

Violence in Later Middle English Arthurian Romance

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

Understanding the representations of violence in Middle English romance is key to understanding the texts themselves; the authors were aware of the cultural and spiritual resonances of violent language, and they often utilised their potential to direct their own meaning. This thesis explores the language of these representations in Middle English literature, from British chronicles to affective Passion narratives, in order to analyse the combat and warfare of Arthurian romances in their literary and social context. In particular, I study the borrowing of violent language between literatures, and its impact on the meaning and generic tone of the texts. If a romance invokes the Passion of Christ in the wounds of secular battle, what is the nature of its chivalric protagonists? Can a romance be said to express “national” interests in its depiction of warfare? How does violence reaffirm and discuss the behaviour of chivalric “individuals”? My research looks specifically at how Arthurian romances such as the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Lancelot of the Laik* are shaped by the culture of chivalry and an awareness of the ways in which religious, historical and romance texts express pain and injuring. The analysis of the language of violence can both invoke the maintenance of broader chivalric norms and revise associations of genre-specific vocabulary.

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Introduction

The observer regards pain as a phenomenon fraught with meanings,
and perhaps most central of those meanings is that pain is a sign,
waiting to be interpreted and understood before it is managed.

(Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*, 145)

War is relentless in taking for its own interior content
the interior content of the wounded and open human body.

(Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 81)

The authors of Middle English chivalric texts, narrating tales of knightly warfare, provide their readers with a variety of descriptions of physical violence and the pain that results from it. As Esther Cohen observes, the written graphic image is “waiting to be interpreted” by the audience; violence and pain become signals of greater meaning. The act of injuring and the injured body provide images which had their own set of vocabulary in Middle English; this language, formulated for categories of knowledge such as medicine, romance and devotional texts, was often shared between texts. The significance of the “wounded and open human body” is inexorably linked with the meaning of the narrative itself. Jody Enders argues that rhetoric – and its mnemonic imagery – depends on violence, and that “forensic rhetors had generated their mnemonic images in order to ensure justice, to punish criminals, and to protect society from the very acts of violence now represented iconically and discursively before judge, jury or audiences” (31). She discusses how, in its re-imagination of destructive violence, rhetorical literature (or performance) attempts to neutralise its violence through its good intentions to reform behaviour; that is, violent mnemonic images teach and discipline the audience (32, 45). Rita Copeland considers the didactic function of metaphorically violent rhetoric, showing how Chaucer’s Pardoner highlights its disciplinary nature by exposing rhetoric’s excesses when used for the wrong purpose; the Pardoner, revealing the rhetorical art he uses to sell his false relics, is physically threatened by the Host for his moral transgressions (150-53). Both discussions of rhetoric rightly connect violence to the human body with moral and didactic ramifications. The use of violent rhetoric in medieval literature, however, does more than discipline those who use it incorrectly; Middle English authors exploit its images and vocabulary for a variety of discursive purposes, manipulating the emotional and literary knowledge of the medieval reader.

This thesis will analyse the representation and function of violent images in Middle English romance; in particular, I will focus on Arthurian narratives, as their familiar cast of characters is ideal for teasing out how warfare is reinterpreted by medieval authors for their own purposes. I also chose to centre my analysis of violence on Arthurian literature because it is the narrative of the two texts at the heart of my argument, the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Lancelot of the Laik*; the limitations of this thesis do not allow me to explore far beyond these texts, but it is only a small corner of the research that has and can be done on violence in Middle English romances. My discussion will also avoid texts such as *Havelok the Dane*, *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, and *Gamelyn*, as plenty of scholarly work has already been done on the combat of these pieces.¹ The *Morte Arthure* and *Lancelot of the Laik* were chosen as my focal texts because of the prevalence of violence in both narratives – both revolving on one of Arthur’s wars – and the unique way in which it is presented, as will become evident as the thesis progresses. For the purposes of the thesis, the violence discussed will also be restricted to human-to-human violence in warfare situations (combat and military attacks), setting aside the killing of animals and domestic violence. As a foundation for understanding how this vocabulary was used in Middle English Arthurian romance – and to what effect – I will first explore how a number of modern commentators discuss violence: Esther Cohen (*The Modulated Scream*), René Girard (*Violence and the Sacred*), Elizabeth Scarry (*The Body in Pain*) and Richard Kaeuper (*Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*). Cohen and Scarry have both initiated investigations into how humans express pain in writing; Girard and Kaeuper have explored how violence works in secular and spiritual social communities.

¹ For further reading on this research, see Rodger Wilkie, “Re-capitulating the Body Politic: the Overthrow of Tyrants in *Havelok the Dane*”, *Neophilologus* 94.1 (2010): 139-50; Scott Kleinman, “Animal Imagery and Oral Discourse in *Havelok’s* First Fight”, *Viator* 35 (2004): 311-27; Graham Drake, “Not Safe Even in Their Own Castles. Reading Domestic Violence Against Children in Four Middle English Romances”, *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin and Merrell Llewelyn Price (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2002) 139-63; M. Mills, “*Havelok* and the Brutal Fisherman”, *Medium Aevum* 36 (1967): 219-30; Richard Kaeuper, “A Historian’s Reading of *The Tale of Gamelyn*”, *Medium Aevum* 52.1 (1983): 51-62; John Scattergood, “*The Tale of Gamelyn*: The Noble Robber as Provincial Hero”, *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. Carol Meale (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994) 159-94; Nicola McDonald, “Eating People and the Alimentary Logic of *Richard Coeur de Lion*”, *Pulp Fictions in Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004) 124-50; Geraldine Heng, “The Romance of England: *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Saracens, Jews and the Politics of Race and Nation”, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 135-71.

The first step to understanding the use of violence and violent language in this literature is to uncover and establish what images this vocabulary contains and how the vocabulary is shared with and/or similar to the vocabularies of other medieval literature describing pain. What vocabulary for pain do medieval medical and spiritual texts employ? Where did this vocabulary come from and how was pain defined, on physical and theological levels? Medieval theology and devotion employed a set language of violence and pain to describe Christ's Passion. Scholastic debate about the nature of Christ's suffering flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; did the incarnate Christ feel pain as humans did? Popular devotion in the late Middle Ages focused on relating Christ's wounds to physical human suffering. How and to what purpose did devotional material transmit the sensation of Christ's pain to the audience? Spiritual texts enumerated each of Christ's wounds, stressing that the Christian must internalise the violence done to Jesus' body, as expressed in the fourteenth-century *Jesu that has me dere I-bought* (IMEV 1761):²

In mine hert ay mot it be,
 That hard, knotty Rode Tree;
 The nail and the spere also
 That thou were with to deth do;
 The crown, and the scourges grete
 That thou were with so sore ibette;
 Thy wepinge and thy woundes wide;
 The blode that ran down by thy side
 The shame, the scorne, the grete despite,
 The spottel that defouled thy face so white (ll. 61-70)

The weapons are listed (nail, spear, crown, scourges), the action and/or result of the violence is described (beating, running blood), and the suffering of Christ is transformed into recognisably human forms of grief (weeping, shame). This vocabulary, in part, offers a mnemonic programme of devotion to the worshipper; late medieval Passion lyrics reconstructed Christ's Crucifixion with vivid mental pictures to aid meditation (Bestul, 37). In Chapter Five of *The Modulated Scream*,

² Survives in eleven manuscripts. Text from *A Devout Prayer of the Passion, Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. R. T. Davies (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1964) 120-25.

Esther Cohen outlines how sermons treat the Passion in terms of theme, often isolating wounds, or the instruments that inflicted pain, so as to facilitate devotional techniques – using mnemonic numerical devices or listing the physical instruments of Christ’s torture to both aid memory and stress his pain (210-15). The pain of the Crucifixion is also expressed in the grief of Mary; the vision of Christ’s suffering is often described through the lens of the Virgin’s motherly gaze. In *Stond well, moder, under Rode* (IMEV 3211), Mary describes the location and nature of the wounds as she looks upon her son: ““Hi se thin fet, hi se thin honden, / Nayled to the harde tre / [...] / Hy se tho blodi flodes hernen / Huth of thin herte to my fet”” (ll. 5-6, 17-18). In certain cases, the pain of Christ is inflicted (symbolically) upon her own body, as can again be seen in *Stond well, moder, under Rode*: ““Sune, hi fele the dede stunde; / The swerd is at min herte grunde”” and ““Y deye ywis of thine wnden”” (ll. 10-11 and 53).³ The language of Christ’s Passion emphasized a wish to unite with the pain of Christ and Mary, to “sense it in one’s own body” (Cohen, 217). Indeed, Cohen points out that the experiences of medieval visionaries were physical manifestations of the medieval desire to become one with Christ’s pain; granted after spiritual meditation and often connected with sensory pain, they acted as “proof that it was possible to feel what Christ and Mary had felt” (218-19).

If pain is central to Christ’s sacrifice for mankind’s sins, how does religion direct and use violence? René Girard finds the answer to these questions in determining a social function for religious sacrifice in *Violence and the Sacred*. Girard believes that sacrifice is society “seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a “sacrificeable” victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members” (4). That is, sacrifice provides an outlet for pent up tensions and feuds and redirects violence into “proper channels” (10). This “surrogate victim” is socially identified as both the “indifferent” and “proper” object of their violence because of his/her status on the outside or the fringes of the community, and as a consequence can be “exposed to violence without fear of reprisal” (2, 13). As internal strife that is not placated often manifests itself in vengeance, and vengeance becomes an endless cycle which threatens the social

³ Reflective of Simeon’s prophecy to Mary, Luke 2.34-5: “[34] And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother: Behold this child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted; [35] And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that, out of many hearts, thoughts may be revealed”. *Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible*, Web, 1 July 2013. <<http://www.drbo.org/chapter/49002.htm>>

body, Girard believes that societies without a fully developed justice system prevent dangerous violent outbreaks with religious sacrifice (15, 18-19).

Does the secular sacrifice of war parallel religious sacrifice? For Girard, war is another form of violence that diverts dangerous violence from nearby to more distant objects (20). However, he does not delve more deeply into how both war and religion might stem and control internal social violence and does not explore the relationship between religion, social violence and war. Cohen hints at the ability of religious vocabulary to transfer to other registers of pain, suggesting that vocabularies would “percolate” from one discourse to another, while still creating a distinct vocabulary for their own purposes (167). However, while Cohen gives examples of how medieval European medical, judicial and spiritual texts share the same registers of pain, she does not look far into how these registers appear in the vocabulary of pain in chivalric texts, and it is this correlation that this thesis aims to understand. She rightly states that the cult of the Passion “affected all other fields of emotional, cultural and scientific production”, but I wish to uncover *how* the spiritual vocabulary “percolate[s]” into secular romances (208). If awareness of the pain of the Passion is present in medieval minds, how and for what reason do chivalric authors borrow spiritual pain for descriptions of battlefield injury? At the core of the relationship between spiritual and secular descriptions of violence is sacrifice and vengeance. Medieval romance emphasises that knights sacrifice their lives for king, country, and chivalry itself; Crusading rhetoric focuses on vengeance for the sacrifice of Christ and Christian warriors. Sacrifice evokes stronger notions than the diversion of internal faction that Girard suggests; in self-sacrifice, it is the physical manifestation of a spiritual belief through the devotion of one’s body to an ideology. War is itself a secular form of sacrifice, the warrior’s dedication of (usually) his body to his nation or cultural identity. It is a willingness to submit the body to injury rather than surrender the individual’s belief system – whether religious or secular. Knightly violence allows knights in chivalric literature the chance to make and maintain their identity in society. The chivalric knight’s sacrifice – for country, personal honour, wealth – is not the same as Christ’s, and the manipulation of Passion vocabulary in romance texts will therefore give rise to moral questions. Can a knight’s deeds in battle be considered Christ-like? In this thesis, I will consider this question and attempt to uncover the ramifications of such a comparison.

The authors of Middle English romances were aware of the cultural and spiritual resonances of violent language, and they often utilised their potential to direct their own meaning; many writers of war narratives were conscious of the vocabulary of Christ's wounds and of chivalric sacrifice, and they used both to illuminate their own representation of violence. My thesis explores the language of these representations in Middle English romance, and the impact it has on the meaning and generic tone of the texts – that is, the implied attitude of the poet and the poem, in terms of the author's sympathies and the text's understood genre. In his discussion of tone, Abrams states that “the way we speak reveals, by subtle clues, our conception of, and attitude to, the things we are talking about, our personal relation to our auditor, and also our assumptions about the social level, intelligence, and sensitivity of that auditor” (218). His definition of tone highlights two aspects of authorial voice which are revealed in the language choice of Middle English authors and on which I will focus my evaluation of descriptions of violence: firstly, the author's own sentiments on the subject, and secondly, his understanding of the readers' knowledge and opinions. How do narratives of war express (or not express) pain, and relate to other cultural experiences of pain?

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry argues that there are numerous ways in which a writer can manipulate the vocabulary of warfare in twentieth-century war narratives to alter the affect of the injury for the reader, either by minimising or re-directing the violence. She names six “paths” by which the authors use language to eliminate (omission and active redescription) or marginalise injuring; in the latter option, injuring is described as a by-product of war, something which occurs on the road to a larger goal, a cost of war, or the continuation of something that is a peacetime activity (games, politics). Scarry's approach to written accounts of warfare is potentially useful for understanding the language of combat violence, and before I enter my own analysis of descriptions of violence, I will apply some of Scarry's “paths” to one of the central texts of my thesis, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*,⁴ to assess their appropriateness with respect to the representation of violence in Middle English romances. In Chapter Two of her book, Scarry discusses the ways in which

⁴ The poem was written in the last half of the fourteenth century or the early part of the fifteenth century. The date of composition for the *Morte Arthure* has been widely debated. For an overview, see John Finlayson, “Morte Arthure: The Date and a Source for the Contemporary References”, *Speculum* 42.4 (1967): 624-38.

language expresses pain and injured bodies during war. She states that war is about the casualties and the ideological (political, territorial, cultural) issues which are its motivation. The enemy, comrade or reader who views the body in pain gives it a particular ideological meaning (62-63). War is a form of violence (injuring) and a form of contest, but Scarry argues that descriptions of war often marginalise or misrepresent these particular aspects (63). Two means by which injuring can “disappear” from a war narrative are omission, in which the author narrates activities peripheral to the injuring itself, and active redescription, in which the injured body or act of injuring is assigned the characteristics of something non-sentient (66). Both strategies distract from the pain of warfare, focusing the reader’s attention on the author’s political and/or ideological purposes.

In what Scarry calls “active redescription”, the arm of the soldier might become an extension of his weapon (the weapon is doing the killing, not the soldier) or the thousands of sentient bodies in an army become one giant (and much less empathetic) force fighting against another; the nonsentient weapon, not the fighter, has agency. Active redescription does not feature much in the *Morte Arthure*, where the author allows the reader to view and feel the pain of the injuring. It is partially used for the crossbowmen of Metz when Arthur first invades Lorraine, whose weapons are described so that they seem almost a part of their own bodies: “Than they bendyde in burghe bowes of vyse, / Bekyrs at þe bolde kynge with boustouse lates; / Allblawsters at Arthure egerly schottes / For to hurte hym or his horse with þat hard wapen” (ll. 2424-27). However, the reality of the human men controlling the bows (and their desire to “egerly” shoot Arthur) does not fade into the background; their motivation for causing injury is highlighted by the intensity of their attack. It is one of the last times in the romance that those being besieged will be able to defend themselves, and the reader not only sympathises with those attempting to save their city, but also with Arthur, who is vulnerable to the dangerous crossbow bolts.

The *Morte Arthure*-author is occasionally guilty of omission, as descriptions of bright colours, luxurious banners and shining armour before and during battle often put a glamorous sheen on a brutal scene of injury and gore; when Gawain’s men attack Mordred’s troop as they land back in Britain, their armour shimmers: “Through þe *sheldys so schene* schalkes þey towche, / With schaftes scheueride schorte of þas *schene launces*” (ll. 3747-48). The emphasis on the quality of the armour and weapons is almost distracting enough for the reader to overlook the

implications of the damage of the spear thrusts after they pierce the armour. In the preparation of Arthur's army before the siege of Metz, the bright and cheerful image painted seems more apt for the celebratory (and mostly harmless) tournament joust than for the moment before the desolation of a city:

Thane the schalkes sharpelye scheftys theire horsez,
To schewen them semly in theire scheen wedes;
 Buskes in batayle with baners displayede,
 With brode scheldes enbrassed and burlyche helmys,
 With penouns and pensells of ylke prynce armes,
 Appayrellde with perrye and precious stones;
 With lawnces, with loraynes and lemande scheldes,
Lyghtenande as þe levenynge and lemand all ouer

(ll. 2456-63, emphasis added)

This is a paragraph not meant to dwell on the injuring capacity of Arthur's men and their weapons, but to highlight their beauty and richness. The men move their horses in the same way the author moves his narrative, "to schewen them semly in theire scheen wedes"; the lances which will soon be piercing bodies are not dangerously sharp but "lyghtenande as þe levenynge and lemand all ouer". This is not an unusual way of avoiding graphic images in medieval literature, but the banners serve another purpose; Middle English romances are riddled with lengthy descriptions of dazzling armour and heraldic devices in order to display the nobility of the story's protagonists and the worthiness of chivalric society. D. Vance Smith argues that Arthur's attempt to occupy the legacy of his father (the Continental lands) is shown clearly in the alliterative *Morte Arthure's* "deep and interested engagement with the art of heraldry" (190). That is, the battle scenes use heraldry to signify the value of the warrior, legitimised by the deaths of his ancestors; the plenitude of heraldic signs (banners, coats of arms) guarantees that the memory of the man associated with it (and his family) will be remembered. Heraldry is ultimately more than chivalric splendour, but a "symbolic capital that is plentiful and ancient" (211).

Scarry argues that narratives can also marginalise war injuries by calling injuring a "by-product" of war; that is, wounds are deemed inevitable, although not desired, when in fact they are the aim of war. Descriptions can also give the impression that injuring occurred "on the road" to another goal. Further undermining the importance of death is the presentation of injuries as inevitable payment:

“injuries are the cost of war”, “war is the cost of freedom” (73-78). The *Morte Arthure* narrative partially acknowledges these tendencies during Arthur’s invasion of Lorraine and the beginning of his siege of Metz; his men search the city, discover “schotte-men” and “skyrmys a lyttill”, before beating down a “barbycan” and winning the bridge with their “bryghte wapyns” (ll. 2466-70). As the author feels that Arthur’s men are justified in flushing out the armed men of Metz, the injuring which must have occurred during these skirmishes is overlooked, and in place of the usually graphic physical encounters there are quick summaries of the events which took place. However, this is not the case later in the narrative, in the final assault of Metz and the destruction of the city of Como, where Arthur oversteps himself by destroying holy buildings and houses and slaying innocents. Here, the author is perfectly clear in his declaration of the injuring of the people: “The *pyne of þe pople* was peté for to here!” (l. 3043). Their pain is not excused as a “cost of war”, and Arthur quickly redresses his sin after both of these events by guaranteeing safety to the Duchess and maidens of Metz and warning his men not to debauch any women or mistreat the citizens of Como (ll. 3055-59). His invasion of Tuscany, however, is followed by a joyful feast with his men (“With myrthis and melodye and manykyn gamnes – / Was neuer meriere men made on this erthe!”, [ll. 3174-75]), and the author goes to some lengths to ensure that the injuring that occurs is *not* minimised:

Towrres he turnes and turmentez þe pople;
 Wroghte wedewes full wlonke, wrotherayle synges,
 Ofte wery and wepe and wryngen their handis,
 And all he wastys with werre thare he awaye rydez –

Thaire welthes and their wonny[n]ges wandrethe he wroghte! (ll. 3153-57).

The narrative here requires the reader’s empathy; the audience must feel the citizen’s pain through the author’s language of violent injuring in order for it to acknowledge that Arthur has made a grievous error and explain the forthcoming destruction of his reign.

Scarry also discusses how narratives of war can gloss over its combative nature, instead deploying metaphors of war as a game, with concomitant associations of play and other peacetime activities (82). Game imagery may then be imported into descriptions of war, such as a light-hearted view of competition in combat. Scarry argues that this trivialises the impact and consequences of war (83). The alliterative *Morte Arthure*, like other medieval narratives of war, uses game metaphors to

describe warfare. When Priamus counsels Gawain not to send Sir Florent to fight against the numerically superior army of Lorraine, Gawain responds by claiming that the battle was a chance for the young men to prove their worth through the “test” of battle: ““We sall proue to-daye who sall the *prys* wyn!” (l. 2751). The goal of combat, to injure and to remain uninjured, is turned by Gawain’s words into a competition to win a *prys*: in this case, glory in military prowess. The use of game terminology deflects the men’s attention from injuring and focuses on the honour to be won in proving themselves in war. It is a tactic Gawain uses to encourage and inspire his troops to fight, and for the narrator to glorify his protagonists’ achievements. The theme is continued by Priamus, who “persayuede theire *gamen*” and desires to come to the aid of Gawain’s men (l. 2811). Arthur also uses the game metaphor to rally his men before he does battle with Mordred:

Ȝif vs be destaynede to dy to-daye one this erthe,
 We sall be hewede vnto heuen or we be halfe cold.
 Loke ȝe lett for no lede lordly to wirche;
 Layes ȝon laddes lowe, *be the layke ende* –
 Take no tente vnto me, ne tale of me rekke (ll. 4090-94)

The word “layke” or “leik” is used multiple times in the *Morte Arthure* and means not only a fight or contest but also refers to a game or amusement.⁵ Arthur is willing to admit to his men that they may die in this “game”, but even in defeat they would be winners “heved unto heven” as long as they fight nobly for Arthur.

Lastly, Scarry argues that war is a contest in which national consciousness is damaged through the destruction of the human body and material culture (buildings) (92). The body is a political and cultural entity, both in peace and war; thus, the nation sees itself in the bodies of their soldiers, and the soldiers accept that their body may be “opened” for the nation during war (112). Yet Scarry hypothesizes that, because the injured human body in war is able to open and be opened by the enemy, it is a vulnerable signifier which changes according to the context of its viewer. This is the phenomenon that she identifies as “referential instability”: it is “the

⁵ “Leik (n): 1. a) Amusement, diversion; fun, mirth, joy; a game; sporting contest; (b) amorous dalliance; (c) an amusing adventure or episode; (d) holiday, festival; (e) place of joy, heaven. 2. (a) A fight, contest, battle; an encounter; (b) an assault, attack. 3. (a) A deed, act, action; activity; (b) conduct, behavior; (c) sin, vice.” *Middle English Dictionary*, Web, 6 May 2013. <quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med>

nonreferentiality of the hurt body” (121). If a soldier is killed, or injured, by a gunshot or a sword thrust, his body is vulnerable to various readings; was he split open for his country, or for his enemy’s country? Scarry states that, through injuring, the “national” meaning of the body has been destroyed (123); however, I would argue that “national” meaning is not destroyed, but by becoming open to plural interpretation on the part of its viewers (comrade, enemy or the reader of the narrative), the meaning has become entangled with other meanings – it is *multi-referential*. Any use of the terms “nation” and “national” must, of course, be used with caution when discussing medieval literature; when used in this thesis, I refer to the growing sense of English and Scottish cultural identities which developed throughout the late Middle Ages, rather than to a fully-formed nation state.

Gawain’s dead body in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* provides an example of these variable meanings, “national” and personal, as the author allows it to be viewed by multiple parties who view it as either a symbol of Britain’s/Arthur’s power or of chivalry itself. The first meaning of his body is the desolation caused by the loss of one of Arthur’s military commanders, a man who “gyede many othire” (l. 3860). Gawain’s troops react with immediate despair to the horror of the stroke and the loss of their leader: “þis galyarde knyghtes, / For glent of gloppynyng glade be they neuer!” (ll. 3862-63). Following this, the author has an enemy lord, King Frederik of Fres, ask Mordred who the man was that he has just killed: ““Qwat gome was he, this with the *gaye armes*, / With þis *gryffone of golde*, þat es *one growffe fallyn*?” (ll. 3868-69, emphasis added). The foreign king sees the defeat of Gawain as a great military success, a triumph over the political ideologies which Gawain stood for as one of Arthur’s knights. Now that the dangerous threat of Gawain is gone, he wants to know the quality of the “prize” won in his death, and thus enquires after his birth and his rank, taking particular note of his rich arms. He takes the audience away from the death stroke and moves onto the image of a defeated body and Gawain’s coat of arms, which have “one growffe fallyn”; Gawain’s identity is physically linked with his corpse and his heraldry. Gawain’s arms and banners are not acting as a displacement, but rather enforcing the connection between the body and its meaning. Perhaps the most complex of meanings given to Gawain’s injured body occurs when Mordred mourns his death; he sees in the extinguishing of Gawain’s virtues both triumph and failure. He explains who Gawain was to the Frisian lord, extolling Gawain’s military and courtly virtues; he calls Gawain the

“graciouslyeste gome”, the “hardyeste of hande”, the “happyeste in armes”, and the “lordelieste of ledynge” (ll. 3875-81). This is, in part, a celebration of Mordred’s conquering of this mighty warrior, but it is a bittersweet one. He acknowledges Gawain’s immense bravery and goodness, but whilst doing so mourns the loss of a great man. The sight of Gawain’s dead body makes Mordred stumble upon the realisation that he is destroying all that he had previously deemed good in his world as well as preventing himself from ever being allowed back into that fellowship (and family):

Whene he thoghte on þis thyng, it thirlede his herte;
 For sake of his sybb blode sigheande he rydys.
 When þat renayede renke remembirde hym seluen
 Of [þe] reuerence and ryotes of þe Rownde Table,
 He remyd and repent hym of all his rewthe werkes (ll. 3890-94).

Gawain’s death is linked with both his chivalric worth and his “national” meaning, insofar as it is linked with Arthur’s reign; his body is a symbol of the Round Table and Mordred’s destruction of it.

When Arthur finally lands and discovers Gawain’s dead body, we are given not only an account of Arthur’s extreme grief but also one of the most detailed descriptions of a dead body – and a reaction to one – in the *Morte Arthure*:

His *baners brayden down, beten of gowlles,*
 His brand and *his brade schelde al bloody berounen.*
 Was neuer oure semliche kynge so sorowfull in herte,
 Ne þat sanke hym so sade bot þat sighte one.
 Than gliftis þe gud kynge and glopyns in herte,
Gronys full grisely with gretande teris,
 Knelis down to þe cors and kaught it in armes,
 Kastys vpe his vmbre and kyssis hym sone;
 Lokes one his *eye-liddis þat lowkkide ware faire,*

His *lippis like to þe lede* and *his lire falowede.* (ll. 3945-54, emphasis added)

Once again, the description links Gawain’s body with his forms of identity (banners and shield), but the emphasis is on how these traditional forms of identity have been tainted and beaten. The bright red banner has fallen, his shining armour is covered in blood, his noble face now like stone, lacking colour and warmth. Arthur sees Gawain’s dead body as the end of his military prowess, and thus the dissolution of

his success as a monarch:

For nowe *my wirchipe es wente and my were endide.*
 Here es þe hope of my hele, *my happynge of armes;*
 My herte and my hardynes hale one hym lengede –
My concell, my comforthe þat kepide myn herte!
 Of all knyghtes þe kyng þat vnder Criste lifede,
 Þou was worthy to be kyng, þofe I þe corown bare.
My wele and my wirchipe of all þis werlde riche
Was wonnen thourghe sir Wawayne and thourghw his witt one!

(ll. 3957-64, emphasis added)

Gawain was the source of Arthur’s military victories as well as the man who guided him in practical and personal counsel. The destruction of a man who embodies so much to Arthur – he is his kin, his wit, his strength, and his friend – is such a dramatic loss to him that Arthur equates the body with the end of everything his realm and his reign have come to stand for. Gawain’s dead body is to Arthur a symbol of his own death, and he “grones full grislich” as if he himself were mortally wounded. Gawain’s downfall is considered a great sacrifice (for Arthur or chivalry) by his men, his enemies, his comrades, his kin and the reader. Scarry’s discussion of injuring in modern war narratives is illuminating, but does not provide a template for a thorough understanding of the use of violent vocabulary in Middle English war narratives. While the author of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* occasionally appears to minimise the act of injuring in the way Scarry outlines, the effect of such a strategy is not to *minimise* the knowledge of the horror of warfare – the detailed gory accounts of injury argue otherwise – but to control sympathies and highlight the virtues of prowess and courage which are esteemed so highly in chivalric culture. Rather than describing war in a way that hides or obscures its true meaning, Middle English romances often yield a vocabulary which holds a range of perspectives in play. Scarry’s desire to uncover the “perceptual process” by which “one human being can stand beside another human being in agonising pain and not know it” reveals ways which modern war narratives may neutralise injuring (61), but in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, acts of violence and the injured body reveal the complex layers of a character’s identity.

The Arthurian materials I examine are largely considered romances, but some – such as the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Lancelot of the Laik* – draw inspiration

from other genres, particularly chronicle and devotional literature. These generic borrowings (or the mutable nature of boundaries between genres) are often evident in the language of violence they deploy, and this thesis will look specifically at how attitudes to violence in Arthurian texts are shaped by the culture of chivalry and an awareness of the ways in which religious, historical and romance texts use vocabulary to express pain and injuring. In Chapter Eight of *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, Richard Kaeuper examines the closely bound relationship between war and knight in the Middle Ages: “Since the greatest opportunity for exercising prowess was war, a delight in war becomes an important corollary to the worship of prowess at the centre of chivalric ideology” (161). Chivalric texts, from romances and chivalric manuals alike, discussed the struggle between the idealism of knighthood – the individual was to be fearless, virtuous and skilful – and the realities of war and its moral complexities. The complicated relation between a knight’s honour and the brutality of warfare causes Kaeuper to pose several intriguing questions about the intermingling ideologies, three of which I will be discussing in relation to Middle English Arthurian romance throughout my thesis. In particular, I will look at how romances such as the alliterative *Morte Arthure* integrate aspects of chivalric and late medieval martial experiences, as well as manuscript and cultural context, into their narratives, provoking a discussion of the expectations and realities of the knight’s role in medieval warfare.

Kaeuper first asks whether a knight delighted in war so much that he did not fear it. He argues that historically warriors of all ages – successful ones – conquered their fears over time, replacing them with anger or steely persistence, and they did so by focusing on the rewards of war, rather than the cost of it (martyrdom for a cause): financial gain, the beauty of spectacle, fame, honour and glory (165). An additional “delight” that would make men desire war was the enjoyment of brotherhood. Throughout the Middle Ages, men formed strong bonds with a group of other men using organised social activities such as jousting and/or war, and this tendency to desire male company is well-documented in medieval sources. M. J. Ailes argues that the expression of homosocial bonds was a public affirmation of masculine identity in the Middle Ages, and that the expression of male affection in *chansons de geste* such as *The Song of Roland* is shown through actions and speech – the feelings are externalised rather than discussed as inner sentiment (214-16). I argue that Middle English chivalric romances also make use of this form of expressing

affection, made particularly clear after two knights have faced each other in combat.⁶ Even if knights did experience fear during war, the culture of chivalry encouraged a focus on the bravery and deeds accomplished in spite of this. It is, indeed, a culture of unity as well as individual skill; prowess and bravery, and a knight's ability to demonstrate them, were virtues and beliefs which could inspire loyalty to a united and international chivalric force. In *Lancelot of the Laik*, Lancelot draws on the principles of chivalry to exhort his troops before battle, asking them to use their "strenth", "curag" and "mycht" so that "the worschip of knycthed and empryss / That [they] have wonyng and the gret renown / Be not ylost" (ll. 3456; 3458-60).

Kaeuper's second question is whether knights desire peace. He argues that while peace is regarded as a spiritual and social ideal – often pushed by members of the clergy – for knights it is in practice incompatible with the correlation between prowess and war (167). War is the central means to showcase a knight's prowess; it is a main building-block in the culture of chivalry. Indeed, knights are often made restless and saddened by peace, as is demonstrated in Arthur's council before the war with Lucius in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (ll. 247-394). The first voice we hear in the council is Cador's, expressing the idealistic mindset of chivalry: war is exciting, the commencement of war is eagerly anticipated, peace in the land makes men lazy and war is necessary in order for Arthur's knights to accomplish deeds and regain honour. Gawain's counter-call for peace – found in the corresponding section in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* – is omitted completely in the *Morte Arthure*. Jörg Fichte argues that this change "shows clearly [the author's] interest in creating a Gawain figure which is distinguished by a superabundance of fortitude, but which lacks any degree of prudence" ("The Figure of Sir Gawain", 108). Indeed, the original passage would have jarred with the Gawain of the rest of the poem, who is the ultimate symbol of knightly virtue and prowess. Rather than assign the speech to someone else, the poet deletes it entirely, and the knights of the text never explicitly articulate a desire for peace. It may be argued that Arthur is criticised for his choice of enemies; Lee Patterson suggests that the wars with Lucius

⁶ Galehaut pledges his friendship to Lancelot after seeing him in battle in *Lancelot of the Laik* (ll. 3406-21), and does the same in Malory after encountering both Lancelot and Tristan in combat in *The Book of Sir Tristram of Lyones*. See *Malory: Complete Works*, ed. Eugene Vinaver (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971) 261-62. Priamus joins Arthur's forces after fighting Gawain in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (ll. 2513-818).

and Mordred indicate disunity in Christendom, and that Arthur attempts (and fails) to create a new Rome in his victory over the Holy Roman Emperor and subsequent conquests (214-15). However, the poet emphasizes the non-Christian nature of most of Lucius' and Mordred's armies; his opponents' troops are largely composed of heathens and Saracens. The Duke of Lorraine's army contains many "wirchipfull biernez, / Of Sessoyne and Spruyslande Sarazenes enewe", according to Priamus (ll. 2656-7). One of the duke's men attacks Sir Floridas and is described as a "rebell to Criste – / Peruertede with paynymys þat Cristen persewes" (ll. 2785-86). The author is certainly attempting to show the *army* of Arthur's enemies as pagans and, thus, worthy opponents.

Finally, I want to consider Kaeuper's question about whether chivalry made war less barbaric. He notes that while chivalry might make war less savage for knights (through the implementation of ransoms and treating high-status opposition with respect, for example), others involved in war did not benefit from chivalry's ideology (169). Chivalric cultural behaviours engaged only those within chivalric society, not those outside of it (185). Even so, while chivalric culture often spared noble lives, chivalric protection for knights is sometimes ignored in literature; in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, chivalric combat is as barbaric as the siege warfare of infantrymen and archers. The episode between Gawain and Priamus reflects chivalric respect for the opposition,⁷ as does the praise Mordred's commanders accord Gawain at his death, but otherwise this noble chivalric sentiment does not feature in the story: kings, dukes, princes and knights are rarely taken prisoner, but slaughtered in battle, which emphasises the brutal nature of Arthur's wars. The higher status the foe and the better he is at arms, the more honour accrues to the knight who conquers him. This understanding highlights a question which I would like to add to Kaeuper's list, one that is central to my discussion of violence: what made an "ideal knight"? How do Middle English authors use violence to shape these ideologies in their text? Violence and descriptions of injuring are at the core of this medieval debate in Middle English romance; the *Morte Arthure*'s savagery seems to emphasize one aspect of chivalry over another. Prowess and glory are encouraged

⁷ Gawain's adventure in the forest and fight with Priamus is, of course, not entirely consistent with the sentiment of the rest of the narrative, and I address its place in the story in Chapter Six.

over honour and courtesy, revealing the inevitable struggle between the knights' dual identities during brutal warfare.

This thesis argues that the conceptualisation and representation of violence informs the generic tone – the text's implied generic associations – and the meaning of any of the texts I consider here, whether it is a romance such as the *Morte Arthure* or a devotional piece on the Passion. Middle English authors carefully choose how to articulate injury, aware of the issues surrounding chivalry and violence and of the vocabulary used to depict violence in other literatures and traditions. The romance audience, likewise, is aware of the rhetorics of violence and can perceive their influence in chivalric texts. The use of violent language may reflect or construct an ideology such as chivalry, and it may itself be influenced by genre-specific vocabularies for pain. This thesis will approach the capacity of violent imagery to indicate authorial interests, cultural context and generic tropes in Middle English Arthurian texts. In the first two chapters, I explore the relationship between violence and genre. I address (in Chapters One and Two respectively) definitions of the genres of Middle English romance and British chronicles, and how their articulations of violence may confirm and/or trouble these categorisations. Chapter One looks at three popular Middle English romances – *Ipomadon*, *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick* – and explores the relationship between violence and chivalric figures, as well as how the depiction of injury may indicate romance tone. Chapter Two asks in what ways, and to what purpose, British chronicles may be said to share with and depart from Middle English romance tropes in their deployment of a language of violence for describing historical warfare, a blurring which aids our understanding of the concept of “genre” in late medieval Britain. As part of this investigation, I discuss the presentation of warfare in the *Brut*, the *Anonimale Chronicle*, and Andrew of Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*, with particular reference to the portrayal of the Anglo-Scottish Wars.

Once I have established how violence and its representation contribute to define, but also to blur, genres, Chapter Three further interrogates how warfare and the language of warfare effect (and affect) Middle English Arthurian romances; the established and familiar Arthurian characters, although they have pre-determined careers, are deployed in different narratives in a way which allows authors to re-tell the story for their own purposes. While chivalric manuals such as Geoffroi de Charny's *Book of Chivalry* give guidelines for ideal knightly behaviour, Arthurian

romances often set up their own debates about the chivalric individual. With respect to the question of how these texts set up and examine chivalric ideologies, I will explore *Golagros and Gawane*, the *Awntyrs off Arthure* and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, three texts that represent violence in ways that interrogate and debate the ideal behaviour of the king and the knight. Chapter Four builds on the relationship between violence and genre which I analyse in the first three chapters and considers the alliterative *Morte Arthur* and its invocation of religious violence in the light of that research. Here I consider allusions to Christ's Passion in the portrayal of chivalric violence in the alliterative *Morte Arthur*, with particular attention to the romance's manuscript context. Lincoln Cathedral MS 91 also contains Passion lyrics and some of the works of Richard Rolle, and I am particularly interested in how images of the pierced heart – principal organ of the body and home of the human soul, according to medieval thought⁸ – are common to the language of affective piety, mysticism and the manuscript's secular texts.

Chapter Five turns to *Lancelot of the Laik*, arguing that, in addition to the poem's use of advice literature and the dream prologue, the representation of graphic images and military leadership sets the Scottish text apart from its French prose source, the non-Vulgate *Lancelot*. The chapter connects the development of a Scottish literary awareness – and its language of violence – with *Lancelot of the Laik*. A discussion of the pivotal importance of the Wars of Independence in developing "Scottishness" leads to a close analysis of the literature which grows out of the conflict, focusing on the relationship between *Lancelot of the Laik*, John Barbour's *Bruce* and Blind Hary's *Wallace*. Finally, Chapter Six outlines the ways in which I have shown that violent representations create meaning in Arthurian romances. It returns to the representation of medieval chivalry (and its homosocial bonds) and the questions Kaeuper raises, and concludes that Middle English romances use depictions of violence to indicate generic tone and engage in social commentary. In this context, the Gawain and Priamus episode in the alliterative *Morte Arthur* emerges as key to understanding how the language of violence can both invoke the maintenance of broader chivalric norms and revise associations of genre-specific vocabulary.

⁸ Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2010) 21.

I. Defining and Defying Genre by Means of Chivalric Violence: The Case of Middle English Romance

‘Knew thow euer this knyghte in thi kithe ryche?
 Of *whate kynde he was comen?* Beknowe now þe sothe:
 Qwat gome was he, this with the *gaye armes*,
 With þis *gryffone of golde*, þat es *one growffe fallyn?*
He has grettly greffede vs, sa me Gode helpe –
 Gyrdedown oure gude men and greuede vs sore;
 He was þe sterynneste in stoure that euer stele werryde,
Fore he stonayede oure stale [troop] and stroyede for euer!

(alliterative *Morte Arthure*, ll. 3866-73, emphasis added)

King Frederick of Friesland, one of Mordred’s men, asks this question after Gawain’s death in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Although he does not know Gawain’s background, he immediately assumes that he is a noble knight of some reputation because of the way he has struck down his enemies, and he asks Mordred to reveal his identity, not because he is a king regretting the loss of many of his men but as one member of chivalric society showing respect to another – even his foe – in recognition of his prowess. In chivalric literature this respect extends beyond a desire for ransoms and into the realm of mutual admiration; male violence, in the case of combat in a chivalric romance, is applauded and encouraged, a universal strength that all chivalric participants respect. A knight’s honour increased with his prowess and the intensity of the physical violence he meted out; thus “a knight’s nobility or worth is proved by his hearty strokes in battles” (Kaeuper, 131). Laura Ashe, in her discussion of the limits of chivalry and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, argues that the “magnanimity” of chivalric behaviour is driven by the practical considerations of economy; chivalric romances avoid the death of their protagonists because there is “no symbolic capital to be gained from death in battle”, and thus a chivalric death “cannot be anything but a failure” (61, 62, 63). This is *clearly* not the case for many Arthurian romances, in which a hero’s death is capable of reaping praise and increasing “symbolic capital”; furthermore, the “worship” he receives can take many forms and proceed from various participants. Tristan and other romance lovers are

capable of dying for love – a death that is not a failure for the hero, but a final and tragic exposition of his character. Warriors, too, can die for their king or country; while Gawain’s death is a result of a personal flaw, he remains a hero for the narrator (and audience), gaining further reputation from his mourning by both friend and foe. Gawain’s death increases his “symbolic capital”, as Mordred’s response to Frederick’s question makes clear:

Had thou knawen hym, sir kynge, in kythe thare he lengede,

His konyng, *his knyghthode*, his kyndly werkes,

His doying, his doughtynesse, his dedis of armes,

Thow wolde hafe dole for his dede þe dayes of thy lyfe!’ (ll. 3882-85)

As previously mentioned, many of Mordred’s examples of Gawain’s greatness directly praise his physical prowess and the great deeds he has done in battle, as well as his leadership abilities (military and not governmental, in this poem). That Gawain was “the gracioseste gome” relies overwhelmingly on his martial ability (l. 3877).

The language of chivalric violence, however, varies between texts: why is it that when Gawain hits a foe with a spear, he “thurghe þe guttez into þe gorre [...] gyrdes hym ewyn, / That the grounden stele glydez to his herte”, whilst, in *Ipomadon*, our hero’s strokes “beyre” his enemy down so that his “shild might no lenger laste”? (alliterative *Morte Arthure*, ll. 1370-1 and *Ipomadon*, ll. 3904-5)? *Ipomadon*’s prowess is not to be considered less than Gawain’s; his strokes are no less lethal. Instead, the representation and meaning of chivalric injuring in Middle English romance is influenced by the contextual, generic and cultural background which it is working in; the difference between damage to armour and bodily injuring in a text provides its own tonal signals for understanding the genres (and associations) at work. Andrew Lynch argues that combat provides the “dominant expressive medium” for the aims of Malory’s knights in *Le Morte Darthur*; the formulaic and tournament-style battles teach knightly readers how to gain recognition and patronage via their prowess (28, 54). Lynch’s work invites further exploration of the use of combat violence in Middle English romance literature, particularly in an Arthurian tradition which attempts to create a British historical narrative; building on Lynch, I suggest that romance authors use violence as an “expressive medium” to teach or reveal their larger themes. Whilst Malory, like the author of *Ipomadon*, often suppresses many of the “unpleasant consequences of

fighting”⁹ to provide formulaic accounts of broken armour in order to emphasize the ritual of combat, tales such as the alliterative *Morte Arthure* use their grotesque injuring to indicate both the cost and the value of war. As we have seen, Elaine Scarry identifies war as a form of violence and/or a form of contest (63). Different modes of war description in Middle English romances invite different responses; when narratives depict war as a game or a sacrifice, the injuring (or lack thereof, if the author minimises its impact) takes on its own symbolism. The variable meanings of violence and injuring which Scarry refers to serve in chivalric romances as particular signifiers of success, loss, worth and grief. Descriptions of violent combat in these narratives are a way to measure allusions to tone and meaning, and their study illuminates our understanding of the operation of genre in Middle English literature.

When considering the language of chivalric violence in late Middle English secular literature, one has to define the relation between representation and genre. To make any claims about violent behaviour and representation in a text is risky without understanding the conflation and extension of genres by medieval authors, as well as a work’s manuscript context. Investigation raises the following questions: how does the representation of chivalric injuring affect the tonal environment of a poem? Why is violence represented in medieval romance, chronicle or epic form? To what extent may these depictions of combat be said to define the characteristics and limitations of each genre? Last, do the formulae which scholars have previously used to determine genre affect the representation of violence, or can violence itself be said to reflect its literary and cultural contexts? In order to answer these questions, the following two chapters will explore previous scholars’ definitions of characteristics of Middle English romance and chronicle and demonstrate how violence is both an indicator of these previously established indicators and provides its own useful determinants and clues as regards genre associations. I will closely examine the language of violence for combat (particularly in relation to damage to armour or body, awareness of battle tactics and weaponry, and discussion of death), and argue for the importance of violence in medieval society and homosocial relations. This discussion will be the springboard for an informed reading of manuscript context and the use of chivalric violence in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Lancelot of the*

⁹ Andrew Lynch, *Malory’s Book of Arms* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997) 50.

Laik, which will in turn inform an understanding of genre and meaning in the Middle English Arthurian tradition, which “crossed the subcultural boundaries [...] and offered a kind of cultural unity in a vision of a shared national past” (Riddy, 331).

The Boundaries of Romance

The boundaries between romance and other genres are often blurred, and the influence of literary genres affects the portrayal of chivalric warfare in late Middle English romances. Scholars have distinguished romance from other genres through the use of recognisable tropes, distancing, intertextual referencing, closure and female-driven adventures.¹⁰ I argue that violence is also a marker of genre, and an author may use its representation to shape tone and allude to tradition in a way that creates audience expectation and guides reception. Violence, then, can function as a generic signal, and its language can also work intertextually and metatextually, signalling other literary references. Carol Fewster emphasises this rhetorical approach to understanding genre when she remarks upon romance’s strong sense of intertextuality, using literary signals to trigger associations which are “part of a system of signals to the reader, related to the reader’s recognition of other generic signals” (8). The reader associates these familiar signals with already encountered romance tropes, such as the conventional description of a lady’s beauty, or formulaic claims of prowess.

The language of violence in a romance can be seen in the same way; thus, when Sir Guy “Out of [...] sadell [...] gan [the emperor] bere / And threw him to grounde” in *Bevis of Hampton*, it is an echo of the tournament language of *Ipomadon*, when the eponymous hero “many a bold man downe [...] beyrys” so that none “myzte in sadull sitt, / But to the grounde he goos” (*Bevis*, ll. 233-4; *Ipomadon*, ll. 3256, 3259-60). Combat violence can also act as a common and recurrent, if not ubiquitous, characteristic and motif. A. C. Spearing highlights the frequent use of diptych structure in medieval romance as a way to show two parallel sets of adventures – one within a social group, one without – where a hero is displaced and regains his position (186). These repetitive sequences that reaffirm the validity of the hero’s prowess often take the form of enclosed combat scenes, either with another knight or a fantastical creature (a giant, a dragon, or a lion, for example). In his

¹⁰ For a useful analysis of romance motifs and patterns, see Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

discussion of *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, Ad Putter highlights the use of repetition as a way to retrieve the hero's past so that his identity may be fulfilled in the present: "The dramatic potential of recognition scenes lies in the oscillation between the loss and the recovery of identity" ("Story Line and Story Shape", 187).¹¹ Attention to chivalric violence in such scenes yields further understanding of a text's generic patterns. The repetitions echo within the narrative (indicating a sign of progression or continuation in the protagonist, as with *Guy of Warwick*) as well as without; they refer to patterns found in other romance texts, allowing the reader to compare the protagonist's adventures with those of other romance heroes. These patterns occur, as shall be discussed later, in popular romances such as *Bevis of Hampton*, which indicate knowledge and awareness of the romance tradition through their reference to other romance heroes.

Another approach to defining romance is to consider a text's representation of closure, and particularly of violence as a means to closure – which can itself function as the means to progression for the protagonist engaged in combat. Formal signals throughout the text create a balance of narrative which evokes similar texts as well as progresses towards a natural end. This sense of a (usually) happy ending is missing from other secular medieval genres such as the chronicle or epic, where the story often carries a sense of tragedy; Kevin Whetter compares the boundaries of the epic in order to define what makes a "romance", and in doing so argues that, while epics raise questions, romances endeavour to create a sense of meaning which was "aided by the Christian Church's emphasis on God's grace and salvation" (*Understanding Genre*, 62). While this way of looking at romance is slightly limited, the use of contrast does allow us to see what sets the romance apart from other literary genres. Sarah Kay suggests that romance contains a journey in which the subject discovers himself by successfully overcoming obstacles, which increases his prestige, while the epic weaves narratives of on-going strife and transitory success which emphasise an ultimately pessimistic view of the future (49-50, 57). Notably, it is through the romance hero's experiences – usually in combat – that he is able to assimilate alterity and is himself somewhat modified; in contrast, the "other" in the

¹¹ Putter also analyses repetition in *Emaré*, arguing that the repetition of the heroine's story (cast adrift by her father and her husband's mother) and its inversion (the reunion of daughter with father and husband after they journey to Rome) creates a redemptive solution to the narrative through "forward reliving". See Ad Putter, "The Narrative Logic of *Emaré*", *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2000) 157-80.

chansons de geste remains external in “irreducible dualism” (51). Fluidity is an important aspect of the romance hero’s ability to increase his own prestige as well as to utilise the knowledge he gains from the “other”: one need only think of Gawain and Priamus’ fight in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, where Gawain garners praise for engaging in near lethal combat while also recruiting Priamus for information and extra martial power in the following battle.

An understanding of the language of violence used to accomplish closure is inherently important to the understanding of the generic tone(s) of a text. Kay argues that the goal of the single-focus romance narrative is to shift the blame of the guilt onto the opponent, creating a “sanitized violence”; the multiple narratives of the *chanson de geste*, on the other hand, allow each participant to become “progressively more consumed by the monstrous passion of violence” (57, 53). In this sense, that combat between warriors permits or forbids closure as a marker of genre, it is the epic’s underlying anger and sense of disjunction which romance attempts to heal. The successful romance hero must cast aside the darker side of chivalric prowess, vengeance and blood-feuds, and balance his desire for praise with the courtly manners expected of a gentle knight. The chivalric knight is not, however, always capable of separating the two, and indeed the Arthurian narrative – with its inevitable tragic ending – is a prime example of a romance with such mixed generic influences (epic, tragedy, history, *lai*) as to complicate any expectations the reader may have. Regardless, while winning honour in battle is still important for the romance hero, he shows an increased interest in courtesy and sentiment which adds to this sense of “sanitized violence”. It is the happy ending, such as the reunion of Orfeo and Heurodis (and his steward) supplies in *Sir Orfeo*¹² – not sustained in the original Greek tale of Orpheus – which these scholars believe provides the sense of completion and purpose which medieval romance reader expected.

It is possible to take a gender approach to defining the romance genre, as the happy ending may be realised by a woman, as in Marie de France’s *Lanval*, where the eponymous knight’s fortunes – struggling for recognition in the chivalric world of Arthur’s court – are bolstered by the fantastical financial gifts of his fairy lover. Often, as in *Bevis of Hampton*, *Guy of Warwick* and *Ipomadon*, the hero is driven not only by a personal desire for fame and the regaining of his lands, but also by a love

¹² *Sir Orfeo*, *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995) ll. 453-76; 553-79.

interest. Even this approach can be bolstered by an understanding of violence, as the hero expresses his love by performing great (physical) deeds. Women are often major players in romance narrative, creating the impetus for adventures and opening avenues for knights to form their identities, while simultaneously exploring their own. The woman and the happy ending are often linked; a romance hero cannot have one without the other. This is showcased in romances which conclude when the hero is married to his lady, and in the temporary madness and dehumanisation endured by Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain and Lancelot when they lose the love of their ladies. The roles of the lady and love are inextricably linked with a romance knight's search for and achievement of chivalric adventure, and it is the interplay of all three of these which creates the genre's purpose, according to Whetter: "romance is ultimately concerned with a self-portrait of knighthood, its ideals and customs. Love and adventures are still linked, but adventure leads to self-awareness" (*Understanding Genre*, 66). This "self-awareness" is achieved through identity formation; the knight's identity is moulded by his (violent) deeds and his manners throughout his adventures, and the examination of this violent behaviour reveals the chivalric ideals of honour and nobility.

The study of the presentation of violence can also be helpful in looking at how internal indications of transmission define genre. Romance can be said to contain reference to the audience and to an "oral" telling which constantly refers back to an ostensibly authentic source which reinforces the great chivalric deeds of its hero. Whilst this is not particular to the romance genre, the allusion to orality in medieval literature indicates the texts' awareness of the tradition which they are working within, whether romance or chronicle. This continual "looking back" to build a sense of authority within a text is a stylised formula designed to indicate its allegiance to its genre(s). Traditional content is written in a traditional style; this is reiterated several times through habitual tendency to refer to previous sources and other popular romance stories, and is reflected in the way a text depicts its knightly combat. Nancy Bradbury argues against the tendency to underestimate the reality of the oral references, pointing toward "variations in a romance text that involve the conflation of passages at a considerable remove from one another" which would be an unlikely scribal error but not unusual from a performer citing from memory (18). This argument, however, is a weak one for the validation of the oral influence on written medieval romances, as the conflation or complete removal of passages is just

as likely to be a result of the copyist's or compiler's desire to achieve a preferred (or requested) editing of the text. That is not to say, however, that the tradition of orality and storytelling does not have any bearing on medieval romances; the presence of the storytelling idea exists in the medieval imagination as well as in the reality. Joyce Coleman rightly argues against viewing orality as "polarized" against writing, but rather sees the two overlapping; this can be seen both in the "minstrel" style of literacy (writing "oral" tales) which Bradbury discusses as well as, conversely, reading written texts aloud, a common practice of late medieval readers which "evinces a unique blend of 'voiceness' and 'bookness'". It is not necessary to take literally the prologues which call upon an oral tradition; the audience being referred to, for that matter, is not limited to "lordinges that are lef and dere" (*Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, l. 1). These prologues create a fictional context for telling the tale which influences the reader's reception of the text; the episodic quality and repetitious nature of romances work to align the values and virtues of the audience with those of the hero by emphasising their orality. Thus, when the author of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* calls on "ȝe that liste has to lyth or luffes for to here / Off elders of alde tym and of their awke dedys" to listen to a "tale þat trewe es and nobyll", he is focusing on the overriding values of the narrative: nobility, prowess, and courage (ll. 12-13, 16). The importance of a romance poem's opening reference to the audience is its emphasis on the virtue of chivalric behaviour, reminding its readers (and listeners) to take note of the physical prowess of the protagonist; the establishment of the hero as a noble figure both asserts his eligibility to star in the story and reinforces romance as the appropriate genre to tell a tale of chivalric deeds.

Finally, it is possible to define a romance through its use of distancing; formulaic devices "mark out the artificiality of romance, the closeness of a romance to other romances, and the indebtedness of the whole to a past in which the literary tradition was supposed to have been established" (Fewster, 37). Chivalric combat is vitally important in creating this "artificiality" as well; it is often established by distancing techniques that create a space between the real and the literary, such as imaginary place names and the use of supernatural foes. Fighting dragons and giants, such as Arthur does (or imagines) in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, is a popular trope used to create a fictional atmosphere which distances the reader from reality; tame lions, magical fountains, and fairy encounters have the same effect. These tropes also open yet another avenue for searching for chivalric adventure – either to defeat a

dragon or giant that has been terrorising the community, or with a supernatural setting which violently challenges the would-be adventurer (Yvain's magical thundering fountain, Gawain's exchange of blows with the Green Knight). Studying chivalric violence allows for a better understanding of other ways commentators have defined genre (by means of fictional distancing, rhetorical structures, and gender, for example), but chivalric violence also contributes a particular literary self-awareness to the genre, as it uses and reuses motifs and signals to locate itself within the long-standing tradition of romance storytelling.

