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To Yield Or Die:

The Power of the Prisoner

from Chaucer to Shakespeare

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in English

by

Holly Lynette Moyer

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

To Yield or Die:
The Power of the Prisoner
from Chaucer to Shakespeare

by

Holly Lynette Moyer
Doctor of Philosophy in English
University of California, Los Angeles, 2016
Professor Christine N. Chism, Co-chair
Professor Lowell Gallagher, Co-chair

Scholars examining captivity in the medieval and early modern periods have laid a strong foundation of work that explores both historical details (the layout of prisons, the laws of ransom) and individual captive voices (especially in martyr stories and captivity narratives). Recently, definitional and theoretical questions have risen out of such specific analyses. For example, what is the difference between a “captive” and a “slave”? Can captives be best categorized by the reason they are held, the duration of their loss of freedom, their social status, or something else?

In response to these challenges, *To Yield or Die* identifies and explores a persistent discourse about captive characters in English late medieval and early modern texts including Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*; Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*; Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*; Marlowe’s *Edward II*, *The Jew of Malta*, and two *Tamburlaine* plays; and the works of Shakespeare (with particular focus on *Richard II*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Rape of Lucrece*). When

characters face the literal or figurative sword's point and are ordered to "yield or die," texts treat their answers as permanently characterizing *choices*. The discourse thus creates three categories of captive character based on those choices: those who yield, those who risk death by resisting, and those who reply illegibly (or not at all) and thus negate the question's definitional power. These categories operate within each story's world to explore selfhood and establish relationships; they also operate at the formal level of textual construction (characters who yield are almost never protagonists; illegible characters often provoke interpretive confusion for fellow characters and readers alike).

While exploring this discourse, *To Yield or Die* also examines how texts manipulate and subvert its conventions, especially when the discourse collides with others including those involving gender, religion, chivalric culture, and so forth. The yield-or-die discourse both celebrates unexpected means of resistance (for example, it respects patient suffering) and is also cruelly oppressive (for example, it labels as "slavish" those who yield to save their own lives). *To Yield or Die* provides a clarifying lens through which to study texts about enslaved people, prisoners, and other captive figures.

The dissertation of Holly Lynette Moyer is approved.

Albert R. Braunmuller

Katherine C. King

Christine N. Chism, Committee Co-chair

Lowell Gallagher, Committee Co-chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

For Mom and Dad

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| Acknowledgements | vii |
| Vita | x |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 1 |
| Methods | 2 |
| Captivity Scholarship | 18 |
| A Cautionary Note | 33 |
| Chapter 2: Yielding | 35 |
| Enslavement and Vassalage | 37 |
| Honorable Yielding: the Pattern | 53 |
| Honorable Yielding: Syncopations | 62 |
| Mutual Yielding | 84 |
| Dishonorable Yielding: the Pattern | 96 |
| Dishonorable Yielding: Syncopations | 104 |
| Love as Captivity | 122 |
| Spenser's <i>Artegall</i> and <i>Radigund</i> | 125 |
| Chapter 3: Resistance | 134 |
| Rescue | 137 |
| Escape | 153 |
| Death | 169 |
| Expressional Resistance | 194 |
| Negotiation | 197 |
| Plaint and Patience | 204 |
| Affective Resistance | 225 |
| Deception | 231 |
| Chaucer's <i>Arcite</i> and <i>Palamon</i> | 248 |
| Chapter 4: Illegibility | 268 |
| Modern Analogues | 270 |
| Unstableness, Blankness, and Deferral | 273 |
| Chaucer's <i>Griselda</i> | 281 |
| Malory's <i>Launcelot</i> | 295 |
| Malory's <i>Palomydes</i> | 313 |
| Spenser's <i>Turpine</i> and <i>Artegall</i> | 337 |
| Marlowe's <i>Edward II</i> | 347 |
| Shakespeare's <i>Richard II</i> | 369 |
| Shakespeare's <i>Barnardine</i> | 387 |
| Conclusion | 394 |
| Bibliography | 396 |

