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## TRUTH, TRANSLATION, AND THE *TROY BOOK* WOMEN

by Lynn Shutters

When one thinks of the great writers of Middle English verse, John Lydgate is not likely to come to mind. Lydgate's vast corpus of writing has often been relegated to a somewhat embarrassing footnote in the annals of medieval literature, and it is relatively recently, in the last thirty years or so, that he has received any critical attention at all. Despite some resurgence of interest in Lydgate, he is still frequently dismissed as a deficient poet whose dullness nonetheless serves to emphasize just how exceptional other poets, particularly Chaucer, are in comparison.<sup>1</sup> The casting of Lydgate as Chaucer's eager yet ineffective disciple figures prominently in studies of Lydgate's *Troy Book*, a work that provides ample opportunity for comparison with Chaucer because it includes the pseudo-classical myth of Troilus and Cressida, and because Lydgate himself repeatedly refers to and compares his work with *Troilus and Criseyde*. How Lydgate depicts himself vis-à-vis his "Maister Chaucer" is certainly of some interest, as Chaucer's colossal presence in Lancastrian England was both a sheltering aegis and a daunting challenge to poets working in the English vernacular. There are problems, however, with reading Lydgate solely in Chaucer's shadow, for when we allow the Chaucerian sections of the *Troy Book* to serve as a stand-in for the work as a whole, other parts of the text, those parts which do not relate so directly to a literary giant, are all but ignored.

Some scholars have already begun the process of reevaluating the *Troy Book* by considering how it figures in the tumultuous political happenings occurring with the deposition of Richard II and the precarious rise of the Lancasters. Such studies focus by and large on the Prologue and closing of the poem, points at which Lydgate invokes his

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Derek Pearsall's *John Lydgate* (London 1970), in which Pearsall describes Lydgate as typically medieval and thus mundane: "His [Lydgate's] claim on us, his usefulness to us, is precisely this, that he is perfectly typical of medieval literary tradition, and provides us with a series of paradigms for our reading of medieval poetry. Prince Hal no doubt enjoyed Falstaff's company more, as we enjoy Chaucer's but he saw the value of cultivating Poins: Thou art a blessed fellow to think as every man thinks: never a man's thought in the world keeps the roadway better than thine" (18).

patron, Henry V, and rehearses his nationalistic motives for writing the text.<sup>2</sup> In this essay I would like to continue this process of reassessment by focusing not upon specific sections of the poem, but rather by considering a theme that runs throughout—Lydgate’s depiction of women. The depiction of the *Troy Book* women is usually viewed as categorically negative and an example of anti-feminist discourse based largely, if not exclusively, on Lydgate’s treatment of Criseyde. This viewpoint changes, however, when a study of the *Troy Book* is expanded to consider other women in the text, for while some female figures indeed conform to the characterization of Criseyde, others deviate from this pattern, suggesting an alternative model of true and faithful female behavior. The division of women into opposing lines of truthfulness and falsehood parallels other genealogical and successional lines in the *Troy Book*, and, like them, extends beyond the text to implicate contemporary issues of legitimacy and authority in both the literary and political spheres of Lancastrian England.

#### 1. LINEAGES OF TRUTH

To understand how women relate to the specific agenda of the *Troy Book*, it is first necessary to know something about the cultural work that this text was designed to perform. The *Troy Book*, an English verse “translation” of Guido delle Colonne’s Latin prose work the *Historia destructionis Troiae* (hereafter *Historia*), was composed between 1412 and 1420 under the patronage of Henry V. The poem is vast in both mythological scope and textual execution (it extends to over 30,000 lines), and Lydgate’s penchant for extensive amplifications and moralizing tangents is often viewed as one of the work’s many weaknesses. Yet there is an overarching theme that encompasses the many political, literary, and moral strands woven throughout the text: legitimization and authority. Recent critical considerations of the *Troy Book* have focused upon the parallels between the legitimizing agenda of the poet Lydgate and of his patron, Henry V, for both were engaged in the precarious task of fitting themselves into disrupted lines of succession.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Alan S. Ambrisco and Paul Strohm, “Succession and Sovereignty in Lydgate’s Prologue to *The Troy Book*,” *The Chaucer Review* 30 (1995) 40–57.

<sup>3</sup>As Alan S. Ambrisco and Paul Strohm (n. 2 above) note, “In each case, Lydgate’s treatment of interrupted succession is an attempt to grapple with the problem of how the broken series is secured and guaranteed” (40).

Authority runs a circuitous route in the *Troy Book*, for while the text is designed to confer and delimit the legitimacy of certain authors and certain rulers, the text itself must be authorized by the patron who commissions it, Henry V, by the source from which it is “translated,” Guido’s *Historia*, and by the physically absent yet verbally present authoritative English poet, Chaucer.

According to the Prologue, it was at the behest of Henry V (who was still prince of Wales when Lydgate commenced the *Troy Book*) that Lydgate undertook this literary project for the specific purpose of providing the English people with a historically accurate vernacular account of the Trojan War, so that the English of both “hie or lowe estate” (high or low rank) (Pro., line 182) might benefit from the moral exempla which the tale provides.<sup>4</sup> As multiple versions of the Trojan War, both in Latin and French, were available in Lydgate’s England, an important question arose as to which version was the best, and, for that matter, on what grounds a particular retelling was to be judged the best. Lydgate bases his choice on historical accuracy, or “truth,” and extols Guido’s *Historia* as the most accurate account of the war because of its fidelity to a long line of truth-telling authors that can be traced all the way back to Dares and Dictys, two alleged eyewitnesses of the actual event.<sup>5</sup> The faithful Guido is contrasted with other more poetic compilers of the war—Homer, Ovid, and Virgil—who, according to Lydgate, privilege poetic and not historical interests and therefore cannot be relied upon for factual information. Also, Lydgate criticizes Homer and Virgil for their chauvinistic interests; Homer writes only to lionize the

<sup>4</sup>Not surprisingly, Lydgate’s poem appears to be directed more to the “hie estate” than to the “lowe.” According to Robert R. Edwards, “Coats of arms indicate that *Troy Book* manuscripts were owned by fifteenth-century gentry and, in at least one instance, by aristocracy.” Introduction, *Troy Book: Selections* (Kalamazoo, MI 1998) 7.

All quotations of the *Troy Book* are taken from: *Lydgate’s Troy Book. A.D. 1412–20*, ed. Henry Bergen, 4 vols. in 3 (London 1906–1935; repr. 1975).

<sup>5</sup>The *Daretis Phrygii de excidio Troiae Historia*, attributed to Dares Phrygius, an alleged Trojan soldier, and the *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani Libri*, attributed to Dictys Cretensis, an alleged Greek soldier, were actually written sometime in late antiquity/the early medieval period. They are the primary sources for a counter-tradition of the Trojan War, which varies greatly from the classical poetic sources. The two accounts of Dares and Dictys were believed to be actual reportings of the Trojan War, and thus they were thought to predate Homer’s *Iliad*, the oldest poetic account of the event. For a discussion of Dares and Dictys and the counter-tradition, see Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* (Cambridge 1995) 18–20.

Greeks, while Virgil idolizes Rome's great founder Aeneas (apparently Guido and his line lack such nationalistic biases). Thus the Prologue operates to legitimize Guido's "line" of historical accuracy even as it appeals to the authority of Guido as the legitimizing factor of Lydgate's own literary ambitions.

Lydgate's loyalty to the "trouthe" of his subject matter is constantly reiterated in the Prologue, as is the fact that this literary enterprise is not a free, independent act springing forth from the author's mind, but a translation that continues an already-established line of authoritative material. The idea of translation is central to both the literary and political agenda of the *Troy Book* as it invokes the classical notions of *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii*—the carrying over or transfer of learned works and of political empire. Translation appropriates literary authority by allowing Lydgate to fit his work into a long line of truth-telling texts at the same time that it acquires political authority by linking the text to the political ambitions of Henry V. In the *Troy Book* acts of literary and political translation are completely intertwined, as Lydgate's project of *translatio studii* is designed to bolster Henry's own translation project, the carrying over of English rule into France.<sup>6</sup> How appropriate then that these two acts of translation, one literary and one political, should converge in a text about the Trojan War, the event that, with its diaspora of displaced Trojans, was the alleged source of all *translatio imperii* in the Middle Ages, and which, ever since Virgil's "translation" of Homer's account of the war, had served as the *locus classicus* for *translatio studii* as well.

