" in his Prologue, he is

explicitly referring to historical truth. Like his predecessor, Guido contrasts the veracity

of Dares with the mendacity of Homer—and he also mentions Dictys as a credible writer

and Virgil and Ovid as unreliable poets:

Nonnulli enim iam eius ystorie poetice alludendo *ueritatem* ipsius in
figurate commenta quibusdam fictionibus transsumpserunt, vt non *uera*
que scripserunt uiderentur audientibus perscripsisse sed pocius fabulosa. . .
. Sed ut *fidelium* ipsius ystorie *uera* scribentium scripta apud occidentales
omni tempore futuro uigeant successiue, in vtilitatem eorum precipue qui
gramaticam legunt, ut separare sciant *uerum* a falso de hiis que de dicta
ystoria in libris gramaticalibus sunt descripta, ea que per Dytem Grecum et
Frigium Daretem, qui tempore Troyani belli continue in oerum exercitibus
fuere presentes et horum que uiderunt fuerunt *fidelissimi* relatores, in
presentem libellum per me iudicem Guidonem de Columpna de Messana
transsumpta legentur, prout in duobus libris eorum inscriptum quasi una
uocis consonantia inuentum est in Athenis. (3-4; italics mine)
[Certain persons, indeed, have already transcribed the truth of this very
history, dealing with it lightly as poets do, in fanciful inventions by means
of certain fictions, so that what they wrote seemed to their audiences to
have recorded not the true things, but the fictitious ones instead. . . .
However, so that the true accounts of the reliable writers of this history
may endure for all future time hereafter among western peoples, chiefly
for the use of those who read Latin, so that they may know how to
separate the true from the false among the things which were written of

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[13] The only moral hint in Guido's prologue comes in his acknowledging that certain events are worthy to be
remembered because of their "greatness" (magnitude) (1).

the said history in Latin books, those things which (were related) by Dictys the Greek and Dares the Phrygian, who were at the time of the Trojan War continually present in their armies and were the most trustworthy reporters of those things which they saw, will be read in the present little book, having been transcribed by me, Judge Guido delle Colonne of Messina, just as it was found written with an agreement as of one voice in their two books in Athens.] [14]

So it is clear that starting with Dares and Dictys all the way to Guido's version of the Trojan conflict by way of Benoît, the various prologues and preliminary sections tend to focus on the historical veracity of the texts to follow and secondarily address matters of moral truth if at all. Lydgate's Prologue too purports to introduce a historically accurate account of the events at Troy. To that effect, like its predecessors, Lydgate's Prologue firmly supports the historical truth of Dares's and Dictys's accounts and rejects the poetic tradition derived from Homer. Indeed, Dares's and Dictys's eyewitness accounts had "established the idea for the Middle Ages that the Trojan War could be approached as history with the same factual basis as found in chronicles" (R. Edwards, Troy Book: Selections 2), and Lydgate is eager to subscribe to this historiographic agenda—or at least give the impression that he is doing so. As I indicated earlier,

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[14] Also as I indicated earlier, Guido briefly returns to the opposition historians vs. poets in the concluding paragraph of his Historia. There, Guido reiterates his reasons for having translated the account of the Trojan War: "Consideraui . . . defectum magnorum auctorum, Virgilii, Ouidii, et Homeri, qui in exprimenda ueritate Troyani casus nimium defecerunt, quamuis eorum opera contexuerint siue tractauerint secundum fabulas antiquorum siue secundum apologos in stilo nimium glorioso. . ." (276). [I considered . . . the failure of the great authors, Virgil, Ovid, and Homer, who were deficient in describing the truth about the fall of Troy, although they composed their works in an exceedingly glorious style, whether they treated them according to the stories of the ancients or according to fables . . .] Elizabeth Meek has commented on this passage. She believes that if Guido did not intend the words "fabula" and "apologus" to be understood as synonyms, he probably was here differentiating between two levels of "inaccuracy" since "a 'fabula' is an improbably story and an 'apologus' is the kind of fable Aesop wrote. In other words, Guido probably mean[t] to suggest that although the poets wrote improbable stories, such as those dealing with the pagan gods and goddesses, they also wrote tales which conveyed moral truths about human behavior" (xxix). Should Meek's assumption be correct, this passage not only reveals Guido's acknowledgment that classical poetry can teach moral truths, but, more generally, it also provides further evidence that Guido was more interested in texts expressing historical truths than fictional texts containing moral truths.

Lydgate explicitly refers to the "cronyc[u]leris" of the Trojan conflict (246) who wrote

about the war and the siege *"Ryghte as it was"* (249; italics mine).[15] These texts contain

"no thing feynt" (255; italics mine). Time has not affected their "story" (250) [that is,

history]. On the contrary, the chroniclers' flowers of rhetoric have kept the "trouthe"

(258) alive.[16] Lydgate's very next lines distinguish truthful chroniclers from the lying

poets of classical Antiquity: "Al-be that somme han the trouth[e] spared / In her writing,

and pleynly not declared / *So as it was*, nor tolde out *feithfully*" (259-61). There is little

doubt that "feithfully" here means "in a reliable manner," "factually correct," much like

Guido uses the adjective "fidelis" when describing trustworthy, reliable historians as

opposed to fanciful poets. Lydgate proceeds to say that the poets have transformed the

truth

> in her poysy
> Thorugh veyn[e] fables, whiche of entencioun
> They han contreved by false transumpcioun
> To hyde trouthe falsely vnder cloude,
> And the sothe of malys for to schroude. (Pro.262-66)

Some 50 lines further, Lydgate names the "cronyc[u]leris" whom he so respects:

> . . . to-forn alle, Dares Frigius
> Wrot moste *trewly* after þat he fonde,
> And Dytes eke of the Grekys lond.
> *They were present and seyen euerydel*,
> And *as it fel* they write *trewe* and wel. (Pro.310-14; italics mine)

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[15] Incidentally, the <u>Middle English Dictionary</u> lists line 246 as the very first use of the word "croniculer" (writer of chronicles) in the English language. Clearly, Lydgate must have given much thought to his word choice.

[16] Notice though that in the vernacular deliberations of the late Middle Ages a writer's eloquence is usually associated with moral truth, not really factual truth (see pages 66-68).

Lydgate then explains that Cornelius Nepos and Guido delle Colonne followed in their

footsteps: they produced versions of the Trojan conflict directly based on (that is,

translated from) Dares and Dictys.[17] So, Dares's and Dictys's texts are clearly presented

as foundational accounts of the war at Troy, and they and the texts that followed after

them are supposed to be understood as reliable, "trewe" chronicles because they

constitute (or rely on) eyewitness accounts of the events at Troy. Dares and Dictys wrote

the events as they *saw* them. In other words, the type of "truth" that we are dealing with

at this point is *historical veracity*.

On the other hand, in addition to all this, there is a whole section of the Prologue

that more specifically deals with moral truth—sometimes actually interspersed with some

factual allusions. Indeed, apart from Benoît, it is Lydgate who most clearly added a moral

element to the original historical/factual emphases and blended all of these together.[18] I

hasten to add that, though I here distinguish between two levels of truth, it is important to

realize that medieval history writers were much less likely than us to overtly differentiate

moral truth from factual truth.[19] Indeed, since often the didactic significance of an event

was deemed at least as important as its historical accuracy, a chronicler might state that

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[17] Whether Lydgate actually knew that Guido did not use Dares's and Dictys's accounts when composing his own text does not matter much in this context. What is, however, significant is that Lydgate would mention Dares and Dictys as trustworthy *auctores* and that he would seek to inscribe himself in their tradition—in contradistinction to the poets of Antiquity.

[18] Another way to look at the situation would be to compare Lydgate's Prologue to a palimpsest where the original factual subtext is still visible underneath the more recent didactic text.

[19] A useful study of the elastic meaning of truth in the Middle Ages and the rhetorical nature of much writing (whether historical or fictional) is Ruth Morse, Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991). Of related interest is Richard Firth Green, A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999). In this detailed study, Green analyzes how, in the late fourteenth century, the meaning of the word "trouth" changed from "integrity" to "factual accuracy."

an event was true, when he meant that it was factually accurate or morally significant—or even plausible (Given-Wilson 2-3). Such elasticity of meaning is likely why Lydgate did not have a problem juxtaposing different notions of truth in his Prologue. However, this is not to say that late medieval chroniclers necessarily lacked the discursive criteria to understand the concept of factual (or lack of factual) accuracy.[20] Furthermore, this is not to say that Lydgate was unaware of the different levels of truths in his Prologue. On the contrary, I would argue that if Lydgate purposely added a strong moral component to his Prologue, he *must* have been able to differentiate the conceptual differences of both types of truths even though at the level of the signifier he relied on one word to express both meanings.

One fifth into his Prologue, Lydgate explains that Henry's reason for having the <u>Historia</u> translated into English is to have "The worthynes . . . / And the prowesse of olde chiualrie" (77-78) remembered in order to encourage his countrymen to avoid "The cursyd vice of slouthe and ydelnesse" (83). Indeed, Henry is said to find "vertu" (81) in "bokys of antiquité" (80). Since it is clear enough that Henry's purpose is moral, we have no reason to doubt that when a few lines later Lydgate explains that he is translating the <u>Historia</u> in order "That of the story þe trouth[e] we nat mys" (116) he means "moral truth." Some 30 lines later, Lydgate explains how one night in 1412, he started reading his source's Prologue:

> Whyche tyme I gan the prolog to beholde
> Of Troye Boke, I-made be dayes olde,

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[20] See, for example, Chris Given-Wilson's example of how Alfred of Beverley, Ailred of Rievaulx, Gerald of Wales, and William of Newburgh (all twelfth and thirteenth century historians) doubted the historical accuracy of Geoffrey of Monmouth's <u>Historia Regum Britannie</u>, a history of Britain which, though mostly invented by Geoffrey, was viewed as true history during the Middle Ages (3-6).

> Wher was remembrid, of auctours vs be-forn,
> Of the dede the verreie trewe corn,
> So as it fil seuerid from the chaf;
> For in her honde they hilde for a staf
> The trouthe only, whyche thei han compyled
> Vn-to this fyn, that we wer nat begyled
> Of necligence thorugh foryetilnesse. (147-55)

We know that Lydgate is consulting Guido, though interestingly he here refers to the

plural "auctour*s*" (149) of the work. Most likely he thereby means Guido and his two

acknowledged sources, Dares and Dictys. This "Troye Boke" (that is, Guido's Historia

destructionis Troiae, not Lydgate's own yet-to-be-written poem) contains the "verreie

trewe corn" (150) of the events at Troy "So as it fil seuerid from the chaf" (151). In

medieval scriptural and literary exegesis, corn refers to the inner meaning (or inner

didactic core/truth) of a text as opposed to the chaff (husks), which represents disposable

surface matters (that is, anything that does not contribute to the core meaning) (Robertson

316-17). Therefore, when Lydgate says that these "auctours" have preserved the

"trouthe" (153), he undoubtedly means the moral truth of the events at Troy. The

subsequent occurrences of "truth" (and semantically related words) proceed along the

same moral line, which is particularly reinforced by Lydgate's mentioning the "sothefast

pyth" (164) of "thinges passed" (165)—that is, the basic truth of the things of the past.

   Other passages seem to blend notions of moral and factual truth. This is, for

example, the case in the following passage, which says that conquerors are represented in

books

> *With-out[e] feynynge þe weie þat þei went*
> In her daies, whan thei wer alyue.
> Ageyn the trouthe who so euere stryue,
> Or counterplete or make any debate,
> *The sothe is rad of highe or lowe estate,*
> *With-oute fauour*, who so list take hede. (178-83; italics mine)

Even if "trouthe" in line 180 should here mean "moral truth" (and this is not a given), the sections in italics add an unmistakable "factual" coloring to the whole passage.[21]

So, to summarize what we have seen so far, in the Prologue Lydgate squarely posits his Troy Book in the truthful chronicle tradition of Dares and Dictys and their followers, which he then sets against the untruths of the poetic tradition of classical Antiquity. The "truth" of the chronicle tradition pertains equally to the historical veracity of the events and to the didactic (moral) lessons to be derived from the events—and it is not always easy to differentiate one from the other. One noteworthy consequence of such an interweaving of two notions of truth is that the medieval literary principle which equates the aesthetic appeal of a text with its moral "sentence" is here somehow expanded to include factual truth as well. In other words, Lydgate's Prologue ends up implying that eloquence illuminates or refreshes old texts to underscore not only their moral truth but also their historical accuracy.

Quite apart from any notion of truth, such an insistence on rhetorical ornamentation in historical texts may, of course, seem curious to our modern sensibilities. (We tend to associate serious historiography with clear, informative scholarly writing.) Therefore, I believe some historical contextualizing of Lydgate's stylistic principles is here warranted. Indeed, a valid question one might ask at this point is whether Lydgate's insistence on rhetorical language in chronicle writing amounts to misplaced literary interference on his part or whether such a stylistic expectation was indeed the norm in late medieval chronicles. We know that Lydgate's source, Guido delle Colonne's

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[21] See also the ambiguity pointed out in footnote 16, page 76.

Historia, was highly adorned with rhetorical devices, a necessity to be considered a history in thirteenth-century Italy (Meek xv), and it is possible that at some level Lydgate was influenced by Guido's style. However, when starting his vernacular Troy Book in 1412, Lydgate would, of course, have been more likely to consider the historiographic tastes and expectations of his English audience. Overall, late-medieval England had witnessed an increasing interest in style in serious historical writings so that, "by the fourteenth century, there were plenty of chroniclers—not just men of the world like Froissart, but also monastic chroniclers such as Thomas Walsingham—for whom *beau récit* was crucial to their perception of their task" (Given-Wilson 126). [22] *However*, it is important to specify that what writers like Walsingham and Froissart would have

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[22] Thomas Walsingham, Benedictine monk of St Albans, started writing history in Latin prose in the latter part of the fourteenth century (perhaps 1380) and did so up until his death in 1422 (Gransden 118-56). He was the most important monastic chronicler of his time. Chris Given-Wilson has this to say about Walsingham's delicate balance between historical precision and stylistic awareness:

> Walsingham's historical writing was certainly influenced by his literary research and his knowledge of classical authors. . . On the other hand, Walsingham *did* still structure his histories in traditional annalistic format, and this inevitably meant that, to a considerable degree, both his rhetoric and his facts tended to be subordinated to chronology. (126)

See also James G. Clark's very interesting article, "Thomas Walsingham Reconsidered: Books and Learning at Late-Medieval St Albans." In his essay, Clark provides a compelling reassessment of Walsingham's reputation as a "traditional monastic chronicler." Clark draws a picture of Walsingham as living in a period of increasing intellectualization of monasteries. Among other things, Clark mentions that Walsingham likely studied for a while at Oxford.

Born in Valenciennes in Hainault (now France), Jean Froissart, the most famous chronicler of the fourteenth century, wrote histories and poems in French. From early on, he had connections with England and lived there for a number of years. (Chaucer knew him, read his work, and was influenced by it.) His Chroniques approximately cover the years 1325-1400 and were written sometime between the late 1360s and the early 1400s. Though Froissart's narrative style was rather terse in the first two books, starting with Book III, Froissart became more stylistically self-aware and even alluded to his new interest: "Si vous vouldroie *esclarcir par bel langaige* tout ce dont je fus adont infourmé pour rengrossier nostre matiere et pour exemplier les bons qui se desirent à avanchier par armes" (3; italics mine). [And I now wish to illuminate in beautiful language all that I was told so as to increase our matter and provide examples to the good men who wish to advance themselves by deeds of arms (trans. mine with help from Richard Firth Green and William W. Kibler)]. Froissart scholar Peter F. Ainsworth explains, "By *bel langaige*, Froissart seems to imply the use of rhetorical devices such as those included under the heading of *amplificatio* so as to please, flatter the ear, and convince. The [didactic] truth, he suggests, will be aesthetically pleasing because of its exemplary nature" (141).

understood by *beau récit* were mainly techniques of digression and amplification (which

Lydgate certainly did a lot of), not so much the kind of rhetorical flourishes (or "floures

of rethorik") that Lydgate seemed to associate with truth-telling in the Prologue of his

Troy Book and that he himself was so fond of using in his own writings. Lydgate's ornate

rhetoric is typical of the flamboyant stylistic traits of fifteenth-century texts. Derek

Pearsall has suggested that Lydgate's aureate language may be linked to the *florida*

verborum venustas of such fifteenth-century monastic chroniclers as Thomas Elmham

and John Whethamstede, and there is undoubtedly much truth to this statement (John

Lydgate 44).[23] So we see that when Lydgate connects trustworthy history writing to

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[23] Thomas Elmham, originally monk of St Augustine's, used all sorts of embellishments in his Speculum Augustinianum, likely composed before he became a Cluniac monk in 1414. Indeed, "much of the prose [was] inflated with rhetorical flourishes and literary mannerisms: stylistically the work [was] a precursor in prose of Elmham's later Liber Metricus de Henrico Quinto" (Gransden 346-47). The Liber, probably written in 1418, relates in verse the first five years of Henry V's reign and features a purposely obscure style. In addition, Elmham uses "various kinds of cryptogram, figure and word-play" as well as acrostics, anagrams, and chronograms (207). (For further information on Elmham's work, see Gransden 206-10 and 345-55.)

John Whethamsted, Benedictine monk and abbot of St Albans, wrote later in the fifteenth century. Like Elmham, Lydgate, and likely Walsingham, Whethamsted studied at Oxford. Also like Lydgate, Whethamsted personally knew Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, who besides being Henry V's younger brother, was also the first humanist patron of letters in England. Even more interesting for us is that Whethamsted was personally acquainted with Lydgate, for he commissioned Lydgate to write St. Albon and St. Amphibalus (completed in 1439). (One of Lydgate's sources for this work was the Tractatus de nobilitate, vita et martirio sanctorum Albani et Amphibali, once believed to have been written by Whethamsted himself, but now thought to be the work of Walsingham [Clark 833].) Whethamsted wrote four encyclopaedias and two abbatial registers covering the years 1420-1440 and 1452-1465. In the words of Antonia Gransden: "The distinguishing feature of Whethamsted's registers is . . . their literary style. They are in the flowery Latin fashionable among men of letters in his day, a style which was a branch of the medieval rhetorical tradition" (374). Whethamsted's registers are a mix of Latin prose and verse filled with rhetorical devices as well as classical and biblical allusions. His choice of such a writing style "was not merely to entertain. He also wanted to reveal his opinions and make general *moral observations*, and to persuade his readers of the *truth* of both" (376; italics mine). To modern historians, however, such high-flown language often constitutes an obstacle to clarity. Indeed, Whethamsted's

> very prolixity makes the texture of his works so loose that the information in them is hard
> to isolate, and his preference for conventional stereotypes to first hand observation often
> almost totally obscures the actual facts. Indeed, Whethamsted's primary purpose was not
> to record facts, but to persuade the reader to accept his idealized view of people and
> events. (378-79)

verbal ornamentation, he is only reflecting the growing stylistic expectations of the

time—though it is also true that Lydgate must have appeared as somewhat of a trailblazer

in 1412 (when he wrote the Prologue), that is, at the beginning of the florid fifteenth

century.

All this being said, if we look at the situation from a different angle, history

writing in the fifteenth century largely functioned as it had always done. That is, for the

past several centuries, most writers of history, *if conscious of their writing*, had not

thought it necessary to apply writing techniques that were altogether different from the

ones writers of fictional narratives used.[24] Indeed, all self-conscious writers (whether

claiming to write history or fiction) were influenced by the same cultural milieu and the

same education, which relied on methods of composition based on classical rhetoric and

classical literary models. Hence, when highly ornate diction became increasingly

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(Gransden's whole section on Whethamsted [371-86] is of considerable interest. See also E. F. Jacob, "*Florida Verborum Venustas*: Some Early Examples of Euphuism in England," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 17 [1933]: 264-90, esp. 264-78.)

[24] Without going too far into the details of medieval historiography, I think it necessary that I here clarify what I mean by writers of history *who were conscious of their writing*. At the beginning of the Middle Ages, there was a clear distinction between chroniclers and historians. A chronicler's job was to write annals, that is, historical records emphasizing chronological precision and characterized by brevity and spare style. Historians, on the other hand, produced historical texts which valued more ample narratives written in elevated style but which paid little or no attention to exact dates. (The distinction was actually inherited from classical Antiquity where, as early as the first century BC, the Romans distinguished between noble histories and the rather less prestigious annals and summaries.) Over time, however, the distinction between both genres blurred so that increasingly works which were called "chronicles" also partook of many of the features of "histories." This was particularly the case in writings of the twelfth through the fourteenth century. A case in point would be Jean Froissart's Chroniques, which combined specific chronology with *beau récit*. Then, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (with the advent of humanism and the Renaissance), historiography witnessed a return to classical tastes: the concern for dates faded away whereas stylistic elegance took the center stage. In my dissertation, I use the words "histories" and "chronicles" quite interchangeably because by the late Middle Ages, the period which interests me here, most historical texts were, as we have just seen, a mix of both and, in practice, it was indeed very difficult to distinguish both types (Given-Wilson xix). By *self-conscious* history writers, I mean those writers who wrote well-developed narratives in an engaging style (whether they called themselves historians or chroniclers). (Much of the above information is to be found in Bernard Guenée's paper "Histoire et Chronique. Nouvelles réflexions sur les genres historiques au Moyen Age.")

fashionable in the fifteenth century, historians and poets alike tended to adopt the new style (for the poets, see, for example, the decorative language of Gavin Douglas).

2.3 Ambiguous details and nuances in the Prologue

From what we have just seen, Lydgate's insistence on eloquent language in chronicle writing is far from unique in the fifteenth-century historiographic landscape, and Lydgate is certainly entitled to discuss this stylistic feature in his Prologue—though none of his textual predecessors do so. However, emphasis on beautiful style is also one of the main components of the Prologue that weakens its basic opposition between chronicle versus poetic tradition. For indeed the core dichotomy between *historia* and *fabula*, which is the very *raison d'être* of the Prologue, finds itself weakened by textual elements contained within the Prologue itself. Or, if you will, the Prologue creates an incipient doubt as to whether history and fiction, truth and untruth actually constitute epistemological categories that are very far apart. The passage on ornate language that deserves our attention is located in Lydgate's discussion on the deceitful poets.

Like Guido, Lydgate singles out Homer, Ovid, and Virgil for having written falsehoods about the Trojan conflict. Of Ovid and Virgil, Lydgate has not that much to say, except that Ovid mixes truth and falsehood in his writing and that Virgil is partly true, partly like Homer (that is, false). Lydgate spends more time criticizing Homer,

> . . . the whiche in his writing
> I-feyned hathe ful many diuers thyng
> That neuer was, as Guydo lyst deuise,
> And thingys done in a-nother wyse
> He hathe transformed than þe trouþe was. (267-71)

Lydgate is particularly annoyed by Homer's claim that the gods helped the Greeks wage

war against the Trojans. He reproaches Homer for being partial to the Greeks to the point

of making famous individuals who do not deserve it. More important for our purposes,

the Prologue points out what is perhaps the most deceptive aspect of Homer's poetry:

> And in his dites, þat wer so fresche & gay
> With sugred wordes vnder hony soote,
> His galle is hidde lowe by the rote,
> That it may nought outewarde ben espied. (276-79)

The above lines merit some close lexical analysis. Homer's verses are here said to be

"fresche & gay" and conceal bitter falsehoods under "hony soote" by means of "sugred

wordes." This is nothing less than an unmitigated attack on the potential evil deployment

of eloquent language, in essence the very same language also used by trustworthy

chroniclers! After all, earlier in the Prologue, in the context of reliable writing, Lydgate

has explained that the "sothefast pyth" (164) of things past is "refresched newe" thanks to

writing (166). Also, in books one can find the Troy story "fully rehersed new and newe /

And freschely floure of colour and of hewe" (253-54). Even more compelling, toward the

end of the Prologue, Lydgate explains how Guido illuminated the Troy story "with many

fresche colour / Of rethorik, and many riche flour / Of eloquence to make it sownde bet"

(363-65). Furthermore, the phrases "hony soote" and "sugred wordes" obviously refer to

mellifluous, pleasant language, and Lydgate will repeatedly use these words in similar

contexts throughout his poem.[25] Interestingly enough, the language here described is also

the language of Calliope, the muse of epic poetry whom—together with Clio, the muse of

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[25] Actually, as the <u>Middle English Dictionary</u> indicates, "sugred" was not employed in English to refer to eloquent language before Lydgate's time.

history—Lydgate invokes at the beginning of his Prologue. Indeed, with her "hony swete" (56), Calliope "Sugrest tongis of rethoricyens" (57). In other words, while (at least on the surface) eloquent language indicates truth telling when used by chroniclers, it reveals lack of sincerity in Homer. Thus, if nothing else at this point, the Prologue here qualifies the connection between ornate language and truth made earlier. The issue is all the more interesting since the part about Homer's eloquent language was *added* by Lydgate to his source(s). Indeed, Guido does not attribute deceitful eloquence to Homer in his Prologue (and neither do Benoît, Dares, or Dictys, for that matter).[26] In other words, in the very Prologue that is supposed to clearly distinguish history writers from fiction writers, Lydgate also goes out of his way to attribute identical stylistic characteristics to both types of writers, in essence to make them look a little more alike. Style is as much an indication of truth (moral and factual) as of untruth (non-factual information). In sum, contrary to what I conditionally posited earlier (see page 64), it now appears that Lydgate actually does *not* display a boundless or uncomplicated admiration for rhetorical embellishments.

A second component of the Prologue that contributes to reducing the gap between *historia* and *fabula* is the presence of the Roman author Statius (first c. AD). He is here mentioned as one of those "clerkis" who have preserved the great deeds of men—in his case the story of the siege and fall of Thebes—in the same way as the "cronyc[u]leris" of the Trojan War have memorialized that conflict.[27] Obviously, at some level, Lydgate

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[26] However, as I indicated in footnote 14, page 75, Guido does mention the "exceedingly glorious style" (in stilo nimium glorioso [276]) of Virgil, Ovid, and Homer at the very end of his Historia.

[27] Guido and his predecessors make no reference to Statius and his Thebaid at this point.

aspires to write a history of Troy which somehow parallels the Thebaid's literary

tradition. On the one hand, Lydgate's choice of Statius is easily understandable given the

Thebaid's subject matter, the rhetorical nature of Statius's writing, Statius's moral

authority in the Middle Ages (especially the Thebaid's perception as providing advice on

good statecraft), and the concern with history in the medieval *accessus* on the Thebaid.[28]

On the other hand, the implicit equation of Statius with reliable "cronyc[u]leris" (who,

we know, are antinomous to writers of "poysy") may be less felicitous when one

considers two factors. To start with, Statius certainly had much in common with the

writers of "poysy," whom Lydgate rejects as unreliable. Indeed, "[i]n the medieval

schoolroom, Statius ranked among Vergil, Ovid, Horace, and Juvenal as a canonical

author" (Battles 1). These were the writers to be admired for their rhetorical skills in the

Middle Ages, and the Thebaid was widely used in schools to teach Latin grammar and

syntax. Statius had deliberately set off to write in Virgil's footsteps and imitated him

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[28] Like Virgil and Ovid, Statius was considered "a pagan authority on morality and ethics" in the Middle Ages. "In the medieval *accessus* tradition, the source of so many author portraits for the Middle Ages, Statius emerges as a virtuous, upstanding figure who composed his Thebaid in order to instruct rulers on good governance" (Battles 6). Other classical authors as well were introduced as having moral purposes in the medieval *accessus*: for example, Homer (Minnis and Scott 17). It is interesting to bear in mind that all of this occurred in spite of the fact that the poets' secular subject matters were often considered potentially disturbing. Yet, the aesthetic appeal of those classical writers was so great that the Middle Ages managed to read their works for the moral lessons they would impart—mostly as to what behavior not to emulate.

As far as Statius's reputation as a historian is concerned, "Medieval readers understood that Statius composed the Thebaid, the main source for the entire medieval Theban tradition, '*Thebanam describere historiam,*' as a medieval *accessus* on the Thebaid indicates" (Battles xv). Statius scholar Harold Anderson explains that, because of this, Statius was "often referred to as a historical poet. Although this phrase (or the word *historiographus*) occurs rarely in the early manuscripts, by the end of the thirteenth century, he comes to be regularly referred to as an *auctor historiographus* (history writer), and in the fourteenth century, Statius is more and more often referred to as both poet and historian" (E-mail 15 March 2006). However, there was some disagreement. The London, BL, Royal 15.A.XXIX accessus to the Thebaid presents Statius as a poet only: "Quod autem simpliciter sit poeta patet. Non enim est satiricus, nec historiographus, nec comicus et cetera" (39-41, Anderson, "Medieval *accessus* to Statius" 84-85) [It is clear that he is simply a poet. He does not write satire nor history nor comedy (trans. Anderson, E-mail 15 March 2006)]. But then again, this sentence may have been a spurious addition (Anderson, E-mail 15 March 2006).

stylistically. In his <u>De vulgari eloquentia</u>, Dante lists Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Statius as

the four *regulati poetae* (II, VI, 7) [poets who respect the rules]. Closer to Lydgate's time

(and the <u>Troy Book</u>'s subject matter), in the Envoy to <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u> Chaucer tells

his "litel bok" to submit itself to "poesye" (1790) and kiss the footsteps of Virgil, Ovid,

Homer, Lucan, and Statius (1791-92).[29] This being said, it is true that, unlike some

classical writers, in the Middle Ages Statius's reputation was more unambiguously moral

and his <u>Thebaid</u> was overall considered a truthful account of the events at Thebes.[30] Still,

there is no denying that Statius *was* after all a poet—and, in practice, he seems to have

been considered a poet foremost.[31] An anecdote might here prove useful. The 1418

catalogue of Peterhouse library in Cambridge divides up the volumes between those

chained in the library and those for use of the fellows. The first category, the *libri*

catenati, are themselves subdivided by subject-headings, amongst which we find

grammar (6 volumes, amongst which Priscian), poetry (4 volumes, amongst which Ovid

and Virgil), and chronicles (4 volumes, amongst which Cassiodorus, Vegetius, and

Sallust). This part of the library (what is essentially a reference library) does not contain

any works by Statius. However, the lending library does list Statius's <u>Thebaid</u> under a

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[29] And in the <u>House of Fame,</u> Geffrey the narrator observes Joseph the Hebrew, Statius, Homer, Dares, Dictys, Lollius, Guido delle Colonne, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Lucan, and Claudian together in Fame's hall, which of course squarely does away with any differences between historians and fiction writers. More about the <u>House of Fame</u> in my chapter 3.

[30] Dominique Battles explains that

> [T]he portrait of Statius that surfaces in the *accessus* differs from that of, say, Ovid or Vergil in one important way. Both Ovid and Vergil, perhaps the most favored poets of the Middle Ages, bore ambiguous reputations: Ovid's disgrace supposedly after the publication of the <u>Ars Amatoria</u> was acknowledged in the medieval *accessus*. Similarly, a tradition developed along popular lines whereby Vergil becomes a sorcerer magician, thus casting awe and suspicion on his powers of intellect and poetic skill. (7)

[31] According to Harald Anderson, "Statius was seen as a poet who, in the case of the <u>Thebaid</u>, wrote history" (E-mail 20 March 2006).

heading which lumps together works of poetry and grammar (*libri poetrie et gramatice assignati sociis*). Thirteen volumes are mentioned under this heading, amongst which works by Priscian, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Ovid, Lucan, Statius, and Francis Petrarch (James, <u>A Descriptive Catalogue</u> 1-26). Clearly, Statius is here primarily thought of as a wordsmith—before being a writer of history.[32]

In addition to the fact that he was a poet, Statius shared another characteristic with Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, one that is likely more damaging to Lydgate's taxonomy. Namely, in his <u>Thebaid</u>, Statius (like the three poets of the Trojan conflict) does not present himself as an eyewitness of the events he relates (or as *basing* his narrative on an eyewitness account). As a matter of fact, Statius is geographically, chronologically, and narratively very detached from his subject matter: "The <u>Thebaid</u> . . . deal[s] with events that are in no way contemporary to him; and in [this] epic, outside of generic apostrophes, he is personally present only at the very beginning and the very end" (Anderson, "Medieval *accessus* to Statius" 11). Indeed, Statius "has selected a story without any direct Roman connexions, because he deals with universals that can be illuminated as well by the retelling of an ancient Greek myth as by the writing of contemporary history" (Vessey 57).

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[32] The catalogue stands out because it was written at the same time as Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> and it uses subject-headings to classify its works.

(Interestingly, this catalogue essentially reserves a similar treatment for Guido delle Colonne's <u>Historia destructionis Troiae</u>. Indeed, it lists two copies of Guido's text as being part of the reference library. One volume is listed under the subject-heading rhetoric and the other one under natural philosophy. Guido's work does not appear under the subject-heading chronicles. This would seem to indicate that the perception of Guido as a serious historian whose Trojan narrative necessarily ranked with other historically accurate works was not as widespread as one might think.)

A third ambiguous component in the Prologue is the fact that Lydgate's so insistently historical <u>Troy Book</u> itself begins with the most conventional opening of a classical epic, an invocation to the muse(s). Indeed, classical writers like Homer in his <u>Iliad</u> and <u>Odyssey</u>, Virgil in his <u>Aeneid</u>, and Statius in his <u>Thebaid</u> all appeal to a muse in the first few lines of their poems.[33] In a similar fashion, Lydgate starts off his Prologue by appealing to a number of classical deities and muses. As I mentioned before, in his Prologue, Lydgate successively asks for help from Mars (the god of war), Othea (the goddess of prudence), Clio (the muse of history), and Calliope (the muse of eloquence). Such an opening is very different from the way Guido, Benoît, Dares, and Dictys wrote their own Prologues, namely, without any types of poetic appeals to classical deities. In essence, in the Prologue, Lydgate squarely situates his upcoming <u>Troy Book</u> within the confines of history *and* poetry by combining conventions of and references to both chronicles and epic poetry—as well as by appealing to both Clio and Calliope, the muses of history *and* epic poetry.

Another ambiguous textual element in the Prologue concerns Lydgate's use of the terms "makyng" and "poysy." I will only briefly touch upon this point, for it actually comes into play again later in the actual text of the poem. Both terms "making" and "poetry" refer to versification but differ in several respects. "Making" describes the technical composition of verse in the vernacular by late medieval writers. "Poetry," on the other hand, refers to original compositions by the revered writers of classical Antiquity as well as by prominent late medieval writers whose interests are

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[33] Statius specifically appeals to Clio, the muse of history.

classical/humanistic in nature (for example, Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, or Laurent de

Premierfait). Usually, there is an evaluative component associated with the terms since

"making" tends to be considered an activity inferior to "poetry."[34] In the <u>Troy Book</u>'s

Prologue, Lydgate modestly describes his craft as "makyng." For instance, in his

invocation to Calliope, he says, "Now be myn help tenlumyne with þis wirk, / Whyche

am beset with cloudis dym and dirk / Of ygnoraunce, in makyng to procede" (59-61). He

also uses this word in lines 65, 109, and 378. As we well know, he then contrasts the

truthfulness of his type of activity with the falsehood of "poysy":

> . . .somme han the trouth[e] spared
> In her writyng, and pleynly not declared
> So as it was, nor tolde out faithfully,
> But it transformed in her poysy
> Thorugh veyn[e] fables . . . (259-63)

Lydgate also uses the adverb "poetically" to indicate how Ovid mixes truth with

falsehood (299). In a real sense, then, though Lydgate does not deny the cultural

significance and authority of the classical poets, he does manage to reverse the ethical

valuation of "makyng" and "poysy." Indeed, in the Prologue, we get the sense that

"makyng" is reliable precisely because it faithfully reproduces its sources—unlike

"poysy," which is an original (read suspiciously creative) composition. Foremost, one

understands that Lydgate genuinely tries to differentiate these two types of activities.

That is, until upon closer reading, one notices that Lydgate also applies the term

"makyng" to Homer's activity. Indeed, when Lydgate denounces Homer's partiality for

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[34] My schematic definition of "making" and "poetry" is indebted to Glending Olson's article "Making and Poetry in the Age of Chaucer," which not only provides useful differential criteria but also addresses some of the manifold complexities and vaguenesses of both terms.

the Greeks, he writes, "For in makyng, loue hath lost his syght, / To yeve a pris wher noon is disserued" (284-85). In other words, Lydgate is not consistent in his terminology, and his attempt at a clear taxonomy once again ends up in a blending of dichotomies. In this particular instance, "makyng" ends up being used for a compositional process that misrepresents what actually happened at Troy. In the rest of the poem, Lydgate occasionally returns to the words "makyng" and "poysy" to describe the writing activities of various individuals but without much success—in fact, his terminology will further obfuscate matters.[35]

The fifth and last component that weakens the basic dichotomy of the Prologue is part of a longer section that I quoted on page 65—and about which I have already commented several times. Here Lydgate is explaining how through their rhetorical writings clerks have preserved the heroic exploits of lords of the past. The clerks

> Besied hem and feythfully travaylled
> Agayn al that þat age wolde assaylled,
> In her bokes euery thyng I-set,
> And with the keye of remembraunce it schet,
> Whiche lasteth yet, and dureth euer in oon. (221-25)

The phrase "keye of remembraunce" refers to writing and likely echoes Chaucer's use of the phrase in Prologue F of <u>The Legend of Good Women</u>: "And yf that olde bokes were aweye, / Yloren were of remembraunce the keye" (25-26).[36] Significantly, in the opening section of *his* Prologue, Chaucer too discusses the importance of books and their

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[35] For Dares and Chaucer, see pages 118-20 of this dissertation.

[36] The <u>Middle English Dictionary</u> only lists two uses of the phrase "keye of remembraunce" before Lydgate's use of the phrase in his Prologue. The first one occurs in line F 26 of Chaucer's <u>Legend of Good Women</u> (composed c. 1395) and the other one in line 4 of Edward Plantagenet's (Duke of York) <u>Master of Game</u> (composed c. 1410). Chaucer's poem would, of course, have been more likely to influence Lydgate than Edward's work.

reliability as sources of knowledge. However, it does not take the reader long before

perceiving the slight sarcasm included in Chaucer's opening lines, since later in the

Prologue Chaucer the narrator is actually reprimanded by the God of Love for having

remained *faithful* to his sources. Specifically, the God of Love disapproves of the

Romaunce of the Rose, which he sees as discouraging people from serving love, and of

Troilus and Criseyde, which features a Criseyde who is unfaithful in love (F 327-34). As

a punishment, Chaucer is instructed to tell tales of women who are true in love. The

problem is that Chaucer is supposed to narrate such tales while also remaining faithful to

his "olde auctours" (F 575) *and* being brief (F 577). Faced with the incompatible

requirements of such a task, Chaucer ends up having to misrepresent his source texts

through various rhetorical abbreviations (as well as occasional amplifications). In Telling

Classical Tales, Lisa Kiser explains how Chaucer's learned audience would undoubtedly

have recognized Chaucer's rewritings of the original tales (97). In the Legend, Chaucer

"parodies the tendency of writers who through *brevitas* 'falsen their matere,' with the

result that justice is not done to the complexities of morality and character in the original

source." In fact, "[b]*revitas* turns into something more like lying." This is especially the

case with the legends of Cleopatra and Medea, which go as far as "transforming these

ladies of bad reputation into paragons of goodness" (100).[37] So my point is that since

Chaucer uses The Legend to illustrate unfaithful renderings of classical texts, one may,

by implication, seriously wonder whether Lydgate intended to obliquely remind his

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[37] "As scholars have pointed out, opinion in the Middle Ages concerning these women was generally that they were stock examples of satanic lust, unfaithfulness, and other assorted vices; Medea was even considered a murderer" (Kiser 100). [Kiser provides a detailed analysis of most of the tales in the chapter "Chaucer's Classical Legendary," 95-131.]

readers of Chaucer's skeptical attitude toward books when he alludes to "the keye of remembraunce" in his own Prologue. After all, does not Lydgate raise a similar doubt earlier when he mentions that he has undertaken the translation of the Troy story to obey his lord's request "*yif I schal nat lye*" (77, italics mine)? Why insert such ambiguous moments if the message imparted is meant to be straightforward, if indeed there is a clear delineation between history and fiction in his mind? There is much more to be said about Chaucerian allusions elsewhere in the Troy Book, yet I will deal with them in the next chapter of this dissertation.