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Vita

Holly L. Moyer holds a B.F.A. in screenwriting from the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts; an M.A. in English from the University of Colorado, Boulder; and an M.A. and C.Phil. in English from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her *summa cum laude* graduation from USC was made possible by the four-year Trustees' Scholarship and her work at Colorado by the two-year Chancellor's Fellowship. While at UCLA, she was a teaching assistant for a wide variety of courses before advancing to the rank of Teaching Fellow and instructor of record for courses including Composition and Introduction to Literary Analysis. She served on the editorial board for, and as editor of, the graduate journal *Comitatus* (published by UCLA's Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies), and she co-led the interdisciplinary graduate Medieval Colloquium. She has written the "Malory and Caxton" and "Verse Romance" sections for Oxford Journals' *The Year's Work in English Studies* (2012-14). Finally, putting her undergraduate degree to good use, she worked as a staff writer on the second season of the television series *The Librarians* and also has a science-fiction pilot in development.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Midway through the long section that bears his name in Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century Arthurian book, the *Morte Darthur*, Sir Trystram is challenged to battle. His bruising swordfight with Sir Galahalt lasts nearly half a day before Trystram finds new strength, redoubles his assault, and seems about to win. At this instant, Galahalt's ally, the King with the Hundred Knights, arrives on the scene—*with* the hundred knights. Galahalt, saved from the brink of defeat, turns to Trystram and announces to his exasperated foe: "thou must yield thee to me or else die." *To Yield or Die* takes this moment—and the many moments like it, either literally so or in spirit, that punctuate late medieval and early modern English literature like a refrain—as the starting point for a wide-ranging discussion of imprisoned selfhood and the power of narrative in *The Canterbury Tales*, the *Morte Darthur*, *The Faerie Queene*, the dramatic works of Marlowe, and the plays and poems of Shakespeare.

Over the past century, scholars examining captivity in the medieval and early modern period have laid a strong foundation of work that explores both detailed historical circumstances (the layout of prisons, the laws of ransom) and individual captive voices (especially in martyr stories and first-person accounts). The applicability of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* to these specific histories and fictions has been thoroughly debated—with no firm verdict reached, but perhaps a healthy skepticism in place. Recently, theoretical or definitional questions have begun to rise out of the specific analysis that has already been done. What is the difference between a "captive" and a "slave"? Can captives be best categorized by the reason they are held, by the duration of their loss of freedom, their hope of release (or lack thereof), their social status? Summing up the state of the field, Adam Kosto, an expert on medieval hostage-taking, recently issued a call for "a not-so-unified grand theory of captivity," arguing that captivity scholars are now ready to build categories and definitions atop the existing foundation of historical detail

and individual narrative.¹ *To Yield or Die* responds to this call. It defines categories of captivity with enough flexibility to account for wide variation within them. Although my study takes its evidence almost exclusively from English fictional texts, its implications will be of use to historians, as well, because of the light it sheds on the cultural conceptualization of captives across the roughly two centuries I examine.

My three innovative categories of captive find their origin in the moment when, with Trystram, a character entering captivity must make some kind of response to the crisis: to surrender, to prefer death to imprisonment (which enables resistance as well as literal death), or to neglect to respond to the crisis at all. These three categories—which I call yielding, resistance, and illegibility—structure this dissertation. The captive’s responses are a major opportunity for self-construction within the story’s world, even as they are also a formal tool for writers to construct characters. The raw material of selfhood in these texts arises from the power to narrate one’s reasons, goals, loyalties, and so forth, and the moment of capture is a moment in which selfhoods are solidified or broken through resistance or yielding.

Methods

I focus on medieval and early modern English literature for the simple reason that these are my periods of expertise, but conversely these periods lend themselves especially well to my study. I am interested in broadly defined personal and non-judicial captivities rather than strictly institutional and penal experiences, an interest which suits the examples that appear in medieval and early modern literature. I started with a general curiosity about the challenge of writing the captive character in fiction—especially the captive protagonist. A character who

¹ Kosto made this point in his keynote address, “UnLiberty: Towards a Not-So-Unified Grand Theory of Captivity,” at a 2014 Brown University conference entitled “Prisons of Stone, Word, and Flesh: Medieval and Early Modern Captivity.”

cannot easily engage in autonomous, heroically scaled action is a character who is harder to characterize as a hero. What tools do authors use to characterize captives?