Translation not only allows Lydgate to fit himself into a specific line of truth-telling authors, but also serves as the factor that distinguishes this group of authors from their more spurious counterparts, the classical poets. According to Lydgate, translators such as himself and Guido change only the stylistic elements of a text so that it can signify properly in its new linguistic and cultural context (the classical concept of sense-for-sense translation), while poets violate the substance of the text itself. Modern readers might blanch at Lydgate's disapproval of Homer, Ovid, and Virgil, yet it is notable that Lydgate does not disparage them

<sup>6</sup>In her discussion of Jean de Meun's prologue to his French translation of Boethius's *Consolatio de Philosophiae*, Rita Copeland describes a similar situation in which "*translatio studii* becomes part of the enterprise of *translatio imperii*." *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1991) 135.

on the grounds that they are bad poets; quite the contrary, the problem with these three is precisely that they are such extremely good poets, that their rhetorical skills are so refined as successfully to conceal the truth from their readers. As Lydgate writes of Homer:

And in his dities that wer so fresche & gay  
 With sugred wordes vnder hony soote,  
 His galle is hidde lowe by the rote,  
 That it may nought outwarde ben espied.  
 (Pro., lines 276–279)

(And in his writings that were so fresh and gay, his gall is sugared and honeyed over, hidden down to the root, so that it may not be seen outwardly.)

Lydgate, the honest purveyor of true information, depicts himself as utterly incapable of writing in the beguiling style of the rhetorician or poet (the two are largely interchangeable in the *Troy Book*). As he repeatedly enunciates, Lydgate is not a poet, but rather a translator of true accounts of the Trojan War, and he draws a distinction between translation and transformation, the latter being the method of the false poets who “transformed it in her poysy” (transformed the Troy legend in their poetry) (Pro., line 262), or commit the crime of “false transumpcioun (transumption)” (Pro., line 264).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The rhetorical trope of transumption (Greek *metalepsis*) is difficult to define precisely, as it was rather vexed from antiquity onwards. According to classical definitions, transumption entails a movement across tropes. Quintilian somewhat reluctantly defines transumption in his *Institutio Oratoria*: “It is the nature of *metalepsis* to form a kind of intermediate step between the term transferred and the thing to which it is transferred, having no meaning in itself, but merely providing a transition. It is a *trope* with which to claim acquaintance, rather than one which we are ever likely to require to use. The commonest example is the following: *cano* is a synonym for *canto* and *canto* for *dico*, therefore *cano* is a synonym for *dico*, the intermediate step being provided by *canto*. We need not waste any more time over it.” (*The Institutio oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge, MA and London 1920–1922] III.vi.37–39.)

A number of definitions for transumption circulated in the Middle Ages; the Englishman Geoffrey of Vinsauf uses *transsumptio* as a term for poetic figures in general: “*Transfero, permuto, pronomino, nomino*, these verbs form from themselves verbal nouns which are the names of figures. The one term *transsumptio* includes them all.” (*Poetria Nova* 4.952–955, trans. Margaret F. Nims [Toronto 1967] 50.) It seems, then, that transumption could refer to the figurative aspects of poetry, and by association, to poetry itself. It is difficult to say exactly what Lydgate considered transumption to be, although based on the context of the appearance of the term in the *Troy Book*, he appears to equate transumption with the ornamental, deceptive, and falsifying aspects of poetry, as opposed to the truth-telling accounts of the historical prose writers from whom he traces his own literary genealogy.

Despite Lydgate's efforts for a clear distinction between translators and transformers, truth-tellers and poets, the two categories often blur. The flowery ornamentation of language associated with rhetorical skill is the domain of the poets, and yet in a somewhat contradictory gesture, Lydgate establishes Guido as the greatest redactor of the Troy story precisely because he *combines* truth and rhetoric:

For he [Guido] enlvmyneth by crafte & cadence  
 This noble story with many fresche colour  
 Of rethorik, and many riche flour  
 Of eloquence to make it sownde bet  
 He in the story hath ymped in and set,  
 That in good feythe I trowe he hath no pere,  
 To rekne alle that write of this matere,  
 As in his boke ye may byholde and se.  
 To whom I seie, knelyng on my knee:  
 Laude and honour & excellence and fame,  
 O Guydo maister, be vn-to thi name,  
 That excellest by souereinte of stile  
 Alle that writen this mater to compile.  
 (Pro., lines 362–369)

(For he [Guido] through his use of craft and rhythm, illuminates this noble story with many fresh colors of rhetoric, and he has inserted and set into the story many rich flowers of eloquence to make it sound better, so that, to judge all who write of this subject matter [the Matter of Troy], in good faith I believe that he has no equal, as you may behold and see in his book. To whom I say, kneeling on my knee: Praise and honor and excellence and fame be unto your name, O Master Guido, you who excel by sovereignty of style all who write about this subject matter.)

Lydgate's copious praise of Guido's "stile" indicates an ambivalence toward rhetoric that is repeated throughout the *Troy Book*, suggesting that our author is more of the poets' camp than he might like to admit. This ambivalence is only augmented by Lydgate's description of his other "maister" in the *Troy Book*, Chaucer, who is never praised for historical accuracy or placed within the lineage of truth-telling poets, but is instead lauded for his rhetorical skill:

Two excellent accounts of the difficult trope of transumption are Leonard Barkan, *Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Humanism* (Stanford 1991) 41–48; and John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley 1981) 133–149.

Noble Galfride, poete of Breteyne,  
 Amonge oure english that made first to reyne  
 The gold dewe-dropis of rethorik so fyne,  
 Oure rude langage only tenlwyne  
 (2.4697)

(Noble Geoffrey, poet of Britain, who among our English was the first to make the golden dewdrops of such fine rhetoric rain down and illuminate our rude language.)

In describing his dual obligations to the historian Guido, who relates all in “ordre ceryously,” (in point-by-point order) (2.4690) and to the poet Chaucer, who displaces the actual events of the Trojan war in favor of the more personal passions of Troilus and Criseyde, the torn Lydgate laments: “So am I sette euene amyddes tweyne” (So am I evenly set between the two) (2.4693)!<sup>8</sup> The tension between rhetoric and truth continues throughout the text, and manifests itself in the forms of true and false authors, true and false rulers, and, as we shall see in a moment, true and false women.

There remains however one final, historicizing note which must be made regarding true and false language in early fifteenth-century England. The double nature of language, its ability both to illuminate and overshadow the truth, was an issue very much related to the political happenings of Lydgate’s day, particularly to the war between England and France that was being waged while Lydgate was at work on the *Troy Book*. Since the English traced their roots back to an errant Trojan, it is the Trojans who are depicted in a positive light in Lydgate’s

<sup>8</sup>The very medium of Lydgate’s text, vernacular verse, is something of an anomaly for a truth-bearing text in the Middle Ages, which would typically be in prose, a format to which Guido’s *Historia* adheres. Vernacular verse, on the other hand, was associated with the romance tradition, a tradition in which historical accuracy was most certainly not a defining characteristic. Of course Chaucer wrote in vernacular verse, thus it seems that in choosing a literary medium Chaucer was more of a guide to Lydgate than was Guido. Another possible model was Benoît de Sainte-Maure, author of the *Roman de Troie*, the French vernacular romance that Guido translated into his Latin prose work, the *Historia destructionis Troiae*. Whether or not Lydgate knew Benoît firsthand is debatable, although even if Lydgate was not directly familiar with the French romance, he might well have known of it. Lydgate does not acknowledge Benoît as one of the compilers of the Troy story from whom his own account is descended, although, considering the contemporary conflict of England and France and the Lancastrian imperative of establishing a specifically English tradition of vernacular letters, Lydgate would have had plausible reasons for the omission of a French literary source. On the possible omission of Benoît, see Ambrisco and Strohm (n. 2 above) 46–47.