These, then, are the main five components that contribute to a narrowing of the gap between writers of *historia* and writers of *fabula* in the very Prologue that also tries to firmly establish this dichotomy. Or, to put this point another way, we have here a classification by genre that contains some of the elements of its own deconstruction. Of course, I am very much aware that issues of genre classification tended to be flexible in the Middle Ages and, therefore, we should treat the above arguments with caution. After all, it is completely possible that when, to take but one example, Lydgate implicitly equates Statius—a classical poet—with writers of truthful chronicles, he does so without truly considering the ramifications of his comparison. What may appear as contradictory or, at least, sloppy reasoning to us, may very well have been part of a more richly flexible and all-encompassing mode of thinking about genre in the Middle Ages. However, it is also true that, though we should be cautious, we ought not discard these five ambiguous components as altogether useless. For indeed, another passage in the Prologue complicates the apparent simplicity of the arguments presented by Lydgate. This passage

does not *as* directly deal with an issue involving a distinction between history and fiction—though it is indeed linked to the whole theme of truth-telling versus lying.

The passage explains how books tell the truth about men after their deaths: "For after deth clerkis lityl drede / After desert for to bere witnesse, / Nor of a tyraunt the trouthe to expresse" (184-86). And a few lines later, Lydgate explains again, "For after dethe, pleynly as it is, / Clerkis wil write, and excepte noon, / The pleyn[e] trouthe whan a man is goon" (192-94).[38] Lydgate here indicates that, during their lifetimes, certain individuals (most notably tyrants) yield so much power that they intimidate "clerkis" and will not allow them to tell the truth. In the context of Lydgate's Prologue and poem, these are actually double-edged statements. On the one hand, these statements are meant to reinforce our confidence in the Trojan narrative that is to follow, for obviously the actors of the events died a long time ago and thus, presumably, nothing will prevent Lydgate from relating only the truth of their actions. On the other hand, since Lydgate claims that his poem derives from the eyewitness accounts of Dares and Dictys and that he is preserving the truth of these accounts, there is a lingering implication that the actions of men still alive during the actual writing by Dares and Dictys may, perhaps, not have been conveyed in the most faithful manner possible. But, more damaging than the application of these statements to Trojan historiography is undoubtedly the fact that they could very well also apply to Prince Henry himself. Indeed, since Henry has commissioned Lydgate to translate the story of Troy, several sections of the Prologue and the Envoy are used to heap praise on the (future) king of England. In the Prologue, lines 74-118 are basically

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[38] Guido, Benoît, Dares, and Dictys do not include any such information in their various Prologues.

about the Prince of Wales and his reasons for commissioning the <u>Troy Book</u> from

Lydgate. The passage portrays Henry as a virtuous man, as exemplified in the following

lines:

> He besyeth euere, and ther-to is so fayn
> To hawnte his body in pleies marcyal,
> Thorugh excersice texclude slouthe at al,
> After the doctrine of Vygecius.
> Thus is he bothe manful and vertuous,
> More passyngly þan I can of hym write. (86-91)

The problem, of course, is that there is no way of knowing whether Lydgate is honest in

his praises of Prince Henry since, according to Lydgate's own historiographic principle,

the most reliable truth is recorded "*whan a man is goon.*" Is Lydgate truly at liberty to say

what he wants as long as Henry is alive? Lydgate's ambiguous attitude toward Henry will

subsequently be confirmed in the Envoy, about which I will talk more in due course.[39]

    This, then, concludes my overview of textual elements within the <u>Troy Book</u>'s

Prologue that slightly complicate the "straightforward" rhetorical and taxonomic

principles established in the Prologue. I will now explore how these hints of ambiguity

are reinforced and confirmed within the body of the poem.

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[39] See pages 130-34 of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3

RHETORIC, LANGUAGE AND TRUTH: BOOKS I-V

In chapter 2, I indicated that when Lydgate points out the deceitfulness of

Homer's beautiful language, he qualifies his original statement that eloquence necessarily

"illuminates" the truth of a text. In addition, the fact that other textual elements (the

presence of Statius, the invocation to the muses, the confusion between "makyng" and

"poysy," and the oblique reference to Chaucer's Legend of Good Women) reduce the gap

between true chronicles and false poetry further weakens the Prologue's assumption that

truth and falsity constitute antinomous epistemological properties that can safely be

anchored to different types of texts (historical versus poetical) with well-defined (and

distinct) thematic and stylistic purposes. As intimated in the Prologue, for all his praise of

rhetoric, Lydgate is actually very wary of ornate and copious language, and in the text of

the poem, he more clearly reveals his point. Indeed, though in Books I-V, Lydgate

seemingly continues to point out the aesthetic and ethical prestige of eloquence, he also

manages to express his profound distrust of rhetoric in ways that are often indirect and

yet very compelling.

In the present chapter, I will examine both the characters' rhetorical ploys and the

narrator's references to other writers in Books I-V. This discussion will give me the

opportunity to address the poem's tricky rhetorical handling of the theme of antifeminism, in which Lydgate foregrounds his sophisticated knowledge of how language and rhetoric can be manipulated. I will then assess Lydgate's debt to Chaucer's House of Fame, arguing that Lydgate not only understood that poem's skeptical stance on the separability of truth and lies, but also that he shared it.

3.1 "Þe gold dewe-dropis of rethorik so fyne" or "Sugre in þe crop, venym in þe rote"?[1]

It is significant that several characters inside the Trojan plot ostensibly use eloquent language for deceitful purposes. Most obvious are the passages in Book IV where Antenor and the Greeks are said to use "swete rethorik" to mislead the people of Troy into accepting a fraudulent peace—and a horse of brass. I am here particularly referring to lines 5199-229 and 6137-41. Antenor's speech is described as "*sugred* wordis swete, / Makyng þe *bawme* outward for to flete / Of *rethorik* and of *elloquence*" (5201-03; italics mine). Antenor is compared to several animals: for example, a serpent "Hydinge his venym vnder *floures* longe" (5217; italics mine) and a bee "þat stingeþ wiþ þe tonge / Whan he haþ shad oute his *hony* sote, / —*Sugre* in þe crop, venym in þe rote" (5218-20; italics mine). He has a "tonge of scorpioun" (5221) and is "Liche þe *sonne* þat shyneþ in þe reyn, / Þat fair[e] sheweþ þough þe weder be / Wonder diuers & troubly for to se" (5224-26; italics mine).[2] When, as a result of Antenor's duplicity, the Greeks and

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[1] Respectively, II.4699 and IV.5220.

[2] As Henry Bergen, the editor of the Troy Book, indicates in his notes, lines 5199-229 are almost wholly Lydgate's (4:179). Indeed, these 30 lines correspond to half a sentence in Guido: "Anthenor uero uolens sue dolositatis commenta callide paliare longum contexuit in sua uerborum prolacione sermonem. . ." (224). [Antenor, wishing to conceal the fabrications of his guile, craftily devised a long speech in uttering his words. . . .] Clearly, Lydgate wishes to draw the attention of the reader to Antenor's deceitful rhetoric,

the Trojans exchange oaths of peace, we are told that the Greeks are forswearing

themselves. In an aside, the narrator explains:

> For, certeynly, so as clerkes teche,
> Who þat swereth falsly in his speche,
> *Florisshinge* outward by a fair *colour*
> For to desseive his trewe negh[e]bour,
> He is forsworn, what-so-euere he be! (6137-41; italics mine)

It is not, I suggest, a coincidence that the words "rethorik," "elloquence," "colour," and

"floures" (as well as the verb "florishen") are used in these passages. By using those

"technical" terms, Lydgate wants the reader to link these excerpts to the passages in the

Troy Book in which rhetoric is (apparently) praised and create a further doubt as to the

ability of rhetoric to convey truth. The other words that I have italicized are interesting as

well, because Lydgate generally uses them when discussing rhetoric. I have already

pointed out Lydgate's use of the words "sugre" and "hony" in chapter 2 (see page 85 and

footnote 25). As for the word "bawme," the Middle English Dictionary indicates that one

of its figurative meanings refers to the "'flavor' or 'honey' (of rhetoric)" and expressly

quotes line 5202 of Book IV to illustrate this meaning. Also, Lois Ebin has pointed out

that this term "introduces a potent analogy between the intoxicating and perfumed

secretion of a flower and the poet's rhetorical or poetical output which overwhelms the

reader . . . by its pleasing or intoxicating effect" ("Lydgate's Views" 82). In the same

essay, Ebin also mentions that Lydgate often emphasizes a poet's role as an illuminator

by representing him as a sun—although she does not make clear the applicability of her

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and he does so by amplifying the text and using a variety of metaphors to describe Antenor's double-faced
eloquence.

comment to Lydgate's oeuvre in general since all her examples are drawn from the <u>Fall of Princes</u> (77-78).

What matters in those two passages in Book IV is that within scenes that address the duplicity of Antenor and the Greeks, Lydgate injects a whole vocabulary that he normally uses to describe rhetoric—the kind employed not only by "deceitful" poets but also by chroniclers thought to be trustworthy.[3] Lydgate could have explained the deception by using, for instance, language associated with military treason. After all, the <u>Troy Book</u> is a war poem, and thus within this context such diction would have been perfectly appropriate. Yet, instead, Lydgate adopts a variety of terms that all semantically relate to rhetoric.[4] The evidence here, as in several other passages in the poem, is too overwhelming to be attributed to chance. Lydgate must have purposely added such passages in his poem to comment, although indirectly, on the potentially manipulative and deceptive aspect of eloquent language.[5] Actually, the text goes even further and indicates that language pure and simple—not just ornate language—is devoid of any foundational truth, for, still in the context of the Greeks' deceit, Lydgate says that "God þat knoweþ þe entencioun, / Demeth þe herte, & þe word right nought" (IV.6146-47). Words matter much less than intention, and one should not look for truth in words. It is a man's heart that should be probed for evidence of sincerity. After all, in the case of the

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[3] Also see chapter 2, pages 84-86.

[4] Actually, in one line that occurs before the second passage that I pointed out, Lydgate uses a brief war metaphor to illustrate the Greeks' duplicity. The Greeks are said to have "Pes in þe face, but in þe herte were" (IV.6132).

[5] It is, indeed, to be noted that the use of words like "colour," "flour," and "sugre" to refer to or allude to (verbal) hypocrisy is original to Lydgate. Neither Guido nor Benoît uses such terminology.

Greeks, they were indeed found "to her speche þe dede so diuers" (IV.6158). Signifier, meaning, intention, and deed are not necessarily linked.

Two rhetorical terms, "colour" and "flour," are used on such a regular basis by Lydgate that I here would like to further discuss Lydgate's treatment of these key words and attempt to narrow down their meanings. "Colour" is mostly used in the phrase "colour of rethorik," which in the Middle Ages, had, or at least could have, a very specific meaning. The medieval understanding of the term "colour" derives from Book IV of the Rhetorica ad Herennium written in the first century B.C. This anonymous treatise listed sixty-four figures, called *exornationes* (means of ornamentation). Nineteen were figures of thought (that is, figures which derive "non in verbis, sed in ipsis rebus quandam . . . dignitatem" [a certain distinction from the idea, not from the words]). The forty-five others were figures of diction (figures where "ipsius sermonis insignita continetur perpolitione" [Ad Herennium, IV.xiii] [the adornment is comprised in the fine polish of the language itself]), ten of which were of special importance (because "ab usitata verborum potestate recedatur atque in aliam rationem cum quadam venustate ratio conferatur" [IV.xxxi.42] [the language departs from the ordinary meaning of the words and is, with a certain grace, applied in another sense]). Subsequent rhetoricians (for example, Quintilian) gave the important figures of diction the name *tropi*, that is, "tropes." The *exornationes* (or *figurae*) came to be called *colores* (in Middle English, "colours") in the Middle Ages. They were widely listed, explained, and exemplified in manuals of rhetoric. However, the term *color* seems to have had different meanings for different writers of the *artes poetriae*. Thus, in Poetria nova, Geoffrey of Vinsauf used

the term indiscriminately for figures of thought (see, for example, line 1249) and figures of diction (for example, 1102), including the tropes (for example, 958). Yet, Geoffrey also dealt with the *colores* in a small document called <u>Summa de coloribus rhetoricis</u>, in which he discussed only twenty of the figures of diction (leaving out all of the tropes) and none of the figures of thought (Faral 321). John of Garland used the word *color* for all figures, but Matthew of Vendôme only applied it to twenty-nine figures. Other writers still might have had alternative opinions on the subject. James J. Murphy believes that by Chaucer's time the term referred to just about any type of decorated language (182-91). Such may well be the case. Definitely by the beginning of the fifteenth century, there seems to have been a tendency to understand the word generically. This can, for example, be inferred from the texts of the Arts of the Second Rhetoric, which reflect poetic ideas more contemporary to Lydgate's time and which Lydgate might possibly have read. Of the seven texts included in Ernest Langlois's <u>Recueil d'arts de seconde rhétorique</u>, only three mention the noun "couleur." In these texts, "couleur" refers to the different ways of making rhymes and/or, more specifically, the different types of fixed verse (for example, "ballade" or "lay"). However, this does not mean that "couleur" could not encompass other types of poetic devices. Indeed, the first text included in the <u>Recueil</u>, Jacques Legrand's <u>Des rimes</u> (composed some time before 1407), starts off by saying that rhymes are one form of color of rhetoric, "Ryme peult estre nombrée *entre* les couleurs de rethoricque" [Rhyme can be counted *amongst* the colors of rhetoric (trans. mine)] (1, italics mine). As for the verb "coulourer," it is defined in more categorically generic terms in the <u>Recueil</u>, for it appears in the last three texts (composed between the last

quarter of the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth century) with the meaning of "to ornament."[6] To now come back to Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>, one is very much tempted to think that "colour" meant any kind of ornamented language in that particular text. For example, in the following lines that explain how Chaucer's imitators cannot achieve his level of eloquence, it does indeed seem that the word "colour" is to be understood in a general way:

> Whan we wolde his stile counterfet,
> We may al day oure colour grynde & bete,
> Tempre our azour and vermyloun:
> It folweþ nat, þerfore I lette be. (II.4715-19)

But whether Lydgate's use of "colour" had a specific rhetorical meaning or not probably matters less than the word's cultural resonance. Indeed, what is important is that we bear in mind that the study of tropes and figures was part of an individual's basic education in the Middle Ages (Murphy 184, 191), and thus the continuous references to "colour" in the <u>Troy Book</u> would have struck a familiar chord.[7]

Furthermore, in Lydgate's poem the word "colour" is frequently employed with meanings different than "color of rhetoric." For example, Lydgate frequently uses the word "colour" with the meaning of "specious reason or argument, a misrepresentation; a pretext; a disguise, ruse, trick."[8] When the term "colour" is understood this way, the phrase "under colour" means "on a pretext, by deceptive means," and "under colour of"

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[6] Also see page 63, footnote 5, earlier in this dissertation for other brief comments on the Arts of the Second Rhetoric.

[7] Also see chapter 2, page 59, of this dissertation for the molding influence of rhetoric on young learners in the Middle Ages.

[8] See the <u>Middle English Dictionary</u>, definition 5b (a).

means "under the guise of, under cover of."[9] There are numerous such uses of "colour" in the <u>Troy Book</u>. For instance, in Book I, Lydgate describes Peleus as a deceitful hypocrite: "vnder colour was [his] tresoun blente" (188) and "vnder colour alwey more and more / His felle malys he gan to close and hide" (208-09). Likewise, Helen goes to see Paris in the temple "Vnder colour of holy pilgrymage" (II.3527). In Book IV, Agamemnon defends his governance by stating that his leadership has not been blemished by corruption, not been "Depict with colour of trewe entencioun / To support swiche false ambicioun" (165-66). Later in the same book, the narrator says about the false Greeks that they are "Makyng a colour of deuocioun" (6172). There is no doubt that the many occurrences of "colour" with such clearly negative denotations in Lydgate's poem contribute to the gradual conceptualization of the thematically important "colours" of rhetoric as emblems of unreliability.

It is worth noting that in the types of "colours" mentioned above—the rhetorical "colours" and the specifically deceptive "colours"—human agency necessarily lies at the root of all manipulation. That is, those "colours" only conceal and deceive because the speaker or doer has the *intention* to mislead. Other types of "colours" that are mentioned in the <u>Troy Book</u> and that are not submitted to human agency either carry neutral connotations or even signal the truth. The latter case is perfectly illustrated in Lydgate's use of the word "colour" (and/or specific colors) to indicate facial colorings.[10] I am here specifically referring to facial colorings that have an emotional origin—for example,

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[9] See the <u>Middle English Dictionary</u>, definition 5b (b).

[10] See the <u>Middle English Dictionary</u>, definition 3 (a) of "colour": "The color of the skin, esp. of the face; complexion."

affective pallors or blushes.[11] The word "hewe" (hue) is also sometimes used in those

cases.[12] Such an emphasis on the characters' complexions is truly a thematic addition by

Lydgate; indeed, we find very little of this in Guido—or Benoît, for that matter. Thus,

every now and then, Lydgate takes the time to zoom in on his characters' faces: for

instance, he notes how Peleus began to "praye, with colour pale and wan" (I.46) that the

gods would turn ants into men, or how the day before Criseyde's departure from Troy

> She of cher pale was and grene,
> And he of colour liche to ashes dede;
> And fro hir face was goon al þe rede,
> And in his chekis deuoided was þe blod,
> So wofully atwene hem two it stood. (III.4166-70)

Some passages deal more specifically with the process of characters changing colors—

growing pale or blushing. For example, when Helen initially mourns her abduction and

her separation from her family, Lydgate explains,

> Now pale and grene sche wexeþ of hir cher,
> Þat whilom was frescher for to sene
> Þan þe lillye on his stalke grene.
> Allas! Changed is hir rosen hewe! (II.3920-23)

Though—as noted—most references to a character's complexion in Lydgate have no

equivalent in Guido, there are exceptions. Such is the case for the following passage that

describes Medea's confusion when sitting next to Jason:

> Al sodeinly hir fresche rosen hewe
> Ful ofte tyme gan chaunge and renewe,
> An hondrid sythe in a litel space.
> For now þe blood from hir goodly face

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[11] A character's blushing can, for instance, signal shame, embarrassment, or some other uncontrollable emotion, and people in the Middle Ages were very cognizant of such affective responses.

[12] In the Troy Book, "hewe" is also used with the meaning of color of rhetoric: for instance, Pro.254, II.4727.

> Vn-to hir hert vnwarly gan avale,
> And þere-with-al sche wexe ded and pale;
> And efte anoon, who þat can take hed,
> Hir hewe chaungeth in-to a goodly red.
> But euere amonge tennwen hir colour,
> Þe rose was meynt with the lillie flour;
> And þough þe rose stoundemele gan pase,
> Yit þe lillie abideth in his place
> Til nature made hem efte to mete. (I.1951-63)

The equivalent for this in Guido's text is: "Existente igitur Medea inter patrem et Iasonem, *licet multo esset perfusa*, tamen . . ." (18; italics mine). [Medea, therefore, was between her father and Jason, *and although she was covered with blushes*, still . . .] Notice how Lydgate has substantially expanded Guido's brief comment and thereby focused the attention of the reader not only on Medea's facial colorings but also on the very concept of "colour."[13]

In the examples above, the characters' complexions indicate truth, for the very simple reason that most often humans do not have any control over their affective facial colorings. Thus, in these excerpts, paleness and blushes signal some profound emotional turmoil (whether positive or negative). Particularly interesting is the last example in which Medea blushes due to her proximity to Jason. In this particular case, Medea's facial coloring, being involuntary, exposes what she really wishes to conceal. I would suggest that, in general, the multiple references to people's complexions in the Troy Book are not a coincidence. They intend to remind the reader of the thematic importance of "colours" in the Troy Book. In a real sense, these references to *involuntary* affective

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[13] None of the above-mentioned excerpts that deal with a character's complexion have any equivalent in Benoît. Indeed, Benoît addresses such details much more infrequently than Lydgate. However, this does not mean that he altogether avoids the topic: see, for example, line 4362 (Love often makes Paris and Helen change colors) and lines 17606-07 (Achilles, in love with Polyxena, oscillates between turning pale and blushing). The second example has a parallel in Lydgate (II.3697 and II.3713), though not in Guido.

responses provide insidious semantic reminders of those other "colours," the *voluntary* "colours of rhetoric" which have such an ambiguous value for Lydgate, indeed which increasingly accrue connotations of untruth in Lydgate's Troy Book.

Let us now turn to the other rhetorical term that is of interest to us here: "flour." In the Troy Book, "flour" is often used in the phrase "flour of rethorik." In medieval rhetorical treatises, *flores* functioned as a synonym for *colores*. Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Poetria nova used the term for figures of thought (see, for example, line 1270) and figures of diction (for example, 1231), including the tropes (for example, 965)—that is, identically as *colores*. However, the word seems to have had a less technical/precise meaning. The Middle English Dictionary defines it simply as "rhetorical embellishment." Thus, if "colour" already had a tendency to refer to any verbal ornamentation, this definitely was the case with "flour".[14] In the Troy Book, Lydgate uses the term in its rhetorical sense several times, often quite elegantly, as when he addresses his poem, "Þou art enlumined with no floures / Of rethorik, but with white & blak" (Env.100-01). Sprinkled throughout the text are similar comments registering the poetic modesty topos: for example, "Of rhetoric þat I haue no flour / Nor hewes riche, stonys nor perre— / For I am bare of alle coriouste [artfulness]" (II.4726-28). But a careful reader will also notice that real flowers pop up throughout the Troy Book, flowers that hide deceptive serpents under them. There are several such instances in the poem. Thus, in Book I, Peleus is compared to a serpent hiding under "flouris fayre" (185).[15] Much later, in Book V,

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[14] The Recueil d'arts de seconde rhétorique does not use the noun "fleur" in the sense of ornament of rhetoric.

[15] The same metaphor is used again for Peleus in I.210-11. Actually, as I indicated on page 42 of chapter 1, Peleus is associated with several other words or phrases that Lydgate repeatedly uses when discussing

Ulysses is said to be "Liche a serpent þat lyth in a-wait, / Wiche vnder floures can so

glide & trace" (846-47). In the <u>Troy Book</u>, both Peleus and Ulysses are well known for

their eloquence and their scheming personalities, and thus the serpent/flower metaphor is

appropriately applied to them—even though in the context of the Ulysses quote, there is

actually no direct reference made at that point to Ulysses's ease of speech.[16]

More generally—and also very significantly—twice Lydgate applies the

serpent/flower metaphor not to a particular individual but to a whole gender, namely

women. In both cases, the rhetorical connotation of the metaphor is reinforced by words

like "sugre" and "colours" (or a reference to actual colors). The first occurrence is part of

an antifeminist tirade on Lydgate's part as he reacts to Medea's private wish to marry

Jason. Lydgate discredits her truthfulness by arguing that all women feign—though he

subsequently reverses course and claims that such are Guido's opinions, not his:

> And þough þat þei faith a-forn pretende,
> And can her fraude with florissyng wel diffende,
> And flaterie, only þe worlde to blende,
> With dowbilnes enclosed in the ende,
> Yit ay deceyt is benethe ment,
> Vndre þe sugre of feyned clene entent,
> As it were soth, in verray existence;
> But, trust me wel, al is but apparence.
> Þei can schewe on, and another mene,
> Whos blewe is lightly died in-to grene;
> For vnder floures depeint of stabilnes,
> Þe serpent dareth of newfongilnes.

rhetoric in the <u>Troy Book</u>, words like "colour" (I.188, I.208), "sugre" (I.218, I.515), or "hony" (I.516). (See page 104 of this dissertation for the sentences associating Peleus and "colour.") As we here increasingly see, such terms are widely used by Lydgate to describe the deceitful rhetoric of untrustworthy characters and writers.

[16] Though the accusation of deception by Ulysses is actually not merited in this particular instance (it appears in a long passage in which Ulysses is falsely reported to have murdered Palamedes, the Greek King Naulus's son), it is, however, correct that Ulysses overall comes across as a calculating and misleading character.

> So pleyne þei seme with wordis fair[e] glosed,
> But vnder-nethe her couert wil is closed. (I.2081-94)

It is remarkable how Lydgate here manages to associate women with deceptive rhetoric, though neither Medea nor women in general are explicitly described in such terms at this point in Guido's <u>Historia</u>.[17] Notice that the noun "florissyng" (2082) derives from the verb "florishen," which according to the <u>Middle English Dictionary</u> not only means "to bloom," but also has several figurative meanings, amongst which "to make (falsehood) attractive" and "to adorn or embellish (a tale, speech) with rhetoric." This passage is, furthermore, interesting because, as Robert R. Edwards notes, it illustrates the instability of colors, blue being the color of fidelity and green of inconstancy (<u>Troy Book: Selections</u> endnote to I.2090).[18] The same diction is used again to describe the duplicity of Criseyde and women in general in Book III:

> Hir wordis white, softe, & blaundyshynge,
> Wer meynt with feynyng & with flaterie,
> And outward farsed with many a fals[e] lye;
> ……………………………………….
> Þei can þink oon, and a-noþer seie,
> As a serpent vnder floures faire
> His venym hydeth, where he doþ repaire—
> Þe sugre a-forn, þe galle hid be-hynde
> ……………………………………….
> For vnder colour euery þing þei wirke
> ……………………………………….
> And her colour euer is meynt with raies. (4272-89)

As in the previous example, Lydgate first reports and then dissociates himself from Guido's second antifeminist diatribe. Lydgate even tries to compensate for Guido's insult

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[17] In an earlier part of Lydgate's antifeminist tirade inspired by Medea's appearance, Lydgate had already associated women with deceptive language: indeed, women's "herte acordeth ful selde with her tonge" (I.1864).

[18] In the same endnote, R. Edwards also notes the thematic similarity of the line with the refrain "In stede of blew, thus may ye were al grene" (7, 14, 21) in Chaucer's "Against Women Unconstant."

by stating that for every bad woman, there are 100 or 1000 good ones, and he comments

on the 11,000 martyred virgins at Cologne as well as on those women who thanks to their

chastity have ascended to the Ninth Sphere of everlasting joy (4361-97).

Concerning Lydgate's changing viewpoints on women, there are serious grounds

to question his honesty in these two retractions. Indeed, not only does Lydgate gladly

elaborate on Guido's indignation at women to start with but in both cases he also inserts a

lot of mocking irony in his subsequent defense of women—and actually ends up

reinforcing some of Guido's accusations (see, for example, III.4401-09).[19] Hence, for

many readers and critics, these two passages and other similar antifeminist passages in

the Troy Book have marked Lydgate as a misogynist narrator.[20] To counterbalance such a

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[19] For Lydgate's amplification of Guido's antifeminist views, see, for example, how the two passages from which I have quoted above compare with their equivalents in Guido. Lydgate's lines I.2072-96, that is *14* lines, correspond to *one* sentence (two lines) in the Historia (18). My second quote is excerpted from a longer antifeminist passage in the Troy Book, namely III.4264-342. This passage of 78 lines in Lydgate translates a mere 14 lines in Guido (164).

[20] Such views (on these two passages and the Troy Book more generally) are held by Derek Pearsall, John Lydgate (London: Routledge, 1970) 134-36 and "Chaucer and Lydgate," Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer, ed. R. Morse and B. Windeatt (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1990) 39-53, esp. 48-49; Gretchen Mieszkowski, "The Reputation of Criseyde 1155-1500," Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences 43 (1971): 71-153, esp. 118-26; Anna Torti, "From 'History' to 'Tragedy': The Story of Troilus and Criseyde in Lydgate's Troy Book and Henryson's Testament of Cresseid," The European Tragedy of Troilus, ed. Piero Boitani (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 171-97, esp. 177-84; A. C. Spearing, Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1985) 181; C. David Benson, "Critic and Poet: What Lydgate and Henryson Did to Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," Modern Language Quarterly 53 (1992): 23-40, esp. 31-33; Nicholas Watson, "Outdoing Chaucer: Lydgate's Troy Book and Henryson's Testament of Cresseid as Competitive Imitations of Troilus and Criseyde," Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Dr. Elspeth Kennedy, ed. Karen Pratt (Cambridge, Eng.: Brewer, 1994) 89-108, esp. 96-98. As the above titles tend to suggest, scholars have focused most of their attention on Criseyde.
        Other passages reveal misogyny on Lydgate's part. For example, as Scott-Morgan Straker points out, in Lydgate's version of the judgment of Paris in Book II, Mercury includes a short anti-feminist diatribe (2672-99) not present in Guido's Historia ("Ethics, Militarism, and Gender" 42). Also, when Lydgate berates Helen's "wommanhede" for her going out to see Paris in the temple of Venus, he actually expands Guido's apostrophe (II.3575-631). Before that, in a real tour de force, Lydgate transforms Guido's warning on how men rapaciously prey on young women into a condemnation of women who go to public places in order to entrap men (II.3536-54). Because of this, Lydgate's subsequent apology for having to translate Guido's words cannot be taken seriously (II.3555-69).

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view, in her article "Truth, Translation, and the <u>Troy Book</u> Women," Lynn Shutters has

pointed out that Lydgate also spends quite some time describing good women throughout

the poem (namely, Cassandra, Hecuba, Polyxena, Penthesilea, and Penelope).

Furthermore, in Book V, ll. 2198-219, Lydgate explicitly rejects Guido's antifeminism

and lists those five good women as embodying virtuous behavior (Shutters 78-87).

Though it is hard to disagree with Shutters's statement that "[t]his passage is not a veiled

critique of women *per* antiphrasim, but rather a genuine reproach of Guido for his

sweeping condemnation of women" (85), Lydgate's defense of women in Book V does

not manage (and probably is not meant) to convince his reader that his *own* (as opposed

to Guido's) earlier misogynistic diatribes and sarcastic apologies were "unintentional."

Indeed, Lydgate here tells Guido, "[O] Guydo, þou shuldest ben ashamed / To seyn of

wyves any þing but wele" (V.2198-99), not that he himself is deeply ashamed of what *he*

wrote earlier. Certainly, it is impossible to erase from one's mind Lydgate's earlier

sweeping vilifications of women. Rather, one gets the impression that, in the <u>Troy Book</u>,

Lydgate engages in a kind of ambiguous pas-de-deux with Guido's <u>Historia</u>, a diachronic

back-and-forth movement which outwardly strives to determine which one of the two

writers is least misogynistic though it purposefully never quite gets there: sometimes

Lydgate distances himself from Guido's antifeminism and sometimes he clearly appears

to want to outdo him. It is not my intention to resolve the critical debate here by trying to

impose a pat solution on a situation that Lydgate very likely wished to remain murky.[21]

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[21] To some extent, Lydgate's contrary viewpoints resemble what Benoît does in his <u>Roman</u> when he
describes Briseida's feelings upon leaving Troy (and Troilus). Though Benoît does not engage in any
antifeminist discourse when discussing Medea's feelings for Jason (which feelings Benoît tends to describe
in terms of pure love—unlike Guido), he is not so generous with Briseida. Indeed, for much of lines 13438-
94, Benoît denounces the changeability of women. However, he interrupts his misogynous attack to

Whether Guido or Lydgate is the least (or the most) misogynistic matters little, after all, since it is clear that they both indulge in their own form of antifeminist rhetoric. What does matter for the purpose of this study is that we do not give too much credence to Lydgate's pseudo-apologies, for doing so would trivialize the implicit condemnation of eloquence that Lydgate achieves by associating it with female duplicity.[22] In the Troy Book, women are said to be unreliable, and Lydgate's casuistic apologies do not

acknowledge the multiple virtues of an unnamed patroness—who could well be Eleanor of Aquitaine: she possesses beauty, nobility, glory, valor, sense, honor, goodness, moderation, purity, generosity, integrity, and wisdom. Barbara Nolan explains that this passage exemplifies "the poet's juxtaposition of narrative perspectives in dialectical relation to each other. In this situation, we notice . . . the audience's need to reconcile opposed or contrary views about the matter being presented." Benoît's lambasting of women fits into his role as an "academic moralist," but he needs to adjust his perspective to fit "his own immediate rhetorical and political situation" (41). Though Lydgate's particular situations are quite different—we have no reason to believe that his changing viewpoints on women have a political explanation—the end result, that is, the changeability itself, is quite the same.

Regrettably, in her 1992 study Nolan is not willing to ascribe to fifteenth-century texts written in the tradition of the *roman antique* (the Troy Book included) a degree of complexity similar to the one found in the earlier *romans antiques*. In Nolan's words, these texts "tend to lack precisely those qualities which, in earlier texts, had given an ethically problematic, circumstantial density to the classical matter of Thebes and Troy" (283). I agree with Scott-Morgan Straker's rejection of Nolan's assessment with regard to the Troy Book ("Ethics, Militarism and Gender" 4-5).

[22] There is no doubt that femininity is at heart deceitful for Lydgate—as for most medieval writers. A brief excerpt might further illustrate my point. In the following passage, Medea is said to conceal her true feelings regarding Jason right after he has secured the Golden Fleece:

> Ful glad and light Medea doun descendeth
> From hir chambre, & outwarde pretendeth
> Sadnes of chere, as sche no þing ne knewe.
> Men koude nat conseyve by hir hewe
> Hir secre menyng, for sche so wommanly
> Demened hir, and so prudently,
> Þat sche avoyded by discrecioun
> Al fantasye and suspecioun. (I.3525-32)

Lydgate's text is quite different from Guido's "Medea uero gratis exillarata successibus uisura Iasonem demum accedit. Cui, si licuisset, in aspectu multorum multa per oscula blandimenta dedisset, et rege mandante iuxta Iasonem quasi pudibunda consedit" (31). [Medea, overjoyed by the favorable outcome, finally approached to see Jason. Although, if she could have, she would have given him the pleasant reward of many kisses in the sight of all these people, yet at the command of the king she sat next to Jason as if full of shyness.] Lydgate's "translation" indicates more clearly than Guido's text that it is because Medea behaved "wommanly" (and "prudently") that she was able to hide her true feelings. Guido does not insist so much on the idea of feigning at this point. For another example linking femininity and deceit, see my comments on II.5892 on pages 113-14 and footnote 24 on page 114.

In his dissertation "Ethics, Militarism, and Gender," Scott-Morgan Straker explains how in the Troy Book women are essentially evil. Even men's vices are attributed to them (168-95). For Straker, "Lydgate only codes femininity as positive when it somehow further men's interests" (169).

substantially change this fact. Indeed, though Lydgate does express admiration and even affection for some virtuous women in the Troy Book, he also deploys such virulence in lambasting women and femininity that his poem never surmounts the general impression that, contrary to what Lydgate claims (III.4361-97), good women are the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, Lydgate metaphorically links women as a whole with characters like Peleus and Antenor, that is, some of the sneakiest, sometimes even downright treacherous individuals in the poem (both groups are described in terms of venomous serpents that hide under beautiful flowers)—and, surely, this is not a complimentary gesture toward women on Lydgate's part. Interestingly, then, what connects all of these deceptive characters in the text is precisely a handful of words that for Lydgate are very much associated with the semantic field of rhetoric. In essence, eloquence is the emblem of falsity in all these characters (that is, characters like Peleus, Antenor, and women).[23]

It goes without saying that the serpent image also carries deep associations with the Biblical image of the ultimate deceiver, Satan himself. That is, when Lydgate mentions snakes or venom in the Troy Book (and this happens quite frequently, even outside the serpent/flower metaphor), the reader cannot help but link such passages with representations of the fiend as a serpent. The Troy Book itself describes the devil as a serpent several times. Interestingly, in Book II, Satan the serpent is said to have *a woman's face* "In his deceytis raþer for to spede" (5892). In other words, the attractive

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[23] Lydgate expresses misogynistic ideas in several other poems—satirical poems like "Beware of Doublenesse" and more outwardly hostile poems like "Examples against Women." However, an analysis of Lydgate's viewpoint on women in his whole oeuvre would extend beyond the focus of this dissertation.

side of Deception incarnate, the appealing part of Falsehood, is gendered female precisely *in order to be more successful*.[24] So there is a direct link established here between femininity and the adorned, the "flourished" aspect of duplicity. Even more noteworthy for our purposes, though Satan is not immediately connected to Lydgate's diction of rhetoric (by which I mean Lydgate's use of words like "bawme," "sugre," "colour," and "flour"), the arch-serpent is far from disassociated from the linguistic concerns of the serpent/flower metaphor. Indeed, Lydgate clearly indicates that the deceptive actions of Satan are foremost actions of the tongue, a point which he partly borrows from Guido. Lydgate explains that Satan first instills in Eve the desire to taste the apple by *talking* to her: "And þus þe fend, first whan þat he toke / Forme of a snake & a woman loke, / And made þe tonge in hir hed to meve" (II.5907-09)—the fateful consequences of his conversation with Eve being well known.[25] Subsequently, Satan induces men through wicked spirits "To meve her tongis falsly oute to breke / In-to blasfemye, what þing þat þei speke" (II.5913-14).[26]

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[24] Lydgate finds the information about Satan having a girl's face in Guido: "dyabolus elegit quendam serpentem tunc de quodam genere serpencium uirgineum habencem uultum" (97) [the Devil then chose from a certain race of serpents a certain serpent which had a girl's face]. Both Guido and Lydgate attribute this information to Bede, which is actually incorrect (see footnote 26). Lydgate even adds the detail about the woman's face *facilitating* deceit. So much for Lydgate's claim that he values female virtue more than Guido does!

[25] Noteworthy is that though Lydgate has been using the masculine pronoun "he" when talking about Satan as a serpent with a woman's face, in line 5909 he speaks of the tongue in "her" head. One can only speculate whether this shift in grammatical gender is due to Lydgate's instinctive association of deceitful tongues with female characteristics.

[26] Guido's text says that the serpent "mouit ad loquendum linguam eius quid loqueretur nescientis, sicut et cotidie adhuc loquitur dyabolus per fanaticos et energuminos nescientes" (97) [moved its tongue for speaking what it did not understand. In the same way, the Devil speaks here daily through fanatics and those who, being possessed, do not understand]. In her endnotes, Mary Elizabeth Meek (translator of Guido's <u>Historia</u>) explains that the information about the woman's face and the tongue is attributed to Bede in Peter Comestor's <u>Historia Scholastica</u> (Migne, <u>PL</u>, vol. 198, col. 1072). However, as already mentioned in footnote 24, the information about the woman's face is not in Bede (Meek 296).