The language of violence acts as a signifier in many later medieval romances which incorporate this traditionality into new forms, often swayed by other literary or cultural influences, as the violence alters to indicate the generic strands at work in the text. This is particularly true in the case of Middle English translators who were adapting French romances; these English versions, as commentators have traditionally noted, were often more narratively concise than their Continental counterparts, but perhaps more brutal. Donna Crawford claims that the Middle English *Sir Launfal* has "a certain blitheness of tone in [its] representations of violence" and links this casualness with "knightly aggressiveness" (35-36). This aggression is evident in the nonchalant way in which the killing of Valentyne is described but not dwelt on. The joust with Valentyne is a new addition to Marie de France's story; in the Middle English text, Launfal is so shamed that he kills Valentyne and his horse, who lie on the ground "gronyng wyth grysly wounde" (l. 600). The sudden and unexpected death of Valentyne during the joust is, not surprisingly, greeted angrily by his lords, whom Launfal despatches in remarkably efficient and lethal fashion: just a line after the lords turn on him in anger, he has his sword out and "as lyght as dew he leyde hem doune / In a lytyll drawe" (ll. 608-09). The surprising metaphor equating Launfal's violent actions with the lightness of dew, as well as the indication that it happened quite swiftly, is reiterated in the next lines which explain Launfal's sudden return to Britain. The blithe efficiency with which *Launfal's* narrator deals with sudden acts of violence marks the Middle English narrative's departure from its French original;¹³ the phrase "gronyng wyth grysly

¹³ For other accounts of the revisions of the Middle English *Sir Launfal*, see Myra Stokes, "Lanval to Sir Launfal: a Story Becomes Popular", *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2000) 56-77; Anna Laskaya, "Thomas Chestre's Revisions of Manhood in *Sir Launfal*", *Retelling Tales: Essays in Honor of Russell A. Peck*, ed.

wounde”, which will be analysed in later chapters, also appears time and again in Middle English narratives which push the boundaries of verse romance violence, and it is no surprise that it occurs during *Launfal*’s key moment of brutality.

However, Crawford argues that this injuring still leads to the expected reconciliation at the end of the romance, and that the Middle English author uses these moments of violence to cause the rupture in society which can then be healed – that is, the wounding acts as a reminder of the cost of warfare without permanently disrupting the social order (37). The centrality and importance of single combat in romance literature accord a certain duality to the combatants – one standing for good and honourable, one for bad and false – which can justify violence in chivalric encounter, emphasising its active heroism rather than its passive pain. However, in Middle English romances such as *Sir Launfal* it could be said there is a deviation from a black and white vision of combat, one which momentarily registers the cost of violence. Crawford sees this deviation recurring in other Middle English adapted romances such as *Sir Degaré* and *Sir Gowther*, where order is achieved only at great cost: the rape of Degaré’s mother and the many atrocities committed by Gowther before his repentance (46). This reminder in Middle English romance of the fragility of life and the suffering violence inflicts is not new; it draws on other, alternative narrative traditions in Britain, such as the chronicle. In the prose *Brut*, the audience is clearly aware of the brutality of war; when Robert the Bruce’s son attacks Edward Balliol’s army, “þousandes felle to þe gronde eche / oppon oþer, into on hepe, boþe horse and man” (ch. 223, p. 278, ll. 31-32). These Middle English romance texts have a strong awareness of the amalgamation of literary traditions, mixing the darker notions of history, epic and tragedy with the chivalric ideals of romances and, importantly, their own insular concerns – a claim which will be further explored in the following chapters.

Indeed, later Middle English romances seldom have the happy endings often associated with romance; Helen Cooper has noticed this evolution within Middle English prose romances, which she argues turn away from the romance tendency towards reconciliation (as found in *Ipomadon* and *Sir Orfeo*) and highlight themes such as treachery, murder within the kin group, parricide, incest and broken lines of inheritance (“Counter-Romance”, 141-42). This transformation may be related to the

Thomas Hahn and Alan Lupack (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997) 191-212; and Daryl Lane, “Conflict in *Sir Launfal*”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74.2 (1973) 283-87.

shift in literary style; writing in prose, the form used in the French Vulgate romances and often found in nation chronicles, brings with it its own sense of literary baggage – and creates a new set of reader expectations. Romances written in prose may carry a mixture of generic characteristics with them, causing the narratives to illustrate a less idealistic world view; there is a “shift in the centre of gravity away from the comforting ideologies of the verse romances [...] to narratives that precisely deny those comforts” (145). Cooper also argues that Malory’s decision to write his tale of Arthur in prose went against the grain of verse tradition and, thus, was a specific generic move to shift away from romance as commonly understood, and onto internal faction; Malory attributes the downfall of Arthur’s court not to the failure of the Grail Quest (as in the Vulgate) nor to the love between Lancelot and Guinevere, but to “the splitting of the kingdom into viciously hostile magnate affinities in a manner analogous to his own age of the Wars of the Roses” (150). Malory is more interested in feudal loyalty; thus, the blame for Arthur’s downfall rests with Mordred’s treachery, blood-feuds, and the hatreds of Gawain and his brothers. However, it strikes me that the majority of the Middle English prose romances Cooper discusses are tales of legendary history – the stories of Thebes, Troy, Alexander, Charlemagne and Arthur – the historical subject matter of which easily lends itself to a more tragic, chronicle-like narrative. Perhaps the authors of these tales did chose to write in prose because they felt the style to be fitting for the gravity of the story they were telling, but the choice to use prose seems less likely to be a causal factor in the gradual complexity and darkening of the Middle English romance. Indeed, French romance writers such as the author(s) of the Vulgate Cycle chose to write in prose and, conversely, many tales of legendary heroes were written in verse.¹⁴ Later writers of Middle English romances may have found in prose the space to illustrate their growing interest in the feudal disruptions of their period, but it seems unlikely that the use of prose was the only deciding factor in the genre’s evolution.

To demonstrate how the presentation of combat and chivalric virtue indicates, implies or questions generic construction in Middle English romance, I will look at the expression of physical prowess and injuring in three different Middle English

¹⁴ *King Alisaunder, Romance of Alisaunder, Sege of Melayne, Sir Ferumbras, and Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain*, for example.

narratives, *Ipomadon*, *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick*, examining the common representations of violence in these romances. Any number of romances would have benefited from an examination, but I have limited my discussion to these three texts for a number of reasons. Firstly, they were popular enough in late medieval England to have been translated from Anglo-Norman into Middle English; the romances survived in the British conscience in different versions over a period of time. *Ipomadon* was chosen not only because it is one of the more traditional courtly romances in Middle English, but because its subject matter interestingly highlights the importance of violence to (noble) masculine identity, provoking a debate which is central to my argument. *Bevis of Hampton* is a useful text for my analysis because it provides the reader with several traditional romance tropes, and its complex narrative offers a glimpse into varied violent languages. Finally, *Guy of Warwick* provides a good example of an English hero text which combines the chivalric and the pseudo-dynastic, and – combined with its reference to the penitential – is a useful vehicle for revealing the development of a hint of “historical” language for violence within romance.

Ipomadon

Ipomadon survives in three different Middle English translations of Hue de Roteland’s Anglo-Norman *Ipomedon*: the fourteenth-century *Ipomadon A*, a stanzaic version in the fifteenth-century Chetham MS Mun A.6.31 (8009); the fifteenth-century *Ipomydon B*, in John Colyns’ sixteenth-century commonplace book now known as BL Harley MS 2252; and the prose *Ipomedon C* in Longleat 257.¹⁵ For this discussion we will be focusing on the earliest version, *Ipomadon A*. The Chetham MS is relatively small, consisting of only fourteen items, but it was composed by multiple scribes from the same workshop; it is likely that its owner purchased various booklets from a shop and had them bound together, after which they added further items to the collection (“The Middle English Romance”, Meale, 143-45). *Ipomadon A* reduces the length of the original by deleting much of the feudal matters of interest to the Anglo-Normans and in part substituting it with increased

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion of the different *Ipomadon* texts and manuscripts, see Carol Meale’s “The Middle English Romance of *Ipomedon*: a Late Medieval ‘Mirror’ for Princes and Merchants”, *Reading Medieval Studies* 10 (1984) 136-91.

sentimentality and human drama; in short, by providing its contemporary audience with a chivalric story which “reads like the courtly romance most readers expect to find” (Field, *Ipomedon to Ipomadon A*, 139).¹⁶ In its traditionality, *Ipomadon* provides a useful control text to begin a close analysis of the role of violence in Middle English romance. *Ipomadon* gives information about literary expectations and reveals how medieval English society chose to explore cultural expectations in literature – in particular, the way in which violence is viewed as a determinant of manhood. Chivalric combat, as in many romances, determines the worthiness of a man, but in *Ipomadon* this is also discussed. *Ipomadon* uses the expected romance tropes of chivalric combat, but questions the efficacy of combat to determine honour. This does not mean that the value of knightly combat is dismissed, but the system of judging a man’s honour by his prowess – as, for example, so clearly shown by the passage on Gawain’s death at the beginning of this chapter – is not taken for granted. It is looked at from a different perspective, one which questions the denial of the name of nobility to a man who, although he behaves courteously, does not engage in physical challenges.

The basic plotline of the story is not unusual for a medieval romance: a young noble son hears of a beautiful maiden, travels far to find her and then serves at a foreign court as a low-ranking unknown. Within this “Fair Unknown” setting, however, a new question is posed: what makes a man? The Fere, the proud heiress of Calabere, makes an oath to marry only the man who shows the most prowess in combat:

‘I shall never man for riches take
 I’youthe ne in eolde.
 For welle or woo whether it be,
 Man that is of low degree
 Shall never to wyffe me holde
But yf he be the best knyghte
Of all this world in armus bryghte
Assayde vnder his shelde’ (ll. 113-20, emphasis added)

The definition of the “best knyghte”, according to the Fere – and many romances – is

¹⁶ For further analysis of the audiences of the *Ipomadon* texts, see Jordi Sánchez-Martí, “Reconstructing the Audiences of the Middle English Versions of *Ipomedon*”, *Studies in Philology* 103.2 (2006): 153-77.

of a man who excels in combat with “armus bryghte”. She encounters a dilemma, however, when Ipomadon begins to serve her; all at court find him noble, gentle, courteous and handsome, but he avoids involvement in jousts and tournaments and instead spends his time hunting. Whilst hunting is in itself a noble pursuit, it does not appear to be enough to prove Ipomadon’s worth. Everything about Ipomadon indicates that he should participate and excel in knightly combat. His refusal to fight puts the Fere in inner turmoil, both because her previous vow makes him unattainable and because he raises the question of what makes a perfect man. A noble man is defined by his status as a knight, and a knight’s worth is defined by proving his masculinity in the field of war or in tournaments. In the fifteenth-century poem *Knyghthode and Bataile*, the narrator reminds us that a knight cannot be judged by appearances – he must prove himself in war first:

[...] not anoon to knyghthode is to lyft
 A bachelor elect; let first appare
 And preve it wel that he be stronge & swift
 And wil the discipline of werrys lere,
 With confidence in conflict as he were.
Ful oftyn he that is right personabil,
Is aftir pref reported right vnabil. (ll. 292-98, emphasis added)

The author cautions against trusting a man who is “right personabil” until the knight has proved his physical strength and his willingness to learn military skill.

Yet the love the Fere bears her “Straunge Valete” raises the question of the necessity of knightly violence. Can Ipomadon be a true and good man without proving his fighting prowess? Ipomadon, as the unknown stranger, chooses to define his manhood via the battle between man and beast (hunting) rather than man and man (knightly combat). This causes the Fere and the court to wonder why Ipomadon is so unwilling to put himself against another man; is he a coward? Many in the Fere’s court, much to her dismay, begin to think so:

C[o]varde be countennaunce hym semyd;
 To hardenes nothyng he yemyde
 To melle hym there wyth all:
 When knyghtys yede to turnement
 Thereto wold he take no tente,
 Nother grette ne smalle.

Of dedes of armus when they spake,
 Ipomadon wolde turne his bake
 And hye oute of the hall.
 He wold here of no cheva[l]rye;
 Prowde men of the cowrte forthy
 ‘Cowarde’ gan hym call. (ll. 515-26)

The court perceives his refusal to fight as a lack of “hardenes” in his nature; he refuses to even hear of chivalry and tournaments, indicating an outright aversion to masculine challenges. He even prefers to “turne his bake” against “dedes of armus”, a physical visual of his rejection of these male activities. Ipomadon has subjected himself to the critical eye of chivalric society, which not only praises those of its members who succeed, but also questions those who are not participating; thus, his apparent lack of interest in fighting induces other noblemen and his own love to believe that his reluctance is based on a sense of fear or inadequacy. Cowardice, even in difficult circumstances, is highly criticised in the chivalric world; Geoffroi de Charny demands of the respectable man:

never admit the idea that you might be defeated nor think how you might be captured or how you might flee, but be strong in heart, firm, and confident, always expecting victory, never defeat, whether or not you are on top (131)

Ipomadon’s preference for hunting and refusal to partake in combat mean that, although not shunned by his peers, he does not socialise with the other noblemen (apart from Jason) and confines himself mostly to women’s circles – except when hunting – through serving the Fere.

By doing so, he “turne[s] his bake” on an absolute cornerstone of a knight’s identity in romance: to physically overcome all opponents. Ipomadon has not yet been knighted, but – as a male of high standing – that is his ultimate and natural goal in life. His wife, wealth and reputation must all be won through the honour he wins through his success in arms. Without this outlet to prove himself, the Fere fears that her Strange Valete – and thus herself, as his love - has been dealt a terrible blow by fate, or “destonye”: “Grettly that myslyke[d] the Fere, / He wold no worshippe wyne. / ‘Allas,’ she sayde, ‘So mekyll fayrenes / Ys loste on hym wythouten proues; *Yt is a sory synne*’” (ll. 534-38, emphasis added). Ipomadon’s inability to win worship through feats of arms is a “synne” both in itself, as a wrong against the knightly nature, as well as against Ipomadon, whose virtues would otherwise prove

him to be a worthy candidate for a husband. The Fere explains to Ipomadon, by way of her cousin Jason, exactly what a man needs to do and be to win a lady's love:

‘Trowes thou this lady bryght of ble
 Here loue on the to laye
For fayre hedde [o]r for any largeness?
But thow were man of proves,
I say the shortely naye!
 Yf thou wylte love of laydes wyne,
 On othere wysse þou muste begynne:
 Syr, for thy good I saye,
 Gyff the to iustys or to turnaynge
 Or els lett be thy nyce lokyng,
 For helpe the not maye.’ (ll. 846-56, emphasis added)

She makes it clear to Ipomadon that beauty, courtesy and generosity (*largesse*) are not what are required to win a lady's love. They are, certainly, elements of the courtly knight, but the Fere indicates to Ipomadon and the audience that they count for nothing unless “‘thow were man of proves’”. The passive act of “nyce lokyng” is condemned as useless; a romance knight must enter into the active and violent activities of “iustys” and “turnaynge” to prove himself to society and to his lady.

The issue cannot be, and is not, viewed by the narrator or the Fere in such a clear-cut manner, however. The Fere feels the injustice of being able to view her *Straunge Valete* as a worthy man; a “valet” is a male servant, someone who attends a knight rather than a knight himself.¹⁷ She regrets ever making her vow to have only the best knight in arms and Ipomadon, as well, chides himself for his pride. As the “Fair Unknown” – a stereotypical prop used by many romance heroes as a way to prove their valour without their name and family connections – he goes against the grain; where most protagonists take the opportunity to showcase their prowess, Ipomadon largely uses the period of time for strangers to determine the worth of his chivalric person outside his physical abilities – that is, to judge his *courtly* attributes of beauty and gentility rather than his chivalric strength. Courtesy is a common theme in medieval romance and in all three Middle English versions of *Ipomadon*, the virtues of which are learned in a “progression through a number of roles and

¹⁷ “Valet (n): A male servant; a groom; also, a knight's attendant, yeoman”. *Middle English Dictionary*, Web, 26 June 2013. < <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>>

corresponding phases of ‘education’; after he has acquired sufficient knowledge in noble behaviour he is allowed to assume his position in society (Meale, “The Middle English Romance”, 151). This concern over courtesy reflects the concerns of the poems’ romance audience, who expect their hero to be both courtly and chivalric. Yet virtuous behaviour is not enough; Ipomadon becomes angry with himself, as he discovers that society will judge him by his knightly prowess above everything else: “In erthe ys none so worthy a knight / But yf his dede be shewyde in sight / Men will no good sopose” (ll. 1138-40). That is, unless a romance knight’s worth can be physically manifest (in combat), his desired peers (noblemen and, presumably, the romance audience) will not believe him to be of any worth at all.

Nevertheless, *Ipomadon*’s representation of combat is precisely what is expected in romance. Ipomadon does not break away from the mould of the chivalric hero; he does, indeed, have prowess and excels in knightly combat, which he proves when the Fere holds a tournament. Ipomadon accomplishes feats of arms, but he does this anonymously – another romance trope. The “Fair Unknown” romance device performs its own function in increasing the worth of the hero; his refusal to reveal his identity and attain both praise and love is associated with his greatness. Malory’s Gareth, arriving at Arthur’s court and serving in his kitchens, also undertakes his quest as the unknown Bewmaynes; he, like Ipomadon, suffers the slurs and insults of the court (and Lynet) with dignity. Both knights’ patience is a sign of nobility to the romance audience; Lynet herself reveals (before she is aware of Gareth’s identity) the intrinsic link between the acceptance of insult and nobility:

‘hit may never be other but that ye be com of jantyll bloode, for so fowle and shamfully dud never woman revyle a knyght as I have done you, and ever curteysly ye have suffyrde me, and that com never but of jantyll bloode’
(Malory, 191)

The nobility that Lynet speaks of is that of “jantyll bloode”; Gareth’s noble *behaviour* is indicative of his noble *birth*. The nobility she refers to is that which cannot be learnt, but is inherently a part of the disposition of the “bloode” of a nobleman; a romance hero’s ability to accept insult, according to her (and chivalric doctrine) is only possible because of who he is. Both the “Fair Unknown” trope and its parallel use of sufferance allows the hero – in this case, Ipomadon – to accumulate what J. A. Burrow calls “the final credit balance in the hero’s account”; that is, the praise which the unknown receives is continually collected throughout the

poem and achieves an even greater meaning when his identity is revealed and the significance of his “worth” is finally attached to him (32). The poet, although writing before Malory, is aware of the “Fair Unknown” tradition he is working with; his knowledge that incognito is chiefly used to gain reputation is drawn from romance stories such as the twelfth-century French *Le Bel Inconnu* (as well as its English equivalent, *Lybeaus Desconus*) and Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal* (as well as the Welsh *Peredur* and English *Sir Perceval of Galles*).

The language of chivalric fighting used in *Ipomadon* further illustrates this essentially traditional romance portrayal of violence in the tale. Most of Ipomadon’s exchanges are in jousting tourneys, and thus descriptions of combat are largely limited to tournament imagery, where he “gaffe so many a sterne strake” and often “hors and man boþe downe he bare” (l. 3840 and l. 3735, in the second joust as the red knight). The tale that “reads like the courtly romance most readers expect to find”, as Field claims (“Ipomedon to Ipomadon A”, 139), regales us with a narration that almost always implies damage by the destruction of armour and weaponry and rarely by the injuring of bodies: “Ipomadon þer *haubrakys* rente / And brekys many a *br[ac]e*; / He hew in sounder *helme* and *shyld* / And feld many knyghttys in þe feld” (ll. 3262-65, emphasis added). The items that he “rente”, “hew”, and “brekys” are protective items symbolising the knight’s status, whilst the knights themselves are “feld” without any information about the physical state of their bodies. This imagery continues throughout the poem; he hits King Melyagere so that “his shild might no lenger laste; / The naylis off his haubreke berste / That worthily was wrou3te” (ll. 3905-07). Once again, it is the worthiness of the armour that signifies the quality of the opponent and the hero’s stroke. Even in war, we are often given imprecise illustrations of what has happened in combat, presenting a vague indication of Ipomadon’s prowess that could easily fit into a tournament setting; when Ipomadon wanders France and Germany to prove himself in arms, we get only this description of his exchanges:

Wherever he came at any werre,
Euer more the price away he bere,
So boldely he hym bare:
He wex so worthy a man of hand,
Agayne his stroke might no man stonde
He set them so sade and s[a]re (ll. 1736-41)

In this account of his chivalric adventures, we know only that he did well and gained “price” and worthiness as a “man of hand”. The men who he encountered have been left “sade” and “sare”, both vague terms in themselves. “Sade” can mean weary and tired as well as unhappy, indicating that they feel exhausted and displeased after their loss to Ipomadon. “Sare” is an even broader term; the *Middle English Dictionary*’s numerous definitions range from “physical pain” due to wounds to mental pain and suffering to feeling “wretched” and “miserable”. Overall, we get the impression of men who are physically and emotionally wounded by Ipomadon’s victories, and nothing more.

The language for violent encounters reflects the romance’s charting of cultural exchange. Combat is the currency of chivalry, and the knight’s prowess determines the value of the item being bartered: the male body. Michael Uebel points out that the male body was viewed as choleric, hot and dry in the Middle Ages; the truly masculine hero was naturally warlike, proud, and courageous (373). However, the humours only define part of what it means to be “male” in the Middle Ages; Uebel theorises that “it is [...] the translation of other spaces (of gender, sexualities, religion, politics, commerce, animality) into the space of the subject that conditions identity as a state of continual becoming” (376). Put more directly, the human body is an “object” until it is given an identity through the “spaces” or external spheres which influence it: in the case of the medieval man, such elements as chivalric training, courtly values, Christian doctrine, and political allegiances. Uebel’s theory about the subjectivity of identity is useful only if the cultural definitions of the medieval male are kept separate from modern gender constructions; the emphasis of my current discussion is on medieval literature’s awareness of and engagement with the societal expectations of a knight. In romance, medieval noblemen in courtly society have a knightly identity, and so take on its meanings and expectations, including prowess, courage, honour and loyalty. Part of Ipomadon’s identity as a literary character, therefore, has been determined by his social position; the literature itself engages in a discussion of the code of chivalry and masculinity through his social status among its practitioners (knights, lords, kings) and its viewers (ladies of the household).

The social position that Ipomadon *should* be occupying in the romance is that of knight, and Matthew Bennett highlights that military training was inseparable from discovering the behaviour of how to be a man in the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries, which – although somewhat early for the fourteenth-century *Ipomadon* – is contemporaneous with the Anglo-Norman *Ipomedon* and can still provide some insight into the traditions of (knightly) masculine culture in the later Middle Ages which were prominent in romance. Young noblemen trained from adolescence, learning how to ride a horse, hunt, and fight in a small group; this close-knit group formed bonds which taught them loyalty, as well as how to co-operate as a team and understand the shared skills and values of chivalric culture (“Military Masculinity”, 73). In order for the noble youth to become an adult, he must prove his masculinity to his peers in battle; he must display the proper virtues of chivalry in order to be considered worthy to represent his social group – in this case secular noblemen. Failure to engage in an enthusiasm for military action, according to Bennett, could result in a questioning of the man’s lineage; even though a knight had to prove his prowess in deeds of arms, it was expected that he would inherit courage and valour from his forefathers (76). This puts *Ipomadon* in an exceedingly tricky position in the noble society reflected in romance; he is not only the “Fair Unknown” with no family, but he also refuses to take credit for his deeds when he is the Strange Valet. Unlike Malory’s Gareth, *Ipomadon* is not in the kitchens and is thus allowed to demonstrate his courtly behaviour; the characters in the tale can guess that he *appears* to be a man of great worth, but they are increasingly dubious about *Ipomadon*’s character the longer he refuses to participate in a practice of masculine competition.

A young romance hero is expected to make a name for himself by tourneying and serving great lords, but the only service *Ipomadon* is providing is to courts of ladies, which is adequate but concerning enough that King Melyagere of Sicily is at first hesitant to take him into his service. *Ipomadon* has not taken the opportunity to make his reputation and he is losing vital chances to prove himself in his youth. The chivalric text *Knyghthode and Bataile* reminds us that “of yonge folk is best electioun” to learn the “perfectioun of chivalers”; those who don’t, when they are old men, “dolorously disdeyne, / That thei here yougthe in negligence haspilde” because they did not engage “in discipline of were and exercise” that they are no longer physically capable of (ll. 201, 203, 210-11, 213). An aristocratic male in medieval romance needs to be accepted by his peers; *Ipomadon* perilously lacks this – unlike Gareth, he hasn’t used his disguise to prove himself. By continually putting off the revelation of his identity, *Ipomadon* spends much of the tale floating in limbo

between youth and manhood, out in courtly society to be praised but not yet fulfilling the “fundamental quality of chivalry” required for and of masculinity (Kaeuper, 130). Prowess was valued by knights as the main form through which they would receive honour and glory; violence, therefore, was practised by knights as an esteemed activity which only the worthy could participate in (126). Honour was the reward the romance hero would receive after risking his body and performing the work of combat. The actuality of *Ipomadon*’s prowess, which is revealed at the end of the narrative, emphasises that physical violence in the form of knightly prowess *is* essential to proving a man’s worth in the Middle Ages, but there are, in the formulation of the question itself, the signs of some uncertainty; more importantly, it allows the reader to examine the role of chivalric violence in medieval romance. It is not only a measuring factor of how a man views himself, and how his fellow knights in turn view him, but also an element which creates social bonds between man and woman in the medieval romance world.

Male violence can be justified by society, and it is not always as limited as it is in *Ipomadon*; knights in Middle English romance often remark upon such violence as a sign of the warrior’s nobility; Malory’s defeated Green Knight is sure Gareth is “a full noble man” because he has “preved himself a bettir knyght” in combat (187). In addition, Leslie Dunton-Downer argues an interesting hypothesis on violence in *Bisclavret* which throws an intriguing light on the way the violence of men is viewed in romance literature. Dunton-Downer claims that the aggressiveness of the werewolf figure can be specifically tied to the destructive nature of male chivalric violence (205). What is unusual about this piece of werewolf literature is that *Bisclavret*, even in wolf-form, is the hero, and is sympathised with by both the audience and the court. When it is discovered that the wolf is the lord *Bisclavret* and he has been betrayed by his wife, his violent outbursts are not only understood but sanctioned by the king and his court. The gory, animal-like violence that men display (in battle or otherwise) is implicitly justified as an acceptable way to avenge a wrong, as the hero (*Bisclavret*) returns to his proper human form and status because of his outburst; the king avenges him with the mutilation and banishment of *Bisclavret*’s wife.

Thus, rote chivalric combat which emphasises the physical worth of the knight inflicting the injury and limits the description of the result of the injuring, as used in *Ipomadon* and many Middle English romances, is both neutralised and

praised. The greatest knight in the Arthurian tradition, Lancelot, does not get his reputation through courtly manners; he is praised for those by many – Chrétien de Troyes, the Vulgate authors, and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, among others – but his reputation is still largely achieved by being the knight who is physically capable of exercising the most effectual violence. In *Lancelot of the Laik*, when Gawain has seen Lancelot’s “gret manhed” on the battlefield, he tells Guinevere that “Nor never I hard nore saw into no sted / O knyght, the wich that into schortar space / In armys haith mor forton nore mor grace, / Nore bettir doith boith with sper and scheid” (ll. 1124-27). She responds to the tale of Lancelot’s extraordinary prowess by telling Gawain “Now, sir, I traist that never more uas sen / No man in field *more knyghtly hyme conten*” (ll. 1129-30). She states that Lancelot has born himself “more knyghtly” in the field than any other warrior through his valorous deeds; his martial skills are being equated with his knightliness. The interchangeability of the terms “prowess” and “chivalry” here indicates their close relationship. Demonstrating prowess is the main function of chivalry; chivalry is the central distinguishing feature of the noble male. Romances such as *Ipomadon* are aware of this and reflect a knight’s need to find a balance between courtesy and chivalric combat; their concern over correct noble behaviour decentralises the violence but they are unable to ignore its importance in the identity of a medieval knight. This centrality of violence in chivalric society becomes clearer in Middle English romances which attempt to create a “historical” narrative, and the nature of this centrality makes itself known in the complex representations of violence in the insular hero romances, which I will turn to next.

Bevis of Hampton

The romance of *Bevis of Hampton* was a popular tale about a local English hero. It survives in six manuscripts, the most complete version in the early fourteenth-century Auchinleck MS, which contains some sixteen romances among its forty-four texts.¹⁸ Auchinleck’s remarkable collection of romances includes several versions of *Guy of Warwick* as well as texts of *Sir Orfeo*, *Amis and Amiloun*, *Sir Degare*, *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, *Sir Tristem*, and *Bevis of Hampton*. Various works in the

¹⁸ The contents of the manuscript are available online on the National Library of Scotland’s website at <http://auchinleck.nls.uk/index.html>. For further discussion of the composition of the Auchinleck MS, see Derek Pearsall and Ian Cunningham, *The Auchinleck Manuscript* (London: Scolar, 1977) vii-xvii.

manuscript refer to *Guy of Warwick*, an indication of how well known it was among romance readers. The figure of Guy gets a mention in a variety of contexts: historical (*The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, in which his fight with Colbrond is a sidenote in Athelstan's reign, ll. 1163-70), didactic (*Speculum Guy de Warewyke*), and romantic (*Bevis of Hampton* and *Reinbrun*). *Bevis of Hampton* also incorporates recognisable literary traditions, something which Carol Fewster and Rhiannon Purdie see in its metre. Fewster argues that the sudden change in metre marks the author's delayed introduction of the romance "hero",¹⁹ signalling the growth of Bevis from boy to hero as he is sent out into the world (albeit forcibly) to accomplish great deeds, an emergence which is completed by the introduction of the romance heroine, Josian (42, 48). Rhiannon Purdie argues that the change in metre and form has much more to do with the poem's Anglo-Norman predecessor, *Boeve de Haumtone*,²⁰ but she points out that tail-rhyme composition had previously been associated with didactic literature aimed at the masses; these tail-rhyme instructional works were "designed to appeal to a broad and varied audience in that they offer elementary, moral or spiritual lessons, attractively packaged" (*Anglicising Romance*, 33). Both arguments centre on the importance of recognisable literary signs (romance, didactic or metrical) within the text. *Bevis's* desire to present a hero and his heroine is often interrupted by moments such as Josian's own attempts to keep herself alive whilst Bevis is fighting tourneys instead of looking for his wife. By such means the story leaves – or at least convolutes – the romance plot; it allows the hero to become side-tracked from his "quest" (searching for his wife). Its many and varied episodes give the tale a meandering yet exciting nature, complicating those recognisable "established generic signals": we expect Bevis to save the endangered Josian, but instead it is Terry's father, Saber, and his wife's own resourcefulness that save her from abduction and starvation. Importantly, the long and complex episodic nature of the piece means that the language of violence in *Bevis*, as well its representation of chivalric combat, is appropriately varied.

In the introduction to his edition of *Bevis of Hampton*, Robert Herzman claims that the poem's variety "makes [it] a difficult one to characterize with any

¹⁹ Previously, during Bevis' childhood, the reader has encountered other possible heroes: Bevis' father Guy and his wife's lover, the Emperor of Almayne.

²⁰ *Bevis* uses the six-line tail-rhyme stanza in place of *Boeve's* short *laissez*, and then abandons them when the *laissez* in the original lengthen. See Rhiannon Purdie, *Anglicising Romance: Tail Rhyme and Genre in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008) 102.

degree of certainty” and that “several other factors make it a poem which is perhaps easier to enjoy than to evaluate accurately” (1). Indeed, *Bevis* could be called a popular romance, thanks to the sometimes exotic and supernatural flavour of its events (for example, its occasionally Eastern setting, and fights with dragons and giants), but it also deals with dynastic issues (Bevis’ fall-out with King Edgar) and local English quarrels (Bevis’ struggle to regain his heritage, the fight with the citizens of London). Despite these various interests, there are recognisable signs in the manuscript of an audience familiar with romance signals; through overlapping and well-known motifs (such as the dispossessed hero, the lady love who must be fought for) and referencing each other (*Bevis* compares its hero to Guy and Gawain), the contents of the Auchinleck manuscript indicate that romance readers can recognise and interpret genre signifiers, even within complex narratives such as *Bevis*, and the poem’s use of combat helps guide the reader.

Violence charts the romance interest in the Orient, found in *Bevis* as the narrative travels throughout Christendom and into the Middle East. *Bevis*’ violent interactions with Eastern characters alludes to a tradition of Crusading literature and can be seen as a cultural reaction to – and interaction with – the Crusades of the Central Middle Ages; in her discussion of the giants Arthur fights in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (written a few decades after the First Crusade), Geraldine Heng claims: “a crisis of subtle alienation requires, and discovers, a medium of subtle transformation” (36). The medium which is able to transform this “crisis” of alienation after the Crusades is romance, with its ability to tap into the magically gruesome and fantastical. It is possible that *Bevis* also uses romance to develop a post-Crusades discussion of the exotic, particularly in the relationship between the knight and the Orient, both in combat and in its absence. Heng points out, as has previously been observed in this chapter, that gender “acts as the special vocabulary of medieval romance, serving as the mediating and expressive terms that enable the articulation of urgent aristocratic concerns” (43). Fascinating, therefore, are the moments within the *Bevis* narrative which eliminate the function of the female and heterosexual relationships, particularly in relation to pacifying the Orient. The main body of the text involves the hero’s attainment of the woman (Josian) and his heritage, as romance dictates, but the final part of the text, over one thousand of the tale’s 4635 lines, is a strange “after-birth” of the romance, fittingly signalled by Bevis’ desertion of Josian in childbirth. While he is distressed to find

her abducted when he and Terry return, there is little to no urgency in the search for his wife that follows, and she is left to her own devices whilst Bevis and Terry tourney around western Europe. Following the Third Crusade, during which Richard I's military successes were not enough to reclaim Jerusalem, encounters with Saracens in Middle English literature either present conflict in combat, wherein a united "imaginary Christendom" is created as a "reflection of the glorious victories of the First Crusade", or interaction with the chivalrous Saracen, who indicates a "desire for engagement with the eastern Other" (Hardman and Ailes, 46 and 62).

Thus "The Orient" in *Bevis* must be either destroyed by the knight's prowess – in the persons of King Ermin's Saracens or King Yvor – or, in the feminine form of Josian (the *belle sarasine*), subdued and converted, married and made a possession. Yet once the Orient has been acquired in the form of marriage to Josian, the "Crusading knight" has become confused (after seven years' imprisonment), sidetracked (by the tourney in Aumbeforce) and less interested in his bond with the exotic – focusing his attentions, instead, on the Princess of Aumbeforce and his mini-adventure with Terry. Josian, as a metaphor of the Orient now possessed by the western knight, is allowed some degree of independence in her fight for survival, but is not allowed to become a fully autonomous individual; in the end, after being passed from Yvor back to Bevis, she is joined once again to the Crusader knight. If Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthur is, as Heng states, "summoned from an earlier cultural order to vindicate the humanity, masculinity, and cultural honor of Christian kings and knights", Bevis too may be a figure created in reaction to the relationship between the Crusader knight and the Orient (39). However, interest in the Orient is a romance signal in itself, allowing the romance knight to show his Christian virtue, and a romance motif is not necessarily purely a response to a medieval psychological concern over the aftermath of the Crusades. Romance is not just a medium to discuss the Crusades; the Crusades are also a medium to discuss romance. While *Bevis* still retains an element of Christian edification, as Purdie implies from her examination of its tail-rhyme form, its morality is that of a secular chivalric society. In *Bevis*, the interest in the Orient is implied primarily by Crusade *violence*; the Orient is a vehicle, not a preoccupation, a form of presenting the hero's physical worth by means of the fantastic. The foreign presents itself as unknown in the same way as the past or the supernatural in romances; all three function as familiar romance tropes

which would allow the tale a flexible narrative frame which highlighted the adventures of its hero whilst still being recognisable by its audience.

However, the audience of the romance certainly didn't view these secular tales in isolation, and the portrayal of violence within stories like *Bevis* indicates a religious interest. It has already been established that the Auchinleck MS included several religious works alongside its romances; other major medieval manuscripts such as Lincoln Cathedral 91 (Thornton MS) also have a large collection of both religious and secular literature. It is not surprising, then, to discover a close relationship between the chivalric culture of romance texts and religious violence such as that involved in the Crusades. Allen Frantzen elaborates on the relationship between knightly violence and spirituality, focusing largely on the Crusades, during which war was sanctioned by the Church as a form of worship and its violence against the Saracens as pious deeds (19). More specifically, he argues that the knights desire revenge for the death of Christ; Christ's bloody death must be paid for with the deaths of heathens (24). This circular argument for violence is motivated by what the knights believed to be a moralistic necessity: "The Passion was, paradoxically, both a model for the knight's piety and his *casus belli*" (26). This connection can also be seen in the violent language in *Bevis*; as Christ's heart was "perchede with a spere" in *Ihesu this swetnes* (l. 59), so Bevis avenges Christ's death by piercing the heart of the heathen beasts he fights: "Beves thanne with strokes smerte / Smot the dragoun to the herte" (ll. 2894-95). Bevis is aware of this as he fights, crying out to Jesus for strength to overcome his foe:

On is knes he gan to falle,
To Jesu Crist he gan to calle:
'Help,' a seide, 'Godes sone,
That this dragoun wer overcome!' (ll. 2870-73)

Bevis' call for help and his willingness to jeopardise his life against a heathen beast acts as a purifying deed which presents the Christian warrior himself as a would-be martyr. Frantzen argues that this "martyrdom" is the knight's most "manly" state: chivalry made the boy into the hero and once he has achieved a sacrificial death in battle he is most like (and closest to) the hero of mankind, the crucified Christ (21). The greater the pain and the more courageous a knight, the greater glory he will receive both from his earthly comrades and in the afterlife.

The major flaw in Frantzen's argument, as with Heng and romance, is that he

is viewing the broad world of chivalry through the narrow lens of the Crusades. He argues that “knights were primarily defenders of the faith; everything else about them, including their image as crusaders, derived from that identity” (76). While the Christian faith was certainly an inspiration for medieval knights, it would be too strong to state that it was the main motivation for knights outside of the Holy Wars. On the battlefields of the Hundred Years’ War between England and France, the English civil war in the War of the Roses, or even in a tournament tilt-yard, issues such as political and personal honour were largely to the fore. Bevis himself, whilst fighting in the name of Christianity against Saracens and beasts, is largely fighting for his own honour and the redemption of his inheritance. Frantzen touches on this himself when he discusses medieval chivalric manuals and concedes that, while a knight’s role as defender of the faith and martyr is discussed, many of the manuals (particularly Geoffroi de Charny’s fourteenth-century *Book of Chivalry*) focus on the ideal behaviour of a knight among his people, acting as a peace-keeper and officer of justice (78). Frantzen is right to highlight, however, that chivalric codes of the Middle Ages honoured men who put themselves at great risk in battle, and the fighting in *Bevis* clearly indicates this. Masculinity is a matter of the will; Bevis’ status as a romance hero is conferred, theoretically, not just because he was born noble, but because he is willing to risk his life in battle and assert himself in combat. Romance knights, in this case, are not required to fight just to avenge Christ’s death, but also – and more importantly, in the eyes of a knight following the chivalric code – to fulfil their oaths to their lord and honour their bonds with their brethren. These very closely-formed ties were at once universal, applying to the respect given to friend and foe, as well as local, pertaining to a small group (kin, battle comrades, fellow courtiers serving the same lord) for which a knight must be willing to risk his life and avenge, such as Bevis and his cousin Terry.

The strong relationship between a romance hero and his comrades is highlighted in the violent and selective activities which they engage in. These close bonds indicate that the love that knights bear for each other is just as strong and inspiring – if not more so – than the love a knight bears for his lady. Many romance knights have a fellow friend and adventurer: for Ipomadon, it is Jason; for Bevis, it is Terry. These romances focus more on heterosexual relationships, but each hero still requires a fellow knight who is loyal to him and who can, moreover, share the values of the chivalric world with him in order for his deeds to have value. In *Bevis* in

particular, there is a sharp turn-around from the adventuring and warring which is required by Bevis to regain his inheritance to the tournament (a romance signal) which Bevis and Terry stop for at the castle in Aumbeforce. The entire period of time the two knights are alone (ll.3646-853) – after the lady love, Josian, has been abducted – is spent in a chivalric mini-sphere, where Bevis' larger troubles are ignored and he is able to partake in jousting with his comrade for the sake of glory. This is only one episode of many in *Bevis*, but it acts as a tiny reflection of the larger world of romance chivalry, demonstrating the importance of prowess in the bond between knights; the greater a knight's prowess, the more spectacular his deeds and the greater his reputation amongst his peers. A hero's actions are public, and thus evaluated by both his fellow knights and the courtly world around him in order to gauge his reputation.

Bevis's violent encounters are largely concerned with what is and isn't honourable in chivalric combat. Bevis enters into every type of violent battle imaginable – from the field of war to jousting at tournaments, fighting thousands of people or just one knight, or surmounting the seemingly impossible combat between dragon, giant and lion. Through all of these encounters, the rules of what is and isn't considered honourable in romance violence are outlined, if only briefly. To be beaten by members of a social class lower than you, even when fettered helpless in jail, is a cause of utmost shame. In Brandmond's prison, Bevis is struck by his guards, and he proclaims: "now the meste wreche of alle / With a strok me doth adoun falle", but if he had "me swerd Morgelay / And Arondel, me gode palfray" he would not care (ll. 1617-18 and 1613-14). That is, if he had the trappings that signified he was a knight, his horse and his sword, he would not be reduced to the shame of being beaten by commoners. Bevis also not allowed to take aid from a woman in chivalric combat; when he is fighting off two lions on his own, he refuses to let Josian help him:

Helpe him she wolde fawe.
 Anon she hente that lioun:
 Beves bad hire go sitte adoun,
 And swor be God in Trinite,
 Boute she lete that lioun be,
 A wolde hire sle in that destresse
 Ase fain ase the liounesse (ll. 2483-89)

Bevis is concerned that he will accidentally kill her if she helps him fight the lioness,

and he cannot honourably let her help in his physical battles. He eagerly accepts her advice and help when in need of a plan to get out of a difficult situation, but he cannot allow her to help him in a fight without losing some of his own “worship”. A worthy romance knight also cannot commit violence against a woman, particularly his mother; so, while he is happy that justice was served in his mother’s death, he makes it clear that he did not directly commit any act of violence towards her by announcing his innocence to the world (and his mother) immediately after it occurs: “Also glad he was of hire [death], / Of his damme, ase of is stipsire, / And seide: ‘Damme, forgheve me this gilt, / I ne yaf thee nother dent ne pilt!’” (ll. 3474-77). Lastly, Bevis’s offer of battle with King Yvor highlights the important role of single combat between two knights:

‘...yif we bataile schel abide,
 Gret slaughter worth in either side.
 Wiltow graunte be then helve,
 That ich and thow mote fighte us selve?
 Yif thow slest me in bataile,
 Al min onour, withouten faile,
 Ich thee graunte thourgh and thourgh,
 Bothe in cite and in bourgh!’ (ll. 4142-49)

Single combat here is able to not only spare the bloodshed of thousands, but also – as romance trope dictates – to settle the long quarrel between the two men by proving which of the men is more worthy of her love with the finality that only violence can provide.

The narrator identifies Bevis as certainly one of the great romance heroes, on a par with Lancelot, Wade and Guy of Warwick (ll. 2609-18). The poem’s stereotypical and formulaic language of violence demonstrates its author’s familiarity with romance vocabulary and imagery. Bevis’ father “smot” the emperor “with is spere” and then “threw him to ground”; knights are “upon the helm a hitte”; Bevis “with a dent of gret fors / A bar [his stepfather] doun of his hors”; and in the combat between Bevis and Yvor, “the fure brast out so brong ibrent, / So fel and eger was either dent” (ll. 232, 234, 865, 3416-17, 4178-79). These common images of helms and shields having been “smote” with spears and of knights unhorsing each other continue fairly regularly throughout these episodes of chivalric violence. However, the results of the strokes are also described; the graphic and

detailed injuring draws on the didactic and political influences in *Bevis*, an insular hero narrative. Knights are beheaded at least eleven times in the poem, usually during battle against an enemy force, and sometimes with delighted glee, as when Bevis is fighting the Saracens: “sum he strok of the swire, / That the heved flegh in to the rivere / And sum he clef evene asonder” (ll. 637-39).²¹ Other grotesque wounds are also inflicted, although with perhaps not quite the same high level of frequency. Necks, heads and bodies are cloven in two on eight separate occasions, often in cases of single combat with beasts, or with envious foes – such as King Ermin’s steward: “The kinges stiward a hitte so, / That is bodi a clef ato” (ll. 873-74). The head itself (also on occasion taken from the body and split in two) is fatally struck in five other instances; when he attacks his mother’s lover, the emperor of Alemanyne, Bevis “thries [...] smot him with is mace / And with is honde. / Thries a smot him on the kroun” (443-46). The arm, hand or shoulder is cut off six times (three of these in reference to his great enemy, King Yvor, whose “right arm and is scholder bon / [Bevis] made fle to gronde anon”, ll. 4230-31) and the presence of copious amounts of blood is also often mentioned (in London, “so meche folk was slawe and ded, / That al Temse was blod red”, ll. 4543-4). There are also, besides these specific injuries, twelve descriptions of general “grisli wounde” done to the body or flesh, most of which are inflicted by animals – indicating the damage done by ripping claws and teeth; when the flesh is damaged by humans, the act takes on an almost bestial tone, as when several Saracens surround Bevis: “And hard on him thai gonne dinge / And yaf him wondes mani on / Thourgh the flesch in to the bon. / Depe wondes and sore” (ll. 626-29). Adding another dimension to the poem’s use of grotesque violence is the rhyming phrase “hew hem alle to pices smale”, as when Bevis wards off the steward’s men (l. 887). Moments of violence and injuring in romances infused with historical and local characteristics (references to familiar cities and figures) can be seen as communicative acts in themselves, indicating the brutal nature of the conflict and the honour of the English hero to the audience as well as the characters in the narrative.

Guy of Warwick

²¹ See also ll. 247-49, 274-77, 825-28, 868, 1782-85, 2553-54, 2896-97, 3418-19, and 4249-52 for instances of beheadings.

Guy of Warwick underwent many changes in the late Middle Ages, several of them influenced by the apparent desire to create a historical (and possibly hagiographical) past within the romance. Partly a romance tale of chivalric deeds inspired by the love of a lady, it is also an ancestral romance for the earls of Warwick, shifting between the generic modes of romance and history, creating a complex narrative in which its romance signals exist in a text that also includes a more chronicle-like desire for authenticity. Locations become more geographically localised in tales such as *Guy of Warwick* and *Horn Childe* in order to give the narrative what Rosalind Field calls a “plausibility” that allows us to believe in the fiction’s “historicity” (“Romance as History”, 169). Indeed, there are those who believed in this historical fiction – or desired it to be believed – in the Middle Ages; Guy appears in Peter Langtoft’s thirteenth-century chronicle (Crane, 85).

Several romances in Middle English verse openly acknowledge the influence of legendary histories, and many of them have French and Anglo-Norman predecessors: *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton*, *Havelok the Dane*, and *Horn Childe* all have Anglo-Norman sources. This body of romance, which Rosalind Field describes as “stubbornly independent of the Continental courtly tradition”, often focuses on the past – in particular, on the creation of an insular history which was interested in assimilation in post-Conquest Britain (“Romance as History”, 163).²² A unified identity emerges from the retelling of historical chronicles in a romance mode:

This creation of an acceptable history and of a ready-made tradition serves to explain the links between vernacular chronicle and romance during the Anglo-Norman period and [...] provides a tradition which is an essential ingredient for the following generations of romance writers, those writing in English.
(165)

Susan Crane locates this development in a specific historical situation, believing that these texts present the general inheritance concerns of the English barony who wished to limit the abusive power of the monarchy (14). The military power of wealthy barons was restricted and they relied on the judicial system to control their

²² This trend was also apparent in the Arthurian tradition, as well; Rosalind Field and Catherine Batt argue that the “underlying historicization” in insular romance “influences both the selection and interpretation of [Arthurian] material”; Batt and Field, “The Romance Tradition”, *The Arthur of the English*, ed. W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2001) 60.

land; Crane argues that their subsequent interest in justice and the stability of the social order is expressed in the English hero romances: “A persistent confidence in custom, law, and social order infuses their accounts of dispossession and reinstatement, translating the barony’s historical situation into terms of absolute justice and providential certainty” (23). Whether or not this is a genuinely accurate portrayal of history – or a specific literary response to historic events – is not, however, the romance’s concern; its fictionality is a literary feature as important as its authenticity – it is not a record of the past but rather, as Field says, “a romance conception of the past”, the past as the tales’ later medieval readers wished to see it (167). The insular interests – either in smoothing over a troubled past or providing baronial propaganda – led to the development of a type of romance that differs from its Continental counterpart in several ways. Crane argues that the insular romance moved the internal crises of the Continental romance hero to the outside; the personal adventure that the hero undertakes becomes a desire to restore not only his own inheritance but also the entire social order: “Rather than locating the human drama in self-discovery, the insular romances propose that the human drama is collective, a communal search for stability that takes place through the hero’s search” (Crane, 83). What is pivotally important about these historical romances is that they are not only plausible, but also easily acceptable and comprehensible: they create an insular past that a late medieval audience can believe in and relate to. If violent language is crucial in signalling genre, it is not surprising to find the descriptions of violence in such historicised romances reflecting this mixing of genres; they are altered accordingly in this new form of romance. Field describes battles in *Horn Childe* as “grim and realistic”, reflecting a sense of suffering in feudal warfare that lies beneath a chivalric façade (171).

Does the blurring of history and romance have an impact on its representation of warfare? To assess this, one can look at the relationship between history and the homosocial, between the process of writing/reading history and the behaviour it encourages. William Caxton’s “proheyme” for his 1482 edition of the *Polycronicon* highlights the fascinating relationship between history and men:

For certayne it is a greete beneurte vnto a man that can be *reformed by other and straunge mennes hurtes and scathes* / And by the same to knowe / what is *requysyte and proufytable for his lyf* / And eschewe such errors and

Inconuenytys / *by whiche other men haye ben hurte* and lost theyr felycyte /
 Thefore *the counseylls of Auncyent and whyte heeryd men* / in whome olde
 age hath engendryd wysedom / *ben gretely preysed of yonger men* (64-65,
 emphasis added)

History, written and read in chronicles and tales, serves a cyclical function; it relates familiar to unfamiliar and young to old, all via a system of injuring and learning. Caxton's history "is a site of intersection and mutual transformation between suffering ('hurts and injuries') and life, and between the wound that is alterity ('other and strange men's hurts') and 'a man' himself" (Fradenburg and Freccero, xiii). For Caxton, history encourages men to be valiant in battle and presents the good and the bad, the vital and the dangerous man – in short, shows how to conduct a good life. The knowledge that the old man gains, such as Guy in the latter stages of his life, passes down to younger men through the recollection of his hurts. Past, present and future all work together, interweaving the stories of the old and the relationships between men: "Homosociality appears here as a generative phenomenon, working through time as well as through the living to make *networks* of power, knowledge and pleasure" (Fradenburg and Freccero, xiv, emphasis added). The word "network" is key in describing the role history plays in the relationships between men; a network allows men to communicate with other men through geographical and chronological space and solidifies the bonds through exemplary repetition. The sacrificial nature of this is important to Caxton, who sees history creating a cycle wherein masculine subjects inspire their readers to be immortalised for their own sacrifices: "it must folowe / that it is mooste fayre to men Mortalle to suffer labours and payne / for glorie and fame Jnmortalle" (66). He himself reiterates this by calling upon history to prove his point through the example of Hercules: "Hercules whan he lyued *suffryd greete labours* and peryllys *wilfully* puttyng hym self in many terrible and ferdful ieopardyes *to obteyne* of all peple the benefaytes of *Inmortal laude*" (66, emphasis added).

Caxton's proeme defends his decision to print the histories in the *Polycronicon*, and in doing so he is continuing the cultural relationship between "wilfully" suffering great pains and "obteyn[ing]" the immortal praise that is provided through historical record. He highlights not only that men *ought* to suffer injuries and pain to achieve eternal glory, but also that they should do it willingly,

and history's role is to inspire them to these brave yet cheerful standards: "Historyes also haue moeued right noble knyghtes to deserve eternal laude whiche foloweth them for their vycoryous merytes / And cause them *more valyantly to entre in Leopardyes of batayles*" (65). That is, the reading (and hearing) of historical examples have inspired and "moeued" knights to desire praise from their performance in battle. In addition, Caxton makes it clear that the eager attitude of the fame-seeking knight is only one side of history's beneficial function, for he reminds us that the knights are fighting "for the defence and tuicion of their countrey / and publyke wele" (65). History creates the willing knight, the willing knight aspires to great martial deeds, increased prowess leads to successful campaigning, and this in turn means a safer environment for his countrymen. Yet he also makes clear that this relationship is neither natural nor stable; history creates identities artificially, it "enhaunceth" noble men and "depresseth" feeble ones, making homosocial ideals stronger than natural ideals and relations which must be repeatedly reiterated and reinforced (66).

Guy of Warwick, though not a history, also teaches through the injuries of other men; the narrative of Guy's life provides edification for his descendants and other readers. Not surprisingly, the nature of *Guy's* battles is varied; the individual encounters to prove Guy's worth in the first half of the poem affect the governance of England in the second half. This allows for both growth and sameness; after his second departure (on pilgrimage), the hero is allowed to progress. Guy's deeds are no longer motivated by a woman, but by country and – following his inner spiritual reflection – God. Guy still proves his honour with great prowess in battle, but his violence is now morally justified – and his success or failure affect the world around him; Guy's companion Tyrry is a less successful knight who is twice saved by Guy. Allusions to wisdom literature can be seen in the romance values of youth and prowess giving way to age and knowledge as Guy swaps his lover's token for a pilgrim's sword and, finally, an eremitical life. The extensive narrative traces a symbolic journey through the genres of Middle English literature itself, from Continental romance to an amalgamation of chronicle, epic and insular romance structures. Christopher Cannon argues that the development of mass-produced English romances in the fourteenth century created a literary conformity which replaced the uniquely different forms of the early Middle English material which

came before and that the individual matter of a romance often disappears under an idealised “exceptionality of spirit” (181). While this emphasis on an overriding ideal is certainly present in the romance genre, it is not the case that “every romance text is the *same* romance” (190). On the contrary, Neil Cartlidge rightly warns of Cannon’s “disproportionate belief in the distinctiveness of the ways in which romance imagined itself as a genre” (123). That is not to say that there was *not* a sense of romance as a genre, but that the writers of the romance were implicitly aware of their borrowings from other literatures. The romance writer had great freedom to utilise various strands of literary traditions and genres for his own purposes, creating not conformity but diversity in the avenues English literature could pursue in a single text, as *Guy of Warwick* amply demonstrates.

The religious turn in the text is, notably, expressed by means of chivalric violence. Guy’s decision to go on pilgrimage does not stop him from continuing his martial lifestyle, and – although he rejects worldly luxuries – he continues to demonstrate physical prowess which “guarantee[s] him an important place in the world” and insists that the rewards from this should contribute to the protection and chivalric education of his son, Reinbrun (Hopkins, 78). Guy’s inner reflections and sudden spiritual motivation do not look negatively on the chivalric deeds that he has carried out in the past for his lady, but form the basis of Guy’s reputation which is expanded as the story continues. Paul Price, arguing that Guy’s “confessional” scene is more interested in the progression of the text than retrospection, points out that Guy criticises himself for destroying abbeys and cities, where in fact he has done no such thing in the story so far (96). Rather than a personal criticism, the romance text appears to be stretching its limits and recognising the general destruction that is involved in waging war. Indeed, it is perhaps the unusualness of this passage’s sentiments that cause it to be edited out of the Caius College MS 107 version of *Guy of Warwick* (the editing of the Caius MS will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter). Indeed, the narrator continues to praise chivalric acts: “The more sensational features of battle have been related with a seemingly inexhaustible narratorial enthusiasm; indeed, authorial commendation frequently goes hand-in-hand with acts of brutal violence” (Price, 102). In addition, Guy is usually fighting against his foes, Duke Otoun and his comrades, whom the author has set up early in the narrative as under-handed, unchivalric enemies against whom honourable knights

like Guy justifiably fight.

It could, however, be argued that the narrative questions Guy's violent actions on occasion, particularly during the slip from chivalric behaviour not long before he repents, when he accidentally kills Florentine's son in the forest. Andrea Hopkins believes the text to be gradually and subtly, if sympathetically, criticising the proud behaviour of its hero, whose "pursuit of knightly fame [...] has in fact corrupted him" (81-82). Guy, in true romance tradition, has been spurred by Felice to become the best knight in the world, but while doing so he has become obsessed with the praise and fame it brings him, to the extent that – as in the defensive but inexcusable murder of Florentine's son – he is "able to justify [...] the casual destruction of anyone who wounds [his] sensibilities by not according him the respect and deference he feels is his due" (100). The move to the penitential supports Hopkins's reading, but the importance that martial ability continues to hold (for both hero and narrator) should not be overlooked; Guy's request to Felice to have their son brought up as a knight emphasises his regard for chivalric qualities. Guy's move to Crusading violence certainly indicates the shift in tone from romance to the penitential. Guy is not criticised for his previous martial actions, but the romance clearly wants the readers to learn from his injuring. Guy clearly feels some guilt for his past actions; if not for the bloodshed, then certainly in his behaviour towards others. As he nears the latter part of the poem and, simultaneously, his life, he has gained the wisdom to perceive his own faults, and so is aware he has abused his privileged position and has neglected God – he has not prepared his soul for the afterlife. Thus, "he returns to his former occupations, transformed by studied, thorough, deliberate humility" (Hopkins, 105). In addition, Guy's sudden desire for penance fulfils a thematic and stylistic purpose. It may be, as Price argues, that Guy's confession "resembles not so much his past as the actions of [the] conveniently typical image of fallen knighthood" (106). That is, Guy's reflective scene which spurs him to a holy cause is acting more like a signal – not for romance tropes, but for a change in tone towards a more penitential, hagiographical text.