With this question before me, I began accumulating examples of captives from a wide range of texts: from *Havelok the Dane* to Massinger's *The Renegado*. I lined up similar moments. I looked for patterns. Essentially, I conducted innumerable close readings of instances of captivity in this literature. In one sense, this dissertation simply presents and organizes those readings to reveal the conclusions I drew.

I decided to limit myself to examples from canonical texts by Chaucer, Malory, Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare. This decision was an uneasy one—in the twenty-first century, it should not sit comfortably with any scholar of literature to limit oneself to famous and well-studied texts by privileged men—but my reasons are as follows. First, I want to show that the patterns I have discovered are ubiquitous enough that I need not cherry-pick texts to find evidence. Second, I want to show that the discourse I am discussing was mainstream, a common component of popular texts. Third, choosing my examples from texts that most of my readers know, at least by reputation, allows more attention to fall upon the new lens I am using to read those texts, not the texts themselves. I am arguing for an addition to the ways we consider these well-known stories—not a supplanting, dominant addition meant to sweep away older readings (although it will seem as if I intend such dominance in a book-length study dedicated exclusively to it!), but simply a new lens to add to our existing toolkits.

Within the broad category of “canonical,” however, my texts vary widely: the poetry of *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *The Rape of Lucrece*, the prose of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, and many dramas by Marlowe and Shakespeare all mingle together here. Obviously the basic tools an author uses for characterization of captives vary across poetry, prose, and drama, but I have not found genre, in the conventional sense, to have meaningful impacts on the patterns I wish to highlight. Similarly, I have not found a neat, teleological arc of historical change in the depiction of captives from Chaucer to Shakespeare, although some later

texts (such as *The Faerie Queene*) certainly comment upon and even challenge earlier ones (such as the *Morte*). In general, the depiction of captivity has its own rules that carry across standard boundaries of genre or periodization.

The incidents of captivity I examine thus share what Paul Alpers (speaking of pastoral moments) calls a literary “continuity” even as they also sometimes push against its baseline patterns (12). In his attempt to define the pastoral, Alpers productively borrows and adjusts Kenneth Burke’s concept of the “representative anecdote,” a small-scale narrative moment or form that generates a large and fruitful discourse while, at the same time, creating limitations (ideological or otherwise) that close off or disguise other aspects of reality. For example, Burke’s representative anecdote for human life is dramatic form (with its representation/reduction of life into acts, scenes, actors, and motives) (13-5); Alpers proposes that the representative anecdote for pastoral is “herdsmen and their lives” (22). In this sense, the representative anecdote that binds together the texts in this dissertation is what I will refer to as the “yield-or-die” question, the moment of crisis in which one character literally or figuratively lays a sword at the other’s throat and explicitly or implicitly asks if the other will surrender or resist.² This question *generates* the vast and complex ideological discourse of yielding, resistance, and illegibility that my dissertation examines. At the same time, the yield-or-die demand, with its correspondent ideology, *closes down or conceals* countless additional possibilities and outcomes as well as ways of speaking about those possibilities and outcomes. On the one hand, the discourse arising from the yield-or-die representative anecdote creates supple and useful

² Alpers explores and adapts Burke’s representative anecdote in chapter 1 of his book *What is Pastoral?*. He explains that representative anecdotes “are genuinely ‘anecdotal’—they briefly and tellingly summarize some specific phenomena in the world or form of human life—and . . . they are representative: they stand for whole fields of study or types of discourse, which we can generate by pursuing the details of these anecdotes, spelling them out, as it were” (14). My goal in this study is to “pursue the details” of the yield-or-die demand in order to reveal the discourse it generates. Alpers, still discussing Burke, continues with a caution that “any concept or representation, by its very formulation, generates its own limitations: scope and reduction, to invoke the title of [Burke’s] chapter in which the idea appears, are mutually implicated in human myths and concepts” (15).

ways to write about the psychological trauma of entering captivity or the means (not always physical) by which a resistant captive may maintain an empowered sense of self. On the other hand, the discourse has sharp limitations. It does not recognize, for example, that a truly yielded character could also serve as a story's protagonist. By extension, the discourse struggles to speak about (and therefore to conceptualize) people who surrender but nonetheless retain a relatively strong sense of self. Throughout this dissertation, I examine texts joined together by their use of the yield-or-die question, the discourse it generates, and the conceptual limits that this discourse imposes.