What we see, then, in the text of the <u>Troy Book</u> is that Lydgate tends to anchor the ability to speak convincingly—especially (though not exclusively) by using beautiful language as expressed by words like "colour," "sugre," and "flour"— to the most untrustworthy characters in the poem through a complex chain of metaphorical associations. The common denominator that unites political, sexual, and biblical traitors is their manipulative use of language itself. In the <u>Troy Book</u>, male deceivers and women make use of "colours" and are equated to serpents hiding under "floures." The fact that the arch-traitor Satan himself somehow embodies all those characteristics (he is a serpent at once male *and* female and deceives people through the workings of his tongue) reinforces the web of interconnectedness between these elements and further undermines the possibility that language be perceived as a faithful channel for truth.

In addition to characters *inside* the plot, several writerly figures—most of whom Lydgate has already discussed in his Prologue—are associated with ornate language in Books I-V of the poem. First of all, there is, of course, Lydgate himself. Indeed, though Lydgate maintains the Chaucerian posture of an unskillful poet throughout the poem, he very much continues to disprove these types of claims by adorning his text with flowery rhetoric. Then, there is Guido delle Colonne, whom Lydgate has previously praised for his rhetorical skills (Pro.360-69). In the text of the poem, Lydgate mainly brings up Guido's eloquence as a contrast to his own supposed lack of ornate language. Thus, in

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Scott-Morgan Straker too comments on Lydgate's passage (II.5886-914) and notices the link between Satan the serpent, its female appearance, and the actions of the tongue. However, Straker only associates women with serpents (he seems to forget that several male characters are compared to serpents in the <u>Troy Book</u>) and, thus, for him Lydgate's passage is merely a warning against the evils of female speech. Straker interprets this passage as discrediting the voice of female prophets within the <u>Troy Book</u> ("Ethics, Militarism, and Gender" 181-83).

Book II, Lydgate explains that he cannot follow Guido, "þat coryous [artful] man, /
Whiche in latyn hath be rethorik / Set so his wordis, þat I can nat be lyke" (170-72).
Shortly afterwards, he repeats that he "ne can þe wey[e] goon / To swe þe floures of his
[Guido's] eloquence" (192-93). And later in the same Book, Lydgate explains that he
cannot describe Helen's beauty as well as Guido has because he lacks "flouris . . . of
rethorik, / To sue his florischyng or his gey peynture" (3680-81).

      If, in the text of the poem, Guido delle Colonne functions as the representative of
the chronicle tradition that Lydgate praises so much in the Prologue, on the other hand
the presence of poets like Homer and Ovid beyond the Prologue reminds the reader of
Lydgate's strong distrust for authors who are part of the poetic tradition. As I indicated in
chapter 2, in the Prologue Lydgate spends some time criticizing Homer, amongst other
things, because of his eloquent language. Lydgate reopens the issue in Book IV, when he
apostrophizes Homer and blames him for using rhetoric to secure fame for Achilles (who
rather cowardly just beheaded Troilus from behind):

> Certis, Omer, for al þin excellence
> Of rethoryk and of eloquence,
> Þi lusty songes and þi dites swete,
> Þin hony mouþe þat doth with sugre flete—
> Yet in o þing þou gretly art to blame:
> Causeles to yeve hym swiche a name,
> With a title of triumphe and glorie
> So passingly putte hym in memorie,
> In þi bokes to seyn and write so. (2791-99)

Clearly, this passage is in line with what Lydgate has been stating from the outset of his
poem, namely that rhetorical ornaments can be used (and *are* used) by poets to propagate
lies. Indeed, the more general association of "poetry" (and related terms such as
"poetically") with falsehood and duplicity that I pointed out in the Prologue continues

throughout the rest of the <u>Troy Book</u>. Thus, it speaks volumes that poets are often said to "feyne" in Lydgate's text: for example, Lydgate says that "Ovyde feyneth in his sawes, / Methamorphoseos" about the Myrmidons (I.10-11), that King Cethes is the son of the sun "So as poetis lusteth for to feyne" (I.272), that Calixtone and Archadius were transformed into stars "as poetis . . . / In her bokys lyketh for to feyne" (I.697-98), that we should not believe Ovid's "feynyng" about Medea's abilities (I.1712), that Jupiter begat Castor, Pollux, and Helen on Danae "as poetis liketh for to feyne" (I.3808), or that Castor and Pollux are stellified as "some feynyn in her poysy" (II.4484). Other statements indicate more gently—but do indicate nonetheless—that poetry does not concern itself with reality but with the stuff of fiction: consider, for example, Lydgate's statements that Fulgentius's "book of his methologies" contain "many poysyes" (II.2487-88) and that stories of "false goddis & of mawmetrie" are found in "poisye" (II.5933-34).

But Lydgate's warnings against the poets throughout the <u>Troy Book</u> are, of course, highly problematic for a number of reasons. Specifically, a few poets do not as easily seem to fit the more pervasively negative description of poets as eloquent deceivers and/or writers of fiction. For example, as I have already pointed out, though in the Prologue Lydgate differentiates at length his own upcoming account from the work of the poets, at the same time he actually does situate his own text within the confines of both history and poetry and as such he implicitly defines himself as a historical poet.[27]

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[27] Also, *inside* the plot of the <u>Troy Book</u>, one of the characters whom Lydgate clearly calls a "poet" seems to receive much praise from him: the "aw[n]cien poete" (II.867) in the new city of Troy who "reherse by rethorikes swete / Þe noble dedis, þat wer historial, / Of kynges, princes for a memorial" (II.868-70). (Lydgate describes at length the New Troy that is built after the destruction of Lamedon's Old Troy. The product of careful urban planning, this is a place of superior architectural as well as cultural achievements and innovations [II.479-1066]. New Troy is, for example, said to be the birthplace of comedy and tragedy.) This poet seems to have much in common with the clerks whom Lydgate ostensibly admires in the

Likewise, we have already seen that in the Prologue Statius is presented as a clerk who

has preserved the true history of Thebes rather than as a poet—though, of course, in

actuality he *was* very much a poet, and his presence in the category of "chroniclers" ever

so slightly diminishes the difference between historians and poets. Yet far more

unexpected than Lydgate's self-definition as a chronicler and poet or his implicit

assimilation of Statius with writers of reliable histories is the fact that toward the end of

Book V Lydgate calls Dares a "poet": "But now þe lanter and þe clere light / Is wasted

oute of Frigius Darete, / Whilom of Troye wryter & poete" (3326-28). This, of course,

constitutes an egregious mistake on Lydgate's part, one that further weakens the reader's

already shaken confidence in the polarized taxonomy of "chroniclers" versus "poets"

established in the Prologue. Of course, one could try to explain the misnomer in different

ways. One could, for example, say that in line 3328 Lydgate was simply in need of a

word rhyming with "Darete," and since he was not overly exacting when it came to

lexical choices, he must have thought that "poete" was an acceptable word. Or one could

also posit that Lydgate at this point decided to use the word "poet" to mean "esteemed

writer of classical Antiquity, whether writing in prose or verse."[28] However, neither one

of these hypothetical explanations seems entirely convincing to me. For Lydgate to call

Dares a "poet" after he himself has made it so clear that Dares is one of the reliable

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Prologue for having preserved the noble fame of conquerors (Pro.195-225). Does Lydgate hereby mean to
say that some poetry conveys historical truths and some does not? Or rather does he only allow himself to
represent an ideal poet in this ideal city of New Troy precisely because the description of this Utopian place
constitutes something of a liminal narrative moment in the Troy Book, a rare moment where perfect
beginnings have not yet been tainted by the imperfections of life?

[28] See the Middle English Dictionary, definition (d) of "poete": "any ancient writer." The MED illustrates
this definition with three examples taken from Piers Plowman, one from the A-text and two from the B-
text.

"cronyc[u]leris" would constitute extraordinary absent-mindedness on Lydgate's part. Or, it may very well reflect Lydgate's opinion on the alleged reliability of historical texts. In other words, it could very well be that by calling Dares a poet, Lydgate means to imply that all narratives are fiction or, if you will, that after all a Dares is not much different from a Homer—thereby undercutting his own earlier distinction. For indeed, as I have gradually started to indicate in chapters 2 and 3, there is mounting evidence that Lydgate's blurring of the lines separating *historia* from *fabula* goes hand in hand with a certain skepticism about the ability of language to express extralinguistic truth—a doubt that also affects the very text that expresses this idea (that is, the <u>Troy Book</u>).

A final major writer to use flowery language in the <u>Troy Book</u> is Geoffrey Chaucer. In the remainder of the chapter, I will focus on him and argue that Chaucer's presence inside the <u>Troy Book</u> shapes the meaning of Lydgate's poem more significantly than has been thought so far. Lydgate's laudatory comments about Chaucer's ornate language must be taken with a large dose of irony, for (1) these comments present Chaucer as more interested in surface matters than content—or, if you will, more interested in chaff than corn—which is not a compliment, and (2) in reality Chaucer was always very suspicious of ornate language and indeed questioned the very ability of language to express truth. The issue is all the more relevant here since Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> is heavily influenced by Chaucer's <u>House of Fame</u>, a poem which expresses strong skepticism about the truthfulness of language. As a matter of fact, the <u>Troy Book</u>'s connection to the <u>House of Fame</u> is so important that I will devote the whole second part of the chapter to the relationship between the two poems. But, let us proceed in order and

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first look at the types of comments that Lydgate makes about Chaucer's eloquent

language.

In several passages throughout the <u>Troy Book</u>, Lydgate heaps poetic praise on his

"maister" Chaucer. In this context, Lydgate sometimes uses the term "makyng" to refer

to Chaucer's art: "Þer is no makyng to his equipolent" (II.4712). "Makyng" is also used

for Chaucer's work in II.4709 and III.554. However, Lydgate is not consistent and most

often employs terms like "poet" and "poetrie" to refer to Chaucer's writerly activities—

all loaded terms for Lydgate.[29] For example, Lydgate complains of the passing away of

> Noble Galfride, poete of Breteyne,
> Amonge oure englisch þat made first to reyne
> Þe gold dewe-dropis of rethorik so fyne,
> Oure rude langage only tenlwmyne. (II.4697-700)

Or again, later, Lydgate calls Chaucer the "chefe poete" (III.4256) who "þorugh his

poetrie, / Gan oure tonge firste to magnifie, / And adourne it with his elloquence" (III.

4241-43). In the same passage, Lydgate even explains that Chaucer should be honored

throughout the land just like Petrarch was honored in Italy: that is, he should be made

poet laureate. It is interesting that in II.4700 Lydgate decided to use the verb

"tenlwmyne" to indicate how Chaucer has elevated the English language. Indeed, the

same verb is commonly used to express the idea that eloquence illuminates the moral

truth of a text (see, for example, Pro.216-20). But whereas in the latter situation the

content of a text is brought to the fore through ornate rhetoric, Chaucer's rhetorical skill

is only said to illuminate the medium itself, not the content. Of course, we do know that

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[29] See pages 90-92 of this dissertation for brief definitions of "making" and "poetry" and how Lydgate confuses the terms for Homer.

fifteenth-century poets expressed much admiration for Chaucer's poetic skill. However,

within the context of the <u>Troy Book</u>, which increasingly seems to doubt the virtue of

eloquence, it would be wise not to take Lydgate's professed admiration for Chaucer's

rhetoric at face value. Indeed, that Lydgate himself would have genuinely valued an

author solely for surface matters is rather doubtful.

In addition to that, Lydgate's focus on Chaucer as a "noble Rethor" (III.553)

comes across as rather ironic when one considers that in his own work Chaucer was often

wary of rhetoric and its ornaments. In the <u>Canterbury Tales</u> alone, several of the tales

express some form of distrust toward eloquent language. For example, the Pardoner, who

has a fine sense of the resources of language and how they can influence an audience, is

also one of the most immoral characters on the trip. On the other hand, the Parson does

not display any particular oratorical skills but comes across as one of the most moral

narrators of the pilgrimage. Somewhat along the same lines, the one narrator who tries

the hardest to stay close to the factual truth of his narrative, the Canon's Yeoman, is also

the least able to convey his information properly. The <u>Nun's Priest Tale</u> contains a

famous parody of the excesses of rhetoric. And more generally, throughout the

pilgrimage, the Host seems particularly wary of tales that might be clouded by high style,

as when he tells the Clerk,

> Youre termes, youre colours, and youre figures,
> Keepe hem in stoor til so be ye endite
> Heigh style, as whan that men to kynges write.
> Speketh so pleyn at this tyme, we yow preye,
> That we may understonde what ye seye. (IV.16-20)

I indicated in chapter 2 that in the late Middle Ages writers of *fabula* and even

historia were encouraged to adorn their texts with rhetorical embellishments to enhance

the moral truths of their texts. Chaucer, however, was deeply skeptical of the attainability of such an ideal. As Robert O. Payne has explained in his influential book The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics,

> Theories, even when they are sound ones, do not write poems. To know that artful language may move men to desire the good does not of itself guarantee that the poet rightly perceives the good, or that what he intends to be moving will actually be so, or that he may not betray the ends of art to its means and please to no purpose. (89)

Elsewhere, Payne has also argued that for Chaucer, "neither language nor emotion nor human reason are in fact reliable" ("Chaucer" 57). Various other scholars have analyzed Chaucer's skepticism vis-à-vis the ability of language to convey truth. For example, in Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry, Lisa J. Kiser has gone a step further and has shown how for Chaucer history and experience, although supposedly non-fictitious, cannot be truthfully mediated in texts. In sum, for Chaucer, language can never successfully approximate the truth of extratextual reality. Nowhere are such ideas as well expressed as in Chaucer's House of Fame, and it so happens that the Troy Book contains many thematic, lexical, metaphoric, and prosodic allusions to the House of Fame. This is highly significant, and in the second part of the chapter we will, therefore, turn to the echoes of Chaucer's poem in Lydgate's Troy Book.[30]

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[30] A few other critics have observed (or at least partially observed) that in the Troy Book Lydgate associates the diction of rhetoric not only with truthful texts but also with the self-serving actions of deceitful characters and the lies of the poets. See Richard Fehrenbacher , "Blood and Virtue: Representing Legitimacy/Legitimating Representation in Fifteenth-Century English Literature," 139-53; Robert R. Edwards, Troy Book: Selections, 4; Scott-Morgan Straker, "Ethics, Militarism and Gender: John Lydgate's Troy Book as a Political Lesson for Henry," 167-222; and Lynn Shutters, "Truth, Translation, and the Troy Book Women." For comments on Fehrenbacher, Straker, and Shutters, see my introduction pages 16-20.

3.2 A Chaucerian connection: The House of Fame

The House of Fame is a bizarre, yet fascinating, poem in which Chaucer discusses and borrows from numerous classical, Italian, and French sources. In essence, the reader witnesses much of Western literary culture come together in the house of Lady Fame. The poem gives an impression of imminence, for, like Geoffrey, the reader expects to hear many tidings. Though Geoffrey starts his oneiric trip to hear tidings of love, it soon becomes apparent that more is at stake in the poem. Geoffrey and, hence, the reader expect nothing less than an understanding of the nature of fame, the *auctores*, the whole of culture, and maybe even the meaning of knowledge itself. After all, we are told that "a man of gret auctorite" makes his appearance (2158). Thus, there is a high expectation of resolution: this man is *bound* to hold the key to understanding. And yet, in a typical Chaucerian move, the poem abstains from providing any resolution. What is worse, along the way, many of Geoffrey's (and likely also the reader's) certainties have been challenged. Indeed, the poem calls into question language ("Soun ys noght but eyr ybroken" [765], which over thirty years ago John Leyerle interpreted as "an elaborate joke on flatulence" [255]); "figures of poetrie" (858) and "colours of rethorike" (859)— all the while expressing those ideas with multiple tropes and rhetorical figures (Teager 413-18); the truthfulness of the *auctores*; and the value of fame itself. More generally, the poem intimates that because people interpret the world of the real through the prism of language, our ability to achieve knowledge is seriously undermined.

So, how does Lydgate's Troy Book remind one of Chaucer's House of Fame? First of all, at a very basic level, there is clearly a big insistence on fame in Lydgate's poem. Many characters are, for instance, discussed in relation to their fame (or lack of it):

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for example, Guido delle Colonne (Pro.371), Cethes (I.1264), Medea (I.2885), Pelleus's

army (I.3980), Cassandra (II.362), King Darius (II.520), Paris (II.3515), Palamedes

(II.4659), Deiphobus (II.4857), Aeneas (II.4915), Carion (III.913), the Trojan knights

(III.1037), Boetes (III.2578), Hector (III.3110), Achilles (III.4001, IV.1748, IV.1761,

IV.1779, IV.2846), Troilus (IV.2046), Pyrrhus (IV.3339), Menelaus (IV.3354),

Penthesilea (IV.3812), Ulysses (V.293), Clytemnestra (V.973), Penelope (V.2152),

Lamedonte (V.2757), and Henry V (Env.30). Not only does Lydgate's poem display a

particular interest in people's individual fame, but it also likes to comment on the

propagation, the spreading of rumors and reports. Thus, in connection with Priam's

decision to fight the Greeks to regain his abducted sister Hesione, Lydgate explains that:

> damages þat wer foryete clene,
> By fals report of rumour fresche & grene
> Renewed ben, þorugh þe swifte fame,
> Þat fleth so fer to hinder a lordis name. (II.1839-42)

Also, the reader learns that Achilles and Hector agree to meet in a duel "Of whiche þe

noise & þe grete soun / Ran to þe eris of Agamenoun" (III.4039-40). Finally, Lydgate

expands on Guido when he notes that Diomede's fame spreads after he successfully

fights for Troy:

> his name sprede gan aboute,
> Þat of his fame þe gret oppinioun
> Dilated is vn-to þe Regioun,
> By swift report. (V.1392-95)

Of course, in some instances, references to fame, report, and rumor in the Troy

Book merely translate what Lydgate found in Guido. For example, in Book II, the news

of the Trojans' plundering of the Temple, the slaughter of the Greeks, and abduction of

Helen reaches the ears of Menelaus, and Lydgate phrases this the following way: "Þe

wykke fame & rumor is y-ronne / With swyfte wynges, of al þat þei han wrought" (4274-75). Lydgate's phrasing translates Guido's "fama loquax et euolans tumultuosis relatibus Menelay regis in multa stupefactione aure sinuadit" (80) [a tattling rumor, flying about by means of confused narrations, came to the ears of King Menelaus].[31] Later, in Book IV, references to Achilles's fame in lines 1748, 1761, and 1779 also have their equivalents in the Historia (Guido 195). Sometimes Guido uses the word "fama," and Lydgate translates it by one of its other meanings, for example "report" or "rumor." This is the case for the "loquax fama" (Guido 6-7) and then again the "fama" (Guido 7) that reaches King Peleus about the ram with the golden fleece, which Lydgate decides to render by "Tidynges newe" (I.253).[32] So, clearly, Lydgate's lexical interest in fame partially derives from Guido himself. However, there seems to be a much more pronounced lexical insistence on fame in the Troy Book than in Guido's Historia. Fame becomes something of a leitmotiv in Lydgate's poem. In this respect, Lydgate's treatment of "fame" is not unlike his lexical insistence on "truth," which I discussed in chapter 2.

It is also possible that Lydgate's interest in fame might have been reinforced by other texts apart from Guido's Historia. There is, for example, a description of Fame in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde:

> The swifte Fame, which that false thynges
> Egal reporteth lik the thynges trewe,
> Was thorughout Troie yfled with preste wynges

---

[31] Ultimately, this goes back to Benoît's "Renomee, que tost s'espant, / Ne se tarja ne tant ne quant" (4773-74) [Fame which spreads rapidly did not delay at all]. Perhaps Guido found the idea of flying fame in Virgil's representation of the goddess Fama who is endowed with "pernicibus alis" (IV.180) [swift wings] and "volat" (IV.184) [flies] in the Aeneid. (Virgil describes Fama at IV.173-90.) He certainly did not find it in Benoît, Dares, or Dictys.

[32] Margaret Meek, the translator of Guido's Historia, uses "tattling rumor" (4) and "report" (5) to translate those two instances of "fama."

> Fro man to man, and made this tale al newe,
> How Calkas doughter, with hire brighte hewe,
> At parlement, withouten wordes more,
> Ygraunted was in chaunge of Antenore. (IV.659-65)

Chaucer's lines are a fairly close translation of Boccaccio's Filostrato IV.78, which book

is itself based on Benoît's Roman and Guido's Historia. Or, Lydgate could have been

inspired by the description of Fama in Ovid's Metamorphoses (XII.39-63). Indeed, as E.

Bagby Atwood showed many years ago, Lydgate was very well acquainted with Ovid's

Metamorphoses—to the point that it can actually be considered the second source of the

Troy Book (27-33).[33] But then, again, in none of these poems do references to fame,

rumor, and other associated topics occur as frequently as in Lydgate's Troy Book.

Compared to Guido's Historia, Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, and Ovid's

Metamorphoses, Lydgate displays a more intense interest in matters of fame, an interest

that in more ways than one reminds one of similar concerns in Chaucer's House of Fame.

Not only are references to a person's fame more frequent in Lydgate than in his

direct source, but such references also tend to be more insistent in the Troy Book than in

the Historia. For example, in Book IV, Hecuba begs Aeneas to save her daughter

Polyxena by appealing to his concern for his own reputation:

> . . . *whan men sen and rede*
> Þe false tresoun and þe foule dede
> Þat þou hast don vn-to Troye toun,
> It may in parti be proteccioun
> To þi *fame*, þe venym to allaye,
> Of þis tresoun; —whan men wiln assaie
> By iust report *þi name to accuse*,
> Þis dede may [þe] helpen to excuse

---

[33] On the other hand, it is unlikely that Lydgate had any direct knowledge of the Aeneid. Atwood has shown that much of Lydgate's knowledge of Virgil seems to have come through Chaucer's Legend of Dido as an intermediary. In some cases, Lydgate even reveals a real ignorance of Virgil's poem (37-40).

> *Ageyns tonges þat speken of Enee*:
> Þan wiln þei seyn, þou haddist yit pite
> On Polycene, only of gentilnes,—
> Þer-with to sugre al þe bitternesse
> Of þi decert, *blowe forþe by fame*,
> By rehersaille of þe foule blame
> *Þat shal of þe þorugh þe world be born*,
> With sclaunder infect whan þou art al to-torn,
> Þat þou ne shalt þe shame mowe sustene!—
> Þan shal my doughter faire Polycene
> Be þi defence ageyns swiche *famus* strif. (6481-99; italics mine)

This long and emphatic passage corresponds to a slight hint in Guido regarding Hecuba's appealing to Aeneas's sense of reputation (Guido does not even use the word "fama"): "nequam tuus oculus ei parcat, ut inter tot mala que feceris tibi saltem possit attribui hoc modicum bonum egisse" (234) [let your wicked eye spare her, so that among so many evils which you have done at least it can be attributed to you that you accomplished this small amount of good].

In addition to Lydgate's straightforward insistence on fame, some statements concerning fame in the <u>Troy Book</u> metaphorically and/or lexically closely approximate statements made in the <u>House of Fame</u>. For example, in the <u>Troy Book</u>'s Prologue, Homer's partiality toward the Greeks leads Lydgate to comment on unmerited fame:

> [Þ]hus ful many oon
> With-oute merit hath his fame blowe—
> Wher of another þe renoun is vnknowe,
> That in armys hath meruelles wrought,
> Of whom par-aunter speketh no man nought. (292-96)

This passage bears remarkable resemblance to Chaucer's comment about famous people who had "her fames wide yblowe" (1139) and his whole section in which Lady Fame attributes oblivion, slander, or fame quite haphazardly, without any consideration for individual merit (1520-867). In Chaucer's poem, it is Aeolus, the god of wind, who

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spreads the fame—deserved and undeserved—of the various suppliants to Lady Fame

(1567-867). Significantly, metaphoric associations between fame/rumor and blowing

winds are quite common in Lydgate's poem. We just saw two examples in Pro.293 and

IV.6493, which I quoted above. Another example can be found in Book IV when Lydgate

inserts a whole passage on how secrets are hard to keep (in this case, the plot against

Aeneas and Antenor) because of rumors spread by the common people (IV.4951-95):

> For now þe conseil is ronne to Enee,
> Þat Priam wend had[de] ben ful cloos:
> For þe rumour & þe wynde a-roos
> By false report, and so fer is blowe,
> Þat Eneas & Anthenor well knowe
> Ende & gynnynge, & euery maner þing. (IV.4996-5001)[34]

But Lydgate's poem goes even further and several times likens words (not only rumors)

to wind. For example, Lydgate reports how Priam feels when he realizes that Achilles has

given up his love for Polyxena:

> For like a wynde, þat no man may areste,
> Fareth a word, discordaunt to þe dede,
> Of whiche a wysman take shal noon hede,
> But lete passe, as he were rek[e]les. (IV.2600-03)[35]

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[34] Other examples include: Achilles refuses to risk his life and states, "For worþines, after deth I-blowe, / Is but a wynde, & lasteth but a þrowe; / For þough renoun & pris be blowe wyde," forgetfulness will soon take over (IV.1871-74); "Reporte [of Calchas's disgrace] blowen is so wyde" (IV.6035); the treachery of Antenor and Aeneas is "abrood y-blowe" (IV.6327); and a false report concerning Palamedes is "Þorugh-oute þe hoste noised & y-blowe" (V.790).

[35] This passage is based on the following sentences in Guido: "Rex uero Priamus multo dolore deprimitur de eo quod Achilles contra promissa sua bellum intrauit. Putat eum magis decipiendi causa dixisse" (203). [King Priam was overwhelmed by great grief because Achilles had entered the battle against his promise. He now considered that Achilles had spoken in order to deceive.] Lydgate here takes a passage in the Historia that loosely deals with language and turns it into a more general negative statement on language. In chapter 1, I pointed out several such situations, one of which happened to compare words to wind as well. See my comments regarding the following quote on page 46 of this dissertation:
> With word & wepyng for to venge oure peyne,
> Be no menys to worschip to attayne;
> Lat vs with swerde & nat with wordis fight,
> Oure tonge apese, be manhod preve oure myght:

This idea is, of course, present in Chaucer's statement "every speche that ys spoken, / . . . / In his substaunce ys but air" (<u>House of Fame</u> 766-68). The message in both Chaucer's and Lydgate's poems is the same. Fame, rumors, and words in general are nothing but empty air, shifting winds, and, as Ulysses rightly indicates in an unrelated remark about the treacherousness of the weather, "[W]ho may trust ouþer in wynde or eyr!" (V.1866). Since winds work independently of material objects and can change at any time, Chaucer's and Lydgate's metaphor implies that fame and rumors are transitory, unreliable, and unrelated to any intrinsic attribute of the person who (or event which) is temporarily "defined." For the very same reasons, the metaphor implies that words do not possess any stable meaning. Only their signifieds have any material reality. This, then, is a strong indictment of the ability of language to convey meaningful information. And, of course, such a viewpoint also patently contradicts the ostensible valuation of rhetoric that one finds elsewhere in Lydgate's poem.

Still other statements in the <u>Troy Book</u> remind one of phrases found in the <u>House of Fame</u>. Thus, Lydgate describes the rumors surrounding Jason's arrival near Troy the following way:

> Þis was þe speche and þe dalyaunce,
> Eueryche to other by relacioun,
> In euery strete thorugh-oute Troye tovn.
> Somme rovnyng [whispering] & somme spak a-brood;
> And þis speche so longe þer a-bood
> From on to a-nother, sothly, þat þe sovn
> Reported was to kyng Lamedovn. (I.950-56)

Word is but wynde, & water þat we wepe. (II.4379-83)

In his endnotes to the TEAMS edition of the Troy Book, Robert R. Edwards compares these lines to "the representation of rumor as sound in The House of Fame, lines 711-24, and as gossip in The House of Fame, lines 1914-76 and 2060-2111, where 'rounen' is used as a verb for private conversation made public."[36]

But most important of all, the one allusion that leaves no doubt as to Lydgate's intention to link his poem to Chaucer's poem is deployed in the following twin statements that both Chaucer and Henry V belong in the house of fame, a *very* ambiguous compliment indeed. Of his literary model, Lydgate wishes that

> þe laurer of oure englishe tonge
> Be to hym youe for his excellence,
> …………………………………
> Þat þe report neuere after faille,
> Nor þe honour dirked of his name,
> To be registred in þe house of fame
> Amonge oþer in þe hiyeste sete.
> …………………………………
> Þe name of whom shal passen in noon age,
> But euer ylyche, with-oute eclipsinge, shyne.
> And, for my part, I wil neuer fyne,
> So as I can, hym to magnifie
> In my writynge, plainly, til I dye. (III.4246-62)

Concerning Henry, Lydgate explains that he is the best knight and "To be registred worþi as of name / In þe hiyest place of þe hous of fame" (Env.13-14). In both statements, Lydgate outwardly professes his admiration for two authority figures—literary and political—and yet neither one of these passages can truly be understood to express a genuine compliment. In fact, under the guise of laudatory flourishes, both excerpts manage to accomplish quite the contrary. Indeed, it is clear that Lydgate's poem here

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[36] In the House of Fame, "rounen" is used in lines 722, 1960, and 2107.

alludes to the "house of fame" of Chaucer's poem, which we know is not a place where rewards are generally bestowed on meritorious individuals. The reason that the allusion is to Chaucer's poem rather than any other literary source is the following. Only two texts that contain a house of fame could have served as a model for Lydgate: Book XII.39-63 of Ovid's Metamorphoses or Chaucer's House of Fame. In Ovid's poem, fame's dwelling is basically a clearinghouse for rumors—it is very much like, and actually served as the main model for, the house of rumors in Chaucer's poem. On the other hand, the house of fame in Chaucer's poem is a place that puts more emphasis on (the literary afterlife of) actual people—as in Lydgate's version of it. Indeed, in Chaucer's poem, Fame's dwelling is filled with minstrels, storytellers, musicians, magicians of different kinds, and writers. It is also a place where hordes of people come to implore Lady Fame to obtain the kind of reputation they desire. The names of those whose fame is preserved for future generations are engraved in the house of Fame's foundation—though some of the names are quickly melting away. When Lydgate says that both Chaucer and Henry are worthy to be registered in the house of fame, he might be alluding to the transitory lists of famous people whose names are engraved in this place. On the other hand, Lydgate also mentions that Chaucer deserves the highest seat in the house of fame (III.4255) and that Henry deserves to hold a palm of knighthood in his hand (Env.15) as well as to be crowned with laurel in front of the queen of fame (Env.20-21). Therefore, it is clear that, for Lydgate, Chaucer and Henry also physically deserve a place in the house of fame—perhaps not unlike the historical writers who populate Chaucer's house of Fame (for example,

Josephus the Hebrew, Statius, Homer, Dares, Lucan [1429-519]).[37] Of course, one

explanation does not have to preclude the other—that is, Chaucer and Henry could very

well have their names recorded in a list and be physically present in the house of fame.

But, again, for Lydgate to associate Chaucer and Henry with a house of fame that

reminds the reader of Chaucer's poem is very much an ironic compliment. As already

mentioned, in Chaucer's world of Fame, most often there is no connection whatsoever

between an individual's reputation and his actual moral worth. Fame is literally a bit of

air blown by Aeolus through one of his two trumpets, "Clere Laude" (pure praise) or

"Sklaundre" (slander). Also, in his House of Fame, Chaucer invites the reader to view

many *auctores* with skepticism rather than with the unmitigated admiration that they

generally enjoy. Here, one finds, amongst others, Homer, Dares, Dictys, Lollius, Guido

delle Colonne, and "Englyssh Gaufride" who are "besy for to bere up Troye" (1467-

70).[38] "Geffrey," the narrator, notices that

> Betwex hem was a litil envye.
> Oon seyde that Omer made lyes,
> Feynynge in hys poetries,
> And was to Grekes favorable;
> Therfor held he hyt but fable. (1476-80).

Chaucer does not specify who the "oon" of line 1477 might be, though it is likely Guido

delle Colonne, for his Historia does contain such information and Chaucer was well

acquainted with this book since he used it as a source for the House of Fame.[39] Homer is

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[37] In his endnotes to III.4254-55 and Env.14, Robert R. Edwards indicates as much (Troy Book: Selections).

[38] The "Englyssh Gaufride" is generally assumed to be Geoffrey of Monmouth.

[39] The ultimate source for this charge against Homer is Cornelius Nepos's prefatory letter to Dares's De excidio Troiae historia. Chaucer probably knew Dares only through Joseph of Exeter's version (Barney 472).

singled out for propagating lies in Chaucer's poem, though of course none of the other

writers (Dares, Dictys, Lollius, Guido delle Colonne, and "Englyssh Gaufride") fare

much better. Indeed, the reader can only assume that, as with everybody else who takes

part in the business of spreading fame in this house of Fame, all the *auctores* subjectively

propagate questionable stories, stories about the (probably distorted) fame of heroes of

the past. In fact, Geoffrey Chaucer himself, though not one of the writers present in the

house of Fame, is not spared by his own poem.[40] Indeed, in a real sense, Chaucer

participates in the subjective propagation of a story—here, the story of Dido and Aeneas.

Specifically, in his poem, Chaucer tempers Virgil's pro-Aeneas stance with a more Dido-

friendly position borrowed from Ovid's Heroides, Book VII. In essence, Chaucer's story

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[40] Some critics have suggested that the "Englyssh Gaufride" of line 1470 is not Geoffrey of Monmouth, but Geoffrey Chaucer himself. In 1926, E. K. Rand first indicated as much in his short article "Chaucer in Error," 224-25. Rand suggested that the passage around line 1470, at least, had been written after the Troilus, which would make the reference to Lollius in line 1468 more meaningful and would allow one to interpret "Gaufride" as being Chaucer. John S. P. Tatlock presented a similar argument in his book Mind and Art of Chaucer (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1950) 63-64. Though Larry D. Benson, editor of the Riverside Chaucer, deems this hypothesis concerning "Gaufride"'s identity unlikely, there is actually much merit to it. Here is why. Homer, Dares, Dictys, Lollius, and Guido delle Colonne constitute a set of authors that Chaucer consistently and quite exclusively associates with narratives of the Trojan War. Chaucer too, of course, has a connection with Troy narratives. In the House of Fame, he spends lines 151-387 discussing the events at Troy and their direct aftermath for Aeneas. Furthermore, Chaucer has his own "account" of the Trojan War, Troilus and Criseyde, in which he, actually, either mentions or borrows from Homer, Dares, Dictys, Lollius, and Guido delle Colonne. By contrast, as Paul Beekman Taylor has pointed out, for a host of reasons, Geoffrey of Monmouth is "out of place in this group" (175). Indeed, Geoffrey of Monmouth is nowhere associated with the Trojan War in Chaucer's mental landscape and, is, actually, never even mentioned elsewhere in Chaucer's corpus. Therefore, we should not disregard the possibility that "Englyssh Gaufride" is Chaucer himself. If we accept this hypothesis, we have here additional proof that Chaucer ranks himself amongst the unreliable writers denounced in the House of Fame. Of course, the hypothesis that "Englyssh Gaufride" refers to Chaucer carries far more weight if we posit that the Troilus was written *before* the House of Fame. This, however, is not the generally accepted chronology of Chaucer's work. And yet, some scholars have suggested that Chaucer might have written the House of Fame *after* the Troilus. Apart from Rand and Tatlock mentioned above, Walter Skeat believed as much (1:lxiii) and Alastair Minnis has also acknowledged this possibility (Oxford Guides to Chaucer 171). The one critic who has presented the most convincing argument in support of such a revised chronology is Helen Cooper—she argues for a specific date late in 1384—and, perhaps not surprisingly, she has also expressed her strong belief that "Englyssh Gaufride" is indeed Chaucer himself ("The Last Four Things in Dante and Chaucer" 58-65; "II: Chaucerian Poetics" 47-50) .

spreads a version of Dido's fame that is neither totally Virgil's nor totally Ovid's. Dido's fame has been "adjusted." Even worse, Chaucer propagates a story literally made out of thin air. Indeed, like any writer, Chaucer uses words to communicate his narrative, and, according to Chaucer's very poem, words are nothing but broken air.

So, to tie all this to the Troy Book and to return to Lydgate's eulogistic lines addressed to Chaucer and Henry, in his own poem Lydgate implicitly places himself in a position very similar to that of Chaucer's fame-spreading *auctores*. Indeed, when Lydgate claims that Chaucer belongs in the house of fame and he himself "wil neuer fyne, / So as I can, hym to magnifie / In my writynge, plainly, til I dye" (III.4260-62), that essentially turns Lydgate into one of those writers who work for Lady Fame—that is, a writer who upholds other people's reputations without necessarily adhering to the truth of the facts. As for Lydgate's treatment of Henry, it reinforces Lydgate's position as the mouthpiece for Fame, since Henry too is said to belong in the house of fame and Lydgate uses his Prologue and Envoy to shower him with abundant praise.

Before moving on to the last Chaucerian lexical allusion in the Troy Book, I wish to briefly return to the fact that Lydgate "covertly" criticizes Chaucer and Henry by placing both of them in the house of fame. Somewhat in the same vein, several critics have pointed out that Lydgate is not subserviently admiring of Chaucer and/or Henry in the Troy Book. Nicholas Watson, Christopher Baswell, and Scott-Morgan Straker have made such claims regarding Lydgate's relationship to Chaucer, and Richard William Fehrenbacher, as well as Scott-Morgan Straker, has observed similar dynamics in

Lydgate's relationship to Henry.[41] However, most of these critics do not question

Lydgate's ultimate—though not blind—respect for Chaucer and Henry. On the contrary,

I do perceive Lydgate's criticism of these two authority figures to be somewhat more

caustic. Most significant in my view, Lydgate's outburst against regicide in Book V

cannot be ignored as if it were unrelated to contemporary political events. Indeed, in his

final Book, Lydgate includes a lament on the murder of Agamemnon and kings in

general, which is not present in his source (1011-72). Particularly interesting are two

passages in which Lydgate exclaims that God should avenge regicide (1046-50 and 1066-

70). Lydgate's strong reaction against the murder of a king is surprising given the fact

that not too long ago Richard II had been murdered at the behest of Henry IV and that

Henry IV's own son commissioned the Troy Book. Of course, it is true that Henry V tried

to distance himself from his father and reconnect with Richard II at the symbolic level,

most notably by having him officially and properly reburied. This official reburial served

two purposes for Henry V: (1) to quell the rumors that somehow Richard II was still alive

and (2) to position himself as Richard II's spiritual son, both aims meant to strengthen

Henry's own legitimacy.[42] However, though Henry V was thus re-positioning himself, he

also never acknowledged any Lancastrian responsibility for Richard's death. In other

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[41] For Chaucer, see Nicholas Watson, "Outdoing Chaucer: Lydgate's Troy Book and Henryson's Testament of Cresseid as Competitive Imitations of Troilus and Criseyde," 91-100; Christopher Baswell, "Troy Book: How Lydgate Translates Chaucer into Latin," Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages, ed. Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997) 215-37, esp. 230-34; and Scott-Morgan Straker, "Dictating to Authority in Lydgate's Troy Book," 285-306, esp. 293-96. For Henry, see Richard William Fehrenbacher, "Blood and Virtue: Representing Legitimacy/Legitimating Representation in Fifteenth-Century English Literature," 139-42 and Scott-Morgan Straker, "Ethics, Militarism and Gender: John Lydgate's Troy Book as a Political Lesson for Henry," 223-85 and "Dictating to Authority in Lydgate's Troy Book," 297-306.