Guy is not a saint, but his deeds are performed for the sake of Christianity; his reflection creates a new impetus to continue the story and further extends Guy's renown. Guy's journey east, founded on genuine Christian principles, is an additional good deed accomplished by the protagonist. Guy is working within a post-

Crusades literary tradition in which the hero turns to the Saracen enemy as a way to unite Christians, and battling Saracens becomes a way to do penance for a life of worldly pride (Hardman and Ailes, 54, 56). The multi-faceted Guy turns to knightly pilgrimage to search for further Christian honour and settle his soul. Guy is given a reason to return to action now that he has gained the hand of his lady, but his reputation is further amplified by the social and moral support of king and church. His chivalric behaviour, necessarily steeped in the violence of physical challenges, is given an acceptable outlet with a less morally questionable purpose, allowing the hero to serve his penance and prepare for death. Thus, Guy's pilgrimage at the end of his life allows him to not only fight Saracens as a "natural expression of Christian knightly virtue", but also to "answer [...] the uneasy concerns about the ethics of violence that surface in some romance texts" by his finding death and repentance in the Holy Land (Hardman and Ailes, 56, 55). Romances such as *Guy*, whilst promoting Christian morals, create their own brand of spirituality which, while being influenced by hagiographical material, might also be called *secular*, defining its morals and cultural values by the standards of a lay, chivalric class, rather than of an institutional ecclesiastical Christianity. The piety in *Guy* then becomes "merely an attribute of secular heroism", rather than prowess being absorbed into chivalric Christianity (Crane, 352). The "pious" second half of the romance does not reject Guy's militarism, but instead gives it gravitas, which ensures the poem – and its hero – are taken seriously; correspondingly, its vocabulary of violence – as I will discuss – reflects a romance interest in damaged armour and choreographed strokes which also acknowledges other literary influences in mourning the dead.

Caxton's justification of historical writing, that it allows men to be "reformed by other and straunge mennes hurtes and scathes",²³ is also present in the language of Guy's battles. We can begin to see *Guy*'s use of violent language in changes between its own versions; the editorial differences between the Auchinleck and Caius manuscripts of the tale highlight some of these developments. The Caius manuscript copy of *Guy* makes several changes to earlier versions such that in Auchinleck MS,²⁴ in order, Alison Wiggins believes, to accommodate later fifteenth-

²³ William Caxton, *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, Early English Text Society Original Series No.176, ed. W. J. B. Crotch (London: Oxford UP, 1928) 64.

²⁴ The first half of the Caius *Guy* stems from Redaction 1 texts (the Auchinleck MS and the fragment in British Library Sloane MS 1044). For further information on the manuscript transmission of *Guy of Warwick*, see Julius Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick: The Second or Fifteenth-Century*

century tastes, in particular an impatience with digression and heavily repetitive descriptions in “extended battle sequences” (471, 478). A closer look at these removals reveals that they often leave only the bare structure of the battle – the beginning and the victory – at the expense of the action proper. The Auchinleck MS gives a lengthy description of the battle between the forces of Guy and the emperor of Germany (ll. 1946-90):

Swiche strokes men miȝt þer se
 Togider smiten þo kniȝtes fre:
 Boþe wiþ launce and wiþ swerd
 Thai ȝiuen mani strokes herd.
 Þer miȝt men se stray þe steden,
So mani kniȝt cri & greden,
Þat wer þurch þe bodi wounde,
& ded fellen on þe grounde (ll. 1979-86, emphasis added)

The Caius manuscript presents the battle in just a few short lines: “Than Guy ayene wente full sone, / And his felawes with him echone. / The Almaignes they have ouere-come, / Some sleyne and some nome” (ll. 1969-70 and 1989-90). Wiggins states that the Caius editor is deleting repetitive sections, but clearly this habit – which increases as the narrative goes on – indicates much more than a desire to shorten the admittedly lengthy poem. While much of the above-quoted episode can be said to be in the romance idiom – sword strokes being given, knights smiting each other with lances – other graphic depictions of battle go beyond the traditional romance combat description. The groans and cries of the dead and wounded strewn about the battlefield give a vivid – even grotesque – picture of warfare, allowing the reader to see the injuries as well as the injuring.

Although it is perhaps possible, as Wiggins argues, that the redactor was attempting to omit “material which is not directly relevant to forwarding the immediate story”,²⁵ the nature of the omissions does seem to indicate the concerns of the medieval editor, as the most heavily edited second section of the *Guy* narrative – post-romance hero but pre-pilgrim – focuses on military prowess and may be more

Version, Early English Text Society Extra Series No. 25 (London: N. Trübner, 1875) and Alison Wiggins, “A Makeover Story: The Caius Manuscript Copy of Guy of Warwick”, *Studies in Philology* 104.4 (2007) 472-73.

²⁵ Wiggins 481.

morally problematic (particularly the Florentine episode). The drastic editing of the battle scenes changes the shape of the story, according greater emphasis to the courtly scenes, as befits a romance, and giving less attention to the military adventures, especially those in the latter (and less chivalric) stages of the story. The overseer of this transcription, by taking the emphasis away from military violence, seemed to have what Wiggins calls “particular literary and cultural prerogatives in mind”; *Guy* is now a tale of a refined, unblemished hero (486). The evidence that this was a fine quality manuscript produced in London and for wealthy patrons (perhaps the contemporary Earls of Warwick) supports Wiggins’ reading; the redactor creates a perfect chivalric hero for a late fifteenth-century audience interested in the ancestry of the Beauchamps (490-91). Crane argues that *Guy* and other English hero romances were not originally written for a specific family but spring “from the history of England’s entire barony”, and claims that their translation from French to English was done to expand the tales’ audience beyond the nobility and towards a broad range of society (86, 23). Whilst it is true that *Guy*’s audience would have increased thanks to its translation into Middle English, I am hesitant to suggest this expansion went beyond lesser nobles and country gentry, considering its translation is as much an indication of the growing literary strength and popularity of Middle English in the later Middle Ages as a sign of its varied audience. It is more important, in this case, to rely less on what we are not sure of – its specific historical provenance – and concentrate on the literary elements that are present in the text itself: clear affinities with romance and history writing.

The language of injuring is vitally important to indicate genre in historical romance; its tone differs between tournaments and battles. This is true in *Guy of Warwick*, indicating that particular chivalric behaviour is expected for each kind of encounter. Jousting scenes are filled with precisely the same familiar romance phrases that one would expect; rote lines such as “Þai smyten togider hard & wel”, “Þe launce brak, þat was wele wrouzt” and “feld him to grounde fot hot”, showing weapons and armour broken and men unhorsed, are repeated several times (ll. 945, 879 and 904).²⁶ Battle combat in the first section of the story, meanwhile, is often fatal, but in line with its romance structure, it is not detailed, and so quickly passed

26 The line references for *Guy of Warwick* will be taken from the Auchinleck MS unless stated otherwise; the Auchinleck and Caius versions can be found side-by-side in *Guy of Warwick*, Early English Text Society Extra Series No. 42 and 49, ed. Julius Zupitza (London: N. Trübner, 1883).

over that it hardly registers. The “choreographed” nature of the violence does not disturb the reader, as Paul Price rightly notes:

Battle is a choreographed act. To cut a body in half is a deed that does no violence to the stylistic regularity of a passage composed of decisive strokes and heroic poses. Intermittent authorial approval, together with the pounding four-stress couplet, does not suggest a narrator wincing with pacific qualms as yet another battle extra is cut in half. (103)

The first sign of this brutal yet legitimate violence occurs when Guy and his comrades are ambushed by Duke Otoun’s men. The fighting is acted out in three deadly yet swift (and relatively clean) motions: “Þurch the bodi [Guy’s] swerd glod”, heads are “cleue vnto þe chinne” and “sum [Guy] smot þurch þe side” (ll. 1377, 1394 and 1399). The efficiency and “choreographed” quality of the violence is apparent here; it occurs in dramatic (yet rather general) sweeps which carry the reader along on Guy’s courageous fight against capture by the evil duke. The reader is now aware, however, that this is a story which will relate not only the chivalric deeds of romance knights, but also the suffering endured in darker violent clashes – Guy has to bury not one, but almost all of his comrades following the episode, and grieves heavily over the loss. As the narrative continues, hauberks and helms are damaged (“on þe helme þat strok glode”, l. 5265), but deeper injuries to the heart also occur on a few occasions: “þurch out his hert þe launce he bar” and “þat þe hert he clef euen atvo” (l. 1415 and l. 6375). There are also references to limb damage, although these are few: “he him wounded þurch þat arm”, “his arme atvo smot Gij” and “thurgh his theigh he thruste his swerde grounde” (l. 1873, l. 4023; Caius l. 2090). The phrase “þurch his bodi”, however, is one of the most popular and economical lines used throughout the piece, usually followed by throwing the knight off his steed and to the ground.

In general, the language of *Guy*’s violence registers the cost of battle in serious injuring and death, and yet cannot break free of the often constricting and repetitive violent images popular in romance. The action of slicing off heads and sliding through bodies is so brief and “choreographed” as not to convey a sense of the pain and suffering of the injured victims. There are glimpses of the reality of warfare, however, when Guy grieves for his fallen comrades, particularly over Herhaud’s dying body:

When Gij seye Herhaud y-feld,
 To-heuen his hauberk & his scheld
 (& of his hors feld he was,

As ded man lay on þe gras;

He seye þe blod þat cam him fro) (ll. 1441-45, emphasis added)

The romance reader usually views the battle through the narrator's lens, but in this passage, we see the world through the eyes of the protagonist himself. The beginning of the glance is fairly idiomatic, but as we move from the narrator's to Guy's eyes, we take in the powerful image of Herhaud prone on the ground, his blood seeping out of him and into the grass. The shock of the (imagined) loss spurs Guy to swear in his fury to avenge his friend and he gallops back into the battle like a madman. Momentarily, the passage gives a glimpse beyond repetitive chivalric deeds and allows us to meditate on the impact of the blows – on suffering and of loss – before plunging back into Guy's storyline; it, like the violence in the tale itself, is balancing between romance idioms and the author's desire to explore the boundaries of romance violence – and thus of the romance genre itself.

Having examined the language of violence in these three popular English romances – *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton* and *Ipomadon* – we begin to understand the basic forms of chivalric interaction and injuring which are common to and diagnostic of the Middle English romance genre: damage to armour and weaponry, joust-like unhorsing, and repetitive (but often unspecified) strokes through or to the body. I am not arguing that these are the only violent images found in romance, or that they are restricted to romance, given the instances I have previously mentioned of pierced hearts and seeping blood. Middle English romances are very flexible in their borrowings from other literatures; these variations in combat can often act as indicators of influence outside the romance genre, such as chronicle representations of violence or religious images of the Passion. To understand the effects of some of these influences, the next chapter will examine how the British chronicle interprets warfare and injuring, particularly in registering loss of life.

II. Defining and Defying Genre by Means of Chivalric Violence: the British Chronicle

Before discussing the chronicle and its influences on Middle English romance, it is important to acknowledge that to place the two genres into separate boxes is an impossible task, although it is understandably helpful to scholarly discussion. Alfred Hiatt has rightly highlighted the flexible nature of medieval genres, acknowledging the existence of generic signs and resonances but stressing that they “do not appear to have been meant, and certainly were not taken, as prescriptive, comprehensive codifications of generic rules” (279). In this chapter I identify chronicle deployment of particular tropes and registers of violence which, while by no means exclusive to the genre, are nonetheless common to it, and may therefore arguably have triggered certain expectations and responses on the part of the audience. I will explore the definitions and tendencies of romance and chronicle in my own discussion of violence, but I will attempt to avoid strict separation and instead emphasize the flexible borders between the two literary forms, highlighting their linguistic and ideological borrowings. Whilst each tradition has its recognisable tropes, their interaction creates a fluid interchange, self-conscious of rhetorical effects. Indeed, authors may have “revelled” in the “flexibility” and “vagueness” of generic expectations (Hiatt, 280).

D. H. Green acknowledges the ability of medieval literature to turn fiction into history and history into fiction, creating a more encompassing definition of fiction which accepts that real or plausible events can occur within fictional literature: “fictions can reassemble familiar details in new combinations, so that, whilst the constituents may be drawn from reality, it is their occurrence in a new combination that makes up the fiction” (5-6). Romance itself is a miscellany of influences, incorporating historical figures, ecclesiastical role models, foundational myths and other forms of instruction.²⁷ Stories such as Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* not only involve mythical figures such as Theseus, but can also be viewed in historical terms as a discussion of Richard II’s rule. Stephen Rigby argues that the duke

²⁷ Fiona Tolhurst, for example, discusses the various use of genre in Malory and argues that the romance is better labelled as a “romantic tragedy”; see “Why Every Knight Needs His Lady: Re-viewing Questions of Genre and ‘Cohesion’ in Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*”, *Reviewing Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Kevin Whetter and Raluca Radulescu (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005) 133-47.

presents an ideal of kingship, not by reflecting Richard II's defects but instead by being the antithesis of a tyrant king; Theseus "becomes the mouthpiece for Chaucer's own views" for a model ruler who embodies "the political virtues [...] which Richard II was to be accused of lacking" (218, 234). Helen Cooper draws this out further and outlines four ways in which romance can "come true": by using the romance to explain present disaster or success; in the re-creation of romance characters or activities in reality (such as Edward III's tournaments); in the reflection of social and cultural changes in romance; or by adapting historical biographies to romance models ("When Romance Comes True", 14). Cooper uses these possibilities to inform her own discussion of how popular romances such as *Havelok* and *Valentine and Orson* highlight the themes of primogeniture and (dis)inheritance. Such emphases can both make the romance more "historic" and lead to romance-inspired tales of historical figures such as Henry Tudor,²⁸ but I would argue that Cooper's hypothesis is a useful springboard to think about additional ways which demonstrate these outlets for "historicising" romance – such as a text's use of violent descriptions.

Two of Cooper's channels for making romance into "history" have already appeared in Chapter One, where I have given examples of how a romance can explain the contemporary state of reality (usually seen in origin myths and genealogical romances which relate stories of the rise and fall of countries, towns and families) and of how romance can reflect social and cultural concerns (as in the increased importance and complexity of the system of inheritance). This is evident in *Guy of Warwick's* genealogical interest in the Warwick family, for example, and certainly in the concern over primogeniture and inheritance in both *Guy* and *Bevis*, whose protagonists are dispossessed heirs. The romances discussed here are not alone in demonstrating this ability to represent fact and fiction; María Cristina Figueredo points out that *Richard Coeur de Lion* balances the structure of a romance with the narrative and protagonist of a history (137-43). Judith Weiss, in arguing that Anglo-Norman insular romances occupy a "hybrid" space between epic and romance, warns against making such clear distinctions between the two latter genres,

²⁸ *Lady Bessy*, for example, told the story of the dispossessed Elizabeth of York, and Lady Margaret Beaufort commissioned a translation of *Blanchardyn and Eglatine* to provide a romance parallel for Henry VII's assumption of the throne. See Helen Cooper, "When Romance Comes True", *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008) 23-27.

stating that – although sometimes useful – doing so “raises problems of definition” (149). These problems occur during any attempt to draw clear lines between romance and other genres – whether epic, chronicle, or saint’s life. It is, of course, useful to be able to use the concept of “romance” and “chronicle” for scholarly discussion, as I claim above, but it is with caution that I proceed in my analysis of “chronicle violence”. Cooper wisely remarks that romance “is the product of identifiable and specific changes in social practices, and therefore much more closely modelled on the immediate conditions of contemporary life” (“When Romance Comes True”, 16). It draws its plots from the actual world as much as from fiction. By the same token, the chronicle is also susceptible to outside influence, and the traits and language of violence which I will go on to outline are suggested as characteristic and by no means exclusive to chronicle texts.

David Dumville defines the chronicle as a sort of “practical textbook”, a detailed and thoughtful account of the past by the would-be historian (3-6). Yet the British chronicle could be – and was – used as much more than an educational tool to learn about the island’s past; it was, in addition, a continuing and developing narration. It was, in short, “almost by definition a living text” (21). Twelfth-century British chronicles (William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum* and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*), moving away from a history centred on Christian conversion – as found in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* – created a British history based on kings and kingship which would provide the template for future chronicles.²⁹ Geoffrey’s history created a story of the British people which dabbled in the fictional; Edward Kennedy, speaking of the courtly elements Wace adds to his French translation of Geoffrey, notes that “most medieval historians [...] had a role similar to that of poets: they hoped to delight and instruct and were free to invent speeches that a person might have said in given circumstances and invent details that would make the historian’s portrait of the past convincing” (“Visions of History”, 32).

The British chronicler was allowed to be somewhat inventive in his historical narration, acting as both entertainer and historian, as long as he was limited in his creativity. Historiography inherited its own literary conventions from ancient

²⁹ For further discussion of medieval historical imagination, see Robert Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain* (New York: Columbia UP, 1966).

chronicles, and familiar characters or speeches could provide literary authority during gaps in a historical record, as “the desire to create a continuous narrative outweigh[ed] the need for absolute fidelity to the documents” (Otter, 110). Geoffrey’s contemporaries were certainly sceptical of the veracity of many of his tales, but that did not stop his account from being one of the most influential sources of information on Britain’s past, and certainly his version of events proved satisfactory for later English kings who used it as a justification for claims over the ruling of Scotland, Wales and France. Indeed, Otter remarks that he became “something of an *auctoritas* for those who engaged in creative history-making”, providing a style which could be imitated by those who wished to stretch the truth of their own chronicles (121). Geoffrey’s narrative of Arthur and the ancient past was adapted by each chronicler to fit their own interests; Wace heightens the courtly and chivalric details, Layamon focuses on the relationship between the king and his subjects.³⁰ Even the two versions of Layamon’s *Brut*, one probably written for a learned ecclesiastical audience and the other for a knight’s household, demonstrates to Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne that there was “more than one style in which to write historical narrative in English at this time” (100). The most influential and popular chronicles to borrow from Geoffrey, the *Brut* and Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon*, as well as their continuations – surviving in some 230 and 130 manuscripts, respectively – were the sources from which late medieval English people learned their history (Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 165). Furthermore, the development of the chivalric chronicle, like those written by documenters of the Hundred Years’ War (such as Jean Froissart and the Chandos Herald), turned the focus of history from kings to the recording of individual deeds on the battlefield.

It is important, nevertheless, to avoid throwing away genres altogether; to say that history and fiction are indistinguishable is unhelpful, as medieval readers were somewhat aware of genre distinctions, however fuzzy. It is also unhelpful to try to create another category for scholarly discussion, the *argumentum* (a fictional tale which *could* be true), as some theorists suggest.³¹ To label a text an *argumentum* only

³⁰ For further analysis on the changes of Layamon and Wace, see Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “Nation, World and Women’s History: Writers and Readers of English in Post-Conquest England”, *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 92-121.

³¹ See Mark Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude: Studies in the Poetics of Gottfried’s Tristan* (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1993) 100-09.

creates another category with unclear boundaries, resulting in further delineations. Scholars would be forced to choose *what* makes a fiction verisimilar, to attempt to decipher literary patterns which contrast from the fabulous fiction – if, indeed, there are any. Rather than create another, separate category, further constricting literary formulas, surely “fiction” and “history” should be viewed as fluid categories which freely borrow from each other, using a variety of narrative devices depending on the desires and goals of the document being written – that is, that each work should be considered within its own unique textual and ideological context. Monika Otter hints at this in the conclusion of her chapter on fiction in historical writing: “each separate instance requires a careful reading, sensitive to its surroundings, its language, its literary techniques” (122). Otter’s own solution to understanding the intermingling of the two genres is to view the understanding of fictionality and truth as a contract between author and audience, a claim which the author makes and which is accepted by its readers: “fictionality is not a function of truth *value* but of truth *claim*: not whether it corresponds to fact [...] but how it asks to be taken by the reader” (112). While this is a good starting-point, she does not discuss how it is that the author creates or articulates this claim; I want to show how writers signalled, primarily by means of representation, an “understanding” of genre with the reader. The reader is invited to engage with a certain type of rhetoric, which could still be occasionally altered, allowing for a great deal of flexibility in the literature.

Some late medieval British histories used this flexibility to incorporate the chivalric into their chronicles, as will be explored in my discussion of Andrew of Wyntoun’s chronicle, whilst others remained primarily interested in domestic politics and international war. Chroniclers manipulated representations of warfare and violence to highlight their particular interest in kings, nations, and great deeds; I will be looking at the *Brut*, the *Anonimale Chronicle*, *Warkworth’s Chronicle* and Andrew of Wyntoun’s *Original Chronicle* to show precisely how the chronicle can become “alive” by using representations of violence to adopt the personal, political and fictional into historical narration. I will also attempt to identify common elements of chronicle violence on which I will draw in my later discussions of medieval Arthurian literature. It is worth noting that, in many accounts, chroniclers commented on effective tactics and the use of weaponry (such as the English longbow, siege artillery and guns). This shows “awareness among chroniclers of the important changes that took place in battle tactics during the later middle ages [*sic*]”,

and chroniclers are keen to represent this awareness in their accounts of battle (Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 189). Thus, chronicle war descriptions can be divided into three common areas of interest: siege weaponry and battle tactics, the raiding of towns and killing of non-combatants, and violent battle imagery (including battle fatalities). Following an examination of these three aspects, I will compare their presentation in the language of the aforementioned British chronicles to gain an understanding of chronicle's depictions of violence in medieval Britain. In addition, I will analyse how this overlaps with or differs from representations of violence in romance, in order that we may better appreciate not only the associations language has within a genre, and also to confirm Hiatt's intriguing hypothesis that "mixing genres [...] may turn out to be the fundamental trait of Middle English literature" (291). Recognising the use and mixture of genres in both romance and chronicle, evident in representations of warfare, is essential to an understanding of how literature was both produced and understood in the Middle Ages. To focus this rather large task into something useful, I have concentrated largely on one period of violence that is narrated in all but one of my chosen chronicles (*Warkworth's Chronicle*) – the Scottish Wars of Independence. By choosing these specific occasions of warfare, I am able to examine closely how each chronicle reports the incidents of violence and whether their political and geographical bias effects their graphic representations; in addition, knowledge of how the chroniclers present the Anglo-Scottish wars will contribute to my discussion of the Scottish *Lancelot of the Laik* in Chapter Five.

The Prose *Brut*

Translated into Middle English from Anglo-Norman during the fourteenth century, the prose *Brut* was one of the most popular secular works in late medieval Britain, and the account became the standard history of the island.³² The work, read not only by the nobility but also by clergy and the merchant class by the fifteenth century, "was a major influence in shaping national consciousness in medieval and post-medieval England" (Matheson, 9). Not only did the *Brut* influence its readers' sense of history, but also of the present; Raluca Radulescu argues that the reading of the

³² For further information on the importance of the *Brut* in late medieval England, see Lister Matheson, *The Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English Chronicle* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998) 1-29.

chronicle by the gentry “could help to shape not only their sense of a historical past, but also their response to a politically complex present”, in that it allowed them to compare their contemporary government with those of past reigns (“Gentry Readers of the *Brut*”, 200). Such a popular work, along with its many continuations, gives ample opportunity to explore presentations of warfare and violence in passages which would have been influential for a varied audience of chronicle readers. In the fifteenth-century Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson B. 171, the *Brut* indicates that siege weaponry is used for attacking walled towns or castles. When Uther Pendragon besieges Octa and Ossa, he “lete ordeyne his / gunnes & his engynes forto breke þe wallys” (ch. 72, p. 68, ll. 18-19). Although gunpowder weaponry does not appear in Western Europe until the fourteenth century, its mention may have lent the episode greater authenticity in the eyes of its late medieval readers, who would likely be familiar with similar narrations of projectile machines and gunpowder cannons after the technological developments of siege warfare of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³³ Late medieval readers would be quite aware of the use of large guns during sieges; Kelly DeVries states that “by the middle of the fourteenth century nearly every siege was accompanied by gunpowder artillery bombardment” (*Medieval Military Technology*, 145). Guns are certainly used when Edward Balliol besieges the city of Berwick during the Battle of Halidon Hill (1333): his men “made meny assautes wiþ gonnes / and wiþ oþere egynes to þe toune, wherwiþ þai destroiede meny / a fair hous, and cherches also were beten adoune unto ther / erþe, wiþ gret stones, and spitouse comyng out of gonnes and of oþere gynnes” (ch. 223, p. 281, ll. 27-30).

The *Brut* is clearly interested in presenting realistic and detailed battles, particularly those more contemporaneous with its composition, and thus more vivid in the minds of author and readers alike. The author knows something of the division and constitution of armies in fourteenth-century battles; the Scots army defending Berwick under Archibald Douglas is “ordeynede in iij wenges” and the vital role of

³³ The first definite use of gunpowder weaponry in Western Europe was at the Siege of Metz in 1324; by the 1340s, there are increasing references to cannons, bombards and other large siege guns. From the 1420s, handguns are also commonly being used on the battlefield and larger guns are becoming more accurate and, thus, more vital to siege warfare. For more information on late medieval gunpowder and siege technology, see Kelly DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1992) and Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare: Theory and Practice of War in Europe, 300-1500* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

English archers in the Battle of Halidon Hill is clearly presented:

and þo hade euery Englisshe bataile ij wenges of pris
Archers, þe whiche at þat bataile shotten Arwes so faste and sore
þat þe Scottis myght nouzt helpe hamself; and so þai smyten [þe]
Scottis, þousandes to þe grounde (ch. 223, p. 285, ll. 11-14)

Whilst producing a descriptive narrative of warfare, the *Brut* is also not shy to illustrate its darker side – the destruction of lands, property and innocent life. During the reign of King Arthur the Scots cry that the Saxons “oure castelles [...] hauen taken & / oure bestes slayne & eten, & mich harm þai hauen vs done” when they have passed through their lands (ch. 76, p. 77, ll. 8-9). The Scottish people are again troubled many centuries later during the reign of Edward I; the border lands are often attacked by the English and, in his rage after losing the battle of Stirling Bridge, Edward I rampages through Scotland: “al þat he / founde, he sette on fire & brent” (ch. 170, p. 193, ll. 22-23). Conversely, the *Brut* records savagery inflicted in both lands, and indeed its English bias is perhaps revealed in its startling description of the Scots raiding Northumberland during the reign of Edward II:

And in þe same tyme come þe Scottes aʒeyne into Engeland,
and destroiede Northumberlond, and brent þat lande, &
robbet hit, and quellede men and wymmen, & childern þat laye
in cradell, and brent also holy cherche and destroiede Cristendome,
and toke & bare away Englisshe-mennes godes (ch. 190, p. 210, ll. 7-11)

The atrocities committed against non-combatants during wartime are here redoubled by the Scottish army, who the (English-favouring) *Brut* paints as not only killing men and stealing their goods, but also killing innocent babies (“children þat laye in cradell”) and destroying holy buildings (“brent also holy cherche and destroiede Cristendome”). Whilst chronicles may not have been written as political propaganda, they were certainly used by English kings for their own political purposes. Edward I, in particular, consulted chronicles in 1291 to back up his claim for Scottish overlordship; he not only used the written accounts of his ancestors as evidence, but also desired that the letters from the agreement with the Scottish lords be inserted into chronicles for posterity (Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 67).

In addition, late medieval readers were, at the least, exposed to this sense of English pride (and Scottish evil) in popular chronicles like the *Brut*; Radulescu writes that the English gentry of the fifteenth century read chronicles and

genealogies “containing political ideas that would have shaped their political attitudes” (*The Gentry Context*, 53). This idea could be applied to the gentry throughout the later Middle Ages, as their growing involvement in politics prompted their growing interest in history, and the *Brut*, popular throughout the medieval period, is here demonstrating such an illustration of “political ideas” which its readers would absorb; the Scots are painted as a worthy enemy to wage war against. It is true that the English, like the Scots, are described as destroying the countryside, but in much less detail: Edward III goes through France, “brenyng, wastyng, & / destroyenge al þe tounes as he went by þe way” (ch. 227, p. 297, ll. 34-35). The Scots, of course, responded to this use of chronicle by promoting their own sense of “national pride” in Scottish histories; these too demonstrated their sense of righteousness in depictions of warfare, as I will explore later in this chapter in my discussion of Andrew of Wyntoun’s *Original Chronicle*.

The *Brut* does not always elaborate on combat between military personnel, but it often remarks upon the death toll. King Arthur “quelledde so meny Saxones þat neuer er / was seyne soche a slauzter” and Merlin prophesies a period when “ryuers [will] renne wiþ bloode and wiþ brayne” (ch. 73, p. 70, ll. 18-19 and ch. 75, p. 72, l. 25). In these instances, the author does not comment on the deaths, but the *Brut* does also provide instances where the grief of such a loss of life is expressed. In Arthur’s battle with the Romans, “so meny were slayne, / what in o side and in þat opere, þat hit was grete pite to wete / and to seen” (ch. 85, p. 87, ll. 3-5). After the Battle of Bannockburn, the narrator cries: “Allas / þe sorw and losse þat þere was done! For þere was slayn / [...] meny [...] peple þat no man couþ nombre” (ch. 188, p. 208, ll. 6-9). These sentiments occur particularly in instances when the death rate is high for both warring sides, when the triumph of victory is overtaken by the sheer horror of the slaughter of men. There are also occasional episodes of single combat, or combat between a limited number of mounted knights, although these are infrequent. When the narrative does venture into chivalric combat, it is usually to authorise the knight’s worth as a great figure of British history. In Arthur’s case, this is demonstrated in his fight with Frolle of France:

Anone þai smyten togederes so fersely
 [...] þat Froll ʒaf Arthure *soche a stroke* þat he knelede to þe
 grounde, wolde he nolde he & as Froll wiþdrow his suerde, he
 woned Kyng Arthure in þe forheuede, þat þe blode felle adoune by

*his eyen and face. Arthure anone sterte vp hertly, when he felede
him hert, as a man þat semede almoste wode; & he toke Tabourn,
his gode suerde & drowe it vp an hye, & ʒaf Froll soche a stroke
þat þerwiþ he cleuede his heuede doun to þe shuldres.*

(ch. 78, p. 79, ll. 21, 23-29, emphasis added)

The emphasis on the stroke as they “smyten togederes so fersely” and give each other “soche a stroke” with their swords is common in romance rhetoric, as discussed in chapter one. It is not surprising to find a hint of the chivalric in the *Brut*, particularly in the Arthurian sections influenced by Geoffrey of Monmouth’s account. Radulescu’s examination of gentry-owned miscellanies which include the *Brut* reveals a readership that was interested in courtesy as well as history – chivalric romances as well as genealogies.³⁴ Radulescu argues that this late medieval gentry audience desired to advance their own status by connecting themselves with the royal court in both governance *and* nobility, and that this is reflected in their broad interest in “the shaping of social identity and political culture” in literature such as the *Brut* (Radulescu, “Gentry Readers of the *Brut*”, 196). Yet an interest in the chivalric in chronicles is not only for those who wished to understand the royal court; the *Brut* instructs, entertains, and uses its chivalric moments to contrast the worthiness of its heroes with the degradation of its antagonists.

The poem is somewhat more ambivalent about the nobility of Robert the Bruce, who kills John Comyn for not supporting him – although the narrative does omit Comyn’s betrayal, which leaves Bruce endangered in the heart of Edward I’s court, an episode greatly detailed in Andrew of Wyntoun’s *Original Chronicle*.³⁵ Regardless, one can’t help feeling that Comyn and his brother are involved in an unfair (and thus, unknighly) version of single combat in the *Brut*. Bruce

pursuede [Comyn] wiþ a drauen sworde, and *bare him þrouz the body,*
and Sir Iohn Comyn felle adoune vnto the Erthe. But when
Roger, þat was Sir Iohn Comines broþer, saw þe falsenesse, he
stert vp to Sir Robert the Brus, and smote him wiþ a knyf; but

³⁴ For a more thorough account of the gentry’s interactions with the *Brut* chronicle which studies Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 185; BL, MS Sloane 2027; BL, MS Add. 70514; and Yale MS Beinecke 323, see Raluca Radulescu, “Gentry Readers of the *Brut* and Genealogical Material”, *Readers and Writers of the Prose Brut*, ed. William Marx and Raluca Radulescu (Lampeter, UK: Trivium, 2006) 189-202.

³⁵ Book XVIII. Wyntoun’s chronicle and his version of this episode will be discussed later in this chapter.

þe false traitoure was armed vnder, so þat þe stroke myght done
 him none harme; and so miche helpe come aboute Sir Robert the
 Brus, so þat Roger Comyn was þere quellede and *alto-hewe into
 smale pices*. And Robert þe Brus turnede aȝeyn þere þat Sir
 Iohn Comyn þe noble Baron lay woundede and pynede towards his deþ
 [...]

and *smote him on the heuede, þat þe brayn
 felle adoune oppon þe Gronde, and þe blode stert vnto the
 wallis*. (ch. 178, p. 199, ll. 6-14, 18-20)

This episode, one of the most gruesome of the *Brut*, littered with the bodily debris of the Comyn brothers, portrays the men as noble victims (“þe noble Baron”) of a treacherous man and his gang of vicious allies (“þe false traitoure”). This passage, reflecting shared interests with romance, questions the chivalry of Bruce, and thus his status as a noble – and, in the process, uses the violence to indicate that Edward I is more suitable to be the overlord of Scotland.

Dumville writes that, from the twelfth century, “exceptionally gifted historical writers might transform the chronicle for their own purposes into a highly individualistic historiographical *tour de force*” (17). The author of the *Brut* is truly one of these gifted writers, delicately choosing descriptive language to colour the character of each figure. The chronicle is careful about how it displays its violence; the mixture of chronicle and romance representations of the violence manipulates combat images to steer the emotions and loyalties of the reader, who – as we have seen – is attempting to form his own judgments on correct behaviour and governance. The English are able to hew through bodies, but the narrator frames it so that there is no sense of outrage; this time, the violence is occurring within a battle. When Robert the Bruce’s son attacks Edward Balliol’s English army, they are at first taken aback, but then “quellede þe Scottis vnto þe grounde, & meny sore woundede, so longe / til þat þai stoden oppon ham, and foynede ham with her suordes / & speres þrouȝ-out here bodyes” (ch. 223, p. 279, ll. 3-5). The violent action of thrusting swords and spears through bodies is acceptable because of its use in its proper environment, the even battlefield. The chronicle is even able to turn brutal images into something laudable when the English-favoured *Brut* gleefully recounts the English victory at Halidon Hill: “þere might men see meny a Scottishe-man caste / doun vnto þe erthe dede, and hir baneres displaiede, & hackede into pices, and meny

a gode habrigoun of stele in hir blode / baped” (ch. 223, p. 285, ll. 23-25). The image of the trodden and battered banners and blood-covered armour is paradigmatic of a destroyed kingdom; the English – and the *Brut* – are trying to stomp out the nobility of Scotland. Violent images in the *Brut* are very aware of the loss of life in war, but are able to adapt this for the chronicle’s own purposes.

The *Anonimalle Chronicle*

Radulescu argues that “the popularity of the *Brut* was due to its readers’ perceived position as both witnesses of the events and contributors to the creation of English national history” (*The Gentry Context*, 54). Later chroniclers were able to edit and to supplement the *Brut* with their own various continuations, indicative of particular interests and geographical bias. One of these, the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, participates in this “creation” of English history by presenting the years after 1307 with Yorkshire flair. The *Anonimalle Chronicle* is a French continuation of the *Brut* which was compiled in St. Mary’s, a Benedictine abbey in York, in the mid-fourteenth century. St. Mary’s produced much of the chronicle-writing in Yorkshire in the late Middle Ages, and had close associations with the politics of the city of York – at the time a second centre of central government. Of particular interest to my argument is St. Mary’s link with Edward III’s Scottish wars, as the abbey acted as treasurer for the funds to finance his 1333 campaign.³⁶ As a result of this, the *Anonimalle* chroniclers would have had a definite “interest in the English king’s claims to overlordship in Scotland” (Childs, 5). The chronicle’s representation of battle certainly shows support for Edward III’s military campaigns. The *Anonimalle* is, on the whole, a sparing but accurate account of the period after 1307, the Scottish raids and attacks are not as detailed as in continuations such as the *Bridlington* and *Meaux Chronicles* (Childs, 53). However, it shares the *Brut*’s interests when describing violence, displaying siege warfare and archers, emphasising Scottish attacks on innocents and the loss of lives in battle. It also includes an interesting account of the Battle of Halidon Hill, which emphasizes the importance of Edward III’s motivating of his troops to overcome the numerically superior Scottish army.

³⁶ See the introduction to Wendy Childs and John Taylor’s edition of *The Anonimalle Chronicle* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1991) for further information on St. Mary’s role in the politics and chronicle production of the fourteenth century.

The *Anonimalle* often gives accounts of the organisation of the English and Scottish battalions, and draws particular attention to the importance of the English archers, as well as offering an insight into the tactical thinking of the army leaders. The chronicle shows the English lords planning their attack on Scotland; Edward II and the Earl of Lancaster hold a council in 1319 where they “planned and discussed among themselves how they could conquer the town of Berwick which was then well provisioned with men and supplies”, a tactic they employ because they “wished to have a good refuge within the said town in case danger should come upon them in the said land of Scotland” (95). The narration demonstrates a practical approach to the siege, stating that the army begins to set up tents around the town and that orders are made for “good provision for foodstuffs and other necessities which were essential for them to make war” (97). The Scots also use tactics in attack, and are portrayed as travelling under cover of nightfall in a covert way: “during the day they occupied and stayed in woods and marshes far from the towns, so that the people of the area should have no knowledge of them, and at night they rode with their army” (99). These tactics allow them to creep up on the town of Myton, where they fight a small and partially non-military army. In both cases, Douglas and Edward II are carefully planning each forward movement. The *Anonimalle* registers the practical use of siege engines; the chronicle goes so far as to say that Edward II has his “sent up from Northampton and Bambourgh, and Edward III “ordered his men to prepare engines and other equipment to make an assault on the said town and to take it quickly by force” (97, 161). As in the *Brut*, the author explains the composition of the battalions and, in particular, the impact of the English archers. They are used in both defence and attack; at Burton, Edward II has “a great multitude of archers and other men-at-arms who vigorously defended the crossing” (105). The archers and infantrymen are seen to work together to create an effective fighting unit, even without the knights; when Edward Balliol’s forces land in Scotland, “the English archers and the small force of footmen, who landed before the men at arms could disembark from their ships, assembled against the Scots, and did so much that the Scots were repulsed and at least 900 were killed and the rest put to flight” (149).

The chronicle is not afraid to declare the English army’s indebtedness to its archers, but is also always careful to emphasise that all three units worked together. At Halidon Hill, the large army of Scots are “drawn up in four battle lines”, and the chronicle proceeds to mention the numerical and positional make-up of each line and

which lords were involved (165). In response, the English lords “marshalled and put their small force into position as seemed best and most possible to them, and the king of England greatly encouraged his men and especially the archers who had come to his aid” (167). This passage draws three things to the reader’s attention. First, it emphasises the relatively small size of the English army, to highlight the extraordinary feat that the men would accomplish. Secondly, the archers this time receive special praise from the king for their help in defeating enemy armies. Thirdly, Edward III’s role is not only as a military general – one who is about to lead the English army into a much lauded victory over the Scots – but also as a king who is able to comfort, support and inspire his troops in difficult circumstances to face what seem almost insurmountable odds. Edward III “rode about everywhere among his army and encouraged his men well and nobly, and generously promised them good reward provided that they conducted themselves well against the great multitude of their Scottish enemies” (163). The *Anonimalle* makes clear that the king’s behaviour, both physically and emotionally, during this battle is a vital component of the English victory at Halidon Hill.

This attention to the king’s behaviour reflects both a practical and a chivalric interest; it reveals the importance of the military leader as well as increases the noble nature of the revered English king. In another continuation of the *Brut* which covers Edward III’s reign, the “Common Version to 1377, full continuation”, there is a chivalric vocabulary used, particularly when discussing the knightly virtues of the king, which Carole Weinberg remarks on: “in the description of events during the reign of Edward III the English chronicler’s consistent use of a terminology associated with chivalry [...] embeds the vernacular narrative more firmly within a chivalric world” (46). Whilst the *Anonimalle* is less obvious in its chivalric borrowings, Weinberg’s preliminary investigation of the chivalric in the adaptations of the *Brut* is apposite to the description of Edward III at Halidon Hill; his heroic efforts act as a guiding light and inspiration for his troops. Both Edward III and the archers’ roles are highlighted at the end of the episode, and we see them working together for victory: “the king of England himself was the first man who engaged the first battle line of the Scots, and the English archers destroyed and injured them so that they were in a short time as if choked and blinded, and soon they were thrown into confusion” (167). Whilst the *Anonimalle* chroniclers at St. Mary’s abbey are charting England’s history, they are also putting a personal stamp on their chronicle.

The English nobles complete the destruction of the Scots and Edward III is portrayed as a heroic king; the chronicle's association with York and the financing of Edward III's Scottish wars is blatantly apparent in its presentation of the victory over the Scots and the king's role in it.

The accounts of raids in the countryside and cities are as present in the *Anonimalle* as they are in its predecessor, the *Brut*, particularly in the reporting of the Scottish wars. Once again, both Scottish and English lands are being raided, although the larger part of the destruction appears to be perpetrated by the Scots – not surprising, considering the interest the chroniclers might have had in portraying the English as superior in moral worth and chivalry. After Edward II launches another unsuccessful expedition in Scotland in 1322, the Scots “quickly came into England robbing and destroying the land and doing much damage” (111). During Edward III's reign, they “came again into this land with a very great army, burning, robbing, and destroying and did much harm” (139). After Edward Balliol attempts to return to Scotland to reclaim his lands, the Scots go to his country and “put it to fire and flame, and drove the people from the country and took and carried off everything they could find” (153). All of these passages are, however, fairly cursory, and it is only when Archibald Douglas' Scottish army “killed [Balliol's] people and robbed them and carried away their goods” that the English army respond in kind: they “began to burn and kill all before them, and they took sheep and other fat beasts in great plenty” (157, 159). The pillaging and the slaughter of innocents are still recorded as an inevitable and historical factor of warfare, but the chronicle appears to be minimising their occurrence, as in the *Brut*. Dumville describes the “living text” of the chronicle form to be continually altered to favour political factions over time and place, a process in which this *Brut* continuation engages here (19).

This biased register continues in the flavour of its graphic combat detail. The *Anonimalle* does not elaborate on grisly wounds, nor does it include any detailed single combats. It does, however, comment when there is a great slaughter of men, and it is its attitude in these passages that again indicates its interest in privileging the English. It has great feeling for the loss of English lives in 1319, when James Douglas comes to England with 20,000 Scots whilst the Earl of Lancaster's army is besieging Berwick. A small army assembles near Myton, with the help of the local people, and the narrator sorrows over the encounter with the numerically superior Scots army:

the Scots, who were well marshalled and well equipped for war, had great scorn for the English [...] and without further delay began to fight the English and soon the English were killed and defeated; many were drowned in the River Swale, over which there was sorrow, and [...] Nicholas Fleming was there cut down and dismembered (99).

Nicholas Fleming is the mayor of York, and his death is unique to this account (Childs, 19). Dumville points out that in the course of the Middle Ages the number of patrons, subjects and authors of chronicles rose, increasing the demand for information and, as a result of this, different forms of the chronicle were created, including the city-chronicle (18). The *Anonimalle* is structured largely around more universal English topics, but an element of the “city-chronicle” appears here in its mention of the involvement of Yorkshire citizens. The inclusion of local knowledge and interest by the chroniclers also showcases the brutality carried out on non-combatants. In the battle near Myton, the incidence of human slaughter is recorded with sadness; the inequality of the combat is remarked upon and the image of the drowned men haunts the reader. High Scottish death tolls are not similarly remarked upon, but are simply stated as facts: “the great multitude of Scots was defeated and killed and put to flight” and “the Scots were defeated at sea, and all the greater part killed and drowned, and all their ships were burned” (151 and 153). Indeed, the great destruction of men appears to be no longer a thing to sorrow over, but changed into a matter of wonder when the English overcome the Scots over a decade later at Halidon Hill under Edward III: “the English nobles attacked the other Scottish squadrons and killed there so many of the force that it was a marvel to see and contemplate” (167). The numerical inequality, previously used by the chroniclers to criticise the Scots’ behaviour, is now being used to praise that of the English; their courage and prowess is being praised by not only recording their triumph in the face of adversity, but also by asking the readers to contemplate (*penser*) the marvel (*merveille*) of the numerous casualties. It is fitting here that *merveille* can translate as something to marvel at “in awe or in disgust” (*The Anglo-Norman Dictionary*). The scene after the battle of Halidon Hill encapsulates both aspects of the marvel, inspiring awe for the deeds accomplished and disgust at the horror of the fatalities. When the author asks his readers to contemplate this, he is not only asking them to think about the scene, but to meditate and reflect on it, to imagine it and to wonder at it. The context of *penser*, closely associated with *merveille* and the countless Scottish

dead, invites a reflection on the visual images the author has conjured of Scotsmen *estuffez* (choked) and *envoegles* (blinded) by the efficient English archers (166). In its own way, the chronicle has turned the bloody image of the lifeless Scottish bodies into a work of art, created by the English army who “vigorously and in good heart” fought their larger adversary, to be viewed and appreciated by the chronicle’s audience (167).

Warkworth’s Chronicle

Although still narrating the history of war, it is true that not all chronicles included the physical aspects of battle; *Warkworth’s Chronicle* – compiled in 1482 at Peterhouse, Cambridge for John Warkworth³⁷ – is more concerned with the political machinations of the houses of Lancaster and York during the fifteenth century than in detailing the wars which accompanied the conflicts. The author – who, Lister Matheson argues, is likely one of the northern fellows at Peterhouse – is able to show critical discrimination when choosing extracts and compiling his sources, and shows an interest in recent politics and popular verse (Matheson, 80-83). Considering this, it presents a rather sober chronicle, and its violence is largely centred on the numerous executions and beheadings which occur on either side throughout the upheaval of England’s civil politics during the Wars of the Roses. However, it does still offer some of the familiar aspects of chronicle violence, which the medieval reader might expect after the representations in the *Brut* and its popular continuations. Canons and hand guns are described; Edward IV “losyd his gunnys off his ordinaunce” against the Earl of Warwick and the rebels, and when Henry VI is reinstated, Edward brings “Flemynges with hand gunnys” to fight him (101, 107). When Thomas Neville is blocked from the city of London, he “losed his gonnys into þe cite & brent at Algate & at Londoun Brygge” (114). The presence of bowmen is also mentioned; Edward IV’s army contains “vii M off archers of þe west cuntre” (98).

The effects of the armies raiding and burning town and country are also again mentioned; the chronicle explains that it is the suffering and losses of the people which eventually make them happy to reinstate Henry VI on the throne, after Edward

³⁷ For further information on the author/compiler of the *Warkworth Chronicle*, see Lister Matheson’s introduction to *Death and Dissent: The Dethe of the Kynge of Scotis and Warkworth’s Chronicle* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 1999) 61-92.

IV's reign brings only costly war and strife: "þe peple loked after all the forsaide prosperites & peece, but it cam not, but euer on batell after an oþer, and moch trouble and gret losse of goodes emong þe comoun peple [...] And yett at euery batell to com fferr out þer contres, &c., at þer oune coste" (105). Gruesome battle detail, however, is quite rare in the *Warkworth*. Warwick is killed, after two of Edward IV's men find him fleeing the field, and they "cam vpon & kyllid hym & dispoled hym naked", and the Duke of Exeter suffers a similar fate when he is "gretely dispoled & wounded and lafte naked for ded in þe feld" (111). Apart from this, the chronicle is more concerned about the executions of important nobles, particularly when it feels that the Yorkists have acted vengefully and cruelly. On behalf of Edward IV, the Earl of Worcester hangs key members involved in the rebellion of Warwick and Clarence, and Worcester's particularly grotesque display of the rebels, for which he was "gretly behated emong þe peple", is recounted:

xx persones off gentylnen & yomen wer honged, drawn, & quartered, and beheaded; and after þat y-hanged vp by þe legges and a stake made scharpe at both endes, whereoff on end was putt in a buttockes and þe other ende ther hedes were y-putt vpon, ffor the which the peple of the lond wer gretly displesyd. (102)

The chronicle limits its depictions of violence, but when these extreme acts do occur, they are perpetrated by Edward IV's men to reinforce the compiler's Lancastrian bias. Radulescu argues that late medieval English gentry were "particularly interested in fashioning their social and political identity" by "their involvement in the writing of national history" (*The Gentry Context*, 54). Chronicles allowed them to participate in contemporary politics (in writing the events) and reflect their political preferences and allegiances; their interests could influence and be influenced by contemporary chronicles, and this can be seen in their depictions of warfare. This is arguably true for many English secular chronicle writers in the late Middle Ages, whether or not they were gentry; it is certainly true of the fellow of Peterhouse who compiled the *Warkworth* chronicle, who chose to declare his position in the tumultuous politics of England in the fifteenth century by writing a narrative of the Wars of the Roses favourable, as mentioned above, to the house of Lancaster.

It is clear in the *Brut*, the *Anonimalle* and the *Warkworth* chronicles that – regardless of how historical or neutral they attempt to be – the portrayal of warfare is

used by the authors and compilers to affect sympathies of their readers. Given-Wilson claims that chronicles were unlikely to have been effective vehicles for propaganda, and that audiences were “more likely to be swayed by sermons, proclamations or visual display” (“Official and Semi-Official History”, 5). While it is certainly true that these visual and interactive experiences would be useful tools for propaganda, it would be negligent to ignore the impact the reading and perhaps writing and editing of chronicles such as these would have had on those who had access to them in the later Middle Ages, as seen with the *Warkworth* chronicle. Many powerful nobles, wealthy townsmen or influential gentry members would have been interested in taking an active role in local or central politics, or perhaps wished to understand their history in a period of political trouble, and the writing, commissioning or reading of a chronicle provided a way for them to become involved in the moulding of their national consciousness. Certainly, regardless of their actual impact, Given-Wilson admits that governments and their opponents would be “unlikely” to be “any less eager to influence what was written in chronicles” (5). Chronicles were written narratives which were recorded as history, and thus it is not just governments who would wish to make sure the “correct” version of events is composed to coincide with local interests. The written document is a person’s (and a people’s) form of posterity, a way to pass down one’s fame and identity into the future. The narration of events, the names included in their highly regarded pages, and the tone in which an earl, a baron, a mayor, a knight, a lady, or a wealthy citizen is portrayed will affect not only the contemporary audience, but – more importantly – those who will read about them in ages to come. If the chronicle acts as both a “living text” and a “practical textbook”, the composers and the subjects are well aware of its power to instruct and to influence – even if it only reaches those who are educated enough to read its pages – and the language of its violence is just as effective in reflecting the chronicle (historical) tone and implying the political bias of the text. Given-Wilson’s thesis that secular historiography becomes clearly propagandist by the fifteenth century can be seen blatantly in the *Warkworth*’s comments on Edward IV’s behaviour and reign, but such propagandist tendencies are also in evidence in the representations of warfare and violence in the *Brut* and its fourteenth-century continuations.

Andrew of Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*

This chronicle representations of violence – which we have so far seen in the interest in siege warfare and battle tactics, the damage to property and non-combatant people, and the loss of life – is not exclusive to chronicle, but it is a common part of its register, and it is thus able to be used by literature to not only represent itself as a chronicle, but also to express political interests within a chronicle. This can be demonstrated clearly once again in an examination of the presentation of warfare and violence in a Scottish chronicle from the late Middle Ages, Andrew of Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*, as it provides a mirror for the episodes of the Anglo-Scottish wars previously discussed in the English chronicles. Wyntoun's chronicle, written early in the fifteenth century by the prior of St. Serfs in Fife, was the earliest full vernacular history of the Scots, and as such acted as a new defining voice for the Scottish experience during the wars for independence (Boardman, 115). Although surely influenced by his clerical training, Wyntoun was writing for a knightly patron, Sir John Wemyss of Kincaldrum, and it is apparent that the chronicler is interested in catering to a noble audience: comparing Wyntoun's history to Bower's more sober *Scotichronicon*, Stevenson states how Wyntoun "often made digressions in his narrative to include tales of chivalric deeds that he thought might have engaged and interested his audience" (Stevenson, 139). Stevenson's review of Wyntoun's chronicle focuses in the main on Wyntoun's descriptions of the importance of a knight's reputation, but this is by no means the only way Wyntoun "romances" his chronicle. This tendency to write the history of the Scots in a semi-chivalric mindset for the benefit of his audience's – and his own – interests can be seen in his chronicle in the three elements of warfare already outlined (siege and battle tactics, attacks on innocents, and combat violence) and also demonstrates again how an author might deploy both romance and chronicle tropes in warfare and violence to convey a sympathetic bias towards its protagonists.

Wyntoun does not mention much use of siege engines or guns in his commentary, nor does he explain strategic military plans, although he does give us a glimpse of the layout of the Battle of Rosslyn in 1303. Edward I comes to Scotland and "ordanyt in to batellis thre / þar ost to departyt be", a decision which rattles the Scottish army, who think they have the battle won when "a noþer weynge þai saw cum sone / Off Inglis men al reddy bowne / On þaim to feycht" (XVI, ll. 2497-98 and 2520-2). In detailing this military strategy, the unsuspecting Scots are viewed

with sympathy. With John Comyn, however, Wyntoun's chivalric interests begin to be revealed. In a lovely analogue to Edward III's speech at Halidon Hill in the *Anonimalle*, Wyntoun has Comyn (before he has betrayed Robert the Bruce and is fighting for the Scots) comfort his weary army with a battle speech as they face the third onslaught of the English army at Rosslyn; he asks them to be inspired by their ladies and by God, but more important, emphasises the justice of the Scottish cause:

For ouris is al hail þe richt,
 [...]
 Our elderis, qwhil þai liffit, þan
 Our gret liffyngē til ws wan.
 Þarfor ʒhe sulde al trow and ken
 Þat ʒhe ar cummyn of gentil men
 [...]
 ʒhe ar al cummyn of aulde [lynage],
 And lordis of fre heretage,
 Þat hald nathyngē mare vgsum
 Þan for to lif in to thrildome. (XVI, ll. 2577, 2581-84, 2587-90)

By calling upon the "richt" the Scottish have to be free from the "thrildome" of the English crown, Comyn has bolstered his men and Wyntoun has justified the cause and righteousness of the Scots to rule their own kingdom, the complete reverse of the *Anonimalle's* portrayal of cruel Scots, with its aim of affirming the English king's right to be the overlord of Scotland.

It is not surprising, then, that the destruction of cities and towns is also, in Wyntoun's account, largely accomplished by Edward I; as he travels through Scotland, "Far Fiwis Nes distroyit was / And wastit til Sancte Iohunston / Be slauchtir and distruccion" (XVI, ll. 2415-18). Wyntoun takes the cruelty of the English marauders a step further by fully detailing the people that they slaughter, particularly emphasizing that they did not spare those considered especially off-limits to war violence in the chivalric code – including women, children, elderly and holy men. In Berwick:

þe Inglis men þar slew down
 Al hail þe Scottis nacioun
 Þat withe in þe towne þai fandē,
Off al condiscion, nane sparandē,

Lerit na lawit, *none na freyr*;
 Al was slayne withe þat powere,
Off alkyn state, of alkyn age;
 Þai sparit nouþer carl na [page];
Batht aulde and zonge, men and wiffis,
 And *soukkande barnys* þar tynt þar liffis;
Þhomen and gentil men alsua,

Þe liffis al þai tuk þaim fra. (XI, ll. 1815-26, emphasis added)

As with the *Brut*'s account of the Scottish slaughter of women and "children þat layed in cradell", the intention here is to cast doubt on the chivalric behaviour of knights in wartime, particularly those of the opposing party, in an attempt to make the sympathetic party seem more worthy characters. In one remarkably sensitive moment in Wyntoun's chronicle, the English are killing the Scottish people so quickly that Edward I sees "A woman slayne, and of hir syde / A barne he saw fal out sprelande, / Besid þat woman slayn lyande" (XI, ll. 1834-36). Few images combine the horrendous atrocities of war better than that of the death of a pregnant woman and her unborn baby, and Wyntoun's particularly violent expression of this event strikes horror into the reader's mind – even the English king's cries to stop after seeing this killing cannot disassociate the thoughtless killing from the English army. The audience is left to consider the slaughter with the sobering image of a flow of blood: "Twa dayis out, as deip flude, / Throw out þe towne þan ran þe blude" (XI, ll. 1843-44). As in the previously discussed chronicles, a particularly cruel language is used to describe the raiding of the enemy army, and its imagery of blood and the gruesome death of innocents asks the reader to respond with sympathy for the aggrieved party. It is a presentation of violence which acknowledges the atrocities of warfare whilst manipulating them to create a desired response.