The "yield-or-die" demand is thus one of the central idiosyncratic terms I rely upon again and again in this study. Sometimes I may also call it "the crisis," "the characterizing choice," or "the entrance into captivity," but in all cases I mean the representative narrative instance in which a captive implicitly or explicitly is invited to select yielding or resistance.

A second cluster of idiosyncratic terms upon which I rely heavily includes "self-narrative," "narrative power," and their derivatives. By using those terms, I enter into the treacherous territory of the definition of "self," and I will make no pretensions toward a full exploration of that territory here. In this study, I assume that one useful way to conceptualize "self" is as a generally coherent internal story of a person's traits, motivations, and experiences: a self-narrative. When I use terms such as "selfhood," "self," or "identity," I do so meaning "self-narrative." Further, insofar as a person (or a literary character) feels empowered to understand, interpret, extend, and revise that self-narrative, that person (or character) possesses "narrative power." An additional—politically and socially useful but not essential—projection of narrative power is the power to make one's self-narrative legible to others; an even more aggressive projection incorporates other characters into accepting or even supporting one's own self-narrative.

This definition of self as narrative is not arbitrary. I have arrived at it via two separate exploratory routes that ended in roughly the same location. The first began with Katherine C.

Little's book *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England*, a study focused on Lollardy that nonetheless intervenes more broadly in a scholarly conversation about medieval and early modern selfhood led by luminaries such as Foucault and Greenblatt. Little agrees that existing cultural discourse and dominant institutions (such as the Church) play a major role in what she calls self-definition, but her analysis of Lollard texts supports her conclusion that self-definition in the period can also be a matter of choosing some discursive options and resisting others—what I would call an exertion of self-narrative power, potentially *against* dominant discourses or institutions (in particular, against the traditional Catholic forms of confession with which Foucault is concerned).

Little grounds her thoughts in the work of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, who argues that a sense of self is inherently narrative. Like Little, I find MacIntyre's thoughts on self-narrative to be a particularly helpful starting point for talking about selfhood more generally. Although his own work is more concerned with cultural, institutional, moral, and scientific narrating, MacIntyre starts from the premise that to have a sense of self is to have a sense of the self's story. In contrast to the idea of performativity or Stephen Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning, MacIntyre emphasizes *self-narration*, which encourages a gentle shift of focus in the discussion. Instead of considering self-construction as an act that happens publicly, for an audience, MacIntyre's term reminds us that self-construction is not only a story that the self tells the world, but *also* a story that the self tells him- or herself (3).

When talking about the selfhood of captive characters, as I will be doing, this framing of self as narrative is especially productive for two related reasons. First, it downplays the importance of the self's physical agency by reminding us that words and even thoughts can be crucial to self-formation (a captive who cannot take significant action or even choose his own clothing may be less able to “perform” but can still “narrate”). Second, it highlights a more *internal* experience of selfhood that may or may not align with any external evidence available

to others within the world of the story (a captive who appears entirely broken may not feel so internally, and this matters).

MacIntyre posits that the self strives for a continuous, consistent narrative—a story of a lifetime that feels unified and that integrates as well as possible both unchosen and chosen aspects of a person's life. Additionally, the self strives to feel like the ethical protagonist of this story, aligned with goodness according to whatever cultural discourses he or she accepts. Inevitably, of course, the self encounters events or new ideas that force it to question its old narrative. These are moments of epistemological crisis, MacIntyre argues, in which the self clings to its original narrative, adopts a new one, or is temporarily or permanently effaced (3-4). MacIntyre suggests that for the self to adopt a revised or new narrative (rather than simply deny or reject the new information, which leads to unintelligibility, a break from consensus reality), the new narrative must allow the self “to understand *both* how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs *and* how he or she could have been so drastically misled by them” (5). Selfhood, for MacIntyre, is a story always under revision, either from small day-to-day additions or, most spectacularly, in moments of crisis when the self evaluates and revises—or rejects—its current narrative.

Though MacIntyre does not address the experience of captivity specifically, I argue that, in the texts I study, the yield-or-die question thrusts the captive character into something very like MacIntyre's epistemological crisis in a severely straightforward way. The question threatens to strip the captive of narrative power over his or her own life's story: the range of actions available shrinks; old goals, hopes, and fears may lose or shift meaning; and his or her sense of personal *telos* (and ability to pursue that end) is shaken. Add to this the presence of a specific captor, a different self who wishes to incorporate the captive into a new, alien narrative, and the crisis is complete. The captive, faced with this existential threat to self-narrative and future narrative power, must thus face revision (either by other or self) or a break from consensus reality.