[42] See Paul Strohm, "Reburying Richard: Ceremony and Symbolic Relegitimation," England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422, 101-27.

words, Henry V was trying to reap benefits from a close association with Richard while also preserving the silence surrounding Richard's death (that is, by not associating Richard's death with his father). Indeed, in the second decade of the fifteenth century, the Lancastrians were still busy trying to consolidate their precarious claim to the English crown. Another means that Henry V used to legitimate his power was his marriage to Katherine de Valois—mentioned by Lydgate with apparent approval in V.3420-42. The marriage aimed not only to secure England's geographical dominion over France but also to bolster the authority of the house of Lancaster at home. Since the claims to power of the Lancastrian monarchs were accompanied by much anxiety, it is all the more surprising that, in the following passage, Lydgate dares to denounce the usurpation of royal power following the murder of a king (here, Agamemnon), a topic which was better left untouched at the time:

> Allas! who shal hym silfe ful assure
> Fro cruel mordre his body to withdrawe,
> Whan þat kynges in her bed are slawe?—
> Whiche bringeth in alyenacioun,
> By extort title fals successioun;—
> Þer may colour of pretense seme,
> But ful streitly God shal after deme
> And iustly venge with due recompense
> Intrusioun brought in by violence,
> And felly quite swiche horrible þinges
> As sodeyn slaughter, specially of kynges,
> Gretly to drede in euery regioun. (V.1136-47)

The fact that Lydgate's outcry applied—at least superficially—to a king of classical Antiquity and could also be interpreted as registering the emotions of a staunch royalist supporter (after all, there were always intrigues against Henry IV and V) must have provided enough cover for Lydgate's allusion not to appear subversive.

Let us now turn to the final set of lexical allusions that firmly ties Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> to Chaucer's <u>House of Fame</u>. In this case, the allusions do not deal with fame, but they clearly show that Lydgate did consult and was influenced by Chaucer's poem while writing his <u>Troy Book</u>. I am here referring to III.4910-16, in which Lydgate explains that Andromache has a premonitory dream concerning Hector's death. Lydgate states that he does not know the proper terminology for the type of dream that Andromache had, an uncertainty that reminds one of Chaucer's avowed ignorance as to the causes of dreams at the very beginning of the <u>House of Fame</u> (7-14). About the passage in Lydgate's poem, Robert R. Edwards writes, "Lydgate invokes the vocabulary and dream categories of Macrobius's <u>Commentary on the Dream of Scipio Africanus</u>, the major literary source for medieval dreamlore, but he follows Chaucer's Prologue to <u>The House of Fame</u> (lines 7-11) in expanding Macrobius's five categories to six" (<u>Troy Book: Selections</u> endnote to IV.4910-16). Lydgate indeed distinguishes six categories of dreams, though it is interesting to note that his categories do not perfectly match up with Chaucer's. *However*, when one pays close attention to the vocabulary used by Lydgate and the order in which he employs various key words, it becomes clear that Lydgate used Chaucer's poem as his model. For ease of comparison, I am placing below the relevant quotes side by side:

<u>House of Fame</u>	<u>Troy Book</u>
	And she þat nyght, as made is mencioun,
Why that is an *avision*	Hadde in hir slepe a wonder *visioun*,
	I not, in soth, what I may it nevene,
And why this a *revelacion*,	Ouþer a *dreme* or verraily a *sweuene*,
Why this a *drem*, why that a *sweven*,	Or fro a-boue a *reuelacioun*,
And noght to every man lyche even;	—As whilom had þe kyng Scipioun—
Why this a *fantome*, why these *oracles*,	Or a *shewynge*, ouþer an *oracle*,
I not; but whose of these *miracles*	Or of goddis a warnyng be *myracle*

The causes knoweth bet then I,   (III.4909-16; italics mine)
Devyne he . . .   (7-14; italics mine)

The correspondences may be minor at first but quickly develop into more complicated

patterns. In the first section, there is a phonetic correspondence between Chaucer's

"avision" (7) and Lydgate's "visioun" (4910), though "visioun" as used in Lydgate's

passage seems to refer to a generic dream rather than a specific category of dreams as in

Chaucer's poem. Then, in both poems, the terms "revelacion" ("reuelacioun"), "drem"

("dreme"), and "sweven" ("sweuene") follow—though the order of sentences has been

reversed by Lydgate. Finally, while it is far from clear whether in Lydgate's mind

"shewynge" is supposed to be the equivalent of Chaucer's "fantome," there is no doubt

that Lydgate's "oracle" and "myracle" copy Chaucer's identical words—and the fact that

both Lydgate's and Chaucer's rhyming couplets end in the same pair of words only

reinforces this conclusion.[43]

        If we now move away from metaphoric and lexical allusions, prosodic

considerations also link Lydgate's poem to Chaucer's <u>House of Fame</u>. To illustrate this,

let us look at a few lines excerpted from an admonition to Achilles by one of his knights

to rejoin the fight against the Trojans:

> Yif it were plesyng to your worþines,
> To your manhod & youre highe noblesse
> To take on you to youre encres of fame,
> For euere-more to yete you a name. (IV.1509-12)

Noteworthy about this quote is the rhyme pair "fame/name" of lines 1511-12. This rhyme

pair and its opposite "name/fame" occur quite frequently in the <u>Troy Book</u>. As a matter

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[43] In his dissertation, Scott-Morgan Straker briefly acknowledges the similarity between Lydgate's and Chaucer's lines as well ("Ethics, Militarism and Gender" 24, footnote 11).

of fact, when "fame" occurs at the end of a line in Lydgate's poem, though it is occasionally paired with "blame" or "shame," it much more frequently rhymes with "name."[44] This is significant because in the House of Fame, "fame" and "name" are often found in rhyme pairs as well.[45] In other words, a homophonic link is here created between Chaucer's skeptical poem and Lydgate's Troy Book. In the House of Fame, the frequent occurrences of the rhyme pair "fame/name" almost subliminally drive home the point that fame foremost resides in a person's name, that is, that fame exists at the linguistic level rather than at the level of intrinsic reality.[46] By repeating this rhyme pair in his own Troy Book, Lydgate manages to impart the same notion that, ultimately, fame is primarily a lexical attribute that is not always connected to any substantive virtue. More generally, the homophonic link between the two poems serves to connect the types of issues and concerns present in the House of Fame to Lydgate's Troy Book. Or, to put this point another way, Chaucer's poem becomes something of a lens through which to interpret Lydgate's poem.

Skeptical readers might doubt that rhyming effects are able to significantly impact the meaning of a poem. However, the idea that prosody contributes to the narrative meaning of a poem is well known by critics. Similar arguments have, for example, been

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[44] See, for example, Pro.175-76, Pro.209-10, Pro.371-72, I.1247-48, I.3883-84, II.1841-42, II.4659-60, II.5095-96, II.7215-16, II.7623-24, II.7773-74, III.913-14, III.2577-78, III.3109-10, III.4001-02, III.4253-54, III.4771-72, IV.965-66, IV.1869-70, IV.2045-46, IV.2845-46, IV.3811-12, IV.6917-18, V.973-74, V.2757-58, and Env.13-14.

[45] See 305-06, 1145-46, 1153-54, 1275-76, 1311-12, 1405-06, 1411-12, 1461-62, 1489-90, 1555-56, 1609-10, 1619-20, 1695-96, 1715-16, 1735-36, 1761-62, 1871-72, 1899-1900, and 2111-12.

[46] This point is, of course, borne out by the fact that the Latin noun "fama" derives from the verb "fari," to speak.

made for <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>. Thus, in his analysis of Chaucer's <u>Troilus</u>, Eugene Vance

explains,

> There is nothing new in proposing that the lyrical axis of the <u>Troilus</u>, in which the process of cognition is closely allied to the phonetic substance of speech, might be a motivating source of paradigmatic structure of signification; poets and linguists alike have been telling us for some time, each in his or her own way, that phonetic structures of meter and rhyme, or "figures of sound," tend to generate isomorphic structures at the level of meaning. (276)

Vance notices how instances of rhyme seem to be loaded with meaning in <u>Troilus and</u>

<u>Criseyde</u>. He especially focuses on the binary "joye/Troye":

> At times . . . it is possible for us to glimpse . . . the extent to which "history" in this hyperpoetical habitat is determined by a kind of deadly verbal—rather, poetical—positivism. For instance, one of the most frequent rhyme pairs in the <u>Troilus</u> is "joye/Troye," so nearly alike in sound, so agreeable in tongue and ear, yet so grimly counterpoised in an antithesis whose sweep includes the very trajectory of human history of which Troy itself is the paradigm: there can be no "joy" in "Troy." (278)

It is significant that the rhyme pair "Troy/joy" is also used in the <u>Troy Book</u> at III.4119-

20. Robert R. Edwards certainly believes that such pairing is significant, for he connects

the occurrence of the rhyme pair in the <u>Troy Book</u> to its occurrence in <u>Troilus and</u>

<u>Criseyde</u>: "[t]he rhyme Troye/joye is pervasive in <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>, beginning with

the opening stanza" (<u>Troy Book: Selections</u> endnote to III.4119).[47] Edwards also notices

that Lydgate uses "Chaucer's ominous rhyme Criseyde/deyde" in lines III.4093-94 and

III.4199-200 (endnote to lines III.4093-94).[48] So, obviously, since Lydgate's use of those

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[47] Interestingly, the "Troy/joy" rhyme pair also occurs in lines 139-40 of the anonymous poem "The Chance of the Dice" written in approximately 1440. Gretchen Mieszkowski comments on Chaucer's language in this poem, amongst others the "Troy/joy" rhyme (130). Obviously, this combination of words became something of a "rhyme classic" after Chaucer's <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>.

[48] To this, we could also add III.4263-64.

two Chaucerian rhyme pairs has invited some critical attention, I believe that it is even more important that we consider the underlying implications of the much more frequently used rhyme pair "fame/name" in both Chaucer's and Lydgate's poems.

Finally, I would like to address the topic of thematic similarities between Chaucer's poem and Lydgate's poem. From the above discussions concerning the lexical, metaphoric, and prosodic similarities between Chaucer's <u>House of Fame</u> and Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>, it should already be abundantly clear that there are also distinct similarities between the themes discussed in Chaucer's poem and the themes present in Lydgate's poem. In particular, both poems directly and indirectly discuss books, language, truth, and fame, and their interconnectedness. As I have already made clear, Chaucer's poem undertakes to deconstruct the idea that truth can be found in texts, indeed that secure or unambiguous meaning can be found in language. For example, during his flight with the eagle, Geoffrey, the narrator, at first explains that he prefers to read *about* the location of stars than experience the information first-hand: "I leve as wel, so God me spede, / Hem that write of this matere, / As though I knew her places here" (1012-14). However, Geoffrey's trip is meant to turn him away from this blind trust in books. He will not only learn that language is "air ybroke" (770), but also that literary tradition and, actually, written knowledge as a whole, are not necessarily based on truth but are arbitrarily processed (or should I say fabricated) in the house of Fame and dispersed by the *auctores*. As I have shown in chapter 1 of this dissertation, Lydgate too dwells on the importance of speeches, books, and other related linguistic topics. His constant references to writerly and rhetorical subjects as well as his insistence on the truth of the chronicles

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about Troy (as opposed to the lies of the poets) initially combine to create the picture of a

naïve and bookish individual who strongly believes in the accuracy of language, the

power of rhetoric, the truth of historical sources, and—more generally—the attainability

of knowledge. Indeed, in his Prologue, Lydgate celebrates the achievements of writers:

"For ner[e] writers, al wer out of mynde, / Nat story only, but of nature and kynde / The

trewe knowyng schulde haue gon to wrak" (159-61). If it were not for them,

> For-dirked age elles wolde haue slayn
> By lenthe of yeris þe noble worthi fame
> Of conquerours, and pleynly of her name
> For-dymmed eke the lettris aureat,
> And diffaced the palme laureat,
> Whiche þat þei wan by knyghthod in her dayes. (208-13)

What is more, we learn that the truth of the clerks' works is illuminated through the use

of ornate language. So, as in Chaucer's poem, language, books, truth, and fame are

interrelated topics in Lydgate's poem. And, as in Chaucer's poem, once a doubt is

introduced as to the validity of one of these categories, our trust in the reliability of the

other categories is shaken as well. Indeed, from the moment Lydgate's poem evinces that

truth and fiction are not necessarily distinct concepts and that language itself contributes

to the blurring of taxonomies, it soon becomes apparent that we should also be wary of

books and the famous heroes these books intend to memorialize. Of course, one should

be cautious not to overstate the influence of Chaucer's House of Fame on Lydgate's

poem. Guido delle Colonne's Historia destructionis Troiae should well and truly be

regarded as the primary source of themes for Lydgate's poem. However, as I explained in

chapter 1, in his poem Lydgate does not as exclusively focus on the Trojan narrative as

Guido does in his Historia, but he spends much time reflecting on (and ultimately

criticizing) the linguistic medium itself. Though there is *some* linguistic consciousness in Guido's <u>Historia</u>, the theme is vastly expanded in Lydgate's poem and reminds us of similar concerns in Chaucer's work.[49] When Lydgate started writing his <u>Troy Book</u> in 1412, it would not have been surprising for him to borrow some aspects of his predecessor's work. Indeed, Lydgate's story of Troy with its many layers of disenchantment and ambivalence so reminiscent of Chaucer's work was perhaps the only version of Guido's <u>Historia</u> that Lydgate could have written in this post-Chaucerian age.

In the present chapter, I have shown how a number of unreliable characters in Lydgate's poem are said to use rhetoric for deceitful purposes (or are somehow associated with the diction of rhetoric), how Lydgate expresses distrust for several eloquent writer-figures in his text, and how the <u>Troy Book</u> contains echoes of Chaucer's <u>House of Fame</u>, a poem that strongly questions the human ability to achieve certainty through written culture and, more generally, language. In other words, a careful reading of the text of the <u>Troy Book</u> clearly reveals that, for Lydgate, rhetoric is not an appropriate vehicle for truth. In the next chapter I will consider the other side of Lydgate's initial equation that links eloquence to truth. That is, I will analyze what Lydgate really means by truth and try to ascertain the truth-factor of Lydgate's "trouthe."

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[49] The <u>House of Fame</u> is not the only Chaucerian poem that deals with language, though for the purpose of the present study I am giving it precedence given the lexical, metaphoric, and prosodic similarities between the <u>House of Fame</u> and the <u>Troy Book</u>.

CHAPTER 4

AN ANATOMY OF TRUTH:

UNCOVERING THE FISSURES IN LYDGATE'S HISTORICAL PROJECT

Thus far in my dissertation, I have analyzed Lydgate's emphasis on linguistic

matters in the Troy Book and his initial apparent equation of ornate style with truth

(moral *and* factual). This equation, of course, implies a basic trust in the ability of

language to signify. However, the Troy Book subsequently reveals that the above

equation does not hold, because the poem either clearly shows or suggests that (1) ornate

language is also indicative of untruth, (2) language itself does not have a stable meaning,

and (3) historical truth is not clearly distinguishable from fictional poetry. In each case,

the starting point for my deconstruction of the initial equation in chapters 2 and 3 has

been to more fully analyze how ornate language and/or the diction of rhetoric is used in

the poem and let my arguments proceed from there.

In contrast, the present chapter will not take as its starting point issues of language

sensu stricto but will consider contiguous matters that further influence the relationship

between language and truth in Lydgate's poem. I will start by reflecting on the issue of

the attainability of truth in general in human experience as it is presented in the Troy

Book. Indeed, since the attainability of truth in language is only one facet of the larger

issue of the attainability of truth in life, it is relevant that we pay attention to Lydgate's

views on truth in the broader context of human experience. This approach is warranted

because in Lydgate's Prologue the theme of truth is so emphasized that it raises questions

which transcend truth's limited historiographic/textual application (the idea that a "true"

text provides accurate facts and/or didactic lessons), questions which pertain to a more

general, existential understanding of "truth." As my discussion will show, Lydgate's

consistent emphasis on his characters' lack of integrity seems to indicate a deep

skepticism on his part as to the attainability of truth in life. The tension between

Lydgate's presentation of himself and his authorial predecessors as tellers of truth on the

one hand and his poem's negative statements regarding truth on the other hand inevitably

creates a certain doubt as to whether Lydgate and the other "cronyc[u]leris" can totally

overcome the limitations of human experience. (Writers are people too, a fact that is more

than once illustrated by the poem's conceptualization of characters and writers in

identical terms.) This doubt is reinforced by Lydgate's intermittent casual remarks that he

(and his sources) may actually *not* be telling the truth—in the sense of factual truth. In

addition, as we know, when Lydgate claims that he tells the truth, he also means moral

truth. In this case too, Lydgate's poem seems to contain elements that weaken its own

claims. Indeed, as this chapter will explain, in a passage that very much functions like a

mise-en-abyme, Lydgate reveals historical narrative to be didactically rather ineffectual.

Furthermore, the main moral virtue of the Troy Book, prudence, becomes entangled in a

series of contradictory meanings. Thus, what should be the unambiguous guiding

principle of the poem, the poem's moral "trouthe," ends up revealing its own limitations.

4.1 Lack of integrity and the ubiquity of deceit

There is undoubtedly something ironic and even strained in the fact that Lydgate's poem, which initially makes so many claims to truth, in actuality deals so much with treachery and empty ambitions. For, indeed, there is not much "trouthe" in the sense of loyalty, sincerity, or integrity in the <u>Troy Book</u>—and truth in people is not all that different from factual truth in a text, for in both cases honesty on the part of the agent (the "doer" or the writer) is the necessary condition for truth. In other words, the experiential equivalent of textual truth is quite lacking in Lydgate's poem. In fact, Lydgate always strongly emphasizes the theme of deceit in his poem—even beyond the kinds of untrustworthy characters whom, as we have seen in chapter 3, he associates with the deceit of language. In a real sense, the <u>Troy Book</u> is a story about falsehood, broken promises, and destructive vanity.

After all, the story starts off with King Peleus's hatred for and hypocrisy toward his nephew Jason, who himself breaks his promise to be true to Medea ("Myn hert[e] menyth as my tong[e] seith" [I.2592]) once he has achieved his selfish ends. Jason's destruction of Troy seems out of proportion to the lack of welcome that he and his men previously experienced there at the hands of King Lamedon. From then on, the story descends more deeply into an agonizing spiral of violence where tit for tat and deceit at all levels prevail. Lack of "trouthe" is most visible in Lydgate's treatment of Helen, Calchas, Criseyde, Achilles, Antenor, and Aeneas. For instance, Lydgate lashes out at Calchas's treachery in IV.6023-51—whereas Guido says nothing like this at this point. In fact, as the following excerpt reveals, Lydgate all but concentrates the whole of human treachery within a single character:

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> Traitour forsworn siþen go ful yore,
> Þat falsid haþ trouþe & his lygaunce,
> . . . .
> For þaugh yeris passe faste a-weye,
> Ruste of sclaundir lightly wil nat deye;
> Þe fret þer-of is so corosif,
> Þat it lasteþ many mannys lyf,
> And is ful hard to arrace away. (IV.6024-33)

Lydgate also calls Calchas a "sleighti serpent, fader & patroun / And fynder-vp of tresoun and of gyle" (IV.6042-43) and "merour of falsnesse" (IV.6048).

Lesser known and even minor characters regularly display lack of "trouthe" as well. For example, Lydgate expands Guido's one sentence on King Cethes's feigned pleasure at Jason's capture of the Golden Fleece (31) into a substantial passage of sixty lines that not only discuss the discrepancy between Cethes's joyful "speche and countenaunce" and his thoughts but also address the topic of pretence in general (I.3440-500). Also, much later, in Book V, a false story regarding the conditions of one Palamedes's death at Troy sets off a series of deceitful, retaliatory measures. In essence, Palamedes's father, the Greek King Naulus, is told a convoluted lie about his son's death with the intent that he, Naulus, would break ranks from the other Greeks. The story he is told—which involves a series of imaginary letters—is that Palamedes was murdered by Ulysses and Diomede, whereas in actuality he was slain by Paris (V.697-919). In retaliation for what Naulus perceives to be treachery at the hands of the Greeks, he arranges for a large number of Greek ships to be wrecked near the coast of his kingdom (920-52). In addition, his younger son Oetes resorts to deceit and writes a letter to Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, falsely claiming that Agamemnon has married one of

Priam's daughters.[1] Though Agamemnon has done no such thing, his wife Clytemnestra *has* actually found a new love during the absence of her husband and, filled with deception, she arranges for her lover, Egisthus, to kill her husband upon his return (953-1122). Later, Oetes, still trying to avenge himself on Diomede for the supposed murder of his brother, tells lies to Diomede's wife, Egra, saying that Diomede killed her brother Assandrus by fraud and has taken another wife. Upon hearing this, Egra banishes her husband from his kingdom, though subsequently, after Diomede has gained further fame at Troy, she decides it is in her best interest to ask for his forgiveness and allow him to return to his kingdom—which he does (1182-433). Those seemingly endless sections of Book V contain layer upon layer of lies and deceit, and the vocabulary used by Lydgate is quite representative of the dominant theme at that point in the poem: lack of "trouthe." Witness the following sample of words and phrases taken at random: "of malys, hatrede, & envie . . . contrived was of newe / An highe tresoun, fals & ful vntrewe" (716-20); "Þis fals also, þat þis tale han feyned" (733); "Al þis þei han feyned and y-told" (754); "a lettre anon to þe wyf . . . In whiche þer was included fals tresoun" (958-60); "she was þe falsest oon alive" (1002); she "shewed oute many faithful signe / Of wifly trouþe in hir countenaunce, / Al-be in herte þer was variaunce" (1080-82); "he forged haþ & feyned" (1284); "he putte hir fully in byleve / Of al þe tresoun" (1294-95). As Lydgate spells out at the end of Book V, his narrative of Troy is all about

> Vnwar slaughter compassed of envie,
> Mordre execut by conspirasie,
> Await[e] liggyng falshede and tresoun,
> And of kyngdammys sodeyn euersioun,—

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[1] Notice that this is the second time in Book V that a text (a letter) is used to deceive.

> Rauysshyng of wommen for delyt,
> Rote of þe werre & of mortal despit,
> Fals mayntenaunce of avout[e]rye,
> Many worþi causing for to dye. (3553-60)

Even overwhelmingly good characters do not quite live up to the expectations that the readers might have set for them. For example, faithful Hecuba and, to a larger degree, "prudent" Hector turn out to be less perfect than expected. In Book IV, Hecuba is so filled with grief that she decides to have Achilles slain treacherously since he himself deceitfully killed several of her sons, including Hector and Troilus. She makes her intentions quite clear to Paris, whom she persuades to perform the actual killing with his men:

> I caste pleynly to compasse,
> By som engyn his deth to ordeyne;
> And lyke as he by tresoun dide his peyne,
> Traytourly with his swerd to smyte,
> Right so, I þink, with tresoun hym to quyte,
> As sittyng is of right and equyte. (IV.3116-21)

The vocabulary of deceit used by Lydgate to describe Hecuba's plan in this short excerpt is significant. Notice the words "engyn" (3117) and "tresoun" (3120), which put Hecuba on a par with Achilles, whose actions are described by the words "tresoun" (3118) and "traytourly" (3119).[2] Also, it is, in my view, significant that Hecuba calls the treacherous murder appropriate "of right and equyte" (3121), when most often Lydgate has his characters use this phrase in the Troy Book to justify actions that end up having or could have negative consequences. Perhaps this is partly what Robert R. Edwards is hinting at when in an endnote to IV.3121 he comments on the phrase "of right and equyte":

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[2] Elsewhere (in an endnote to III.5283-84), Robert R. Edwards rightly observes that "'engyne' is a term for deviousness" (Troy Book: Selections).

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> Hecuba's justification for plotting Achilles's death is the same that Priam uses earlier (2.1203, 2.1214, 2.1253) to urge retaliation for Hesione's abduction; Hector uses the phrasing in his interview with Achilles (3.3897), and Priam repeats it in arguing that King Thoas should be put to death after his capture (3.3139). (Troy Book: Selections) [3]

More generally, the murder of Paris at Hecuba's request illustrates that in the second part of the Troy Book Greeks and Trojans alike resort to treacherous means to achieve their ends. It also illustrates a sense of the futility of violence coming to a head in Book IV.

As for Hector, though he usually stands for honor and rectitude and embodies prudence in the Troy Book,[4] three times he is overcome by covetousness in his combat against the Greeks. The first time Hector reveals such an inclination is when he attempts to despoil Patroclus after killing him (III.794-811). The second time is when he tries to despoil King Merion whom he has just killed (III.1905). Lydgate does not speak out against Hector's covetousness in those first two instances. The third time, however, is a different story. Again, Hector is trying to despoil a Greek fighter, this time an unnamed Greek king (III.5332-53). In this context, Lydgate makes it a point to bewail the presence of greed in Hector in 19 lines stretching from line 5354 to line 5372, "For couetyse and knyghthod, as I lere, / In o cheyne may nat be knet y-fere" (5365-66). Distracted by the precious armor, Hector recklessly casts his shield behind his back to better despoil the Greek king, while Achilles seizes the opportunity to kill Hector from behind (5373-499). Interestingly, Lydgate has here changed the information he found in Guido's Historia. Indeed, in Guido's version of the story, there is *no* hint of covetousness in Hector *at the time of his death*—not even a reference to the king's fine armor: "Hector uero interim in

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[3] The only instance of the phrasing that is not linked to any potentially negative consequence here is the one in III.3897.

[4] For example, Hector is associated with prudence in II.251, II.1129, II.2168, II.4804, and III.490.

quendam Grecorum regem irruerat, ipsum ceperat, et captum conabatur ipsum a turmis extrahere, scuto sibi suo post terga reiecto ut habilius regem ipsum a turmis eripere potuisset" (175). [Hector in the meantime had rushed upon a certain Greek king, had seized him and was trying to drag him in captivity away from the troops. He had cast his shield over his back so that he might more easily snatch the king away from the troops.][5] What this means, then, is that Lydgate has purposely equipped Hector with a deadly moral flaw, greed—indeed, in Christian terms, one of the seven deadly sins. In other words, Lydgate's Hector is made less perfect than Guido's Hector.[6]

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[5] By contrast, in Guido's Historia, greed also plays a part during the earlier incidents with Patroclus and King Merion.

[6] In his article "Prudence, Othea and Lydgate's Death of Hector," C. David Benson has suggested that Lydgate drew on Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea (written c. 1400) for his writing of this passage. In Christine's text, Hector attempts to despoil king Polibetés of his rich armor and in the process gets killed by Achilles. Covetousness is specifically mentioned as the cause for Hector's behavior. It is, I believe, very likely that Lydgate's Troy Book was influenced by Christine's text. Indeed, if nothing else, Lydgate's second invocation in the Prologue of the Troy Book is to Othea, the goddess of Prudence created by Christine. In addition, the brief references to Hector's worthy knighthood and the deadly consequences of covetousness in the gloss to section 92 of the Epistre Othea (that is, the gloss following the short verse text describing Hector's death) find an echo in Lydgate's poem (III.5367-72 and 5384) (Benson, "Prudence" 122-23). (Also, more generally, the Epistre was a popular work in medieval England [Benson, "Prudence" 116], and it has been established that Christine presented a copy of her treatise to Henry IV [Laidlaw 137-40], all of this making it more likely that Lydgate would want to use the Epistre as a source for his Troy Book written for the future Henry V.) There are, however, two noticeable differences between Lydgate's and Christine's versions of Hector's death. First, where in the Epistre, Polibetés is the last Greek to be killed by Hector and it is his attempted despoiling that leads to Hector's death, Lydgate follows Guido's Historia (which follows Benoît's Roman) in having Hector attack another king after Polibetés (in Lydgate called "Polycenes") and this episode, then, leads to Hector's murder by Achilles. In his article, Benson does not indicate his awareness that for Guido and Lydgate Polycenes and Hector's last victim are two different people. (We know that Christine de Pizan drew inspiration from one or more manuscripts of the Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César for this passage of her Epistre, and it seems fair to assume that she must have consulted a manuscript of the Histoire ancienne in which Polibetés is Hector's last victim—other manuscripts are much closer to Benoît de Sainte-Maure's Roman for this passage.) Second, Lydgate does not merely mention that Hector is attracted to his victim's rich and beautiful arms like in Christine ("belles armes et riches"), but he also specifically refers to the precious stones on the king's apparel, a detail not present in the Epistre. There is, however, a reference to such precious stones in Benoît's Roman (16163)— as well as in at least one prose version of the Roman de Troie originally written in the thirteenth century (Le Roman de Troie en prose 134) and in the Old French translation of Dares's De excidio in the first redaction of the Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César (also written in the thirteenth century) (Jung, La légende de Troie 442). (Jung explicitly indicates that the reference to the precious stones in the Histoire ancienne is borrowed from Benoît de Sainte-Maure [413]. As far as the Roman de Troie en prose is concerned, there exist five versions of this text as well as many manuscripts, the vast majority of which have never been

So, what we see in the Troy story is that sooner or later many, if not most, characters display a distinct lack of "trouthe,"[7] a characteristic that Lydgate strongly highlights in his version of the story—even though he also very much insists on the concept of truth, especially in the Prologue (see my chapter 2). Interestingly, it is in the Troy Book's Prologue that the reader also first encountered the theme of deceit, where it pertained, or claimed to pertain, to a certain category of writers (the poets), not characters. Now we see that this theme is also very much a part of Lydgate's narrative world. With Lydgate, people tend to be "vntrewe," whether they are writers or characters. In both groups, Lydgate focuses on the same characteristic. In addition, Lydgate tends to recoil from simplistic manicheistic descriptions opposing, for example, good characters and bad characters. A good character in one episode of the story may be endowed with negative attributes a few pages later. Significantly, as I have shown in my dissertation thus far, chroniclers and poets are not two hermetically distinct groups either but often share common features as well. In short, the theme of deceit tends to run through both Lydate's diegetic and extradiegetic fields, and such a thematic link almost subconsciously reduces the gap between writers and their characters.

Yet, not only does character after character in the poem embrace lies and half-truths, but the concept of unreliability is itself firmly embodied into "variaunt" and

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edited.) This would, then, seem to indicate that Lydgate consulted the Roman (or one of its prose versions or the Histoire ancienne) at this point in his writing.

     For Christine's text, I have consulted the following edition: Christine de Pizan, Epistre Othea, ed. Gabriella Parussa, Textes Littéraires Français (Geneva: Droz, 1999). Jane Chance has published a translation of the text: Christine de Pizan, Letter of Othea to Hector, trans. Jane Chance, The Focus Library of Medieval Women (Newburyport, MA: Focus, 1990).

[7] Notable exceptions are characters like Cassandra, Polyxena, Penthesilea, and Penelope.

"double" Fortune in the <u>Troy Book</u>. Compared to Guido's <u>Historia</u> (and Benoît's <u>Roman</u>), Fortune is very much emphasized in Lydgate's poem and appears as more deceptive. Take, for instance, the first 72 lines of Book II, which are original to Lydgate and describe the deceitfulness and fickleness of Fortune. Here, Fortune is described as "fals and flekeryng" (2), "of her cours, fals & ful mutable" (6); "vn-to somme [she] pretendeth to be trewe" (26), and yet "Who trusteþ hir, sche wil hym ouercaste, / And hym deseyue pleynly at þe laste" (69-70). Another fairly long passage on Fortune is added by Lydgate at the beginning of Book V (16-40). In the passage, Lydgate explains how Fortune introduces division amongst the Greeks:

> Þis blinde lady falsly made flete
> In-to her sugre galle of discordance,
> Amonge hem silf to bring in variaunce,
> And her hertis, of rancour & of pride,
> Contagiously to seueryn & deuyde. (V.20-24)

And, of course, in addition to such long passages, one finds interspersed throughout the text of the poem short references on the changeability and deceptiveness of Fortune.

In a nutshell, the important values of integrity and stable truth are more often contradicted than illustrated in the plot of Lydgate's poem. In a world replete with deceit and "variaunce," where characters all too easily break their word or say one thing and mean another or act as signifiers connected not to unique meanings but to variable meanings, is it truly possible for "cronyc[u]leris" to be different and make any serious claims to encapsulate truth? The question is all the more warranted because, as I just mentioned, in a real sense Lydgate links writers and characters to each other in the <u>Troy Book</u>. Indeed, apart from the fact that Dares and Dictys are writers *and* participants in the events at Troy, other writers who are not strictly participating in the events described are

still associated with some of the characters through effects of diction and/or thematic

correspondences. For example, we saw in chapter 3 that Lydgate describes unreliable

poets and unreliable characters by using the same diction of rhetoric. Also, in IV.2780-

840, Achilles and Homer are lambasted simultaneously, one for his experiential deceit

and the other one for his textual deceit. Witness, for example, the content of the following

lines:

> O þou, Omer, for shame be now red,
> And be astonyd, þat haldest þi silfe so wyse,
> On Achilles to setten swiche a pris!
> In þi bokes for his chiualrie
> Above echon dost hym magnyfye,
> Þat was so sleighty & so ful of fraude! (IV.2784-89)[8]

In other words, the degree of credibility of the writer is here directly proportional to the

degree of credibility of his hero.

But, to come back to the above question as to whether "cronyc[u]leris" can truly

encapsulate truth, the answer provided by Lydgate's own text is at once an assertive

"yes" and a more nuanced "well, maybe not." On the one hand, the Troy Book does

everything in its power to valorize the writings of Dares and Dictys, the original

"cronyc[u]leris" of the Trojan War, by clearly stating that those two writers were present

at the siege of Troy (Pro.313 and V.3332, 3334)—and eyewitness accounts were deemed

amongst the most trustworthy historical texts in the Middle Ages (Given-Wilson 6).[9] The

reliability of the two accounts is even further strengthened by Lydgate's assertion that,

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[8] Lydgate's outburst occurs after Achilles has killed Troilus (who was at a disadvantage) and dragged his body through the field. Guido too upbraids Homer for the same reasons (204). However, Benoît does not mention Homer at this point in the narrative. (If he had, it would be at line 21451).

[9] However, Lydgate's text does not explain how Dares's and Dictys's alleged eyewitness status at the siege of Troy validates their accounts of the events that occurred before and after the actual conflict.

though Dares fought on the Trojan side and Dictys fought on the Greek side, both their versions are substantially the same (Pro.316 and V.3335-40). The reasoning is, of course, that if two enemies wrote almost identically about the same events, then truly the facts described in their narratives must have happened as such. So it is fair to say that Lydgate attempts to be perceived as historically accurate not merely by inscribing his work in the line of texts that in the Middle Ages were deemed to be true (Dares's <u>De excidio Troiae historia</u>, Dictys's <u>Ephemeris belli Troiani</u>, and Guido delle Colonne's <u>Historia destructionis Troiae</u>), but also by emphasizing himself what makes those sources reliable. On the other hand, as we have seen in previous chapters, throughout his narrative, Lydgate manages to express, directly and indirectly, a certain skepticism vis-à-vis the reliability of fame, books, and language. In previous chapters of this dissertation, I have also pointed out unsettling statements concerning the reliability of the particular narrative at hand: Lydgate's remark in the Prologue that he will translate the Troy story "yif I schal nat lye" (77) (see page 94 of this dissertation); the indirect possibility that Dares and Dictys might not have been totally honest when writing about their contemporaries (see page 95)—which effectively cancels out the privileged status of eyewitness accounts; and Lydgate's calling Dares a poet (see pages 118-19). The situation is made even more complicated by the fact that, as I have shown in this chapter, though dishonesty and "variaunce" at all levels prevail in Lydgate's narrative and writers, Dares's, Dictys's, Guido's, and Lydgate's narratives are yet said to be the product of honest endeavors on the writers' part. In other words, a tension between the untruth of the characters and the truth of those writers is created. Though deceit *inside* a narrative *by no means*

automatically affects the credibility of its writers, in this case, however, it does remind the reader that even "perfect" individuals have their flaws, people lie, and sometimes those individuals who most adamantly assert their truthfulness are the least reliable (see, for example, Jason's betrayal of Medea).

The impression that "cronyc[u]leris," like their characters, do not necessarily always adhere to the highest criteria of integrity is reinforced in the text of the poem by the fact that every now and then Lydgate drops a hint that he and his sources may not be the most trustworthy. It is important to understand that such comments on Lydgate's part are limited and Lydgate certainly never outrightly states that he and his sources do *not* tell the truth, for the Troy Book must continue to be perceived as a reliable text— especially given the circumstances of Lydgate's commission by the (future) monarch himself. Lydgate plays it safe by alternating casual observations that books and his own narrative encapsulate truth with other remarks that this may actually not be the case at all. For example, on the one hand, Lydgate inserts the following phrases attesting to the truthfulness of his narrative: "sothely þis no tale" (II.5181), "And as seith Dares, whiche list nat lye" (II.7715), "plainly þis no lye" (II.8151), "þis no fable" (III.2022), "þis þe verray trouthe" (III.2139), "þis no tale" (III.2435), "And þis þe soth" (III.2468), "þe story seith certeyn" (III.3688), "sothly, as I rede" (III.4600), "þe story wil nat lye" (V.1513), and "But þe story reherseth in certeyn" (V.1819). And yet, on the other hand, here and there, Lydgate opens up the possibility that his narrative and its sources are not necessarily reliable, as illustrated by the following phrases that pertain to the truthfulness of his text: "but yif bokis lye" (II.4456, II.4844, II.5580, III.4728), "[y]if I s[c]hal nat

feyne" (I.833, II.4821, II.7647, III.331, III.612, IV.29, V.838), "yif I s[c]hal nat lye"

(II.5195, II.7860, V.961), and "yif I report aright" (II.8483).[10] Of course, it could be

argued that most of those phrases (those that emphasize the truth of Lydgate's poem *as*

well as those that doubt it) come at the end of a line and, thus, are merely used as rhyme

tags and metrical fillers with no substantive meaning. However, I would suggest that

Lydgate was under no obligation to fill in lines with such information. When he needed a

filler or rhyme tag, he could have used phrases that pertain to a totally different lexical

field than the language of truth and un-truth.[11] Or, if he really did not want to express

himself on other topics, he could at least have avoided raising ambiguity about his own

text by leaving out phrases that doubt its truthfulness. A slight alteration to the

ambiguous phrases listed above would have easily turned them into short statements

unambiguously reinforcing the truthfulness of his text. Thus, instead of "but yif bokis

lye," Lydgate could have written "bokis wil nat lye"; "[y]if I s[c]hal nat feyne" could

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[10] Interestingly, some of Lydgate's characters use identical (or almost identical) phrases in the Troy Book.
For example, in Book II, Diomede insists on the truth of his words when he tries to convince the Greeks to
attack Troy now: "þis þe pleyn[e] trouþe" (7982), "for me list nat lye" (7987), and "What schulde I feyn or
fage fro þe trouþe" (7989). Similary, Hector says, "me lykeþ nat to lye" (III.3644), and Achilles makes the
following statements in Book IV, "To telle trouþe, me list nat for to feyne" (985), "þe sothe to expresse"
(996), "For þis is soth" (1064), and "I holde, in soth, (me liketh nat to lye)" (1815). But then at other times
some characters suggest that they might actually not be telling the truth: for instance, Agamemnon says,
"yif I schal nat feyne" (II.5302); Priam uses the exact same phrase at III.464 and IV.4819; so does Achilles
at IV.1125 and IV.1860; and at IV.3341 Ajax says, "but if bokes lye." Similarity of diction between writers
and their characters in Lydgate's poem contributes to creating a narrative world where writers of texts and
actors within those texts are conceptually brought, if not together, at least to some identity of purpose.