poem. While claiming a family resemblance to the likes of Hector or Troilus is attractive, such a claim is also problematic—the Trojans lost the war after all, and given England’s war with France, battle prowess was of the utmost importance.<sup>9</sup> The Trojan defeat had long plagued European historians who wished to appropriate the myth, and a solution to this problem was achieved through the suggestion that the Trojans *would* have won the war, had it been a fair fight. Lydgate’s depiction of the Greeks follows and amplifies this tradition, for in the *Troy Book* it is the unchivalric behavior of Achilles, characterized by “The false fraude and the sleighti gyle, / the tresoun caste to-forn with many wyle,” (the false fraud and the crafty guile, the treason strewn before him with many stratagems) (4.2975–2976) that allows him to kill Troy’s otherwise unconquerable heroes, Hector and Troilus. The Trojan horse ploy is an even greater example of Greek “dubilnesse” (duplicity), although the role of fraud and deceit in bringing down the Trojan city is not limited to the Greeks. The *Troy Book*, like both its direct source and many other medieval retellings of the Trojan War, participates in a counter-tradition deviating from the classical models that attributes the fall of Troy to the treasonous acts of two Trojan noblemen, Aeneas and Antenor.<sup>10</sup> Antenor is characterized throughout the text by his rhetorical skill, and it is because the honest Priam trusts Antenor’s negotiations with the Greeks that the Trojan king agrees to a duplicitous treaty with his enemy and subsequently accepts the horse into the city. Lydgate is quite clear in establishing Antenor’s role in the deception of Priam:

Sithen Grekis tho in her sweryng  
 Ne bounde hem silfe to no manere thing  
 To stonde to, as in special,  
 But for to holde & kepe in general  
 The poyntes hool engrosid, and no mor,

In thilke trete that daungh Anthenor  
 With Grekis helde, this traytour fraudelent!  
 (4.6119–6125)

<sup>9</sup>English chroniclers had already drawn comparisons between the English war with France and the Trojan War before Lydgate commenced the *Troy Book*, and such comparisons were not always propitious. In the summer of 1386, when a very vulnerable England awaited what appeared to be an inevitable French attack, one writer compared the French host to the Greek force that had destroyed Troy. Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven and London 1997) 153.

<sup>10</sup>Baswell (n. 5 above) 17–21.

(Since the Greeks did not then bind themselves to stand by any sort of thing in particular in their swearing, but [only bound themselves] to hold and keep in general the points written down and no more in these negotiations which Lord Antenor, this fraudulent traitor, held with the Greeks.)

“Dubilnesse,” which began as a specifically Greek character trait, appears to be contagious.

For Lydgate, these issues of falsehood and particularly the falsehood of language were not remnants of a half mythic, half historical antiquity, but current concerns in his own world, only instead of wily Greeks, it was the French and their language that threatened the English. That there was a certain anxiety in Lancastrian England regarding language, particularly the ability of the French language to beguile and deceive, has been admirably demonstrated by Lee Patterson in an essay reevaluating Lydgate’s status as the traditional medieval poet. Patterson discusses the paradoxical positions of the English regarding their country’s campaign against France. On the one hand, “The war was typically described not as the conquest of a foreign nation but as the recovery of the king’s inheritance,”<sup>11</sup> and thus the French were regarded as misguided kinsmen who would benefit once rejoined to their English brothers. On the other hand, as is the case with almost every war, the opponent was turned into a monstrous other, whose very difference threatened to encroach upon an English way of life. One of the cultural fronts on which the othering of the French was carried out was the domain of language: “On the English side, French difference—the difference, that is, that set the French apart from both the English and from themselves—was understood as duplicity and double-dealing.”<sup>12</sup> Similar to Lydgate’s depiction of the false poets Homer and Virgil are the English chroniclers’ depictions of the French, who were “‘dobil,’ (double) full of ‘fraude and sotilte,’ (fraud and subtlety) practiced in ‘ymaginacionys, congettis and slehythis’” (fantasies, devices, and deceitful thoughts).<sup>13</sup> There appears to have been a particular fear that the French would be disingenuous in the drawing up of French-English treaties; some difficulties in dealing with the French are reported in the negotiations of John of

<sup>11</sup>Lee Patterson, “Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate” in *New Historical Literary Study*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton 1993) 108–135.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. 81.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. 81.

Gaunt and Richard, duke of York with Philip of Burgundy and Jean, duc de Berry in 1394.<sup>14</sup> In 1418 Henry V, a man of prodigious language skills, so mistrusted the French language (or at least wished to appear to mistrust it) that all negotiations with the French had to be documented in both French and Latin, and, in the case of a discrepancy, the Latin was to be preferred.<sup>15</sup> The affinities between Patterson's depiction of the French and English languages and Lydgate's recasting, via Guido, of the Trojan War as a war lost due to a duplicitous treaty further suggest the extent to which the *Troy Book* was a product of and perhaps contributor to the concerns regarding the French at this moment in British history.

## 2. TRUE AND FALSE WOMEN

In a text that is so concerned with the idea of truth and its legitimizing function, any person or thing that deviates from the truth stands out. One of the most notable disrupters of truth in the *Troy Book* is female duplicity. Women of the Troy legend are loaded with deceptive implications, with "dubilnesse" to use Lydgate's word, as particularly Criseyde but also Helen and Medea are of questionable moral intent. The prevailing view on the characterization of women in the *Troy Book* is that Lydgate draws on a medieval tradition of anti-feminism in which an antithetical, mocking defense of women is employed to emphasize women's universally weak, inconstant nature.<sup>16</sup> Scholars such as C. David Benson, Derek Pearsall, and Anna Torti all appear to concur on this point, and, not surprisingly, all three critics center their discussions upon Lydgate's treatment of only one woman: Criseyde.<sup>17</sup> The choice

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. 83.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. 83.

<sup>16</sup>While Lydgate's treatment of women is often viewed as anti-feminist, it is interesting that in an essay dating back to 1961, Alain Renoir counters the claim that Lydgate's depiction of women is always negative. (Renoir, "Attitudes Toward Women in Lydgate's Poetry," *English Studies* 42 [1961] 1–14.) Renoir makes little mention of the *Troy Book*, however, and his final assessment of the poem is that it falls into a category of anti-feminist works that "are generally clearcut attempts ... at illustrating the sagacity of the monastery's objections to women" (8). It seems, though, that in the *Troy Book* Lydgate was much more concerned with promoting political interests than monastic ones, and it is my argument that a categorically negative depiction of women is not in keeping with the political initiatives of Henry V.

<sup>17</sup>See Pearsall's *John Lydgate* (n. 1 above); C. David Benson, "Critic and Poet: What Lydgate and Henryson did to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (1992) 23–40, repr. in *Writing after Chaucer: Essential Readings in Chau-*

of Criseyde is of course obvious, given Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Torti and Benson's essays specifically focus upon the reworkings of Chaucer's Criseyde in the writings of later medieval poets. Yet all three critics appear comfortable in extending Lydgate's depiction of Criseyde to encompass the *Troy Book* women in general.<sup>18</sup>

Lydgate's treatment of Criseyde is often less than generous, particularly in his "defense" of the heroine in Book 3. To summarize briefly his depiction of Criseyde, the poet includes what are supposedly the anti-feminist remarks of Guido, characterizing Criseyde as "ful of dubilnesse" (full of duplicity) (3.4269):

For in his boke as Guydo list expresse,  
That hir teris & hir compleynyng,  
Hir wordis white, softe, & blaundyshyng,  
Wer meynt with feynyng & with flaterie  
And outward farsed with many a false lye;  
(3.4270–4274)

(For as Guido likes to make explicit in his book, her tears and her complaining, her white, soft, and blandishing words, were intended with feigning and with flattery, and outwardly embellished with many a false lie.)

Lydgate then reproves Guido for having made such unfair criticisms:

Thus techeth Guydo, God wot, & not I,  
That hath delyt to speke cursidly

Alwey of wommen thorough-out al his bok  
(3.4343–4345)

(Thus teaches Guido, God knows, and not I, [Guido] who delights in always speaking disparagingly of women throughout the whole of his book.)