Katherine C. Little and, more foundationally, Alasdair MacIntyre thus led me by one road to my terms “self-narrative” and “narrative power.” A second road that leads to a similar place is that laid down by psychological and theoretical specialists in trauma. “Trauma” is a modern concept, arising out of Freud’s studies of hysteria and shell-shock (Caruth xiv) and giving rise in the twenty-first century to both ongoing psychological and neurological research into its causes and treatments (Crespo and Fernández-Lansac 149-50) as well as to ongoing trauma-related writing and art and its accompanying criticism (Pellicer-Ortín 193-4). Central to scientific and artistic understandings of trauma is the understanding of self-narrative as a crucial aspect of selfhood. Psychological and neurological studies define trauma as an as-yet not fully understood failure of the brain to integrate unusually painful memories into an existing structure of “autobiographical information” governed by a “first-person perspective” and “temporal continuity” (Crespo and Fernández-Lansac, 149), a failure which gives rise to the group of symptoms known as post-traumatic stress disorder. Psychoanalyst and trauma expert Dori Lamb explains that “the healing of the [traumatic] wound” is accomplished “by shaping and giving shape to an experience that’s fragmented” through a process of “symbolization and the formation of narrative”; the traumatic memories are integrated into the existing autobiographical memory. This narrative work is conducted sometimes with the help of an external listener (such as an analyst) but most crucially with “an internal companion” or “internal audience,” a part of the self that can help structure events into the logic of narrative (qtd. in Caruth 48-50). Another expert, psychiatrist Judith Herman, summarizes treatment for post-traumatic stress as a process of turning the disjointed memories of trauma “into normal memories that have a narrative, that serve as witness within one’s internal story and in relation to others” (qtd. in Caruth 141). Notably, while sharing this narrative (and the process of its creation) with others is often a part of mental survival and recovery, such sharing is not essential. An imaginative or constructed “companion” or “witness” to the narrative within a person’s mind will suffice.

The word “normal” in Herman’s statement therefore need not be understood as a Foucauldian normalizing judgment imposed institutionally, a need for these self-narratives to conform to a rigid, pre-approved structure. While Foucault would no doubt argue that some institutional influence is inevitable, attention to ethical, non-directive witnessing and profound respect for individual lived experience are refrains among those working with trauma survivors. Further, commenting on the literature of written trauma narratives, scholars Ganteau and Onega observe that such narratives often turn away from realist modes, transparently linear plots, or strict adherence to any single genre’s conventions in favor of “the malleability, iterability, and ubiquity of the romance” or, more broadly still, “dialogism, indirection . . . fluidity and excessiveness” (5). They argue that such storytelling serves the need to “transform traumatic memories into narrative memories” while also honoring the trauma victim’s unique and sometimes conventionally indescribable experiences—showing “faithfulness to the symptoms of trauma.” Further, “that such evocation is generally provided from the inside implies a great deal of attentiveness to the vulnerable subject. This subject is not envisaged from a domineering, totalising position, thus favoring an ethical treatment” (7). To bring disjointed, confusing memories into greater unity with an existing self-narrative need not require strict conformity with the expectations or demands of a generalized or institutional external audience.

The connections that scholars of trauma build between self and narrative are, clearly, similar to the connections that MacIntyre suggests. We can think of “selfhood” as an internal awareness of a generally unified autobiographical story in which we are the protagonist. This narrative may be profoundly shaken by events (traumas) that disrupt our sense of power over that narrative, that displace us from the protagonist role in our own lives into the role of victim, that rewrite us without our consent. Recovery from such a crisis involves recovering narrative power and revising the self-narrative to integrate what happened.