The leaders of the English and Scottish armies are compared in their use of violence as well. Edward I is pictured as a tyrant who has his men kill the Scots who do not swear an oath to him, "sparande nane" (XVI, l. 2431). Wallace's actions, on the other hand, may reflect Wyntoun's knightly interests, as he perpetrates his violence as a hero in single combat or against an enemy who outnumbers him, such as when the English attack him in Lanark market: "þar he gaf dynt for dynt, / Þar was na strentht his straik mycht stynt. / As he was in þat stoure feychtande, / Fra ane he straik son þe richt hande" (XIII, ll. 2055-59). It is not a one-sided slaughter, but

he is giving “dynt for dynt”. As in the chivalric chronicles of Froissart and Sir Thomas Gray’s *Scalachronica*, wherein “the chief purpose [...] was to preserve the memory of famous knights and of the deeds they performed in war”, Wyntoun praises Wallace’s prowess and strength in battle (Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 103). In addition to this romance rhetoric, however, the chronicle adds its own descriptive sense of injuring, as Wallace has to fend off the bloody stump of his opponent’s sword hand even after he cuts it off. When Wallace chooses to kill the sheriff of Lanark at night, it is defended as revenge for the sheriff’s decision to kill his lady’s child (XIII, ll. 2106-16).

Wallace, throughout, is portrayed as a hero fighting to put right the injustices done to him and his fellow Scots. Stevenson notes that Wyntoun’s “keen interest in chivalric lifestyles” is “apparent in his recounting of the deeds of Scottish knights”, and this is certainly true during the Scottish Wars of Independence (136). This use of chivalric language to indicate a sense of moral superiority is not unique to Wyntoun’s chronicle; in the 1400s, John Hardyng used tales of Joseph of Arimathea at Glastonbury and the Arthurian Grail Quest in his chronicle to give Britain prestige and highlight its Christian and martial superiority (Kennedy, “Visions of History”, 45-6). In Wyntoun, Wallace and his Scottish army are become quasi-romance heroes by their display of courage and chivalry during battles. In the Battle of Falkirk (1298), the Scots in the field “Togedyr stude sa sarraly, / Strikande befor þaim manfully” and at Rosslyn they “freschly faucht, and laid on þen, / Qwhar mony dyntis doure war seyn; / Þar mony ded lay on þe greyne” (XV, ll. 2249-50 and XVI, 2508-10). These images of manly and brave knights reflect the chivalric qualities which Wyntoun believed to be of value and which, therefore, are embodied by the Scottish soldiers. In her summary of chivalry in Scottish literature, Stevenson argues that these representations of martial abilities, combined with expression of the Scots’ dedication to their cause, indicates a wider theme in Scottish chivalric literature, in which loyalty was paramount, and knights fought more for the love of their king than a lady (166). Whether or not this is true for Scottish romances which cover another subject, such as Arthur and the matter of Britain, is a matter to which I will turn in Chapter Five. Nevertheless, this hypothesis certainly seems to be confirmed in tales which document the history of Scotland, perhaps because chivalric chronicles and narratives of Scottish heroes such as Wallace and Bruce are quite overtly aimed at interests of king and country, and it can be seen in the language Wyntoun uses for

warfare.

While Wyntoun's rhyming couplets may limit his expressions, his choice of literary form and his selection of vocabulary is fitting. The familiar image of dead knights lying on the field, so favoured in the language of violence in romance, is found within these heroic descriptions of the worthy and doughty deeds of the Scottish knights. These passages are further enhanced by beautiful details of shining armour and broken swords at Rosslyn:

Pan þai laid on dusche for dusch,
 Mony rape, and mony a rusche;
 On bassynatis þar burnyst bricht
 Man mycht se polakis licht;
 Mony suerde and mony sper

In pecis brokyn þar lyande weyre (XVI, ll. 2525-30)

These glamorous, almost mesmerising scenes which transform the armour of war into glittering ornamentation parallel the image of the shields and spears of the Saxons which Arthur's warriors slay in Layamon's *Brut*; as their dead sink into the river Avon like "stelene fisces", their "gold-faȝe sceldes" are "scalen" and their "hitspæren" float like "spiten" (fins) (ll. 10,641; 10,643-44). Just as the Saxon bodies become at once beautiful and horrid in their fish-like form, so the knights at Rosslyn transform the horror of the battle into a glorious display of shining armour. Although both Wyntoun and Layamon's *Brut* are chronicles, these images – involving the damage and splendour of armour and weapons – wouldn't be out of place in an episode from chivalric literature; the use of a romance representation of violence within the chronicle is used to further establish the heroic and almost mythical status of both the Scottish army who fought in the Wars of Independence and the legendary King Arthur. Wyntoun's own Arthurian narrative is a short segment quite similar to the *Brut* versions, but this is unusual for a medieval Scottish chronicle; Scottish chroniclers such as Fordun and Boece portrayed Arthur as a symbol of the English threat, as a tribal warrior or treacherous. In his discussion of Arthur in the Scottish chronicles, Karl Heinz Göller notes that these historical writers were "more interested in the prestige of the Scottish throne than in historical truth" and that "the purpose of such works was the exaltation of their own nation" ("King Arthur in the Scottish Chronicles", 174). Wyntoun chooses to leave the British hero alone, and instead focuses on the Anglo-Scottish wars, but he shares the patriotic sentiments of

his fellow chroniclers, particularly in his treatment of Robert the Bruce and the behaviour of his Scottish warriors.

There are two episodes in Wyntoun's chronicle which neatly respond to passages in the *Brut* and the *Anonimalle* and which refer to our third strand of chronicle violence, loss of life and gruesome death in combat, thus providing ample illustration of the chronicle representation of violence and its use for propagandist (or at least partial) purposes. The first occurs at the Battle of Rosslyn, where – as at Halidon Hill in the *Brut* – many men are slain and the banners of the opposing army are trampled. Where men might “see meny a Scottishe-man caste / doun vnto þe erthe dede” and “hir baneres displaiede, & hackede into pices” at Halidon Hill, at Rosslyn “Par baneouris þai stew al downe, / Þai left bot few, þat bare pennowne, / [Off] Inglismen in to þat feycht, / Sa mony gert þai tak þe flicht” (ch. 223, p. 285 of the *Brut* and XVI, ll. 2613-16 in Wyntoun). Wyntoun's image of the destroyed banners reflects the destruction of the English army – and, thus, the victory of the Scots – and is a perfect (inverted) echo of the *Brut*, two visions of the pageantry of the Anglo-Scottish nobles struggling to assert their right to rule Scotland. On a medieval battlefield, banners served both symbolic and practical functions; they assured troops of their lord's presence on the field, were used to convey orders and movement, and indicated the status and martial authority of the lords engaged in war. Robert Jones points out that the loss of a banner could be catastrophic for a late medieval army, as it provided a rallying point as well as the army's visual contact with its commander, thus “the loss of a banner could be as devastating as the loss of its owner”; the absence of either could create a crippling fear that would make the troops easier to defeat (39). The fallen banners in Wyntoun and the *Brut* symbolise the overthrow of enemy lords and, thus, of the opposing army. In addition, the banner was “a prize to be seized and a commemoration of victory” (43). Although, after having been torn to pieces, the English and Scottish banners are unlikely to be in a fit state to mount on a wall, they are still “prizes”; their destruction is in itself a violent act of commemoration. The implication of their destruction is that the banners will now never be able to be raised again and, indeed, even if they were, there are “few” left that can “bare pennowne”; the large-scale slaughter of the enemy is again seen as laudable. There is further parallel to Halidon Hill when, after commenting on the resounding victory of an outnumbered Scottish army, Wyntoun marvels at the battle, claiming that no man “euer hard, or saw befoir / A mair

commendable memore” (XVI, ll. 2627-28). This is a similar sentiment to that found in the *Anonimalle* when the chronicler tells the audience that so many of the numerically superior Scotsmen were defeated that it was “a marvel to see and contemplate” (167). Both episodes ask the reader to consider the deeds of the outnumbered heroes and remember them.

The second episode in dialogue with the *Brut* narrative is the killing of John Comyn after he betrays Robert the Bruce to Edward I. Comyn pretends to make an agreement with Bruce to fight against Edward I to be king of Scotland, after which he immediately runs to the English king and tells him of Bruce’s plans. Bruce is called down to Edward’s court unaware of Comyn’s betrayal, and shown the document that has been drawn. Wyntoun stresses Bruce’s sudden peril and vulnerability as he escapes back to Scotland with one of his men, a frightful and non-stop ride through the night. Set within these confines, Bruce becomes the victim, not Comyn – unlike the episode’s portrayal in the *Brut*, where Bruce is seen foremost as a man who has betrayed his oath to the English king, not as a man betrayed. The scene of Comyn’s death is thus appropriately truncated and altered to fit this change of attitude; Comyn is not attacked by both Bruce and a gang of his men, and the death is neither pitied nor described in gruesome detail:

In þe Freris at þe hie altere,
 He schewt hym wiþ hewy chere
 His endenturis; þan withe a knyf
 He reft hym in þat stede þe lif. (XVIII, ll. 2919-22)

It is an account of one man facing another, and his killing is immediately joined with his betrayal by Bruce showing him his “endenturis” – Wyntoun is reminding the audience, if they had forgotten, why Comyn deserves to die, and his quick death on a holy altar is portrayed as a fitting end for someone who had committed such sacrilegious treason against as great a hero of Scotland as Robert the Bruce. Once again, loyalty to your lord is paramount, and the reputation of Robert the Bruce, so blemished by his violent conduct in the popular and influential *Brut*, is redeemed by his behaviour in Wyntoun’s chronicle. Bruce’s role in Comyn’s death is treated similarly in other Scottish chronicles; in Boece’s *Historia Gentis Scotorum* (1527), Bruce again faces Comyn alone: “eftir [Bruce] had accusit him of his tresoun, [he] straik [Comyn] with ane swerd in þe wame” (263). As in Wyntoun, the strike is presented directly after a reminder of Comyn’s treachery; Walter Bower’s

Scotichronicon (1447) has Bruce run off in distress after stabbing Comyn,³⁸ and it is Bruce's friends, James Lyndsay and Roger Kirkpatrick, who decide to return to Comyn and stab him several times to ensure he is dead (*A History Book for Scots*, 198-9). In the fourteenth century, John of Fordun does not even mention Bruce's involvement in Comyn's death in *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*; instead, he states vaguely that "the evil-speaker is stabbed, and wounded unto death, in the church of the Friars" by "his foes" (333). Wyntoun is participating in a tradition of Scottish historical narrative which presents Bruce as blameless and which, indeed, portrayed him as a chivalric leader; John of Fordun states that Bruce won battles "by his own strength and human manhood" and that he "fearlessly cut his way into the columns of the enemy, now mightily bearing these down, and now mightily warding off and escaping the pains of death" (334). Stevenson admits, whilst highlighting Wyntoun's digressions from the historical narrative to report chivalrous deeds, that his elaborations are not the acts of an inadequate chronicler erring from the truth; she emphasises that "the role of the chronicler in the reportage of chivalrous deeds was regarded as essential" (141). That is, a vitally important part of the chronicler's duty, in addition to recording the events of history, is to testify to the worthy nature of the nobles who contributed to the events. This rings particularly true for this passage on Comyn's death. Wyntoun's realignment of the tale records the episode in testimony to Bruce's chivalric worthiness. Steve Boardman argues that Wyntoun avoids writing a history of the Scots as a people defined by language or *gens*, and instead focuses on their dynastic ancestry, beginning with Malcolm III and Margaret (116). The Wars of Independence are indeed not seen by Wyntoun as an ethnic war between two races, but as a political struggle defined by geographical boundaries rather than cultural ones; certainly both sides engaged in a chivalric culture which valued loyalty, prowess, courage, and courtesy. Boardman's claim that it was the "tyrannous behaviour of Edward I" which was the wedge that drove the two countries apart and into conflict is clearly in keeping with Wyntoun's own beliefs (116). He spends much less time discussing the Anglo-Scottish wars after Edward I, even going so far as to completely omit much of the period after Comyn's death in 1306 and thus briefly

³⁸ "[...] the missive letters of the same John were produced and the same John was attacked *for his betrayal and breach of faith*. [...] A fatal blow was dealt in the same church on this slanderer, and on being wounded by the said Sir Robert, John was carried behind the altar by the friars. When this happened, Robert Bruce, *like a man beyond endurance and beside himself*, made for his horses..." (*A History Book for Scots*, 198, emphasis added).

skip through most of Edward II's reign. In addition to the political division, however, it is the violent atrocities which Wyntoun states Edward I's men have committed which divide the English from the heroic Scots on the field of Rosslyn, and the writer revels in chivalric behaviour both to please his noble audience and to influence the history of the Scots.

The *Brut*, the *Anonimalle* and Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle* cover events of the Anglo-Scottish wars, but each chronicle presents the warfare and violence of these battles in a clear context, using emotional vocabulary to work on the political conscience of the readers. This is effected through the manipulation of the common elements of violence depicted in chronicle, which – according to my analysis of these texts – can be loosely defined in terms of attention to battle detail (use of guns, siege engines, archers, battalions, and tactics), descriptions of raiding the countryside (often worse when perpetrated by opposing armies), and a sobering but accepted account of injuring and death in battle (unless it is unequal competition, in which case the loss of life is mourned, if it is that of the protagonists, or celebrated, if it is the enemy's). The chronicles' representation of violence almost always takes the form of war on the battlefield, rather than single combat; however, chronicles such as Wyntoun's do often feature single combat and freely borrow from romance rhetoric to create a chivalric effect. The description itself may include language from romance idiom – detailing damage to armour and strength of blows – as well as reflect a sobering account of the physical damage done to the body, as seen in the account of Arthur's battle with Frolle in the *Brut* and Wallace's encounters with his enemies in Wyntoun. *Warkwick's Chronicle*, interested primarily in the political machinations of the English nobility during the Wars of the Roses, changes the emphasis to judicial violence: namely, execution.

All of these texts reproduce, utilise and direct an understanding of chronicle violence which allows the “living text” of the chronicle to both create and be created by social history and fiction. Gabrielle Spiegel, arguing that French historiography was used by nobles to revive and secure their threatened social and political status in the thirteenth century, states that medieval historical writing is a “powerful vehicle for the expression of ideological assertion, for it is able to address the historical issues so crucially at stake and to lend to ideology the authority and prestige of the past” (2). This is true not only of Spiegel's French texts, but also of the British chronicles discussed here; their histories provide ample ground for the discussion

and development of national consciousness and emphasise the authority of their ideologies by establishing them in historical precedents, and the imagery and presentation of violence is one of the most effective ways of expressing their interests. Furthermore, the texts' flexible nature allows them to use linguistic and visual tropes associated with their own or another genre to create generic expectations – historical or chivalric – and this indicates a more fluid literary practice. This understanding of how chronicles use the language of violence, combined with the previous discussions of how romance employs a rhetoric for chivalric warfare, can now be applied to the Middle English Arthurian romance tradition, and our knowledge of both representations will illuminate the texts' dialogue on chivalric figures.

III. The King and His Knight: the Individual in *Golagros and Gawane*, *Awntyrs off Arthure* and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*

English hero romances such as *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and *Ipomadon* can be said to be “socially conservative” in their ultimate concern for the restoration of marriage and inheritance and the continuation of law and social order (Crane, 88). While these tales utilise romance and historical devices and follow the adventures of heroic knights in fields of war, the dark and uneasy nature of the Arthurian story – and its ending – gives it further license to explore the benefits and flaws of the chivalric social system, which leads to an intensification, I would argue, of the language of violence and injuring within fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Arthurian literature, drawn from various generic forms. An examination of this language in the *Awntyrs off Arthure*, *Golagros and Gawane* and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* reveals not only the literatures’ complex attitudes towards kingship and the individual knight,³⁹ but also the flexibility of the language of violence that demonstrates these attitudes. There is no shortage of discussion of the themes and structures of the Middle English *Awntyrs off Arthure* and Scottish *Golagros and Gawane*; scholars echo the same questions and wrestle with debates over cohesion and meaning. What is most striking is the similarity of the poems; in addition to their Arthurian *locus*, they struggle with the same concerns about independence and imperialism as does the chronicle tradition. Both texts are fifteenth-century alliterative poems constructed as diptychs; their narratives divide into two separate episodes. In addition, they are both interested in the representation of Arthur-as-conqueror and in Fortune’s role in the rise and fall of the Round Table. Gawain also plays a major diplomatic role for Arthur in both the *Awntyrs* and *Golagros*; Gillian Rogers argues that, in both poems, “Arthur finds himself in an untenable position because of his act of unjust sequestration and has to be extricated by Gawain, who in each is the loyal vassal” (94). Gawain has this role in all three alliterative poems; his close position to the king allows Gawain to act as an extension of Arthur’s force which, when threatened in *Golagros*, results in the terrified grief of the king and his knights. Yet Gawain is

³⁹ For a discussion of the “individual” in romance, see Robert Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1977). Elizabeth Fowler also provides interesting insight into the function of social persons as models and individuals in *Literary Character* (London: Cornell UP, 2003).

more than a servant to Arthur, but an individual in his own right, and an exploration of Gawain's actions in the texts, both in relation to his king and as the "chivalric individual", illuminates the desired behaviour of the medieval romance knight.

The mutual interest in both Gawain and the topics of imperialism and Fortune in *Golagros* and the *Awntyrs* could perhaps be explained by what Randy Schiff calls the "borderlands culture" between the edges of Scotland and England in the late Middle Ages, a mixed Anglo-Scottish civilisation which was both fuelled and hampered by the wars between England and Scotland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (614). Schiff argues that these militarised border areas experienced changing allegiances, local violence and dispossession which transcended national identities and created its own unique culture which felt anxiety over the "shared culture of militarism" which links the *Awntyrs*, the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Golagros* (615). His argument is intriguing; it is not surprising that one of the four surviving manuscript copies of the *Awntyrs* is in fact in the same manuscript which holds the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, Lincoln Cathedral MS 91. It is, however, perhaps a bit limiting to claim that these works would only be of interest to borderland areas and, thus, the only areas capable of producing them. Chivalric romances could be considered subjects of the international European culture in general, and the alliterative verse of *Golagros and Gawane* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is English in origin. It is clear that both poems are concerned with topics commonly of interest to the chronicle tradition of Arthur – that is, imperialism, the resistance of an "other" or foreign lord, and the effects of warfare upon those actively and inactively involved in its violence. More important is the universality of many of the themes in all three poems, particularly concerning the establishment and maintenance of the individual and his role in chivalric society. The first half of this chapter will discuss the impact of imperialism and independence in the discussion of the knight and king in *Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Golagros and Gawane*, and then analyse how the language of violence engages with this dialogue. In the second half, the chapter will look at how combat interacts with the discussion of the individual in an Arthurian romance with different concerns, the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*.

Political Independence and Thematic Unity in *Golagros* and *Awntyrs*

The two sections of the *Awntyrs* are so seemingly irreconcilable in subject matter and outlook as to raise the question of whether it is, in fact, a single poem. In the

nineteenth century, Hermann Lübke declared it to be two separate poems, and Ralph Hanna's 1974 edition appears to endorse Lübke by dividing the poem into "Awntyrs A" and "Awntyrs B". In the 1980s, A. C. Spearing and Rosamund Allen both argued that it was one poem unified by theme, while Jörg Fichte argued at the end of the decade that it was two poems placed together by a medieval editor. Fichte finds the two episodes incompatible, as the adventure setting of the first episode (in the forest) is frustrated by the religious tone of the ghost's appearance, and the ensuing return to romance adventure in Galeron's duel with Gawain displays an "irreconcilable dualism of purpose"; one section condemns, and the other praises, the Arthurian ethos ("*The Awntyrs off Arthure*", 135). There is certainly a "dualism of purpose" in the two episodes, but it is hardly irreconcilable; in fact, I would argue that the blatant contrast of the two episodes brings the driving force of the poem together in an inevitable cycle of fortune. The reader, familiar with the Arthurian narrative, already knows the ending of the story – so do Gawain and Guinevere. Their decision to ignore the advice given to them by the ghost, or rather their inability to comprehend it – apart from Guinevere arranging prayers for her mother's soul – is precisely the bitter irony which consistently controls the Arthurian narrative and spirals it into its descent. Whether the destruction of the Round Table is caused by the revelation of Lancelot and Guinevere's affair, or Gawain's desire for revenge, or Arthur entrusting his kingdom to Mordred, tales of the collapse of Arthurian society always hinge on the characters' blindness to a problem or their unwillingness to address it. The *Awntyrs of Arthure* fulfils the sense of unavoidable tragedy which is a prerequisite in the Arthurian story, particularly a version that invokes the tradition of Fortune's Wheel.

It is the unifying theme of the *Awntyrs* which is of interest to my discussion of violence and the individual. Helen Phillips claims that the episodes in the poem "become frames for other episodes, through which the secular becomes a context for the spiritual and the spiritual for the secular, and in which the same motifs and patterns [...] recur in both secular and spiritual form" (87-88). Instead of seeing the poem as a diptych, she suggests the poem is tripartite, with the kingship of Arthur as the unifying theme (84). According to this structure (inspired by the Ireland manuscript layout), the limits and mutability of Arthur's temporal power is the cohesive theme of the poem (73). The *Awntyrs* shares its concern with the overreaching desire for conquest with a simultaneous celebration and condemnation

of the military glory of Arthur and his knights. I would argue further that, regardless of whether the poem was originally one or two, a medieval scribe copied it as a unified piece, and its manuscript dissemination took this form; even if the author didn't conceive of it as one work, medieval readers received it as one. Its availability in multiple manuscripts attests to its seeming popularity in the fifteenth century, which suggests that the readers found in it a unifying theme – the governance of Britain – which both entertained and intrigued them. I will focus on three areas of governance which are discussed in both the *Awntyrs* and *Golagros* – resistance, imperialism, and war – and, with them, the role of the king and the knight in government and chivalric society.

Arthur's kingship dominates both the *Awntyrs* and *Golagros and Gawane*, and two particular aspects of his leadership are prevalent issues in both: the territorial rights of independent leaders within and outside Arthur's realm, and imperialistic policies. In addition, both poems have some form of connection with Scotland or Scottish figures, which raises questions about their relationship with the Anglo-Scottish wars during the late Middle Ages. Previous research has suggested that both address Scottish independence, and both certainly allude to Scottish affairs. *Golagros and Gawane* was first printed in Scotland in 1508 and is believed to be of Scottish origin (Walsh, 92). The title character, Golagros, fights to keep his land independent of the Arthurian empire, a theme that would be popular in a land struggling with English relations throughout the Middle Ages. There is certainly a sense of English aggression over an independent lord in *Golagros* which is absent from its source, the French *Perceval*, in which Arthur is attempting to free one of his knights from the *riche soudoier*,⁴⁰ whereas in the Scottish poem Arthur's ambition is the only motive. Rhiannon Purdie has sought via source study to establish the poem's "Scottishness", and notes that the inclusion of Spynagros' caution to Arthur to avoid needless war with Golagros can be linked to the strong tradition of advice literature in late medieval Scotland ("The Search for Scottishness", 101). In the *Awntyrs off Arthure*, the knight who challenges Arthur's court, Galeron, comes from Galloway ("Galwey") in Scotland. Galeron's anger at the British king for claiming Scottish land may also reflect a concern which anxious Scots had over their independence. Both poems concern what Elizabeth Walsh identifies as the

⁴⁰ See Arthur's complaint in *The Continuations of the Old French Percival of Chrétien de Troyes*, Vol. 1, ed. William Roach (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1949) ll. 8979-9044.

“preoccupations of the Scottish people”, freedom and sovereignty (92). Arthur was criticised in Scottish chronicles such as Boece’s *Historia Gentis Scotorum* as a figure of English authority, and it is no surprise that questions of authority feature in the two surviving Scottish Arthurian romances, *Golagros* and *Lancelot of the Laik*. Walsh cites parallel sentiment towards England in Hary’s *Wallace*, also written in the second half of the fifteenth century, and sees *Golagros* as representing “an evolving national consciousness”, with *Golagros*’ land remaining an independent and equal sovereignty (99). *Golagros*’ concern over territorial integrity is certainly an issue which would speak to the evolving Scottish identity in the late Middle Ages.

These suggestions are not incorrect, but the poems also suggest a broader and more subtle reading. Cory Rushton may have hit the matter precisely when he claims that “Galeron does not represent a specific ethnicity so much as he signifies resistance to centralized authority and a deeply held interest in ever-elusive security and peace” (116). Galeron may come from Scotland, but Scotland here functions as an example of one of the fringe lands over which the English continue to struggle to maintain control; it is no coincidence that the poet had Arthur choose to give Gawain “Glamergan londe”, “Ulstur Halle”, “Wayford and Waterforde” and “two baronrees in Bretayne”, all lands in the contested areas of Wales, Ireland and Brittany and which, doubtless, would also have previous lords aggrieved that the English king has taken their land (*Awntyrs*, ll. 665, 668-70). Yet Rushton still cites Galeron and the Scottish faction in Malory as evidence of the English view of the Scots as dangerous and stubborn:

For the Scottish knight, there is always someone who needs to be avenged or destroyed, whose reputation needs to be defended or undermined. The Scots are never innocent or unwitting and they seem incapable of fully participating in Arthur’s society, instead pursuing a programme of ambition and aggression. (118)

This view of the Scottish knight perpetually fighting against unity is perhaps consistent with Malory’s view of Gawain of Orkney and his Scottish brothers, but there are no such negative connotations with the actions of Galeron or *Golagros*; neither Galeron, as a token Scottish knight arriving to reclaim his land, nor Gawain, as a knight associated with Scotland (Lothian and the Orkneys), is painted as acting out of desire for revenge or hatred. Indeed, it is difficult to view either combatant negatively in the poem; Galeron seems in the right yet Gawain is still our hero and

the court, the narrator and the reader want him to win. The two poems may perhaps be looking at the issue of independence from two sides of the same coin; the celebration and eventual triumph of the independent lord, Golagros, may have struck a chord with the poem's Scottish author and readers, while the English *Awntyrs* may have been viewing centralised government from an English point of view. Fichte believes that the Arthurian court in the *Awntyrs* is "convinced they are in the right by defending the contested territories" and that "the point of view we get here is decidedly English; the author's sympathies are with Gawain and Arthur's court" (134). In contrast, the criticism of Arthur found in *Golagros* could then be said to voice Scottish perspectives on centralised power. This is ignoring any potential criticism which may be aimed at Arthur's territorial policies in the *Awntyrs*, however, which is vital to the unifying theme of the story. One should also be aware, of course, that the themes, while they might coincide with "nationalistic" concerns, are also common in English Arthurian literature such as the alliterative *Morte Arthure*.

It is perhaps too complicated to look at the poems in such limited terms, then. Randy Schiff argues for almost precisely the opposite meaning, regarding the two poems as symbols of Anglo-Scottish cohesion rather than division. To Schiff, Galeron's allegiance to Arthur at the end of the *Awntyrs* signifies the side-switching which was "key to survival on the militarized Anglo-Scottish border" and which was part of a society where "profit regularly trumped patriotism" (613). That is, the *Awntyrs* emerges from a cross-border culture which was regularly changing and vulnerable to the pressures of the Anglo-Scottish conflict. Imperialist expansionism is then feared not for its attack on opposing peoples, but for its trespass on the societies which refused to be neatly assigned a national identity – which, indeed, thrived on the localism found in the unique experience of the militarised Anglo-Scottish border continually on guard for attacks and invasions. In *Golagros*, Schiff points out Arthur's shock at finding that Golagros owes fealty to no lord, and he claims this element reinforces the resistance of the English and Scottish to the shifting political allegiances of borderland territories (630). In the *Awntyrs*, Galeron's capitulation and Arthur's incorporation of the Scottish knight into the Round Table could be seen as assimilating the "other" for political gain; thus, Schiff believes that the "appeal of the *Awntyrs* may lie in its response to the concerns of a military class that saw the profitability of its side-switching style of warfare threatened by fifteenth-century efforts to retrench and limit the hybridity of the marcher zone"

(625). Yet, by denying *Golagros* and the *Awntyrs* any “nationalistic” sentiment, Schiff reassigns the meaning to another specific group of people, casting aside the very widespread chronicle tradition which he himself claims ties the two poems together with the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Although any of these cultural groups – Scottish, English, or marcher – could or may have applied the themes in *Golagros* and *Awntyrs* to their own purposes, the flexibility of the poems’ theme(s) allowed them to be disseminated around Britain to be read and appreciated by widespread and diverse social groups. The *Awntyrs off Arthure*, at least, “enjoyed a remarkable popularity outside (and also presumably within) the region in which it originated”, including Yorkshire, the Midlands and London (Hahn, 1). Its opening line promises an “aunter” from Arthur’s time, and the poem presents his story with familiar romance conventions which could be enjoyed by a variety of readers; Arthur’s court enters into a wood and engages in a hunting scene, where “thai werray the wilde and worchen hem wo. / The hunttes thei halowe, in hurstes [hillsides] and huwes [cliffs]” (ll. 56-57), and the poem closes with single combat. The “adventure” that these scenes frames is not a chivalric one, but nor is it political. The ghost’s parting words to Gawain and Guinevere highlight the universality of her message:

‘Thenke on the danger and the dole that I yn dwell.

Fede folke for my sake that failen the fode

And minge me with matens and Masse in melle.

Masses arn medecynes to us that bale bides’ (ll. 318-21)

Although she has foretold Arthur’s fall, she is not concerned with the politics of Gawain and Guinevere’s behaviour, but with their Christian salvation. She asks them to think of the plight of her own unhappy soul, and to perform deeds of Christian charity (“fede folke [...] that failen the fode”) to redeem their own souls. Lastly, she emphasises the importance of Mass; holy services and prayers are a healing “medecyne” for mankind. These guidelines are not reserved for Arthur’s court alone; they apply to all humans, who are ultimately tempted by earthly riches. The Arthurian characters illustrate many of these universal temptations – fame, honour, wealth, power – and their abuses. Perhaps this common interest was in the very tradition which both poems draw on, the Arthur who rises and falls on Fortune’s Wheel and depicts the inevitable destruction of the world’s great temporal powers by God’s will and human fallibility. Within this cyclical narrative is the discussion of the powers and weaknesses of the great conquerors, the questioning of the limits of

imperialism and its effect on the outside world.

The *Awntyrs* and *Golagros*, whether written in the spirit of Scottish independence or not, certainly offer narratives which strive to discuss the theme of territorial independence and Arthur's imperialist conduct. Neither poem presents Arthurian imperialism in black and white; rather, Arthur's motives and actions as conqueror are both supported and questioned. Unlike the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, where Arthur's original invasion of the Continent was a response to the demand of tribute from the Holy Roman Emperor, there is no provocation in the attack on Golagros' lands, apart from Golagros' owing no allegiance to a higher lord – a bucking of the feudal system which clearly upsets Arthur, who rides back from his pilgrimage to the Holy Land to demand Golagros' fealty. We are given no reason to believe Galeron had caused any offence for his lands to be taken “with a wrange wile”, either; thus we may assume that it is Arthur's abuse of imperialist power which has caused these events (l. 421). However, Arthur is not fully condemned by either poet – he is given a chance for redemption and his cause is treated with some favouritism, particularly in the fights between his champion, Gawain, and his opponents. In both, Gawain wins the single combat and Arthur is at a vantage point where he may keep the disputed territory, but he returns the land in both cases. The reader perceives sympathy for Gawain in the *Awntyrs* in the concern of the court, who suffer “for gref of Sir Gawayn”, and of the narrator as well, who admits “that me wel likes” that Galeron is injured more than Gawain (ll. 600 and 615). In *Golagros*, both combatants are treated with sympathy, but during the battle it is through the eyes of Arthur and his men that we perceive the fight and Gawain's injuries: “Knichtis ramyt for reuth; Schir Gawyne thai rew” (l. 966). However, in the *Awntyrs* Arthur relinquishes control of the lands only on condition that Galeron himself is brought into the fold of Arthur's empire and the Round Table companionship, essentially retaining his extensive reach of territory whilst diminishing an outside threat by accommodating it. This complex and layered depiction of imperialism under Arthur seems less a condemnation of a strong centralised power and more of a warning against irrational and overreaching imperialist expansionism. The poems are, as Schiff says, a reaction to the “continuing alarm of a reversion to an age of unbridled imperialist activity” (618). The key word in this statement is “unbridled”; the poems caution against covetousness and greed, against taking that one step too far which compromises the

moral and political ethics of a king. *Golagros*, in particular, steps away from the regionalism of indicting English imperialism against the Scots by placing the contested area firmly in Continental territory.

Helen Phillips' argument for the *Awntyrs* tripartite structure at least highlights the centrality of Arthur which gives the *Awntyrs* a certain cohesion: "what runs through it [...] is a preoccupation with lordship, with the rights of lordship, and with revolutions of power brought about by conquest in battle" (Phillips, 72). The poem is not necessarily an anti-imperialist tract, but a guide to Christian princely duties. The ghost's warning to Guinevere to be chaste, modest and full of charity extends beyond Guinevere or womankind alone; it is *memento mori* advice to all rulers from beyond the grave. The ghost asks the reader to "Muse on my mirroure; / For, king and emperour, / Thus dight shul ye be" (ll. 167-69). This is indicated by Gawain's sudden concern for the noble warriors who fight for Arthur, and the ghost happily moves from Guinevere to Arthur with little change in her advice to be full of "mekenesse" and "charité" (ll. 250 and 252). This reminder to be both humble and charitable to the poor acts as both spiritual and political guidance for rulers, and Arthur's handling of a potentially dangerous situation with Galeron continues this theme. He is able to defuse the situation by tactfully pacifying the offended party, whilst making an ally out of his enemy. It is the reader who is left to question Arthur's next move, as he again makes the decision to reward his loyal follower, Gawain, with disputed lands on the fringes of his empire. The reader's knowledge of what is to come – the eventual downfall and destruction of Arthur's kingdom – allows them to read over the events of the poem and ask "what went wrong?". The inevitability of Arthur's fall from Fortune's Wheel (as with any of the Worthies) places the conqueror in a position where he is "absorbed into a drama which shows the glory, tragic insecurity and moral perils" that come with a position of power and control (Phillips, 79). A king must rule his men and his people wisely and virtuously for the safety of his kingdom and of his own soul, but those who grow too strong in power and do not exercise control and caution over their desires can easily be destroyed by their own flaws.

Rather than see either *Golagros* or the *Awntyrs* as primarily moralistic or anti-imperialist texts, however, I would argue that there is an integration of the secular concerns with the spiritual; by choosing the familiar characters of the Arthurian world, the reader can sympathise with, admire, and question the righteousness of

their actions. There is no outright condemnation of the members of Arthur's court; instead, the authors' interest is the revelation of the weaknesses, faults, and abuses of the powers and duties of sovereigns and knights, particularly in relation to covetous and extreme imperialism. In *Golagros and Gawane*, after Kay is thrown out of a lord's castle for demanding food, Gawain is immediately contrasted with his impetuous and boastful counterpart; he is the pinnacle of courtesy and magnanimity, and his gentle demeanour wins the lord's favour and hospitality for Arthur's troops. Geoffroi de Charny, in the opening of his *Book of Chivalry*, emphasises that men-at-arms who are praiseworthy should "conduct themselves properly and pleasantly" ["se tiennent nettement et jollement"] and be "gentle, courteous and well mannered toward others" [doux et courtois et de bonne maniere entre la gent"] (85). The superiority of Gawain's gentle and friendly approach is shown again when Arthur's decision to grab what he wants – Golagros' lands – goes awry, like Kay's behaviour, and leads to war. Spynagros acts as the spiritual adviser to the king, perpetually warning and admonishing Arthur, but it is Gawain's actions, not Spynagros' moralistic diatribes, which move both Arthur and the reader to admiration for Gawain's chivalrous nature. In Gawain's courteous speech and willingness to pretend to surrender to Golagros, the poem is highlighting the true and Christian qualities of chivalry (honour and compassion), which Arthur and Kay, in their selfish desires and angry outbursts, appear to have forgotten. When Golagros explains what has happened to his court, he makes his praise for Gawain's actions clear:

'In sight of his soverane, this did the gentill:
 He has me savit fra syte throw his gentrice.
 It war syn, but recure,
 The knightis honour suld smure,
 That did me this honoure,
 Quhilk maist is of price.
 I aught as prynce him to prise for his prowese,
 That wanty nought my wourschip, as he that al wan;
 And at his bidding full bane, blith to obeise
 This berne full of bewté, that all my baill blan' (ll. 1201-10)

Gawain is to be praised not only for his prowess, but because his actions have saved Golagros' honour ("wenty nought my wourschip"). Gawain's behaviour astounds Golagros so much that he is moved, once his people decide to remain loyal to him, to

promise fealty to Gawain; Golagros vows to serve him not because of his physical strength, but on account of his “grete kindnes”. Gawain not only puts aside his pride by conceding a victory he had won, but also does so in front of his liege lord and his fellow Round Table knights. The reconciliation of the story’s conflict between Arthur and Golagros is achieved through Gawain’s noble behaviour; it is Gawain’s courtesy, not Arthur’s imperialistic force, which has won Golagros’ loyalty. The poet is “emphasizing the fact that it is not Arthur’s aggression that has subdued Golagros, but Gawain’s magnanimity” (Rogers, 109). Arthur is so moved by Gawain’s behaviour and Golagros’ honesty that he undergoes a form of chivalric rejuvenation, and in his decision to release Golagros from his bonds (ll. 1354-62), he has taken Gawain’s example in a display of humility and honour. In this sense, *Golagros* is a reminder of the chivalric duties of the king; R. D. S. Jack takes the idea of Arthur’s redemption one step further by claiming that Arthur, feeling the vulnerability of his earthly powers, appeals to God with humility at the end of the poem: “the *Golagros* author wishes as this stage to suggest a gradual spiritual awakening on the part of the king, occasioned by the events of the battle” (15). However, it is not Arthur’s Christian behaviour that is found wanting in the poem, but his kingly compassion and courtesy; Gawain, in his polite and understanding behaviour, is the model chivalric individual, and Arthur is able to drop his pride and undergo a behavioural change through the observation and recollection of Gawain’s actions. Indeed, Geoffroi de Charny states that good kings “at the height of their power and lordship and at the time of their great victories over their enemies [...] know how to behave in this position, with due humility and without arrogance, and showing mercy, without excessive pride and ferocity, giving thanks and acknowledging their indebtedness for all that they have to God [...]” (144-45). If Arthur’s proud behaviour was questionable when he attacked Golagros’ lands, he has redeemed himself as a worthy king here, showing mercy to Golagros by returning his lands and giving thanks to God.

Combat Violence in *Golagros* and *Awntyrs*

The *Awntyrs* and *Golagros* share the discussion of the rise and fall of kings with the chronicle tradition, but how do they deal with war and battle violence? Once again, the importance and role of injuring can illuminate an understanding of the poems. Some, such as Matthew McDiarmid and Krista Sue-Lo Twu, see both as not only

anti-imperialist, but also anti-war – in short, as criticisms of the Arthurian chivalric ethos. To McDiarmid, the criticisms of Spynagros in *Golagros* outline a Christian morality which questions the act of killing and shows that “the poet could not take the knightly world seriously” (331). However, Helen Phillips warns against such an extreme spiritual reading of the poems, rightly pointing out that modern scholars should avoid viewing the *Antwyr*s “within a framework of moral assumptions about the world order that exactly matches our own priorities” (74). Modern readers have to approach discussion of medieval warfare and knightly combat with caution and with the understanding that sentiment on military matters may not parallel our own ethics. Sue-Lo Twu, for example, seemingly anxious to criticise Arthur’s warfare, fails to comprehend the function that combat fulfils in medieval society and in the constitution of knightly identity, and the complex feelings chivalric violence would stir in the contemporary reader of romance or chronicle. Phillips suggests that the central theme of mutability in the *Awntyrs* may be the catalyst for criticism of a chivalric ethos which is elsewhere praised, but more important is her reminder that “there is often ambiguity or outright contradiction in the presentation of military glory and power: they are presented both as admirable and as fraught with immorality” (77). This ambiguity is a vital part of the two Arthurian romances; it is necessary to both appreciate the role of the British king and his knight *as an individual* and understand their abuses of power within the system.

Elizabeth Walsh also believes that *Golagros* is questioning the medieval “warlike way of life”, as well as the feudal system that fed and encouraged continual war (94). She argues that Spynagros creates a dialectic between war and peace, and that the conduct of Golagros (as the outside challenger) contrasts with the militant ways of Arthur and his court; she sees the poem itself as signalling weariness of perpetual feudal warfare (100). Yet, Walsh herself admits that the battle scenes occupy 650 lines, nearly half the poem. It seems unusual for a poem supposedly signalling a distaste for combat to linger so long on warfare, and even to glorify it. The war between Arthur and Golagros is limited to a description of individual fights between two or more knights, as is common in chivalric romance. There are mentions of injuries during battle, but they are somewhat concise in their account. Blood and the groans of dying soldiers do feature in *Golagros*, but for only brief seconds:

Throu thair schene [beautiful; bright] scheildis thair schuldiris war schent

[destroyed];

Fra schalkis [warriors] schot schire [bright; pure] blude ov[e]r scheildis so schene.

Ryngis of rank [strong] steill rattillit and rent [tear];

Gomys [knights] grisly on the grund grams on the grene (ll. 692-95)

Most of the damage done in battle is registered by means of the intensity with which the jewelled armour is attacked (and which, I note in Chapter One, is an important romance trope): “The scheld in countir he kest ovr his cleir weid, / Hewit on hard steill woundir haistely; / Gart beryallis hop of the hathill about hym on breid” (ll. 950-52). Indeed, there is a great deal of importance placed on the battle arms and armour, which – along with the reactions of Arthur as he watches – gives the battle sequences a strong sense of spectacle, something which seems at odds with a wholehearted castigation of warfare. Instead, it shows the importance of combat violence in the construction of a knight’s identity; it is clearly aware that knights depend on the display of violence to establish their individual worth and participate in chivalric society. Both poems, as Schiff rightly notes, present a society which “simultaneously yearns for the era of unchecked militarism even as it meditates upon the misery and violence upon which that militarism feeds” (632). The poems do not condemn violence, but use it to investigate the behaviour of individual chivalric figures.

Krista Sue-Lo Twu picks up on the role that chivalric combat plays in the Arthurian society of the *Awntyrs*: “the duel between Gawain and Galeron provides another means of simultaneously expressing and containing violence that might otherwise threaten the court” (109). That is, Galeron’s challenge of single combat avoids whole-scale war between Arthur and Galeron’s armies, thus minimising the death toll. However, rather than acknowledge the usefulness of this function, Sue-Lo Twu claims that the poem questions the chivalric ethos: the combat “merely clothes its violence in the gorgeous trappings of peace-time games. Arthur cannot eliminate violence, only limit it to the two main disputants” (113). The battle between Galeron and Gawain may resemble the tournament spectacle by referring to the knights’ trappings, the seated audience, and its knightly competitors, but the poet never denies that it is a combat to the death – Gawain can only keep his new lands if he “wyn hem in were” (l. 427). It is true that Arthur does not eliminate violence, and that the chivalric ethos does not get rid of violence, but I would argue that the

display of prowess is not a veneer of courtly trappings, but is symbolically central to the identity of the chivalric world Arthur and his court belong to; as signalled so clearly in *Ipomadon*, prowess must be demonstrated in order for a male to gain status in homosocial society. Without prowess, and without a “proper” venue to exercise it, a chivalric society can get restless and take it out in less controlled ways. In an age where trained military men are required to protect the kingdom from outside invasions and civil feuds, the chivalric knight needs an outlet to demonstrate his skill at arms, whether in joust or single combat – both of which defuse boredom, prevent feuds and allow him to prove his worth in arms. The chivalric system is not ideal, or perfect, but it creates opportunities to avoid dangerous situations whilst continually adding to the warrior’s and the king’s fame. The fight between Gawain and Galeron does not fail in its function, and Arthur’s first response – to return the lands and take fealty from Galeron – also defuses the situation, whilst allowing Arthur to keep an eye on a previously dangerous enemy. It is not until Arthur gives the potentially controversial lands to Gawain where we question the wisdom of the king’s actions within the episode. The poem does not suggest that Galeron rebels against Arthur, or that the military brotherhood now formed cannot last; we know that the Round Table is destroyed, but that is through an allusion to the tale of Mordred’s treachery found in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* – a tale which indicates the power of Fortune and the evils of disloyalty, rather than the futility of a military brotherhood. Arthur’s court and the chivalric system certainly have their faults – amongst them, such issues as pride, anger, and covetousness, as we see in all of the alliterative Arthurian tales, but the authors (and readers) admire the good which is found in them and acknowledge the fallibility of humanity as they lament Arthur’s fall.

The controlled violence which is an essential part of the chivalric individual is vital to social unity. Sue-Lo Twu points out the similarity between Galeron and Gawain during their fight: “Identical in their actions, they inflict identical wounds on each other, simultaneously chipping the myriad jewels and decorations from each other’s armor” (114). She argues this to be a reflection that all men, when stripped of their trappings, become the same in death, but this also signifies their equality of social status. They are both noblemen, they are both great fighters, they both wear the same kind of armour and jewels, they both subscribe to the same mode of behaviour; in other words, they both belong to the same (chivalric) society. In a moment that signifies division, we see Gawain and Galeron as the same. Before and

after the fight they signify a representative of their opposing parties; during the fight, they share in a union of aristocratic society. Not surprisingly, this union occurs during chivalric combat, a statement about its centrality in the societal ethos. The grief that Guinevere, Arthur's knights and Galeron's lady express during the fight is not "undifferentiated horror" at the violence of their combat (115). It is not unusual to see the grief of spectators during single combats; in *Golagros and Gawane*, Gawain and Golagros' fight is interrupted several times to turn back to Arthur, who "unto Criste kest up ane cry" to keep Gawain safe, a feature not uncommon in romance (l. 956). This idea of spectacle is also apparent in *Lancelot of the Laik*, during which Gawain and Lancelot's escapades are followed by Arthur and the Queen's court. The drama of the seemingly equally matched competitors is heightened by the account of action and emotional reaction. The greater the blow, the worse the injury, the more admiration the audience has for both knights; the Arthurian court and the reader alike judge the combatants.

Twu also argues that the request to stop the fight implies that single combat is no longer sufficient and "the search for justice through combat no longer matters, undermining the function of the court as a legal body"; the inability to conclude the fight shows the Arthurian court's ultimate failure in implementing justice (115). This argument fails, however, to recognise common romance tropes; the request is made by Galeron's lady, who sees Galeron is defeated and begs for mercy. It is not unusual in romance for a knight's lady to take this role, nor for Guinevere, as a woman, to act as a Marian intercessor to the king, who allows the fight to stop when he sees Gawain has won, and does not indicate a failure of courtly justice.⁴¹ Unable to claim the same authority as their husbands, queens and other aristocratic women used the ability to soften the heart of kings to intercede on behalf of the king's subjects.⁴²

⁴¹ For further discussion, see John Carmi Parsons, "Ritual and Symbol in the English Medieval Queenship to 1500", *Women and Sovereignty*, ed. Louise Olga Fradenburg (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1992) 60-77.

⁴² The role of the woman or queen as intercessor is commonly found in medieval literature and history. Edward III's wife, Philippa of Hainault, begged the king to spare the lives of the burghers of Calais after the town's siege in 1348; she behaved similarly in 1331 when she stopped Edward from killing the workmen responsible for the collapsed stand she was sitting on during a tournament in Cheapside. In the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the duchess of Metz and her ladies plead with Arthur for mercy on behalf of the city of Metz (ll. 3044-53). John Carmi Parsons highlights the importance of the intercessory role in the re-emergence of queenly power in England during the thirteenth century; abundant records show that Henry III's wife Eleanor of Provence and Edward I's Eleanor of Castille both used their intercessory influence to "sustain perceptions of their influence" (151). See John Carmi Parsons, "The Queen's Intercession in Thirteenth-Century England", *Powers of the Weak*:

Both the court and the fight have served their legal purpose; although the fights in *Awntyrs* and in *Golagros* are not the immediate means to an end, they allow Arthur, as king, to fulfil his duty as a ruler and make a political decision on the matter. Whether or not Arthur makes the right decision to demand fealty and give away other contested lands, he has not made it without reason: Arthur has placated the outside threat while keeping it close, and he has rewarded the loyal service of one of his men with land.

The elements of individual power and fate are at play in both *Golagros* and the *Awntyrs*, mixing the traditions of romance and chronicle so that Arthurian combat and chivalric violence become both useful and dangerous, admired and questioned. Warfare provides our heroes with their glory and fame, but it is through the violence of battle that they must be destroyed, and the *Awntyrs* gives us such mixed imagery in combat:

To bataile they bowe with brondes so bright.
 Shene sheldes wer shred,
 Bright brenes bybled;
 Many doughti were adred,
 So fersely thei fight.
 Thus thei feight on fote on that fair felde
 As fressh as a lyon that fautes the fille.
 Wilele thes wight men thair wepenes they welde;
 Wyte ye wele, Sir Gawayn wauntis no will.
 He brouched him yn with his bronde under the brode shelde
 Thorgh the waast of the body and wonded him ille.
 The swerd stent for no stuf – hit was so wel steled (ll. 568-79)

The bright armour is “shred” and “bybled”, but its beauty is still appreciated; the vivid imagery paints its own picture to shock and be admired because of the strength and skill of the knights, who fight “as fressh as a lyon”. The wound to Galeron, piercing through armour to his waist, is all the more remarkable for the quality of Gawain’s sword, which is “so wel steled”, and reflects the quality of its owner. The court and the audience fear for the lives of the great men who are suffering, whilst still we share the admiration which Galeron showers on Gawain, claiming that he

Studies on Medieval Women, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Champaign, IL: U of Illinois P, 1995) 147-77.

had never imagined a man in the world to be “half so wight” and resigns his lands “with a mylde mode” because he is a man “makeles of might” (ll. 639, 642, 643). *Golagros and Gawane* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, then, both discuss the uses and misuses of earthly power, the turning of Fortune’s Wheel and the tragedy of fate; chivalry is here part of a society that admires the violence inherent in prowess and power. The individual knight’s worth, judged by his behaviour and prowess in combat, allows the authors to engage in debates on chivalric conduct itself; the military decisions of Arthur, similarly, leads to a discussion of the role of kings in the maintaining of their kingdom and their interaction with the chivalric code.

The Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*

The stanzaic *Morte Arthur* also uses violence to investigate the chivalric way of life in the behaviours of Arthurian individuals, and appeals to a variety of readers into the sixteenth century. BL MS Harley 2252, which contains the sole surviving copy of the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, was compiled by the London bookseller John Colyns in the early sixteenth century and contains a miscellany of items of interest to him – mercantile and civic documents, the *Annals of London*, information on the administration of his parish church (St. Mary Woolchurch), and political poems relating to contemporary figures such as Ann Boleyn and Thomas Wolsey. An awareness of the manuscript’s contents may further illuminate the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*’s interest in chivalric behaviours; Colyns’ literary taste “seems to have been largely subsumed to his dominant interest in the world of practical affairs in which he lived” (Meale, “The Compiler at Work”, 101). Why would a merchant concerned with the practical and political matters of the early sixteenth century include two romances, the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* and *Ipomydon*, in his collection? Carol Meale has identified them as originally independent booklets from the late fifteenth century, so the romances were originally distinct from the rest of the manuscript, but she also points out that Colyns acquired them first, and apparently constructed the rest of his manuscript around them (83, 93). The romances were thus certainly a highly esteemed possession of Colyns’, and a sign of the romance genre’s continuing popularity. Furthermore, in light of my research into the uses of chivalric violence in literature, I argue that the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* is a continuation of Colyns’ fondness for the workings of the social and political world of the court, as well as more generally a sign of his own interest in the “chivalric”.

What is it, exactly, about the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* that would so interest Colyns and his contemporaries? There is, of course, the general appeal of the tragic; the recognition of human downfall. It is the overriding belief of scholars that the *Morte Arthur* is a tale which reflects that the destruction of a society occurs through a mixture of malicious intent, unfortunate misunderstanding and, primarily, the unavoidable human flaws of the main characters themselves. Flora Alexander, Kevin Whetter and Sherron Knopp all stress the different ways in which the poet underlines the destructive nature of accidents and human error, rather than that of fate or fortune. Alexander points to the poem's use of irony, showing how the juxtaposition of Gawain and Lancelot allows their strengths to provide a "perspective which exposes the weakness of the other" ("The Treson of Launcelote du Lake", 15). Lancelot is deceitful and unable to remain loyal to his king through his affair with Guinevere, and Gawain's inflexible loyalty to his brothers does not allow him to make the peace with Lancelot which would avoid the Round Table's destruction. Misunderstandings over Lancelot's relationship with the lady of Ascolat and Guinevere's innocence in the poisoned apple episode lead to bigger consequences which, as Knopp points out, are solved in the first half of the poem but are no longer able to be remedied in the second. The poet is interested in the "social repercussions of personal choices and decisions" which affect the chivalric camaraderie of the poem; the fellowship cannot handle the pressure which is applied from characters within its society (566). The seemingly well-meaning actions of our heroes, such as Lancelot's kindness to the lady of Ascolat, later cause other events – like Lancelot leaving the court when Guinevere chides him – which will unknowingly contribute to the downfall of the kingdom, and Whetter claims that this sense of unavoidable tragedy makes the poem not a romance but a "tragic romance" ("The Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*", 88). Like the Greek tragedies, the main characters demonstrate "patterns of thought and conduct which result not only in their greatness, but also in their destruction or downfall and tragedy" (Whetter, 88). However, the tragic ending is not only a result of coincidence and flaws, but also of tensions in the construction of the chivalric knight – both of which I believe would have been of interest to affluent London citizens like Colyns. What is the "ideal" chivalric knight, according to the poem, and do the contemporary contents in Colyns' manuscript reflect this concern? How does violence fit into this identity, and does the poem's representation of violence change to reflect its purpose? To begin, I will outline the stanzaic *Morte*

Arthur's discussion of expected knightly behaviour, after which I will conclude with an examination of how this theme reverberates with the political ballads in Colyns' manuscript.

The Ideal Knight: Prowess, Courage, and Courtesy

The poet sets up the Arthurian world as one which is, and must be, created and sustained by the accomplishment of deeds of arms. The display of violence is an integral part of the ideal Arthurian knight, but it is also a focal point for the establishment and criticism of his character. Barron points to the "theme of identity and self-awareness which runs through the poem"; it is the winning of worship and knightly prowess which is central to the discovery and formation of the Arthurian identity throughout the poem (144). Guinevere warns Arthur that his "honour begins to fall" and that he ought to hold a tournament so that it is "spoke of on every side" and "knightes shall there worship win / To deed of armes for to ride" (ll. 25 and 34-36). In this way, according to Guinevere, the court will not cease but continue in honour and pride; the military deeds provide direct access to the reputation and worth of the Arthurian world. Prowess is also directly linked to the recognition and identity of its main figure in the poem, Lancelot; when he attempts to go to the tournament undercover, he is recognised by the way he controls his horse when it stumbles, and Sir Ewain assures the king that they "shall know him by his deed" – that is, his performance in the tournament (l. 135). When Lancelot is injured, he insists on going to the next tournament Arthur has announced; to retain his pride he must compete, even if he risks his life in doing so: "though I die this day, / In my bed I will not lie; / Yet had I lever do what I may / Than here to die thus cowardly!" (ll. 376-79). Lancelot's behaviour here "dramatizes better than any number of tournaments the heroic spirit that characterizes the fellowship" (Knopp, 572). Indeed, it is a knight's bravery and stamina that is valued just as much as his skill in battle. Lancelot is not the only one concerned about losing his honour; when Arthur hears how his wounds began to bleed at the thought of not being able to compete, he calls off his tournament in order to protect Lancelot's life and honour. This concern is paralleled when Lancelot's knights are faced with actual battle later in the poem; when Arthur's force rampages through Lancelot's lands in France, he holds a council with his men and they debate whether to hold the castle under siege or go out to fight Arthur's forces. Lancelot hopes to offer peace and avoid war with

his king, but many of his men are against the idea, both for fear of the harm he might cause to their lands and for the shame of avoiding a battle.