*cer and the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Daniel J. Pinti (New York 1998) 227–242; and Anna Torti, "From 'History' to 'Tragedy': The Story of Troilus and Criseyde in Lydgate's *Troy Book* and Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*" in *The European Tragedy of Troilus*, ed. Piero Boitani (Oxford 1989) 171–198.

<sup>18</sup>Benson (n. 17 above), in reference to Lydgate's defense of Criseyde, remarks that "he [Lydgate] uses the same kind of mock defense of other women in the *Troy Book*" (32). Pearsall (n. 1 above) similarly sums up the treatment of women in the *Troy Book* as "the conventional genre of anti-feminist satire *per antiphrasim*" (135). After noting a resemblance between Lydgate's treatment of Medea and Criseyde, Torti (n. 17 above) remarks, "... it can be noted how Lydgate's approach to the question of women's nature is always the same: he denigrates and then defends by attributing to Guido the blame for the denigration of which he in reality approves" (183).

Lydgate registers his regret for having to translate such slanderous passages—“the Latyn to translate / Inwardly myn herte I felte blede” (I felt my heart bleed inwardly to translate the Latin.) (3.4350–4351). Yet considering that he alters and amplifies Guido’s charges, Lydgate’s stance as the faithful translator bereft of authorial agency can be regarded as suspect. It is true that Guido writes disparagingly of his Briseida (an alternate name for Criseyde), and he repeatedly emphasizes her fickleness, an unseemly characteristic that showcases her “feminine” weakness but not a particularly malevolent trait.<sup>19</sup> The charge in the *Troy Book* is duplicity, a crime that suggests some motive and scheming on the part of Criseyde and links her to both textual falsity and political treason. Lydgate’s defense of himself as the helpless translator is further complicated when we consider that the narrator’s technique of scapegoating his source is straight out of *Troilus and Criseyde*, thus suggesting that Lydgate is less interested in a genuine vindication of women than he is in aligning himself with the greatest English poet of his day.<sup>20</sup> The final unraveling of this so-called defense

<sup>19</sup>In the Latin, Guido accuses Briseida of “mutabilitas et varietas” (fickleness and changeableness) (164). All quotations of the *Historia* are taken from: Guido delle Colonne, *Historia destructionis Troiae*, ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffin (Cambridge, MA 1936); trans. Mary E. Meek (Bloomington 1974).

<sup>20</sup>The complaints of Lydgate parallel those of the *Troilus* narrator who likewise complains that he must translate the disparaging comments of his sources. The Chaucerian echoes in this passage are prominent; consider Lydgate’s above-mentioned claim that he, as translator, is not responsible for what he writes and the *Troilus* narrator’s claim at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

Byseching every lady bright of hewe,  
 And every gentil womman, what she be,  
 That al be that Criseyde was untrewre,  
 That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me.  
 Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se;  
 (5.1772–1775)

(Beseeching every lady bright of hue,  
 And every gentle woman, whoever she be,  
 That even though Criseyde was untrue,  
 hat for that guilt she [i.e., every gentle woman] be not angry with me.  
 You may see her guilt in other books:)

Lydgate also might have been drawing from Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*. In the G Prologue the God of Love chastises “Chaucer” for not writing accounts of good women even though there appear in books “... sundry wemen, which lyf that they ladde, / And evere an hundred goode ageyn oon badde” (various women, and the sort of life that

occurs when Lydgate suggests that even if all women are indeed “dubil,” they can not be blamed for this weakness as it is merely a part of their God-given nature: “For yif wommen be double naturelly, / Why shulde men leyn on hem the blame?” (For if women are naturally duplicitous, why should men lay the blame on them?) (3.4408–4409).

This dismissal of Criseyde’s behavior with an “all women are like that” jab suggests that she is not alone in her deceit, and two other infamously duplicitous women, Helen and Medea, are described in language remarkably similar to that used to depict Criseyde and the other falsifiers, both textual and political, of the *Troy Book*. Medea’s craftiness and purposeful deception of those around her resembles the rhetorical skills possessed by both Antenor and the falsifying poets from Lydgate’s Prologue. Therefore the anti-feminist harangue that Medea’s behavior inspires is worth quoting at length:

Loo, ay the maner and condicioun  
 Of this wommen, that so wel can feyne,  
 And schewen on, though thei thinke tweyne;  
 And covertly, that no thing be seyn,  
 With humble chere and with face pleyn  
 Enclose her lustis by swyche sotilte,  
 Under the bowndis of al honeste  
 Of hir entent, though the trecherie  
 With al the surplus vnder be y-wrye  
 And though that thei feith afor pretend  
 And can her fraude with florissyng wel diffende  
 And flaterie, only the worlde to blende,  
 With dowbilnes enclosed in the ende,  
 Yit ay deceyt is benethe ment  
 Vndre the sugre of feyned clene entent,  
 .....  
 For vnder floures depeint of stabilnes,  
 The serpent dareth of newfongilnes.  
 So pleyne thei seme with wordis faire glosed,  
 But vndernethe her covert wil is closed;  
 (1.2072–2094)

(Lo, it is ever the manner and condition of these women, who know so well

they led, and there are always a hundred good ones for every bad one) (lines 276–277). Lydgate similarly writes “For I dar wel affermen by the rode / Ageyn oon badde ben an hundrid gode” (For I dare to swear by the cross that for every one bad woman there are a hundred good) (3.4361–4362). Quotations of Chaucer are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston 1987).

how to dissemble, and display one thing though they think a second; and covertly, so that nothing is seen, with humble demeanor and an open face, they enclose their lusts with such subtlety under the bounds of honest intentions, though the treachery with all the rest is hidden underneath. And even though they openly affect faith, and they well know how to conceal their fraud with fine words and flattery for the sole purpose of blinding the world, with duplicity enclosed in the end, yet deceit is ever intended beneath the sugar of honest intentions that are only feigned.

For under flowers colored with steadfastness lies hidden the serpent of novelty. So transparent they seem dressed in fair words, but underneath their hidden intention is enclosed.)

Here duplicitous women are depicted as language itself, or a rhetorically dressed text that conceals a “couert wil” under “wordis faire glosed.” Considering women’s propensity for falsehood, they bear a strong resemblance to both the French language (as depicted by Patterson) and to the classical poets who disguise their lies with sweet words.

Like Medea, Helen also occasions a vituperation against all womankind, although in this case the charge is not so much duplicity as lasciviousness:

O mortal harme, that most is for to drede!  
 A, fraude y-cast be sleight of wommanhede,  
 Of every wo, gynnyng, crop, and rote!  
 Ageynes whiche helpe may no bote.  
 Whan lust hath dryve in her hert a nail,  
 Ay dedly venym sueth at the tail,  
 Whiche no man hath power to restreyne;  
 Recorde I take of the quene Eleyne,  
 That hoote brent allas!  
 (2.3576–3583)

(O mortal harm, that is to be most dreaded! Ay, the fraud caused by the deceitfulness of womankind, the beginning, branch, and root of every woe, against which no remedy can help. When lust has driven a nail into their hearts, a deadly venom always follows in the end, which no man has the power to control; I cite the case of the Queen Helen, who burned hotly, alas!)

While Helen’s burning hotness is not quite the same as the charge of duplicity, the reference to the “fraude y-cast be sleight” suggests the fore-mentioned “dubilnesse” of Criseyde and Medea. More interesting in the case of Helen is Lydgate’s depiction of her as a colorful, fair

creature whom his humble, historically based writing is powerless to reproduce:

I wante flouris also of rethorik,  
 To sue his [Guido's] florischyng or his gey peynture,  
 For to discriue so fayre a creature [Helen];  
 For my colours ben to feble and feynt,  
 That nouthur can ennwe wel nor peint;  
 (2.3680–3684)

(I also lack the flowers of rhetoric needed to follow his [Guido's] flourish or his gay painting in describing so fair a creature [Helen]; for my colors are too feeble and faint, so that I do not know how either to shade or to paint well;)

As we have already seen so many times in the *Troy Book*, beneath the fairness of rhetorical flowers dwells the serpent; this specific association of Helen and rhetoric also continues the general association of women with duplicity, treasonous behavior, and rhetorically-dressed texts. It is fitting that the Trojan traitors Antenor and Aeneas are described in language remarkably similar to that depicting Lydgate's false women, as are literary texts themselves that had previously, and, in Lydgate's opinion, falsely addressed the Trojan War. The author's ambivalence regarding the constancy of women in the *Troy Book* thus appears not merely as an anti-feminist gesture, but fits into a broader questioning of truth, and how truth manifests itself in literary, linguistic, and political spheres.