   I have found some evidence that in his Roman, Benoît de Sainte-Maure used similar phrases either
supporting or doubting the truthfulness of his sources. The following examples are all situated at the end of
(or go until the end of) a line: "se li Livres ne me ment" (6220) [if the book does not lie to me], "Ço dit li
Livres, qui ne ment" (14766) [thus reports the book, which does not lie], "Ço dit Daires, qui pas ne ment"
(15200) [thus reports Dares, who does not lie], and "Ç'afiche Daires, senz mentir" (19082) [thus states
Dares, without lying]. In Guido, I have found one comment on the truth of Dares ("ut Daretis liber pro
ueritate testatur" [145]; as the book of Dares testifies as truth) and no comment doubting the truth of the
sources.

[11] Along the same lines, see my comments regarding Lydgate's textual allusions in the Troy Book on pages
37-38 of this dissertation.

have been replaced by "and I s[c]hal nat feyne"; and, along the same lines, Lydgate could

have written "and I s[c]hal nat lye" as well as "and I report aright." But far from doing so,

Lydgate decided to use phrases that insert doubt in his narrative. And what more

convenient way to discreetly express skepticism in a poem commissioned for the king

and—as the Prologue explains—for the moral elevation of the nation than by doing so at

the level of rhyme tags and metrical fillers, which can easily be *thought* to have been

added for prosodic reasons solely.

There are other instances in the <u>Troy Book</u> where Lydgate implies that he does

not fully trust his sources. For example, in chapter 1, I mentioned how Lydgate registers

skepticism when he discusses some statues described by Dares in his book (III.4808-

14).[12] Another interesting passage occurs earlier in Book III. In it, it is possible to discern

a Lydgate who is skeptical of both Dares's and Guido's accounts. The doubt pertains to a

statement which appears in Dares's book and is repeated by Guido, namely that during a

particular battle Hector killed a thousand Greeks after having been wounded in the back

by Duke Menestheus. Here is how Lydgate expresses his doubt:

> For in his boke lik as writ Darete,
> For verray soth, and in þe stori seith
> (Yif it be so þat men may yeue feyth
> And credence of possibilite,
> As in Guydo clerly ye may se),
> Aftir þat he caught his lattre wounde,
> Finally Grekis to confounde
> —So as it is affermed in certeyn—
> A þousand knyghtes with his hond wer slayn,
> With-oute hem þo, þat I spak of rath! (III.1926-35)

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[12] See pages 53-54 of this dissertation.

What is particularly interesting about this passage is that Lydgate juxtaposes the vocabulary of trust in books with the vocabulary of doubt. In between Lydgate's saying that Dares has affirmed "[f]or verray soth, and in þe stori seith" (1927)—for reminder, "stori" is here to be understood to mean "history"—and his reiterating that "[s]o as it is affermed in certeyn" (1933) that Hector killed so many Greeks, he has actually managed to express skepticism as to whether one should ever believe such type of information: "Yif it be so þat men may yeue feyth / And credence of possibilite" (1928-29). Lydgate adds that believing in such type of information is exactly what Guido did in his book— and this, of course, constitutes a stab at Guido as well. In other words, in the very midst of a passage asserting his trust in his textual source, Lydgate displays clear uncertainty about the reliability of the said text. Such a core doubt inserted in the middle of repeated assertions of truth is, in my view, very indicative of the type of subdued skepticism about truth that Lydgate displays in his Troy Book.

4.2 The moral lesson to be learned?

In chapter 2, I explained that when Lydgate talks about how he, his sources, and "clerkis" preserve the truth, he not only means factual truth but also moral truth. This is not at all surprising, for in the Christian Middle Ages, people considered history to be morally useful. In fact, starting with the twelfth century, "[t]he moral value of history became an element in the introductory apologia for almost any standard history book" (Murray 131), and this feature is clearly emphasized in Lydgate's Prologue. It is, therefore, particularly fitting that we try to determine whether the moral valence of

history finds itself corroborated and illustrated in the rest of the poem. There are two ways to proceed in this inquiry. The first one is by looking at whether Lydgate mentions a historical text within the plot of his Troy Book and shows the type of effect generated by this history on the characters inside the plot. The second one is by analyzing Lydgate's poem itself as history and the effectiveness of its moral lesson.

4.2.1 The historical text within and its didactic effectiveness

With respect to the first approach, the Troy Book does not deploy *inside* its classical, historical plot another history of the kind that a medieval reader would unhesitatingly associate with the work of a "well-established" historian. For example, no character inside the plot is described in the action of reading a text recognized as being a history in the sense that Guido's Historia destructionis Troiae was considered by its medieval audience to be a history. There is, however, a historical "text" that is mentioned, actually elaborated on by Lydgate, and which reminds one not only of the types of reliable historical texts—the chronicles—that Lydgate describes in his Prologue but even more of his own Troy Book. I am here referring to Lydgate's description of tragedies in Book II, both his description of their content and to a large extent of their delivery. The passage occurs in the section of Book II that deals with the reconstruction of Troy by Priam after the old city of Troy—formerly ruled by Priam's father, Lamedon—was destroyed by the Greeks. The city of New Troy not only boasts superbly designed streets and buildings but also provides many diversions to its inhabitants. For example, manly sports are organized in this place, and the city is said to be the birthplace

of chess, dice, backgammon, and comedies and tragedies. Lydgate indicates his interest in comedies and, mostly, tragedies by dwelling on them for 86 lines (II.842-926), as opposed to Guido's one sentence concerning the matter.[13] In these 86 lines, Lydgate first provides generic definitions of comedies and tragedies and then focuses on how dramatic tragedies were performed in classical Antiquity. In this context Lydgate specifies that tragedies pertain to historical events. Indeed, they rehearse

> Þe noble dedis, þat wer historial,
> Of kynges, princes for a memorial,
> And of þes olde, worþi Emperours,
> Þe grete emprises eke of conquerours. (II.869-72)[14]

Before explaining why in the case of the <u>Troy Book</u> the concepts of history and tragedy are closely linked, I want to make it very clear that, as a rule, the definitions of tragedies and histories were *not* interchangeable in the Middle Ages. Medieval tragedies were understood to be "the story of a person of high status who, deservedly or not, [was] brought from prosperity to wretchedness by an unpredictable turn of the wheel of fortune" (Abrams 332). As this definition suggests, medieval tragedies referred to any type of narrative work—not drama like in classical Antiquity. The most well-known collection of tragedies in England in the Middle Ages was Chaucer's <u>Monks's Tale</u> in the <u>Canterbury Tales</u>.[15] Another influential collection was Lydgate's massive <u>Fall of Princes</u>. Lydgate provides his own definition of tragedies in Book II of the <u>Troy Book</u>:

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[13] "Ibi tragedie et comedie dicuntur primitus insitute, quamuis quidam asserant in insula Sicilie inuentam fuisse primitus comediam" (49). [There they say tragedy and comedy were first instituted, although some claim comedy was first devised on the island of Sicily.]

[14] In chapter 3, I already briefly commented on this passage: see pages 117-18, footnote 27.

[15] The first stanza of the <u>Monk's Tale</u> characterizes tragedies the following way:
I wol biwaille in manere of tragedie
The harm of hem that stoode in heigh degree,

> But tragidie, who so list to knowe,
> It begynneth in prosperite,
> And endeth euer in aduersite;
> And it also doth þe conquest trete
> Of riche kynges and of lordys grete,
> Of myghty men and olde conquerou[ri]s,
> Whiche by fraude of Fortunys schowris
> Ben ouercast & whelmed for her glorie. (II.852-59)[16]

Notice that, though right after these lines Lydgate focuses on how he believes ancient

dramatic tragedies were performed (see my comments on page 174), the definition that he

provides in II.852-59 pertains to medieval narrative tragedy, not ancient dramatic

tragedies.[17] Though Lydgate was aware of the existence of dramatic tragedies in the

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> And fillen so that ther nas no remedie
> To brynge hem out of hir adversitee.
> For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee,
> Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde. (VII.1991-96)

In essence, for Chaucer, tragedy pertains to people of high standing who fall from grace through the workings of Fortune (a clear borrowing from Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy).

[16] On the other hand, medieval comedies were non-dramatic stories which dealt with the fortunes of lower-class individuals and which moved from troubled beginnings to happy endings. In Book II of the Troy Book, Lydgate also provides a definition of comedies:

> A comedie hath in his gynnyng,
> At prime face, a maner compleynyng,
> And afterward endeth in gladnes;
> And it þe dedis only doth expres
> Of swiche as ben in pouert plounged lowe. (II.847-51)

[17] The classic definition of tragedy in Antiquity was the one provided in the fourth century B.C. by Aristotle in his Poetics. In this work, Aristotle viewed tragedy as

> mimesis of an action which is elevated, complete, and of magnitude; in language embellished by distinct forms in its sections; employing the mode of enactment, not narrative; and through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions. (VI.49b23-28)

This rather straightforward definition did not prevent Aristotle from holding contrary positions in the rest of the Poetics. For instance, nondramatic narratives (like the Odyssey and the Iliad) were part of his discussion of tragedy as well. Aristotle's Poetics had no influence on Latin Antiquity and was hardly known in the Middle Ages (Kelly, Ideas and Forms 1). For example, it is to be noted that the concept of catharsis does not exist in any other classical or medieval theory of tragedy (2-3). Certainly, neither Chaucer nor Lydgate were directly influenced by Aristotle's views on tragedy. Lydgate's definition of tragedy that he provides in the Troy Book is clearly much closer to Chaucer's definition of tragedy (see footnote 15 above) than any classical concept of tragedy.

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ancient world, his actual knowledge of such plays must have been very scant at best.[18] Obviously, for him, the subject matter of a classical tragedy was no different from a medieval tragedy.

The concept of history in the Middle Ages is a bit trickier to define. As Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis explains about the subject of history, "It is difficult to assess precisely what all medieval historians thought they were doing, because there are very few theoretical treatises devoted to the writing of history" (3). Most generally, it was accepted that *historia* was a text that described the events of the past in a truthful manner. For example, Isidore of Seville's discussion of *historia* in Book I of his Etymologiae clearly contrasted history to fiction: "Nam historiae sunt res verae quae factae sunt; . . . fabulae vero sunt quae nec factae sunt nec fiery possunt, quia contra naturam sunt" (I.44.5). [*Historiae* are things which really have been done; . . . *fabulae* are things which neither have been nor could be done, since they are contrary to nature.] [19] Amongst the other writers who discussed the truthfulness of history, one finds Bede and Hugh of St. Victor, who alluded to the topic in the Historia ecclesiastica and the De sacramentis, respectively.[20] So, there was a concensus on the importance of truth, though it is also the case that various authors seem to have interpreted the notion of truth differently. But, apart from the "agreement" on truth, there was no one definition regarding the kind of

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[18] See Henry Ansgar Kelly "The Dramatic Tragedy of Old Troy," Chaucerian Tragedy, 151-66. Kelly's Chaucerian Tragedy provides an excellent and in-depth study of Chaucer's idea of tragedy as well as Lydgate's and Henryson's. For a larger historical survey of the notion of tragedy, see by the same author Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages.

[19] It is also worth pointing out that Isidore viewed history as a type of prose writing and as such classified it as a branch of grammar. Other theorists considered it to be part of rhetoric.

[20] The allusions are to be found in the preface of Bede's Historia and the prologue to Hugh's De sacramentis.

subject matter that was to be included in histories. The term *historia* could be applied to texts as diverse as universal histories, local histories, national histories, institutional histories, biographies of major rulers, hagiographies, and histories of recent wars. Furthermore, "[m]any historians mixed format or subject matter or both in one text—a little hagiography, a little annal, a little universal history, a little eyewitness account, a little brevity, a little prolixity" (Deliyannis 6).[21] So, to sum up, in the Middle Ages, whereas the general definition of "tragedy" looked at the social class of the protagonist(s) and the downward movement of the plot, "history" was really only defined by its relationship to actual events. That does not mean, however, that those terms could not at times overlap. For example, Chaucer's Monk's Tale is not only a collection of tragedies but also of brief histories (Strohm, "*Storie*" 848).

To now come back to Lydgate, it is certainly apposite that we try to determine how he defines "history" in his Troy Book, if at all. Though Lydgate uses the word "story" in his poem numerous times, he never provides the reader with a neat, convenient definition of "history." However, in the Prologue, right after explaining how one night in 1412 he set about to translate the "Troye Boke," he does discuss at length the work of writers as preservers of cultural memories, especially historical facts. Here, he elaborates on the concept of truth in histories—which was, as we just saw, the defining characteristic of history. Apart from that, Lydgate also describes the type of protagonists whose memory is kept alive in historical texts: worthy knights and conquerors. Indeed,

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[21] As regards format, see also my earlier comment on how by and large the distinctions between chronicle and history were blurred in the Middle Ages (page 83, footnote 24).

    The information concerning the description of *historia* comes from Deborah Mauskopf Delyannis's introduction in Historiography in the Middle Ages. The translation of Isidore of Seville that I here provide is also Delyannis's (3).

notice how in the passage below the focus is clearly on aristocratic heroes involved in

military action:

> For ner her writyng nowe memorial,
> Dethe with his swerde schulde haue slay[e]n al,
> And y-dymmed with his sodeyn schoures
> The gret[e] prowes of thise *conquerouris*,
> And dirk[ed] eke the brightnesse of her fame,
> That schyneth yet by report of her name;
> For vn-to vs her bokes represent
> With-out[e] feynynge þe weie þat þei went
> In her daies, whan thei wer alyue.
> Ageyn the trouthe who so euere stryue,
> Or counterplete or make any debate,
> The sothe is rad of *highe or lowe estate*,
> With-oute fauour, who so list take hede;
> . . . .
> And by olde tyme for her writing trewe
> Thei cherisched werne of *lordes* þat hem knewe,
> And honoured gretly in tho dawes;
> For they enacted and gilte with ther sawes
> *Her hyghe renoun, her manhood and prowes,*
> *Her knighthood eke and her worthynes,*
> *Her tryvmphes also and victories,*
> *Her famous conquest and her songe glories*,
> From poynt to poynt rehersyng al þe trouthe,
> With-out[e] fraude, necgligence, or slowthe
> Thei dide her labour and her besynesse.
> For elles certeyn *the grete worthynesse*
> *Of her dedis* hadde ben in veyn;
> For-dirked age elles wolde haue slayn
> By lenthe of yeris *þe noble worthi fame*
> *Of conquerours*, and pleynly *of her name*
> For-dymmed eke *the lettris aureat*,
> And diffaced *the palme laureat*,
> Whiche þat þei wan by *knyghthod* in her dayes. (Pro.171-213; italics mine)[22]

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[22] Line 182 "The sothe is rad of highe or lowe estate" probably means that "the truth is read *by* high and low" rather than "the truth is read *about* high and low." Indeed, the passage as a whole (Pro.171-213) indicates that the truth of historical texts overwhelmingly concerns itself with the warring upper classes, not the lower classes. Furthermore, earlier in the Prologue, Lydgate has used similar language to state that Henry V wanted everybody to be able to read the story of Troy in English: "he wolde that to hyghe and lowe / The noble story openly wer knowe / In oure tonge" (Pro.111-13).

A careful reading of this long passage reveals interesting similarities with Lydgate's
(shorter) descriptions of the types of protagonists featured in tragedies. Indeed, in
Lydgate's definition of "tragedy," which I quoted above, one finds that such a narrative
"doth þe *conquest* trete / Of riche kynges and of *lordys* grete, / Of myghty men and olde
conquerou[ri]s" (II.855-57; italics mine). A few lines later, Lydgate describes how the
tragedy is told by an old poet who rehearses:

> Þe *noble dedis*, þat wer historial,
> Of kynges, princes for a *memorial*,
> And of þes olde, worþi Emperours,
> Þe grete emprises eke of *conquerours*,
> And how þei gat in Martis highe honour
> Þe laurer grene for fyn of her labour,
> Þe *palme of knyghthod* disservid by [old] date. (II.869-75; italics mine)

So, what we see in Lydgate's characterization of historical texts in Pro.171-213 is that,
just like for tragedies, they deal with protagonists of an elevated social status, namely the
warring aristocracy. Yet, the similarity does not stop here. In addition to understanding
history to be about individuals of a particular social class, Lydgate inserts in his history of
Troy another element that is usually associated with tragedy: changeable Fortune. I have
already noted earlier in this chapter that the theme of Fortune is very much emphasized
and omnipresent in the <u>Troy Book</u>.[23] Lydgate himself is, of course, aware of the thematic
emphasis that he has inserted in Guido's history of Troy. Thus, when at the end of Book
V he summarizes the general dynamics of his plot, he does not fail to point out the
importance of Fortune in his poem (and in the same passage he also reminds his reader of

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[23] See page 152-53.

the truthfulness of his account and of the high standing of its protagonists). Speaking of

his (potentially critical) readers, Lydgate explains:

> And þough so be þat þei nat ne rede
> In al þis boke no rethorikes newe,
> Yit I hope þei shal fynde *trewe*
> Þe story *pleyn*, *chefly in substaunce*.
> And who-so liste to se *variaunce*,
> Of worldly þing wrought be daies olde,
> In þis boke he may ful wel beholde
> *Chaunge of Fortune, in hir cours mutable,*
> *Selde or nat faithful ouþer stable,*
> *Lordes, princes from her royalte*
> *Sodeinly brought in aduersite,*
> *And kynges eke plounged in pouert.*
> *And for drede darynge in desert,—*
> *Vnwar slaughter compassed of envie,*
> *Mordre execut by conspirasie,*
> *Await[e] liggyng falshede and tresoun.* (V.3540-55; italics mine)

After listing some other instances of reversals of fortune, Lydgate then proceeds to

conclude that one should not trust the things of this world but that one should only put

one's trust in Christ. Notice the similarity between Lydgate's comments on the

changeability of Fortune inside his Trojan narrative and the effects of Fortune in the

Greek tragedy recited by the "aw[n]cien poete":

> How pitously þei [conquerors] made her mortal ende
> Þorugh fals Fortune, þat al þe world wil schende,
> And howe þe fyn of al her worþines
> Endid in sorwe and [in] highe tristesse,
> By compassyng of fraude or fals tresoun,
> By sodeyn mordre or vengaunce of poysoun,
> Or conspiringe of fretyng fals envye,
> How vnwarly [þat] þei dide dye. (II.883-90)

So from the information on "history" that we can glean from Lydgate's

introductory and concluding sections as well as the actual poem, it is clear that Lydgate

envisages his history of Troy to possess the characteristics of a tragedy. Indeed, for

Lydgate, the history of Troy is not only a truthful narrative, but it also recounts the fall from fortune of people of high standing. In a real sense, then, Lydgate's Troy Book is, if not a tragedy, at least a tragic history. I hesitate to call Lydgate's poem a full-fledged tragedy for a number of reasons. First, though the city of Troy is destroyed in the Troy Book, Lydgate's poem does not really end in the utter misery that we are used to seeing in tragedies. The Troy Book actually ends on a rather positive note with Ulysses's legitimate son, Telamon, forgiving his half-brother, Telegonus, for the murder of their father. Moreoever, Telamon and Telegonus lead quite successful lives: they become monarchs of their respective islands, which they rule for several decades (Telamon for seventy years and Telegonus for sixty years). After that, "þei made a royal ende, / And boþe two to Iubiter þei wende, / To regne þere among þe sterris bright." (V.3323-25). Neither Guido's Historia nor Benoît's Roman mentions such a reunion after death. As Robert R. Edwards explains, "Lydgate's addition recalls Castor and Pollux, the ideal figures of brothers united in death" (Troy Book: Selections endnote to V.3323-25). Thus, the ending of the poem contains a distinct message of hope, namely that forgiveness yields far better results than revenge, whose wretched consequences have been clearly demonstrated throughout the Troy Book. Second, Lydgate himself does not call his Troy Book a tragedy but a history. Within the context of his Troy Book, he only employs the word "tragedie" to refer to ancient drama—at least at face value, since (as I observed earlier) Lydgate's actual *definition* of "tragedie" pertains to the medieval narrative genre, not the classical dramatic genre. Third, history clearly differs from tragedy by its emphasis on the factual truthfulness of the events narrated, and of course the Troy Book

makes a distinct point to highlight its own truthfulness and thus identifies itself primarily as a history. Fourth, the one poem that Lydgate wrote and unhesitatingly called a collection of tragedies was the <u>Fall of Princes</u>.[24] In his work at large, Lydgate tends to reserve the word tragedy to refer to either ancient dramatic tragedies (as in the <u>Troy Book</u>) or relatively short narratives about the downfall of one (or a limited number of) individual(s) of high status (in effect, stories in the *de casibus* tradition).[25] This seems to leave out texts like the <u>Troy Book</u>. On the other hand, Lydgate's understanding of "tragedy" does not, of course, preclude the existence of tragic characteristics inside his <u>Troy Book</u>, as my analysis has just revealed. In addition, it is undoubtedly the case that individual episodes inside Lydgate's Trojan narrative constitute small-scale tragedies in their own right.

Take, for example, Penthesilea's role in the story of Troy. She is the Queen of the Amazons, not only virtuous, wise, and discreet, but also a fierce warrior renowned for her successful conquests. She and her Amazons come to the rescue of Troy, fight the Greeks very courageously, and kill many Greek fighters. However, one day, Fortune turns her face away from the Queen:

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[24] In his monograph <u>John Lydgate's </u>Fall of Princes<u>: Narrative Tragedy in its Literary and Political Contexts</u>, Nigel Mortimer lists the several occurrences of the word "tragedy" in the <u>Fall of Princes</u> (218).

[25] Significantly, in the Middle Ages, the word "tragedy" and the phrase "*de casibus*" quickly became interchangeable in English (Mortimer 157).

   In his analysis of how Lydgate uses the word "tragedy" outside of his <u>Fall of Princes</u>, Nigel Mortimer also points out three instances where Lydgate refers to tragedies in the context of a funeral. Because of this, Mortimer concludes that Lydgate's "understanding of tragedy overlaps to a large degree with the category of the *planctus*: pathos (or 'pite') is so much a facet of the Lydgatean tragedy that it can seem that 'tragedy' is for him sometimes nothing more than a catch-all term meaning 'sad story'" (215). There is certainly a lot of pathos in the <u>Troy Book</u>, which means that, here again, Lydgate's history partakes of a characteristic that he also includes in his notion of tragedy. I will return to Lydgate's focus on pathos in his <u>Troy Book</u> later in this chapter.

> But she [Fortune] þat can euery day so varie,
> Allas þe while! & selde in oon soiourne,
> Gan fro þis quene hir loke aweie to turne,
> To enhaste þorugh hir vngoodlyhede
> Antropos to breke hir lyves threde. (IV.4274-78)

Those lines about the changeability of Fortune have been added by Lydgate to Guido's text; Guido says no such thing at this point. Fortune's change of mind leads to Penthesilea's death at the hands of Pyrrhus during an ensuing combat. Another example would be Agamemnon's demise. Agamemnon, a Greek king who is also Helen's brother-in-law, is made leader of the Greek expedition to Troy. Throughout the <u>Troy Book</u>, he proves to be a skillful warrior and an adept leader of men. His presence fills the pages of Books II through V of Lydgate's poem. Very much ironically, this noble warrior meets his end not on the battlefield but in a purely domestic environment when upon his return home he is murdered by his wife's lover. Here too Lydgate makes sure to add the central influence of Fortune to Guido's version of the facts:

> O Fortune, fals and vnassured,
> Þat [to] no man was neuer fully lured,
> To highe nor lowe of no maner estat,
> With bond of feith to be confederat;
> Ageyn whos myght no man may him diffende,
> But at his torne þat he shal descende
> Whan he sit highest on þin vnstable whele,—
> Þi brotel fauour, forgid not of stele,
> Meynt and allaied with mutabilite:
> For welfulnesse and fals felicite
> With sodeyn swigh forward þou canst avale!
> Now freshe of chere, now for anger pale,
> Of highe disdeyn þou sparest no degre;
> For princes, dukes, highest in her se,
> Mighti kynges & worþi Emperours
> Þat richest regne in her royal floures,
> With sceptre & crowne þou canst pulle doun!
> I take witnesse of Agamenoun,
> Þat was so noble & myghti in his lyve,
> As soundry auctours his highe renoun discrive;

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But, sothfastly, for al his excellence,
He myght[e] nat make no diffence,
With alle þe kynges þat his baner swe,
Conspired mordre to voiden & eschewe.
Reskus was noon þat he koude make! (V.1019-43)

My two examples regarding Penthesilea and Agamemnon mainly take place within the

central war narrative of the poem. However, the Troy Book also showcases small-scale

tragedies that, in large part, take place outside the war narrative. This is the case for the

Troilus and Criseyde episode in Lydgate's poem. As we know, it is very closely based on

Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, which poem Chaucer unambiguously identifies as a

"tragedye" (V.1786).[26] As in Chaucer's poem (and Guido's text), Lydgate narrates

Troilus's fall from an enviable position as prince of Troy and lover to Criseyde to his

agonizing loss of Criseyde, her betrayal of him, and his eventual death in combat. Even

more significant, as in Chaucer's poem, deceitful Fortune plays a crucial role in the

protagonist's adversity: see the narrator's outburst against Fortune when Troilus learns

that Criseyde will have to leave Troy (III.4077-87). As in my previous two examples,

Fortune does not play any such role in Guido's text. Interestingly, Robert R. Edwards has

made the following comment about Lydgate's passage describing Criseyde's departure

for the Greek camp:

> Lydgate presents Troilus's story as if it were a *de casibus* tragedy, an
> example illustrating the general principle of Fortune's mutability as in the
> Fall of Princes, which he translated from Boccaccio's De casibus virorum
> illustrium, rather than the individualized, subjective experience that
> Chaucer emphasizes. (endnote to III.4075-448)

I would add that there are many more passages in the Troy Book where Lydgate uses a

character's great adversity to illustrate the deceitfulness of Fortune (my examples with

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[26] Chaucer himself partly based his poem on Guido's Historia destructionis Troiae.

Penthesilea and Agamemnon are only two of them), and so Edwards's comment could be applied to other such passages in Lydgate's poem. At any rate, it is clear that, as far as my three examples are concerned, though Lydgate does not *call* these episodes tragedies, they are well and truly small tragedies included in the larger framework of the Trojan history—and here too my comment applies to all other passages that deal with downturns of Fortune in a similar manner in the Troy Book.[27] In addition to those types of mini-tragedies inside the main plot of Lydgate's poem, the overarching narrative of the city of Troy's downfall is presented as resulting from the whims of Fortune, who in Book I misleads Lamedon into believing that Jason's men have landed on the Trojan coast with harmful intentions, for "þe ordre of Fortunys myght / Hath euere envy þat men lyue in ese" (I.750-51). As a result of this, the city of Troy is eventually destroyed (I.765-68) and "many [a] man and many [a] worþi knyghte / Were slawe þer, and many lady bryghte / Was wydowe made by duresse of þis werre" (I.769-71). Because of all the evidence that I have here accumulated, it is then, I believe, accurate to characterize Lydgate's Troy Book as a tragic history. Indeed, Lydgate's poem not only displays several features that are

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[27] Interestingly, when right after Hector's death, Lydgate is briefly at a loss for words as to how to write further, he implicitly compares Hector's life story to a dramatic tragedy. Indeed, Lydgate says that the muses cannot help him here:

> For no discorde is founden hem among,
> In her mvsik þei bene entvnyd so—
> It syt hem nought for to help in wo,
> Nor with maters þat be with mournynge shent,
> As tragedies, al to-tore and rent,
> In compleynynge pitously in rage
> In þe theatre, with a ded visage. (III.5436-42)

I disagree with Henry Ansgar Kelly's statement that "[t]here is no suggestion here that Lydgate himself is writing a tragedy in telling of Hector's fall or of the lamentation that followed it" (Chaucerian Tragedy 156).

usually associated with tragedies but more specifically contains within its main plot several small-scale tragedies.[28]

To summarize what we have seen so far, the tragedies that Lydgate discusses in the section on New Troy in Book II bear interesting similarities with the type of history that Lydgate presents *inside* the Troy Book as well as exemplifies *by* the Troy Book. In the previous pages, much of my discussion has focused on similarities in *content* between the concepts of history and tragedy in the Troy Book. But there are other similarities that I have not touched on yet, namely similarities in the delivery of the Troy Book and the

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[28] As further evidence that tragedies and histories were not necessarily completely separate genres in the late Middle Ages, I want to point out two instances of the word "tragedy" that are (almost) contemporary to Lydgate. My first example comes from Chaucer's "Monk's Prologue," which explains that tragedies

> ben versified communely
> Of six feet, which men clepen *exametron*.
> In prose eek been endited many oon,
> And eek in meetre in many a sondry wyse. (VII.1978-81)

Henry Ansgar Kelly has convincingly argued that the dactylic hexameter mentioned in line 1979 means that, for Chaucer, classical epics like Lucan's Pharsalia, Statius's Thebaid, parts of Vergil's Aeneid, and parts of Ovid's Metamorphoses were tragedies too. In addition, Chaucer's definition includes other types of meter as well as prose. Kelly specifies, "Perhaps Chaucer felt it necessary to include works in prose in order to account for Boccaccio's De casibus and Guido of LeColonne's Historia destructionis Troje" (Chaucerian Tragedy 61). This is important for our purposes, for, as we know, Lydgate considered both Statius's Thebaid and Guido's Historia to be histories (see pages 86-89 of this dissertation for Statius). By pointing this out, I do not mean to imply that Lydgate necessarily paid particular attention to Chaucer's definition of the forms of tragedy and agreed with this definition. I only mean to suggest that the Monk's Tale, which we know Lydgate read, presents a rather flexible definition of the forms of tragedy, and this definition could have exerted some influence on early fifteenth-century understandings of tragedy.

My second example comes from a history by Thomas Walsingham, the Benedictine monk and chronicler who was Lydgate's contemporary and whose writings Lydgate was probably familiar with. (See my comments on Walsingham earlier in this dissertation page 81, footnote 22 and page 82, footnote 23.) In his Chronicon angliae, Walsingham refers to a crime committed in 1378 in Westminster Abbey as a matter "plus quam tragicam" [more than tragic], and when narrating the Peasant Revolt of 1381 he refers to the crimes committed in London as a "tragoediam" [tragedy] and calls his whole account a "tragicam historiam" [a tragic history]. In these instances, "tragedy" seems to be synonymous with "crime" (Kelly, Chaucerian Tragedy 45; "Non-Tragedy" 94). Since the Latin word "tragedia" was by no means widely known in England at the time, it is possible that Walsingham became familiar with it through his knowledge of classical literature. At any rate, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is interesting to see Walsingham use the word "tragedy" in a historical context. Again, as with my first example, I here do not wish to imply that Lydgate knew of this particular lexical choice in Walsingham's chronicle, paid attention to it, and gave it some thought. (I am not aware that Lydgate even read Walsingham's chronicle.) I only mean to show that the spheres of history and tragedy could at times intersect in late-medieval England.

delivery of the tragedies in the new city of Troy. Both "texts" (that is, Lydgate's poem

and the tragedies) are narrated by a poet-figure. In the case of the Troy Book, the narrator

is supposed to be John Lydgate himself, even though it is unclear to what extent

Lydgate's public persona as presented in the poem accurately corresponds to his real self.

(For example, it is safe to say that Lydgate's modesty as far as his rhetorical skill is

concerned is a mere posture, a type of poetic fiction at its best.) [29] As for the tragedies,

they are said or sung by "an aw[n]cien poete" in a theater (II.867). While the poet stands

in the pulpit and tells the tragedies, actors—their faces covered with masks—mime the

action below him. Except for the fact that Lydgate presents himself as writing his text

whereas the classical poet recites his text in a theater (or does he? more about this later),

both Lydgate and the "aw[n]cien poete" deliver their texts in ways that bear interesting

similarities. For one thing, the "aw[n]cien poete" who tells the tragedies does so "by

rethorikes swete" (II.868), a stylistic characteristic that we also associate with Lydgate

himself—though, as I just mentioned above, Lydgate outwardly plays the part of an

unskillful poet in the Troy Book. More importantly, the Trojan poet displays much pathos

when reciting his tragedies. For example, he tells about his protagonists' downfall "with

chere and face pale" (II.877). The poet stands in the pulpit "With dedly face al devoide

of blood" (II.898). The actors below emphasize the poignancy of the situation even

further, for there is "no maner discordaunce / Atwen his [the poet's] dites and her

contenaunce" (II.905-06). Thus, when the poet gets to the more moving passages, the

actors change their masks to express sorrow (II.907-16). Interestingly enough, Lydgate

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[29] See pages 63-64 of this dissertation.

too shows himself to be very emotionally involved with his materials in the <u>Troy Book</u>.

In chapter 1, I pointed out two passages where the narrator's hand trembles due to his

emotional involvement in the action of the plot. This is, for example, the case when he is

at a loss as to how to write about Hector's death:

> But now, allas! How shal I procede
> In þe story, þat for wo and drede
> Fele myn hond boþe tremble and quake
> O worþi Hector, only for þi sake,
> Of þi deth I am so loth to write. (III.5423-27)

Lydgate also reacts very emotionally when he is about to report the murder of

Agamemnon: "For whiche, allas! my penne I fele quake, / Þat doth myn ynke blotten on

my boke" (V.1044-45). There are many other passages where Lydgate displays much

pathos. In the following example, the narrator rails against Achilles for planning to kill

Troilus in a dishonorable way, and he feels his heart bleeding with sadness:

> Lo! here a manhod for to preise a-right!
> Vengaunce of deth, of rancour, & of pride,
> Compassid tresoun, knyghthod leyde a-side!
> Worþines be envie slawe,
> Falshed alofte, trouþe a-bak y-drawe!
> Allas! in armys þat it shulde falle,
> Of trecherie þat þe bitter galle
> Shuld in þis world in any knyght be founde,
> Þat be to trouþe of her order bounde!
> Allas, allas! for now þis Achilles
> Conspired haþ with his Mirundones
> Þe deth of oon þe worþiest[e] wyght
> Þat euere was, and þe beste knyght!
> Allas! for wo myn herte I fele blede
> For his sake, þis story whan I rede. (IV.2668-82)

Notice the repeated interjection "allas" as well as the overall histrionic quality of the

whole passage. And, again, later when Lydgate describes Polyxena's murder at the hands

of Pyrrhus, he adds a lot of pathos to Guido's more direct account of the facts. Lydgate

reports on how he is astonished by Pyrrhus's cruelty. In fact, he is so involved by the

action of the plot that he even addresses his character Pyrrhus in his poem:

> Allas! how myght his cruel herte endure,
> Merciles to done so foule a dede!
> I am astonid, sothly, whan I rede,
> After hir deth, how it dide hym good,
> Like a tiraunte to cast abrood hir blood,
> Or a tigre, þat can no routhe haue,
> Rounde enviroun aboute his fadris graue
> He spreint of hate and of cruelte.
> O þou Pirrus! þou maist [ful] wel [y-]be
> Achilles sone by lineal discent;
> For like to hym of herte & of entent
> Þou wer, in soth, deuoide of al pite,
> And wers þan he yit in o degre:
> For of þi fader in al his lyvynge
> Ne redde I neuere yit so foule a þing
> —Þough I wold of hatrede hym abraide—
> For no rancour þat euere he slow a maide! (IV.6858-74)

There are many such passages in the Troy Book where Lydgate shows himself to have a

very emotional relationship with his own text. Certainly, we may assume that if sections

of the Troy Book were ever read aloud for an audience the narrator's whole demeanor

would have reflected the emotional content of the events, in a way not unlike what the

tragic poet does inside the poem. But there is a final element in Lydgate's text that links

the Trojan poet to Lydgate himself. When Lydgate describes how the tragic poet narrates

the downfall of famous men, he specifies that after telling of their successful conquests,

the poet "With stile enclyned gan to turne his tale, / And for to synge, after al her loos, /

Ful mortally þe stroke of Antropos" (II.878-80). This description is of course

problematic, for in Lydgate's image the poet who is *reciting* the tragedy also appears to

be *writing* it "With stile enclyned." Or, if we are to take this image figuratively, it still

does not take away the fact that a reciting poet is here associated with the world of

writing. The image is all the more significant because most often in the <u>Troy Book</u>, when

Lydgate mentions a "stile," he is actually talking about his *own* pen. Thus, the visual

detail of the pen reinforces the impression that Lydgate has in a way inserted a version of

himself in his own poem.

Indeed, it is amazing how much the description of the Trojan tragic poet fits

Lydgate himself. As we have seen above, Lydgate and the Trojan poet both narrate texts

that bear similarities of content. Now it also appears that they both use sweet rhetoric and

abundant emotions to narrate their stories and that they are both associated with the

image of a pen. Some might argue that the fact that Lydgate's Trojan alter ego is called a

"poete," a term that Lydgate overwhelmingly tends to associate with mendacious activity,

affects the credibility of my comparison. (Why would Lydgate so openly want to

compare himself to a poet?) However, the activities of this particular poet are not

described in the negative terms that Lydgate uses so frequently in the <u>Troy Book</u> when he

discusses poets. In fact, there is not as much as a remote hint of criticism included in the

passage. On the contrary, this particular poet reminds us much of the writers of true (or

seemingly true) history described by Lydgate in his Prologue (195-225).[30] Because of the

similarity between the Trojan poet and Lydgate, I think it appropriate that we consider

the episode on tragedies in ancient Troy as a type of *mise-en-abyme* of Lydgate's

historical project in the <u>Troy Book</u>. The <u>Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms</u>

explains that *mise-en-abyme* refers to "an internal reduplication of a literary work or part

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[30] See also my earlier comments pages 117-18, footnote 27. I use the phrase "seemingly true" because, as I
have shown in chapter 2 of this dissertation, the difference between history and fiction is blurred in
Lydgate's very Prologue that also attempts to differentiate both concepts.

of a work." In other words, Lydgate has inserted within his <u>Troy Book</u> a text that reminds

one of his own tragic history. I am not suggesting that the dramatic performances in Troy

in any way enact Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> or parts of his book. It would be quite unrealistic

for the events at Troy to already be written down before they actually take place.

However, I do believe that, because of the way they are defined by Lydgate, the Trojan

tragedies embody the same type of text as Lydgate's poem and as such somehow

represent inside the <u>Troy Book</u> the textual tradition that it is itself a part of. Since

tragedies in the Middle Ages, like histories, were expected to convey a moral lesson,[31] we

can then use this small-scale historical tragedy to analyze the moral effect it has on its

audience and from there extrapolate the type of effect that a work like the <u>Troy Book</u>

might have on its own medieval audience. Or, if you will, the Trojan audience constitutes

a reduplication of Lydgate's medieval audience, and this internal duplication allows us to

gauge the didactic effect that both the classical tragedy and Lydgate's tragic history have

on their respective audiences.