Alexander claims that the fallibility of men in the poem indicates the instability of the secular world, hence its final “emphasis on religious values” (“The Treson of Launcelote du Lake”, 27). However, the conclusion of Lancelot and Guinevere’s lives, in which they take up religious vows and live in a holy community, seems merely a relic of the moral structure of the French *Mort Artu*. The Grail Quest is also much cut in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*; the author limits his narration to one optimistic stanza which praises the Round Table knights for their great chivalric deeds.⁴³ The stanzaic poet recognises the fragile and flawed nature of humanity, but still seems to mourn its loss; Lancelot enters into holy orders only because his king and his lover have been taken away from him. Religion offers another way of life to Lancelot, but his time spent within it still offers chivalric brotherhood in the community which Lancelot’s knightly family forms in the bishop’s chapel. Lancelot’s vows seem neither to replace nor erase his earlier secular life or the reputation he had within it. Instead, we remember Lancelot as a great chivalric hero and see the story as “an exquisitely detailed and compelling portrait of the chivalric spirit associated with Arthur and embodied in his best knight” (Knopp, 565). The fraternity around Lancelot is created by the brotherhood formed through the exchange of blows; injuring is central to the establishment of not only the knight as an individual, but also in the binding of one knight to another. Ector is afraid that Lancelot is angry with him because of the terrible wounds he gave him during the tournament, but instead Lancelot proclaims: ““Though thou have sore wounded me, / There-of I shall the never wite, / But ever the better love I thee, / Such a dint that thou can smite”” (ll. 500-03). Ector is loved because he is Lancelot’s brother and because he has the military prowess to cause such an injury to the poem’s hero; respect within the homosocial society is passed on through each blow struck. This form of chivalric bonding is seen again in the case of Mador, fighting Lancelot to avenge his brother’s death by poison. The character of Mador challenges the knightly brotherhood and tests the Round Table, but the poet demonstrates the ability of prowess to overcome disturbances and restore the fellowship. Lancelot’s display of a

⁴³ “The knightes of the Table Round, / The Sangrail when they had sought, / Auntes they before them found / Finished and to ende brought; / Their enemies they bette and bounde / For gold on life they left them nought. / Four yere they lived sound, / When they had these workes wrought” (ll. 9-16).

superior force in arms immediately reconciles Mador to his brother's death, particularly when he finds out he is fighting against Lancelot: ““Wele is me, / Mine avauntement that I may make / That I have stonde one dint of thee, / And foughten with Launcelot du Lake”” (ll. 1616-19). Lancelot, as the greatest knight in Arthur's court, carries with him his own sense of honour, so that those who have withstood even “one dint” from him have gained honour, and will indeed be something to boast about afterwards – he is an adventure in himself. In this episode, potential tragedy is averted through the use of combat and the performance of physical skill; Mador joins with Arthur's knights after the fight, weeping and laughing, and peace is restored within the society. In the second half of the poem, a display of violence will not heal the divisions within Arthur's world; indeed, it is ironically the very strength of Lancelot which will have the power to destroy the fellowship it had previously protected.

Whetter claims that the tragic nature of the stanzaic *Morte Arhur* makes it closer to the alliterative *Morte Arthure* than we originally thought (“The Stanzaic *Morte Arthure*”, 106). However, homosocial behaviour is depicted slightly differently in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, particularly with respect to Gawain and his relationship with Arthur. Uncle and nephew are close in both; Arthur remains steadfastly loyal to Gawain throughout the end of the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* when he considers forgiving Lancelot. However, there is a scenario in which blood ties weigh more importantly than the feudal ties which bind Arthur and Lancelot. In choosing to favour Gawain's wishes, inextricably linked with revenge and war, Arthur forsakes his friendship with Lancelot, a man valued for his “beautee”, “bountee” and “nobilitee” (ll. 1739 and 1741). Although Gawain is cherished as the king's nephew in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, more focus is placed on his position as one of Arthur's greatest fighters and war-leaders; the chivalric more emphasized than the feudal (ll. 3957-64). The emphasis is on Gawain's significant role in the military success of Arthur, both in arms and counsel, and thus his ability to win honour for Arthur in a chivalric (and worldly) sphere. In comparison, Arthur gives no such eulogy about Gawain when he finds his body in the stanzaic poem; we are told simply that “an hundreth times his herte nigh brast” because “His *soster son*, that was him dere, / Of him sholde he here never more” (ll. 3135 and 3142-43). Arthur holds his nephew “dere”; Gawain's relation to Arthur is referred to at his death in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* as well, but he is simply a “kosyn o kynde”, and the blood

relation – while not unimportant – is overshadowed by the lengthy tribute to Gawain’s military prowess which follows (l. 3956). That is not to say that Arthur does not hold relatives close in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, but Arthur and Gawain’s chivalric bond is clearly the more dominant factor in their relationship. Arthur’s reaction to Gawain’s death in the alliterative poem is, in general, far more emotionally intense; in the stanzaic poem, the poet presents Arthur as upset, but not driven into blind anger or irrational thinking out of a desire for revenge.

The lack of emphasis on Gawain’s chivalric importance in the stanzaic *Morte Arthure* is also seen in the manner of Gawain’s death scene. Rather than having a heroic, if rather ill-advised, last battle with his troop of men against Mordred’s much stronger army, as in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the stanzaic Gawain dies before he even sets foot on land, and certainly without allowing Gawain’s voice to be heard; he dies as they are disembarking and he is “hit upon the olde wound / With a tronchon of an ore” (ll. 3070-71). The style of the stanzaic poem does not allow for extensive battle speeches such as those found in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, but the poet nevertheless at this point observes the swift and sudden silencing of Gawain – a character who stubbornly pushes his opinions – with the words “speche spake he never more” (l. 3073). Even Gawain’s single combat with Lancelot in the stanzaic *Morte Arthure* limits his chivalric prowess; while Lancelot defends himself against Gawain’s strokes all day, on both occasions it takes only one blow from Lancelot to knock out Gawain:

And Launcelot forbore for that case;
Again twenty strokes he gave not one.

[...]

Then he straught in that stour
And gave Gawain a wounde wide;
The blood all covered his colour

And he fell down upon his side (ll. 2808-09 and 2814-17)

Gawain exists in the stanzaic *Morte Arthure* not to serve as a military or chivalric ideal, but to work in contrast with the balance of Lancelot’s courtesy and prowess, and provide a dynamism between the chivalric and familial bonds within Arthurian society. Furthermore, the bonds of family are strongly linked with the abuse of violence for the purposes of revenge. While this may not be true of Gawain throughout the story, it is certainly the case in its closing stages; there is tension

between the familial and the chivalric not only in Arthur and his conflicting loyalties between his best knight and his nephew, but also in Gawain's decision to renounce his previously steadfast defence of Lancelot in order to avenge his brothers' murders. The events of the narrative hinge on the scene in which Gawain sees his brothers' dead bodies, the importance of which is highlighted by its vivid and graphic depiction of the corpses: "Gawain sprent as he were wode / To the chamber there they lay slain; / The chamber floor all ran on blood / And clothes of gold were over them drayn" (ll. 1994-97). The bold images of red blood and golden clothes are intertwined with Gawain's race to the chamber; we cannot help but see the scene through his eyes, bringing into focus – again – his sudden loss of speech and, once he recovers, the declaration of his transformed sentiment towards Lancelot. Indeed, Whetter claims this striking image sets the tone for the rest of the poem ("The Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*", 94). Such a tension, while criticising the darker side of familial bonds, inevitably also questions the dominance of chivalric violence and the viability of a manufactured knightly brotherhood.

In this respect, the poet is clear that the chivalry of the knightly individual should have more than one dimension; the display of violence and deeds of arms is not enough. In fact, the bishop of Rochester reminds Lancelot that he has defeated so many men only "through grace that God hath for you wrought" (l. 2297). Should a knight fail in honest speech and manners, the honour he has won through deeds may be lost. Geoffroi de Charny makes clear the need for a balance of courtesy and physical prowess:

"[Noblemen] are closely observed as examples of good manners and behaviour, whether they are in the company of great lords who hold them in high regard or in the company of ladies and damsels who also hold them in high regards; and they are questioned about their situation, way of life, and conduct. It is not, therefore, the only virtue of those who bear arms that they carry weapons and perform feats of arms; but, in addition to this, it is necessary that in all the respects mentioned above, in no way can anything dishonourable be perceived nor said concerning them..." (109)

While Charny's chivalric manual is a different form of textual evidence from the Arthurian romance, both share an interest in developing a balanced chivalric individual. It is not surprising that it is Gawain, whose inflexible and violent attitude will later allow Lancelot no mercy, whose honour in this regard is first questioned in

the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*. When Gawain tells Guinevere the truth of Lancelot's relationship with the lady of Ascolat – even though he was ostensibly misinformed himself – she reprimands him and accuses him of betraying his courtesy:

*'Thy worship thou undidest gretlich,
Such wrong to wite that goode knight;
I trow that he ne aguilt thee never much
[...]
I wend thou haddest be stable and trew
And full of all courtaisy,
But now me think thy manners new;
They ben all turned to vilainy,
Now thou on knightes makest thy glewe*

To lie upon them for envy' (ll. 1152-54 and 1160-65, emphasis added)

The core of Guinevere's accusations hinge on two focal points: that Lancelot would not behave in the way Gawain has, and that Gawain acted out of envy. We do not have, as in the French *Mort Artu*, the scene in which Gawain approaches the lady of Ascolat with an offer of love;⁴⁴ Gawain vaguely refers to it when they find her body (ll. 1010-15), but it is never explained. In addition, Guinevere gives no indication that she is aware of Gawain's possible feelings for the lady, so one can assume that the "envy" that she speaks of is not with regard to the woman, but rather because of his honour. Gawain is still Lancelot's loyal friend at this point, and he gives no indication that he is jealous of his military prowess – indeed, there is no physical confrontation between the two men until Gawain's challenges in Brittany and their single combats. Yet Lancelot is aware that prowess does not fulfil a knight; Barron claims that his "intuitive understanding that self-glorification through the pursuit of chivalric perfection is not enough is shown in his unfailing self-control, courtesy, compassion and tolerance towards others" (146). He is right to state that Lancelot's character comprehends the need for courtesy and compassion, but it is not because the "pursuit of chivalric perfection is not enough" – it is, rather, that *in* his pursuit of chivalric perfection he has recognised the need for gentleness and flexibility.

Although Barron can be understood to be referring to the physical skill of a knight here, the term "chivalric" should not be conflated with prowess, for the social body

⁴⁴ See *La Mort Le Roi Artu*, ed. Jean Frappier (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1996) 23-27.

of knights in the Middle Ages was aware of and strove for a chivalry which included both deeds in arms and courtly manners. The stanzaic *Morte Arthur* is a platform for the debate of these values and ideals, and Guinevere's comments begin the evaluation of the two knights' behaviour, which will be highlighted when the rift between them drives Gawain to stubborn inflexibility and Lancelot to desperate measures of reconciliation (the return of the queen, the voluntary banishment from Britain, and the offer to quit all his men and journey to the Holy Land). This tension and envy drive the friends apart once Lancelot is accused of killing Gawain's brothers, and forces division in both Arthur and his kingdom – a division between Arthur's family and retainers, and between vengeful violence and courteous chivalry.

The Ideal and the Flawed Knight: Effects on the Presentation of Violence

The stanzaic poet also indicates his interest in presenting a multi-faceted perspective on chivalry in his relatively limited interest in describing the battles themselves. Many of the actual battle scenes use a language parallel to that used in the earlier tournament episode. In the jousting, Lancelot gives Ewain “a dint [...] with mikel main” which unhorses him and leaves him “wounded wonder sore” (ll. 269 and 272). In his battle to the death with Mador, much the same images are depicted: “Unhorsed were bothe knightes keen, / They metten with so mucche main” (ll. 1584-85). Great strength or “main” is again referred to when Arthur's forces attack Joyous Guard: “Sir Lionel with mucche main, / With a spere before gan found; / Sir Gawain rides him again, / Horse and man he bore to ground” (ll. 2158-61). In the tournament, Lancelot also hits Ector “that nighe lost he all his pride” before he and his horse fall (l. 308). This sentiment is voiced in a more serious scenario, again during the attack on Joyous Guard, when Bors hits the king: “And on his helm he hit so fast / That ner he lost all his pride; / The steede rigge under him brast, / That he to ground fell that tide” (ll. 2176-79). There is, as yet, no distinction in the combats between the knights in a playful tournament and a deadly battle. No reference is made to the precise nature of the hit or of the wound; we are left to imagine a generic *melée* in which men are unhorsed and great “dints” are given without much insight into their impact: “With dintes sore gan they dere, / And deepe woundes delten they” (ll. 2896-97). It is a far cry from the vividly grotesque depictions of war found in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, where one of Arthur's men strikes the Viscount of Rome “abowne þe spayre a spanne, emange þe schortte rybbys, / That the splent and the spleen on the spere

lengez!” (ll. 2060-61). The stanzaic author is not interested in where the knight strikes or which intestines he has ripped open, but simply in emphasizing the knights’ display of great physical strength channelled in appropriate ways (in the tournament or, when in battle against esteemed knights, in a restrained manner which indicates the knights’ prowess without graphic injuring). Even in the depictions of siege warfare, although Arthur attacks Lancelot in Brittany “with alblasters and bowes bent”, there is no mention of the physical effect the crossbows and archers have on the men or the battle (l. 2729).

As the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*’s narrative becomes darker, however, we may pick out more disturbingly violent images. At the end of the Joyous Guard siege, the poet reflects on the battle which has taken place:

Of this batail were to tell
 A man that it well understood,
 How knightes under saddles fell
 And sitten down with sorry mood;
 Steedes that were bold and snell
 Among them waden in the blood (ll. 2230-35)

While the passage gives little physical description apart from noting the horses have to wade through blood on the field, there is a sense of foreboding within its portrayals of the sad and fallen combatants, one which will develop further in the desolation of Arthur’s final battles with Mordred’s forces. Lancelot’s choice to fight against Arthur in the tournament “serves as a foreboding parallel to the more earnest and severe war between his forces and Arthur’s in Part II”, (Whetter, “The Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*”, 94). This parallel is also apparent in the language of the fight at Joyous Guard. Although the assault is littered with familiar descriptions from jousting scenes, the tragic image at the end continues this sense of foreboding which will increase as the poem reaches its conclusion, an indication of the tragic result of the abuse of chivalric prowess. Indeed, the last battles are suddenly scattered with violent semi-alliterative lines which would not be out of place in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, such as “Arthur of batail never blanne / To dele woundes wicke and wide” (ll. 3364-65) and “riche helmes they rove and rente; / The riche routes gan togeder raikē” (ll. 3372-73). The tone of the poem has changed with an alteration of style; the pounding alliteration intensifies the violent actions as the poem approaches its tragic end.

The destruction of Arthur's court shares other similarities in the two poems; when Arthur's boats land back in Britain to face Mordred's forces, we feel for the first time that we are experiencing a battle away from the jousting field. In the absence of Lancelot and his men, as well as of the dead Gawain, there is no knightly hero to excel in battle. The focus shifts to Mordred, the traitor, and Arthur, the king who has largely been confined to watching combat throughout the poem. As they struggle to be the leader of Britain, we are exposed to the fate of their men in addition to their own. The harm done to the men is marked by the increased use of and, in fact, repetitious mention of blood: "rich hauberkes they rive and rent / That through-out brast the redde blood. / Grounden glaives through them went" and, three lines later, "the stronge stremes ran all on blood" (ll. 3076-78 and 3081). A few lines after that, again, Arthur "hewed on their helmes bright / That through their brestes ran the blood" (ll. 3084-85). The strokes are now given a direction for their hit; the head is a central point of focus and the damage of this can be seen in the amount of blood which is being lost. The resting place of the bodies which have been unhorsed is now revealed, we see "fele men lieth on bankes bare, / With brighte brandes through-oute borne" (ll. 3114-15). In complete contrast to this is the image of the two would-be kings which is placed between the combat: Arthur has a "rich array" while "hornes blewe loud on hight" and Mordred is "glad and gay" (ll. 3098-100). The pageantry which may have once fit into a story of tournaments and great deeds is out of place here, highlighting the loss of the chivalric ideal in the absence of Arthur's Round Table knights – and foreshadowing the destruction of the Arthurian world. The most specific and detailed blow is reserved for Mordred himself, the traitor who betrays this brotherhood with the most base abuse of chivalric power: Arthur "hit Mordred amid the breste / And out at the backe bone him bore" (ll. 3392-93). That Arthur chooses to strike Mordred in the breast, the house of the heart, is an indication of the nature of Mordred's treason; he betrays Arthur's love and trust, as well as attempts to marry Arthur's wife. Mordred epitomises the failure of both the familial and the chivalric ties, as Arthur's nephew/son and knight, but he is not solely responsible for the society's downfall; his treachery is the culmination of Lancelot's deceit and Gawain's vengeance, and he symbolises "a nation brought to an end by inherent contradictions in the ideals on which it was built" (Barron, 143). The core components of the Arthurian society – prowess and courtesy, loyalty, compassion and conviction, family ties and brother-in-arms – are at once idyllic and

irreconcilable, and the “romance” of the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* is challenged in the form of tragedy and tension in violence, while yet retaining the feeling that there is something in the chivalric that is to be desired. The poem ponders, but chooses not to offer, the answers – perhaps because they are less important than the questions themselves.

John Colyns demonstrates a wide range of interests in his manuscript, but his anxieties about noble behaviour and the governance of the realm is clearly indicated by his inclusion of numerous items of verse discussing the royal court. Of the twenty-six items of verse in BL MS Harley 2252, not including the long romances *Ipomydon* and *Morte Arthur*, eight of these pertain to members of Henry VIII’s royal court: six to Cardinal Wolsey, one to the Duke of Buckingham and one to Anne Boleyn. One of these ballads is John Skelton’s *Speke, Parrot*, and the manuscript also contains a version of his *Colyn Cloute*, which – although not specifically about Wolsey – continues to berate the corruption of the clergy. More importantly, they are all interested in one of two important aspects also found in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*: human failings and the proper behaviour of nobility. While not directly concerned with the role of violence in knightly identity, these political poems demonstrate a longing for proper behaviour on the part of chivalric nobles and a criticism of the grovelling which Wolsey has now brought them to, a concern which is reflected in the *Morte Arthur*’s discussion of ideal knightly or noble behaviour. *Of the Cardnall Wolse* begins with a plea to the king to call his “nobyll peyrs” to him in order to stop the tyrannical rule of Wolsey (l. 16). It regrets that Wolsey, a “Bochers Curre”, holds power over the traditional figures of status and wealth, the realm’s noblemen (l. 21). It alludes to Wolsey’s ability to “Blynde[...]

and “vndermynd[...]

the king with subtle and treacherous reasoning, but its primary concern is with the debased nature of the country’s great knights (ll. 29 and 30). The poet spends several stanzas discussing ideal chivalric English behaviour, and the level to which the current nobility has fallen; its criticism is harsh, but sympathetic – it wants its heroes to gather courage and break free of Wolsey’s influence. In doing so, it focuses on the traditional knightly virtues of courage and pride:

o gentyll Talbott, the day hathe byn,
 pou woldyste be hard, or else be sene ;
 But nowe ye are soo stoppyd with wolle,

ye Can not Barke, your mowþe ys Full.

o gentyll Chevalry, ye have byn bolde!

your Corage ys gon, your hartis byn Colde! (ll. 43-48)

The “Talbot” in question probably refers to George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, who was an influential figure under the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII, but the name can also be used for a dog (*Middle English Dictionary*), and the poet does this to provide allegorical criticism of the hesitant nobles. The poet questions the noblemen’s “chevalry”, mocking their meekness and “manhod” in feudal terms, pointing out the incongruity of the “subieccion” of the “gentyll Blode” which the non-aristocratic Wolsey so scorns (ll. 52, 55 and 58). The “hard” chivalric figure has been stripped of his “bark”; the poet laments that the aggressive nature of the proud noble figure has been silenced. Courage was, as Heather Webb has pointed out, thought to be “directly related to the size and heat of the heart” in the Middle Ages (107); this correlation is continued by the early modern poet, who signifies the loss of the nobles’ courage by their cold hearts.

The Ruyn of a Ream is also concerned with the judgement and monitoring of personal behaviour in Henry’s court, but is far more critical. It first approaches the “fallyng in decay” of England by addressing the changed nature of the nobles, once again emphasising their growing passivity (l. 4). They are compared with the nobles of old; once, noblemen “levyd in þer Contre, / And kepte grete howsoldis”, but now they desire to be at court, “with ladys to daly” (ll. 15-16, 18); they are no longer overseeing their land or going to tournaments, and – unlike Guinevere – their women are not driving them to activity, but keeping them in court to “daly”. Their pastimes have become less honourable as well; where once they “lovyd for to Iuste” and “in shotyng chefely they sett þer mynde”, they can now be found “at Cardis & dyce” (ll. 22-23, 25). The poet repeatedly contrasts the energetic, masculine pursuits integral to chivalric honour in the *Morte Arthur* – jousting, combat, hunting – with the passive and questionable behaviour of the sixteenth-century noble. The poet invokes a great “golden age” of feudalism, where noblemen served their lord and displayed “valeaunte Corage” by fighting wars or jousting in tournaments and proving their honour, rather than vainly displaying their “gownis of golde” and “Ryche Clothying” whilst being attended by their servants (ll. 29 and 32). This proud and self-interested

behaviour is not only a concern for the knightly individual; it is also carried into the government of the people, and the poet finally asks “Where be the Rulers & mynesters of Iustyce / That Sumtyme Spake for the Common wele?” (ll. 36-37). Their unwillingness to help the poor is, eventually, blamed once again on the fear that grips the nobles of Henry VIII’s court: “now in owur dayes none dar speke ne loke ; / they ar all Abasshyd, & glade to knele & Croke” (ll. 62-63). The ideals of bravery, compassion, and prowess which are set out for the chivalric figure in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* no longer exist, and the ballads in Colyns’ manuscript mourn the cowardice and passivity of its contemporary nobles.

BL MS Harley 2252, as a commonplace book, may be a collection of miscellaneous items, but its compiler John Colyns was not without his interests and his objectives; Colyns’ manuscript places these contemporary political poems in a context which is concerned with the composition of a noble hero, one who is expected to defend the common people. What is it that makes a knight? What behaviour is expected of a nobleman? In the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, Colyns saw a poem that seemingly described an idyllic golden age of chivalry but also discussed the careful balance between physical prowess and courtesy that was required in an honourable noble, and many of the other texts in his manuscript echo this concern. The stanzaic *Morte Arthur* is not alone in its interest in the chivalric individual, and violence’s role in determining this identity; although their conflict is with an outside threat to the Arthurian empire (Golagros and Galeron), *Golagros and Gawane* and the *Awntyrs off Arthur* also use the description of injuring and physical power to discuss the king and his knight in chivalric society. The story of Arthur’s death is manipulated by each narrator for his own unique purpose, and chivalric combat and the depiction and function of physical prowess is part of this narratorial stratagem.

IV. The Language of the Passion in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*: Literary and Manuscript Context

As established in Chapters One and Two, the genre and tone of a medieval text is not limited to pre-determined generic structures; it is informed by literary influences from inside and outside the text. As we have seen in the shared rhetorics of violence in Middle English romances and British chronicles, these influences may come from linguistic borrowings or manuscript context; both of the latter feature strongly in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and make the romance an ideal subject for a study of the fluidity of medieval literary form.⁴⁵ The prominent violence of the *Morte Arthure* is central to an understanding of the text's material and linguistic connections with narratives of the Passion.⁴⁶ Looking first at Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91, I will draw out the concerns of the devotional material and the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, and contextualise them with reference to the language of bodily violence and injuring in medical texts and Passion literature in general. I conclude with a study of the images of violence in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which illuminate an affective rhetoric that is shared between genres, ultimately arguing for a fluid Middle English literary tradition. This makes for a fresh understanding of the *Morte Arthure* itself; the poem's language of violence evokes similar emotional responses as requested by Passion narratives, and this informs a new reading of what has been perceived variously as a glorification and a criticism of chivalry in the Arthurian narrative.⁴⁷

Robert Thornton and the Compilation of the Thornton MS

The impressive collection of material in Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 (the

⁴⁵ The poem mixes chronicle, epic and romance motifs; see Maureen Fries, "The Poem in the Tradition of Arthurian Literature", *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Reassessment of the Poem*, ed. Karl Heinz Göller (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981) 30-43.

⁴⁶ My discussion is limited to descriptions of violence and does not include any specific references to Christ found in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*; Roger Dalrymple has provided an excellent survey of pious tags in Middle English metrical romances dated before 1500. See Roger Dalrymple, *Language and Piety in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000) 149-250. For the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, see page 179. For all tags referencing the Crucifixion, see pages 212-22.

⁴⁷ Some of the research in Chapter Four may also be found in an article I wrote, "'The rosselde spere to his herte rynnnes': Religious Violence in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript", for a volume entitled *Studies on Robert Thornton and the Thornton Manuscript* (edited by Michael Johnston and Susanna Fein), to be published by York Medieval Press in late 2013.

Thornton MS) includes not only the sole surviving copy of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, but also many romances and devotional texts. An understanding of the manuscript's contents and concerns gives context for how the alliterative *Morte Arthure* – and its violence – was received by late medieval readers such as the manuscript's compiler, Robert Thornton. Much research has been undertaken on the Thornton MS since the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly by George Keiser and John Thompson, who have examined how Robert Thornton structured his manuscript. The first section comprises romances (ff. 1-178), the second religious works (ff. 179-279), and there is a final, medical, section (ff. 280-321). These interesting categorisations have prompted the question: how aware was Thornton of differentiation between genres and to what extent did Thornton separate these different genres? Thornton, like most medieval manuscript compilers, did not have access to all of his material at once; the nature of his collection, inevitably, depended on the availability of his exemplars. Both Keiser and Thompson argue that the prose *Life of Alexander* was not the first item copied, but was added after the *Morte Arthure* and the *Previte off the Passioun* (f. 179), the first items Robert Thornton copied.⁴⁸ If the *Alexander* was acquired later, they claim, this would account for the (blank) areas for illumination set aside in *Alexander* which are not found in the rest of the MS, as well as the few blank pages left remaining after the *Alexander* (Keiser, "Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91", 178). Angus McIntosh argues persuasively that the alliterative *Morte Arthure* was taken from the same Lincolnshire exemplar as *The Previte off the Passioun*, and that they were both copied down quite early in Thornton's collecting career.⁴⁹ If the *Morte Arthure* was copied first, Thornton clearly decided to create this division from the beginning of his compilation: rather than continue copying the *Previte* on the remaining leaves of the quire with *Morte Arthure* (F), he chose to begin a new quire (L). That is, Thornton desired to make

⁴⁸ See John Thompson, "The Compiler in Action: Robert Thornton and the 'Thornton Romances' in Lincoln Cathedral MS 91", *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth Century England*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983) 116; George Keiser, "Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91: Life and Milieu of the Scribe", *Studies in Bibliography* 32 (1979) 177-78. Joel Fredell and Thomas Crofts provide further proof of Thornton copying the *Morte Arthure* first in their studies of the Lincoln manuscript's illustrations; see Joel Fredell, "Decorated Initials in the Lincoln Thornton MS", *Studies in Bibliography* 47 (1994) 78-88, and Thomas Howard Crofts, "The Occasion of the Morte Arthure: Textual History and Marginal Decoration in the Thornton MS", *Arthuriana* 20.2 (2010): 5-27.

⁴⁹ See Angus McIntosh, "The Textual Transmission of the Alliterative Morte Arthure", *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Norman Davis and C. L. Wren (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962) 231-40.

either two generically different manuscripts or one manuscript in which “romance” and “religion” were strategically kept separate, but still physically linked in the same volume. This indicates not only a keen awareness of different kinds of reading experiences, but also a “complete confidence in his ability to acquire other materials, both narrative and devotional, for his volume” (Keiser, 179). Copying the two into separate quires allowed him to fill each quire with similar material and indicates an interest in creating an organised plan for the manuscript.

Robert Thornton’s decision to copy the romance and the Passion piece separately shows that he had reason to believe that he would be able to gain access to literary materials without great difficulty. It is likely that the final medical tract, the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, was obtained from Richard Pickering, the rector of Oswaldkirk – an area close to Thornton’s East Newton – as he is credited for supplying many of the medical recipes in the manuscript (Keiser, 168). He was presumably close to the Thornton family, as he left land to both Robert and his younger brother Richard in the 1440s, around the period the manuscript was probably compiled (Halliwell, xxvi). This rector (or, indeed, any other pious Christian in Yorkshire with whom Thornton had contact) may have contributed the manuscript’s devotional pieces. Several items similar to Thornton’s devotional material circulated in Yorkshire in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁵⁰ The popularity of these works reflects how those who could afford books turned to them for guidance in private and individual devotional practice. It is uncertain, however, who the devotional material in the Thornton manuscript was meant for and exactly what purpose it served; was it for Thornton’s own personal spiritual benefaction, or was it for the instruction of his household? Thompson suggests that it functioned as a paternalistic spiritual guidebook meant for a female family member, due to the exclusion of a male-oriented address in some of the material, but then rightly points out that this is too insubstantial a claim.⁵¹ Indeed, this seems likely to indicate, if anything, only a broadening of the text so that it could be read and accessed by a

⁵⁰ See Keiser, “Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91”, 171-73 for a detailed account of the correlations found between Thornton’s religious content and the devotional material named in Yorkshire wills.

⁵¹ These comments were in reference to altered openings to Thornton’s copies of *Mixed Life* and *Of Angel’s Song*. John Thompson, “Another Look at the Religious Texts in Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 91”, *Late Medieval Religious Texts and their Transmission*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994) 179-80. On the role of women in the development of affective meditational practices, see Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

number of Thornton's family and friends.

The general scope of Thornton's religious interests could be described as the compiler's own "particular brand of simple – some would say naïve – piety" (Thompson, "Religious Texts", 173). The texts range broadly from moral and religious stories to hagiographical and biographical narratives, common didactic pieces and popular affective lyrics. Most of his devotional works can be said to be for daily and practical purposes, rather than for deep meditation; given Thornton's status in life – that of a devout but secular and public head of family and manor – this is hardly surprising. Yet the works by Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle may have been, as Thompson suggests, "intended to facilitate prayer, penance, and contemplation among enthusiasts for the 'mixed life'" which is alluded to in the Hilton piece of the same name (173). "Enthusiasts" may be too strong a word; perhaps "practitioners" is more accurate. Thornton's particular compilation of devotional literature indicates that he was interested in having a book which would give him and his family a personalised guide for devotional practices. Thornton suggests this not only by means of his repetitious scribal tag, "Robertus Thornton qui scripsit sit benedictus amen", attached to several of his devotional pieces, but also by supplying his own Christian name in the Latin orison on f. 176v: "libera me Robertum famulum tuum". The prayer and its English instructions – similar to others of its kind, meant to be recited often by "busy men and women of the world" and carried around on scraps of paper, is turned into Thornton's own prayer (Thompson, "Religious Texts", 174). Thornton's compilation contains a number of instructional programmes which revolve around standard elements of instruction and devotion, such as the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, Mary and the Passion of Christ; all of these, though often repeated, reflect the religious interests of many men of middling wealth and land in the late Middle Ages, secular men concerned about how to live the spiritual side of their life in order to attain salvation. Even his more "theoretical" Hilton inclusions (*Of Angel's Song*, *Of Mixed Life*, and the extract from the *Scale of Perfection*, ff. 219v-30) are tempered with a sense of practicality; *Of Mixed Life* offers guidance on how to live a spiritual secular life, *Of Angel's Song* cautions against false ecstasies, and the extract from the *Scale* assures that you do not need to have mystical experiences to attain salvation. His inclusion of some of Richard Rolle's treatises (which I will discuss in detail later) could be a result of Rolle's general popularity and the wide circulation of

clusters of Rolle-related devotional materials, but it may also further indicate local interest in the hermit, both by Thornton and in Yorkshire itself.

As regards Thornton's secular literature, we do not have any specific evidence of origin, but he certainly had connections with influential secular men in the area; he was a witness to certain documents detailing local property transactions in the 1440s, all of which may have put him in contact with men who "held prestigious rank" and "must have been fairly well educated" – men like John Kempe, archbishop of York; Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury; Ralph, baron of Graystock and John Thryske, mayor of York (Keiser, "Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91", 161). Although such putative connections do not indicate that he had access to these men's libraries, they do show that Thornton was in contact with diverse members of society. His social circle would have extended even further in the 1450s, when he was appointed one of six to collect taxes in the North Riding.⁵² Such a public service would have not only extended Thornton's connections amongst his fellow Yorkshire gentry, but also would have made his figure more known amongst the people he was collecting tax from, either in town or manor.⁵³ It is certainly not unusual for a man of Thornton's position to have owned books – his fellow tax collectors, William Gascoigne and Brian Stapleton, well-connected members of parliament, were book owners (Keiser, 166). The nearby city of York was a commercial centre and would have been conducive to book trade, so it is likely that a man with an avid interest in compiling a manuscript – such as Thornton – would have been able to gather more material there. The presence of several romances in the manuscript, some unique (*Sir Percyvelle of Galles* and the *Morte Arthure*), is another indication of the particular interest and dedication Thornton had to reading and gaining knowledge through literature. Where and how Thornton got his large selection of romances, however, is less certain.⁵⁴ Thornton's social circles and connections allowed him "some degree of choice" in how he compiled his manuscript (Keiser, 178). Whatever his reasons,

⁵² For further insight into Thornton's role in society, see Michael Johnston, "A New Document Relating to the Life of Robert Thornton", *The Library* 8.3 (2007): 304-13.

⁵³ Keiser even suggests that Thornton's position may have got him in to trouble during the disturbances in Yorkshire due to an increase in Neville-Percy rivalries and the appointment of Richard Neville as chancellor in 1454. It is interesting that Thornton was temporarily relieved of his position as tax collector – and then re-appointed in 1454 - if Thornton was indeed an acquaintance of the Earl of Salisbury (163).

⁵⁴ John Finlayson argues that Thornton also exercised some degree of organization in the layout of his romances; see John Finlayson, "Reading Romances in Their Manuscript: Lincoln Cathedral Manuscript 91 ('Thornton')", *Anglia* 123.4 (2005): 632-66.

Thornton had a keen interest in collecting material of varying literary genres and dividing them as best he could, seemingly guided by how the work would be read and what it would be used for. It is clear that Thornton physically separated the romance and religious items in the manuscript, but that does not mean that the items he chose fit neatly in their designated section. Indeed, there is also a mixture of the secular and the devotional in many of Thornton's texts, and it is to this I turn next.

The devotional material, which reveals something of the relationship between secular and spiritual in the manuscript, sheds light Thornton's rationale for interests and concerns copying the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Derek Brewer claims that Thornton made copies of circulating treatises "when a piece was particularly valued" (x). What did Thornton "particularly value" about the *De miraculo beate Marie* (f. 147), the Latin orison with a Middle English proeme (f. 176v), and *Active and Contemplative Life* (or *Of Mixed Life*) (f. 223-29)? On examination, there emerges a distinct overlap of secular and religious interests, and a concern with the practical application of religious literature. This overlap reflects the multi-faceted nature of private devotion among fifteenth-century English laity, which can be better understood by taking a closer look at these "mixed" pieces. *De miraculo beate Marie* borrows from both romance and devotional literature; it is a tale of the reformation of an errant knight, the salvation of a secular man by the Virgin Mary. It neatly bridges the gap between the secular adventures of the knights in Thornton's romances and the requests for mercy in the affective piety in the devotional section. The wicked knight "bothe fers and felle" refuses to go to church and scorns the teachings of a local friar (l. 13). When the knight – prone to anger, greed and pride – comes upon the friar preaching, he is enraged at being chastised for his sins, and rushes to attack the holy man. He is stopped by the friar's prayer to Mary; she drives away the knight's demonic spirits: "for sorowe þay cryed schill" (l. 113). The knight regrets his previous wrong-doings and the friar gives him absolution, asking Mary "to forgyffe hym his werkes wylde" (l. 118). The tale concludes with a warning to all men, threatening that those who "tane with ryfe & raffe, / With falsehed & with wrange" will not achieve Heaven's bliss (ll. 130-31). Thornton's choice of this piece for inclusion is of note for two reasons: the secular status of the main character, the knight, and the role of Mary in his absolution. The plenitude of religious prayers in the manuscript indicates a man who was concerned for his soul and, like most pious Christians in the Middle Ages, he would have identified with the character of the

“sinner”. The knight commits several of the seven deadly sins, including lust, anger, greed, envy and pride: he lusts after women, “glomede als he were wrathe”, is not charitable with his goods, has “grete envy” and “Full sone [...] garte þam be slayne” those who insult him (ll. 30, 46, 23). The *De Miraculo* shows concern for the lot of the secular gentleman and his religious redemption. Mary’s role in the knight’s salvation is reflective of her status in late medieval devotion;⁵⁵ she is celebrated as a merciful, mediating figure between the sinner and God, and this is her role in all the Thornton Marian pieces, including *A Preyere off the ffyve Ioyes of owre lady* (f. 177v). The prayer details the five joys and the five sorrows of Mary, with the sinner reiteratively asking for mercy of the “Modir of Mercy, socoure and comforth to þe saluacyone of all Mankynde” (*Preyere off the ffyve Ioyes*, 379). In the prose treatise *Active and Contemplative Life*, when addressing the subjects for meditation, the author asks that the reader “mynd of oure Lady Saynt Marie abowne all oþer sayntes” in order to understand “þe abowdance of grace in hire haly saule [...] þat owre Lorde gafe hir allane, passand all oþer creatours”(39). Mary’s other virtues are praised – her purity, meekness, and charity – but it is her grace that is specifically emphasised above others, indicating her main function as an instrument of forgiveness. In addition, not only does the sinner seek mercy from the Virgin, but they should also be moved by the beauty of her holiness: “The behaldynge of þe fairehede of þis blyssid saule sulde stirre a mans herte vn-to gostely comforth gretly” (39). She, as a mother-figure, fulfils a role which offers benevolent reassurance to the Christian sinner. Thornton, like other Christians of the fifteenth century, took great interest and comfort in the cult of the Virgin.⁵⁶

Thornton certainly copied some of these prayers for his own devotions, including a Latin orison with an English proeme on f. 176v. Eamon Duffy points out the similarity between this prayer and many popular lay devotions in fifteenth-century England which requested deliverance from enemies (spiritual and physical) and were used like a charm, which blurs the line between religion and magic (267-69). Thornton’s orison, among the usual requests for mercy and a remission of sins, asks that all his enemies be dispersed and confused [“dispergantur et confundantur

⁵⁵ See Karen Saupe’s introduction to *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, ed. Karen Saupe (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

⁵⁶ See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2005) 256-65.

omnes adversarii mei”] and that God defend the sinner by being an impregnable tower [“turre inexpugnabilis”] (*Latin Orison with English Proeme*, 377). Attached to many of these prayers were guarantees of safety against all nature of threats and promises of fortune. Thornton’s proeme states that if a priest sings mass over the written orison, and the person then takes it with them to an interview with a king or a lord, “þou sall fynd grace, helpe and ffauore byffore þame” (376). If they are travelling, it can be recited so that “no thefes sall hafe powere to robbe the” (376). If the user is on the sea and a tempest flares up, it has the power to calm the storm. In addition, it can also help in war: “if þou sall goo to Batell, saye þis Oryson devotely and Enterely one þe Croys of þi swerde, and girde the þer-with, and bere þis Oryson with þe appone the: and þou sall noghte be slayne nor skomfet” (376). These prayers also often came with an offer of pardons – indulgences ranging from forty to forty thousand years – which offered remission from “the penance or temporal punishment believed to be still due to God after a sin had been repented, confessed and forgiven” (Duffy, 288). The vernacular introduction to Thornton’s orison claims that daily recitation of the prayer will give the sinner “remysyone of alle his synnys” as well as three hundred days of pardon from Pope Innocent (*Latin Orison with English Proeme*, 376). The “grotesque and materialistic” promises of these prayers seem to indicate a “low”, self-serving religion, but Duffy points out that they are found in pious manuscripts as well as those of a more “popular” provenance (275, 278). This is certainly the case with Thornton’s prayer; the Lincoln manuscript is, as previously mentioned, filled with the serious meditations of Richard Rolle and Passion lyrics. Its inclusion, however, does indicate that Thornton’s religious interests were both practical and meditative.

Active and Contemplative Life (or *Of Mixed Life*) is one of the Walter Hilton pieces included in the Thornton manuscript. It is not clear whether Hilton’s treatise on the values of secular and religious lifestyles is addressed to anyone in particular, but it is certain that it was meant for those who controlled land and people, such as Thornton – lord of the manor of East Newton. Hilton explains that there are three types of living – the active (secular/worldly), the contemplative (religious/spiritual), and the mixed; the mixed life belongs to those religious figures, such as priests, who spend time in devotion but also go out into the world to teach others (*Active and Contemplative Life*, 25). However, he also claims that this mixed life belongs to his addressee:

And sothely, as me thynke, this Mellid lyfe accordis maste to þe; For, sen owre Lorde hase ordaynede þe and sett þe in þe state of soueraynte ouer oþer, [...] and lent þe habowndance of werdly gudes for to rewle and susten specyaly all þose þat are vndire thi gouernance and thi lordchipe [...] thou hase ressayuede grace of þe mercy of oure Lorde Godd. (28)

He warns that the body is not immediately ready for the “gostely” life when it is born, and that the Christian must work to reach this through good deeds in the “actiffe” life, via “fulfyllinge of the dedis of mercy” (22). Those who wish to prepare themselves spiritually for God should perform these charitable actions as outwards signs of moral virtue. Indeed, he cautions that those who are in a position of power over others should not immerse themselves entirely in the spiritual life, because they are “bonden to the worlde by children and seruantes”, and it is their duty to guide those they govern: “if þey do well, comforth hem there-in and helpe them; if thei do evill, forto teche hem, amende hem, and chastise hem” (24). This treatise acts as a guide for Thornton’s own personal (and Christian) conduct towards his tenants and servants, indicating that he should care for them as the members of the Christian church – that is, the “lesser” members should be governed in order to sustain Christian society. It is also, however, a spiritual code of conduct for him, indicating that these good deeds to other Christians act as moral “sticks” on the “fire” of God’s love, and act as outward signs of the desire for God (32). These charitable acts are, indeed, the way to spiritual redemption and help bring the secular lord closer to God. Charitable works were a form of piety, for the Yorkshire gentry as for others; they were “one means of gaining remission from the pains of Purgatory and of assuring one’s own salvation” (Vale, *Piety, Charity and Literacy*, 7). Many wills of Yorkshire gentry in the fifteenth century gave donations to the poor, and these gifts were a benefit to not only the sick and needy who received them, but also to the gentry who gave them, as they had a “direct and immediate spiritual purpose”; the recipients were expected, indeed sometimes required, to pray for the soul of the deceased, which resulted in an accumulation of prayers which the noble used to assure their salvation (7).

This code of conduct also applies to the man’s own behaviour, and Hilton outlines the vices to which the secular sovereign lord is particularly susceptible:

Breke downe firste *pride in bodely berynge*, and also with-in this herte, thynkyng, *boostyng*, and prikkyng and presyng of *thi silfe* and of *thi dedis*.

Breke downe also *envy* and *Ire ayene thyne even cristen*, wheþer he be riche or pore, goode or badde, that þou hate hym nott, ne haue disdeyne of hym wifully, nethir in worde, ne in dede. [...] All-so breke doune *Couatise of worldely goode*, þat þou [...] offende not thi conscience [...] for loue of no worldely gode. (*Active and Contemplative Life*, 22-23)

In particular, Hilton warns the powerful (like Thornton), against pride, in bearing (caring too much for physical appearance) and in deeds (particularly applicable for those who were knights and had to prove their prowess in arms); against envy and anger against those who are above and below you in status (desiring a richer noble's wealth, mistreatment of servants), and excessively coveting worldly goods (spending too much of one's wealth on adornments or gaining power). They are cautions against the temptations of earthly treasure and power, and remind the reader that it is Christian charity which will save their souls.

Hilton's treatise, then, is especially pertinent to a man of Thornton's status and position in society, acting as a guide for his behaviour towards himself, his peers, his superiors and, most importantly, those who are under his lordship. It instructs the reader how to be a good Christian and save his soul, and can also be seen as a general code for appropriate conduct in secular society. The treatise finishes with a detailed list of suggested meditation topics, but these items are again not only for the ruler's own spiritual health but also "for to rewle the in thyn ocupacyon", and Hilton continuously warns not to spend too long thinking over these matters (37). It is, in the end, the balance between the two that is most desired, a balance that is reflected neatly in the composition of the Thornton manuscript, and which is very fruitful for understanding Robert Thornton's concerns and interests, and his reasons for including the alliterative *Morte Arthure* in the compilation of his own "private library". Vale states that the gentry of this period had a greater "degree of understanding of the liturgy, the Scriptures and the lives of the Saints" than ever before (*Piety, Charity and Literacy*, 18). The *De Miraculo Beate Marie*, the Latin prayer and the Hilton treatise all appeal to an accessible form of devotion which incorporates the worldly with the spiritual; Thornton's manuscript reflects the growing interest in personal spiritual education and the compiler is aware of the close relationship between secular and religious literature. Furthermore, Thornton understands the usefulness of borrowing between secular and devotional material, and one must think it possible that Thornton had a very clear idea of how and with

what he assembled this prized item of his collection.

Richard Rolle in the Thornton MS

Robert Thornton was also interested in Richard Rolle: the Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 contains a large section of his works (ff. 192-96v). To Thornton, Richard Rolle would have been something of a local legend (Rolle was born less than 20 miles away from Thornton's residence in East Newton).⁵⁷ It is likely that Thornton's interest in this Yorkshire religious figure reflects the "strong local ties and sentiments of the Yorkshire gentry" during this period (Vale, 8). Creating and maintaining ties with local heritage emphasised the importance of Thornton's role as a powerful and influential figure for the servants, tenants, authorities and religious members of the community. In addition, Rolle's works were popular in fifteenth-century England; Rolle was "one of the first European contemplatives to combine the description of his religious experiences [...] with a grasp of mystical theology which enabled him to direct the spiritual life of nuns and recluses" (Catto, 113). Rolle's writings were not just for the clerical community, however; the material of Rolle and followers such as Hilton became increasingly of interest to the lay reader (123). Although a hermit, Rolle – like other mystics – incorporated the practical and popular side of theology into his writings, teaching both "the way of perfection, the ruling of life" to his disciples and undertaking the "edification and instruction of the people, of the poor and illiterate, taught them the elements of the faith, the commandments, the sacraments, etc." (Horstmann, xiii). His work often combines the pastoral with the contemplative, indicating that he was "very much aware of the need for basic instruction" (Renevey, 107). Thornton was hardly poor or illiterate, but he was certainly part of a general lay community desirous of closer and more direct access to God. This is precisely what mystical writers such as Richard Rolle offered: a turning from a scholarly religion to a simple and more accessible spiritual pathway. Born in Thornton le Dale in North Yorkshire to a relatively poor rural family, Rolle was given a grant to study at Oxford, but his studies of logic and rhetoric did not suit him, nor did the university's dogmatic approach to religion; once he returned home he ran away and became a hermit against his father's will, leading a nomadic life until he settled in Hampole (Glasscoe, 60-63). He became familiar with recluses and

⁵⁷ See Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 1988) 93, 295-96.

was extremely popular with the local people due to his effective (and affective) preaching, his renowned mystical experiences and his prolific writing (64-65). His English texts made religion more accessible and more emotional; many of his texts guide the reader in a spiritual performance and are “deeply affective in nature, appealing to the emotion of his audience in order to move it to a stronger desire for God” (Renevey, 106).

These features are evident in several of the shorter pieces included in the Thornton manuscript, particularly *Narracio: A tale þat Rycherde hermet* (f. 193v), *De imperfecta contricione* (f. 194), *Moralia Richardi hermite de natura apīs* (f. 194), *De vita cuiusdam puelle* (f. 194v), *A notabill Tretys off the ten Comandementys* (f. 195v), and *Item Idem de septem donis spiritus sancti* (f. 196). There are a few short Latin prayers interjected between these pieces, but apart from this Thornton has limited himself to Rolle’s English works, which are largely treatises explaining how to live a devout life. Three of these are narratives from Rolle’s experiences, *exempla* which tell a life story from which the reader can take example. The first one, the *Narracio*, is a little episode recounting the story of a woman who appeared to Rolle early in his hermetic life. When she lay down beside him, Rolle “dred þat scho sulde drawe [him] to iuell” and perceived that she was a devil (*Narracio*, 9). As in many accounts of demonic illusion, he demonstrates that the appropriate response is to banish the temptress she-devil is by calling on Jesus (in his case, the blood of Jesus) and make the sign of the cross. Similarly, when Malory’s Perceval is ensnared by the devil in the form of a beautiful woman, she disappears when he looks at the cross-shape made by his sword-hilt, and makes the sign of the cross on his forehead.⁵⁸ These symbols demonstrate the salvific power of the Crucifixion, particularly in cases where the Christian might believe themselves or others to be afflicted by a demonic spirit. The text which follows the *Narracio* is *De imperfecta contricione*, a tale of two sinful men (a canon and a scholar) in Paris. When near death, the canon is shriven, but he does not repent his sins in his heart, and thus realises he is damned: “3et walde I hafe delyte in myn alde lyfe [...] And forthy I had na stabyll purpose in gude, na perfite contrycyone; wharefore sentence of dampnacyone felle one me and

⁵⁸ “And by adventure and grace he saw hys swerde ly on the erthe nake[d], where in the pomell was a rede crosse and the sygne of the crucifixe [there]in, and bethought hym on hys knyghthode and hys promise made unto the good man tofornehande, and than he made a sygne in the forehed of hys. And therewith the pavylon turned up-so-downe and than hit chinged unto a smoke and a blak clowde” (*Malory’s Works* 550).

wente agaynes me” (*De imperfect contricione*, 12). The scholar, however, had “swa mekill contricyone [...] in his herte, syghynge in his breste, sobbynge in his throtte” that the sins he had written down on paper one day had disappeared the next, showing that “God has sene hys contrycione and forgyfes hym all his synnes” (12, 13). The importance of *meaning* the words you say in your inner soul, rather than simply reciting them for the sake of convention, is a theme which continues in Rolle’s meditation on Jesus’s name, the *Oleum Effusum* (*Of the vertus of the holy name of Jesu*, f. 192); he stresses, in very simple and understandable terms, that a sinner must be truly contrite in order to be fully cleansed of his sins and achieve salvation. The *Oleum Effusum* is a discussion of the worthiness of Jesus’s name, and explains why it should be contemplated. Rather than recite the name out of convention or habit, Rolle invites the reader to meditate on the sound and react to the love it brings. He relates his own experience of concentrating on the holy name, recalling his extremely sentimental emotions as if languishing over a departed lover:

The nam of Ihesu has taughte me for to *synge* and has lyghtenede my mynde with the *hete* of vnmade *lyghte*. Therefore *I syghe and crye*: wha sall schewe to þe, lufede Ihesu, þat *I langwys for lufe*? My flesche has faylede, and *my herte meltes in lufe zarenande Ihesu*. (*Oleum Effusum*, 3, 5; emphasis added)

Rolle has called out the name of Jesus as he would to his lover, full of longing and passion, but this love is one of spiritual purity. This purity only increases the power of the love-bond, and Rolle adds that if you love and devote yourself to Jesus’s name, you will be strengthened: you will not fall to enemies, you will be wise, and the evil thoughts within you will be destroyed (5). The devotee will be, in essence, a soldier of God’s army, able to deflect all evils which would afflict them. In addition to gaining the protection of Christ, Rolle also claims that devotion to his name will bring joy (7). He closes his treatise with a reflection of his life which neatly summarises the hermit’s advice to his readers: “Ihesu es noghte funden in riches bot in pouerte, noghte in delytes bot in penance, noghte in wanton ioyeynge bot in bytter gretynge, noghte emange many bot in anelynes” (9). As a guide for the contemplative life of fellow hermits and holy figures, this is an exemplum to follow strictly; for those involved with the secular world, such as Thornton and other members of the lay community, it acts as a reminder to avoid getting caught up in the temptations of worldly company and wealth. Jesus, and thus salvation, can only be found in time spent devoted to solitary meditation, a meditation which requests an

emotional response. Finally, *De vita cuiusdam puelle* relates the daily life of a female hermit, and he explicitly states that her holy practices and habits can be used as an exemplum: “Richard Herymyte reherces þis tale in ensampill” (*De vita cuiusdam puelle*, 14). All of these pieces use story-telling and personal narration of life events to connect to the sympathies of the medieval Christian reader.

Rolle also makes spiritual concerns more understandable through the use of metaphor; *Moralia Richardi heremite de natura apis* compares humans to bees and birds in order to clarify the nature of the soul by means of familiar earthly images. Men who love God are like bees because they are never idle (if not working, they should be thinking of and praying to God), they keep their wings bright and clean (by keeping their soul pure and following the commandments), and they fight off the enemies (devils) who try to take their honey (love of God). In addition, he compares mankind to birds; some are good at flying, while others “are of ill flyghynge for heuynes of body” and are tied to the earth because “theyre herte ryste and delyttes þaym in sere lufes of mene and women” (*Moralia Richardi*, 13-14,14). Again, the issue of illusion versus sincerity is of concern to Rolle; he speaks of other birds who have large wings and the appearance of flight, but are not able to fly. These men/birds “fastes and wakes and semes haly to mens syghte, bot thay may noghte flye to lufe and contemplacyone of God, þay are so chargede wyth othyre affeccyons and othire vanytes” (14). This is a warning from Rolle to avoid using artificial holiness to gain fame and respect, and certainly acts as a vivid and clear metaphor that even the less educated could understand. Indeed, Rolle has a “gift for language that he is able to share a sense of the actual process [...] of spiritual discipline which for all the mystics is the weapon in the battle against the forces of darkness that self-evidently threaten to destroy human fulfilment” (Glasscoe, 59). Sincere spirituality becomes its own weapon against human failure; the treatise emphasises that humankind’s greatest enemy is not an external foe, but its own weaknesses. This is a view which lingers in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*; its understanding of human fallibility illuminates the tragedy of the downfall of Arthur’s kingdom.

A notabill Tretys off the ten Comandementys and *Item Idem de septem donis spiritus sancti* are less poetically creative than the works previously discussed, but they continue the practical application of Rolle’s texts. The treatise on the Ten Commandments is just that: a thorough, clear explanation of what following the commandments entails in daily life. Of particular note are the issues Rolle discusses

which are especially relevant to contemporary concerns, such as cautioning against the use of astrology, sorcery, witchcraft, charms, divining and other magical arts in the first commandment. The Anglo-Norman treatise on the Ten Commandments in Paris, BnF, MS fr. 19525 (thirteenth century) also warns against sorcery when discussing the tenth commandment: “think now on these things: whether you have believed in sorcery, or practised it, or set an example, or consented to it; whether you watched the seasons, the weather, the new moon, enchantment...” (*Cher alme*, 333). However, while the Anglo-Norman text focuses on lechery and covetousness in its discussion, Rolle is largely concerned with the Christian’s relationship with God; in his explanation of the second commandment (“þou sall noughte take þe name of god in vayne”), Rolle cautions against swearing by or calling upon Jesus’s name without actually meaning it. Both texts, however, are interested in the particulars of the seventh commandment, against theft; the Anglo-Norman tells the reader not to engage in direct and indirect robbery through wayward merchants and usurers, while Rolle includes a warning against “violence or drede” committed by “mynysters of þe kyng; or thurgh extorcyone, als lordes duse” (*Cher alme*, 329 and *A notabill Tretys*, 17). *Item Idem de septem donis spiritus sancti* enumerates the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost and describes how to use these gifts to separate ourselves from earthly riches, correctly use and understand the contemplation of God, undertake good deeds and avoid all sins. Rolle explains, essentially, how mankind should “ledys their lyfe in this worlde reghtwysely” (*Item Idem*, 19). His teachings work to de-construct the complexities of religion and re-organise its components in a way that all can understand. Rolle’s writings function as guidance between the religious and secular worlds, operating as a model to draw example from and which encourages the personal bond between the Christian and God, without the assistance of a third party.