In the *Troy Book* neither political leaders nor texts are uniformly duplicitous for quite obvious reasons: if they were, how would Lydgate justify his patron Henry V, or his own textual production, the *Troy Book* itself? Something similar occurs in the case of women, for just as there are two lines of texts and two lines of political leaders, there are also two lines of women in the *Troy Book*. These "good" women, including Penthesilea, Penelope, Cassandra, Hecuba, and Polyxena, are practically never mentioned in Lydgate criticism, perhaps because they do not fit the anti-feminist paradigm upheld by other interpreters of the text. Lydgate follows his "maister Guido" in rendering these women in a positive light, and then takes pains to amplify their honor and truthfulness beyond what appears in the *Historia*. For example, in the case of Penthesilea, the Amazon queen, Guido offers the praise of "regina



quedam virgo nobilis et nimium bellicosa” (“a certain noble and exceedingly aggressive young woman”) (212), and describes her admirable battle prowess throughout Book 28. Lydgate amplifies Guido’s praises, and, in addition to her martial abilities, he also emphasizes her feminine virtues:

And yit in soth to speke of wommanhede,  
 For al her myght she had an huge pris,  
 For bothe she was vertuou and wys,  
 Wonder discret, & had an honest name  
 (4.3808–3811)

(And yet in truth to speak of womanhood, for all her might she was of great worth, for she was both virtuous and wise, amazingly discreet, and had an honest name.)

Hecuba too is praised for her steadfastness, and even though she uses deception to instigate Achilles’s death, Lydgate finds no fault, since through a treacherous death Achilles reaps his just desert.<sup>21</sup> Penelope’s classical standing as the faithful wife *par excellence* is preserved by Lydgate, who uses her as a pretext for once again castigating Guido’s constant deprecation of women. This defense of women involves a notable departure from the tenor of Lydgate’s earlier replies to “maister Guydo,” for here, at the end of the *Troy Book*, Lydgate undoes the mocking “all women are like that” commentary that accompanied his account of Criseyde:

And, o Guydo, thou shuldest ben ashamed  
 To seyn of wyves any thing but wele;  
 For in good feith, as fer as I can fele,  
 Though oon or two do among offence,  
 She that is good through hir prouidence  
 Is ther-of no thing for to wyte.  
 And though Guydo in his boke endite  
 The variaunce of Eleyne or Cryseyde

<sup>21</sup>Lydgate writes of Hecuba’s treason plot:  
 And rightfully, of resoun as it sit,  
 Thus was the fraude and the falshede quit  
 Of Achilles, for his highe tresoun:  
 (4.3195–3197)

(And justly, as it is befitting, thus was the fraud and falsehood of Achilles repaid, for his high treason:)

Or Medea, that for sorwe deyde,  
 Lete ther ageyn, of right and equité,  
 The wyfly trowth of Penelope,  
 The maydenhed of younge Policene,  
 And the goodnes of Eccuba the quene,  
 Of Cassandra eke the stedfastnes;  
 And with al this, take the kyndenes  
 Of Pantasile, with-oute variaunce;  
 And put al this to-gidre in balaunce,  
 And ye shal fynde, yif ye list acounte,  
 Maugre who grucchith, trouthe shal surmounte—  
 (5.2198–2216)

(And, oh, Guido, you should be ashamed to say anything about wives except good things; for in good faith, as far as I can tell, even though one or two among them do offense, she who, through her discretion, is good, is not to blame at all. And though Guido describes the inconstancy of Helen and Criseyde in his book, or the inconstancy of Medea, who died of sorrow, in the interests of justice and impartiality set against these bad women the wifely truth of Penelope, the virginity of young Polyxena, and the goodness of the queen Hecuba, as well as the steadfastness of Cassandra; and with all this, take the benevolence of Penthesilea, which was without inconstancy, and put all this together in a scale, and you shall find, if you wish to take it into account, no matter who complains, truth will surmount—)

As Lydgate indicates, *not* all women are like that, there are in fact two types of women in the world, those like Helen, Medea, and Criseyde, and those others who are characterized by “stedfastnes” and “trowth.” This passage is not a veiled critique of women *per antiphrasim*, but rather a genuine reproach of Guido for his sweeping condemnation of women.

That Lydgate upholds the truth of some of the *Troy Book* women is best demonstrated by his treatment of Polyxena, the Trojan princess who, at the moment before her sacrifice, is granted more extensive speech than any other woman in the text. Polyxena draws interesting parallels with Criseyde and the other “bad women” of the *Troy Book*, Helen and Medea. Like these women, Polyxena is slated to leave her homeland to become the wife of an enemy leader, and while Helen and Criseyde present an infamous ability to adapt to a new environment, switching both political and amatory allegiances, Polyxena remains true to the bitter end. At the moment of sacrifice, Polyxena never begs for mercy, for with her city and family destroyed the Trojan princess prefers death. Death will insure both Polyxena’s faithfulness to Troy and

her virginity, the latter being of particular importance to the princess, as she informs her enemies that she will die

A clene maide, so as I began  
 With-oute touche of eny maner man  
 In al my lyf to this same day—  
 (4.6827–6829)

(A pure maiden, just as I began, without having been touched by any sort of man, in all my life up to this very day—)

Here the gender stereotypes adhered to earlier in the *Troy Book* where women, particularly Criseyde, are depicted as the false beguilers of true men are effectively reversed, as it is Polyxena who remains unvaryingly true to both her nation and her feminine ideals of chastity. The Greek men, on the other hand, are imputed falsifiers in claiming the necessity of Polyxena's sacrifice, and Polyxena indicates that the gods will eventually reveal "The trouthe plein, & spare no degre / But maken open that is nowe secre" (The plain truth, and spare no social rank, but reveal that which is now secret) (4.6801–6802). Thus Polyxena embodies a very different sort of femininity in the *Troy Book*, as she demonstrates that women are capable of the greatest sacrifices in order to remain true to feminine ideals, and this unwavering constancy is a direct contrast to the earlier depiction of women as sweetly beguiling rhetoric. Because of her constancy, Polyxena is the feminine ideal worthy of emulation: "And alle maidenen, remembreth vp-on me / To take exaample how ye shal yow kepe" (And all maidens, take note of me, in order to take me as an example of how you will behave) (4.6840–6841). Her unwavering loyalty suggests that there is another option for women outside the duplicitous pattern of Criseyde.

The good women of the *Troy Book*, particularly Polyxena and Penelope, are exemplary because they are true. The word "trouthe" takes on multiple valences in the poem: true as in faithful to a husband, family, or country, and true as in historically accurate. Yet these two meanings often blur, especially in the case of the written text. For Lydgate, the *Troy Book* is true, as in historically accurate, precisely because it is true, or faithful, to the appropriate sources, namely Guido. Just as there are two lines of women in the *Troy Book*—those faithful to their countries and lovers and those whose outward loyalty belies inner treachery, there are also two lines of historical texts, those of Homer, Virgil, and

Ovid, which implement rhetorical embellishments in order to misrepresent, and those of Guido, Dares, and Dictys, which accurately present the historical truth. And just as Lydgate extols the virtues of honest, historically accurate texts, he sings the praises of true women. Such parallel constructions of women and text were not at all uncommon in the Middle Ages,<sup>22</sup> and, in a text where the two are as explicitly linked as they are in the *Troy Book*, this parallel necessitates two varying female traditions. Indeed, if women are always characterized by untruth, then how can a text fare much better? Thus Lydgate's explicit categorization of women reinforces his similar categorization of texts as established in the Prologue.