The classical tragedies that are performed in New Troy are never named or

differentiated on the basis of their particular plot content. Lydgate only describes them

generically. However, it is clear that the moral lesson of the tragedies recited by the

"aw[n]cien poete" is that princes sooner or later meet their downfall and, therefore,

Fortune ought not to be trusted.[32] One would expect the Trojans to be receptive to the

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[31] In the words of Henry Ansgar Kelly, Lydgate "insists upon the importance of the didactic purpose of tragedy" (<u>Chaucerian Tragedy</u> 151). For example, in his <u>Fall of Princes</u>, Lydgate employs his many envoys to discuss the moral purpose of his tales.

[32] Incidentally, according to the <u>Middle English Dictionary</u>, "awncien" means more than "old." The word means "wise or experienced by reason of age, venerable" (see definition 2b). This is significant because in Lydgate's account this poet clearly represents the voice of reason.

underlying didactic message of such tragedies. And yet, this is not the case at all.

Lydgate's poem suggests that these plays are merely occasions for social entertainment,

perfect opportunities to enjoy the return of spring outside, for the plays were performed

"in April & in May, / Whan blosmys new, boþe on busche & hay, / And flouris fresche

gynne for to springe" (II.917-19). As the Troy Book clearly indicates, the Trojan

audience does not learn any moral lesson from the tragedies. In fact, the one individual

whom the text clearly identifies as having started this "ryyt [of] tragedies olde" (II.924),

King Priam, is shown to trust Fortune subsequently. Indeed, soon after rebuilding Troy,

Priam decides to send Antenor to try to regain his sister Hesione from the Greeks, but

when Antenor's peaceful embassy does not succeed, Priam resolves to attack the Greeks.

Lydgate reprimands him for his rash behavior and singles out Fortune's wicked

influence:

> For sothly, Priam, þou wer to rek[e]les,
> For to comytte þi quiete and þi pes,
> So dredfully, duryng by no date,
> To cruel Fortune or to fikel fate;
> Whos maner is, of costom comounly,
> Þat whan a man trusteth most souereynly,
> On þis goddesse, blind & ful vnstable,
> Þan sche to hym is most deceyueable,
> Hym to abate from his royal stalle,
> And sodeynly to make hym doun to falle,
> And with a trip, þrowe hym on þe bake,
> Who þat geynstryueth schal haue litel tak.
> ………………………………………..
> Þerfor, no man haue noon affyance
> In Fortune, nor in hir variaunce;
> Ne late no wight his ese more Iupart—
> List þat þe pleye wil afterward departe—
> To turne his chaunce ouþer to wel or wo:
> For selde in oon sche doth þe gamen go,
> As ye may se be example of Priamus. (II.1857-79)

In fact, Priam is not only shown to blindly put his faith in Fortune. He even rallies his

lords to his decision by urging them to commit themselves to Fortune: if she favored the

Greeks when they destroyed Troy in the past, she is bound to be on the side of the

Trojans this time. Unfortunately, of course, Priam fails to notice that by the same logic

the Trojans will likely not stay on top for long either:

> Fortune, whiche þat chaungeth ofte,
> List on hir whele make a man ascende,
> And vnwarly doun ageyn descende,
> Stoundemel his honour to avaunce,
> And with a swyghe þrow hym to meschaunce;
> Now with favour sette hym vp ful highe,
> Efte avale hym, with twynklyng of an eye.
> Hir pley vnstable turneþ as a bal,
> While on goth vp, an-other hath a fal;
> Sche reiseth on, & doth anoþer loute,
> For euery man, whan it cometh aboute,
> Mote take his turne, as hir pleye requereþ.
> Who is expert and hir fraudes lereth,
> Schal with hir sugre finde galle meynt,
> And hir hony ay with bitter spreynt—
> In pes and werre, in honour & in fame,
> In dignites, in resoun, and in schame,
> At hir likyng, as hir list to graunte;
> Þerfor no man his hap to moche avaunte.
> For þough Grekis whilom wern a-lofte,
> It may her-after hem hap ful vnsofte.
> Wherfore, echon schewe youre worþines,
> Þat so ar named of strenþe & hardynes,
> And to Fortune pleinly yow committe,
> And late no fere youre manly hertis flitte,
> But stondeth hool & beth in menyng pleyn,
> And here-vp-on, lat se what ye wil seyn. (II.2020-46)

Of course, some or all of Priam's lords who subsequently decide to fight and some or all

of Priam's sons who agree with their father and push for an attack on the Greeks must

have attended Troy's vernal tragic performances as well, but evidently they have learned

nothing from them either. The few individuals who defend a more prudent approach to

the tense situation with the Greeks—Hector, Helenus, Pentheus, and Cassandra[33]— are

very much at odds with the generally intrepid and bellicose mood that prevails in the city

of Troy at the time, and, therefore, their entreaties fall on deaf ears. In short, the Trojan

ruling class has overwhelmingly ignored the opportunity it has been given to learn from

tragedy and has embraced random Fortune. In their actions, the Trojans are not much

different from the Greeks, who in the Troy Book are not seen to have been given the

opportunity to learn from tragedy. Witness for example King Agamemnon's brief

reference to Fortune in his speech to the Greek lords before they sail off for Troy: "[I]f

Fortune & goddis, of her grace / Be nat be-hinde oure Iourne to apreve, / We may nat

faille oure purpos to acheve" (II.5256-58). Priam's earlier appeal to his lords to commit

themselves to Fortune is fundamentally not different from Agamemnon's belief that

Fortune is on the Greeks' side. Truly, the lessons of the tragedies performed in New Troy

at Priam's request have gone completely unnoticed by Priam himself and just about

everybody else in the city.

Since, as I have suggested, the world of Trojan tragedies functions as a type of

mise-en-abyme of Lydgate's project in the Troy Book, it then derives that the absence of

any didactic effect of the tragedies on their Trojan audiences reflects the kind of reception

that Lydgate realistically knows his own tragic history may receive in fifteenth-century

England. I am not hereby suggesting that didactic works were not appreciated for their

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[33] Two of those four individuals denounce blind trust in Fortune in their speeches to the Trojans. Hector questions where Fortune will lead Priam (II.2235) and explains that he deems it "no prudence, / To Fortune, ful of doubilnes— / Sith we be sure—to putte oure sikernes" (II.2301-03). Likewise, Pentheus warns the Trojans "Of hastynes, þat ye [nat] submitte / To Fortune þat can so falsly flitte" (II.3201-02). As for Cassandra, she does not denounce the Trojans for embracing Fortune, but, foreseeing the future, she blames Fortune for the eventual ruin of Troy (II.3240-44).

moral lessons in the Middle Ages and beyond. Far from it, for, as we well know, the

Middle Ages and the fifteenth century in particular were very fond of works with moral

import. The Troy Book itself was definitely understood to be a moral poem and was

appreciated for it. Indeed, "[t]o judge from the reception of Troy Book and the marginal

commentary recorded in the manuscripts, medieval and early Renaissance readers

understood Lydgate's moralizations on the level he intended them" (Edwards, Troy

Book: Selections 6).[34] However, one should not overstate the role of moral literary

examples on people's actual lives and decision-making processes. This is, for example,

the case when it comes to the Troy Book's role of instructing Henry V. As a mirror for

princes, the Troy Book was supposed to teach Henry lessons in statecraft and moral

matters. Indeed, medieval princes were expected to receive advice, and in this context

many didactic works were written for their edification. However, it is not because rulers

were presented with specular works that they necessarily implemented all the lessons of

these works. That is, princes were often more eager to be *known as* the commissioners

and recipients of ethical works than they were willing to actually implement the advice

received. As Derek Pearsall has observed,

> Princes welcomed [mirrors for princes] and on occasion commissioned
> them, not because they especially desired to have instruction in the
> business of government from clerks, nor because they would much
> appreciate being told things they did not wish to hear, but because it was
> important that they should represent themselves as receptive to sage
> counsel. They are not simply political public relations exercises but,

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[34] For example, the Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.876, a manuscript of the second quarter of the
fifteenth century, contains the annotation "note thes│and follow" next to a passage where Agamemnon
urges Menelaus to hide his distress at Helen's abduction (II.4337-429). Rawlinson C.446, written in the
1420s, contains verses added in the sixteenth century lamenting the death of Hector and Troilus by Achilles
(Edwards, Troy Book: Selections 6).

equally, they are not "books of instruction." (Pearsall, "Hoccleve's
<u>Regement of Princes</u>" 386)

As a result, a work that was designed to be morally useful could very well end up being

more appreciated for its symbolic/social value—which is also the case for the springtime

tragedies in New Troy. Indeed, in Lydgate's poem, the Trojan tragedies perform a

distinctly social function by creating a sense of community amongst the inhabitants of the

newly rebuilt city of Troy. Likewise, a didactic literary work presented to a medieval

monarch performed a social function by representing the king in his role as a wise and

advice-taking ruler. It is extremely likely that this goal was on Henry's mind when he

commissioned Lydgate to write the <u>Troy Book</u> (see my introduction). In addition, as

Lydgate's Prologue states, Henry wished that the <u>Troy Book</u> be read by many more

people than just himself. Lydgate tells us that Henry "wolde that to hyghe and lowe / The

noble story openly wer knowe / In oure tonge" (Pro.111-13). Derek Pearsall suggests that

"[t]he first distribution of presentation copies of Lydgate's <u>Troy-Book</u>, after its

completion in 1420, was probably done at his instigation" ("Hoccleve's <u>Regement of

Princes</u>" 397). It is, however, incorrect that the "lowe" would have had the opportunity to

access or read Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>—at least, the "lowe" as we would be inclined to

interpret the word in the twenty-first century. Indeed, the reading public in late-medieval

England did not extend beyond the king's entourage, the aristocracy, the provincial

gentry, the urban patriciate, and of course the clergy. In the case that interests us, "[c]oats

of arms indicate that <u>Troy Book</u> manuscripts were owned by fifteenth-century gentry and,

in at least one instance, by aristocracy" (Edwards, <u>Troy Book</u> 7). There is also evidence

that members of the mercantile classes owned copies of the text (Meale 218). Here too,

ownership of instructional books by individuals of those social classes did not

automatically result in genuine transformations of the way they conducted their lives.

Though good advice sounds convincing when read in a book, in reality it is all too often

ignored, something that Lydgate was undoubtedly very aware of. Just like what happens

to the Trojan tragedies inside the <u>Troy Book</u>, Lydgate's generic warning to not put one's

trust in Fortune ran the risk of not being heeded in the face of real-life circumstances

because of shortsightedness, over-confidence, hubris, greed, or simply inattention. Here

is what Henry Bergen, the editor of Lydgate's <u>Fall of Princes</u>, has to say about

Boccaccio's <u>De Casibus</u>, the Latin source for the <u>Fall of Princes</u>:

> It was the sort of book that would especially appeal to the great
> personages of the time: it told about people just like themselves; and
> although very naturally it taught them nothing—as if the impulses and
> desires of men were controlled by either precept or example—it at any rate
> interested them. They were all exposed to the vicissitudes of fortune, and,
> the world being then very much as it is to-day, many of them became
> victims of the same disasters that had afflicted and destroyed their
> predecessors. (xii)

There is no doubt in my mind that the same argument can be made for the <u>Troy Book</u> and

other works in the *de casibus* tradition. On the one hand, the didactic purpose of such

moral works would most often succumb to the realities of human fallibility. On the other

hand, just like for princes, the act of acquiring a literary work like the <u>Troy Book</u> would

have been very much a social act for members of the aristocracy and the "middle class."

Indeed, the possession of such a prestige object would have openly indicated that the

owner belonged to a select class of society. As Lesley Lawton explains,

> Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> . . . falls into the category of fashionable reading. . . .
> Most of the <u>Troy Book</u> manuscripts are large, impressive volumes,
> whether or not they contain miniatures. They are not readily portable
> volumes and were evidently intended for ostentatious display. (52)

In addition to the fact that social considerations could easily become more important than the actual ethical content of a literary work, so too the entertainment value of a didactic literary work was all too likely to take precedence over its moral message. This is clearly illustrated by the Trojan tragedies performed inside Lydgate's poem. Tragedies, we are told, are introduced by Priam alongside various sports and games (jousts, tourneys, wrestling matches, chess, gambling, comedies) the "newe cite for to magnyfye" (II.788). This, added to the description of the sunny spring weather during the dramatic performances, gives the impression that it is a time of relaxation after a period of hard work (in addition to it being a time for social cohesion, as I just mentioned). As for Lydgate's Troy Book, one certainly gets the sense, when reading the many descriptions of bloody fights and other testosterone-filled passages, that Lydgate and his readers enjoyed the plot for its own sake. To a large extent, reading the Troy Book in the fifteenth century must have rather been like watching an action movie these days—or watching a tragic play in ancient Troy.

In sum, the Troy Book indicates in its very plot that a text which possesses distinctly moral content may not primarily be received by the audience for this purpose. This is true for the historical tragedies performed in the city of Troy as well as for Lydgate's Trojan poem. Thereby, a new light is shed on Lydgate's claim in the Prologue that he, his literary sources, and other "clerkis" preserve the truth—in the sense of moral truth—so that subsequent generations of readers might benefit from this didactic content. Indeed, Lydgate's defense of historical texts now finds itself seriously undermined, for

the very plot of the Troy Book shows that such texts are all too easily trivialized and their moral lessons ignored.

4.2.2 Prudence in the Troy Book

As I commented earlier in this chapter, there is another way that we can assess the moral valence of Lydgate's historical poem, namely by analyzing the effectiveness of the Troy Book's own moral truth. In order to proceed with such an approach, it is first necessary to determine what the main moral lesson is that Lydgate tries to impart in his history of Troy. The Prologue informs us that Prince Henry has requested that Lydgate write a history of Troy in order that the English people learn of the "worthynes" of "verray knyghthod" (Pro.77 and 76) and "the prowesse of olde chiualrie" (Pro.78). The emphasis is on military action coupled with virtue. This is indeed made clear by Lydgate's appeal to both Mars and Othea at the very beginning of his Prologue as well as reflected in the person of Prince Henry whom Lydgate here describes as "bothe manful and vertuous" (Pro.90). In Books I-V, Lydgate purports to further illustrate the importance of those two principles, though due to the bellicose impulses of many of the characters and their otherwise generally willful behavior, he feels compelled to focus his moral commentary on the virtue of prudence. More specifically, the plot of Lydgate's poem warns the readers against the dangers of variable Fortune and informs the readers that, above all else (prowess in combat included), prudence is the one virtue that needs to be cultivated to avoid unfortunate reversals of Fortune. Truly, prudence is a crucial virtue in the Troy Book. In fact, as C. David Benson observed over 30 years ago, prudence is

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"Lydgate's principal moral concern in the poem" ("Prudence" 117). Or, as Robert R.

Edwards has more recently stated, "[t]he principal lesson that Lydgate's Troy story offers

its royal, aristocratic, and noble readers is the virtue of prudence" (Troy Book: Selections

4).[35] Since prudence occupies such a central position in the poem's moral landscape, it is

fitting that we try to understand more fully what this virtue meant for Lydgate's fifteenth-

century audience.

In the Middle Ages, just as in classical Antiquity, prudence was recognized as one

of the four cardinal virtues, besides justice, fortitude, and temperance. In its orginal,

classical sense, prudence "refers to the exercise of reason to achieve practical goals and

to anticipate consequences of actions" (Fewer 235). Moreover, because Cicero

subdivided prudence into memory (knowledge of the past), understanding (knowledge of

the present), and foresight (knowledge of the future),[36] prudence often came to be

represented in art as having three faces, one looking left toward the past, one looking

right to the future, and one looking straight ahead to the present. This pictorial

representation symbolized the fact that knowledge of the past allowed one to make proper

decisions in the present and the future. In the Middle Ages, *prudentia* was analytically

discussed by Thomas Aquinas, who applied it not only to individuals but also to political

and social situations. In this second category, Aquinas differentiated four different types

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[35] See also Robert R. Edwards's "Lydgate's Troy Book and the Confusion of Prudence," esp. 53.

[36] "Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum neutrarumque scientia. Partes eius : memoria, intellegentia, providentia. Memoria est per quam animus repetit illa quae fuerunt ; intellegentia, per quam ea perspicit quae sunt; providentia, per quam futurum aliquid videtur ante quam factum est" (II.160). [Wisdom is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad. Its parts are memory, intelligence, and foresight. Memory is the faculty by which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it ascertains what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to occur before it occurs.]

of prudence: the prudence of kings and other rulers, political prudence, prudence in the

management of one's family finances, and military prudence. Lydgate's contemporary

and fellow Chaucerian poet, Thomas Hoccleve, advises Prince Henry to be prudent in his

Regiment of Princes (4747-858) and defines prudence as follows:

> Prudence is vertu of entёndement;
> She makith man by resoun him gouérne.
> Who-so þat list to be wys and prudént,
> And þe light folwe wole of hir lanterne,
> he mostё caste his look in euery herne
> Of þyngёs past, and ben, & þat schul be:
> The endё seeþ, and eek mesúreth, sche. (4761-67)

This is an example of regal prudence.[37]

In his Troy Book, Lydgate does not define prudence. Oftentimes, he has in mind

what Hoccleve means by prudence, as is, for example, clear from Hector's exhortation to

King Priam not to seek revenge on the Greeks:

> But first I rede, wysely in your mynde
> To cast aforn and leue nat be-hynde,
> Or ye be-gynne, discretly to aduerte
> And *prudently* consyderen in your herte
> Al, only nat þe gynnyng but þe ende,
> And þe myddes, what weie þei wil wende,
> And to what fyn Fortune wil hem lede—
> Yif ye þus don, amys ye may nat spede. (II.2229-36; italics mine)

At other times, Lydgate applies the concept of prudence to various other realms of

experience, and these may or may not correspond with Aquinas's taxonomies. Thus, a

rather broad "definition" of prudence is gradually built in Lydgate's poem through an

accretion of the diverse instances and contexts in which "prudence" is used and the many

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[37] Much of the above information on prudence is to be found in John Burrow's essay "The Third Eye of Prudence."

connotations that are attached to the word. The resulting semantic range is actually no surprise, for in the late Middle Ages, the Middle English word "prudence" had acquired a variety of meanings. The <u>Middle English Dictionary</u> provides the following definitions: "Wisdom, intelligence; discretion, foresight, shrewdness; knowledge, words of wisdom." Lydgate uses the word "prudence" (and the related "prudent" and "prudently") with several of those meanings in many different situations in his <u>Troy Book</u>. For example, after Jason and Medea have spent their first night together, they take their leave in the morning "Of hyghe prudence and discrecioun" (I.3080). Here, the word "prudence" is either a synonym for "discrecioun" or may mean shrewdness. Sometimes, "prudence" clearly means discretion in the sense of "caution." This is likely the case in Book V, where Lydgate tells his readers that "of prudence" for a long time Circe refuses to tell her son Telegonus who his father is (V.3113-14). In Book IV, Achilles's emissary urges Hecuba to convince her husband that Achilles should be allowed to marry Polyxena:

> Yif Eccuba, by hir discresioun,
> Þorugh hir wit and mediacioun,
> And hir prudence might aboute brynge
> Þat Priamus were fully assentynge,
> Þat Achilles might his doughter wyve. (IV.773-77)

"Prudence" in this context could be a synonym for "discresioun" or "wit" or could very well mean "words of wisdom." "Prudence" can also refer to wisdom with no verbal component, as when the goddess Pallas is introduced by Mercury as the "goddesse of prudence" (II.2721). Sometimes, Lydgate uses "prudence" to refer to a type of intelligence. This is the case when Lydgate explains that in New Troy "clerkys ful prudent" (II.806) create the game of chess,

> Whiche is so sotil and so meruelous,

> Þat it wer harde þe mater to discryue;
> For þoughe a man stodied al his lyve,
> He schal ay fynde dyvers fantasyes
> Of wardys makyng, & newe iuparties. (II.808-12)

Oftentimes, intelligence is coupled with foresight as in the following passage where

Lydgate explains that the broad streets of New Troy

> Wer by crafte so prudently prouided,
> And by werkemen sette so and deuided,
> Þat holsom eyr amyddis might enspire
> Erly on morwe to hem þat it desire. (II.669-72)

These are just a few instances randomly selected. All in all, "prudence" and its adjectival

and adverbial forms occur 146 times in the text of Lydgate's poem—which is clearly

indicative of the importance of this virtue in the <u>Troy Book</u>.[38] The majority of the

occurrences of the word "prudence" and grammatically related words are to be found in

the context of governance (like in II.2229-36, which I quoted above) and military

strategy—which is, of course, to be expected given the type of plot we are dealing with.

For example, in Book II, after Lydgate relates the destruction of Old Troy because of the

Greeks' perception that King Lamedon had failed to receive them properly, he inserts a

moralizing passage addressed to kings and lords that they ought to "prudently

consydereth in [their] wit, / Þat to a lorde of gentilnes hit sit, / To euery straunger goodly

hym to haue" (II.99-101). There are also many passages that refer to prudence in combat

(especially preparations for combat), as when Lydgate says that Hector is prudent in

Book III because he arranges for the best knights of Agreste and Kings Esdras and Phion

to go along with the unarmored archers (III.312-18). The relationship between Hector and

the virtue of prudence is actually extremely significant, for, as I mentioned earlier in this

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[38] There are 39 instances of "prudence," 57 instances of "prudent," and 50 instances of "prudently."

chapter, to a large extent Hector embodies prudence in the <u>Troy Book</u>. Hector comes

across not only as an effective and shrewd warrior but also as an honorable man in the

Trojan community and a dispenser of sound advice (he is the voice of reason). He is wise,

provident, intelligent, and cautious. All of this is unambiguously laid out by Lydgate

when he first introduces Hector in his poem:

> He was þe Rote and stok of cheualrie,
> And of knyghthod verray souereyn flour,
> Þe sowrs and welle of worschip & honour;
> And of manhod, I dar it wel expresse,
> Example and merour; & of highe prowesse,
> Gynyng & grounde; & with al þis I-fere,
> Wonder benigne & lawly of his chere,
> Discret also, prudent and vertuous. (II.244-51)

Because of the poem's emphasis on Hector's chivalric virtues, several critics have

actually discussed Hector as a type of alter ego to Henry V. For example, Lois A. Ebin

has commented that "Hector, though vulnerable to human temptations, remains dedicated

to the ideals of the true chivalric hero which Lydgate associates in his prologue with

Henry V" (<u>John Lydgate</u> 44). Also, Colin Fewer mentions that,

> More than any other figure in the narrative, Hector embodies the chivalric
> ideal of knighthood that was so central to the public image of Henry V.
> Moreover, he embodies his society's values and aspirations just as Henry
> wished to be seen as embodying English values: he is not only an
> exemplar of chivalry in general but of Trojan identity. (239)

Finally, for Scott-Morgan Straker,

> Hector is the historical pattern from which Henry V is cut. Hector is the
> heir to Priam's throne . . ., just as Henry was heir to a throne when he
> commissioned the <u>Troy Book</u> (Prol.95-104). Lydgate describes both men
> in terms that combine martial prowess and moral virtue: Hector is the
> source of all chivalry, masculinity and prudence (II.237-56), and Henry is
> also "bothe manful and virtuous" (Prol.75-91). (62)

In a very real sense, Hector is the hero of Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>. This can be seen in ways large and small. For instance, twice Lydgate identifies Hector as the defender of Troy by calling him the Trojan wall: "Þis Troyan wal, Hector, þis worþi knight" (III.4938) and "þi diffence and þi stronge wal" (III.5483). Hector's death leads to immense sorrow in the city of Troy (and considerable pathos on Lydgate's part) and his body is embalmed and preserved in a temple as if alive. Hector's importance is even reflected in the poem's structure. Indeed, Lydgate rearranges Guido's narrative to make Hector's death the center of his five book poem, which event thus corresponds to the climax (or turning point) of the plot.[39]

To come back to the virtue of prudence, there is another, more disturbing aspect to Lydgate's understanding of "prudence." In a real sense, "prudence" at times also refers to the opposite of the overall virtuous meanings of the word that I have illustrated above. That is, "prudence" in Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> also comes to be associated with, or even comes to mean, craftiness, hypocrisy, dissembling, and deception. I am not here referring to the several instances where impetuous characters are erroneously said to be prudent. Such individuals do not deserve this descriptive adjective, for it is quite clear that overall their behavior is controlled by their impulses and they are ultimately the victims of their own willfulness. A prime example of such a failure is Achilles. The one passage in the story where Achilles is described as being prudent or where he claims this quality for himself (IV.766, IV.977, and IV.1073) is when he falls in love with Polyxena, and he,

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[39] This is much different from Guido's version of Hector's death and funeral in books 21 and 22 of his <u>Historia</u> in 35 books.

therefore, feels compelled to stop fighting the Trojans. Here, Achilles (or the narrator) attributes to prudence his desire to achieve peace. But, of course, Achilles's supposed prudence is no prudence at all but rather a semblance of prudence motivated by erotic desire, not reason, and this lack of prudence will lead to Achilles's murder at the hands of the Trojans (IV.3159). Somewhat along the same lines, it is quite absurd that, when Paris has to choose one of the three goddesses in his dream, Mercury would tell him that he is "holdyn . . . right prudent & right wys" (II.2706), when we well know that Paris's main motivator is his libidinal energy, which overwhelms him to the point of engulfing Troy in a destructive war. Though Achilles's and Paris's behavior is far from virtuous, it is nonetheless clearly not the case that either man puts on an appearance of prudence to be better able to deceive those around him. To a large extent, Priam falls into the same category as well. When Priam is first described, he is said to be "[w]onder manly, discret, and ful prudent" (II.209). In the same passage, he is also said to be a formidable warrior who every day risks his life in combat during a siege to try to recapture a castle. In the course of the poem, Priam is called prudent a few more times by Lydgate or other characters or even himself (see, for example, II.476, II.1578, II.1588, II.2068, II.6806, III.3626, III.5015, IV.829, IV.4663, IV.4672). And yet, Priam is the one character who commits the great folly of wanting to avenge the crimes that the Greeks have inflicted on the Trojans. In addition, though the text says that Priam prudently (II.2068) assembles all his sons and asks them for advice about his proposed Greek attack, it is clear that Priam has already made up his mind and will brook no dissent. So, in such situations too Priam

may not be prudent, though he is really not engaging in any deliberately deceitful activities either.

However, at times some of the statements made about Priam or actually articulated by him subtly indicate that prudence is also associated with hiding and dissembling in the Troy Book. This is, for example, implied in the juxtaposition of "dissymvle" and "prudently" in Priam's statement that the Trojans will endure the harms that the Greeks did to them of old and only demand the return of Hesione: "We schal dissymvle, & prudently endure / Our harmys olde forþe in pacience" (II.1282-83). Also, Priam indicates something similar when he comments on Diomede's and Ulysses's impertinent remarks to him during their embassy to regain Helen:

> For to folis longeth kyndely,
> With-oute a-vis to speke folily,
> Vndiscretly his menyng to fulfille,
> Where a wysman schal heryn & be style
> Til he se tyme, and haue pacience,
> And dyssymule in his aduertence
> Þe rage of folis þat last but a þrowe. (II.7015-21)

The same idea is again implied when Priam is forced to go along with Aeneas and Antenor's scheme to make peace with the Greeks but hides his opposition: "He [Priam] gan anoon dissymulen in þis cas; / For of prudence he clerly gan to se, / For þat tyme it may non oþer be" (IV.5074-76). The belief that hiding and prudence intersect is not unique to Priam, for, after Helen gets abducted, Agamemnon, trying to console Menelaus, advises him to conceal his distress ("dissymble youre offence" [II.4344]) and feign cheerfulness, since

> It is a doctrine of hem þat be prudent,
> Þat whan a man with furie is to-rent,
> To feyne chere til tyme he se leyser

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Þat [he] of vengaunce kyndle may þe fer. (II.4351-54)[40]

Along the same lines, in the context of Amphycamus's banishment from Troy because he

had earlier accused Antenor of treachery, Lydgate explains that it is prudent to not always

tell the truth. Indeed, "it is ful expedient, / Of prudence euery man to charge, / Þat his

tonge be nat ouer-large" (IV.5452-54) and "Men most amonge cure and ouerreke / Þe

trouþe of þinges, only of prudence" (IV.5462-63).

Truly, there is something unexpectedly subversive in the virtue of prudence as

presented by Lydgate in his <u>Troy Book</u>. It is, for example, odd to say the least that some

of the most deceptive characters in the poem are first introduced as being prudent. Take

Antenor, whom Priam chooses to regain Hesione because, in Priam's own words,

> [he] is a man discrete and avisee,
> And specialy in mater of trete,
> For he is bothe wyse and eloquent,
> As ye wel knowe, & passyngly prudent. (II.1291-94)

Perhaps we may attribute to Priam's own lack of prudence such a radical misreading of a

person's character, for, as we know, in Book IV Antenor becomes Troy's biggest traitor,

and from this moment on Antenor is described by Lydgate as "ful of trecchery, / Replet

of falsehood & of doubilnesse" (IV.5128-29) and overall "fals and malicious" (IV.5443).

However, it is not only chararacters inside the plot who seem to misinterpet the "prudent"

intentions of other characters. Lydgate too makes the same "mistake." After all, when he

first introduces King Peleus in the introductory lines of Book I, he says of him that he

was "Wys & discrete & also vertuous" (I.4). And yet, as I have abundantly made clear in

the earlier parts of this dissertation, Peleus turns out to be one of the most deceitful

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[40] In an endnote to line II.4344, Robert R. Edwards mentions "this problematic notion of prudence as dissembling" (<u>Troy Book: Selections</u>).

hypocrites of the poem.[41] It is, in my view, significant that, as I explained in chapter 3,

both Antenor and Peleus are characters that Lydgate describes as serpents hiding under

fair flowers. In chapter 3, I also noted that women as a group are metaphorically

associated with serpents, and it is therefore noteworthy (and again rather bizarre) that

women are several times said to use prudence in Lydgate's poem. Thus, in the context of

his misogynous speech regarding Medea, Lydgate generalizes that all women are

deceivers,

> Whos fraudes arn of so huge a weighte,
> Þat as hem list ay þe game gothe,
> Her purpose halt, who so be lefe or lothe—
> *Þei ben so slighe, so prudent, and so wyse*! (I.1940-43; italics mine)

Old women may no longer be able to ensnare men, but for Lydgate they are still as crafty

in matters of love thanks to their prudence,

> For þei a-forne can casten euery doute;
> Of yeris passed olde experience
> Hath yove to hem so passing highe prudence,
> Þat þei in loue alle þe sleightes knowe. (I.2798-801)

The one cunning/prudent woman whom Lydgate singles out in the poem is Medea when

he explains that she hides her true feelings for Jason by behaving "wommanly" and

"prudently" (I.3529 and 3530).[42] Besides women, it is perhaps even more significant that

Ulysses, who is also associated with the serpent image, is several times said to be prudent

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[41] I write "mistake" between quotation marks because in a sense Lydgate merely translates what he finds in Guido. There, Peleus is said to be "iustus et nobilis" (3) [just and noble]. Those are indeed words antinomous to Peleus's later deceit. However, Lydgate slightly alters the meaning of the passage, since he does not say that the king was just and noble but rather "Wys & discrete & also vertuous," which effectively means "prudent."

[42] Also see page 112, footnote 22.

in Lydgate's poem.[43] Overall, Ulysses is identified as a deceitful character in the <u>Troy</u>

<u>Book</u>. It is particularly significant that when Lydgate first introduces him, he provides a

description of the character that focuses more on the negatives than on the positives:

> Of Vlixes what schal I also seyn?—
> Þat was so noble & worþi in his daies,
> Ful of wyles and sleighty at assayes,
> In menyng double and right deceyueable,
> To forge a lesyng also wonder able;
> With face pleyn he coude make it towe,
> Merie worded, and but selde lowe,
> In conseillynge discret & ful prudent,
> And in his tyme þe moste elloquent,
> And halpe to Grekis often in her nede. (II.4598-607)

This quote clearly links prudence with deceit, which thematic insertion is actually an

addition by Lydgate to Guido's text—Guido does not speak of prudence in this context.

The quote also inserts Ulysses's eloquence in the equation. We see such a juxtaposition

of prudence, agility with words, and deceit in other passages describing Ulysses. For

example, when Ulysses goes as an envoy to Troy to present the conditions of peace,

Lydgate explains how he

> his tale gan in swiche a wyse,
> So prudently his wordis to deuyse,
> Þat to herkene euery man hath Ioye,
> And specially þei þat werne of Troye,
> Þat of his inward menynge fraudelent
> Ful litel wiste, nor of his entent,
> To her plesaunce so he koude feyne. (IV.5425-31)

There is, of course a very strong basis in Guido's text for Lydgate's treatment of Ulysses

—as a matter of fact in many a version of the Trojan conflict Ulysses is a rather crafty

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[43] For Ulysses's metaphorical representation as a serpent, see pages 107-08. In the same passage, Ulysses is also said "In euery þing to be deceyuable, / Double in his werk & ful ay of deceit" (V.844-45) and to speak "with a feyned face" (V.848).

individual. However, it is particularly clear in Lydgate's version that, as an English

citizen and therefore presumably a descendant of the Trojan race, Lydgate vehemently

resents Ulysses's schemes with the Trojan traitors which will lead to the fall of Troy.

This is especially visible in the above-quoted passage of Book IV since Guido at that

point does not refer to Ulysses's eloquence, prudence, and craftiness. Later, in Book V,

when Ulysses is trying to regain his homeland, he experiences many adventures and

manages to disentangle himself from some dangerous situations through his eloquence,

prudence, and cunning. For instance, the winds drive Ulysses into Ajax's land and he is

imprisoned there on the grounds that he murdered Ajax. However,

> he so wrought by his sleighti wyle,
> And his tale sette in swiche a stile,
> Þat hem alle he [pleinly] hath be-iaped,
> And fro her hond frely is escaped. (V.1807-10)

Unfortunately for him, he is unable to take his possessions with him. Indeed, the text

specifies that "Vlixes, for al his wordis white, / I-robbed was of riches and of good"

(V.1796-97). Just a few lines later, the text explains that Ulysses is then captured by King

Naulus for his presumed murder of Palamedes, though "By his prudence he eskaped is a-

geyn, / —For he was boþe expert, wys, & olde" (V.1820-21). These two lines strongly

seem to indicate that *once again* prudence has enabled Ulysses to flee, which then by

implication means that Ulysses's earlier "sleighti wyle" and "wordis white" are but

another instance of Ulysses's prudence. Of course, Ulysses is not the worst character in

the <u>Troy Book</u>, and thus there are several instances of eloquence and/or prudence that are

unaccompanied by deception. For example, in Book IV, Ulysses "ful of elloquence, / Gan

his tale prudently deuyse" (1698-99) when he tries to persuade Achilles to regain the

fight. There is no slyness involved here. Neither is there any double-dealing of any sort

when on his way home Ulysses visits with King Alphenon, who enjoyed "To here hym

talke, for his elloquence, / For his wysdam & his highe prudence" (V.2143-44).

Sometimes, Ulysses even uses his eloquence for a good reason as when he saves Helen's

life from the Greek destruction at the fall of Troy through "his wit and his elloquence"

(IV.6577). Still, those positive qualities do not overshadow the negative attributes which

are seemingly more firmly attached to Ulysses's person.[44] Even characters inside the

narrative are fully aware of Ulysses's craftiness. Thus, when after the fall of Troy, Ajax

complains that Ulysses has unfairly been awarded the Palladium, he focuses on what he

perceives to Ulysses's falsity. In his view, Ulysses is "But word & wynd & sleighti

compassyng, / And on falshede euere ymagynyng" (V.139-40). He achieves things

through fraude,

> For vnder colour he can curen al,
> Pretende fair, liche a peinted wal,
> Diuers hewed, þat nouþer highe nor low,
> Þer may no man his pleyn[e] menyng know! (V.145-48)

It would seem that Ajax actually has good reason to distrust Ulysses, for the very same

night Ajax is murdered in his bed and public suspicion falls on Ulysses. Though the

reader never knows whether or not Ulysses is responsible for this murder, again it is clear

that the characters inside the story have no problem associating Ulysses with

underhanded actions. It is, therefore, no surprise that subsequently a false rumor accuses

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[44] In her analysis of the role of eloquence as a theme in Lydgate's poetry, Lois Ebin limits her discussion of Ulysses's eloquence to a couple of neutral or even virtuous uses of rhetoric by Ulysses. By ignoring the more deceptive aspects of Ulysses's eloquence, Ebin manages to make Ulysses into an example of how eloquence is linked with prudence, wisdom, and discretion ("Lydgate's Views on Poetry" 86; Illuminator, Makar, Vates 29). Like me, Richard William Fehrenbacher has noted Ebin's mistake in this respect (146-47).

Ulysses of another murder, Palamedes's murder, and describes him "In euery þing to be deceyuable, / Double in his werk & ful ay of deceit" (V.844-45), like a serpent hiding under a flower.

To summarize my discussion on prudence so far, prudence is the main moral lesson that Lydgate tries to impart in the Troy Book. The concept is omnipresent in Lydgate's poem and accounts for some of the most honorable actions that occur in the narrative. However, there is also a whole range of deceitful actions in the poem that are attributed to prudence. That is, "prudence" as used by Lydgate in his Troy Book also comes to be associated with falshood, dissemblance, and deception. It is not simply that the Troy Book illustrates prudence and the absence of prudence: the poem also illustrates the *subversion* of prudence. Indeed, Lydgate's poem goes as far as to link the concept of prudence with a totally distorted understanding of the constituent principles at the heart of the cardinal virtue. In short, in some of the poem's lines, prudence is subverted to the point that it no longer refers to "the exercise of reason to achieve practical goals and to anticipate consequences of actions" but rather refers to the exercise of ruthless calculation to manipulate and deceive other people and influence events in such a way that their consequences benefit oneself.