As I explore the concepts of self-narrative and narrative power as they relate to characters in medieval and early modern English texts, I shift focus frequently through layers of narrative:

from the world within the story to the formal level of textual craft to the audience or reader's implied response to that craft. Numerous narratologists have theorized these varying aspects of a text's existence. My division of layers is inspired by—but far more pedestrian than—Paul Ricoeur's intricate theorization of the three levels of mimesis: where he describes mimesis₁, mimesis₂, and mimesis₃, I tend to refer to the *story-world* (in which the characters are approximations of real people and may be analyzed as such), the *text* or its *formal* aspects (the construction of the story), and the *audience's point of view*, which is arguably also the level of moral engagement or judgment (the reader or audience's experience of the story as a teleological whole).³ The yield-or-die discourse operates on all these levels. Most obviously, it helps to structure interactions and events within the world of the story, but it is also a formal characterizing device as well as a frequent determinant of whose story is prominent (those who yield are far less likely to be protagonists). The audience's point-of-view becomes especially meaningful to the discourse when a character's true status is visible only to readers or viewers, not to other characters. If the audience can reasonably judge that a character is yielding deceptively rather than sincerely, for example, then that character is resistant in terms of the discourse even if no other characters ever realize the deception occurred.

Overall, the discourse tends to pull form into service of its ideology. For example, the discourse usually silences characters who dishonorably yield. As an audience, we then become accustomed to the idea that shamefully yielded captives are inanimate parts of the setting rather than participants in the action. At the extreme, these characters are the poor figures dressed in rags and chains in the background of a hero's journey, either detestable or pitiable but united by their inability (within the story-world, formally, and in the audience's assumptions) to say anything for themselves. The formal use of dishonorable yielding to characterize someone as

³ I owe a debt to William C. Dowling's *Ricoeur on Time and Narrative: An Introduction to Temps et récit* for my introduction to Ricoeur's theory.

slavish thus supports an ideology that says enslaved people are cowardly, lazy, and even lack independent identities.

As the previous paragraph demonstrates, a major consequence of my choice to shift between these narrative layers is that I also frequently shift between speaking of formal characterization and identity/self-narrative. In other words, I will frequently sound as if I am discussing constructed literary characters as if they were real people. I have not forced the lines between *characterization* and *self-narrative* to be as bright and rigid as they could be because I believe that some blurriness is, for this study, useful and thought-provoking. If philosophers such as MacIntyre as well as trauma psychologists are increasingly arguing that how we narrate our own lives to ourselves—how we experience ourselves as the protagonists of our own stories—is crucial for a real-world understanding of selfhood, then narratology does have things to say about human psychology, and vice-versa. At moments when the lines seem to blur in this study, I therefore urge additional thought and future questioning; there is more to explore and more to be said about how the yield-or-die discourse as it appears in these narratives reflects historical medieval and early modern English cultural understandings of captive psychology and selfhood. At its foundation, however, this is a study of captive characters in literature and how tools of narrative craft portray those characters. If readers ever find themselves in doubt about whether I intend to connote a psychological “person” versus a formally constructed “character,” I invite them to explore the uses of that doubt and expand the discussion, but also to assume as a default that I mean “character.”

In general, a narrative understanding of selfhood lines up well with the yield-or-die discourse in texts by Chaucer, Malory, Marlowe, Spenser, and Shakespeare. Imagery of writing (or other forms of artistic representation) is surprisingly common as imprisoned characters wrestle with the yield-or-die question and the ramifications of their response to it; such imagery is one reason that an understanding of selfhood or identity as self-narrative suits this project so well. The moment of entrance into captivity functions as a moment of trauma to the new

prisoner's self-narrative, and the prisoner's chosen response either to yield or resist determines how that self-narrative will be revised to integrate the experience of captivity. Failure to respond to the question leads to illegibility, an inconclusive state that nonetheless possesses a set of relatively consistent markers of its own. (To observe that these markers, which include diction and imagery of doubleness or blankness, resemble the symptoms psychologists and trauma scholars observe in the speech and writing of trauma victims is reductive and anachronistic but not entirely invalid.) This link between the prisoner's chosen response and the prisoner's subsequent self-narrative is the reason that the answer to the yield-or-die question is assumed to be profoundly characterizing.