Not all of the devotional works included in the Thornton manuscript are limited to practical application, however; some of the writings lean towards contemplation and meditation, indicating the compiler’s interest in mysticism, reflecting the affective spiritualism which Thornton displays in many of his literary choices. One piece is a short rumination by Rolle on why it is good to delight in and yearn for God (*Item Idem de delectacione in deo*, f. 196v). Rolle often used the affections humans have for earthly things and transferred them to those of a spiritual nature, using the body of Christ as a bridge (Gray, 208). Thus, as in lyrics which use

affective piety, Jesus becomes the sinner's lover in *Item Idem de delectacione in deo*, and the love of Christ solidifies their contemplation of God. Most of this contemplation relied heavily on the experiences of sorrow (at images of pain) and joy (at the sound of Christ's name); Rolle claims his meditative experiences are what Denis Renevey calls "physico-contemplative", achieving feelings of *fervor* (heat), *dulcor* (sweetness), and *canor* (song) (105). *The Anehede of Godd with mannis saule* (or *Of Angel's Song*, f. 219v), one of the Walter Hilton pieces in the Thornton manuscript, focuses on this "purification"; Hilton states that, for your soul to become one with God, you must clear your mind of worldly desires and focus on spiritual thoughts. When the soul is thus cleansed, it can be illuminated by the wisdom and love of God, as well as comforted by the Angel's Song, as Hilton calls it: "Bot what pat sange es, it may noughte [be] dyscryuede be no bodyly lyknes, for it es gastely, and abown all manere of ymagynacyone and mans reson. It may be perceyuede and felide in a saule, bot it may noghte be spoken" (*The Anehede of Godd*, 17). This indescribable divine sound was then capable of transferring joy and comfort to the person meditating. Whilst exhorting his readers to purify and open themselves to the hearing of this heavenly song, Hilton is practical in his precautions, warning that "ouertrauells [...] turnes þe braynes" and this can lead to fantasies and delusions which are not spiritually authentic (18). He also claims that from Devil-inspired frenzies "sprynge errors and heresydes, false prophesydes, presympcyons and false rusynngs, Blasfemydes, and scandirynges" (19). In his warnings, Hilton appears to be cautioning against the heretical ideas that could stem from the misuse and misunderstanding of the visions he so clearly cherishes.

As the emphasis on feeling meant that the language of mystical treatises could be very close to that of affective devotion, it is thus no surprise that one of Hilton's works in Thornton's collection focuses on the memory of Christ's Passion, *The Virtue of Our Lord's Passion* (f. 229v). The image of the suffering Jesus conjures up intense feelings of sorrow and penitence, which can encourage the personal relationship between Christ and the reader. In the mystic tradition, the force of the feelings brought about by a contemplation of the figure of Christ lead to a transcendent mystical experience (Gray, 208). *The Virtue of Our Lord's Passion* does not conjure up images of Christ's suffering, but rather informs the reader precisely *why* it is worthwhile to spend so much time in contemplation of the Passion: no matter how grievous the sin, the truly penitent can call upon the Passion and obtain

salvation. Here Hilton comforts the lay community, the Christian masses – opposing the idea that only those who spend their entire lives contemplating spiritual matters can be saved, and assuring the reader that many can be saved provided they keep their commandments and are fully penitential (*Virtue of Our Lord's Passion*, 45). He warns against taking advantage of this, however, and reminds that you cannot be fully penitential without desiring salvation – salvation which was specifically provided by the Passion (46). It is a discussion of the process of meditation for those in a spiritual calling as well as for the lay Christian who might need encouragement to contemplate Jesus's suffering.

While none of the Rolle (or Hilton) treatises in the Thornton manuscript specifically discusses the importance of Mary, there are several Marian pieces in Lincoln Cathedral MS 91 (*De miraculo beate Marie; A Preyere off the ffyve Ioyes of oure lady; Hymn to the Trinity, the Virgin, and Jesus; Oracio de VII gaudia; Anoper salutacioun till our Lady*; and other small prayers and poems) and these, too, could be used and seen as emotional and educational tools, particularly in her role in the Passion of Christ. Lyrics of the joys and/or sorrows of Mary act as mnemonic devices to teach the major events of the Virgin's Life (Whitehead, 115). The Pietà was a popular devotional figure in the late Middle Ages, and the moving image of the mother grieving over her dead son is used just as affectively in lyric as it is in sculpture and painting (107). Mary is depicted in the lyrics expressing her passionate maternal grief, and it is from this that readers should "learn" the appropriate feeling to experience when they are faced with the Passion of Christ; the sorrow of Mary should move the reader to sorrow, the grief she is experiencing should be reflected and parodied. The act of "seeing" is paramount in an affective lyric, and as such, it is important to note Mary's sensitive and feminine gaze upon Jesus, for it is with her eyes that the reader is meant to be viewing Jesus's wounded body; Christiania Whitehead states that the person meditating is asked to "view his sensations of sorrow and compassion for Christ's suffering as a wound that replicates, either the physical wound in Christ's side, or Mary's psychological wound of maternal anguish (112). Thus, not only is the general reader reacting to Mary's sorrow, but any adult figure reading the text can identify with the parental nature and concern of the Passion narrative (116). Marian lyrics, like the works of Richard Rolle, use affective sensations to draw the reader into a close relationship with God as well as work as educational tools to direct the faithful into a better understanding of their spirituality.

The Marian lyrics and the affective material of Rolle and Hilton were popular and accessible to devout late medieval readers, and they were also particularly relevant for the Thornton manuscript; Thornton's religious habits, ranging from practical to emotional, are linked strongly with the affective spiritualism provided by Christ's wounds in violent Passion narratives, many of which grace the pages of both Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 and Thornton's other compilation, British Library MS Add. 31042. Thornton's interest in an affective language can be seen not only in the religious texts he copied, but also in his secular material, as I will demonstrate.

Medical Literature and the Body

The Passion narratives are not the only texts in the Lincoln Cathedral manuscript to be interested in the body. The final item is a medical treatise, the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* (ff. 280-321), and its organisation and approach to different parts of the body illuminates medieval conceptualisations of the human body. The *Liber* contains a range of recipes for healing drinks and plasters for a diversity of body ailments. The remedies are arranged by the affected member, starting with the head. Pains in the head, heart, and stomach dominate the list of ailments, with recipes for such things as "werke and vanytee in þe hede", "euyll at þe hert" and "gryndyng in þe body" (*Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, 1-3, 24-25, 21-24). Particularly interesting is the large section on "saues", which occupies folios 308 to 314. The section gives very thorough instructions on how to make drinks (or "saues"), plasters, and poultices for the care and healing of wounds, as well as how to mend broken bones, clean out dead flesh, stop the bleeding of severed veins, cleanse festering wounds and execute brain surgery. The use of salves to heal wounds features in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, after Gawain and Priamus have given each other deadly wounds. Gawain's men are concerned when they see the extent of his wounds, but he assures them that Priamus has a (holy) ointment that will heal them both. The two knights are cared for by their men with the magical salve (ll. 2710-13), which is applied with "clene hondes" and "clere watire" to cleanse the wounds, much as the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* instructs the reader to use a *Gratia Dei* poultice, which cleanses wounds (68). The alliterative *Morte Arthure*'s interest in the healing of the human body is, then, arguably informed by a text such as the *Liber*. In his fascinating discussion of the fragmenting of chivalric bodies in the *Practica* of English surgeon John Arderne, Jeremy Citrome highlights the importance to Arderne of maintaining the wholeness

of chivalric bodies, for the dissolving body also involves the “dissolving” of chivalric identity (139). Thus, knights (and surgeons) must engage in an “anxious self-regulation, an insistence upon their own bodies as positively distinct from those collapsed bodies with which they are trained to engage” (161). That is, in order to deal with the dismembered bodies a knight constantly encounters, they *must* emphasise the importance of the wholeness of their own well-formed, healthy body; the underlying emphasis in medieval medical treatises is on maintaining the identity (and soul) of the injured.

The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*’ concern with injuries to the head and the heart can be connected with the maintenance of the “self”. Altogether the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* gives twenty-seven recipes for general healing plasters/drinks and thirty-four to help clear festers and broken bones, several which are specifically for the head. The heart and head were believed to be “instrumentis of þe soule”, along with the hand and the liver, according to *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, a Middle English translation of a fourteenth-century Continental medical treatise (30). They were considered principal members of the body, and the neck one of the greater non-principal members. The head was considered the most important member of the body, according to Guy and his medical authorities, as it included the brain and the eyes; sight and knowledge are thus placed, physically and symbolically, “in þe hiest place of al þe body” (37). It is here that the virtues of wit, imagination, thought, reason and memory abide (41). Knowledge of the heart’s function in the Middle Ages was based on the theories of two classical authorities, Aristotle and Galen; while Aristotle believed that the heart reigned supreme, Galen argued that the brain was the source of movement. Medieval scholars struggled to reconcile these two contradicting beliefs, and were largely aided by Avicenna’s *Canon* in the eleventh century, which reasoned that the soul resided in the heart, and thus the heart was the power source for all other organs (and their functions). That is, “the motion of the heart, a primary movement that in turn moves all the other parts of the body, is caused by the soul” (Webb, 22). The soul’s connection to the body was the heart, therefore the central location for the spiritual members is in the breast. Guy states that the heart is “forsope the instrument of alle þe vertues of þe body and þe ful oonhede of þe soule”, and thus it takes pride of place in the chest, where it sits “as a kyng and a lord, nouȝt bowynge to eny partye” (54, 55).

This metaphor of the heart as a king is particularly interesting, as there is an

emphasis on striking noble lords through the heart in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and, of course, Christ's heart is pierced in Passion narratives; nobility and spirituality are closely connected. Guy continues this image when he explains that blood coming from the liver is made spiritual by the heart and then "bequeped" to the rest of the body (54). The *Middle English Dictionary* offers various definitions for the term "spiritual"; it may mean "immaterial", "intellectual", "divine", "imaginative", or refer to the "work of bodily spirits". Guy's meaning here seems closely tied to the *Middle English Dictionary*'s definition as "originating in or affecting the soul"; the heart is the source of the soul, and it sends it out through the nerves and veins, or the "conduits for powers dispersed from the soul and distributed to all the members" (Webb, 21). The "blood of lyf" travels a circuit through these spiritual organs, where its spiritual state is altered before being passed on to the rest of the body. The neck serves an important role as a connector between the major spiritual members of the head and the heart (*Guy*, 48). The hands, too, take part in the spiritual nature of the body; their central function is to protect the spiritual organs: "The Creatour or Maker apparailled man wiþ handes and wiþ resoun in stede of armour" (49). When a sword hand is lost, a warrior obviously loses his ability to protect his spiritual members and his own identity; the body becomes part of a man's armour just as armour is able to become part of a man's body. Citrome addresses the melding of armour and the human body in *Knyghthode and Bataile*; the "enclosing armour" and the knight's body are "conflated in a way that emphasizes their interdependence in the maintenance of chivalric identity" (161). The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*' attention to head and heart injuries, as well as its emphasis on healing "salves", reflects a concern for the wholeness of the body and the spirit, a concern which is in evidence throughout the Thornton manuscript.

Violence to the Body in Passion Narratives

The language of the Passion literature in the Thornton manuscript, particularly its handling of violence and its use of affect, requires further analysis. The gospels, the liturgy and early exegetical texts supply the foundations of the Passion narrative, but the gospels themselves have little information about the crucifixion as regards the appearance of Jesus's wounded body or Mary grieving over her son's corpse. By the twelfth century, however, writers began to fill in graphic descriptions of the Passion in Latin prose and verse, often taking details from passages in the Hebrew Bible

which were believed to be prophetic, particularly Psalm 21 and the book of Isaiah (Bestul, 27). Whilst John 19:34 simply states that “one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water”, Middle English poems graphically portray the wound to Jesus’s side, and often identify his heart as the primary wounded organ; *Ihesu thi swetnes* (f. 219 of Lincoln Cathedral MS 91), for example, states that “his herte was perchede with a spere” and that “his sydes full bla and bludy ware” (l. 59, 57). In these affective lyrics, Christ’s wounded heart stood as a “symbol and proof of His love” as well as a “resting-place, in which a man may hide enveloped in Christ’s love”, and became a popular image in fifteenth-century devotion (Woolf, 186). The emotional connection between Christ’s suffering and Christ’s love was pivotal; the Cistercians led a theological reformation which focused on Christ’s humanity and suffering, as well as meditation and inner spiritual growth, and which was continued by the emotional devotional practice of the Franciscans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Bestul, 35). This expressed itself in terms of a growing literary interest in the Passion of Christ and the culture of affective piety. In particular, vivid detail of Christ’s wounds evoked sensational and sympathetic images of the Passion and functioned as an aid in meditation. Lyrics such as those written by Richard Rolle provided “a text for a spiritualized psychological drama, serving specifically to prepare readers for the exercise of contemplation” (Ellis and Fanous, 138). Common focal points for meditation were the enumeration of Christ’s bones, profuse bleeding from his wounds, ripped skin from the garments torn from the dried blood on his body, trampling, hair-pulling, and driving the nails through Christ’s feet and hands.

Passion narratives dwell especially, however, on the spear wound which pierces Jesus’s heart and side. Christ’s spear wound holds great symbolic power; in the late medieval spiritual desire to become one with Christ, the sinner could enter Jesus’s heart through the wound. This union could also take place through participating in Mary’s grief. In Wynkyn de Worde’s edition of the pseudo-Bonaventure *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, Mary is “wounded in her herte wyth a new wounde of sorowe” and “the swerde of this spere hath perced bothe the body of the sone and the soule of the moder”.⁵⁹ Passion literature may also indicate that it is not

⁵⁹ Bonaventure, *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (or *Our lorde god stronge and myghty, and myghty in battayle, he is kynge of glorie*), trans. Nicholas Love (London: Wynkyn de Worde,

just the heart that is pierced, but that it has also struck the liver and lungs; the *Long Charter of Christ* vividly describes the power of the invasive spear:

With a spere my hert they stonge
 Prow my lyuyr and my longe
 Vpon my syde they made a wownde
 That my hart blode ran to grownde.

(*Long Charter of Christ, B-Text*, ll. 221-24)

The heart still receives the main point of the thrust, but the liver and the lungs are also damaged. The Charter of Christ tradition,⁶⁰ in which God grants mankind the kingdom of heaven in a legal charter, includes the meditative image of the crucified Christ and sometimes literalises the charter metaphor so that the parchment becomes Christ's skin, the pen becomes the lance, the ink becomes Christ's blood and the seal becomes his wounded heart (Woolf, 210.) Legal terms provided yet another way to understand and enumerate Christ's suffering. The careful naming of Christ's wounds, as with the itemisation of the instruments of the Passion, becomes a way to focus on the whole; as Flora Lewis points out, the "fragmentation of the Passion narrative to meditate on each individual instrument and action" is simultaneous with a "parallel desire for totality" within the body of Christ (222).

Religious devotion was increasingly being brought into the home; an ever greater number of nobles began to use the monastic models of meditation and spiritual development for their personal use in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, leading to an increasing demand for spiritual texts for the wider reading public. The Passion was particularly popular in late medieval England, as demonstrated by vernacular lyrics, which served both pastoral and private devotional purposes in society (Bestul, 66). Lyrics were quite commonly used in sermons to admonish the congregation or act as a memorable summary of the themes being preached. Friars viewed them as helpful vehicles to transmit religious doctrines and spur practitioners into examining their own personal devotion. They were also used privately by the middle and upper-class lay as a supplement to their daily devotional programmes (Whitehead, 98-99). The lyrics served the devout Christian as an aid in their own

1507), online, *Early English Books Online*, Web, 20 December 2012, image 109. <<http://0-eebo.chadwyck.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/home>>

⁶⁰ The Passion narrative is exclusive to the long charter material; the short charter texts cut the Crucifixion scene so that the charter metaphor is predominant. See Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 213.

private contemplation, using rhythm and images to appeal to the senses and thus engage the reader's feelings as they meditate on the humanity of Christ. In order to do so, the lyrics often utilised detailed images of the suffering of Christ on the cross to give the reader a vivid mental picture. Thomas Bestul argues that the grotesque descriptions of the crucifixion scene are not just a result of the spiritual reformations and affective piety of the late Middle Ages, but are also connected with the use of torture in medieval judicial systems; he points out that the increasing obsession with the body in medieval culture and the extreme bodily violence found in the Passion narratives coincides with the general judicial reform in Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the consequent re-emergence of legal torture. It is certainly true that the Passion lyrics, "in keeping with the late medieval taste for spectacle and display", have a "great emphasis on Christ's public suffering and on his bloody and disfigured body" (57). However, this focus on judicial torture obscures the inventiveness of medieval theology about and literary reworkings of the Passion, according to which physical violence to the human body is *essential* for the Christian's association with Christ's pain – not because it reflects the punishment of criminals but because it harnesses the reader's own experience of suffering. Affective piety aimed at intensifying the religious experience. Strong visual pictures heightened emotion by means of the senses. Mary Carruthers points out the importance of "affective" visual images in memory which call on personal experience: "successful memory schemes all acknowledge the importance of tagging material emotionally as well as schematically, making each memory as much as possible into a personal occasion by imprinting emotional associations like desire and fear, pleasure or discomfort" (60). The function of the intensely graphic images in Passion narratives is the same as in the secular alliterative tradition; set images and words create a vocabulary to trigger the memory and call to mind certain feelings and reactions. The heart, the human soul, produces the memory images and relays them to the brain, where the associated emotional perception can be recalled by visual perception (48-49). The reader is meant to feel the pain of Christ, the grief of Mary, and, correlatively in the secular poetry, the despair of the dying soldiers.

A focus on the Passion and affective language is evident in the Lincoln manuscript. Of the prayers addressed to Mary or Christ, eight of these are solely on the Passion, and several prayers address the cross and/or Christ's wounds, including *A Meditacione of the fyve woundes of oure Lorde Ihesu Criste with a prayere in þe*

same (f. 212), *A medytacion of the Crosse of Criste with a prayere* (f. 212b), *A noþer antyme of þe passyoun of Criste Ihesu* (f. 278) and *A preyere to þe wounde in Crystis syde*⁶¹ (f. 278). Many of the Passion texts are in Latin and engage in the *Arma Christi* tradition of listing the instruments of the Passion, rather than concentrate on Christ's physical pain. Typical is the prayer *Crucem, coronam spiniam* (f. 278b), which recites the *Arma Christi* in a check-list of items for meditation:

Crucem, coronam spiniam,
 Clavos, diramque lanceam
 Devote veneremur;
 Acetum, fel, veronicam,
 Virgas, sputaque, spongeam
 Iugiter meditemur... (ll. 1-6)

[The cross, the crown, the thorns,
 The nails and the dreadful lance
 Let us devoutly worship;
 The vinegar, the poison, the Veronica,
 The rods and the spittle, the sponge
 Upon these let us continually meditate]

As the poem continues down the list, the Latin is direct, leaving simple but clear images to help place the reader at the scene of Christ's crucifixion. The Latin prayer which follows it in the manuscript is given a Middle English title, *A Preyere to þe wounde in Crystis Syde*, and focuses specifically on the spear wound to Christ's side:

Salv[e] plaga domini, domus requiei,
 Tu tutum refugium, anc[o]ra fidei:
 Per te iam a cr[i]mine nos purgemur rei,
 Et post introibimus in conspectu dei (ll. 13-16)

[Hail wound of the lord, home of rest,
 You are a safe refuge, the anchor of faith:]

⁶¹ *A preyere to þe wounde in Crystis syde* is the Middle English heading Thornton gives to the Latin hymn *Salve plaga lateris nostril redemptoris*.

Through you we are now cleansed from the crime of the thing,
 And after we will enter into the presence of God]⁶²

It reminds the reader that Jesus suffered to cleanse mankind of its sins and identifies the act of this salvation – the very wound in Christ’s side – as a place of respite and refuge. This concern to expound on the symbolism of the wound in Christ’s side is evident also in the English lyrics in the manuscript. There is a large segment devoted to the Passion in *Ihesu thi swetnes* (f. 219, item 44), which repeats the familiar image of the heart being pierced with a spear – in a vivid and iconic scene:

His sydes full bla and bludy ware,
 That sum-tyme ware full brighte of blee;
His herte was perchede with a spere;
 His bludy woundes was reuthe to see.
 My ransone, I-wys, he payede þare
 And gaffe his lyfe for gylte of me.
 His dulefull dede burde do me dere
And perche myne herte for pure petee (ll. 57-64, emphasis added).

The image is cyclic – Jesus’s literal piercing to the heart figuratively pierces the reader’s. The reader is invited to feel the same emotions Mary did when her heart is pierced with grief after seeing her son on the cross. This cyclical pattern of pierced hearts is a common trope in affective lyrics, reminding the reader of Simeon’s prophecy to Mary in Luke 2:35, as pointed out in the Marian lyric *Jesu Cristes milde moder*: “Hise wundes sore and smerte / Stungen thureu and thurw [Mary’s] herte / As te bihichte Simeon” (ll. 16-18). Sensory feelings of pain and anguish are stimulated so that the Christian may understand Christ’s suffering.

The manuscript’s inclusion of *The Previte off the Passioun*, an English translation of the pseudo-Bonaventure *De Mysteriis Passionis Iesu Christi* is a prime example of the compiler’s interest in Passion narratives and affective piety which runs throughout his material, and as one of the first items copied, it must have been of particular interest to Thornton. Bonaventure and his followers espoused the new spirituality in the thirteenth century which increased devotion to the human suffering

⁶² I am very grateful to Dr. Mark Stansbury for the help he gave me in the Latin translations. For further discussion of these prayers, see John B. Friedman, *Northern English Books, Owners, and Makers in the Late Middle Ages* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1995) 161, 172-73.

of Christ (Bestul, 43). The *Previte* focuses on bodily pain and torture; the translation narrates the Passion of Christ, breaking the meditation into stages for the holy hours, encouraging the evocation of strong sensory pictures and asking the reader to “make hym-selfe present in his thoghte as if he sawe fully with his bodily egne all the thyngys þat be-fell abowte þe crosse” (*Previte*, 198). To this end it provides the reader with graphic and gory images; Longinus, with his spear, “ffersely and with a fell herte [...] thriste oure lorde thorow-owte his swete herte, & made a greouse wonde” (208). Other images in the Middle English pseudo-Bonaventure, such as injuries to the head, are striking in their vividness. Christ is struck on the head, and the thorns pierce his brain pan:

Be-hold hym nowe with compassione & tendirnes of herte, hou his heued was thurge-prikkede with scharpe thornes thurghe his blesside brayne, and ofte-tyme þey smote hyme with þe septure one þe heued fore scorne & dispite; and beholde his blyssede face all rynnande with rede blode. (204)

The gory image emphasises Christ’s physical agony; in addition, his body is broken: “In this hevvy fallynge all þe ioyntes & cenowes of his blesside body braste in-sondire” (206). The *Previte*’s violence is there to remind the reader of the suffering Christ went through for human salvation.

Robert Thornton’s other manuscript, the London Thornton manuscript (BL MS Add. 31042), also includes several Passion texts. With regard to the theme of the London Thornton manuscript, Phillipa Hardman notes that its texts “all indicate a typical late mediaeval concentration on the humanity of Christ expressed chiefly through devotion to Mary and to the Passion” (268). The main body of the London manuscript is comprised of religious texts and romances; a fragment of the *Cursor Mundi*, a meditation on the life of Christ, the *Northern Passion*, accounts of the sieges of Jerusalem and of Milan, and romances of Charlemagne and King Richard.⁶³ Ralph Hanna has demonstrated that the *Northern Passion* was probably copied around the same time as the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which emphasises Thornton’s early simultaneous interest in Arthurian and Passion narratives, even if he did not decide to link all of these in the same physical manuscript (“The Growth of Robert Thornton’s Books”, 56). Hardman suggests that the London Thornton manuscript is organised as a Passion-centric manuscript, with extracts from the *Corpus Mundi*

⁶³ For further discussion of the contents and organization of the London manuscript, see John Thompson, *Robert Thornton and the London Thornton MS* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987).

acting as a prequel to the *Northern Passion* and the *Siege of Jerusalem* as a sequel to it, with the final prayers to the cross as a concluding meditation (263).⁶⁴ In addition, she argues that the blank spaces left for illumination are intentional, constituting “an opportunity [for] the reader [...] to visualize the incident which Thornton has marked out, using the rubric not only to indicate the subject of the episode, but also to stimulate the imagination” (259).

Although incomplete, the copy of *The Northern Passion* in the London manuscript is still the largest piece on the Crucifixion in Thornton’s second compilation and further illuminates the role of affective violence in Thornton’s texts. Thornton’s version is fragmentary, with a much shorter segment on the Crucifixion than the version extant in BL, MS Harley 4196, but it still conveys the essential importance of the Passion to medieval Christian devotion. The reader is presented with the image of Christ’s stretched and broken body; the soldiers “dide a rope one the ryghte hande” as Jesus is placed on the cross, so that “the blode braste owte for strenghe strange”, and “drewe his arms than full faste” so that “the synowes braste alle in twaa” (ll. 1614-15, 1617, 1619). Mary cries bloody tears as she beholds the sight of her son’s wounds: “Oure lady herde thies wordis swete / and teris of blode scho gane downe lete / all was hir face by rowne with blode / whene scho by helde Ihesu one the rode” (ll. 1747-50). Mary’s grief demonstrates how to correctly respond to the Passion; she takes on Christ’s wounds as her own. Longinus’ spear thrust in Christ’s side is given the longest description of all the wounds:

longeus putt the spere hym fra
 To Ihesus herte it gune ga
 the blode by gane owt to sprynge
 and þe water owte to thrynge

⁶⁴ Thornton seems to have consciously chosen to organize the beginning of the London manuscript so that the *Siege of Jerusalem* directly responds to Christ’s Passion with the brutal destruction of the Jewish people; see Michael Johnston, “Robert Thornton and *The Siege of Jerusalem*”, *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 23 (2009): 125-62. Recent scholarship has also provided intriguing analyses of affective vengeance and penitence in the *Siege*; see Maija Birenbaum, “Affective Vengeance in Titus and Vespasian”, *The Chaucer Review* 43.3 (2009): 330-44, and Suzanne Yeager, “Jewish Identity in *The Siege of Jerusalem* and Homiletic Texts: Models of Penance and Victims of Vengeance for the Urban Apocalypse”, *Medium Ævum* 80 (2011): 56-84. For further discussion on revenge in the *Siege*, see David Lawton’s discussion of recreational hunting and the image of the Jew: “Titus Goes Hunting and Hawking: The Poetics of Recreation and Revenge in *The Siege of Jerusalem*”, *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. O. S. Pickering (Woodbridge, UK: Brewer, 1997) 105-18.

ffra deuylls we ware with his blode boghte
 and with þe water waschede fra euyll thoghte (ll. 1877-80b)

As with all the previous Passion narratives, the poet specifically identifies the heart as being pierced by the spear; the blood and water stems directly from the heart. These bodily liquids have been altered by the injuring; the blood has purchased the redemption of humankind and the water has cleansed Christians of their sins. The redemption of mankind achieved by the spilling of this divine heart blood is almost immediately symbolised by the recovery of blind Longinus; endowed with the power to heal (physically and spiritually), Christ's blood restores Longinus' sight as soon as it touches him.

This direct connection between Christ's pierced heart and healing would have been familiar to the late medieval reader, who would also have recognised the blood and water flowing from Christ's side as symbolic of baptism and the Eucharist (Bestul, 39). The authors of Passion narratives reminded the reader of this connection through emphasis on Christ's horrible suffering. The *Northern Passion* also ensures that its readers remember that the Passion is not limited to the past, closing with a passage which requests they put the images into memory: "Send vs thi strange pynynge / To hald it stabilly in oure menyngge / agayne þe deuyll oure warant it be" (ll. 2081-83, emphasis added). The image of the Passion must be "sent" to the reader so that they may "hald it stabilly" in their "menyngge" (understanding, memory) and keep themselves safe from the devil. Indeed, the poet also offers a very tangible benefit for reading his poem (and other Passion literature): all those who have heard the narrative "sall haue a thowsande 3eris to pardone" (l. 2090). Regardless of whether or not Thornton had planned to illuminate the London manuscript, it is clear that he intended to use the texts in the manuscript as a way to meditate on the images of suffering in the Passion of Christ. Hardman does not, however, connect her hypothesis with the romances in Thornton's other manuscript, Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91, which contains the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Affective piety and devotion to Mary may be slightly less pronounced in the Lincoln Cathedral manuscript, but they are still prominent in its contents, and readers of the *Morte Arthure* would have been very aware of its context within the manuscript and any linguistic similarities shared between the devotional material and the romance.

Violence and Injuring in the *Morte Arthure*

Roger Dalrymple has shown that the recurrence of pious tags in Middle English metrical romances has associative value and that the use of devotional Passion-formula, for example, intensifies emotion (26, 28). While I am not concerned with pious tags in this discussion, representations of violence work similarly; like pious tags, affective violent language is “employed to anchor response to narrative and to foster a participatory dynamic between audience, narrator, and text” (Dalrymple, 29). That is, graphic images in the Passion material and in the *Morte Arthure* ask the reader to interact with the text. The previous analysis of affective violence in Passion texts illuminates how the combat of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* similarly invokes an emotional response from its readers. The most graphic images of violence in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* focus on attacking major areas of importance on the warrior’s body: the centre (heart, torso), the head, and the sword arm. The poet repeatedly describes how a sword or lance pierces and often cuts clean through the opponent’s body. In Arthur’s battle with Lucius in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the king stalks about to avenge the death of Kay and skewers the prince of Egypt and his horse:

Thane remmes þe riche kynge fore rewthe at his herte,
 Rydes into [þe] rowte his dede to reuenge,
 Presede into þe plumpe, and with a prynce metes
 That was ayere of Egipt in thos este marches,
 Cleues hym with Collbrande clenlyche in sondyre;
 He broches euen thorowe þe byerne and þe sadill bristes,
 And at þe bake of þe blonk þe bewells entamede. (ll. 2197-203)

The prince’s chest is ripped open; Arthur slices so emphatically through his entire torso that the horse’s bowels have also been pierced. On other occasions, ribs are crushed, as when Arthur’s knights had “braste with rank steel [their enemies] ribbes in sonder” (l. 2271). The injury to internal organs is implied in such strokes, and made fully explicit in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*; mutilated entrails (lungs, intestines, bowels, guts, etc) feature more than thirteen occasions. By doing this, Arthur’s knights are fighting in the most lethal way possible, following the guidelines for combat given in *Knighthode and Bataile*:

Empeche his hed, his face, have at his gorge,
 Bere at the breste, or s[e]rue him on the side

With myghti knightly poort, eue as Seynt George,
 Lepe o thi foo, loke if he dar abide;
 Wil he nat fle, wounde him; mak woundis wide,
 Hew of his honde, his legge, his thigh, his armys (ll. 369-74)

The author directs the warrior to the most effective areas to strike and, like the *Morte Arthure*-poet, is not afraid to express the gory strokes in a way which valorises the attacker (“with myghti knightly poort”). Indeed, the ferocious strokes are compared to those of Saint George. *Knighthode and Bataile* also warns against the inefficiency of “smiting”, encouraging the knight instead to “foyne” (stab, thrust) in order to cut through steel and bones and reach the entrails (ll. 376-82). Arthur’s knights follow these instructions perfectly, particularly when attacking the chest organs. This passage is particularly interesting because of its reference to “woundis wide”; the phrase is frequently used in Passion material⁶⁵ and connects the chivalric violence with the wounding of Christ.

The language of the *Morte Arthure* also picks up on this connection with affective response; as the reader mourns the violence of Jesus’s graphic wounds, he/she is similarly effected by the injuries of the knights in the Arthurian poem. The damage done to the heart is given special attention; it is the site of Christ’s spear wound and the principal organ which not only facilitates the “traffic of spirits” through the human body, but is also the location of the human soul (Webb, 18). There are several instances where the heart is struck by the offending weapon; the sword or lance “runnes” or “glodes” to the heart:

Sir Bedwere was borne thurghe and his breste thyrllede
 With a burlyche brannde, brode at þe hiltes;
 The ryall rannke stele to his herte rynnys,
 And he rusches to þe erthe – rewthe es the more! (ll. 2238-41)

The heart pierced by a spear reflects the function of affective violence evident in popular late-medieval Passion lyrics; both languages offer descriptive images of

⁶⁵ For example, in *A devout prayer to the Passion*, “The crown, and the scourges grete / That thou were with so sore ibette; / Thy wepinge and thy woundes wide” (ll. 65-67), and in *The wells of Jesus wounds*, “Jesus woundes so wide / Ben welles of lif to the goode” (ll. 1-2). See R. T. Davies 120-25 and 216.

bodily injuries to ask the reader to feel the pain of its victims. Similar injuries occur in both; in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*; during a battle with Lucius, Kay spots an enemy king and strikes through the liver and the lungs:

Bot sir Kayous þe keen castis in fewtyre,
 Chasez one a coursere and to a kynge rydys;
 With a lance of Lettowe he thirlllez his sydez
 That the lyuer and þe lunggez on þe launce lengez;
 The schafte sc[h]odyrde and schott in the schire byerne
 And soughte thorowowte þe schelde and in þe schalke rystez. (ll. 2165-70)

The alliterative *Morte Arthure* shares with language about Christ's wounds a preoccupation with striking the heart and creating affect; the images of secular violence are illuminated through an awareness of their use in Passion literature.

The image of the heart pierced by a spear must therefore come with emotional associations, similar to those found in religious material. As with Passion narratives, the memorable image conveys the agony which is being felt – by Christ or on the battlefield. As the mutilated body of Christ is described in poignant detail in the *Previte off the Passioure* – his beaten body, the streams of blood which “ran from hym on euery syde [...] owt of his blessed wondes”, the horror of his pierced side – in order to engrave onto the memory the image of the suffering of Christ, so the knights “gryselyche gronande for grefe” of their gory injuries in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* impress a memorable image on the reader's mind (*Previte*, 206; *Morte Arthure*, l.1373). It was thought that the continual recollection of a virtuous act – such as the Crucifixion – was morally healthy, as it enabled the Christian to remember the deed and practise self-sacrifice in his own life (Whitehead, 115). The intense images of the noble knights sacrificing themselves for a greater cause – in the case of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, their country's empire, Arthur, chivalry itself – function in a similarly emotive way, recalling deeds of heroism and sacrifice which the poem asks the reader to appreciate and echo, however minutely, in their own life. The piercing of the heart undoubtedly served as a similar experience of intensity for both religious material and the *Morte Arthure*; the literary influence worked in both directions, as evidenced by *Ihesu thi swetnes*, which uses the popular *topos* of Jesus as a warrior for mankind. The poem is full of battle imagery: “Whene he hade venqwyste his bataile / His banere full brade displayede es, / When so my faa will me assaile” (ll. 74-76). Not only has Christ “venqwyste” mankind's foe (sin), but he

triumphantly exhibits God's banner after the battle (the Harrowing of Hell and the Resurrection).⁶⁶

The alliterative *Morte Arthure* also contains graphic detail of attacks aimed at the head, or the “dwellynge of þe resonable soule” according to the *Cyurgie of Guy de Chauliac*. Arthur's Continental wars involve several instances of crushed skulls, pierced brains, cloven necks and beheadings. Obviously, beheading removes the source of intellect from the rest of the body, separates the mind from its vehicle; Arthur, when fighting the giant of St. Michel's Mount, “with þat stelen brande [...] strake ofe his hede” (l. 2129). A blow to the head, on the other hand, is used to destroy the source of thoughts itself – the brain. Arthur's knights “craschede doun crestez and cruschede brayne”, while the brains of Roman nobles explode: “braynes forebrusten thurghe burneste helmes” (ll. 2114 and 2272). The armour is destroyed and its beauty is marred by the grotesque image of the crushed brains. Middle English Passion literature also made use of head and brain injury in its violent descriptions; in the lyric *O litel whyle lesteneth to me*, Mary cries out that her “sones hed hath reste none, / But leneth on the schuldre bone. / The thornes thorow the panne [brain] is gone” (ll. 105-07). Whilst there is not necessarily a direct correlation between the Crucifixion and chivalric injuring, it is clear that the author of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* was aware of the affective function of the vocabulary of religious violence and used a similar language to establish his own images of secular battle. The alliterative *Morte Arthure* would not be the only Middle English romance to be aware of the affective qualities shared by Passion violence and knightly combat; commenting on the repetitive use of Passion formulae in the stanzaic *Morte Arthure*, Roger Dalrymple notes that, as the pious tags “cohere into a sustained pattern of imagery”, the secular poem “pursues a strand of related images of the suffering and wounding of the protagonists” (86).⁶⁷ These affective descriptions of chivalric violence are not necessarily positive with respect to the knights in either Arthurian poem; the reader is perhaps being asked to consider the injuring of Arthur's knights in light of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, to compare this violence in

⁶⁶ This *topos* can also be seen in, e.g., William Herebert's *What is he this lordling that cometh from the fight* (NIMEV 3906) and William Dunbar's “Done is a battell on the dragon black” (NIMEV 688.3).

⁶⁷ For Dalrymple's full argument on the effect of pious tags in the stanzaic *Morte Arthure*, see Roger Dalrymple, *Language and Piety in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000) 81-102.

different contexts. The recollection of an affective vocabulary shared with Passion narratives may force the reader to both praise and question the knights' behaviour, if the value of their wounds is measured by those of Christ. Given a general contemporary familiarity with the tropes of Passion narratives and Thornton's own religious practices, it not unlikely that as a compiler the latter would have recognised how violent images in the *Morte Arthure* and in his preferred prayers to the Passion shared an affective function. A fifteenth-century reader would also have recognised any similar iconography, and the intensity of feeling encouraged by Passion literature could be transferred to the secular violence encountered on Arthur's battlefield. The strong emotions recalled by the poignant religious image of a pierced heart allow the reader to experience the pain of the knights, glorifying the virtues of chivalric power and punishing its sins.

The human body was a potent image in the Middle Ages.⁶⁸ Its unity and destruction were not just aspects of physical form and nature; the body figured social and spiritual structures, and injuring had connections with the medical (flesh), the spiritual (soul and salvation) and the chivalric (power). As a human body is made up of component parts that unite in a whole, so is society; in the twelfth century, John of Salisbury, summarising Plutarch's "Instruction to Trajan", writes that "a republic is [...] a sort of body which is animated by the grant of divine reward and which is driven by the command of the highest equity and ruled by a sort of rational management" (*Policraticus*, 66). The citizens of the society are the different limbs that serve various functions in the organism that is the state. The soul is the Church, who directs the body politic as does the soul in a human body; the head is the prince, who rules the body and is ruled by the soul; the heart is the senate; the ears, eyes and mouth are the governors; the hands are soldiers and officials; the feet are the peasants; and so on (66-67). This view promoted a sense of community and an understanding that none of the parts could function as units independent from the body. An injury to any member has repercussions throughout the body politic; John of Salisbury explains that "a blow to the head [...] is carried back to all the members" just as "a wound unjustly afflicted upon any member whomsoever tends to the injury of the head" (137). The strong, unified body was used as a symbol for a healthy state that could overcome enemies, instead of a weak body subject to internal conflict

⁶⁸ For further discussion, see *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis, *York Studies in Medieval Theology I* (York: York Medieval Press, 1997).

(Beckwith, 28). However, this analogy also reinforced societal hierarchy, as the labour of the arms and legs was believed to be subordinate to the head. The king must be able to control his soldiers, the “wisdom and justice” of the head is apparent in his “moderate use of [the armed] hand” (*Policraticus*, 109). It is possible that the extreme power that Arthur and his men exert over the bodies of their enemies in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* indicate Arthur’s own superiority as the “head” of the body. However, although the author of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* seems to know and to reiterate this sense of social hierarchy, he is clearly aware of the instability of Arthur’s position. The king’s dream of Fortune’s wheel, wherein Lady Fortune casts him down from his lofty position, and the subsequent downfall of his kingdom, demonstrate that the author is aware that Arthur, as well as the societal hierarchy, is working within a historical cycle. Arthur, while sitting in a position of power, is vulnerable to humankind’s biggest obstacle – his own humanity.

Similarly, the body was also a metaphor within the medieval church. If the body politic is envisioned laying down instead of standing up, the emphasis swings from the head to the centrality of the heart as the supreme (and singular) power. This view reflects the unity of the Christian community: “Just as there is only one central source of life in the body, there is only one way to salvation and only one Christ” (Webb, 37). Christ’s body was an inclusive and exclusive symbol, one which defended its followers against outsiders. Beckwith argues that imaging of Christ’s body as a social order – a symbol of the unified Christian community – led to questions of hierarchy and how to police the entrance to Christ’s body; the Christian’s desire to enter his wound brought an increased intensity in the ripping and mutilating of Christ’s body in late medieval Passion narratives (Beckwith, 42-44). Certainly, membership in the Church was a path to redemption, but the late medieval yearning to be united with Jesus via his heart and the spear wound that pierced his side in the Passion was linked to more than a wish to be part of the Christian community; it was part of the individual’s desire to be personally connected to Jesus himself. Devout Christians wanted to be accepted into God’s grace and were concerned about gaining entrance to Heaven’s bliss; the narrative voice of a medieval religious lyric commonly agonised over the sinner’s own unworthiness (Whitehead, 96). Robert Thornton’s decision to include the alliterative *Morte Arthure* in the Lincoln manuscript can also be said to reflect the concerns of the medieval secular Christian, worried about his or her earthly sins. The alliterative

Morte Arthure is set within the courtly world of King Arthur and his royal nobles, but it is a world which is destroyed by its own pride, envy and greed. Mordred betrays his king and submits to the temptations of power; Arthur is distracted from protecting his own people by his increasing desire to conquer more land. The king's fall from grace is part of Fortune's cycle, but it is also ultimately destroyed by the weaknesses of the characters within the Arthurian world. The readers' sympathies are aroused by means of an affective vocabulary, but the fall of the realm reminds them that the knights are *not* divine figures, nor are they fighting for a religious cause. The excessively violent images in the poem highlight this disparity and perhaps, in the ripped bodies of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, Robert Thornton saw a parallel to the affective violence found in Passion texts; the language of injuring asks the reader to *feel* the chivalric wounds and manipulates the audience's emotional response. The image of the pierced heart in secular combat allows us to admire the courage and experience the pain of the soldiers, be moved by the knights' loyalty to their lord, and question the characters' actions.

Robert Thornton clearly felt the religious pieces he found worked well with the first pieces he collected, the *Morte Arthure* and *The Previte off the Passioun*, and he was interested in both violent narratives. Affective devotion centred on vivid images of the wounds of Christ was clearly a practice that Thornton participated in. The violence of warfare, indeed, can be viewed as a spiritual act; the sacrifice of blood which the knights in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* make for Arthur's cause reflects that which Christ makes for sinners. When injured by the Roman emperor, Arthur's blood symbolically runs down his body and bloodies his symbols of chivalry, his armour: "The blode of [þe] bolde kyng over þe breste rynnys, / Beblede al þe brode schelde and þe bryghte mayles" (ll. 2249-50). Jill Mann, in her discussion of knightly combat in Malory, suggests that knightly combat provides a structure for adventure which is carried out by the body; by submitting himself to chance, the knight exposes his physical body and discovers his inner potential (334). A knight jeopardizes his body when he enters into combat, but the engagement of two bodies in battle allows him to prove his own mettle; the outer, physical body reveals (and is integral to) the quality of the non-physical inner self. After the combat, the knights often surrender and join together in the wholeness of fellowship (338). Mann draws attention to the concept of Christ as a perfect knight-figure: he

enters into the “adventure” of the Crucifixion, where he exposes his body to suffering and wounds, and afterwards creates a wholeness between God and mankind, which is now redeemed of its sins (339). While the context of the combat in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* – the bitter war with Lucius – does not allow this reconciliation to happen often, it does occur when Gawain goes into the woods “wondyrs to seke” (l. 2513) and fights with Sir Priamus, an enemy soldier (ll. 2513-717). In an episode which is distinguished from the rest of the poem by its “adventure” setting, the two knights test each other’s bodies, discover their individual physical prowess and then, as previously mentioned, make a peace which involves the healing of their wounds with a holy salve. However, they attack and nearly destroy each other’s bodies before this “wholeness” of fellowship can take place. Even without reconciliation between fighters during Arthur’s wars, there is still a sense of the “wholeness” of an individual knight’s self being created; the violent acts which Arthur’s men can commit on their opponents’ bodies reveal their worthiness in a chivalric world where status is largely assigned via physical prowess. The reader participates in the chivalric world by observing and recalling the blood that is spilt by Arthur’s knights. Chapter Six will discuss the complex role of injuring in the Gawain and Priamus episode further, honing in on the role of chivalric sacrifice in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*.

The use of affective violence in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, inflicted on and by knights, asks the reader to emotionally respond to the injuring it encounters in the poem. She/he can both sympathise and moralise; the knights are victims of violence as well as perpetrators of brutality. The violence in the *Morte Arthure* echoes the devotional function of the language which relates the Crucifixion; feeding on the readers’ knowledge and awareness of Passion tropes, it also manipulates their affective sympathies. The connection violent language creates between Thornton’s texts – the *Morte Arthure*, the Passion narratives and the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* – draws attention to the interplay of genres within and across the romances, devotional literature and medical tracts in Thornton’s manuscripts and the alliterative *Morte Arthure* itself. The Lincoln Cathedral manuscript uses its genre awareness for not only discrimination, but also for cohesion. The shared tropes of injuring are also the means to share conceptualisations of physical sacrifice, making certain emotions and expectations common to religious material and romance narratives alike. The rhythm and images of the Passion lyrics engage the reader’s feelings, and these

devices serve the same function in Arthurian romance, where the author invites a sympathetic and complex response to the war-torn end to Arthur's golden reign.

V. Finding the “Scottish” in *Lancelot of the Laik*: History and Legend

It can be said that the narrative of King Arthur’s war with Galiot in the fifteenth-century Scottish poem *Lancelot of the Laik* does not venture far from its original French source, the thirteenth-century Prose *Lancelot*. When considered as a product of its particular social and literary environment, however, a seemingly unoriginal translation may take on a deeper meaning. Translation has always been an important forum for the transfer of cultures and ideologies; rather than see translations such as *Lancelot of the Laik* as derivative and consequently of less value, the modern critic and reader should be aware of its role in literary interchange. Michelle Warren emphasises the cultural relations that are formed through these translations, both in how they are the same as their originals and in the aspects altered by the translator (51-53). The reader is aware of the literary tradition (such as French romance) being translated, while the translator simultaneously provides changes (to language, narrative) so that the reader views it through the translator’s own cultural focal lens; through this exchange, the material develops its own unique perspective. Scholars have already identified two additions to *Lancelot of the Laik* that are reflective of its “Scottishness”; in order to place my own argument within this academic discussion, I will provide a survey of the current scholarly analysis of the originality of *Lancelot of the Laik*, and then move to my examination of the violent descriptions in the text, which suggests another way in which the translation has become “Scottish”. This discussion, in turn, will continue to develop my thesis’ argument that representations of violence are often manipulated to signify authorial tone, textual meaning and generic allusions.

Many of the episodes in *Lancelot of the Laik* are taken from the French romance: Arthur’s nightmares, Galiot’s challenge, the wars between Galiot and Arthur, the advice from the clerk, Lancelot’s imprisonment, Gawain’s prowess, and Lancelot’s use of disguise and his supremacy in battle. Scottish interest in such a poem is not surprising; chivalric culture thrived in Scotland in the latter part of the fifteenth century, when *Lancelot of the Laik* was composed. James IV (1488-1513) held several tournaments and encouraged the reading of romances (Smith, 31). Louise Fradenburg points out that James IV’s “particularly striking” way of using

chivalric motifs in his art of rule both confirmed Scotland's participation in a European aristocratic culture and indicated the king's "national" interests; the spectacular tournaments of the wild knight and the black lady, held in 1507 and 1508, impressed France and alarmed England, and were thus "a way of articulating national ambitions through the celebration of a chivalric ideal that in theory cut across national boundaries to create an aristocratic community" (179, 178). *Lancelot of the Laik* is similarly both "national" and international; although similar to its French source, it is in verse rather than prose, and there are other notable differences made by the Scottish translator which have been highlighted in scholarly discussions of *Lancelot of the Laik*: most notably, the prologue and Amytans' extended advice to the king in Book II.⁶⁹

The Dream Vision and Advice Literature in Late-Medieval Scottish Texts

The prologue takes the form of a strange dream vision that seems out of keeping with the rest of the story; a woeful lover falls asleep in a garden and dreams that a messenger of love, in the form of a bird, advises him to write a story of love for his lady in order to demonstrate his affection for her. It is similar to Chaucer's Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, which also starts with an admiration of flowers and spring, and has the narrator falling asleep in a meadow, only to have the God of Love upbraid him for his translations of works about false women, and the God of Love and Queen Alceste command he write about faithful female lovers. Although the dream vision of nature and love is a conventional frame inspired by *Roman de la Rose* and writers such as Chaucer and Lydgate (the latter in his *Temple of Glas*, for example), its presence in *Lancelot of the Laik* is reflective of another movement, a surge of interest in creating literature influenced by Chaucer in Scotland during the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The prologue may have been in part inspired by *The Kingis Quair*, most likely written by James I (1406-1437). The work

⁶⁹ For further discussion on the originality of *Lancelot of the Laik*, see Elizabeth Archibald, "Lancelot of the Laik: Sources, Genre, Reception", *The Scots and Medieval Arthurian Legend*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Nicola Royan (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005) 71-82; Flora Alexander, "Late Medieval Scottish Attitudes to the Figure of King Arthur: A Reassessment", *Anglia* 93 (1975) 17-34; J. M. Smith, *French Background of Middle Scots Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934); Martin Shichtman, "Sir Gawain in Scotland: a Hometown Boy Made Good", *King Arthur Through the Ages*, Vol. I, ed. Valerie Lagorio and Mildred Leake Day (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990) 234-45; and A. S. G. Edwards, "Contextualising Middle Scots Romance", *A Palace in the Wild: Essays on Vernacular Culture and Humanism in Late-Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen, A. A. MacDonald and S. L. Mapstone (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000) 61-73.

follows the king's meditations in prison, from his youth to his imprisonment. Imprisoned, the narrator desires to engage with the natural setting of the garden below.⁷⁰

The interest in the Chaucerian dream vision continued throughout the latter half of the fifteenth century in Scotland, used by not only the *Lancelot* poet, but also his contemporaries Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas. The narrator of William Dunbar's *The Thrissill and the Rois* has a vision in his bed in which May asks him to write a poem in her honour (ll. 22-42) and then witnesses Nature commanding the birds, beasts and flowers to her court (ll. 85-91). Dunbar is certainly aware of the growth and importance of Scottish literature in the fifteenth century; in *I that in heill wes and gladnes*, he recites a list of great "makaris" who have been (or will be) taken by death, and includes Scottish authors such as Blind Hary, Andrew Wyntoun, John Barbour, Gilbert Hay, Henryson, Walter Kennedy and Richard Holland alongside Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate.⁷¹ Gavin Douglas's *Palice of Honour* has "almost every important convention of structure" used in medieval literature, from the dream framework to descriptions of springtime gardens, processions, a trial, a complaint to fortune and a journey to the palace of a divinity (Bawcutt, *Palice of Honour*, xxix). In *The Palice of Honour*, the poet has a frightening vision in a garden and appeals to Nature; in the vision, he writes a complaint about Venus and is taken to her court to be judged (ll. 607-59). He is saved by Calliope and the Muses, and then joins their court as they travel to the Palace of Honour.

The employment of a Chaucerian dream vision may seem out of place in *Lancelot of the Laik*, as it is unusual for an Arthurian story, and made even stranger by the fact that the theme the prologue constructs – love – does not seem to feature strongly in the story itself. There is a concern with Lancelot and his love for Guinevere, but this seems secondary when compared to the attention drawn to the

⁷⁰ For further discussion of the "individual Scottish response" to the Chaucerian tradition, see Sally Mapstone's intriguing analysis of the role of love (self-government) and kingship in the *Kingis Quair*. Sally Mapstone, "Kingship and the *Kingis Quair*", *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 51-67.

⁷¹ Many of Dunbar's poems also reflect the interest in pageants and entertainments in James IV's court, such as *To Aberdein* (a description of the royal welcome for Queen Margaret in Aberdeen), *Ane Blak Moir* (for the "black lady" of the tournaments in 1507 and 1508), and *The Ballade of Barnard Stewart lord of Aubigny* (for Stewart's visit to Scotland during the tournament of 1508). For further comment, see Louise Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland* (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1991) 173-74.

advice of Amytans in the second book. The unhappy ending of Lancelot and Guinevere may also be considered an odd choice of story for the dreamer to write if he is hoping to gain his lady's love. However, this may not be as strange as it seems, as it was never the poet's intention to write the story beyond the happy meeting of the lovers; after declaring that he will bypass the story of Lancelot's youth and the events leading up to his capture by Lady Melyhalt (ll. 214-98), he explains that his subject matter will be "of the weris that was scharp and strong" between Arthur and Galiot, and Lancelot's subsequent reward from Venus who "makith hyme his ladice grace to have" (ll. 299, 311). Although the text ends mid-line in Cambridge University Library Manuscript Kk.1.5.vii, this proclamation by the narrator makes it clear that he did not intend to expand beyond the wars and the love theme should, therefore, not be overlooked. The stated goal of the author is to prove to his lady that he is in her service, and the poem indicates that Lancelot's great deeds in battle are inspired by his love for Guinevere, for he refuses to participate until she asks him to. Nevertheless, the prologue serves as more than a framework to consider the aspect of love in *Lancelot of the Laik*; its primary purpose is to recollect a contemporary interest in Chaucerian poetry in Scotland, and to indicate its participation in the trends of late-fifteenth-century Scottish vernacular literature, which increased its own authority by showing awareness of the traditional dream-literature device .

Many of the Scottish Chaucerian works touch on the issue at the heart of the other major difference in *Lancelot of the Laik* to have been noted by scholars such as Archibald: advice literature. The extended advice given to Arthur by the clerk Amytans in *Lancelot of the Laik* shifts the emphasis of the advice from a personal reproof in the French to a more politically charged education of a king's duty to justice. Was this alteration to the French narrative motivated by "national" concerns? In the twentieth century, the general consensus of scholars was that late medieval Scotland was antagonistic to Arthur, whom Scottish historiographers such as Hector Boece (*Scotorum Historia*, 1527) viewed as politically and morally questionable. Scottish frustration at English aggression has been cited as the source for this portrayal of Arthur; Karl Heinz Göller believes that Arthur was the subject of reproof in Scottish texts because English monarchs such as Edward I and Edward III used Arthur as a symbol of English imperialism, and thus he was seen by the contemporary Scots as a threat to their independence ("King Arthur in the Scottish

Chronicles”, 173).⁷² However, the criticism of Arthur in *Lancelot of the Laik* does not seem to be connected to English aggression. Indeed, it is Arthur who is protecting his land from unwanted outside pressure. Flora Alexander argues that, while there was some criticism of Arthur in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Scotland, it was not overwhelming, as past scholars have argued (“Late Medieval Scottish Attitudes”, 18). The criticism added to the French text, on a king’s sense of duty and justice, seems to be directed more at the inadequacies of Scotland’s James III than of English kings. While the advice section in *Lancelot of the Laik* can be seen as conventional,⁷³ it is the popularity of advice literature in Scotland during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries – as with the Chaucerian dream vision literature – which nevertheless marks it as an addition of “Scottish interest” to the French tale.

The popularity of advice literature during this period is likely related to the contemporary reigning Scottish monarchs; James III (1460-1488) was criticised by his nobles for his unrealistic foreign aspirations, his strong appeals for peace with England and his unwillingness to administer justice in his own country. It is not difficult to see the parallels in Amytans’ advice in *Lancelot of the Laik*; in the additions made to his speech from the French source, no duty of the king is stressed more than the necessity to dispense justice. In particular, he encourages the king to travel, to be sure that he sees his people and they see him, as a way to avoid the destruction of his reign (ll. 1645-54). Amytans highlights the importance in the king personally dispensing royal justice, acting as a focal point for the connection between the king and his people’s support. This is especially poignant when one considers James III’s isolation in the latter part of his reign, when he preferred to remain in Edinburgh and became estranged from his wife and eldest son. Robert Henryson’s fable “The Lion and the Mouse” compares the lion to a king and the mice to his people, and comments that the lion’s failure to administer justice could end up in disaster for the kingdom. James IV (1488-1513) was not exempt from receiving advice from Scottish authors. Dunbar’s *The Thrissill and the Rois* was probably written for the wedding of James IV and Margaret Tudor, and in it Nature

⁷² See also Juliet Vale, “Arthur in English Society”, *The Arthur of the English*, ed. W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2001) 185-96.

⁷³ See R. J. Lyall, “Politics and Poetry in Fifteenth-Century Scotland”, *Scottish Literary Journal* 3.2 (1976) 5-29.

addresses the newly crowned lion king, James IV (ll. 103-12). As with Amytans' speech to Arthur, the emphasis of the advice is on the administration of justice, particularly in the king's duty to *personally* travel to his people ("onto thi leigis go furth and keip the lawis") to make sure all Scotsmen, rich or poor, are being treated equally under the law (l. 105). As the date of *Lancelot of the Laik* is not certain and there is no dedication, however, we must be cautious of assigning its advice literature any direct criticism to a specific king. Instead, it can be seen to be taking a "more broadly based moral line", as argued by Sally Mapstone, one which addresses recurrent issues and interest in the conduct of kings ("Court Literature", 420).⁷⁴

Like the *Lancelot of the Laik*, *Golagros and Gawane* also uses the Arthurian legend as a platform for advice literature. The inclusion of Spynagros' caution against needless war with Golagros, although not about administering justice to the people, addresses another issue of kingly government, the waging of war. Spynagros warns Arthur not to fight Golagros because he has done no harm to Arthur, and thus warring against him will only bring him shame (ll. 279-91). He calls on Arthur's duty as a wise king, a leader who "wenys best" when to "wendis for to were" (l. 287). This is also one of Amytans' main quarrels with the king in *Lancelot of the Laik*; he informs Arthur that a large part of his force does not wish to fight for Arthur because they are unhappy with his governance; through his "averice" and "errogans", Arthur has lost the hearts of his people (ll. 1519-22). His rule, centred around his greed and pride instead of the fair administration of his people, has a direct impact on his military success. Arthur's bad governance has caused a chain reaction, a cycle which comes back to haunt the king: the disgruntled troops have no inspiration or courage to fight, thus jeopardising Arthur's ability to protect his own country from outside threat (ll. 1509-18). In the 1549 *Complaynt of Scotland*,⁷⁵ Dame Scotia addresses her sons, the three estates, and calls for unity in Scotland, reprimanding her sons for their internal divisions. Although composed half a century

⁷⁴ Mapstone further argues that the royal court was not as important to fifteenth-century Scottish literary production as scholars have previously argued. See Sally Mapstone, "Was There a Court Literature in Fifteenth-Century Scotland?", *Studies in Scottish Literature* 26 (1991) 410-22.