Some of this can be explained by the accretion of meaning that was attached to the word "prudence" in the late Middle Ages. Indeed, as I explained earlier, "prudence" at the time referred to a wide range of concepts, as is clear from the definition of prudence provided in the Middle English Dictionary: "Wisdom, intelligence; discretion, foresight, shrewdness; knowledge, words of wisdom." Alexander Murray explains in

<u>Reason and Society in the Middle Ages</u> that two broad concepts merged under the

umbrella term "prudence" in the Middle Ages: "Christian goodness" and "pagan useful

intelligence." The second concept referred to very practical skills, which could, but did

not necessarily imply, virtuous behavior. This is clear from two of the examples that

Murray gives to illustrate the meaning of prudence as worldly wisdom:

> According to both vulgate and some medieval vernacular versions (from
> which the English Authorized Version was partly drawn), Jesus himself
> had spoken of the *prudence* of the steward who had falsified accounts in
> his own interest. . . . Odo of Cluny used the word in the tenth century, in a
> context making it clear it is the pagan virtue he is thinking of, for the
> policy of a soldier who uses trickery to crush an enemy. (134)[45]

So those examples clearly show that there was a lexical tradition of using the word

"prudence" (in vernacular languages and Latin) to refer to worldly characteristics that

sometimes verged on or intersected with deceit. However, that still does not explain

Lydgate's choice to use "prudence" to refer to deceit *inside* a poem that presumably

purports to teach the reader about the value of good prudence and clearly separate it from

deceit. Indeed, Lydgate could very well have used another word to refer to false prudence

in order to differentiate it from good prudence ("engyne," for example, which he does

sometimes use for this purpose). Instead, by failing to clearly differentiate the two types

of prudence, by using the same word to refer to antinomous concepts, Lydgate creates a

confusion that is not unlike the one he obtains when he uses the vocabulary of rhetoric to

refer to both the truthful pronunciations of the chroniclers and the lies of the poets and

other deceitful characters inside the plot of the poem. The presence within the same work

of contradictory understandings of the central concept of prudence introduces a doubt

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[45] See respectively Luke 16:8 and Odo's <u>Collationes</u> I, xxv (<u>PL</u> 133.537A).

where moral clarity should prevail. Or, if you will, the <u>Troy Book</u> does not offer any real assurances when it comes to the virtue of prudence. Since for the characters inside the plot, "bad prudence" is at times undistinguishable from "good prudence"—much like virtuous and deceitful characters are sometimes undistinguishable in Lydgate's poem— the effectiveness of the <u>Troy Book</u>'s moral message is thereby somewhat eroded. It would be a mistake to solely assume that when he used the same word for antinomous concepts, Lydgate was only following current usage or, at best (that is, if he was aware of the possible lexical confusion), that he was trying to warn his readers against false prudence. Though these assumptions *may* be correct, it is important not to stop there: we must realize in turn that by deploying contradictory meanings of the word "prudence," Lydgate's work leaves open the possibility that good prudence is not completely separate from elements of bad prudence. In effect, there is no such thing as totally good prudence since the word itself as used by Lydgate in his poem always includes within its range of possible meanings deceitful underhanded actions. In other words, the cardinal virtue at the heart of the <u>Troy Book</u> is also the (semantic) disguisement for the vice of deception. In his Prologue, Lydgate repeatedly claims that his poem will tell the truth. As we know, part of what he means when he uses the word "trouthe" in this context is "moral truth." However, the primary moral tenet of the poem, prudence, is semantically also associated with craftiness, hypocrisy, dissembling, and deception. Once again, Lydgate's poem contains elements that weaken its own claims.

In the introduction to his 1998 partial edition of the <u>Troy Book</u>, Robert R. Edwards briefly notes the contradictory meanings of prudence in Lydgate's plot:

> [I]f prudence is the chief virtue of <u>Troy Book</u>, it also generates the profound moral contradiction that inhabits the center of Lydgate's poem. In the Troy story, prudence means right reason, foresight, cleverness, eloquence, and practical wisdom, but it also comes to mean cunning, deceit, and false language. (6)

He elaborates on this idea in his 2001 article "Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> and the Confusion of Prudence." Edwards here refines his argument by, amongst others, introducing the notion of "false prudence":

> At various points, the capacity for foresight and nimble adjustment threatens to become indistinguishable from cold calculation and treachery. Language, in a repeated image, is poisoned by hidden venom. Though prudence offers the hope of outwitting Fortune by anticipating the consequences of action, the correlative problem is to escape the consequences of false and sham prudence. (57)

Though Edwards's scrupulous analysis often intersects with mine, it nevertheless reaches different conclusions mostly because of the types of assumptions on which Edwards bases his argument. In particular, Edwards does not truly consider the possibility that the <u>Troy Book</u> might be anything else than the work of a plain-spoken poet who wholeheartedly supports the monarch. Edwards spells this out in the introductory paragraphs of his article:

> I shall argue that <u>Troy Book</u> not only extols prudence but simultaneously charts its confusion. By confusion I mean both misunderstanding and undoing. My point is not that Lydgate is an ironist whose subtlety has thus far eluded detection. Rather, the virtue he celebrates so insistently is complicated by the movement from precept to narrative and by the competing meanings he seeks to hold in a coherent relation to each other as he expounds the lessons of pagan history to an aristocratic audience far removed in time and space. (53)

He returns to denying any sense of subtlety to Lydgate in the final paragraph of his article when he says that at the end of the poem "Lydgate recommends the lessons of prudence to Henry without irony or any evident sense of contradiction" (68). Regretfully, Edwards

does not present any evidence to back up his premise that Lydgate is not an ironist. Edwards seems to consider the unironic Lydgate as a given, something that everybody agrees on, probably because most critics have always interpreted Lydgate this way. Indeed, Edwards never entertains the possibility that Lydgate might at times have treated his topics with a certain degree of thematic sophistication—occasionally including contradictory elements to express some resistance to politically (and poetically) monolithic views of the world. It is the case, however, that within his own article Edwards uses the word "irony" and "ironic" to describe the actions of some of Lydgate's characters within the poem (see Achilles page 64 and Hector and Agamemnon page 66). This re-emergence of the concept of "irony" in Edwards's article, in contexts where the concept is more seemingly attached to the actions of the characters rather than the author (as though agency resided in the characters, not the author) is—one cannot avoid noting—rather ironic and clearly indicates that irony does play an important role in the dynamics of the <u>Troy Book</u>. Ultimately, of course, the person responsible for adding, or at least emphasizing, ironic situations in a plot is the author, not the characters. So in this sense at least, one has to admit that Lydgate is indeed something of an ironist. Furthermore, in other contexts, Lydgate is not afraid to show himself as an all-out ironist, as, for example, when in a passage relating Criseyde's betrayal he transforms Guido's remark on the changeability of women into an ironic praise for women who take pity on other men and therefore accept them as lovers (IV.2148-77).[46] In short, I cannot agree

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[46] In their respective editions of the <u>Troy Book</u>, both Henry Bergen and Robert R. Edwards actually mention irony in relation to this passage: Bergen refers to Lydgate's "30 ironic lines" (4:169) and Edwards perceives line IV.2148 to be an "ironic comment" on one of Chaucer's repeated assertions in the <u>Canterbury Tales</u> (endnote to IV.2148).

with Edwards's unsupported premise that Lydgate uses no irony in his treatment of prudence—or other topics for that matter.[47]

Because in his article Edwards thus ignores the possibility that Lydgate might sometimes have purposely inserted ironic elements into his narrative, I cannot fully agree with some of his subsequent points either. Edwards argues that the insertion of false prudence in the <u>Troy Book</u> is purposely meant to educate the readers to beware of hidden vices that parade as virtues. I would suggest, however, that if this were fully the case, Lydgate would have spent many more lines moralizing about these instances of false prudence. Arguably, some of the differences between my analysis and Edwards's analysis are due to the fact that Edwards is less interested in analyzing the use of the *word* "prudence" in the <u>Troy Book</u> than in analyzing the many facets of prudent *behavior* in Lydgate's characters. As can be gathered from the previous pages, I am mostly interested in commenting on Lydgate's use of the word "prudence" and its derivatives. While it is in my view undeniable that Lydgate denounces craftiness, deception, and treachery in his poem, it is also the case that when he elaborates on such negative attributes in order to get his didactic message across, he generally prefers to use terms like "trecchery," "tresoun," "falsehood," doubilnesse," "deceyt," and "feynyng" instead of the more polysemic "prudence." For example, in the passages in which Lydgate specifically denounces Antenor's duplicity in the poem, he does not bring up the word "prudence" in this context, though he could very easily have used it there. Furthermore, if he had wanted to, somewhere in the poem, he could have focused the attention of the

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[47] This dissertation, of course, constitutes further evidence to that effect.

reader on the contradictory meanings of the word "prudence" by inserting some didactic moralizing on the several understandings of the concept—and we know Lydgate was quite good at extensive moralizations. In other words, I am not denying that Lydgate connects the word "prudence" with ambiguous or outrightly negative situations in his poem, for he clearly does. However, unlike Robert R. Edwards, I believe that Lydgate does so in a rather subdued manner, not an overly didactic manner. (And, again, I am very much aware that some of the differences between Edwards's analysis and mine derive from my lexical emphasis versus his thematic emphasis.) Here, as in other places in the <u>Troy Book</u>, Lydgate seems first and foremost interested in inserting subtle ambiguity in his poem while maintaining the superficial appearance that his is an ontologically, politically, and poetically conservative text.

I also believe that the ending of Lydgate's poem is rather more complex than Edwards's article leads us to believe. Indeed, in his article Edwards strongly suggests that the poem's ending presents a resolution to the ambiguities that surround the concept of prudence throughout Lydgate's Trojan plot. This is evident in Edwards's concluding paragraph: "When we turn from pagan Troy to Lydgate's age, the perspective changes. <u>Troy Book</u> was commissioned by and addressed to a Christian prince. . . . Henry as a Christian prince has the chance to achieve directly what Trojan history finds only obliquely," namely peace (68-69). For Edwards, the world of fifteenth-century England does not obey the same rules as the classical world of the poem: unlike the world of Troy, Lydgate's contemporary world is not ruled by Fate but by the Christian God. That, for Edwards, seems to make a big difference. The kingdoms of Thessaly and Achaia only

achieve peace after years of cruel combat at Troy and elsewhere. By contrast, Henry has

a chance to achieve immediate peace thanks to his recovery of France, his marriage to

Princess Katherine of France, "his myghti prudent gouernaunce" (V.3385), and,

foremost, Christ's support. Though, as the poem has shown, prudence has serious

limitations, with God's help Henry has the opportunity to overcome these limitations.

Edwards derives this interpretation from (1) Lydgate's statements at the end of Book V

that one should not trust in worldly things and that only God can shield princes from the

nefarious acts of Fortune (3563-92) and (2) Lydgate's subsequent prayer to God that He

grant prosperity and victory to Henry (3593-604).

I would suggest, however, that we do not lose sight of the fact that Lydgate's

Christian ending is above all culturally determined. Like so many other medieval poets,

Lydgate turns to God at the end of his poem and tries to reconcile Christian principles

with the main content of the poem's plot. Also culturally determined is Lydgate's praise

of Henry. Lydgate's prayer that God send Henry his grace is foremost a way for Lydgate

to ingratiate himself with his patron and monarch. Indeed, it matters tremendously that

Lydgate respect certain conventions of literary and political decorum and wish the utmost

best to Henry at the end of his poem.[48] In short, unlike Edwards, I am not convinced that

we should look at the poem's final religious and ingratiating outburst to find new and

meaningful information to understand the poem. However, since Edwards does pay

attention to this section of the poem, let me here briefly address his reading of the Troy

Book's ending. In my view, the altogether optimistic tone of Edwards's conclusion (the

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[48] By stating that Lydgate's praise for his patron and monarch is culturally determined I am not necessarily
implying that it is disingenuous.

impression his article imparts that prudence's ambiguities are resolved in Lydgate's ending) does not sufficiently take into account the cautionary phrasing that Edwards himself uses when he says that Henry has a *chance* to achieve peace directly by embracing Christ. Nowhere does Lydgate state that Henry already enjoys God's protection. Lydgate merely says that he prays that God will protect Henry. This may be a minor distinction, though in my view a point worth noting. In effect, Lydgate implies that in a Christian world, there is no assurance of God's support and, therefore, the virtue of prudence is still left to its own devices and its own limitations. That is, Lydgate's Christian ending does not do away with prudence's ambiguities. Just like in the classical world, there is still a potential for prudence to be used for the wrong reasons in a Christian world.

As I stated earlier, the reason why any of this matters, then, is that the moral truth at the heart of the poem, the "trouthe" that Lydgate mentions over and over in his Prologue, is in fact always a potentially contaminated truth. Moreover, the ambiguity that is thus created by a confusion of meaning affects not only our understanding of the virtue of prudence as displayed by characters inside the plot (which is important enough since the characters inside the plot are supposed to act as models to be emulated, or not, by the readers), but it also weakens the foundation of Lydgate's own historiographical project. Indeed, we will remember that one of the divinities that Lydgate invokes in his Prologue is none other than Othea, the goddess of prudence, whom he asks for help his "wirke texsplyte" (Pro.39)—that is, to cause to succeed—and to make Clio into his muse. The problem is that since the concept of prudence in Lydgate's literary text includes a host of

contradictory meanings, the type of help that Lydgate may receive from Othea is likely to include trickery and perhaps even deceit in addition to the more unequivocally virtuous behavior. That is, Lydgate's intentions in writing his poem may, after all, not be as immaculate and straightforward as he strongly implies elsewhere in his poem. Likewise, the polysemic understanding of prudence in the Troy Book has an effect on what is commonly understood to be the prudential value of history. As Alexander Murray explains, in the Middle Ages history was not only read for its moral value but also for its prudential value (131-32). By prudential value, I mean the ability of readers of history to learn from the past and avoid making similar mistakes. If prudence as described by the Troy Book itself not only implies virtuous behavior but also comprises cunning and treachery, then it follows that those types of backhanded methods, though seemingly rejected in Lydgate's plot, are in actuality always present at some level in the advice given to a (future) monarch. In a nutshell, by refusing to clarify the semantic confusion of prudence, Lydgate's historical project incorporates within itself—or at the very least always remains open to—the very ambiguities that it appears to reject elsewhere.[49]

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[49] Germane to my discussion of prudence in the Troy Book is Paul Strohm's analysis of Lydgatean prudence in the Fall of Princes as expressed in his Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare. In this book, Strohm argues that fifteenth-century England experienced something of a "pre-Machiavellian moment" during the years between 1450 and 1485 (that is, roughly the period of the Wars of the Roses) in that many writings of the time addressed issues of "practical statecraft and political calculation" (1). Much of this new interest was connected to a revised view of a person's relation to Fortune which had occurred earlier in the century. Whereas in the past, individuals were encouraged to adopt humility in the face of a Fortune that could not be controlled by human beings but was the instrument of God's will (like in, for example, Boccaccio's De casibus illustrium virorum), "the prudent prince [could now] effectively Fortune-proof himself by exercise of foresight and qualities of *virtue*… This view [was] introduced to England by … John Lydgate, and [flourished] in the second half of the fifteenth century" (2). Strohm analyzes the shift in the understanding of prudence between Boccaccio's De casibus and Laurent de Premierfait's translation into French of this work, Des cas des nobles homes et femmes. This shift was then reflected in Lydgate's translation of Premierfait into the Fall of Princes (appr. 1431-38). (In turn, the Fall of Princes had a lasting effect on later English texts. The traces of this influence can, for example, be seen in the sixteenth-century text Mirror for Magistrates and Shakespeares's Henry VI, Part 3.) One of the main differences between my analysis of prudence in the Troy Book and Strohm's analysis of prudence in the

In the preceding pages of this chapter, I have more deeply considered what truth means in Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>. By paying closer attention to the concept of factual truth and moral truth, I have managed to expose the limitations of the "trouthe" that Lydgate claims for his work in the Prologue. In the next and last chapter, I will return to the topic of eloquence, address the issue of rhetoric's effectiveness, and link it to the overall validity of Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u>. I will focus on Hector's and Paris's debate in Book II. My reading of this debate will foreground a sharp contrast between Hector's logic-based rhetorical speech and Paris's more subjective flowery disquisition. Though victorious inside the plot of the Trojan story, Paris's speech comes across as nothing but a rhetorical travesty in Lydgate's interpretation of the passage. This situation not only further undermines the value of eloquence in the <u>Troy Book</u>, but also raises some interesting implications for Lydgate's poem itself. Indeed, as I will show, distinct stylistic and thematic similarities between the <u>Troy Book</u> and Paris's speech contribute to casting an additional and final doubt on Lydgate's own <u>Troy Book</u> project.

<u>Fall of Princes</u>, is that—though both poems encourage the use of prudence for political advancement—prudence in the <u>Troy Book</u> sometimes borders on or is synonymous with deceit. On the other hand, Strohm's analysis of prudence in the <u>Fall of Princes</u> reveals no such confusion of prudence. Prudence as discussed by Strohm in relation to the <u>Fall of Princes</u> refers to a more honorable virtue.

CHAPTER 5

HECTOR'S LOGIC-BASED RHETORIC, PARIS'S POETIC ELOQUENCE,

AND LYDGATE'S <u>TROY BOOK</u>

When in this dissertation I have discussed Lydgate's treatment of rhetoric in the

<u>Troy Book</u>, I have most often used the word "rhetoric" as it was understood at the

beginning of the fifteenth century, that is, as a synonym for eloquent style.[1] Indeed, when

Lydgate equates rhetoric with truth in the early parts of his poem (a premise that, we now

well know, his poem subsequently strongly undermines), it is not Ciceronian-type

arguments that Lydgate is thinking of but amplified and ornate language of the kind that

was much admired during his lifetime. This is not to say, however, that concepts

pertaining more decidedly to classical oratory and/or elements of rhetoric emphasizing

the content of a speech rather than the form are altogether absent from Lydgate's poem.

For example, as I noted in chapter 1, Lydgate hints at the five canons of classical rhetoric

when he explains how Jason develops and delivers a speech to King Cethes of Colchos

(I.1397-405).[2] In the next few pages, I wish to focus on a speech by Hector in Book

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[1] See pages 61-63 for a short explanation of how "rhetoric" came to mean poetic style in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

[2] See page 43 of this dissertation.

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II.2185-216. Hector mostly bases his fairly brief performance on his ability to capture the goodwill of his audience and to articulate powerful arguments that appeal to his audience's reason, all rhetorical concepts that are very much associated with classical oratory. In contrast, Paris's response to Hector (II.2310-809) is a stylistically ornate, long narrative which displays many characteristics of late medieval poetry. That is, Hector's and Paris's speeches illustrate the tension between two different understandings of rhetoric: rhetoric as argument and rhetoric as style. I will analyze both the content and the form of those two speeches and discuss the ways that they both play out with their Trojan audience.

The debate between Hector and Paris takes place in the context of Priam's attempt to rally his sons (legitimate and illegitimate) to his decision to attack the Greeks, take vengeance for the Greeks' destruction of Old Troy, and recover Priam's abducted sister, Hesione. In terms of classical rhetorical theory, both Hector's and Paris's speeches are deliberative speeches. That is, they aim to persuade the audience of the necessity of a course of action in the future.[3] In classical oratory, deliberative speeches usually had an introduction (*exordium*), a proof made up of arguments in favor of one's viewpoint (*confirmatio*) and refutations of one's opponent's arguments (*reprehensio*), and a conclusion (*conclusio*). Because of the forward-looking nature of deliberative speeches, another part of speech, the narration (*narratio*) of the facts that need to be known before

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[3] The two other types of speeches are judicial speeches, which aim to persuade the audience that actions of the past need to be defended or condemned (for examples, speeches delivered in courts of law), and epideictic (ceremonial) speeches, which express praise or blame but do not require the audience to adopt a particular course of action.

presenting one's proof, was often left out.[4] If a *narratio* was included, it came right after

the *exordium*.[5] Since Hector is Priam's oldest son and well known to be wise, Priam

makes his appeal to him first. Hector is all too aware that his father has fundamentally

already made up his mind about his decision to attack. Indeed, before consulting with his

sons, Priam met with his lords in a parliament and convinced them of the necessity to

attack the Greeks. Therefore, Hector proceeds with caution and makes especially sure to

win the benevolence of his father (and the rest of the audience) first, before actually

advising him not to seek redress for the terrible wrongs done to the Trojans. Thus, at the

beginning of his speech, Hector reveals much prudence and appeals to his audience's

goodwill in an extended *exordium* (II.2183-228). Cicero explains in his <u>De inventione</u>

that "Exordium est oratio animum auditoris idonee comparans ad reliquam dictionem;

quod eveniet si eum benivolum, attentum, docilem confecerit" (I.20). [An exordium is a

passage which brings the mind of the auditor into a proper condition to receive the rest of

the speech. This will be accomplished if he becomes well-disposed, attentive, and

receptive.][6] Cicero explains that one of the ways to obtain one's audience's goodwill is

by stressing the greatness of the audience itself:

> Ab auditorum persona benivolentia captabitur si res ab eis fortiter,
> sapienter, mansuete gestae proferentur, ut ne qua assentatio nimia

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[4] A *narratio* is better adjusted to the needs of judicial speeches.

[5] In practice, there were plenty of deviations from all those theoretical precepts. Indeed, rhetorical theory needed to be adapted to the particulars of individual speeches. Much of this information on classical oratory is to be found in the introduction to George A. Kennedy's <u>A New History of Classical Rhetoric</u>, esp. 4-5.

[6] <u>De inventione</u> is considered to present the most systematic account of a speech's arrangement. Cicero identifies six parts of speech. In addition to the *exordium*, *narratio*, *confirmatio*, *reprehensio,* and *conclusio*, Cicero discusses a speech's *partitio* (clarification of the speech), which he puts between the *narratio* and the *confirmatio*.

significetur, si de eis quam honesta existimatio quantaque eorum iudici et
auctoritatis exspectatio sit ostendetur. (I.22)
[Good-will will be sought from the persons of the auditors if an account is
given of acts which they have performed with courage, wisdom, and
mercy, but so as not to show excessive flattery: and if it is shown in what
honourable esteem they are held and how eagerly their judgement and
opinion are awaited.]

We can observe such rhetorical maneuvering in Hector's *exordium*. Indeed, Hector starts

by addressing his father with much deference, even filial affection: "Myn owne lord, and

my fader dere" (II.2183). Then he proceeds to praise him by marking him (and his kin)

off as having great worth while also clearly stating his support for an attack on the

Greeks. Hector explains that great wrongs done to noble men should be revenged, in fact

revenged more forcefully than wrongs done to lesser men. This rationale for retaliation is

part of Nature's plan. In his view,

> Gretter gref is to highe estate
> To suffre an harme, of cas or auenture,
> Or any wrong vniustly to endure,
> Or Iniuries compassed of malys,
> Is more offence, by discret avys,
> To hem þat ben famous in manhod,
> Renomed, & born of gentyl blood,
> Þan to swiche on þat holde is but a wreche. (II.2202-09)[7]

Hector himself is filled with rage and thirsty for Greek blood,

> For right as I eldest am of age
> Among your sonys, so am I most with rage
> I-fret with-Inne, iustly of knighthood,
> With my right hond to schede þe Grekys blod,
> As þei schal fynd, paraunter or þei wene,

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[7] Robert R. Edwards explains how in this whole passage,

> Hector argues for distributive rather than rectificatory justice. As Aristotle explains in
> Book 5 of the <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u>, distributive justice remedies discrepancies between
> persons of unequal worth by a geometrical progression, while rectificatory justice works
> among equals by an arithmetic progression. Thus an injury done a great person is greater
> in magnitude than one done a person of lesser social stature. Lydgate is expanding on a
> theme in Guido (Book 6). (<u>Troy Book: Selections</u> endnote to II.2197-209)

Whan tyme cometh, þe soþe schal be sene. (II.2223-28)

Thus, Hector manages to present himself as being completely at one with his father's intentions; he is the son that Priam wants him to be. Now that Hector has positioned himself as on his father's side, not an outsider, he can then more easily shift to presenting his viewpoint that war in the present circumstances would, after all, not be the best choice.[8]

But even this move is handled very delicately and deftly by Hector. That is, Hector does not make an abrupt 180 degree turn in his speech. Instead, he continues talking to his father still assuming he is going to attack, but he encourages him to consider in his mind *before he attacks* how this war is likely to end:

> But first I rede, wisely in your mynde
> To cast aforn and leue nat be-hynde,
> Or ye be-gynne, discretly to aduerte
> And prudently consyderen in your herte
> Al, only nat þe gynnyng but þe ende,
> And þe myddes, what weie þei wil wende,
> And to what fyn Fortune wil hem lede—
> Yif ye þus don, amys ye may nat spede. (II.2229-36)

Hector then mentions the possibility of a good or a bad ending ("What weye þei trace to wo or to delite" [II.2241]) before settling down on the prospect of a bad ending ("[Þ]ough a gynnyng haue his appetite, / Yet in þe ende, pleynly þis no fable, / Þer may þing folwe,

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[8] There are similarities with Cicero's scenario where an orator has to argue a difficult case, that is "a quo est alienatus animus eorum qui audituri sunt" (I.20) [one which has alienated that sympathy of those who are about to listen to the speech]. One of the reasons for that alienation is that the case to be defended may appear as "scandalous" (*turpitudo*) to the audience (I.23). In that case, it is best to proceed by insinuation. Very practically, "interponi oportet; . . . pro re in qua offenditur, aliam rem quae probatur . . . et dissimulare te id defensurum quod existimeris; deinde, cum iam mitior factus erit auditor, ingredi pedetemptim in defensionem et dicere ea quae indignentur adversarii tibi quoque indigna videri (I.24). [[I]t is necessary to substitute . . . for a thing at which offence is taken, another which is approved . . . Also, you must conceal your intention of defending the point which you are expected to defend. After that, when the audience has now become more tractable, approach the defence little by little and say that the things which displease your opponents are also displeasing to you.]

whiche is nat commendable" [II.2242-44]). He then finally draws the following logical

conclusion:

> But whan þat it in wele ne may contene,
> It is wel bet by-tymes to abstene
> Þan put in doute þat stant in surete;
> For who-so doth hath ofte aduersite. (II.2251-54)

In other words, it is only at the 68th line of his rather brief speech of 120 verse lines that

Hector finally starts revealing his mind. This point of view (presented in II.2251-54) now

needs to be supported by arguments (a speech's *confirmatio*). It is, however, the case that

Hector's viewpoint has already been preceded by and even includes within itself Hector's

first argument in favor of peace: namely, that one should not start a project the outcome

of which one cannot predict. It is also the case that Hector continues to appeal to his

audience's goodwill in the second part of his speech.[9] Indeed, right after Hector states his

opposition to war, he tries to mitigate the impact of his statement and reaffirm his

complete deference toward his father by stressing that he means no offence:

> But humblely to your estat royal,
> Of hert I praye, lat nat offende at al,
> Þat I am bolde to seie my mocioun;
> For in good faith, of noon entencioun,
> I no þing mene yow to don offence. (II.2255-59)

Then, he returns to discussing his first reason to abstain from seeking revenge. This

argument is a general appeal for prudence in the face of the vagaries of Fortune. He

refines this argument and subsequently proceeds to discussing his second argument in

favor of peace. Hector's second argument is also a prudential argument but more specific

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[9] In his <u>Institutio oratoria,</u> Quintilian mentions that the *exordium* can appear anywhere in a speech: "Haec de prohooemio, quotiens erit eius usus" (4.1.72). [Such are the rules for the *exordium*, wherever it is employed.]

than the first one: he warns the audience that the Greeks are much more powerful than the

Trojans—most notably, the Greeks have at their subjection Europe and Africa, whereas

the Trojans can only rely on the help of the Asians (II.2265-78). Next, Hector moves on

to his speech's *reprehensio.* He first refutes one of Priam's most emotional arguments,

namely the argument that right now the Greeks are holding Priam's sister Hesione

captive and that his sons should be ashamed that through their inaction they are suffering

her to be misused:

> And how vngodly also þat þei holde
> Myn oune suster, called Exyoun,
> To ful gret schame and confusioun,
> And highe repref to your worþines,
> Þat, me semeth, of verray kyndenes,
> And of nature ye ought to ben agreued,
> And inwardly in hert[e] sore ameved,
> To suffren hir, in hyndring of hir name,
> So to be tretid, for your alder schame. (II.2106-14)

In a real sense, this is Priam's most compelling argument for war, for in his entreaty to

his sons Priam has managed to couch Hesione's continued abduction as an attack on the

family honor. Waging war against the Greeks would not only enable a family member to

regain her freedom but also restore the family honor in general. So it is particularly

important for Hector to deflate this issue in his speech. In classical oratory there are

different ways to refute an argument, depending on the validity of the argument

presented. In this particular case, the argument of Hesione's capture is certainly a strong

argument. Cicero explains that

> modus erit reprehensionis per quem contra firmam argumentationem
> aeque firma aut firmior ponitur. Hoc genus in deliberationibus maxime
> versabitur, cum aliquid quod contra dicatur, aequum esse concedimus, sed
> id quod nos defendimus, necessarium esse demonstramus. (I.96)

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> [[One] method of refutation is to counter a strong argument with one equally strong or stronger. This kind will be used particularly in speaking before a deliberative body, when we grant that something said on the other side is fair, but prove that the position we are defending is necessary.]

Hector indeed acknowledges that Hesione is illegally detained by the Greeks: "And þough also myn aunte Exioun / Ageyn al right be holde of Thelamoun" (II.2279-80). He even acknowledges to some extent that Hesione needs to be rescued, but with a major caveat: "It is nat good for hir redempcioun, / To putte vs alle to destruccioun" (II.2281-82). This then is the first of two arguments Hector uses to refute Priam's claim that they need to regain Hesione: many Trojans would unnecessarily lose their lives while trying to rescue her (II.2281-87). The second argument Hector uses is that Hesione might potentially die soon after her release, in which case the Trojans would have gained nothing but enmity and death (II.2288-93). In other words, in both these arguments Hector purposely decides to present Hesione as an individual person, not the symbol of a whole family's and, by extension, nation's honor.[10] Finally, Hector turns to the brief *conclusio* of his speech. He leaves out all appeals to the emotions that one might find in a speech's ending under other circumstances,[11] and he limits himself to a recapitulation of the overarching theme behind his two arguments in the *confirmatio*: prudence (II.2294-303). Though he does not appeal to his audience's emotions, he does attempt to make a

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[10] I borrow this observation from Scott-Morgan Straker's brief comparison of Hector's hermeneutic strategies to Paris's ("Ethics, Militarism and Gender" 63). Though Straker's general discussion follows others lines of inquiry than my present analysis and thus achieves different conclusions, I do agree with this particular comment.

[11] Cicero's De inventione includes an *indignatio* (arousal of ill-will against one's opponent) and *conquestio* (arousing of pity and sympathy) in the *conclusio* (I.98-109). Given that in this debate, Priam is at once Hector's "opponent" and audience, it would be inappropriate for Hector to include an *indignatio* in his *conclusio*. Hector also leaves out any *conquestio*, obviously deeming that emphasizing the rational aspect of his arguments is more useful at this point.

final appeal to Priam's goodwill by anticipating and rebutting a potential criticism of his viewpoint not to attack:

> But dout[e]les, for no cowardyse
> I seie nat þis in youre highe presence,
> But for cause I hold it no prudence,
> To Fortune, ful of doubilnes—
> Sith we be sure—to putte oure sikernes. (II.2298-302)

In other words, even as he is concluding his speech and reasserting the importance of prudence, Hector includes a small *reprehensio* in which he denies that there is any cowardice involved in his decision.

So what we witness here is a well-crafted oration which is markedly to the point and skillfully delivered by Hector "[w]ith softe speche" (II.2180) and "sobre countenans" (II.2181). Certainly one would think that Hector's rhetorical performance might come as a welcome, rational, and effective response to Priam's overly emotional and all but inarticulate appeal for revenge ("His hertly wo was so outragous, / Þat for wepyng & sobbyng furious, / Vnneþe he myght with any word out-breke" [II.2089-91]). And yet Hector, for all his rhetorical skills (combined, of course, with his impeccable reputation as an outstanding fighter and a prudent leader), will not manage to persuade his father and his brothers of the sagacity of his judgment.[12] On the other hand, as we are about to see, Paris's subsequent speech which is quite different in style and content and which is fundamentally weaker will manage to win the approval of his Trojan audience.

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[12] Other critics have also commented on Hector's rhetorical ability. Thus, in a brief analysis of Hector's speech James Simpson has called Hector's response "an accomplished rhetorical performance" (Reform and Cultural Revolution 255). Likewise, Robert R. Edwards has referred to Hector's "skill in debate and deliberation" (Troy Book: Selections 5). Though Edwards does not here specifically refer to Hector's speech at II.2183-303, it seems likely that Edwards has this speech in mind since it is one of Hector's most memorable speeches in the Troy Book. On the other hand, Scott Morgan-Straker speaks of Hector's lack of "rhetorical sophistication," an assessment with which I disagree ("Ethics, Militarism and Gender" 63).

Paris's speech stands out not for its rhetorical structure but rather for its great

length (499 verse lines compared to Guido's 83 prose lines), its looseness, and its

extended and digressive narration of Paris's dream (Hector's speech does not include any

narrative). This, however, does not mean that Paris's speech completely lacks structure.

In fact, there is quite a bit of structure, and though it is indeed more simplified and

somewhat more buried than in Hector's speech, it is at times used to very good effect. To

begin with, Paris leaves out any *exordium* at the beginning of his speech.[13] Instead, he

immediately gets into the meat of things. That is, Paris immediately expresses his opinion

on the matter at hand, a move which, in this particular case, is probably most effective,

given that he wants to demarcate himself from Hector's stance by unambiguously

aligning himself with his father's decision. The impact of Paris's direct statement is

furthermore increased by the fact that in its wording it harks back to the issue of honor

and pride that was first raised by Priam:

> [W]e schuld litel drede
> In knyghtly wyse for to vndirtake
> Vp-on Grekis a were for to make,
> Al attonys her pride to confounde. (II.2312-15)

Paris then proceeds to refute Hector's second argument in favor of peace, namely

Hector's belief that the Greeks are stronger than the Trojans. In Paris's view, the Trojans

have plenty of well-equiped knights and can count on the help of many regions (2316-

29). As I mention in footnote 13 below, this passage on the excellence of the Trojan

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[13] There are, however, moments later in his speech where Paris tries to ingratiate himself with his audience. For example, right before and right after narrating his dream, Paris addresses his father with the uttermost reverence: "my lord most souereyn" (II.2368) and "my lord, whom I most loue & drede" (II.2793). Also, Paris's first argument in his *reprehensio* is bound to assure him the good-will of his father and brothers since in it he stresses the high degree of preparedness and strength of the Greek forces (and in that way his speech subtly praises the Trojans' own battle readiness).

knighthood has the added advantage for Paris of flattering his audience since his brothers

are themselves Trojan knights:

> [W]e passyngly habounde
> Of chiualrie, here with-Inne our toun,
> And haue plente and pocessioun
> Of eche þing þat may to werre a-veile,
> Stuf in our silf and ryal appareile
> Of al þat longeth to assautis marcial,
> And with al þis, more in special,
> Help & socour of many regioun,
> With vs to werke to her destruccioun,
> Þe pompe & pride manly to abate,
> And of Grekis þe malis for to mate;
> For al þat þei of hert[e] ben so stoute,
> Me semeth schortly þat we dar nat doute,
> Nor on no part for to be dismaied. (II.2316-29)

However, beyond the fact that such a statement plays well with the audience present, it is

to be noted that Paris does not provide any real specifics to strengthen his general

argument. In particular, he does not address the issue brought up by Hector that the

Greeks control all of Europe and Africa, whereas the Trojans only have Asia. The

audience is just asked to take him at his word—and it will. Once Paris has clarified this

point, he can then move to his speech's *confirmatio*. Notice that Paris has reversed the

usual order of a speech by including a *refutatio* before his *confirmatio*. Paris's one

argument in support of war in his *confirmatio* is that, provided Priam agrees to it, Paris

will undertake the whole enterprise himself and recover Hesione. In practice, he explains,

he will ravish a Greek lady of high birth and bring her back to Troy in order to swap her

for Hesione. The gods have revealed to him in a dream how to achieve his goal. He next

includes an extremely detailed and long narrative of his dream as well as the events

immediately preceding the dream. When he is finished with this narrative, he then

concludes his speech by restating one more time that if Priam agrees to send him to Greece, he will return with a beautiful lady whom Priam will be able to exchange for his dear sister Hesione. That is, Paris's *conclusio* is a restating of his *confirmatio*. So in a nutshell, Paris's speech indeed relies on a recognizable and at times quite astute arrangement of its various parts. And yet, for all that, the speech's arrangement (*dispositio*) is all but overshadowed by Paris's style or manner of speaking (*elocutio*), an ease with words that results in his speech's great length and detailed narrative. What is more, the quality of the arguments used also takes a backseat in Paris's speech. In fact, Paris's rhetoric to a very large extent is responsible for concealing the fallacy of his main argument in support of war.

In what respect, then, does Paris's stylistic facility display itself? To start with, Paris has a distinct tendency to express in many words what could easily be said in just a few words. Such wordiness reveals itself in the most innocuous sections of his speech, as for example when he introduces his narrative of the dream in the following way:

> First, how þat I schal þis purpose fyn,
> Þe goddis han þorugh her power devyne
> Schewed to me be reuelacioun;
> For þer-vppon I had a visioun
> But late agoon, as I ley and slepe,
> Vn-to whiche yif ye taken kepe,
> Ye may not faile nor be in no dispeire
> To han recur of hir þat is so faire,
> For whom ye haue now so moche care.
> And þe maner hol I wil declare
> Of þis drem to your magnificence,
> Yif it so be ye yeue wil credence
> To my tale, for I schal not dwelle
> Ceriously in ordre for to telle
> Þe trouþ[e] pleyn, & no fable feyn,
> To yow þat ben my lord most souereyn. (II.2353-68)

It is rather ironic that in this passage Paris says that he will not postpone ("schal not dwelle") telling the truth, when those fifteen lines actually repeat information that he has already stated earlier (that Priam will recover his beautiful sister for whom he is so worried), reveals information that will be stated later (that recently he had a dream in his sleep [which begs the question whether people ever dream when they are not asleep]), and overall displays a prolixity that delays rather than enables a prompt delivery of "[þ]e trouþ[e] pleyn." Certainly, Paris's verbosity contrasts significantly with Hector's concision. The wordiness of the passage becomes even more apparent when one compares it to Guido's original, which is a mere sentence: "Quod si a uobis querendum est qualiter istud sciam, dabo de hoc uestre conscientie certum signum quod a diis ipsis pro certo recepi" (61). [But if you must inquire how I know this, I will present to your understanding a sure sign concerning it, a sign which I have surely received from the gods themselves.]

The section where Paris's fluent rhetoric displays itself the most is clearly in the narrative section of the speech: II.2369-792. As I mentioned earlier, this section, which relates Paris's dream and the events leading up to the dream, is extremely long: 423 verse lines—a considerable expansion of Guido's 62 prose lines. Here too, one immediately gets an impression of diffuseness, convoluted lengthiness, and general delaying of what Paris deems to be (and wants his audience to believe is) "[þ]e trouþ[e] pleyn." Indeed, from the beginning of his narrative, Paris risks losing himself in an abundance of details. Thus, his long introduction establishes the season and the time of the day, followed by his decision to go hunting during which he gets separated from the rest of the company while

pursuing an isolated hart, which in turn leads him to fall asleep by a river and dream

(II.2369-465).[14] The problem is, of course, that Paris has promised he "schal not dwelle"

explaining how he received a revelation from the gods. In addition, given that this

narrative is part of a deliberative speech and supposed to function as evidence that he can

recover Hesione by ravishing a Greek lady (the sole argument in his *confirmatio*), one

would expect Paris to actually hurry to the heart of the matter instead of waxing poetical.

Here too, Paris likes to use many words to express otherwise fairly simple ideas—for

example, he likes to repeat concepts using different words or phrases (a device that most

medieval rhetoricians called *interpretatio*). And yes, Paris's language acquires a

distinctly poetical, literary quality in his narrative, most notably in the passage where he

imitates the structure, the feeling of incipiency, and even some of the imagery of the first

18 lines of the <u>Canterbury Tales</u>:

> Whan þat Tytan, with his bemys rede,
> From Gemmyny drof his chare of gold
> Toward þe Crabbe for to take his holde,
> Whiche named is þe paleys of Dyane,
> Þe bente mone þat wexe can & wane;
> Whanne halwed is þe sonnys stacioun,
> Nighe þe myddes of þe moneþ of Ivn—
> At whiche sesoun, erly on a morwe,
> Whan þat Phebus, to voide nyghtes sorwe,
> Doth Pirrous hys wayn ageyn vp drawe,
> And Aurora estward doth a-dawe,
> And with þe water of hir teris rounde
> Þe siluer dewe causeth to abounde
> Vp-on herbis and on floures soote,
> For kyndely norissyng boþe of crop & rote,
> Vp I roos [out] of my bedde anoon,
> Ful desyrous on huntyng for to goon,
> Priked in hert with lusty fresche plesance

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[14] My purposely long-winded sentence reflects, to some extent, the nature of Paris's speech.