While the parallel between women and texts helps explain Lydgate's treatment of women in the *Troy Book*, there is also a political reason why Lydgate would want to establish a tradition of good women, which brings me to the last good woman of Lydgate's text, a princess who hails not from classical mythology but from fifteenth-century France: Katharine of Valois. Part of the Treaty of Troyes, negotiated shortly before the completion of the *Troy Book*, was the betrothal of Katharine to Henry V, allowing him to insert himself and his posterity into France's line of succession. Katharine is one among many factors mentioned by Lydgate in this final portion of the *Troy Book* that add to the legitimacy of Henry's claims to France. This elaborate focus is itself something of a displacement, as the perhaps more crucial question, whether Henry had a legitimate claim to the *English* throne, is occluded from the text, although the two claims are not completely separate; a successful conquest and reincorporation of France would certainly bolster Henry's position as a monarch, and thus quell hostility toward his domestic rule. As for Henry's French claims, they are, like most things in the *Troy Book*, multifarious. Henry is successful in conquering France because he is a great knight, the flower of chivalry for his age. His victory is achieved "Through his prowes & his chivalrie" (through his prowess and his chivalry) (5.3379–3380). Lydgate then goes on to claim that

<sup>22</sup>The act of reading in the Middle Ages could be construed as a heterosexual sex act in which the masculine reader penetrates, interprets, and imposes readings upon a feminized text. For studies that consider the sexual politics of reading in the Middle Ages, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison 1989); and Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis 1994).

For thorough his knyghthod & diligent labour,  
 Maugre alle tho that list hym to with-seyn,  
 He [Henry] hath conquered *his herytage ageyn*.  
 (5.3382–3384, my emphasis)

(For through his knighthood and diligent labor, despite all those who wished to resist him, he has again conquered his heritage.)

The final words of this quotation—“his herytage ageyn”—suggest that Henry is not conquering a foreign land, but a land which he, by right, should already possess, and a land which, in typical Lancastrian legitimizing logic, never should have existed as an entity apart from England.<sup>23</sup> The justification of this never-should-have-been claim is the lineal descent of Henry as it appears in ancient texts, authorities which Lydgate evokes as “The pe-de-Grew of cronycles olde” (the genealogical tables of old chronicles) (5.3388) and “bokes y-write longe a-for” (books written long ago) (5.3389). Ancient records of Henry’s genealogy are then the second factor that justifies his French claim, the third being a more contemporary record, the Treaty of Troyes, where Henry’s rights are “clerly.... / Enrolled vp in the conuencioun” (clearly recorded in the treaty) (5.3397–3398). The fourth and final legitimizing factor is Katharine herself. Through her insertion into a series of authorizing records and treaties, Katharine becomes one more paper in a pile of textual documentation, one more legitimizing record to be used and interpreted by the men who surround her. The overdeterminedness of Henry’s claims (If you are already king of France by lineal descent, why do you *need* to confirm this claim with a strategic marriage?) parallels the multiple justifications of Lydgate’s choice of a literary source at the beginning of the *Troy Book*, and, instead of bolstering confidence, implies some anxiety present in the Lancastrian legitimization project.

This slight nervousness, a feeling that our author is perhaps trying too much, continues in the depiction of Katharine herself. In England and other European countries foreign queens were a long-standing tradition, as they allowed for the formation of alliances and the consolidation of power. While such a marriage bond might have seemed a logical

<sup>23</sup>For a discussion of the Lancasters’ recursive rewriting of their rivals’ and enemies’ claims to legitimacy, see Paul Strohm’s chapter “Prophecy and Kingship” in *England’s Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimization, 1399–1422* (New Ha-

conclusion to the strife between England and France, not all of the English were pleased with this outcome. Some feared that Henry's increased legitimization through his marriage to Katharine would operate as a two-way street; if Henry's claims to the French throne were increased, so too were French claims to the English throne. And foreign brides often came with problems: they were expensive to maintain, and their allegiances were questionable, Katharine's queenly predecessor, Joanne of Navarre, being a case in point.<sup>24</sup> Lydgate apparently felt a certain need to justify this marriage, for he specifically refers to this union as a means of insuring peace between England and France, and, invoking a by-then standard trope of the queen as an intercessory figure, sees Katharine as the "mene a-twixe bothe two" (an intermediary between the two) (5.3426).<sup>25</sup> Lydgate puts a great deal of emphasis upon Katharine, suggesting that it is only with her arrival in England that peace and happiness will return to this kingdom which had endured so much political upheaval. Possible grumblings regarding this foreign bride are preempted, for Lydgate adds "Of grace enprentid in hir womanhede, / That to compleyne we shall haue no nede" (Her womanhood [is] so strongly marked with grace that we shall have no need to complain) (5.3427–3428). The choice of the phrase "enprentid in" once again links princess to text.

Given her status as a foreign bride, a medium of exchange between men and countries, Katharine bears a considerable resemblance not only to historical queens but to her mythological counterparts in the *Troy Book*. The idea of woman as an object of exchange for the express purpose of solidifying masculine bonds is emphasized in Guido's and thus Lydgate's account of the war. Indeed, the rather complicated Troy story can be simplified to a matter of woman-swapping: the Trojan princess Hesione is seized by the Greeks; Helen is seized supposedly as a bargaining chip to be bartered off for Hesione; Criseyde is transferred from the Trojans to the Greeks; the transference of the Trojan Polyxena to Achilles is intended to replace the return of Helen. In the case of the

ven 1998) 1–32.

<sup>24</sup>On Joan of Navarre's queenship, see Paul Strohm's chapter "Joanne of Navarre: That Obscure Object of Desire," also in *England's Empty Throne* (n. 23 above) 153–172.

<sup>25</sup>On the intercessory role of medieval queens, see Lois L. Huneycutt, "Intercession and the High-Medieval Queen: The Esther Topos" in *Power of the Weak*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana 1995) 126–146.

Troy story, the exchange of women is never actually successful, and tends to make relations between countries worse, not better.

So what are the implications of tagging Katharine, yet another displaced princess, to the end of such an account? Obviously some sort of redemption is necessary, for if women are untrue, duplicitous, and the continual cause of war, then the final success of the Treaty of Troyes remains problematic. Leaving duplicitous mythological women such as Medea and Criseyde as the paradigm for foreign queens in the text would undermine Lydgate's elaborate praise of Katharine at the end of the *Troy Book*. Thus I interpret the need for *two* lines of women in the *Troy Book* as the need for a female tradition into which Katharine can be inserted. In contrast to the sometimes "treasonous" foreign queens of England's not-so-recent past, Katharine is, like Penelope, completely faithful to her lord and king, and, like Polyxena, completely truthful and virtuous in her dealings. It is enticing that the "bad" women dominate the first few books of the Troy story, and the "good" women appear more toward the end, as if in preparation for Henry's engagement to Katharine. Of course this is due less to Lydgate's innovation and more to the order of events of the Troy story itself. Still, in the final defense of women that occurs after Penelope's demonstrated faithfulness, Lydgate does go to some length to distinguish between his two lines of women, to prove that not all women are unequivocally "dubil," and, as this is a later section which was quite likely being written around the time of the Treaty of Troyes, a link between this genuine defense of women and the woman who was to come to sit upon England's throne is possible.

### 3. WOMEN AND TRANSLATION

If our consideration of the *Troy Book* women were to end here, we would be left with a fairly neat package: two lines of women, true and false, that parallel and reinforce the two lines of literary texts and political figures which Lydgate seeks to establish in his Prologue. We have already seen how the language used to describe true women is identical to that depicting true leaders and true texts, while the beguiling sweetness of rhetorical language is repeatedly evoked to capture the falseness of women, traitors, and poetry. Yet sometimes the distinctions between truth and falsehood break down, thus challenging the neat dichotomies which Lydgate seeks to establish, and revealing that this system is nei-

ther necessary nor natural, but one normalized to fit the agenda of the political and literary powers which shape it. One such instance, Guido's superiority to other authors based on not his historical accuracy but rather his rhetorical skill, has already been mentioned. Another case involves the tale's "bad" women, namely Medea, Helen, and Criseyde, who, despite their characteristic duplicity, are strongly associated with the activity which legitimizes the enterprises of both poet and patron of the *Troy Book*: translation.