⁷⁵ The *Complaynt* may pay tribute to *Lancelot of the Laik*, amongst other British vernacular works, in its catalogue of literature (largely romance) found in chapter six (50). A. M. Stewart suggests that these lists allow both author and reader to make sense of their place in the world: "By ordering experience it gives aesthetic pleasure and a sense of man's role in the scheme of things, and surveys his achievements and aspirations" (*Complaynt*, xli). More importantly, I argue that the catalogue of romances, music and dances places Scottish literature and culture in the broader context of great European works of art.

after *Lancelot of the Laik*, the *Complaynt* continues to recognise literary devices popular in late medieval Scottish literature (the dream vision and advice literature) and places them in a text which explicitly calls for the recognition of a unique Scottish identity.

It has also been argued that Scottish Arthurian romances such as *Lancelot of the Laik* and *Golagos and Gawane* have been altered so that Gawain has a more positive, prominent role; Martin Shichtman suggests that the Scots chose Gawain to be their hero, and emphasised his Scottishness and enhanced his reputation (234). Shichtman identifies *Lancelot of the Laik* and *Golagos and Gawane* as revisions of French sources made in order to encourage positive portrayals of Gawain (240). The emphasis in *Lancelot of the Laik* is certainly as much on Gawain as it is on Lancelot, particularly in the battle sequences. While Gawain is portrayed as a great fighter and military leader in both *Lancelot do Lac* and *Lancelot of the Laik*, the Scottish poet's decision to isolate this episode from the larger narrative of Lancelot's career alters the emphasis so that Gawain is equally important to the success of Arthur. Although it is ultimately Lancelot who ends the war, his entrance in the battles occurs only after Gawain has been injured and Arthur's forces are in great need. Shichtman believes that Gawain's loyalty, courage and martial skills are increased for the benefit of the Scottish audience, who believed him to be Scottish and thus would approve of showcasing his prowess and status (243).

Battle Descriptions in *Lancelot of the Laik*

While all of these arguments are valid, there is one element of "Scottishness" that has been so far overlooked: its depictions of combat. I believe that the passage which the *Lancelot of the Laik*-poet chose to translate offers an interesting reflection of Scottish concerns. In her discussion of the sources and reception of *Lancelot of Laik*, Archibald rightly observes that the poet is original in his decision to translate just the wars with Galiot from the French source, noting that there are few English or Scottish texts that deal specifically with Lancelot's early love for the queen (73). The *Lancelot of the Laik*-poet, however, devotes more interest to chivalric and kingly conduct than to the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. What is interesting about the section of the Prose *Lancelot* that the *Lancelot of the Laik* poet chose to translate is the *setting*: the wars between Arthur and Galiot. The translation is, as Warren describes it, a transfer of ideologies. In *Lancelot of the Laik*, this includes the

previously discussed use of the dream prologue and advice literature, as well as an emphasis on Gawain as a Scottish hero, but can also be seen in an increase of detail involved in battle descriptions. The intensity of graphic detail in *Lancelot of the Laik* soars beyond the French *Lancelot*, which describes much of the war in terms of jousting; many men are struck down with lances, but with apparently very few repercussions: “Messires Gauvains et li suem lor guenchissent ireement anmi les vis et les vont ferir, et cil aus, si durement que lor lances volent am pieces, et tells I ot qui s’antrabatent” [“Sir Gawain and his men turned very fiercely to meet them head on and went to strike them, and the others struck them, so hard that their lances flew into pieces, and there were some who knocked one another down”] (278; trans. Corley, 231). Indeed, scenes of mutilated bodies in *Lancelot of the Laik* are similar to the portrayal of violence in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*; many of Galiot’s men are “through and through [...] persit in the feld” by *Lancelot* (l. 3080). This focus on battle descriptions encourages a set of chivalric values and gives a specific meaning to physical damage done to the body; it reflects the importance of sacrifice for a cause – the defence of the “nation” against outside aggression. I will argue that this heightened attention to violence in battle brings a sense of intensity which is unique to the Scottish translation; this intensity seems, in fact, to take inspiration from late medieval Scotland’s own historiographical tradition, the narratives of which focus on bodily violence, illustrating the struggles of war-torn medieval Scotland. To better understand the significance of this elevated violent language, I will establish how parallel passages of combat in the two texts differ, what graphic images are provided by *Lancelot of the Laik*, and how these images may be pulling from Scottish historiographical texts.

A close inspection of the violent language in *Lancelot of the Laik* reveals interests in images and sensory vocabulary which are not found in the Prose *Lancelot*, ranging from magnified views of battlefield corpses and cries to detailed reports of injured body parts. It also highlights the actions of the military leaders by embellishing speeches and commands. The violence in *Lancelot of the Laik* includes descriptions of individual fights between two or more knights as well as detailed clashes between armies; Arthur and Gawain organise their battalions in order to overcome Galiot’s vastly superior force. Battalions are dispatched in waves so that there are fresh troops to support Arthur’s men when they are overwhelmed by Galiot’s forces:

Bot al to few thei war and mycht nocht lest
 This gret rout that cummyth one so fast.
 Than haith Sir Gawan send, them to support,
 One othir batell with one knyghtly sorte,
 And syne the thrid, and syne the ferde also;
 And syne hymself oneto the feld can go
 When that he sauch thar latter batell steir,

And the ten thousand cummyne, al their ueir (*Lancelot of the Laik*, ll. 811-18)

Galiot's deputy, the First Conquered King, acts similarly to Gawain, sending messages to Galiot when more troops are needed. The battles between Arthur and Galiot continue in this fashion, ebbing and flowing as the war carries on. This presentation of the battles is similar to its source, the Prose *Lancelot*; *Lancelot of the Laik*, however, has added further detail on how a battalion should be formed when facing a larger but unorganised force. In the first battle, when Gawain sees Galiot's forces rushing at him on horseback, he quickly puts his men in formation so that the onrushing horses will face the spear points of his vanguard:

This noble knyght that seith the grete forss
 Of armyt men that cummyne upone horss
 Togiddir semblit al his falowschip
 And thocht them at the sharp poynt to kep
 So that thar harmm shal be ful deir ybought.
 This uthere folk with straucht coursse hath socht

Out of aray atour the larg felld (*Lancelot of the Laik*, ll. 843-49)

This passage shows not only that Arthur's men are tactically superior, but also indicates some knowledge of the importance of shield walls and battle formations when forces are outnumbered, an interest shared with many British chronicles, as discussed in Chapter Two; John Barbour's *Bruce* also uses a protective "schiltrum" in the Battle of Bannockburn, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The biggest change in *Lancelot of the Laik*'s violence is the embellishment of its source's use of graphic detail. In the episodes containing the wars with Galiot, the French source has very few moments of physical descriptions of the terrible wounds of war. One of these is the mention of blood coming out of Gawain's mouth and nose ["li sang li sailoit par la boiche et par lo nes fors"] after Arthur's knight is forced to leave the field during the second battle (*Lancelot do Lac*, 307), a description which

the Scottish version repeats. Gawain is also said to have two broken ribs, but the nature of the fighters' wounds are seldom detailed. Most combat is recorded with a vague description of knocking men off their horses: "Li chevalier fiert lui sor l'escu si durement que il abat lui et lo cheval en un mont" ["The knight struck him on the shield so hard that he knocked him and his horse down in a heap"] (*Lancelot do Lac*, 282; trans. Corley, 235). These rote descriptions, in which the opposition knight is struck off his horse without mention of the impact of the blow, are repeated throughout the French *Lancelot*. The nature of the descriptions – the blow and the name attached to the deed – assigns a social function to the violence; Andrew Lynch argues that combat in Thomas Malory's *Morte* allows the knights to fulfil a social duty, where the knight's prowess is an important index of his success, reflected in the need to mention individual names and deeds not just during single combat but also during large battles (33). This can be seen, for example, when Arthur's men attack Lancelot's forces at Joyous Guard following the death of Gareth and Gaheris, where Malory marks out the knights in Lancelot's party who perform well: "For sir Bors and sir Palomydes and sir Saffir overthrew many knyghts, for they were deadly knyghtes, and sir Blamour de Ganys and sir Bleoberys, wyth sir Bellyngere le Bewse, thes six knyghtes ded much harme" (691). Malory is listing these knights for the express purpose of assigning them honour; although in the midst of a battle, they are singled out for their prowess because they "ded much harme". In order to highlight the worthiness of individual knights, the French *Lancelot* uses routine combat description that records their feats, often making passages of battle sound more like the narration of a tournament. The fighting that occurs is described using repetitive images of horses charging, broken lances and knights being struck to the ground.

The tournament-like feel of combat is at times also reflected in *Lancelot of the Laik*, where battle can become a spectacle; Lancelot's escapades are witnessed by Arthur and the queen's court. After Gawain is injured in the second battle, he joins the queen on the parapet "that he mycht see / The manere of the ost and assemble" (ll. 1119-20). He sees Lancelot's deeds in disguise (as the Red Knight) and then turns to the queen:

‘Madem, yone knyght into the armys rede,
Nor neuer I hard nore saw into no sted
O knyght, the wich that into schotar space

In armys haith mor fotton nore mor grace,
 Nore bettir doith boith with sper and scheild' (ll. 1123-27)

In *Lancelot of the Laik*, however, many of these routine depictions are enhanced with bloody and graphic descriptions of the injuries sustained in battle. Gawain “in the press so manfully them servith / His suerd atwo the helmys al tokervith, / The hedis of he be the shoulderis smat” during the first battle (ll. 867-69). The first battle, occupying ll. 806-85 in the Scottish poem, is expanded from the French *Lancelot*, where it only occupies a paragraph; the only description of Gawain’s prowess in the French version says that he and his men “turned very fiercely to meet [their enemies] head on and went to strike them, and the others struck them, so hard that their lances flew into pieces, and there were some who knocked one another down” (Corley, 231). In the second battle, which is also expanded from a paragraph to 86 lines (ll. 1060-146) in *Lancelot of the Laik*, Lancelot also perpetrates violent bodily damage:

Oneto the hart the spere goith throw the scheld;
 The knychtis gaping lyith in the feld.
 The Red Knycht, byrnyng in loves fyre,
 Goith to o knycht als swift as ony vyre,
 The wich he persit throuch and throuch the hart
 [...]
 Into his rag smiting to and fro:
 Fro sum the arm, fro sum the nek in two;
 Sum in the feild lying is in swoun,
 And sum his suerd goith to the belt al downne. (ll. 1089-93, 1097-100)

Lancelot’s deeds are recalled in detail; he strikes wildly with ferocious blows much as the berserk Gawain at the end of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, damaging his opponents’ bodies in every part – from the neck down through the heart. The effect of the violence is not overlooked in the attempt to highlight Lancelot’s prowess; on the contrary, the intensity of his blows is implied by the seeming ease in which he slices through their bodies and emphasises the power of the knight. In the French *Lancelot*, Lancelot’s deeds in this battle are again limited to unspecified strikes and unhorsing: “cil a l’escu vermoil let corre por joster a un des cheveliers lo roi que il ot abatu, si lo fiert, si que il lo porte a terre, et sa lance vole em pieces” [“the knight with the red shield charged forward to joust with one of the knights of the king he had knocked down, and struck him, so that he knocked him to the ground, and his

lance flew into pieces”] (282; trans. Corley, 236).

The French *Lancelot* is indeed sparing in its accounts of the brutality of the battlefield: “Iluec fu la meslee anforciee, si ot plus grant domache tant por tant que il n’avoient mes hui eü, car assez i ot chevaliers pris et morz et navrez” [“Then the fighting became more intense, and there were greater losses than there had been all day, for many knights were captured and killed and wounded”] (307; trans. Corley, 269). One excursion into this area, near the end of the war, covers the general mayhem and death found on the battlefield: “Iluec fu granz la meslee, si i avoit maint cheval estraier et ocis, et maint chevalier abatu et ocis et navrez, si veïssiez chevax fuir estraiers de totes parz les uns, et les autres sor cors de chevaliers” [“Then the fighting was very fierce, and there were many horses riderless or killed, and many knights knocked down or killed or wounded, and you would have seen horses running away riderless in all directions, and others on top of knights’ bodies”] (316; trans. Corley, 281). At this same point, however, the Scottish *Lancelot* brings the destructive scene to life by recalling the despair of those dying:

So at the cummyng of thar ennemys
Thei them resauf in so manly wyss
That many one felith deithis wound
And wnder horss lyith sobing one the ground (ll. 2655-58)

Later, the French simply states that Galiot’s side had “suffered many losses” because Arthur’s men has “done great deeds of arms” (Corley, 281). *Lancelot of Laik* relates this episode with poignant emotion:

The aucht batellis assemblyt one this wiss;
On ather half the clamore and the cryiss
Was lametable and petws for til her
Of knyghtis wich in diverss placis sere
Wondit war and fallying to and fro (ll. 3263-67)

In both scenes, the Scottish poem manipulates the senses; the reader experiences the deaths with both sight and sound. In addition to the images of fallen knights, the author provides the noises of battle. The emotions of the injured warriors are reflected for the reader to share; the poet informs the audience that the sobbing and the anguished cries are piteous to hear. The recollection of the cries of the wounded is a strong reminder of the gruesome nature of war. The poem depicts fields strewn with dying knights filled with images of death and destruction. Injured knights lay

“gaping on the ground”:

Than mycht the feld rycht perellus be sen
 Of armyt knychtis gaping one the ground.
 Sum deith and sum with mony a grevous wond (ll. 3158-60)

So was the batell wonderful to tell,
 Of knychtis to se the multitud that fell
 That pety was til ony knycht to senn
 The knychtis lying gaping on the gren (ll. 3313-16)

Lancelot of the Laik uses the image of the despairing, dying knight and transfers it to the horror of the battle scene, informing the reader that they should feel “pety” when confronted with the horrors. The rampant horses treading on the faces of the dead warriors indicate the horrid nature of war which is not presented in the Prose *Lancelot*.

This interest in detailing battle sequences is also evident in the elaborate speeches given by Gawain and Lancelot to their troops in *Lancelot of the Laik*. As in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, where several battle speeches are made by Gawain and Arthur’s knights to spur their armies into combat with enemy forces, *Lancelot of the Laik* contains speeches used to similar purpose, speeches which are greatly expanded from the original source. Gawain’s speech in the French *Lancelot* is quite short and occurs after Galehaut sends his force of 30,000 men: “‘Or, seignor chevaliers,’ fait messires Gauvains, ‘or i parra qui bien lo fera, car nos n’i avons niant autrement. Or iert veü qui amera l’enor lo roi et la soe.’” [“‘Now, gentlemen, knights,’ said Sir Gawain’, ‘we shall see who fights well, for there is no hope for us otherwise. Now it will be apparent who loves the king’s honour, and his own.’”] (278; trans. Corley, 231). It is direct and succinct, quite unlike the passionate cries of Gawain in *Lancelot of the Laik*:

‘Ye falowis wich of the Round Table benn,
 Through al this erth whois fam is hard and sen,
 Remembrith now it stondith one the poynt,
 Forwhy it lyith one your speris poynt,
 The wellfare of the King and of our londe;
 And sen the sucour lyith in your honde
 And hardement is thing shall most avail

From deth ther men of armys in bataill,
 Lat now your manhed and your hie curage
 The pryd of al thir multitude assuage;
 Deth or defence, non other thing we wot' (ll. 795-805)

Feudal and chivalric honour is called upon in both speeches, but the characteristics of this fame are elaborated on in the Scottish version: courage, pride, prowess and individual agency. In the second battle, Lancelot gives an even more impressive speech:

'What that ye ar I knaw not yhour estat;
 Bot of *manhed* and *worschip*, well I wat,
 Out through this warld yhe aw to be commedit,
 This day ye have so knyghtly yhow defendit.
 [...]
 And now almost cummyne is the nycht,
 Quharfor yhour *strenth*, yhour *curag* and yhour *mycht*
 Yhe occupye into so *manly* wyss
 That the *worschip* of knyghted and empryss
 That yhe have wonyng and the gret *renown*
 Be not ylost, be not ylaid doune.
 [...]
 And to yhow al my consell is, tharfore,
 With *manly curag* but radour yhe pretend
 To met tham scharply at the speris end'

(ll. 3445-48, 3455-60, 3464-66, emphasis added)

This is not a speech of a lord to his vassals, but that of a warrior to his fellow warriors; a speech that calls on the virtues of manhood, worship, bravery, and strength when up against a fearsome foe.

These extended speeches are inspirational for Arthur's troops, who indeed take heart at Lancelot's words. It is not unlike the sentiment found in John Barbour's *Bruce*, finished around 1375. In Book XII, Bruce heartens his outnumbered men before the Battle of Bannockburn (1314) with a rousing speech:

'And, as ye luf me, I you pray
 That ilk man for his awne *honour*
 Purvay him a gud baneour,

And quhen it cummys to the fycht

Ilk man set *hart will* and *mycht*

To stynt our fayis mekill prid' (XII, ll. 218-23, emphasis added)

Like Lancelot, the Scottish king calls upon his men's honour, courage and might.

Bruce then turns to the behaviour of their enemies, advising his Scottish army – as

Lancelot does with Arthur's – how to respond to their challenge:

'On hors thai will arayit rid

And cum on you in full gret hy,

Mete thaim with speris hardely

And think than on the mekill ill

That thai and tharis has done us till.' (XII, ll. 224-28, emphasis added)

Bruce's request that his men "mete" their foes "with speris hardely" is reflected

nicely in Lancelot's command for his troops to "met" Galiot's forces "scharply at the speris end". Indeed, Lancelot's speech – written nearly a century later – uses many of the same keywords as Bruce, who continues:

'Quharfor I you requer and pray

That with all your *mycht* that ye may

That ye pres you at the begynnyng

But cowardys or abaysing

To mete thaim at sall fyrst assemble

Sa stoutly that the henmaist trybble,

And menys of your gret *manheid*

Your *worschip* and your *douchti deid*

And off the joy that we abid

Giff that us fall, as weill may tid,

Hap to vencus this gret bataill.' (XII, ll. 263-73, emphasis added)

Both speeches address the "manheid" or "manly" nature of the knights, as well as

their "worschip" and "mycht", in addition to general references to their "curag" (*LL*,

l. 3456) or "hart will" (*Bruce* XII, l. 222). Lancelot's sentiment that his knights use

these qualities in the forthcoming battle so that the "renown" that his men have won

"be not ylost, be not ylaid doune" (l. 3460) also closely echoes the closing passage

in Bruce's speech: "'Bot all wate ye quhat honour is, / Contene you than on sic a wis

/ That your honour ay savyt be"' (XII, ll. 315-17). Bruce's statement is simple but

efficient: all of these men know what honour is, and its importance in their lives. A

reminder is sufficient to bolster the troops and send them to victory at Bannockburn. Lancelot's speech in the late fifteenth-century *Lancelot of the Laik* asks its reader to draw on their knowledge of battle speeches in late medieval historical accounts, particularly those in which the troops are outnumbered, such as in the *Bruce*.

A set-piece of slicing the opponent down to his saddle is used multiple times in *Lancelot of the Laik* to describe Lancelot's prowess on the field: "Sum in the feld fellit is in swonn; / Throw sum his suerd goith to the sadill doune" (ll. 3299-300). In the same passage, the heart is struck by the offending weapon; those who fight Lancelot "throw the scheld [are] persit to the hart" (l. 3295). The French *Lancelot* does not tell us anything of Lancelot's deeds during this passage; although a short while later he "hacked helms apart", "cut shields to pieces", and "split hauberks", the damage mentioned is to armour, not bodies (Corley, 283). In the second battle in *Lancelot of the Laik*, many knights die when "oneto the hart the spere goith throw the scheld" (l. 1089); while the French does state that Arthur's men "left dead and wounded that day", the manner of their death is not described (Corley, 236). Lancelot slashes opponents' necks "in two" (l. 1098) and there is also mention of the separation of the head from the shoulders in cases of beheadings:

For throw the feld he goith in such wyss
And in the press so manfully them servith
His suerd atwo the helmys al tokervith,
The hedis of he be the shouderis smat (ll. 866-69)

There are no such grisly images of injuring in the French *Lancelot*, which summarises the battle in terms of the knights' prowess: "Mout dura la meslee, et fu li estorz buens; et mout i ot chevaleries faites" ["The fighting lasted a long time, and it was a good battle; many knightly deeds were done"] (282; trans. Corley, 236). The limbs were also powerful tools for the fighter, the sword arm and hand being the main means of a man's expression of prowess. Thus, in addition to damaged heads and hearts, we see strong images of fighters depriving enemies of these upper limbs. Lancelot rather methodologically smites "fro sum the hed and sum the arm in two" during the wars with Galiot in *Lancelot of the Laik* (l. 3298; see also l. 1098). The implications of the removal of the sword arm, a knight's means to fight and prove his manhood, are not made explicit in *Lancelot of the Laik*, but the powerful feat puts Lancelot in a position of superior power over his enemies, who cannot fight back.

Why would a late fifteenth-century Scottish poem use depictions of violence

so different from those in its French prose source? Rather than using the routine depictions of knights being unhorsed found in the French *Lancelot*, *Lancelot of the Laik* details its violent encounters with strikes to the heart (“he persit through and through the hart”, l. 1093) and beheadings (“ the hedis of he be the shoulderis smat”, l. 869), as well as using descriptive set pieces for slicing through an opponent (“throw sum his suerd goith to the sadill doune”, l. 3300) and battlefield imagery (“The knychtis lying gaping on the gren”, l. 3316). In developing their own literature, Scottish authors may well have turned to neighbouring regions in northern England, where the alliterative style flourished in the fourteenth century and where literary influences might have mixed. Perhaps the epic nature of the alliterative style – its war narratives and its violence – appealed to Scottish sensibilities. However, this was not their only literary inspiration for depictions of violence. Descriptions of battle were given prominence in medieval Scottish historiography, according to Anne McKim: “Well into the sixteenth century, Scottish historians were producing images of Scotland as ‘first and foremost a nation-in-arms’ whose history provided many examples of acts of aggression against its sovereign status and the successful defence of the nation’s freedom by warrior heroes” (“Scottish National Heroes”, 132-33). While battles were also an integral part of the fabric of chronicles such as the *Brut*, English chronicles often covered sweeping narratives of chronology which focused on the political and genealogical as much as the chivalric. Important Scottish historiographical works – John Barbour’s *Bruce* (1376), John of Fordun’s *Chronica Gestis Scotorum* (c. 1360), Andrew of Wyntoun’s *Original Chronicle of Scotland* (c. 1406), and Blind Hary’s *The Wallace* (1477) – paid special attention to important military heroes such as William Wallace and Robert the Bruce and elaborated their chivalric reputation to define Scottish history and increase awareness of Scotland’s past and a contemporary sense of what was “Scottish”.

In doing so, contemporary Scottish historiography certainly did not spare the gory details. *The Dethe of James Kyng of Scotis* (written c.1440) vividly recounts the tortured deaths of the murderers of James I (1406-1437), in particular that of Sir Robert Graham’s son: “And after this, for the more grefe and sorow to hyme, thay boweld his sonne all quyke and quarterd hym afor his eene, and drewe owt his hart of his body: the which harte lepe thrise more than a fote of heghte, after hit was drawn owte of his body...” (28). Indeed, before Graham himself is killed, his hand is nailed to a tree “with that same knyf that he sloughe the kyng withal” and the

hangman is “commandid, with that same knyfe, to kut of that hand from the arme” (27). Again, the sword hand is taken off before death as an act of power that strips the knight of his manhood and his nobility. Scotland, like other emerging nations in the later Middle Ages, needed a way to define itself, and did so in narrating its history and heroes in literature. If the identity of medieval Scots in historiographical works was based on prowess in combat, violent descriptions of the deeds of Scottish heroes and their injuries would likely appeal to them – or perhaps reflect an accurate state of life for a country torn by warfare with England throughout the Middle Ages.

Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities*, claims that, between the late Middle Ages and early modern period, a shift occurred that was instrumental in the emergence of nationalism: “Beneath the decline of sacred communities, languages and lineages, a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world, which more than anything else, made it possible to ‘think’ the nation” (22). “Think” is a key idea in the “imagined community” that is a nation: in order to have a sense of nation, its inhabitants must share the knowledge of activity simultaneously taking place within the community, a recognition of similarity shared with others and ability to “imagine” the whole (30). The revolutionary change that Anderson believes brings about this comprehension is the advent of the modern age: capitalism, book printing and the Reformation. He highlights the importance of the printed book – acting as a swift mode of vernacular dissemination and communication – as the main factor in the creation of nationalism (37-38). Whilst he admits that the pre-print culture rise in the use of written vernaculars was a step towards “national consciousness”, he tosses aside the idea that any actual form of nationalism was in existence before the printed press: “nothing suggests that any deep-seated ideological, let alone proto-national, impulses underlay this vernacularization where it occurred” (41). Anderson’s stance seems a rather black-and-white view of the formulation of nationalism; it is not a phenomenon which occurred swiftly after the printing press, but a long gradual process which may have sped up in the fast communications of the modern world but which began to solidify in the late Middle Ages.⁷⁶ Anderson particularly

⁷⁶ There is a vast amount of research being done on the relationship between vernacular and a sense of “nation” in medieval England. For further discussion, see Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art, and Patronage of Medieval England*, ed. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeemann (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988); Jill C. Havens, “As

mentions the seemingly “haphazard” and arbitrary use of language in written documents in comparison to the pointedly political choice of language in nineteenth-century dynasties (42). While it is true that many languages – English, French, Latin, Scots – were used in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Britain, it does not mean that a poet could not choose to use one of them with a particular purpose. Indeed, I believe that the language – Scots dialect and a particular vocabulary of violence – used by late medieval poets John Barbour, Blind Hary and the author of *Lancelot of the Laik* reflected a growing sense of “nation” and “national literature” within Scotland.

That is not to say that medieval Scottish literature has a thoroughly defined, distinct identification. Nicola Royan notes that the Scots language itself was not labelled as separate from English until the end of the fifteenth century (357). Scottish writers were familiar with European culture and writing styles; Scottish literature appropriately used alliteration, rhyme, Germanic and Celtic motifs, and French and Latin vocabulary. However, Royan also argues that “particular Scottish political, linguistic and cultural inflections are evident in a broad range of writing; such inflections are not necessarily dependent on English versions of similar material” (354). The historical, political and cultural events of medieval Scotland influenced its writers; the “national” concerns were reflected in the way its poets told their story. It has already been seen that certain themes, such as advice to kings, were popular *topoi* in late-medieval Scottish literature. In addition, Scottish authors told the story of their own history, and set about incorporating these events into their identity; in the popular stories of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, late-medieval Scots were struggling to create a narrative of their own (relatively recent) past, and through it, their own sense of identity as a single nation. In order to complete this process, a somewhat inventive construction of what it means to be “Scottish” is produced and subscribed to by Scottish authors through the elaboration of the military virtues and deeds of their heroes. Blind Hary’s *Wallace* and John Barbour’s *Bruce* are excellent examples of this creation of Scottish history and the sense of “national literature” which developed from it.

Englishe is comoun langage to oure puple’: The Lollards and Their Imagined ‘English’ Community”, *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*, ed. Kathy Lavezzo (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2004) 96-128.

Blind Hary's *Wallace* and John Barbour's *Bruce*

Blind Hary's *Wallace* was composed in the 1470s, during a turbulent period in Anglo-Scottish relations which culminated in the Battle of Flodden in 1513. It retrospectively narrates the life of William Wallace and his involvement in the Scottish Wars of Independence. Hary's *Wallace* is depicted as enraged at the presence of the English in Scotland and at the injury done to his family (the killing of his father and brother) by the English – indeed, even at the thought of an Englishman. Yet Wallace's idea of a true Scotsman is more complicated than the overtly black-and-white “English bad, Scottish good” nature of the poem. Richard Moll argues that one of the defining differences between the English and the Scots in *The Wallace* is that of descent and blood (““Off quhat nacioun art thou?””, 123). The medieval foundation myth claims that the Scots race was descended from Scota, the daughter of an expelled Greek prince. However, Moll rightly alludes to the fact that more recent founding myths are being created in the poem: “Founding myths describe the ancient origins of a nation, but this imagined community extends into the not-so-distant past as well” (127). He is referring to the blurring of the lineage of Wallace, a man painted as a true Scot but who in fact had Norman ancestors. Indeed, Hary was turning the legend of Wallace into a new foundation myth not just for the people of Scotland, but the nation of Scotland. In addition, Hary and Wallace determine a true Scot not only by his descent but also by his “political orientation within the complex web of Anglo-Scottish relations” (127). Wallace embraces the ideal of a unified Scotland independent of England; he believes that any Scotsman who fights against this is not a true Scot. Thus, when Wallace fights against the rebellious Macfadyan and his men until they cry for mercy, they are able to become “true Scots” when they join Wallace's cause. The Scottish Wars of Independence which occurred during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries did not *create* nationalism in Scotland, but they did form the basis of the ideology which Scottish writers later used in the creation of a “Scottish” literature – that of a Scottish people united in a struggle for freedom from English rule and occupation. John Balaban also argues for the pseudo-historical nature of Hary's *Wallace*, going so far as to say that the poem is “not only inaccurate but fantastically inaccurate” (242). Several encounters in the text (burning the barns of Ayr, the meeting between Wallace and the English queen, the battle of Biggar) are completely fictitious and Balaban claims that Hary's creative additions are inspired by Celtic folk-myths (247). According to

Balaban, Hary's purpose in using folk-tale themes is in fact to make Wallace seem superhuman and increase the popularity of the poem itself: "*The Wallace's* inaccuracies, unlikelihoods, exaggerations, and fictions serve Blind Harry's [sic] dramatic ends. [...] It is not *despite* the distortions, but *because* of them that *The Wallace* has remained in Scotland far more popular than the *Bruce* and almost as popular as the Bible" (249). While Hary certainly would have wished his poem to be remembered, it seems simplistic to state that *The Wallace*, an intense and epic poem, was intended solely as folk-tale entertainment. It is true that some interesting mythological themes can be found in the poem – magical Celtic beheadings, superhuman fishing tales, the "Blind Hary" alias itself – but even so, it seems likely that Hary would be incorporating legendary motifs for more than dramatic purposes. *Celtic* myths and *Scottish* folk-tales are exactly the sort of cultural material that Hary would want to include as he attempts to mould his own Wallace legend as part of the identity of Scottish literature, and creating a superhuman protagonist serves to emphasise Wallace's greatness as a Scottish hero-figure.

It would be appropriate here to look at the contemporary subjects and themes Hary and Barbour might have been responding to in composing a Scottish hero-chronicle. The central topic for both *The Wallace* and *The Bruce*, of course, is the Anglo-Scottish wars, and Scottish and English relations are a primary feature. Why would the Wars of Independence and an anti-English sentiment be of interest to John Barbour in the 1370s and Blind Hary in the 1470s? Barbour was writing for the Scottish king Robert II (1371-1390) and his royal court during a period when hostilities between Scotland and England were being renewed. Bruce was legendary, but also controversial for his guerrilla warfare; nevertheless, as Robert II's grandfather and a king who fought to keep Scotland independent, he was an ideal hero to praise in Robert's court. Barbour's Bruce was not as obsessed with the ideological utopia of a free and united Scotland as Hary's Wallace, nor does Bruce share Wallace's blinding hatred of the English, but he *is* pictured as a tactical leader concerned about the lives of his men. Bruce's smart leadership is something for the new King Robert II to emulate; Thea Summerfield particularly points out the concern Bruce shows for troop morale by his constant attention to their well-being when the Scots are hiding in the woods and his tales of ancient heroes up against the odds (116). Lancelot shows similar concern for the emotional well-being of Arthur's troops in *Lancelot of the Laik* when they are "in dispar and dout" because they "hard

the noys and saw the multitud” of Galiot’s forces (ll. 3438-39). Lancelot “saw the gret ned” of the men and “assemblyt al his falowis” to give them a motivating speech (ll. 3442-43). Yvain also comforts the men by telling them to “be nothing affrayd” because they need not fear a surprise, as they “se the strength” of their enemy (ll. 3478, 3480). Barbour also eliminates Bruce’s early support of the English, a period which is instead filled with James Douglas’s childhood story, detailing the denial of his inheritance and justifying his rebellion against the English. Douglas’s pivotal role in the Bruce narrative reiterates the importance of the military and feudal bond between Bruce and his nobles, particularly with the Douglasses. Robert II’s right to rule was contested by the Douglas family and he bargained for their loyalty; Summerfield suggests that Barbour was perhaps attempting to stress the need for peace between the king and his nobles and reminding the Douglasses of their past glory through attachment to the king (112). While it is possible that Summerfield’s connection may be correct, James Douglas’ role in the *Bruce* is more importantly linked to the general late medieval Scottish interest in the correct behaviour of military leaders and the promotion of unity among the Scots in the face of English aggression.

The desire for unity stemmed from widespread discord among the Scottish people throughout the Middle Ages. James I, II, III, IV and V all successively struggled with powerful magnate families. Elizabeth Ewan argues that despite “isolated short periods of friction”, the ruling of late medieval Scotland was “marked more by co-operation than conflict”, and its attention was focused mostly on its foreign relations with England and France (20). Scotland’s relationship with these two countries was certainly vital to state affairs; James I and James II supported France in the Hundred Years’ War in the early fifteenth century, James III attempted to make amiable relations with the English, and his successor James IV unsuccessfully invaded England. It would be wrong, however, to argue that international relations occupied most of their concerns; Scottish interest in England and France depended largely on their ability to help or hinder Scotland’s own sense of identity. Issues within late medieval Scotland also affected the successful growth of this identity; the Scottish population was divided between cultures, language (Gaelic Highlanders and Scots-English Lowlanders), and disagreements within the noble families themselves. Richard Moll sees Blind Hary’s fictitious account of Macfadyan’s rebellion and campaign against Wallace as a scene which displays

conflict between Macfadyan's Highland (and Irish) force and Wallace's Lowland troops similar to the rebellion of Highland noble John of Islay, Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross, in the 1450s (135). Macfadyan's Highland men do eventually surrender, as earlier stated, and are united with Wallace's Scotsmen. Once again, it seems unnecessary to connect any episode in the *Wallace* with a specific contemporary event; the overall purpose of Hary's description of this battle is to emphasise once again the importance of Scottish unity, and the dangers of a discordant Scottish community. Moll himself rightly realises that the battle demonstrates not only the importance of Wallace's only political ideal, but also that a united Scotland can overcome their differences and fight off English incursions (134). *The Wallace* is rife with struggles between Scottish parties – not only Wallace and Macfadyan but also Wallace and Bruce – and clearly emphasises that the biggest enemy to the formation of the Scottish nation is not the English, but the weakness of internal division. Hary addresses this issue both directly through Wallace's story and in his own moral apostrophes.

The reign of James III was a particularly troubled one, rife with anti-royalist sentiments amongst Scottish nobles because of James' desire to negotiate with the English and his inattention to the upkeep of justice within the kingdom. The late medieval Scottish legal system revolved mainly around the king and his personal council until the institution of a central judicial court in 1490, and as such it was vitally important that the king actively administered justice throughout the kingdom. In Elizabeth Ewan's survey of late medieval Scottish politics, she points out that "the successful Stewart monarchs were those who went on justice ayres (circuit courts) around the country, demonstrating active involvement in maintaining law and order" (21). Those who didn't suffered the consequences; in James III's case, the disaffection and rebellion of his nobles in the 1470s and 1480s led to his arrest in 1482. I would argue that it is not surprising that it is the subject of discussion in a large portion of *Lancelot of the Laik*; while the section is not original to the translation, the poet's decision to translate Amytans' advice from within the French *Lancelot* narrative reflects its interest for a contemporary Scottish readership. While not of itself indicative of "nation", the preoccupation with advice literature does indicate that late medieval Scottish writers had an understanding of the common concerns of its "imagined community". Indeed, Barbour's account of Robert the Bruce is a form of advice literature in itself; a careful demonstration of the skills

needed to be a good king of Scotland.

The Bruce discusses these leadership skills in its presentation of Bruce, James Douglas and its battle descriptions. Scholars such as Anne McKim and Thea Summerfield have already commented on the role of Bruce and Douglas in Barbour's presentation of an excellent military leader. Bruce was legendary for uniting the Scottish people, but he was also criticised by Scottish nobles; Robert II and his predecessor David II were both keenly interested in chivalry and the renewed glory to be found in martial prowess during their involvement in the Hundred Years' War, and some of Robert's contemporaries were critical of Bruce's "underhanded" military tactics (ambushes).⁷⁷ Barbour, however, demonstrates Bruce's excellent tactical skill as a military leader, illustrating that he and his next-in-command James Douglas were capable of outwitting the numerically superior enemy via the element of surprise and knowledge of terrain. Summerfield points out Barbour's ability to disentangle the chivalric interest in weaponry and proper conduct from important leadership skills: "In his story Barbour unobtrusively incorporates comments on aspects of chivalry to illustrate examples of chivalric conduct that he considered irrelevant to effective leadership" (113). In effect, Bruce's image as an excellent leader is redeemed by removing it from the popular understanding of what was "chivalric" and placing it within the context of Bruce's ability to succeed in difficult circumstances. While it is certainly true that Bruce's status as an intelligent military commander is vital to the *Bruce*, I would argue that "proper conduct" is still hugely important to Barbour; in addition to providing "comments" on it, he bolsters Bruce's chivalric reputation whenever possible. He is depicted as courteous to his men and to ladies, and his martial prowess is emphasised when he is attacked by multiple assailants. In Book V, Ingram Umfraville convinces three traitors to secretly attack Robert the Bruce when he takes his morning stroll away from his troops, and Bruce has little trouble dispatching them. He hits the father in the eye with an arrow "till it rycht in the harnys ran" (l. 627), strikes the first son with a sword so hard that "he the hede till the harnys claiff" (l. 635), and – when the next son charges with a spear – Bruce "with a wysk the hed off strak" (l. 643). When left alone to defend Carrick in Book VI, Bruce remains resolute and does not flee:

⁷⁷ Thea Summerfield, "Barbour's Bruce: Compilation in Retrospect", *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*, ed. J. Saunders, Françoise H. M. Le Saux, Neil Thomas (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004) 107, 113-14.

Bot his hart that wes stout and hey
 Consaillyt hym allane to bid
 [...]

Strang utrageous curage he had
 Quhen he sa stoutly him allane
 For litill strenth off erd has tane
 To fecht with twa hunder and ma. (VI, ll. 118-19, 128-31)

Bruce's "curage" and "manhed" (l. 124) are praised; his bravery and the fortitude of his vigorous strokes are capable of frightening and overcoming the entire troop:

He smate the fyrst sua vygorusly
 With his sper that rycht scharp schar
 Till he doun till the erd him bar.
 [...]

And he that stalwart wes and stout
 Met thaim rycht stoutly at the bra
 And sa gud payment gan thaim ma
 That fyvesum in the furd he slew.
 The lave [remainder] then sumdell thaim withdrew
 That dred his strakys wondre sar
 For he in na thing thaim forbar. (VI, ll. 138-40, 148-54)

Bruce is "stalwart" and "stout", both brave and fierce in attack; he excels in single combat and against many. He becomes almost superhuman; the very sight of his deadly strokes causes the enemy to panic. In Bruce, Barbour has created an ideal Scottish leader who is also a chivalric hero: he encourages his men, fights wisely and efficiently, and inspires his men to fight by his own highly courageous and skilled example.

James Douglas is depicted as another example of excellent leadership to be emulated, both in war and in feudal relations; Barbour's knight highlights "the importance not only of prowess but of relationships with their attached obligations" (McKim, "James Douglas and Barbour's Ideal of Knighthood", 171). The author not only details Douglas's proper educational and cultural upbringing, but stresses the knight's ideal military leadership and feudal loyalty. In comparison to the courtly knight, whose concern is with his own feats in battle, Douglas the feudal knight is also aware of the loyalty required of his relationship with his lord, Bruce, and of the

responsibility he has to look after his own vassals. Douglas's military prowess is also important, however; Douglas is praised for his physical strength and, like Bruce, his intelligent (and cautious) military leadership.⁷⁸ He is brave and bold, but his actions are tempered by a wisdom and practicality which lead him to avoid endangering the welfare of his troops. Douglas's commendable behaviour is contrasted with the actions of two of Bruce's other military commanders, Edward Bruce and Thomas Randolph. Edward is courageous but rash and unthinking, resulting in his failed mission to conquer Ireland; he lacks the wisdom to be a successful leader. Douglas, on the other hand, is wise and practical, the sign of a good military leader: "This kind of practical consideration and deliberation marks him out as a good captain, who is above all concerned to protect his men, and as a worthy delegate for Bruce in his adherence to sound judgement" (McKim, 176). However, he is also able to use his guile to overcome his enemies in difficult circumstances. Randolph is the opposite: his petulant desire to observe the proper chivalric codes of fighting is a hindrance to Bruce's guerrilla warfare success, and he receives chastisement from Douglas when he criticises the king's tactics. In Douglas, Barbour created a perfectly balanced knight who understood the necessities of waging Bruce's war whilst still retaining chivalric qualities. The ideal qualities of Bruce's close military leader reflect well on the Bruce's own judgement and leadership, allowing Barbour to create a Scottish king whose actions are no longer in question, but can be moulded into an admirable figure playing a central role in the formation of Scottish identity. Indeed, R. James Goldstein believes Barbour's presentation of Bruce to be pivotal in the development of the Scottish nation: "By presenting an idealized image of Bruce's heroic enterprise, Barbour's text might once more unify the nation and defence its sovereignty" (151).⁷⁹

In addition to the presentations of their protagonists, the battle descriptions in *The Bruce* and *The Wallace* lend themselves to the authors' discussion of intelligent military leadership. When describing the war against the English, Barbour and Hary pay close attention to the details of battle tactics and the waging of siege warfare and troop formations. In *The Bruce*, Barbour explains that the Scots have formed

⁷⁸ Indeed, Barbour's narration of the disinherited Douglas fighting to regain his land is much like an ancestral romance in subject and representation of the hero. See Goldstein, 169-70.

⁷⁹ For a thorough and engaging discussion of lordship in the *Bruce*, see R. James Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland* (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1993) 185-214 and

themselves into a “schiltrum”⁸⁰ in order to fight off the English during the battle of Bannockburn (Book XII, ll. 428-44). The purpose of this battle formation is made clear in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, where the “scheltrone” is mentioned on eight occasions, showcasing Arthur’s wise military organisation as he prepares to go into battle with emperor Lucius:

Forthi the kynge chargez hym, what chaunce so befall,
 Cheftayne of þe cheekke with cheualrous knyghttez.
 And sythyn meles with mouthe þat he moste traistez;
 Demenys the medylwarde menskfully hym selfen,
 Fittes his fote-men alls hym faire thynkkes,
 On frounte in the fore-breste the flour of his knyghtez;
 His archers on aythere halfe he ordaynede þeraftyre
 To schake in a *scheltrone*, to schotte when þam lykez.
 He arrayed in þe rerewarde full riall knyghtez,
 With renkkes renownnd of þe Rounde Table (ll. 1985-94)

Arthur orders his effective English longbowmen into a “scheltrone” to guard the valuable knights in his first rank;⁸¹ some of the Round Table knights are ordered to guard the river passages while others are placed at crossroads, and Lancelot and Lot remain with their troops on Arthur’s left flank should he need them. All of these precautions are taken in order to protect his own troops and to hinder Lucius from making any secret attacks: “He plantez in suche placez pryncez and erlez, / That no powere sulde passe be no priué wayes” (ll. 2004-05). The “schiltrum” in *The Bruce* has a similar function, providing a wall of protection for Bruce’s men in the face of English cavalry charges. Grouped together in a band, the knights were better placed to defend themselves and fight the enemy: “As the Scottish *schiltrons* and the Swiss phalanxes had shown, the use of densely-packed groups of pikemen, in attack as well as defence, could be extremely damaging to heavy cavalry” (Vale, *War and Chivalry*, 113). Romance and history borrow tactics and interests from each other; the use of a “schiltrum” in literary representations across genres indicates an interest in effective

⁸⁰ Old English “scild-truma”, a battle formation surrounded by a protective shield wall. See “sheltroun”, *Middle English Dictionary*, Web, 12 July 2012. < <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>>

⁸¹ The effectiveness of the English longbow was not as a lethal killing machine, but in guarding troops in situations similar to Bruce’s and Arthur’s sheltrons. Placed along the edges of infantry lines, the archers protected the battalion’s flanks and confused the attackers as they charged. See Kelly DeVries, “Catapults are Not Atomic Bombs: Towards a Redefinition of Effectiveness in Premodern Military Technology”, *War in History* 4.4 (1997) 454-70.

battle tactics which reflects the intelligence of the leader (historical or fictional).

Hary and Barbour also give accounts of the ambushes and clever tactics that Bruce was so criticised for in the later Middle Ages, but do so in a way that praises the guile of the Scottish leaders. In Barbour's tale, Douglas, as previously mentioned, is often able to use his guile to outsmart his English enemies; he plans surprise attacks and travels at night to achieve success. In Book V he takes back his own heritage, Douglas Castle, by attending church on Palm Sunday in disguise, "that men suld nocht hym ken", in order to ambush the unarmed and unaware English soldiers, "for thar-through trowyt thai to ta / The castell that besid wes ner" (ll. 316, 328-29). Douglas is warned by Bruce that it would be a dangerous task to attempt to take his castle when the area was so strongly controlled by the English, but he overcomes this handicap by utilising the guerrilla battle tactics that Bruce himself often uses to strike English armies: surprise attacks and the secret aid of the local Scots population. Hary's Wallace is not above using clever schemes to overcome larger English forces, either, and he makes this point before the battle at Stirling Bridge in Book VII:

‘Our mekill it is to proffer thaim battaill
Apon a playne feild bot we haiff sum availl.
[...]
Quhar sic thing cummys of neid,
We suld thank God that makis us for to speid.
Bot ner the bryg my purpos is to be
And wyrk for thaim sum suttell jeperté’ (ll. 1135-36, 1139-42)

Recognising that it would be futile to fight against a larger force on an open field, Wallace sees the need for a plan and arranges to fight the battle by Stirling Bridge, where he has a carpenter saw the boards of the bridge in half so that, on a blast of a horn by Wallace, a pin would be released and the bridge would collapse. The scheme works expertly, and the English troops fall into chaos: "A hidwys cry amang the peple rais; / Bathe hors and men into the wattir fell" (VII, ll. 1184-85). As a result of this plan, the Scots are able to turn back the much larger force of Englishmen and emerge victorious. Hary also includes detailed narrations of the practicalities of siege warfare in *The Wallace*, particularly during the sieges of York (Book VIII) and St. Johnston (Book VII). At York, the English fight off the Scots by throwing out "fagaldys off fyr", "pyk and ter", "gaddys off irne" and "stanys" with springald

catapults (ll. 774-78). In St. Johnston, the Scots devise to scale the walls by building “byg strang bestials of tre” and filling the ditches with earth and stone (l. 977). In response, Hary declares that the English have “hand gunnys”, new machines which startle the Scots with the speed with which they cast stones (l. 996).⁸²

Barbour and Hary were both attempting to create a national history for Scotland, and they chose as their subject the leadership of Robert the Bruce and William Wallace as well as the Wars of Independence in which they were involved. The centrality of this violent period for the formation of a national literature meant that the practicalities of warfare, such as smart military leadership and battle tactics, were important to “national” self-awareness. The violence necessarily involved in these wars became in itself a part of Scottish writing, which *The Bruce* and particularly *The Wallace* demonstrate. Both of them make frequent mention of rushing blood and gore, a bloody field strewn with groaning men, and injury to the head and brains. In the *Bruce*, “throu the byrnys bryst the blud / That till erd doune stremand yhude” (XII, ll. 561-62); In the *Wallace*, there is a “Boundance of blud fra woundis wid and wan” so that “Stekit to deid on ground lay mony man” (VII, ll. 834-36). “Boundance” and “stremand” indicate the gravity of the wounds as the blood comes rushing out, and the graphic nature of the imagery of the blood bursting through the brains adds to the visual affect; the blood connects the injured man with the ground. The scene of death is being replayed all over the battlefield, where the knights’ pain is audible:

Sic gymyng granyng and sa gret
 A noyis as thai gan other beit
 And ensenyys on ilka sid
 Gevand and takand woundis wid,
 That it wes hydwyys for to her. (*Bruce* XIII, ll. 157-61)

As in *Lancelot of the Laik* – where the knights are “wondit [...] and fallyng to and fro” (l. 3267), “sobing one the ground” (l. 2658) and their cries are “lamentable and

⁸² Hary seems to be referring to contemporary battle technology here, rather than that of the First War of Scottish Independence. While it is possible that gunpowder weapons were being used at the beginning of the fourteenth century, there is no definite evidence of their use until the Siege of Metz in 1324. Hand-held guns may have appeared in the later half of the fourteenth century, but were not in regular use until the 1420s. The earliest guns did not have the best accuracy, but were effective in frightening the enemy; Hary’s Scots are certainly surprised by the new machines. See Kelly DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology*, 143-63, and Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare: Theory and Practice of War in Europe, 300-1500*, 88-112.

petws for til her” (l. 3265) – these images in Barbour add a sound to the visual horror; we not only see the warriors on the ground, pierced so horribly that blood streams from their wounds, but we also hear their “hyd wys” groans. The *Wallace* also features violence to the heart; Wallace fends off an English attacker in Book II and with a “felloun knyff fast till his hart straik he” (l. 98-99). Barbour and Hary are also fascinated by beheading and slashing the neck in two, as is the Scottish *Lancelot*, where Gawain “be the shouderis smat” the heads of his enemies (l. 869):

Wallace in ire on the crag can him ta
With his gud suerd and *straik the hed him fra*.
Dreidles to ground derfly he duschit dede. (*Wallace* V, ll. 107-09, emphasis added)

[Bruce] hyt the formast in the hals
Till thropill [windpipe] and wesand [throat] yeid in twa
And doun till the erd gan ga.” (*Bruce* VII, ll. 590-92, emphasis added)

Bruce strikes the neck so that it “yeid in twa” just as Lancelot strikes his opponents’ “nek in two” during the second battle in *Lancelot of the Laik* (l. 1098). Similarly, Wallace “straik the hed” from his foe just as Gawain “the hedis of [Galiot’s soldiers] be the shouderis smat” in the first battle of the Scottish *Lancelot* (l. 869). The historical narratives are even more detailed in their head injuries, striking to the brain (*Bruce* V, ll. 642-44; *Wallace* V, ll. 959-63).

While the mutual interest in combat violence which describes beheadings and throat injuries does not mean that there is a direct connection between the *Lancelot of the Laik* and the *Wallace* or *Bruce*, the romance certainly could have been inspired by the gory visuals of Hary and Barbour, both of which draw attention to the difficult and bloody nature of Scotland’s struggle for independence. The historiographical works certainly made use of romance to shape the ideology of their narrations; Goldstein notes how “literature of heroic deeds [...] served a specific political function” in the *Bruce*, highlighting the validation of Bruce by comparison to the Nine Worthies and his placement within the Western heroic literary tradition (144).⁸³ Late medieval Scottish chronicles of the Wars of Independence – and the literature of Scotland – glorify the deeds of their past leaders and military commanders, but also

⁸³ See Goldstein, 145-49.

immortalise the Scottish blood spilled in the cause of a unified people. Although the idea of Scotland as a nation was not yet a solidified idea, it does not mean that late medieval Scottish authors were not aware of the desire to become an “imagined community”. In his discussion of national identity in *The Wallace*, Richard Moll argues that “many of the Scottish people identified themselves with the land and its inhabitants” and “this recognition was expressed in both Latin and vernacular literary traditions” in late medieval Scotland; Scottish identity within the *Wallace* is more determined by political alliances than blood (121). Political allegiance to Bruce or Wallace is not the only way vernacular Scottish literature understood Scottish concerns, however; *Lancelot of the Laik*, Hary’s *Wallace* and Barbour’s *Bruce* all participated in the *recognition* of the Scottish community and their *expression* of this recognition is visible in the presentation of warfare in Scottish texts. These attempts to define their identity do not mean that Scotland *was* nationalist in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, it does indicate that a Scottish literature was forming and that Scottish writers were trying to formulate a nationalistic history by creating a language that would help its inhabitants communicate their growing sense of identity as a “nation”.

VI. Conclusion: Chivalry and Violence in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*

I have looked at the representations and expressions of violence and warfare in a variety of Middle English texts in order to establish how they contribute to generic registers and determine meaning in Middle English Arthurian romances. Middle English authors utilised violence to make textual commentary and to recall and manipulate generic tropes. Representations of violent acts can reaffirm or interrogate the values of chivalric society, react to social issues, display homosociality, or discuss the qualities of the ideal warrior or leader, as in *Golagros and Gawane*, the *Awntyrs off Arthure* and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (Chapter Three). Representations of violence may also incorporate tropes which force the reader to consider the narrative and its characters in terms of genre. The language of combat can invoke chronicle, devotional and romance traditions, and it directs particular understandings of Arthurian romances (Chapters Four and Five). In this final chapter, I will re-examine and summarise my conclusions on the uses of violent language as social commentary and generic marker, looking closely at the central text of my thesis, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*.

Violence as Social Commentary: Physicality and Homosocial Relations

The representation of combat, its victors and victims, is key to understanding the medieval author's thoughts on society in many respects; to return to Richard Kaeuper's questions in chapter eight of *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*: did the experience of fear outweigh a knight's desire to fight in a war, and were they concerned with peace? These questions are fundamental issues in Middle English narratives of warfare, which often deny fear and pain by means of exuberant violent descriptions. The undercurrent of subdued fear occasionally bubbles to the surface in the form of phantasms. This occurs, for example, in the apparition of Fawdon's ghost in the woods after Wallace has killed him in Book V of Blind Hary's *Wallace*. Driven into the forest by the English and isolated from most of his warriors, Wallace nearly goes insane through exhaustion, and it is his men's fear that is manifested in the frightening blow of the horn which accompanies Fawdon's ghost. A similar idea can be seen in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which includes two of Arthur's dreams. The

first, his dream of the fight between the dragon and the bear, has Arthur so upset that “nere he bristez for bale on bede whare he lyggez” (l. 805). After the second dream, in which he is cast down from Fortune’s Wheel, he tells his philosophers that he has “cheueride for chele sen me this chaunce happened” (l. 3391). He is eager in both cases for his dreams to be interpreted so that he can understand and conquer his fears. However, the culture of chivalry embraced in Middle English Arthurian romances encouraged a focus on the deeds accomplished in spite of the men’s fears. Prowess and bravery, and a knight’s ability to demonstrate them, could inspire loyalty and a united and international chivalric force. Knightly violence, and its representations, reacted to contemporary concern over fear by demonstrating the sheer power of physical assault. The alliterative *Morte Arthure* is full of such forceful blows from the very first violent encounters; during the first Roman pursuit after Gawain has beheaded Lucius’ uncle, Gawain strikes an opponent so hard that he cleaves him in two: “The knyghte on þe coursere he cleuede in sondyre, / Clenlyche fro þe croune his corse he dyuysyde” (ll. 1388-89).