> To do to Loue some due observaunce,
> And Lucyna þat day to magnifie,
> Which callid is lady of venarye,
> And duely oure rytis to obserue,
> Cithera and hir[e] for to serue,
> I and my feris, oure hertis to releue. (II.2378-4001)

The "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote" (1), "Whan Zephirus . . ." (5), "Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages" (12) structure of the <u>Canterbury Tales</u> is here replaced by "Whan þat Tytan, with his bemys rede" (II.2378), " Whanne halwed . . ." (II.2383), "Whan þat Phebus . . ." (II.2386), "Vp I roos [out] of my bedde anoon, / Ful desyrous on huntyng for to goon" (II.2393-94). Whereas in Chaucer "the yonge sonne / Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne" (7-8), Paris talks about Titan moving from Gemini toward Cancer (II.2378-80) and says that "halwed is þe sonnys stacioun" (II.2383). Instead of going on a pilgrimage and seeking the shrine of a martyr, Paris prefers to go hunting and "To do to Loue some due observaunce" (II.2396). In Chaucer's <u>General Prologue</u>, Nature "[p]riketh" small birds "in hir corages" (11), while in Paris's speech he himself was "Priked in hert with lusty fresche plesance" (II.2395). Finally, the rhyme of Chaucer's first couplet, "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote" (1-2) has its equivalent in Paris's statement that dew abounds "Vp-on herbis and on floures soote, / For kyndely norissyng boþe of crop & rote" (II.2391-92). Yet, not only is this whole passage distinctly literary due to its obvious allusions to Chaucer's poem, but also it is vastly amplified from the corresponding passage in Guido, which is less than one sentence: ". . . celebrante sole sol‹s›ticium estuale, dum sol sub principio Cancri ageret cursum suum, quodam die Veneris, venationis causa, placuit michi adire nemora in multorum collegio venatorum"

(61). [. . . when the summer sun was at its solstice, and when the sun was running its course near the beginning of Cancer. One Friday it suited me to go to the groves to hunt, in a troop of many hunters.]¹⁵

Such prolixity and various amplifications continue into the dream section of Paris's narrative. As a matter of fact, it is in this section of Paris's narrative that we find the most substantial additions to Guido's original. Most notably, Paris gives us four very detailed iconographies of Mercury and the three goddesses, Venus, Pallas, and Judo. These lengthy descriptions of the physical and moral attributes of the divinities—which are not even remotely touched on by Guido—mean that one sentence in Guido's version of Paris's speech gets extended to 159 verse lines in the Troy Book (II.2470-629).¹⁶ Incidentally, extended descriptions of people (or objects or events) were modes of amplifications commonly recommended by rhetoricians in the Middle Ages—the device was called *descriptio* in manuals of rhetoric. Earlier in this dissertation, I already discussed Mercury's iconography,¹⁷ and I will return to the implications of this iconography later. As for the descriptions of the three goddesses, they are similar to Mercury's description. Venus is said to be accompanied by white doves, has red roses, and floats in the sea. Pallas has a spear and crystal shield, as well as a rainbow around her

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¹⁵ I have here adjusted Elizabeth Meek's translation of Guido, which I have most often followed in this dissertation. Indeed, it is my belief that in the Latin sentence above, "Veneris" modifies the noun "die" located immediately to its left and not "nemora" located much further in the sentence. In other words, I reject Meek's translation that Paris goes hunting in the groves of Venus. Instead, I believe that for Guido Paris goes hunting on a Friday.

¹⁶ "Soporatus igitur tam grauiter vidi in ipso sompno meo mirabilem uisionem—quod deus, scilicet Mercurius, tres deas in suo comitatu ducebat, Venerem uidelicet, Palladem, et Iunonem" (62). [While I was so heavily drugged with sleep, I saw in my dream a miraculous vision—that a god, namely Mercury, was leading three goddesses with him, namely Venus, Pallas, and Juno.]

¹⁷ See pages 48-50.

head. In front of her, an olive tree is growing with an owl sitting on one of the branches. As for Juno, she comes accompanied by her nymphs who dwell in floods. Juno is a virgin and her sacred bird is the peacock. Each time, Paris provides an explanation of the symbolism behind the iconography. Apart from the detailed descriptions of Mercury and the three goddesses, there are other additions and expansions of various sorts in Paris's narrative of his dream. For example, when Paris reports Mercury's words, there is a digression (*digressio*) of some 27 lines on the vanity of women (II.2672-99). In this side reflection brought about by the competing ambitions of the three goddesses to be judged the most beautiful, Mercury explains how it is characteristic of women to think themselves more attractive than all other women. Men should be cautious, for some women use the illusions of nighttime and cosmetics to hide their lack of natural beauty. Therefore, one should judge their beauty early in the morning "Whan euery drogge and pot is set a-syde" (II.2696). Guido's Historia reports no such information here. In the Latin prose version, Mercury immediately goes from stating the facts of the engraved apple to telling Paris that he has been chosen to settle the dispute.[18]

So, to summarize, in Lydgate's version of Paris's speech, especially in the narrative, there is a distinct propensity to use an abundance of words and to tease out as many narrative and descriptive strands as possible. Such amplifications in turn push into the background the structure and the overall argumentation of Paris's speech. In other words, the audience starts focusing on the narrative for its own sake, not the narrative's

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[18] Guido's version also relates the whole story without any reference to Discord's role in the appearance of the apple at the banquet. On the other hand, Lydgate's poem does mention Discord and further specifies that the banquet is organized by Jupiter.

place within the whole speech. Paris's amplified *elocutio* is something that readers of

Lydgate's <u>Troy Book</u> are, of course, quite used to. Indeed, such a manner of speaking

reminds us very much of the type of rhetoric that Lydgate appreciates in others and uses a

lot himself. For example, in the Prologue of his <u>Troy Book</u>, Lydgate explains how he

admires Guido's many amplifications and rhetorical flourishes.[19] In turn, Lydgate

conceives of his job of translating Guido's <u>Historia</u> along the lines of amplifying and

embellishing his source text. If one pays close attention to Paris's speech in Book II, one

will notice that Paris is actually made to sound like Lydgate himself, not only because of

his lengthy narrative style but also because of the content that he expresses in some of his

additions and asides. More generally, due to the way Paris frames his dream and due to

the types of literary allusions that he makes in his narrative, Paris very much comes

across as a poet-figure in Lydgate's version of the passage. In short, where Hector has

relied on incisive rational arguments structured in an orderly manner and enhanced with

touches of pathos in his earlier speech (all of which reminds us very much of classical

oratory), Paris's response embodies the type of flowery style, intertextual influences, and

traditional literary *topoi* found in late medieval poetry.

In what specific ways, then—apart from his general inclination to verbosity and

narrative amplification—does Paris remind one of Lydgate? There are two passages that

strike me as particularly *Lydgatean* in Paris's speech. The first one is his stating, right

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[19] See my brief quote on pages 64-65. Lydgate explains that in translating Dares's and Dites's accounts, Cornelius has "left moche be-hynde / Of the story, as men in bokys fynde" (Pro.325-26). He then proceeds to survey the parts of the story that were left out: the origins of the conflict; the names of the regions; details about the ships and food; the number of kings and dukes present at the overthrow of Troy; descriptions of the armors and the battles; and the number of casualties (Pro.324-52). In an endnote to these lines, Robert R. Edwards explains that "Lydgate here gives a list of topics that can be used for rhetorical amplification" (<u>Troy Book: Selections</u>).

before recounting the dream narrative, that he will "not dwelle / Ceriously in ordre for to telle / Þe trouþ[e] pleyn, & no fable feyn" (II.2365-67). This statement is interesting, for it presents a version of Paris who feels the need to point out the truth of his upcoming narrative—just as Lydgate does in his own poem. We will indeed remember that in the Prologue Lydgate speaks extensively about textual truth and, in particular, the truth of his own Troy Book.[20] Guido's Paris does not address such issues in his speech. The second passage that reminds one of Lydgate is Paris's imitation of the introductory lines of the Canterbury Tales when he explains the context of the hunt (II.2378-4001), which I described above. Several times in his Troy Book Lydgate alludes to the first 18 lines of the Canterbury Tales when he wants to describe beginnings of sorts: see I.1197-214 (beginning of the day when Jason and Hercules ready themselves to leave the land of Troy), I.3907-39 (description of April when the Greeks set sail for Troy),[21] and III.2745-57 (description of the morning before a battle). So here too by attaching to Paris a rhetorical move that is often associated with Lydgate, Paris is made to sound like Lydgate himself.

There are a couple of other passages in Paris's speech that carry Lydgatean echoes or connotations, though in those instances the force of the allusions is not as explicit. Thus, Mercury's misogynistic digression on the vanity of women (II.2672-99) that I mentioned above certainly reminds one of the types of antifeminist comments that

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[20] See my chapter 2.

[21] This passage has its equivalent in Guido's Historia (34-35). It is actually very likely that Chaucer modeled his introductory lines of the Canterbury Tales on Guido's lines. In his Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Walter Skeat noted the similarity between Chaucer's passage and Guido's passage (5:1-2). As I mentioned earlier, Chaucer knew Guido's prose text well. See page 132 of this dissertation.

Lydgate inserted a lot in his <u>Troy Book</u>.[22] The problem, of course, is that Mercury's

digression, though part of Paris's speech, is not actually produced by Paris but merely

repeated by him *verbatim*—or so at least we are made to believe. Yet, even so, Mercury's

misogynistic digression in a real sense colors the whole speech in which it is repeated and

therefore contributes to the Lydgatean feel of Paris's speech. The other "Lydgatean"

passage that I have in mind is Paris's denunciation of stinginess, which he brings up in

connection with his hostile representation of Juno as goddess of riches. It is not the fact

that Paris's depiction of Juno is negative that in itself makes the passage "Lydgatean."

When Lydgate wrote Paris's speech, he was probably influenced by the negative views of

Juno and wealth in Fulgentius's <u>Mitologiae</u>, which work Paris twice mentions in his

speech (II.2486, II.2581).[23] What seems unique in Paris's speech is that his negative

description of Juno focuses on her as an embodiment of avarice. Paris condemns this

characteristic and expresses the opposite viewpoint that money should be shared

liberally:

> For þis no drede, as clerkis can declare,
> Þe frute of good is to spende large;
> And who is manful, set but litel charge
> To parte frely his tresour in comovne,
> Whan he discretly seth tyme oportune. (II.2622-26)

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[22] See pages 108-13 of this dissertation for Lydgate's hostility toward women.

[23] Fulgentius does not mince his words when discussing Juno. Among his most biting descriptions one finds, "[D]eam etiam partus uolunt, quod diuitiae semper praegnaces sint et nonnumquam abortiant. Huius quoque in tutelam pauum ponunt, quod omnis uita potentiae petax in aspectum sui semper quaerat ornatum; sicut enim pauus stellatum caudae curuamine concauans antrum faciem ornet posterioraque turpiter nudet, ita diuitiarum gloriaeque appetitus momentaliter ornat, postrema tamen nudat" (38-9). [They choose her as the goddess of birth, because riches are always productive and sometimes abortive. They also place the peacock under her patronage, because the whole acquisitive life of power is always looking to adorn its appearance; and as the peacock adorns its front by spreading out in a curve the star-spangled sweep of its tail, and thereby shamelessly exposes its rear, so the striving for riches and renown is alluring for the moment but eventually exposes itself.]

This is certainly the sort of opinion that a late medieval poet whose financial status depended heavily on somebody else's generosity would have been eager to express. That is, Paris's remark reminds us of pleas for money by late medieval poets. Lydgate himself is known for having inserted monetary allusions in some of his poems in the hopes of bringing this issue to the attention of his patron.[24] In that respect then, Paris's condemnation of stinginess and his concomitant urging to give away generously sounds very Lydgatean and constitutes another element that rhetorically links Paris to Lydgate himself.[25] And yet, we cannot consider this material to be as fully a Lydgatean allusion as the material I mentioned earlier, for a couple of reasons. First, other medieval poets discussed matters of payment inside their works. Most notably, Lydgate's fellow poet and contemporary, Thomas Hoccleve, was well known for inserting pleas for money inside

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[24] He is best known to have done this in his Fall of Princes, which was commissioned by Humphrey, duke of Gloucester. See Derek Pearsall's description of this point in his monograph John Lydgate (227-30).

[25] Compare, for example, the content and tone of the passage above with Lydgate's plea to Duke Humphrey to relieve his financial hardship in the Envoy of his Fall of Princes. Incidentally, notice how Junos's wealth is here mentioned:

> Yit of Bachus seryd wer the vynes,
> Off Mygdas touch the aureat lycour,
> And of Iuno wellys crystallynes
> Wer dryed vp; ther fond I no favour:
> A thrustlewh accesse cause of my langour,
> Noon egal peys, herte hevy and purs light,
> Which causith poetys syhen at mydnyght.
>
> Trustyng ageynward your liberal largesse,
> Off this cotidien shal relevyn me,
> Hope hath brought tydyng to recure myn accesse:
> Afftir this ebbe of froward skarsete
> Shal folwe a spryng flood of gracious plente,
> To wasshe a-way be plentevous inffluence
> Al ground ebbys of constreyned indigence. (IX.3338-51)

his poems.[26] Before that, Chaucer had written his "Complaint to His Purse," Deschamps

had addressed King Charles IV in a ballade on himself and his poverty (81, No. 247), and

Machaut had brought up the issue of his blind horse in a poem addressed to John II

(78)—to name but a few examples. Secondly, inside the Troy Book itself, Lydgate never

once broaches the topic of any payment, so that within the context of the poem, it may be

a bit excessive to speak of a Lydgatean allusion here. Nonetheless, the passage I quote

does carry some of the connotations present in poetic requests for payment, and in that

sense it makes Paris sound, if not like Lydgate himself, at least like a poor medieval poet

strapped for cash.

There are other factors that make Paris come across as a poet-figure in his speech.

Most obvious is Paris's recounting of the dream episode in such a way as to make it

sound like a French-inspired literary dream vision. For indeed the reader cannot help

noting the similarities of the whole passage with continental and English dream visions

like the Roman de la rose, many of Guillaume de Machaut's works, and much of

Chaucer's early poetry.[27] To be sure, the basic plot of Paris's dream as narrated in

Lydgate's poem is also present in Guido's Historia. That is, many of the literary *topoi*

that contribute to making Paris's dream feel like a late medieval dream vision are already

contained within Guido's text: the pleasant weather linked to the beautiful season,[28] the

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[26] For example, financial anxiety looms large in his Regement of Princes, written in 1411 and addressed to Prince Henry. Also, Hoccleve's poem "Male Regle" is essentially an appeal to the treasurer to pay him his wages.

[27] Lydgate himself wrote several dream visions according to the French model. See, for example, his "Temple of Glass" and his "Complaynte of a Louers Lyfe."

[28] However, it is true that Paris's dream takes place in June (summer solstice) in both Lydgate's and Guido's versions rather than the more common month of May in literary dream visions.

early morning, the hunt motif, the protagonist's separation from the group, the isolated *locus amoenus*,[29] the meeting with a figure of authority and the learning of some type of lesson inside the dream, the abrupt awakening, and the somewhat anticlimactic return to reality.[30] That being said, it is undeniable that Lydgate emphasizes or adds textual elements that further increase the equation of Paris's narrative with a late medieval dream poem. Thus, though Guido's text mentions both the summer season and the early time of the day, Lydgate poeticizes these almost factual pieces of information by adding touches of lyricism and details concerning lush nature, details that remind one of medieval reverdies found, amongst others, in medieval dream poems.[31] For example, in the following passage, Lydgate speaks about the night's sorrows and Aurora's tears and details the beneficial effects of dew on the surrounding flora:

> Whan þat Phebus, to voide *nyghtes sorwe*,
> Doth Pirrous hys wayn ageyn vp drawe,
> And Aurora estward doth a-dawe,
> And with þe water of hir *teris* rounde
> *Þe siluer dewe causeth to abounde*
> *Vp-on herbis and on floures soote,*
> *For kyndely norissyng boþe of crop & rote.* (II.2386-92; italics mine)

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[29] The motif of the *locus amoenus* ("pleasant place") goes back to the classical and medieval Latin literary tradition. In his landmark European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, Ernst Robert Curtius defined the *locus amoenus* as "a beautiful, shaded natural site. Its minimum ingredients comprise a tree (or several trees), a meadow, and a spring or brook. Birdsong and flowers may be added. The most elaborate examples also add a breeze" (195).

[30] The motifs related to the time of year, the time of day, the hunt, the isolation, and the *locus amoenus* can be found inside or outside the dream—or both.

[31] The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines "reverdie" as follows: "A kind of medieval French dancing song celebrating the arrival of spring. The term is sometimes extended to include any poem or poetic passage that welcomes spring's return." Notice that songs, poems, and poetic passages celebrating early summer are considered reverdies as well. Indeed, one of the best known reverdies is actually called "Sumer is icumen in" (ca. 1250).

Also similar to many medieval reverdies and French-inspired dream poems is the fact

that luscious nature here acts as a thematic background and motivator of sorts for

romantic/erotic pursuit. Love is definitely on the protagonist's mind in Lydgate's version

of Paris's narrative. Indeed, Paris's amorous preoccupation is abundantly made clear in

the following passage, which blends almost to the point of confusion Paris's desire to go

hunting with his desire to find a mate:

> Vp I roos [out] of my bedde anoon,
> Ful desyrous on huntyng for to goon,
> Priked in hert with lusty fresche plesance
> To do to Loue some due observaunce,
> And Lucyna þat day to magnifie,
> Which callid is lady of venarye,
> And duely oure rytis to obserue,
> Cithera and hir[e] for to serue,
> I and my feris, oure hertis to releue,
> Cast vs fully til it drowe to eve,
> In þe forest to pley vs and disport,
> And pleasauntly vs to recomfort,
> As it longeþ to loue of lustiness.
> For þilke day to Venus þe goddess
> I-sacred was, by ful gret excellence,
> With gret honour & due reuerence
> Doon vn-to hir, boþe of on and alle;
> And on a Fryday þis auenture is falle,
> Whan we gan hast vs to þe wodis grene
> In hope þat day som gam[e] for to sene. (II.2378-412)[32]

There is undoubtedly a measure of double-entendre involved in phrases like "our hertis to

releue," "to pley vs and disport," "pleasauntly vs to recomfort," and "loue of lustiness,"

since Paris explains that those activities take place *because* "þilke day to Venus þe

goddess / I-sacred was."[33] In other words, Lydgate clearly connects love and hunting in

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[32] Lucyna is the goddess of hunting (as Paris himself explains) and Cithera is but another name for Venus, the goddess of love.

[33] The day that is sacred to Venus is Friday. Paris himself explains that the hunting takes place on a Friday (II.2410).

Paris's narrative by inserting an echo of another literary convention, the medieval love-hunt *topos*, whereby love is normally compared to a hunt.[34] In Paris's narrative, a real hunt seems to be the primary activity described, though it unquestionably carries a lot of libidinal connotations. What matters for our purposes is that Lydgate here elaborates on a quick reference to Venus in Guido's text, namely Guido's reference to the day of the week, "die Veneris" (61), which means "Friday" (literally, "the day of Venus"). This reference may not even be used by Guido to convey any clear connection with the theme of love. Indeed, Guido does not at all refer to any distinct rites of love at this point in his text.[35] In contrast, Lydgate's version of Paris's narrative here clearly injects an element of romantic love so dear to late medieval poets.[36] Another element that makes Paris's narrative sound like a literary dream vision is the insertion of a river and fountain in the *locus amoenus* where he falls asleep:

> I me laide doun vp-on þe gras,
> Vp-on a brink, schortly for to telle,
> Be-syde a riuer and a cristal welle.
> And þe water, as I reherse can,
> Like quik-siluer in his stremys ran
> Of whiche þe grauel & þe bright[e] stoon
> As any gold ageyn þe sonne schon. (II.2454-60)

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[34] The convention actually goes back to classical Antiquity. Marcelle Thiébaux has written the classic study of the love chase in medieval literature: The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1974). See also, Anne Rooney, Hunting in Middle English Literature (Cambridge, Eng.: Brewer-Boydell, 1993), esp. 45-49.

[35] Guido says the following here: " Nondum enim sunt multi dies elapsi, dum agerem in Minori India iusso uestro, celebrante sole sol‹s›ticium estuale, dum sol sub principio Cancri ageret cursum suum, quodam die Veneris, venationis causa, placuit michi adire nemora in multorum collegio venatorum" (61). [For not many days have elapsed since I was living in Minor India at your command, when the summer sun was at its solstice, and when the sun was running its course near the beginning of Cancer. One Friday it suited me to the groves to hunt in a troop of many hunters.].

[36] Scott-Morgan Straker too has noticed the amorous allusions in the pre-dream passages ("Ethics, Militarism and Gender" 32-33). He also makes the same argument concerning Elizabeth Meek's erroneous translation of "die Veneris" (32, footnote 18). See my footnote 15, page 226.

Though Guido's Paris too describes a pleasant dell with lush, green grass, he does not mention a river or fountain at this point. Margaret J. Ehrhart points out that "With its gravel and bright stones, the 'cristal welle' is reminiscent of the fountain in the Roman de la rose; the river, too, suggests the river which the dreamer followed to reach the garden of the Rose" (59). This allusion to the Roman de la rose is next followed by a Chaucerian echo when Paris says, "And as I ley I hadde a wonder sweuene" (II.2465). Indeed, as Robert R. Edwards explains, in that passage "Lydgate renders Guido's 'mirabilem visionem' in a way that recalls the phrasing Chaucer gives to his dreams in his dream visions; see 'Me mette so ynly swete a sweven, / So wonderful' (The Book of the Duchess, lines 276-77)" [Troy Book: Selections endnote to II.2465]. The actual dream then starts, and as I explained earlier, Paris delivers an extended iconography of Mercury and the three goddesses, a description that reminds one of the allegorical images and paintings which the narrator of the Roman de la rose sees on the garden wall as well as the allegorical characters whom he meets inside the garden in the French love vision.[37] So all of these elements, then, contribute to transforming Guido's version of Paris's narrative into a medieval dream vision, which, in turn, reinforces the general impression that Lydgate's Paris is something of a poet-figure.[38]

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[37] Furthermore, as far as the word choice is concerned, when Lydgate has Paris say that Mercury's sweet music made him feel as though he was "ravisched in-to paradys" (II.2482), the reader may associate these words with a line in Lydgate's dream vision The Temple of Glass in which the narrator says that he was "Rauysshid in spirit in [a] temple of glas" (16). However, since the date of composition of The Temple of Glass is unknown—that is, since we do not know whether the vision was written before or after the Troy Book—it is impossible for us to ascertain whether line II.2482 in the Troy Book echoes a previously written line in Lydgate's dream vision.

[38] Margaret J. Ehrhart too has noticed that Lydgate's version of Paris's adventure is influenced by the dream vision genre (58-60). In particular, she explains that Lydgate inserts the passage on the rites of love (though she does not seem to notice that Lydgate might have taken a hint from Guido's "die Veneris"), she astutely observes that the river and fountain have antecedents in the Roman de la rose, and she also notes

So far, I have shown how Paris's speech mostly stands out for its prolixity, its flowery rhetoric, the diffuseness and delaying of its argument, its many amplifications, and its literary allusions, all of which contribute to making Paris's speech resemble Lydgate's own mode of expression. Some of my readers might argue that Paris sounds like Lydgate for the simple reason that Lydgate is not sophisticated enough to adjust his writing to make his characters speak in their unique voices. In other words, the similarity between character and writer is due more to a writerly deficiency than to a purposeful narrative design. However, a comparison of Paris's speech with the other speeches in this particular parliament—namely the speeches by Hector, Deiphobus, Helenus, and Troilus—clearly reveals that the "Lydgatean" elements are all very concentrated in Paris's speech. That is, of the various speakers in the parliament, Paris is the only one who is eloquent and poetic in the manner of Lydgate.

There is yet another aspect of Paris's dream that solidifies the connection between Paris and Lydgate: namely, the presence of Mercury, the patron of eloquence, inside Paris's dream. As I explained in chapter 1, Lydgate adds much information to his sources here.[39] Indeed, Guido's text neither describes nor discusses any of Mercury's characteristics, nor does Lydgate slavishly adhere to Fulgentius's iconography of Mercury in the <u>Mitologiae</u>, which he (Lydgate) nonetheless relies on quite heavily for his

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that the iconographies of Mercury and the three goddesses bear similarities with allegorical representations in the <u>Roman de la rose</u> and other dream visions. However, I do not agree with her statement that it is Lydgate who "tries to create the effect of a *locus amoenus*, a perfect spot set apart" (59) when describing the isolated dell where Paris falls asleep, for the information that Ehrhart is referring to is already present in Guido's version. She also does not perceive the dream vision aspect to be a part of a more general representation of Paris as a poet-figure—which, I should add, is quite understandable given that her main focus is to review all the representations of Paris's judgment in the Middle Ages, not to focus on Lydgate's long poem.

[39] See pages 48-50 for Lydgate's treatment of Mercury.

own description of Mercury. Most patently, Lydgate inserts in his portrayal of Mercury the fact that he is the god of rhetoric. Of course, rhetoric is the one concept in the Troy Book that readers associate most closely with Lydgate himself, for not only does Lydgate employ eloquent language throughout his own poem, but also as I have shown in this dissertation he expresses himself quite a bit *about* the value of rhetoric inside his poem (he outwardly supports the truth-value of rhetoric while indirectly undermining it—see my chapters 2 and 3) and, more generally, he seems fascinated with linguistic matters (chapter 1). A close analysis of Mercury's iconography actually reveals that several of the broad themes that we have traced in Lydgate's Troy Book are somehow embodied by Mercury himself. Indeed, for Lydgate, Mercury's rod represents prudent governance, and the snake that is wrapped around the wand stands for falsehood that is readily willing with "trouþe to werreye" (II.2516). Mercury's crooked sword brings back to the right way "Swiche as wrongly fro trouþe do forveye" (II.2510), while his cock acts as a guide for insight "of swiche as voide by waker diligence / Oute of her court, slouþe & negligence" (II.2505-06). In other words, in addition to rhetoric, Mercury is associated with prudence, truth, and good governance. Such associations represent an attempt on Lydgate's part to elevate Mercury's moral stature compared to Fulgentius's treatment of Mercury in his Mitologiae (Lydgate's acknowledged Latin source), where Mercury is the patron of both trading and thieving. The latter activity, it should be noted, includes mendacity—an important point since, in contrast, Lydgate seems eager to portray Mercury as embodying truth.[40] Fulgentius's explanation of Mercury's iconography

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[40] On a related note, classical texts overwhelmingly represent Mercury as a deceiver. There are also several such representations in medieval literature. On the other hand, many medieval texts describe Mercury in

pertains to commerce and theft. We will remember that, in Fulgentius, the rod surrounded by a snake signifies that commerce can be empowering or damaging, and the cock represents the ever-vigilant businessman. As for Mercury's crooked sword, it has no relationship to truth either, for in Fulgentius's account it is used to kill Argus. Notice that in the following sentence neither Mercury nor Argus are presented in enviable terms: "Quid sibi ergo tam fabulosum Greciae commentum uelit, nisi quod etiam centum custodes totidemque astutos sine negotiatione uacuos—unde et Argus Grece uacuus dicitur—et furantis astutia et negotiantis circumuenit astuta falcataque cautela" (Fulgentius 30-31). [What would such a fantastic notion of the Greeks signify except that, with a sly blow of the scythe, the cunning of someone both thief and trader got the better of even a hundred guardians and the same number of artful ones, yet ones useless without barter, whence Argus is the Greek for idle?] However, all of this being said, and as I hinted at in chapter 1, the more honorable representation of Mercury in Lydgate's version is not devoid of negative hints and undercurrents. That is, under the apparent positive valuation of Mercury's eloquence, truth, prudence, and virtuous governance, Lydgate inserts textual elements that call into doubt either the perfection of such attributes or humanity's ability to achieve them—just as we have seen Lydgate do with such themes throughout his Troy Book.

Thus, one textual element that does not quite fit in with Lydgate's description of a perfect Mercury is Paris's statement that Mercury looked "Liche as he is discriued in Fulgence, / In þe book of his methologies, / Wher be rehersed many poysyes" (II.2486-

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positive terms: for example, Martianus Capella's De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii.

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88). Here, Paris claims that Mercury comes straight out of the world of poetry, which for Lydgate may very well be a way to insert skepticism in his description of Mercury. Indeed, as we well know, in the Troy Book, poetry is mostly associated with falsity. Besides that, Paris's statement is chronologically impossible, for Fulgentius wrote in the sixth century A.D. and, therefore, his Mitologiae postdates the events at Troy! And, finally, to top it all, we know that Paris does not follow Fulgentius in his description of Mercury anyway, so that this short passage lays the foundation for a certain lack of credibility that seems to surround the whole Mercury episode. Inside Mercury's iconography, Paris's interpretation of the snake as representing falsehood trying to combat truth is more than equivocal in itself. Indeed, the imagery really does not indicate that truth defeats falseness at all—as one might expect in a representation of a perfect Mercury. Rather, the imagery reveals that wherever Mercury (that is, rhetoric) goes so does falseness, and truth itself is never devoid of the stings of falseness.

This multi-layered doubt concerning Mercury is then reinforced by the fact that in his version of Paris's dream Lydgate has gone out of his way to actually stress the unreliability, or lack of truthfulness, of Paris's vision as a whole. Indeed, as Scott-Morgan Straker has convincingly shown, "Lydgate exploits scientific and literary treatments of dreams to establish Paris' amorous disposition, and thus to cast doubt upon the prophetic status that Paris claims for his vision" ("Ethics, Militarism and Gender" 7-8). As we have seen, Lydgate transforms Paris's narrative into a French-inspired literary dream vision in which the events that lead up to the dream are filled with amorous allusions and longings. Love is in the air and on Paris's mind so that, based on

Macrobius's classification of dreams, Paris's dream is not, as Paris later claims, a reliable

dream sent by the gods (in this case, an *oraculum* that functions as a *somnium*),[41] but

rather a self-induced *insomnium* in which the dreamer satisfies the desires of his waking

hours (25). Straker further shows how Lydgate stresses the self-induced nature of the

dream through Paris's readings of the goddesses' iconographies, which seem to favor

Venus—whereas other mythographic sources appear more favorable to Pallas and Juno

(45-51). In short, there are indications inside of Paris's narrative that the dream does not

bear enough validity (that is, truth) to function as Paris's one argument in support of war.

The fundamental unreliability of Paris's dream, then, leads us back to a point I

hinted at earlier in this chapter concerning the logical fallacy of Paris's *confirmatio*. It is

apposite that we now remember why Paris is recounting the long narrative of his dream

to start with. Almost unbeknownst to us, it seems as if Paris's narrative section has taken

on a life and logic of its own. That is, the attention of the reader and the Trojan audience

has become focused on the events and internal logic of the narrative rather than on the

overall logic of Paris's deliberative speech and how the long narrative fits into the

speech. But, if we now go back and consider the overall structure of Paris's speech, it

becomes evident that the speech is deeply flawed because it primarily relies on a huge

non sequitur. Indeed, Paris's main argument for attacking the Greeks is that in his dream

he has been promised a Greek woman. Now we know that Paris has actually induced

himself to believe that the gods promised him a Greek woman. Even more important is

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[41] An *oraculum* is a type of dream "in which a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire." A *somnium* "conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding" (Macrobius 90).

the fact that the promise of a Greek woman hardly bears any connection with what

Paris's real concern should be in his speech, namely the Trojans' potential for

successfully seeking revenge on the Greeks and recovering Hesione.[42] In other words,

due to Paris's eloquence and his gift for storytelling (his literary inclination), the audience

(Paris's direct audience of his father and brothers but also the reader of Lydgate's poem)

has essentially lost track of what it was that Paris was supposed to convince his

listeners/readers of. The amplified rhetoric and poeticization of the narrative have largely

contributed to concealing the fallacy of Paris's speech. Paris's speech may well be

effective with the Trojan knights, and yet at the end of the day, Paris's address is nothing

but a weak and logically flawed speech. The fact that the speech eventually manages to

sway the Trojan audience has more to do with the predisposition of the worked-up

audience to accept fiery definitions of manliness and honor, than with any intrinsic

logical quality of the speech.[43]

In addition to all this, the speech's inherent flaw carries extradiegetic

consequences as well, namely consequences for Lydgate's own poem. Indeed, since in

many ways Paris is made to sound like Lydgate the narrator himself and since it now

appears that those very stylistic and poetic principles that link Paris to Lydgate conceal

the weak argument at the heart of Paris's speech, it follows that Lydgate's own project is

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[42] Scott-Morgan Straker too has noticed this point ("Ethics, Militarism and Gender" 49, 54).

[43] To be accurate, after Paris's speech, Priam's other sons speak out. Deiphobus first urges the Trojans to lay aside their fears and send Paris to Greece. Helenus then counters that he has learned from the gods that, if it is allowed, Paris's expedition will bring about destruction for Troy. Finally, Troilus ridicules Helenus for what he claims to be priestly cowardliness and urges his brothers to back Paris—which they do. Though strictly speaking, Priam's sons assent to the decision to go to war after Troilus has spoken, it is well and truly Paris's ideas that they embrace—not Troilus's. Troilus is a character of lesser importance here who, together with Deiphobus, gives a final push to Paris's argument.

thereby somewhat undermined as well. In other words, Lydgate implicitly questions the value of poetic eloquence in his version of Paris's speech and this questioning can legitimately be applied to the Troy Book itself. Or, if you will, Lydgate uses Paris's poetic aspirations as a kind of self-parody. As Paris's speech illustrates, eloquence can be a powerful tool in communicating one's ideas successfully to a given audience, but it does not guarantee the validity of the message. On the contrary, the mode of expression shared by Paris and Lydgate provides a decorative cover for statements that, upon analysis, may include much ambiguity or may even lack foundational strength. Commissioned by Henry V to write a history of the Trojan conflict that would elevate the English nation, Lydgate complied by producing a highly rhetorical and outwardly conservative poem about the events at Troy. However, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, Lydgate also inserted elements of doubt in his text, doubt regarding broad experiential categories like truth, fame, language, and prudence. Paris's speech constitutes the latest passage that illustrates how Lydgate was, after all, deeply skeptical of some of the lofty ideals that his own work was supposed to promote. Lydgate turns Paris's speech into a rhetorical travesty and thereby reveals that he himself questioned the conservative, dogmatic, and propagandistic message he had been commissioned to convey in his Troy Book.

Obviously, Lydgate had no choice but to outwardly support the agenda that his patron, his primary reader, Henry V, had asked him to propagate. However, his outward compliance did not prevent him from being acutely aware that pleasing one's audience does not necessarily equate uttering words of wisdom and truth. Lydgate expresses as

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much in a reflection he makes in Book III on the importance of pleasing one's audience,

an aside brought about by Cassandra's imprisonment even though she tells the truth.

Lydgate explains that

> nouþer wisdam nor discrecioun,
> Counseil nor wit, prudence nor resoun,
> Trouth nor rede—with-outen any lye,—
> Nor þe spirite of trewe proficye,
> Availeth nat,—nor al swiche sapience,
> In place wher þer is noon audience.
> For, be a man inly neuere so wys
> In counseillynge, or in hyghe devys
> In werkynge, ouþer in elloquence,
> Eche þing to sen in his aduertence
> Or it be falle, a-forn in his resoun,
> Amyd þe eye of his discreccioun,—
> Yet for al þis (it is þe more dool),
> With-oute fauour, he holde is but a fool:
> For vnfavored, wysdam vaileþ nought,
> Nouþer trouth, how dere þat it be bought. (III.2297-312)

These words, of course, echo Solomon's saying "Ther as thou ne mayst have noon

audience, enforce thee nat to speke" used in Chaucer's Tale of Melibee to comment on

the councilors' hostile reaction to an old man's plea against war (VII.1047).

Undoubtedly, there is also an allusion to the Host's remark to the Monk's boring tale in

the Canterbury Tales: "Whereas a man may have noon audience, / Noght helpeth it to

tellen his sentence" (VII.2801-02). Just like Chaucer, Lydgate emphasizes the power of

the audience to make or break a speech—or a poem. In the end, what will make a speech

or poem successful is its pragmatic adaptation to a particular audience. After all,

Lydgate's own acknowledged intention in writing the Troy Book is "only to agreen þin

[Henry V's] highnesse" (Env.62). In Lydgate's historical milieu, the Troy Book must

foremost function as the ally of the political establishment. Writing on commission from

the future king himself, Lydgate would not have been at liberty to openly discuss the constrictions placed upon his own work. On the other hand, sprinkling his work with covert references to the precarious value of eloquence, truth, prudence, fame, and even the act of pleasing one's audience was an available option.

In my dissertation, I have shown how, far from embracing dogmatic paradigms, in his Troy Book Lydgate ocasionally adopted Chaucer's poetics of ambiguity and skepticism. Indeed, Lydgate's ultimate message in the Troy Book is in a sense very Chaucerian. Of course, on the one hand, Lydgate's poem follows aesthetic criteria that are vastly different from Chaucer's aesthetic. Lydgate's epic treatment of the Trojan War bears little comparison with Chaucer's more limited focus in his Troilus and Criseyde (and, for that matter, Lydgate's comprehensive poem is unlike any other text by Chaucer) and Lydgate's amplified medium differs significantly from Chaucer's more concise diction. And yet, on the other hand, underneath the divergent plots and stylistics, the type of epistemological questioning that so often defines Chaucer's poetics can be clearly detected in Lydgate's Trojan poem. Lydgate's Troy Book shows us that Lydgate was neither a Lancastrian propagandist nor a courageous loyal critic to the ruler but rather a skeptic who entertained fundamental epistemological questions: he embraced instability of meaning, multivalence, and irony, and doubted the attainability of truth—linguistic and textual truth but also experiential truth. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that the lines of argumentation that I have discussed in my dissertation automatically extend to all of Lydgate's corpus. That is, I do not claim that every single one of Lydgate's texts addresses similar foundational issues. Quite to the contrary, I am tempted to think that

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some of Lydgate's texts *are* probably genuinely conservative and unironic. It is true, however, that some critics have started to notice contiguous, even similar, concerns in other Lydgate poems.[44] In my dissertation, I have deliberately focused on Lydgate's first long poem, his <u>Troy Book</u>, written between 1412 and 1420. In this apparently conventional history of the war at Troy written in the still incipient stages of his writing career, Lydgate actually managed to occasionally question the fundamental premises of his work as a courtly poet and an adviser to princes. Surely, the presence of such covert messages in Lydgate's early poetry should motivate us to rediscover the rest of Lydgate's corpus for other potential disruptions concealed underneath conservative appearances.

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[44] See my introduction.

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