As I have already discussed, the Trojan War material, particularly in its medieval incarnations, boils down to a tale of woman-swapping, an act that paralleled the contemporary practice of solidifying patriarchal alliances through politically-motivated marriages. A noblewoman such as Katharine of Valois would have realized from a young age that her days in her native land were numbered, for she would most likely be shipped off if not to a foreign land then at least to a different sphere of political control where her success as a noble lady would depend on her abilities to adapt to her newly-acquired lord and country. The translation of women from one state to another parallels the translation of texts from one language to another, for in both cases the person or material being translated must be adapted and revised in order to suit her/its new political/linguistic setting. It is precisely this ability to adapt an old text to a new context which sets Guido above the other translators of the Trojan material and which justifies Lydgate's own project of translation. Certain women in the *Troy Book* also display a willingness and ability to adapt, particularly Criseyde, Medea, and Helen. All three women are carried over, or translated, from one cultural context to another, and while they mourn their departure from their homelands, they acknowledge the necessity of abandoning old ties in favor of new surroundings.

When Medea aids Jason, she openly acknowledges the stakes at which she transfers her loyalties from father and homeland to her foreign lover:

So that for yow I schal sette a-syde  
My birthe first, of the stoke royal,  
And ouermore myn heritage with-al,  
And myn honour schal be putte a-bak  
Yow for to helpe,  
(1.2530–2534)



(So that I shall set aside for you first my birth of royal stock, and furthermore my heritage, and my honor shall be caste aside in order to help you.)

All that Medea asks in return is that Jason marry her and “In your repaire to your fadres reigne, / that feithfully ye schal me with yow lede” (In your return to your father’s kingdom, that you shall faithfully lead me with you) (1.2562–2563). The translation of Medea is ultimately a failure, as her relationship with Jason disintegrates shortly after their departure from Colchis, and she is unable to signify properly in her new Greek context; instead of Jason’s beloved queen, she becomes a murderous witch.<sup>26</sup> Medea’s tragic ending serves as a warning regarding the dangers of translation, suggesting the dire consequences which can result when one carries either a foreign princess or a foreign text to a new setting.

The translations of Helen and Criseyde are even more telling, as in these cases the translation proves successful, and it is precisely because of this success that the two women are calumniated by generations of Troy-story compilers. Helen’s infamous association with the motility of female desire long predates Lydgate’s poem, as does her shift of allegiance from Menelaus and Sparta to Paris and Troy; yet the specific reasons she gives for her acceptance of Paris in the *Troy Book* are of some interest:

Ye wote also, *be nature*, oute of drede,  
That it ne longeth vn-to womanhede  
In *straunge soille* to stryuen or rebelle;  
And namly ther, where as hir querelle  
Schal haue no favour nor sustened be.  
(2.3965–3969, my emphasis)

(You also know, no doubt, that by nature it is not a characteristic of women to struggle or rebel upon foreign soil; and namely there where her complaint will meet with no favor nor will it be tolerated.)

According to Helen’s account, women adapt themselves “be nature”; thus translation is the natural activity of women, whose survival on “strange soille” depends on assimilation, not resistance. Criseyde dis-

<sup>26</sup>Medea’s fall from grace was one with which a number of medieval ladies and queens could readily empathize. When Joanne of Navarre fell out of favor with the English people, she too was accused of witchcraft.

plays a similar practicality in her understanding that if a woman were to survive in a hostile, foreign environment, then she would do well to make friends.<sup>27</sup> Thus Criseyde's shrewd reply to the messenger of Diomedes:

And she anon, with herte glad and light,  
*Ful wommanly* bad hym repeire ageyn  
 Vn-to his lord, & pleyntly to hym seyn  
 That she ne myght, of verray kyndenesse,  
 Of *womanhede*, nor of gentilnes,  
 Refusen hym, platly, from hir grace,  
 That was to hir, there in *straunge place*,  
 So kynde founde, and so counfortable  
 In every thing, and so servisable,  
 That it may nat lightly oute of mynde  
 To thinke on hym that was so trewe & kinde.  
 (3.4642–4652, my emphasis)

(And she at once, with a glad and light heart, full womanly bid him return again to his lord, and to say to him plainly that she could not, out of kindness, womanhood, or nobility, flatly refuse him from her grace, he who, in that foreign place, was found to be so kind and comforting in everything, and so serviceable, so that it might not easily leave her mind to think of him who was so true and kind.)

As when Helen finds herself on “straunge soille,” it is the “straunge place” of the Greek camp which compels Criseyde to readjust her amatory allegiances, and the repeated emphasis on the “wommanly” way in which Criseyde proffers her affections again suggests that such emotional realignments are the natural defense of unprotected women.

The importance of abandoning former ties in favor of cultural adaptation becomes even more evident when we consider just what the good women of the *Troy Book* reap for their refusal to be carried across political and cultural boundaries. Cassandra, a devotee of truth in both her fidelity to her city and in the veracity of her predictions, opposes the

<sup>27</sup>In her discussion of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Dinshaw (n. 22 above) points out that Criseyde's ostensible infidelity is actually a necessary characteristic of a noble woman, as it allows her to serve as an object of exchange between men: “... the conformity of her desire to the desire of men around her is necessary to, and compelled by, patriarchal social organization. Her act of infidelity can thus be analyzed more in terms of complicity than in disruption or betrayal of fundamental masculine social control; she betrays, in truth, only an illusion of reciprocity between men and women, an illusion generated as a cover for the real workings of traffic in women” (58).

acceptance of Helen into the city of Troy and repeatedly urges the Trojans to return her to the Greeks. Cassandra's reward is imprisonment, and her truthfulness is ignored: "Sche was not herde, al-be sche seide trougth" (She was not listened to, although she spoke the truth.) (3.2296). Eventually Cassandra is forcibly translated from Troy to Greece, from royal princess to Agamemnon's slave. The other true and faithful women fare little better, if not much worse. Polyxena is sacrificed and mutilated; Penthesilea is killed on the battlefield and then mutilated; Hecuba goes mad and is stoned to death. Penelope is the only true woman who meets with something akin to a happy ending. As for Helen and Criseyde, they appear not to suffer such terrible fates. Criseyde is all but forgotten in the later books; we never learn what happens to her after the fall of Troy. Nor do we learn much about Helen, except that she is reunited with Menelaus, and returns with him to Greece. After some initial family strife, Menelaus settles down to rule his kingdom with, one may assume, the retranslated Helen sitting at his side. It seems then that truth or fidelity does little to benefit the *Troy Book* women, and that women must shift their loyalties if they expect to survive in foreign lands. Female adaptability thus mirrors the art of translation, for the infamous sliding of Helen and Criseyde suggests the changes that the capable translator must execute in order to render an old work meaningful and pertinent in a new cultural context.

This notion of flexible translation as opposed to slavish devotion to the source text goes back to classical rhetoric, particularly to Cicero, although Rita Copeland has demonstrated that while medieval translation theory borrowed its terminology from antiquity, the application of these terms had altered significantly.<sup>28</sup> One of the terms that shifted from antiquity into the Middle Ages is that of the *fidus interpres*, the faithful translator who, according to Jerome, is more faithful when he is not slave to the letter of the text. Jerome writes of Hilary the Confessor:

Neither did he bother himself with the sleepy letter, nor did he wrench himself with an unnatural rendering of the vulgar matters; rather, by right of victory he led away the sense captive into his own language.<sup>29</sup>

Jerome's militant equation of text with captive, specifically a female

<sup>28</sup>Copeland (n. 6 above) 43.