That same link is also the root of dangerous divergences between reality and the discourse about that reality generated by the yield-or-die question. While a response at such a moment of crisis certainly *might* be characterizing or *might* represent a first step toward incorporating the crisis into a self-narrative, it also might be a local, pragmatic choice or, crucially, it might be fully coerced, no choice at all—sword's-point is not an ideal location for self-expression. Scattered throughout the chapters that follow will be many examples of the discourse's false and cruel rigidity. For example, true yielding, in this discourse, accomplishes the necessary revision of self-narrative by giving "authorship" to the captor, who henceforth has unrealistically enormous—arguably total—power over his prisoner's selfhood. That pattern is allowable as a literary device, but it may reflect unsettling ideas about the power of the act of surrender beyond the bounds of fictional stories. To ask whether this belief still permeates modern cultures—and perhaps even enhances traumatic suffering (by intimating that a perceived failure to resist places a victim permanently in thrall to an abuser, for example)—is far beyond the scope of this project, but is, I think, a worthy question.

For now, I will simply repeat that my arguments in this dissertation are based upon the idea that, for characters in texts from Chaucer through Shakespeare, a self-narrative, created by narrative power, can be disrupted by the yield-or-die question at the moment of entrance into

captivity. This disruption is resolved (or not) in one of three ways, each of which works to characterize the new captive: by yielding, resisting, or lapsing into illegibility.

These three potential responses provide the material for the three main chapters that follow. At the crisis point of capture, a captive's first possible response is the topic of chapter 2: yielding. Drawing on scholarship about historical conceptualizations of vassalage and slavery as well as evidence primarily from the *Morte*, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays, and *The Faerie Queene*, I show that to yield means to surrender power over one's self-narrative to the captor—permanently. Perhaps surprisingly to a modern reader, such yielding need not be dishonorable or even undesirable. A captive who yields out of respect for his or her captor's merit yields honorably, becoming a supporting player in the captor's self-narrative but gaining reflected glory and privilege as well. King Arthur's vassals often yield this way in Malory, as does Theridamas to Tamburlaine early in Marlowe's play. A captive who yields only to save his or her life, however, yields dishonorably—Malory's characters call such a captive "coward," while Marlowe's opt for the revealing word choice of "slave." Crucially, from *The Canterbury Tales* to *The Tempest*, texts consistently treat yielding as a *choice*: even a desperate cry of "I yield!" at sword's point is rarely treated as a meaningless fluke of war but rather as a final, reliable, and permanently characterizing instant of self-narrating agency for the captive. This understanding of surrender as an absolute, revealing, and irreversible act is, as I have already and will repeatedly insist, a cruel fiction, but it is a profound and overriding one, too, often taken for granted in the deep background of all these texts. That said, I conclude this chapter with an extended reading of the knightly hero Artegall's enslavement by the Amazonian warrior Radigund in Book V of *The Faerie Queene*, in which Spenser wrestles with and indeed subverts some of the yield-or-die discourse's fundamental rules: that dishonor is chosen and that yielding's loss of narrative power is permanent.

The captive's second response to captivity is to resist, even if that means to die, and resistance is therefore the topic of chapter 3. A yielding captive chooses to surrender narrative

power; a resistant captive chooses to keep that power. I examine methods of resistance that range from the physical (such as escape or suicide) through the verbal and affective (such as negotiation, deception, or patience). Some of these methods, of course, could easily appear cowardly or sinful in different contexts, so the crucial ingredient is the captive's retention of narrative power. Malory's *Launcelot* carefully articulates justifications for escaping captivity to clarify that he is not acting out of fear of death, which would come uncomfortably close to dishonorable yielding; Shakespeare's *Cleopatra* frames her suicide with metatheatrical narration that reveals her determination to deny Caesar authorship over her life. Sometimes, a female character's mere horror at the idea of rape is enough to act as a talisman that prevents her rape, as if her narrative power alone defends her; when this neat (and utterly unrealistic, of course) system breaks down, as it does in both Chaucer's and Shakespeare's retellings of *Lucrece*, the woman must battle suspicion that she has chosen rape, either through outright consent or the "choice" to yield. This battle, of course, takes place on narrative ground. Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, famously, is haunted by imagery of storytelling, writing, performance. Resistance means retention of self-narrating power, at any cost and—significantly—regardless of whether the captor or anyone in the story's world other than the prisoner knows about it. I conclude this chapter with an extended look at Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, in which the imprisoned cousins Arcite and Palamon attempt a wide range of these resistance tactics.