Andrew Taylor argues that chivalric literature such as *The Vows of the Heron* and Froissart’s *Chronicles* showcases the repression of the male experience during battle, rather than its expression; the behavioural norms expected of a knight restricted the knight’s actual feelings (173). He argues that, as the medieval knight was still human, he inevitably felt fear when confronted with violence and only the strictest of training taught the knight to resist his inevitable natural instinct to run away from danger (182). While it is true that chivalric literature often omits the experience of fear, I would argue that it does not repress it, but rather reconstructs it into something useful; the strength of fear is transformed into strength of commitment. Romances played an important role in this, passing down examples of fearless men to their young readers, encouraging the same type of selfless devotion in battle. While there is an element of social suppression in the structured nature of the chivalric environment, Taylor’s emphasis on the repressive nature of chivalry is too negative; it eradicates any possibility of enjoyment in military pursuits. It ignores the blatant abhorrence of peace occasionally demonstrated by knights clamouring for war as well as the often celebratory nature of depictions of war pageantry. Undeniably, the banners and accoutrements of battle are by their nature distractions, items of beauty to bedazzle or impress the onlookers and identify the nobility of the fighters. Their purpose, however, grew beyond suppression and into festivity. That

which knights were brought up to do – fight – encouraged a social bond which celebrated the shared violence which they experience together. A motivational speech before a battle not only boosted troop morale but also externalised an identity which the man is creating for himself, constructing a figure of bravery and willpower; John Comyn’s lengthy speech in Wyntoun’s chronicle advises his Scottish troops to “standande agayn [their] fais” (l. 2574) because they are free and noble men (“Ȝhe ar al cummyng of aulde [linage], / And lordis of fre heritage”, ll. 2587-88), and his warriors respond accordingly: they “tuk þe feylde, and manlely / Felyt wiþe þar fais in feicht, / Pat stude agan þaim stowt and wicht” (ll. 2602-04).

There are some occasions in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* in which the narrator gives us a perhaps limited view of battle. There are two major instances of this in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*: first, Cadur’s recount of his somewhat ill-fated attack on the Romans, and lastly, the messenger’s report of Gawain’s victory over the army of Lorraine. Both of these dangerous skirmishes were accomplished without Arthur’s orders and by a small segment of Arthur’s army, but any fear or uncertainty from the knights is never hinted at:

‘We hafe cownterede to-day in ȝone coste ryche
 With kyngez and kayseres krouell and noble
 And knyghtes and kene men clenlyche arrayed.
 They hade at ȝone foreste forsette vs þe wayes,
 At the furthe in þe fyrthe with ferse men of armes;
 Thare faughtte we in faythe and foynede with sperys
 One felde with thy foo-men and fellyd them o lyfe’ (ll. 1892-99)

‘All thy forreours are fere that forrayede withowttyn –
 Sir Florent and sir Floridas and all thy ferse knyghtez –
 Thay hafe forrayede and foghten with full gret nowmbyre
 And fele of thy foomen has broghte owt of lyffe’ (ll. 3017-20)

In both cases the emphasis is on the fierceness of the enemy, not on how frightened the knights must have been against such an overwhelming force. However, this turns into a kind of joy which can be felt in the messenger’s exclamations, not just of relief but of pride. The worthiness and nobility of their foes is stressed – they are kings and knights, well armed (“clenlyche arrayed”) and “ferse” – as is the courage of the knights who have “forrayede and foghten” against the larger forces. The knights

have proven to Arthur – and the reader – that they are capable of facing such danger with bravery and great prowess. The obvious desired result from telling such tale, the reward of glory and honour, is clearly pointed out by the messenger when he claims that Gawain’s performance ““es wele escheuyde, / For he has wonn to-daye wirchipe for euer”” (ll. 3021-22). While Cadur is criticised by Arthur for engaging his troops in battle with the Roman blockade, he joins combat assuming he will win praise from the chivalric world for his deeds.

The element of “worship” is important when thinking about what kind of battle-accounts we receive; it is significant to remember that most, if not all, of our narratives of war are about knights and nobility. Taylor downplays the idea that knights enjoy war by indicating the universally human fear all men experience in battle, but chivalric stoicism offered an opportunity to transform fear into a positive force, one that could yield fame and wealth. Pain itself was esteemed; although certainly not a pleasurable or desired experience, it was honourable: “Feeling pain was a badge of honour, a test successfully taken, and the sufferers did not seek alleviation” (Cohen, “The Expression of Pain in the Later Middle Ages”, 198). The experience of the pain of the battle wound was affirmation of a knight’s passage into homosocial chivalric society, a certification of masculinity itself. They receive and react to the pain conscious that they suffer for an honourable cause and hoping for glory. The idealistically fearless knight is marked out in Geoffroi de Charny’s *Book of Chivalry*: good men-at-arms do not fear death, because they have “exposed themselves to so many physical dangers and perilous adventures in order to achieve honor”, and while cowards “have a great desire to live and a great fear of dying”, great men “do not mind whether they live or die, provided that their life be good enough for them to die with honor” (127). It could perhaps be argued that there is a gulf between the ideology of chivalric material and the activities of knights themselves, but Laura Ashe convincingly argues that “there is much less of a gap between the ‘ideal and reality’ of chivalrous behaviour than has been often assumed” in her analysis of the chivalric presentation (and historical accuracy) of the *History of William Marshall* (20).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Ashe argues that the biography of Marshall, while obviously affected by the partiality of its patrons, still largely draws on household and legal documents, and its depiction of Marshall reflects his excellence in tournaments, his desire for honour, his largesse – when economically feasible – and his just and loyal rule as a lord later in life. See Laura Ashe, “William Marshall, Lancelot, and Arthur:

Middle English authors emphasise an additional “delight” that made men desire war: the enjoyment of brotherhood. Ruth Karras states that knights reaffirmed their masculinity by performing deeds under a feminine gaze (49). Molly Martin points out that women in Malory such as Lyones, Isode, and Guinevere all engage in the “construction of masculinity” as “members of [the] evaluating audience” (148). While this is often the case in romances, it ignores the fact that knights were able to – and quite often did – assert and prove their masculinity by performing deeds for a *masculine* gaze. Martin’s study of the gaze in Malory’s Arthurian narrative acknowledges the power of the gaze, whether male or female, to “judge and praise men according to their abilities to project [the] ideal masculine spectacle”; that is, masculinity must be seen and recognised (146). In the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, Guinevere’s gaze is never present to view any of Britain’s knights overcome their foes; the narrative is concerned only with how men prove their worth, prowess and masculinity to other men, without requiring a woman’s praise. The Duchess of Brittany is not there to appreciate the defeat of her abductor; we do not see the old woman’s reaction to Arthur’s defeat of the giant, but his valour and prowess are witnessed by Kay and Bedivere (ll. 1152-69). The deed reaffirms homosocial bonds by giving further proof to comrades – and readers – of the warrior’s prowess. This is clearly emphasised in the presentation of the violent battle between Arthur and the giant of St. Michael’s Mount. It is the only instance of an attempted rescue of a female in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and it is notable that Arthur “fails” to save the Duchess of Brittany, as she is already dead. However, Arthur’s mission is certainly not seen as a failure, because the original goal – to save the lady – is quickly overshadowed by the challenge of fighting the giant itself. The episode is presented by the poet so that Arthur does not need to save the lady to succeed, as long as he overcomes his opponent. Her loss, though temporarily upsetting, is soon overcome, and Arthur uses it to spur his anger at the barbarity of the giant. When he completes his task by defeating the villain, his deed is celebrated by the citizens of Brittany, who spare no words of sorrow over the loss of their duchess: “Now thy comly come has comforthede vs all. / Thow has in thy realtee reuengyde thy pople; / Thurghe helpe of thy hande, thyne enmy es struyede” (ll. 1203-05).

The importance of other men’s esteem is already highlighted early in the

Chivalry and Kingship”, *Anglo-Norman Studies XXX*, ed. C. P. Lewis (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2008) 19-40.

poem, during Arthur's council. All of his noblemen respond enthusiastically to the prospect of war, either out of loyalty, for revenge or because they desire the renown that they anticipate for their deeds. Lancelot exclaims joyfully as he hears the other lords cry out for war: "now lyghttys myn herte – / I loue Gode of þis lone þis lordes has avowede!" (ll. 368-69). He is gladdened at the thought of both his, and others', deeds: "I sall be at journee with gentill knyghtes / On a jamby stede full jolyly graythide" and "Stryke [Lucius] styfflye fro his stede with strengthe of myn handys" (ll. 372-73, 376). The entire process of war, from assembling, fighting and invading the cities, is described with the light-hearted, jubilant tone of a man preparing for an entertaining game with his friends; the serious tone of the actions is overlaid with the illusion of adventure and camaraderie, bloody scenes temporarily forgotten in idyllic moments of pageantry and waving banners, in meadows "full of swete floures" (l. 2508). Lot also declares that he will accomplish great feats "at þe reuerence of þe Rounde Table"; companionship and honour of the brotherhood of the Round Table are more important than king and country (l. 389). The Round Table is, in itself, a microcosm of chivalry; as a small, closely bound group of men devoted to achieving glory, its members are the communal brothers worshipping the quasi-deity of prowess.

The bonds between the men make themselves apparent throughout violent narrations; Arthur's knights rescue any comrade they see in trouble or, if their friend has been slain, set out to avenge them by attacking their killer. Any hesitancy to engage in battle, no matter how impractical it is, is seen as a shameful mark of cowardice upon the knight which is deemed worse than death itself. Stephanie Trigg has usefully noted that it is the power to suggest shame (rather than the actual experience of psychological shame) which is prominent in medieval chivalric narratives. In the story of the creation of the Order of the Garter, Edward III picks up a garter dropped by a lady and criticises the court for laughing, uttering the Order's motto, "honi soit qui mal y pense". Though the tale is somewhat fanciful, Trigg argues that it is significant because it is "less concerned with the courtiers' feelings of psychological shame, and more with the king's power to induce the shame effect" (75). She notes that this idea is also present in Middle English romance, where shame is emphasised for "its performative and its ritual aspect"; in Malory, shame is invoked by "good" knights to question the chivalric identity of those practising uncourtly behaviour (76, 78). That is, the threat of shame is more important than the

actual physical or psychological shaming of a knight. I would suggest that this idea can be carried further; a knight calls social shame down upon others, but also upon himself. In the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, Cadur, when asked whether to fight or retreat from a Roman battalion, answers Cleges with firm resolution:

‘It ware schame þat we scholde schone for so lytyll.

Sir Lancelott sall neuer laughe, þat with þe kyng lengez,

That I sulde lette my waye for lede appon erthe!

I sall be dede and vndone ar I here dreche

For drede of any doggeson in 3on dym schawes’ (ll. 1719-23)

It is again the invocation of shame, rather than shame itself, which holds power; Cadur uses the “shame effect” to encourage his troops. Cadur’s speech forces his men to recall not just worldly dishonour, but dishonour before one of their comrades; Lancelot is specifically cited as both a great knight and a close friend to the king to emphasize the humiliation they would endure. Gawain is also keenly aware of the importance of creating honour not only for yourself, but also for your comrades; he engages his forces in battle with the much larger army of Lorraine because he wants the “galyarde gomes” to “proue to-daye who sall the prys wyn!” (ll. 2748, 2751). Aware that these are men who have boasted “with the coppe knyghtly wordes” in Arthur’s chamber but who have “faughte noghte þeire fill this fyftene wynter”, he ensures that neither he nor Priamus enters the fight until they have been given a chance to achieve glory (ll. 2750, 2822).

The public expression of homosocial bonds is made clear in Arthur’s response to the sight of Gawain’s injured body. His grief is relayed to us by the narrator through descriptive passages recounting the physical effect the loss of Gawain has on Arthur’s body: he stares and is “glopyns in herte” and “gronys full grisely with gretande teris” before kneeling down, clutching and kissing Gawain’s body (ll. 3949 and 3950). The image of Arthur’s grief is intensely vivid and corporeal; similar versions of “gronys full grisely” are used in the poem for the pain experienced by dying men on the field of battle (ll. 1373 and 3938), linking Arthur’s inner sorrow with the physical sensation of a battle wound. This is echoed in the physical weakness manifest when Arthur attempts to leave the body: “Than swetes the swete kyng and in swoun fallis, / Swafres vp swiftly, and swetly hym kysses / Till his burliche berde was bloody berown” (ll.3969-71). The shock of Gawain’s death grieves Arthur so deeply that he is physically unstable, teetering as if he himself had

received his death blow; it is symbolically reflected in the blood which passes from Gawain's body to Arthur's beard. Indeed, the author states that the bloodied Arthur looks "alls he had bestes birtenede and broghte owt of liffe"; the importance of physical violence in the relationship between the two men is emphasised in their final embrace (l. 3972). Arthur is mentally unstable, as well, and his men criticise him: "It es no wirchipe, iwysse, to wryng thyn hondes; / To *wepe als a woman* it es no witt holden. / *Be knyghtly of contenaunce*, als a kyng scholde" (ll. 3977-79, emphasis added). In reaction to this warning, Arthur channels his loss into a perhaps more masculine outlet, anger, and vows immediately (and somewhat rashly) to avenge his nephew. The length of time the poet devotes to Gawain's death and its mourning takes up more lines by far than any other single event in the poem: Gawain's last battle spans approximately 140 lines (ll. 3724-864), over forty lines longer than Arthur's battle with Mordred (ll. 4173-253) and the king's death (ll. 4311-27). Several lines are devoted to laments from Mordred and his men (ll. 3865-96) and over one hundred are given to Arthur to mourn his nephew (ll. 3943-4051). Although Mordred himself has slain Gawain, it is the recollection of Gawain's contribution to chivalry which arouses Mordred's grief (ll. 3875-94). Arthur's tribute to Gawain is, as discussed in Chapter Three, almost entirely focused on Gawain's military prowess and Arthur's dependency on Gawain: "My wele and my wirchipe of all þis werlde riche / Was wonnen thourghe sir Wawayne" (ll. 3963-64). These long passages indicate the important role Gawain's death plays in the outcome of the story, and the laments signify not only the loss of a great knight, but also the termination of the influential homosocial bond between Arthur and Gawain. The author uses these characters' violence to highlight the flaws of the chivalric world (Gawain's impatience, Arthur's pride), but he also devotes an impressive amount of the poem to the centrality of violence to the relationship between king and knight.

The representations of violence in Middle English Arthurian romances also address the issue of peace: is it desired by knights and/or authors? How does the perpetration of martial violence affect the reader's judgement of the protagonists/antagonists? As discussed in Chapter Three, failure to comprehend the social function of chivalric violence can lead one to misconstrue the late medieval reader's response to literary combat. The battle sequences in the *Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Golagros and Gawane* do not signify anti-war sympathies, but engage in the narratives' discussion of human flaws and appropriate kingly behaviour. *Golagros*

does not catalogue the destruction of innocent lives, but instead focuses on knightly battles and chivalric courtesy – contrasting Gawain’s behaviour with Arthur’s. Arthur’s actions are again questioned in the *Awntyrs*, but the single combat between Gawain and Galeron offers an alternative in which controlled violence is a means to avoid full-scale war. Descriptions of warfare show this ambivalence; Gawain and Galeron fight boldly with “brondes so bright”, but their armour is “shred” and “bybled” (*Awntyrs*, ll. 568, 569, 570). While foreknowledge of the destruction of the Arthurian reign forces the reader to question Arthur’s decisions as king (attacking Golagros, the initial seizure of Galeron’s lands, and demanding fealty from both), the chivalric combat in both provides set-pieces for the authors to use in their discussion of imperialist policies and chivalric behaviour; violence, as the building-block of Arthur’s reign, is both useful and dangerous. This is also seen in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, in which the author uses chivalric encounters to debate the constitution of the “ideal” knight, balanced between the display of prowess in violent combat and courteous brotherhood. Descriptions of battle emphasise the physical strength of the stroke more than the injury it causes; the wounds are qualified by their reflection of the stroke, so that Bors hits Arthur “on his helm [...] so fast / That ner he lost all his pride” and knights “with dintes sore [...] deepe woundes delten” (*Morte Arthur*, ll. 2176-77 and 2896-97). Arthur’s knights’ failure to successfully combine chivalric courtesy and prowess (Gawain’s stubbornness, Lancelot’s deceit) in the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* contributes to the king’s downfall, the poem’s dark tone reflected in the grimness of the wars against Lancelot and Mordred. Arthur’s knights bleed both figuratively and literally in the final battle, where the chivalric ideal is shattered in the destruction of beautiful armour, the symbols of knightly status; “rich hauberkes” are “rive and rent” so that “through-out brast the redde blood” and “helmes bright” are “hewed” so that “through their brestes ran the blood” (ll. 3076-77, 3084-85).

As I argued in Chapter Three, however, it is important to view these depictions of medieval warfare carefully; George Keiser insists that Arthur’s campaigns must be looked upon from a late-medieval mindset that sees both Arthur and the campaigns of the Hundred Years’ War in a generally favourable light, and that the author presents a king who reacts to an outside threat to his “nation” and then gathers considerable fame through his subsequent victories (“Edward III”, 50-51). I agree that violence in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* is not condemned; the author is certainly attempting, despite a modern reader’s shock at the brutality of

Arthur's sieges and raids, to make the *army* of Arthur's enemies worthy opponents to Christian men. Mordred's army is full of pagan, foreign and criminal warriors; Sir Craddock tells Arthur that Mordred has

‘Dubbede of þe Danmarkes dukes and erlles,
Disserueride þem sondirwise, and cités dystreynede,
To Sarazenes and Sessoynes appon sere halues.
He has semblede a sorte of selcouthe berynes,
Soueraynes of Surgeuale and sowdeours many,
Of Peyghtes and paynymms and prouede knyghttes,
Of Irelande and Orgaile, owtlawede berynes’ (ll. 3528-34)

The “otherness” of Mordred’s army is emphasised, increasing their barbarity to both Arthur and the reader. Their destruction of cities, pillaging and raping of holy women is immediately placed in the context of their foreignness; isolated from Arthur’s chivalric court, they commit brutal acts instead of courageous deeds. The extent to which the medieval reader felt horror at the destruction Arthur caused on his warpath through Italy must be considered carefully.⁸⁵ The arson and pillaging of town and country was – according to Kaeuper – commonplace both in private warfare and *chansons* of the period (177). Chivalric chronicles such as the Chandos Herald’s *Life of the Black Prince* also made an explicit link between knights and the destruction of the countryside: “They made their way through Caux, burning, laying waste, and driving out the inhabitants, until the French were full of sorrow” (Barber, 87). The *Life* was a celebratory text written to honour the memory of the Black Prince, so it seems unlikely that such passages would have been included if they meant to criticise Edward. To better understand how to evaluate Arthur’s behaviour, we must look at the context of Arthur’s raids within the poem.

William Matthews, writing in the 1960’s, was one of the first scholars to classify the action of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* as “ruthless imperialistic warfare”, denouncing Arthur as “cruel and keen” (135).⁸⁶ Göller finds Arthur’s behaviour corrupted by his growing power; he is finally condemned for spilling innocent blood during the conquest of Italy, “a typological admonishment to every

⁸⁵ For a discussion of medieval perspectives of violence, see Daniel Baraz, “Violence or Cruelty? An Intercultural Perspective”, *A Great Effusion of Blood?: Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark Daglas Meyerson, Daniel Thiery, and Oren Falk (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004) 164-89.

⁸⁶ For Matthews’ argument, see *The Tragedy of Arthur* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1960).

monarch involved in war” (“Reality versus Romance”, 28). The decision to continue ravaging Italy after the defeat of Lucius, and the subsequent attacks on Lorraine, Metz, Como and Tuscany, is the key moment when scholars such as John Finlayson and Larry Benson believe Arthur’s wars turn from “just” to “unjust”, when the fighting moves from knights to villages and towns. The king is kind and merciful to the duchess and her children after he besieges Metz, but he dishonourably attacks holy buildings, and the poem relates the piteous cries of its citizens (ll. 3032-75). In Como, his men “steke and stabbis thorowe that them azayne-standes”, but afterwards “comfourthes” the people (“comouns”) with “knyghtly wordez” (ll. 3110, 3131). Arthur’s invasion of Tuscany, is the most questionable:

[He] Wroghte wedewes full wlonke, *wrotherayle synges*,
 Ofte *wery* and *wepe* and *wryngen their handis*,
 And all he wastys with werre thare he awaye rydez –
 Thaire welthes and their wonny[n]ges wandrethe he wroghte!
 Thus they spryngen and sprede and sparis bot lytill,
Spylles dispetouslye and spillis their vynes (ll. 3154-59, emphasis added)

The expression (aural and visual) of pain during the violent episode suggests the reader should pity Arthur’s victims. The widows are given voice and feeling; their suffering becomes reality. In contrast, Arthur’s army are “dispiteous” in their actions and are alienated from the reader’s sympathies. This is not to say, however, that the poet is condemning Arthur and his knights, but it is perhaps questioning the courtesy of their actions. The author places Arthur’s dream of his fall from Fortune’s Wheel immediately after he invades Tuscany. The sage who interprets the dream both praises and censures the king; he glorifies the violence Arthur has committed in pursuit of knightly deeds, claiming that he shall be judged ““for dedis of armes, / For þe doughtyeste þat euer was duelland in erthe”” and that ““many clerkis and kynges sall karpe of [his] dedis / And kepe [his] conquestez in chronycle for euer”” (ll. 3442-43, 3444-45). However, he also advises Arthur to repent of the innocent deaths he caused in his pride: ““Thow has schedde myche blode, and schalkes distroyede, / Sakeles, in cirquytrie, in sere kynges landis. / Schryfe the of thy schame and schape for thyn ende!”” (ll. 3398-400). Arthur’s pride and shame are part of the cycle he must complete on Fortune’s Wheel. In the dream, Arthur’s reign is in the frame of the Nine Worthies, all of whom describe themselves as having once ruled great lands by their deeds or arms; their rise and fall on the wheel depends on their physical

proWess, highlighted by the violence with which Arthur claims Fortune cast him down: “scho whirles the whele and whirles me vndire, / Till all my qwarters þat whille whare qwaste al to peces, / And with that chayere my chyne was chopped in sondire” (ll. 3388-90). Arthur’s place on Fortune’s Wheel means that he, like all of the great worthies, must eventually account for his power and fame and accept his own mortality. As Richard Moll points out, Arthur’s fall “need not be seen as a condemnation of his earthly achievement, only its necessary outcome” because “neither the king nor the court over which he presides is exempt from the mutability of history” (115, 121).

The question of peace is also addressed several times in the narrative as Arthur gathers his war councils. Although there is no call for peace before Arthur leaves Britain, the king does respond to Cador’s warmongering enthusiasm with the advice to approach war with caution and careful consideration:

‘Sir Cadour,’ quod þe kyng, ‘thy concell es noble;
 Bot þou arte a meruailous man with thi mery wordez,
 For thow countez no caas, ne castes no forthire,
 Bot *hurles furthe appon heuede as thi herte thynkes*.
 I moste trette of a trew towchande þise nedes,
 Talke of thies tythands þat tenes myne herte.’ (ll. 259-64)

Arthur describes the heart, the origin of the soul, as the guiding principle of Cador’s desire for war; he does not deliberate, but “hurles furthe” his thoughts,⁸⁷ and Arthur informs Cador that he must talk over the matter before making a decision. The council engages in a discussion of the value of war and peace; before entering into war against Lucius, Arthur listens to what his lords have to say, most of them bitterly calling for revenge or vowing to follow Arthur’s will. In contrast, the continuation of the war after his enemy is defeated is never given the same wise consideration; his decision to continue his Continental invasion is littered with war-like vocabulary. Arthur does not ask his council *if* he should continue the war, but rather *how*: he “*comandez them kenely to caste all þeire wittys / How he may conquere by crafte the kythe þat he claymes*” (ll. 2392-93). Arthur makes a command, not a request, and it

⁸⁷ Hurlen (v): “to rush violently or quickly, charge”. *Middle English Dictionary*, Web, 27 June 2013. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>>

is being given “kenely”,⁸⁸ implying a sense of military intensity which is lacking in the deliberate musings of his first council, where he promises to heed the advice of his lords rather than “warpe wordez in waste” (l. 150). The nature of Arthur’s wars and his engagement in them reflect an ambiguous view on war and peace; the wounded body of the enemy is mourned in the Continental sieges, but it is praised in Arthur’s battles. Violence against a worthy opponent in war is to be admired; the injury signifies the virtue of the man who has created the injury. When the British forces ambush the Roman army, their violent deeds are glorified: “Thrughe brenés and bryghte scheldez brestez they thyrlé, / Bretons of the boldeste, with their bryghte swerdez. / Thare was Romayns ouerreddyn and ruydly woundyde, / Arrestede as rebawdez with ryotous knyghttez!” (ll. 1413-16). The wounded brains, chests and bodies are linked with the bold Britains and the deeds they accomplish with bright swords. Nevertheless, these deeds quickly turn negative when Arthur “wastys with werre” all the cities he conquers (l. 3156). Göller’s argument that the alliterative *Morte Arthure* is a “typological admonishment to every monarch involved in war” oversimplifies the attitude of the poet, who Göller himself admits has an “enthusiasm for the description of war” (“Reality versus Romance”, 28). It is possible that Arthur’s wars become unjust at (or after) the siege of Metz.⁸⁹ Even then, however, the presentation of the sieges does not indicate that the continuation of the war itself is wrong; it is the way in which the violence is carried out – destroying churches and non-combatants – which is questioned. In the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, as in all of the Middle English romances I have discussed, war is complex and must be carefully considered; the behaviour of its participants must be monitored.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ The adverb “keneli” can mean bravely, stoutly, earnestly, eagerly, loudly, urgently, or sharply (*Middle English Dictionary*). All definitions imply a sense of strong urgency from Arthur; if it is Arthur’s lords who must “cast all their wittes” keenly, the passage still indicates the demanding nature of Arthur’s sudden instruction.

⁸⁹ For further reading on the “unjust war” discussion, see Larry Benson, “The Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and Medieval Tragedy”, *Tennessee Studies in Literature* (1966): 75-87; John H., “The Concept of the Hero in *Morte Arthure*”, *Chaucer und Seine Zeit: Symposium für Walter F. Schirmer*, ed. Arno Esch (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1968) 249-74; Richard Moll, *Before Malory: Reading Arthur in Later Medieval England* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003) 97-122.

⁹⁰ Lesley Johnson avoids making a judgement on the morality of Arthur’s wars, and instead comments that the poem “seems to be a product of a lifetime’s reading and reflection on the business of diplomacy, military campaigning and governance in late fourteenth-century England”. Regardless of whether the poet had any direct involvement in warfare, his detailed and subtle presentation of violence certainly indicates that he had a great understanding of the significance of combat and injuring. See Lesley Johnson, “The Alliterative *Morte Arthure*”, *The Arthur of the English* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2001), 90-99.

Violence as a Reference to Chronicle and Historical Writing

Medieval literary depictions of warfare range widely, from fantastical displays of individual prowess to tactical employment of siege weaponry. As I have demonstrated, the combat may be described differently according to genre, incorporating elements of historical warfare to varying levels. Medieval romance often inaccurately depicts warfare as single combat between two knights on horseback, which gave rise to the popular belief in what Matthew Bennett calls the “great man and decisive battle approach to warfare”, wherein the victory or loss of the battle appears to depend entirely on the prowess and success of the mounted cavalry (“The Myth of the Military Supremacy”, 306). Matthew Strickland also points out the “formulaic descriptions” of mounted charges commonly found in romances, which portray battle as “a series of successive single encounters”, which seldom occur outside the literary world (331 and 335). A closer analysis of historical warfare in the Middle Ages reveals that victory often swung on the efficacy of an army’s archers, foot soldiers and siege weaponry. Scholarly understanding of late medieval warfare was transformed by the “Military Revolution Thesis”, proposed by Michael Roberts in the 1950s,⁹¹ and the “infantry revolution of the 14th century”, which suggested a drastic change in the formulation and fighting of medieval combat brought about by “revolutions” in military technology (siege artillery, gunpowder) and infantry tactics (English longbows, pikemen) in the later Middle Ages. Historians who followed this hypothesis claimed that the English longbow changed the way war was fought and won, and that the weapon’s increased range and impact dealt a deadly blow to cavalries, achieving physical and social death for the mounted knight in battle (DeVries, “Catapults Are Not Atomic Bombs”, 460-61). Malcolm Vale claims that the archers “broke up [cavalry] formations, killed, wounded or maddened their valuable mounts, and could penetrate their mail and rudimentary plate armour”, whilst pikemen “formed an impenetrable hedge, a defensive and immovable wall” (*War and Chivalry*, 100). In contrast to the mounted combat so popular in romance, chronicles are often very aware of the importance of foot soldiers in warfare; in the *Anonimale Chronicle*, for example, Edward Balliol’s forces contain archers and footmen who “did so much that the Scots were repulsed and at least 900 were killed” (149).

⁹¹ See Michael Roberts, *The Military Revolution, 1560-1660: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the Queen’s University of Belfast* (Belfast: M. Boyd, 1956).

Late medieval battles were won with a successful balance between cavalry and infantry forces. Matthew Bennett's re-evaluation of the eleventh-century Battle of Hastings already observes an interaction between archers, foot soldiers and mounted cavalry; mounted knights could successfully breach the defence of an infantry line only if it were broken by archers and other infantrymen and foot soldiers were highly vulnerable if they moved to the attack on their own ("The Myth of the Military Supremacy", 316). Kelly DeVries states that "the archer's purpose was simply to narrow and confuse the attackers' charge, so that when it fell on the infantry troops, it did so in a disrupted and relatively impotent manner" ("Catapults Are Not Atomic Bombs", 463). In addition, Vale notes that the role of pikemen was similarly supportive, acting as a screen for both oncoming charges and for the reformation of their own mounted men (*War and Chivalry*, 125). Historians now appreciate medieval combat as a battle fought by all; each member has a vital role in the success of the rest of the army. An advancing army required a balance of mounted and unmounted warriors and weaponry to be effective; cavalry and infantry alike needed to help and support their comrades in order to weaken and break the opposition defence. Chronicles often reflect an understanding of this relationship between archers and mounted cavalry in factual warfare; in the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, Edward II has "a great multitude of archers and other men-at-arms who vigorously defended the crossing" at Burton and Edward III encourages his lords and archers in advance of the impending fight at Halidon Hill (105, 167).

As I suggest in Chapter Two, chronicle violence commonly incorporated (but was not limited to) elements of factual warfare; in addition to acknowledging the importance of infantrymen in battle, chronicle depictions included effective military tactics (battle formations, speeches), the use of siege weaponry and artillery, the raiding of towns, and accounts of battle fatalities. However, I want to argue not for rigid definitions of generic violence, but for medieval authors' readiness to borrow from other traditions, creating fluid boundaries for genres. Middle English romance authors could also choose the vocabulary they deployed to depict their combat in ways which drew on – or contrasted with – their knowledge of battle descriptions in chronicle warfare. If they wished to give their story a trace of authenticity or show their characters' military intelligence, they could manipulate their graphic encounters to reflect chronicle tropes by imitating contemporary warfare. The *Morte Arthure* employs siege weapons and artillery; during the siege of Metz, crossbows are used to

attack Arthur (ll. 2424-29). The knights search for a place to “sett withe engeynes” for the siege, and they protect their position by searching around for “schotte-men” (ll. 2423 and 2467). Once the siege starts, they assault the town with “somercastell and sowe appon sere halfes”, scale the walls and “boldly þay buske and bendes engynes / Payses in pylotes and proues theire castes: / Mynsteris and masondewes they malle to þe erthe” (ll. 3033 and 3036-38). As in the *Brut*, where Edward Balliol assaults the city of Berwick with “gonnes” and “opere egynes” which “beten adoune unto ther / erþe, wiþ gret stones” houses and churches (ch. 223, p. 281, ll. 27, 28, 29-30), the *Morte Arthure* is emphasising the authenticity of the narrative by drawing on a chronicle description of warfare which incorporated elements of contemporary warfare. In addition, by illustrating Arthur’s tactical use of the engines, the romance author indicates Arthur’s suitability as a military campaigner; he is successful not just because he has a highly-skilled group of knights, but also because he is able to utilise military technology.

Archers and footmen, used so effectively in the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, are deployed with similar efficiency in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which reflects a knowledge of chronicle war descriptions and historical reality by narrating both knightly combat and infantry fighting. The close relationship between archers and mounted knights is hinted at when Cadur faces a Roman force led by the King of Libya: “Thane schotte owte of þe schawe schiltrounis many, / With scharpe wapynns of were schotande at ones” (ll. 1765-66). It is implied here that the “shotande” weapons are being fired at the same time that the mounted warriors charge from the bushes, boosting their advancing attack. Arthur’s tactical use of all his military resources is made even more specific before the battle at Sessoynes (ll. 1988-93), where he has carefully positioned all of his men to get the best use out of them; he has arranged for a selection of knights to make an initial foray, followed by an infantry which will hold its line and protect the knights behind them. This mounted cavalry, in turn, is poised to charge once the archers arranged on the flanks of his army have successfully forced the opposition army to squeeze towards the centre to avoid the piercing missiles, effectively disrupting their battle lines. This indeed happens later in the battle, providing opportunity for a lengthy passage on the effectiveness of both longbows and crossbows (ll. 2095-106). The narrative highlights the interaction between infantry and mounted warrior which is represented

in chronicle; the English bowmen attack both foot soldiers (“bregaundeȝ”) and knights. The author shows an awareness of how the archers should be used, as they shoot the knights’ horses to thin the enemy lines (l. 2100); the passage emphasises that it is the hail of arrows which breaks the defensive shield wall (“all the scheltron schonte and schoderide at ones”). Once the line has been broken, the mounts are immediately in disarray; the archers have completed their mission and a charge of noblemen crashes through (ll. 2109-10). These descriptions of battle, borrowed from the chronicle tradition, lend the combat authenticity, but the *Morte Arthure* is also interested in what these contemporary developments mean for the knightly society. The use of archers increases the reader’s sympathy for the mounted heroes; the warriors’ armour is vulnerable under a storm of lethal bolts which rip “quaintly” (*MED* cleverly, skilfully, cunningly, craftily) through mail coats and shields. The author seems ambivalent about the deadly archers; he acknowledges their effectiveness but also complains that “siche flyttinge es foule þat so þe flesche derys” (l. 2099). The poet is very aware that the bowmen threaten the knights physically and socially; we pity the knights who are unable to respond or guard against the swift arrows of distant archers (ll. 2103-04) and rejoice when Arthur and his knights arrive to win the battle.

Kaeuper claims that chivalric literature offers guidance for ideal chivalric conduct during war (170), and this can be seen in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Lancelot of the Laik*, which use descriptions of violence to create sympathetic and antipathetic warriors. While single combat provides ample opportunity for ethical discussion in the romances, they also incorporate the factual elements common in chronicle violence to approve or condone violent action. In *Lancelot of the Laik*, the increased intensity of brutal injuring in *Lancelot of the Laik* is inspired by graphic descriptions in Scottish historiographies such as Blind Hary’s *Wallace* and John Barbour’s *Bruce*. Battle scenes are filled with graphic images in the Scottish historiographies; “stekit to deid on ground lay mony man” and the cries of the dying are “hidwyss for to her” (*Wallace*, VII, l. 836 and *Bruce* XIII, l. 1610). These images (and sounds) of the battlefield are picked up in *Lancelot of the Laik*, with its knights “sobing on the ground”, their cries “lamentable and petws for til her” (ll. 2658 and 3265). The author of the Scottish *Lancelot* provided more than a simple translation of the Prose *Lancelot*; he is aware of the implications of violent images, and constructs the language of his combat in a way that would put the reader in mind of

the vocabulary being used to describe the Scottish fight for independence. While not directly reproducing the language of the *Bruce* or *Wallace*, the poem acknowledges the existence of this intense description of warfare and draws on it to accentuate the prowess of its protagonists and the cruelty of its antagonists. In the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, it is Arthur's destruction of cities and towns that tests the reader's sympathy; the depictions of the raids, borrowed from chronicle, engage with the value of peace and the costs of war. Often, chronicle writers use these descriptions to manipulate the sympathies of the reader; in the *Brut*, the author quite clearly criticises the barbarity of the Scots when they raid Northumberland during the reign of Edward II; they kill innocents (women and "children þat laye / in cradell") and destroy holy buildings (ch. 190, p. 210, ll. 9-10). In contrast, in Andrew of Wyntoun's chronicle, it is Edward I's men who attack innocents: "Þai sparit nouþer carl na [page]; / Batht aulde and ʒonge, men and wiffis, / And soukkande barnys þar tynt þar liffis" (ll. 1818-20). Like the chronicle writers, the author of the *Morte Arthure* chooses his language of attacks on citizens to provoke or withdraw sympathy. Arthur promises that his knights will not stray into questionable behaviour, vowing to the Duchess of Lorraine that no one will harm the women and children: "I gyf ʒow chartire of pes, and ʒoure cheefe maydens, / The childire and þe chaste men" (ll. 3058-59). At this point, Arthur is still a "valyante bierne" who speaks "myldly with full meke wordes" (ll. 3055, 3056). As the accounts of the Anglo-Scottish wars manipulate sympathies by picturing the atrocities the English or Scottish commit to children and women, the *Morte Arthure* uses the audible grief of the Tuscan widows and inhabitants of Metz to turn our pity towards the non-combatant victims: "the pyne of þe pople was peté for to here!" (l. 3043).

Violence as Allusion to Romance and/or Spiritual Literature

The vocabulary of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* is influenced by not only chronicle and romance representations of violence, but also depictions which would be familiar to the devout reader. The romance set-piece of single combat, two knights jousting against each other to prove their worth, is the representation of the "ideal" chivalric encounter, but the *Morte Arthure* does not hesitate to invoke the vocabulary and sacrificial violence of Passion narratives. As discussed in Chapter Four, the violent language of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* draws inspiration from graphic representations of Christ's suffering, particularly in its references to the pierced

heart.⁹² All three traditions of violent representations – romance, chronicle and spiritual – are highlighted in Gawain’s adventure with Priamus. During Arthur’s wars, Gawain wanders into the forest and encounters Sir Priamus, an enemy knight. They engage in a ferocious single combat and endure “stokes at þe stomake with stelyn poyntes” (l. 2554) which leave them both near death. The disparity between the war narrative and Gawain’s single combat is not as incongruous as it first seems; on the contrary, the episode highlights the ability (and desire) of Middle English Arthurian romances to allude to various genres (romance, devotional, chronicle) within their narratives through a deliberate choice of violent language – and not without reason.

The inclusion of Gawain’s adventure with Priamus has been remarked upon by previous scholars of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Richard Moll states that the episode has been viewed as a chivalric scene from a romance, included to contrast knightly “adventure” and jousting with the realities of warfare and thus revealing the meaninglessness of heroic endeavour (102). Rather than see it as critical of knighthood, Lesley Johnson suggests this episode, in the chivalric “adventure” tradition, is primarily about making another political convert to Arthur’s cause (“The Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, 95). Karl Heinz Göller describes the scene as a piece of inverted romance which clashes with the reality of war in the fourteenth century: “nearly all the stereotype scenes of courtly literature are recognisable, but they are embedded in new contexts and ridiculed either by comic-ironic parody or by confrontation with the historical reality of the fourteenth century” (“Reality versus Romance”, 16). Some scholars argue that it is a purposeless chivalric combat which marks the turning point in Arthur’s downfall (John Finlayson), while others consider it a symbolic parallel to Arthur’s fight with the giant (Wolfgang Obst). If viewed in

⁹² There is, of course, some room for scribal error in the use of the word “spear” in the *Morte Arthure*; as Jefferson and Putter point out, the inconsistent alliterative patterns in the poem often cluster around words such as “spear” and “men”, indicating a possibility that the Thornton scribe glossed them as easier readings of the original alliterative words. They compare, for example, “That þe grounden *sper*e glade to his herte” (l. 2972), with “Pat þe growden *glayfe* graythes in sondyre” (l. 3761), arguing that the Thornton scribe has likely emended other difficult alliterating lines elsewhere in the manuscript (*The Siege of Jerusalem*). The frequent use of “sper” in the *Morte Arthure* (29 instances, at least 6 alliteratively inconsistent) certainly indicates a scribal and authorial preference for the term, but I would argue that Thornton’s interest in Christ’s Passion suggests a reason other than simplicity; his fascination with the connection between secular and religious violence may have influenced his choice to emend alliterative lines with “sper”. For further discussion on the *Morte Arthure*’s alliterative patterning, see Judith Jefferson and Ad Putter, “Alliterative Patterning in the ‘Morte Arthure’”, *Studies in Philology* 102.4 (2005): 415-33.

terms of Elaine Scarry's definitions of descriptions of war, it might even be seen as a large form of "omission", an extended period of narrative in which the audience is distracted from the brutalities of warfare – specifically, Arthur's siege of Metz – whilst Gawain and his fellow knights are sent foraging in the forests. The scene is set for a romance adventure with a long, beautifully detailed description of the natural landscape around them; Jeremy Withers hypothesises that this is a reminder of the beneficial properties of nature during peace, one which the warriors can only think on so long before Gawain's adventuring brings them back into the world of violence (95). The reader's attention may be drawn away from the combat that is about to take place when the poet describes Priamus' beautiful armour, but this again emphasises the importance of heraldry in establishing his worthiness: "He bare g[l]essenande in golde thre grayhondes of sable, / With chapes a[nd] cheynes of chalke-whyte syluer, / A charebocle in þe cheefe chawngande of hewes" (ll. 2521-23). The episode is certainly structured as a separate adventure, but I question the argument that its purpose is to show the irrelevance of romance combat. Throughout the poem, the author includes similar mini-narratives of one-on-one combat during battle set-pieces. Gawain's decision to leave camp is dangerous and perhaps foolish, but it seems primarily constructed to discuss chivalric behaviour in single combat. Priamus' request to be absolved of his sins (ll. 2587-88) and the use of holy water to heal the knights adds a spiritual layer to the fight, and I will argue that the language of the violence itself alludes to the sacrificial.⁹³ The alliterative *Morte Arthure* calls upon various forms of violence throughout the narrative, attempting to use its language to both question and clarify the behaviour of Arthur and his knights.

It is, in the very character of its structure and placement, an episode whose value should be seen in view of the overarching morality of the poem. The combat is a narrative set-piece to build upon the complexity of Gawain's behaviour. The audience has already witnessed, earlier in the poem, Gawain's sudden actions in the counsel with the Roman emperor; we have seen him in his role as advisor, and we have discovered that he lacks the even-tempered nature that is required of a good diplomat. The narrator has also told us of his prowess in war. However, Gawain is

⁹³ The relationship between chivalry and religion provides a tension which can, of course, be seen throughout the poem; see Donna Lynne Rondolone, "Wyrchipe: The Clash of Oral-Heroic and Literate-Ricardian Ideals in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*", *Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry*, ed. Mark Amodio (New York: Garland, 1994) 207-39.

also a familiar figure in chivalric romances and he must fulfil his role as “knight” which the audience expects, through an individual quest and test of arms.

Nevertheless, the poet is aware of the incongruous nature of the episode in the narrative and uses this to his advantage, taking the overall morals of the poem – a glorification of chivalric deeds and a castigation of Arthur’s self-exalting pride – and reflecting them in a minor form in Gawain’s actions. Priamus’ very first comment to Gawain is an accusation of pride:

‘Whedyr prykkes thow, pilour, þat proffers so large?

Here pykes thowe no praye, profire when þe lykes;

Bot thow in þis perell put of the bettire,

Thowe sall be my presonere, for all thy prowde lates!’ (ll. 2533-36)

As the fight commences, the narrator chooses to complicate the episode by indicating the difficulty with which Gawain and Priamus are able to keep the chivalric combat separate from the warfare in which both knights have been embroiled for some time. At the beginning of the fight, the audience sees how “thus worthylye þes wyes wondede ere bothen” (l. 2547) as the usual chivalric blows are struck through shields, hauberks and mail shirts which create an almost artistic spectacle of fire: they “Feghtten and flouresche withe flawmande swerdez / Till þe flawes of fyre flawmes on their helmes” (ll. 2555-56).

These worthy wounds, however, take on an altogether grimmer tone when the world of chivalric combat meets the realities of warfare and the poet regales us with the grotesque images of injury he uses for battle violence: Gawain strikes through Priamus’ shield and side so that “with þe lyghte of þe sonne men myghte see his lyuere” (l. 2561). Gawain himself, when giving the stroke, seems to undergo a transformation whereby he is “greued” and “grychgide full sore”, and in his anger forgets the behaviour required for a chivalric duel and falls into a momentary battle rage (a behaviour he repeats in his final battle against Mordred) which results in the horrible wounding of Priamus (l. 2557). We are immediately brought back into the image of the battlefield, as Priamus responds to his injuring with “granes [...] fore greefe of his wondys” and the audience recalls similar scenes of soldiers “grislich gronand” (ll. 2563, 1373). It is only after Gawain breaches the border between duel and battlefield that Priamus responds in kind, cutting viciously through Gawain’s shoulder:

With þe *venymous swerde* a vayne has he towchede,

That voydes so violently þat all his witte changed –

The vesere, the aventaille, his vesturis ryche

With the valyant blode was verrede all ouer! (ll. 2570-73, emphasis added)

The “venymous swerde” alludes not only to its poison, which Priamus will later reveal, but also adds a darker, unknighly layer to a symbol (the sword) so closely related to the gallantry of knighthood; Priamus has used unfair tactics against his opponent which, like Gawain’s vicious attack, break the chivalric code. The description of the intensity with which Gawain’s blood bursts from his body is another reversion to the poem’s often very bloody images of injuring, and it is here again we see the bright images of heraldry – Gawain’s armour and fine clothes – being soiled by the spilling of blood. The audience view his injured body as a symbol of knightly chivalry whose bright sheen has been grotesquely blotted with the stains of warfare. However, almost immediately after they give each other these mortal wounds and Priamus explains the poison on his sword, the author draws again on romance motifs; Gawain asks Priamus what quest he is on and what his lineage is. Following Priamus’ long recital of his noble ancestry, Gawain claims to be no more than a yeoman in Arthur’s army, before Priamus’ exclamations cause him to reveal his true identity; the exchange and revelation of identities after knightly combat is standard behaviour in chivalric romances. The extremity of injury in chivalric jousts is not often as severe as it is in the case of Priamus and Gawain, however, and it is this juxtaposition of injuring and knightly combat that highlights the variety of influences in the encounter. After these formal exchanges, Priamus once again brings the audience back to the world of warfare by warning Gawain that the Duke of Lorraine’s army is in a nearby wood, and that they must leave soon to avoid danger and to tend their wounds.

The world of romance often produces a magical potion to heal wounded knights, such as the magical ointment of Morgan le Fay used by the damsel to cure Yvain in Chretien’s *The Knight with the Lion*;⁹⁴ in this case, however, it is not a magical potion, but a holy salve from the waters of Paradise. When Gawain’s men see his injured body, they react in much the same way they will at the end of the poem when they perceive his dead body: full of grief and fear over the loss of their leader and, thus, their own honour as they declare that ““For all oure wirchipe,

⁹⁴ *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, IV, Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1975) ll. 2947-3005.

iwysse, away es in erthe!’” (l. 2685). The injured bodies themselves are not given much description, but they are drained of the spirit of life: “In all the bodye of that bolde es no blode leuede” (l. 2697). Priamus “hastily, for his hurtte, all his herte chawngyd” and, like Gawain, he collapses lifeless on the ground whilst his men take care of him (l. 2701). After the sacrifice of the body, unity of fellowship is physically symbolised by the healing of the two knights with Priamus’ salves. After being stripped of their clothes, Gawain and Priamus are laid out on the ground:

They laide [Priamus] down in the lawndez and laghte of his wedes,
 And he lenede hym on lange, or how hym beste lykede.
 A fyole of fyne golde they fand at his gyrdill:
 ‘Pat es full of þe flour of þe four well
 Pat flowes owte of Paradice when þe flode ryses’ (ll. 2702-06)

Like newborn babies, the two knights are submitting their naked bodies to a (second) baptism, exposing their wounds to be anointed by the precious holy salve Priamus carries in a symbolically rich golden container. The wounds are a tender of their chivalric worth, but are also unclean; their chivalric sins can be purged through the washing of their wounds:

They vncouere þat cors with full *clene* hondes;
 With [the] *clere* watire a knyghte *clensis* theire wondes,
 Keled theym kyndly and *comforthed þeir hertes*,
 And whene þe carffes ware *clene* þay clede them azayne.

(ll. 2710-03, emphasis added)

Their helpless injured bodies are near death; the anointment of the holy balm brings a pseudo-resurrection from their near-death state. The process cleanses their physical, spiritual, and chivalric wounds; the words “clene”, “clere” and “clensis” are used to describe every element of the ritual. The treatment physically clears the injuries of Priamus’ poison and infection, but the holy balm (and the knight applying it) also “comfort[s] þeir hertes”; the process is symbolic of the greater, inner cleansing which the two knights should be going through after their experience. Neither knight is a religious figure, but the alliterative *Morte Arthure* offers something of a sacrificial parallel in the language and images conjured by the poet. Both knights have undertaken physical injuring and, as in Passion narratives such as

The Long Charter of Christ,⁹⁵ damage to the liver and drastic loss of blood; Gawain pierces Priamus so that “with the light of the sun men might see his liver” and Gawain’s blood “voydes [...] violently” after Priamus severs a vein (ll. 2561, 2571). The wounding leads to *physical* damage which can only be healed by *spiritual* means, suggesting that their souls are also unwell. Priamus plainly states that he desires absolution for his sins so that he can prepare for the afterlife (“suffre me, for sake of thy Cryste, / To schewe schortly my schrifte and schape for myn ende”, ll. 2587-88). Mary Hamel has challenged the idea that Priamus is a Saracen, instead arguing that Priamus’ name and Alexandrian heritage indicate he is Greek Orthodox; his reference to “thy Crist” is thus a request to be converted to Latin Christianity (298-306). Hamel’s argument intriguingly emphasises the political association between Arthur and Alexander through Priamus’ spiritual conversion; his dedication to Arthur’s cause prepares the reader for the king’s dream of the Nine Worthies.

The episode borrows from these spiritual allusions to comment on Gawain and Priamus’ chivalric “sickness”. The alliterative *Morte Arthure* uses allusions to spiritual sacrifice and redemption in the Gawain and Priamus episode to offer its heroes a form of chivalric cleansing; Arthur’s best knight (and, through him, Arthur) is given a chance to purge his pride and reform his chivalric behaviour. After the spiritual healing, the knights take a meal of bread, wine and meat (ll. 2714-15) to symbolise their new fellowship and Priamus converts to Arthur’s cause by agreeing to help Gawain’s men. The combat, in the guise of a romance adventure, is a mini-story of the larger narrative, and it brings with it certain understandings and expectations which, when put in context with the larger piece, force the audience to make judgements. Gawain and Priamus are both condemned for their pride; Gawain needlessly jeopardises his life for an unnecessary encounter in the forest, and Priamus says himself that his wounds from Gawain are a result of his arrogance:

‘I was so *hawtayne of herte* whills I at home lengede,
 I helde nane my hippe-heghte vndire heuen ryche;
 Forthy was I sente hedire with seuen score knyghttez
 To asaye of this were, be sente of my fadire.
 And I am for *cyrqwitrye* schamely supprisede,
 And *be aw[n]tire of armes owtrayedede fore euere!*”

⁹⁵ Lines 221-24; refer to Chapter Four for further analysis.

(ll. 2612-16, emphasis added)

He assesses that his punishment is a result of his pride or “surquidrie” in his “aunter of armes”, and it is for pride that Arthur is reprimanded by his philosopher after his dream of fortune. When Priamus discovers that it is a great knight who has injured him, and not one of Arthur’s household servants, he is relieved: “me ware leuer preuely be prykyd to þe herte / Than euer any prikkere had siche a pryse wonnyn” (ll. 2648-49). The pierced heart, in chivalric combat, may invoke sympathy (for the injured) or praise (for the injurer), but it must occur on the battleground, in public view of other knights, to gain worth; Priamus claims that it would be even more shameful to be defeated by an ordinary “prikkere” (*MED* “horseman”, “scout”) than to be struck in the heart “preuely”. The comment is a reflection of the emphasis on chivalric worth in the Gawain and Priamus episode, an encounter which punishes Priamus and Gawain for pride while highlighting the value of their chivalric injuring. The curing of the wounds with the salve is a chance for Gawain and Priamus to repent of their chivalric misdeeds as they are cleansed and their *hearts* are comforted in addition to their bodies (ll. 2711-12).

Gawain, however, much like Arthur after his dream, does not repent and does not renege on his actions; he does not change his behaviour after the lesson taught to him by the abrupt collision of knightly, military and spiritual worlds. Immediately after they are healed, Gawain rushes into battle with the Duke of Lorraine’s armies and persuades his men to engage in a highly dangerous combat in which his force is extremely outnumbered, an action which both Priamus and Sir Florent caution against. Gawain seems to recognise that his encounter with Priamus should caution against rash and proud behaviour, as he agrees that it is dangerous; however, he once again prioritises the gaining of honour through prowess (ll 2747-51). Gawain’s chivalric ideology is unbalanced; he still desires glory and courage above all else, even if it jeopardises the lives of his men. Lee Patterson sees the episode as Arthur’s failed transition from Priamus’ classical ancestry to his own, and that the conversion of Priamus to Arthur’s cause represents an Arthurian appropriation of Alexandrian values to the new order (217-30). Whilst Patterson believes this episode indicates Arthur’s failure to avoid Alexander’s fate, I would argue that it is more interested in Arthurian (and knightly) reformation than failure. It does not condemn Arthur or his knights; its purpose is to highlight the chivalric and ethical flaws of the Arthurian characters, who struggle to negotiate between Christian (and chivalric) morality and

the vanity often required for heroic endeavour. The audience observes that the physical sacrifice of the two knights leads to peace and brotherhood because of the healing powers of Christianity, but Gawain's sacrifice is not for God or to defend his country, but for fame and honour; the balance of chivalric prowess and courtesy is uneven.

Ralph Hanna states that alliterative poems are concerned with *gesta* or public deeds, searching for the values and problems of governance in the self and in the community; the hero is never entirely exemplary, and often repeats the errors previously made by himself or those he vanquished ("Alliterative Poetry", 504-06). This is at the core of not only the Gawain-Priamus episode, but of the entire narrative. Arthur and Gawain both have this problem in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*; they repeatedly encounter the dangers of excessive pride in public governance and, while great heroes, are never fully capable of rising above their flaws. Gawain's lack of precaution in the Priamus episode is repeated in his last battle against Mordred's army, when his men are outnumbered and encircled, and leads to the tragic end of his entire troop as well as himself. His fatal mistake, ignoring the warnings given to him and letting his pride persevere, is echoed on a much larger scale when Arthur sees Gawain's dead body and goes on the rampage to find and destroy Mordred despite the advice of his counsellors. George Keiser disputes the idea that Arthur's fall is a punishment for his sin, maintaining that Arthur himself acts as an agent of divine justice (in the war against Lucius and the defeat of the giant) and his ultimate acceptance of his death is a recognition of God's will ("The Theme of Justice", 98, 106-07). While Arthur's irrational demand to fight Mordred before more troops arrive hardly seems to be an acceptance of his fate – indeed, Arthur seems quite defiant in his rage – Keiser gets to the heart of the *Morte Arthure*'s message; the tale is one of "sin and expiation" rather than "sin and retribution" (102).

The contrast between the sacrificial allusions in the single combat and the unnecessary (and perhaps unethical) violence which follows it invokes a comparison and a questioning of the morality of Arthur's knights and of proper chivalric behaviour. While still sympathetic to the plight of the heroes, the poet uses allusions to romance, devotional and chronicle vocabularies of violence in order to make its reader think; the language specifically plays with external (and internal) genre conventions to both emphasise Arthur's glory and place his actions in a wider ethical

and literary context. It is an Arthurian poem which does not fit neatly into one box, but is an amalgamation of different concerns and ideas during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Its audience perceives the grotesque injuries and heroic deeds displayed in warfare and analyses this violence in the development (and destruction) of knights and chivalry. Arthur and his men, as the ultimate example of British homosocial chivalric combat, allow the *Morte Arthure*, *Lancelot of the Laik*, *Golagros and Gawane*, *The Awntwys off Arthure*, and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, amongst other Middle English poems, to showcase both the right and wrong way to integrate the behaviours and expectations of knightly society and kingship, as well as the inevitable impossibility of successfully merging them in medieval warfare. Rather than working within rigid generic boundaries, the authors of Middle English Arthurian romances manipulated various literary traditions and cultural issues in their representation of warfare and combat to engage their readers in a discussion of chivalric society and ideology.

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Appendix

Violence in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*

(by type of injuring)

General Body	Guts/ Intestines	Genitals	Ribs	Heart	Cleaving in Two	Blood	Head/B rain	Neck	Hands/ Limbs	Battlefield	Grisly Grooming
1120	1122	1123	1134	1135	1388-89	1799	2114	1798	4167-8	1131	1373
1797	1130	1129	1151	1371	2125	1863	2129	2975	4232	1372-73	3938
2202	1370	2173-74	2271	1858	2201	2062	2228-29	3760	4244-45	2143-50	
3683	2060-61		3843	2238-40	2206-08	2144-45	2272	4120		3929-42	
3831	2167-68		4237-39	2793	2254	2233	2770-71				
3844	2175-76			2909		2249-50	2959				
4250-1	2203			2911		2570-73	2993				
	2781-82			2972		3837	3709				
	3845					4121	3857				
						4130					
						4212					
						4233					