<sup>29</sup>Jerome, *Epistulae*, letter 57 (to Pammachius) quoted in Copeland (n. 6 above) 50.

captive, appears most famously in his interpretation of Deuteronomy 21.10–13 where he justifies not linguistic but cultural translation. According to the Deuteronomy passage, a beautiful pagan captive can be wedded by one of God’s chosen only after he brings her into his house, removes all of the outward signs of her otherness, that is hair, nails, and raiment, and, after a month has passed, sleeps with her. Jerome compares the beautiful pagan woman of Deuteronomy to beautiful pagan texts which must likewise be forcefully adapted to fit a Christian context: “Is it surprising that I, too, admiring the fairness of her form and the grace of her eloquence, desire to make that secular wisdom, which is my captive and handmaid, a matron of that true Israel?”<sup>30</sup> A family resemblance between Jerome’s captive texts and Lydgate’s bad women, specifically Helen and Criseyde, is readily apparent, for both women and texts are made to comply to the specific cultural and linguistic contingencies to be found where the act of signification occurs. As such, translation would seem to be akin to the rhetorical arts, in which appropriateness to both audience and occasion determines the particular manifestation of a speech or text. Yet according to Copeland, Jerome implements the linguistic variance of sense-for-sense translation to establish a fixity of meaning that is not in accordance with the rhetorical tradition:

The theoretical legacy of Jerome is to remove from translation the agonistic hermeneutic of rhetoric, and to substitute a hermeneutic of access through language to a communality of meaning.... Through Jerome the Middle Ages inherits the formula “non verbum pro verbo” as a model of textual fidelity rather than of difference, as a theory of direct conservation of textual meaning without the impediment of linguistic multiplicity.<sup>31</sup>

This notion of sense-for-sense translation, which entails the modification of a text to a specific situation in order to preserve, rather than sacrifice, a central core of truth, proved to be something of a vexed enterprise in both the textual and political spheres of Lancastrian England. In conclusion, I wish to consider how this notion of faithful translation as related to the self-translating women of the *Troy Book* complicates the roles of Lydgate as literary translator, of Katharine as translated princess, and finally, of Henry V as forceful translator of legitimate political

<sup>30</sup>Jerome, *Epistulae*, letter 70 (to Magnus) quoted in Dinshaw (n. 22 above) 23.

<sup>31</sup>Copeland (n. 6 above) 51.

authority.

Copeland's assessment of Jerome corresponds nicely to the imperatives of translation in the *Troy Book* Prologue; because Guido is not a literal translator his translation is more faithful to his original and more accessible to his audience. Lydgate similarly justifies the *Troy Book* on the grounds that it makes the one, universal truth of the Troy story available to the English people. Jerome's theory of translation becomes problematic, however, when applied to the tangled web of Troy materials that Lydgate had inherited. Much like Helen and Criseyde, the matter of Troy was given to moving from country to country, and, in each "straunge land" in which it found itself, the legend was adapted to suit the historiographical imperatives of the indigent people. The widespread applicability of the Trojan materials, which were somehow relevant to all nations yet particular to none, rendered this corpus both infinitely useful and infinitely contradictory, and, by the late Middle Ages, claims to "truth" were precarious at best.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the matter of Troy was so often translated to suit so many different cultural and historiographical agenda that multiplicity and difference, the characteristics that the Hieronymian formula of sense-for-sense translation sought to circumvent, are instead the products of medieval redactions of the myth. Any truth generated through such translations was locally contingent and subject to change. Thus it appears that Lydgate's attempts to render himself a *fidus interpres* of the matter of Troy fail to link him to immutable truth, but instead link him to those self-translators Helen and Criseyde. Indeed, the changes wrought in both women and texts in their carrying-over from one culture to another suggest that it is only by being untrue to former ties that a foreign princess or text can survive and flourish in a new setting.

The carrying over of Katharine from France to England at the end of the *Troy Book* presents similar problems regarding truth and translation. Lydgate anticipates that the translation of Katharine from French princess to English queen will successfully mediate the conflict between the two nations and thus put an end to the violence and bloodshed so characteristic of the Hundred Years' War. Katharine's harmonizing role is therefore a rewriting of and counterbalance to the unsuccessful transla-

<sup>32</sup>For a discussion of the circulation of the Troy legend in medieval Europe, see Nicholas Birns, "The Trojan Myth: Postmodern Reverberations," *Exemplaria* 5 (1993) 45–78.

tions of the women of the Troy legend—Medea, Criseyde, and Helen. Yet considering the paradigms for good and bad, true and false women in the poem, Katharine's role is a rather complicated one. Based on the examples from the *Troy Book*, the good woman prefers to die true to her country rather than to adapt to her enemies' behests. In order for Lydgate successfully to uphold his sovereign's interests, he must uphold Katharine as a "true" woman, but in doing so he must make the somewhat contradictory gesture of modifying the paradigm for female fidelity as it appears earlier in the *Troy Book* to allow for the truth of a translated woman. Furthermore, the superimposition of Katharine upon an account of the falsities of Helen, Medea, and Criseyde inadvertently links her to her more spurious counterparts. The end result is that the matter of Troy, which, in Lydgate's redaction, is intended to bolster Lancastrian policies, ends up, through its showcasing of unfaithful foreign queens who instigate political turmoil, registering an oblique anxiety regarding Katharine's role as queen of England.

The difficulties Lydgate faces in translating the matter of Troy and in reconfiguring Katharine within it are in turn related to the larger issue of the Lancastrian usurpation of the British throne—indeed, both the *Troy Book* and the marriage of Henry V to Katharine were strategic tactics devised to quell hostilities to Lancastrian rule. Both Henry IV and Henry V attempted to carry over the authority of the Plantagenets to their own monarchical claims, and, in doing so, they faced the daunting task of the sense-for-sense translator—how does one preserve constancy in change? Or, in this specifically political setting, how does one transfer intact the divine right to rule, supposedly inherent in the blood of the Plantagenets, to the Lancaster genealogy? The Lancasters necessarily became self-translators, who, much like Lydgate in his literary endeavors, attempted to draw distinctions between their own carryings-over of monarchical and political authority and those of their enemies. Indeed, the Henrys continually sought to manipulate the symbolic economy available to them, and Henry V in particular was an adept performer who could adapt and control his own public image to increase his claims to authority.<sup>33</sup> The continual process of self-adaptation

<sup>33</sup>Exactly how the Henrys sought to perform political authority is the subject of Strohm's *England's Empty Throne* (n. 23 above), and his examples of Lancastrian manipulation of the symbolic include the anointment of Henry IV with a coronation oil alleged to have been provided by the Virgin Mary herself and to have been used in the

employed by Henry V suggests the methods of the faithful translator who is willing to change outward form in order to preserve meaning, and, perhaps even more resonantly, Henry's actions suggest the self-preserving acts of translation performed by Lydgate's foreign princesses. While I do not wish to suggest a direct parallel between Henry V and the bad women of the *Troy Book*, I do think that these women are a specific site where anxieties regarding translation—both textual and political—are allowed to enter the poem, and such anxieties would most certainly bear some relationship to the shaky political claims of Lydgate's monarch.

That female figures should operate as a locus for the exploration of political instabilities is neither innovative nor surprising; Helen had served as a scapegoat for the conflict between the Greeks and Trojans from antiquity onwards, and, in the Middle Ages, Criseyde's infidelity displaced concerns regarding the contemporary practice of exchanging women to solidify political alliances. Duplicitous behavior in the *Troy Book* is not limited to female figures, yet women appear to be a particularly conducive site for broaching this subject, for by gendering duplicity female, women would ostensibly function as a safely contained space where issues such as deception, falsehood, and unfaithfulness could be explored without the risk of implicating the poet, or, more importantly in Lydgate's case, the usurping prince. Yet the contradictoriness of Lydgate's depictions of true and false women, and particularly the resemblances between self-translating women and the enterprises of both Lydgate and Henry V, suggest the degree to which the construction of a clearly distinct category of truth for either the Lancastrian poet or monarch was simply not possible. Instead of containing duplicity to only certain groups of people—false women, false political leaders, and false texts—Lydgate's presentation of women in the *Troy Book* reveals the fluidity of such categories and the anxiety with which they were regarded in Lancastrian England.

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coronation of Richard II (207–208); the reinterpretation of ancient prophecies (1–32); and Henry V's elaborate reburial of Richard II (101–127).