Arcite and Palamon's story also prefigures the indeterminate topic of chapter 4: illegibility, the captive's non-choosing when faced with the demand to yield or die. The cousins are captured alive but unconscious on the battlefield, meaning that they awake in prison having skipped the choice that usually marks the entrance into captivity. The capture of unconscious characters is everywhere in these texts: Malory's Arthur, Launcelot, and Trystram repeatedly fall into imprisonment during magical sleeps; Spenser's Redcrosse Knight is knocked unconscious and locked in *Pride's* dungeon; Chaucer even revises his source texts to have *Lucrece* swoon the instant before Tarquin rapes her. In these examples, unconsciousness is both a pragmatic

authorial tool and a kind of narrative grace, allowing characters to avoid a moment of capture that would effectively end their story (either through yielding or a swift death). Chapter 4 examines characters who enter this state of illegible non-choice and remain in it long enough to befuddle their captors and their readers alike. Although she is not a literal prisoner, Chaucer's Griselda, from the *Clerk's Tale*, is such an ideal representation of this mysterious state that she is the first of my major examples. From her fellow characters within her story, to the Clerk and his audience of pilgrims, to present-day critics, no one ever feels particularly confident about how to read and interpret Griselda: is she powerful or passive? In my terms, has she yielded to her husband or is she silently resisting him? The answer is both and neither. She is illegible. Malory's Saracen knight Palomydes also exhibits illegible qualities when threatened with capture, allowing him to slip through many conventions that otherwise govern Malory's text; the "unstable" Launcelot flirts with the condition as well. Two deposed kings, Marlowe's Edward II and Shakespeare's Richard II, lapse into illegibility during their depositions and subsequent imprisonments, denying either themselves or their captors narrative power over their identities. My final major example is the imprisoned and inebriated murderer Barnardine from *Measure for Measure*, a seemingly minor character whose complete inability to be read and understood constitutes a powerful roadblock to the immense narrating power of the Duke. In response to the choice of yielding or death, illegibility—unconsciousness, silence, madness, indecision, and drunkenness—may not constitute resistance or even narrative power in itself, but it withholds power from the captor and, by doing so, preserves a space where the potential for future choice, future self-narrative, may live.

Taken together, these three chapters describe a basic pattern—the discourse of yielding and resistance. This dissertation is therefore, in some ways, formalist, but by necessity it also anticipates and initiates the deconstruction of the structures it reveals. If the binary opposition of yielding and resistance generates most of the patterns I observe, illegibility becomes a

deconstructive third term that upends these neat oppositions and exposes the discourse's limits. Chapters 2 and 3 thus explore the binary and chapter 4 disrupts it.

Further, within each chapter, I both reveal an aspect of the discourse's basic rhythm (the conventional markers and usages of yielding, resistance, and illegibility), *and also* indicate some of the countless ways in which texts introduce syncopation to that rhythm, playing with, warping, and disrupting the basic pattern. Sometimes this syncopation seems deliberate; one imagines an authorial impulse (by Chaucer, by Spenser, by Marlowe) to push conventional assumptions to or past their limits and see what happens. For example, the Amazonian Radigund in Book V of *The Faerie Queene* offers a radical challenge not only to gender roles in her world, but also to rules of honorable and dishonorable yielding. Through her, Spenser plunges his hero Artegall into a situation where either refusal to yield or honorable yielding (both situations that, according to the yield-or-die discourse, ought to preserve a character's prestige) lead to nothing but shame. Artegall's experiences reveal the discourse's brittleness and, indeed, its resulting fragility.

As this same example suggests, sometimes the disruptions to the yield-or-die discourse are also an inevitable result of collisions with ideological assumptions from other discourses. That Radigund is a woman further complicates the yield-or-die crisis between her and Artegall. Gender, sexuality, illness, class, ethnicity, race, religion, and other factors—usually operating intersectionally rather than in isolation—all have the power to introduce syncopation into a baseline rhythm established by and for white, heterosexual, male, and usually noble characters. Lucrece's resistance to Tarquin is complicated by the fact that the discourse treats wives as fully and permanently yielded to their husbands, making her an already-yielded character at the time the story begins. Edward II's erotic affection for his favorites muddles his ability to be the lord to his vassals (a variation on a captor/captive relationship). Lovesickness—treated in these texts as a medical malady as well as a manifestation of desire—can disrupt the standard rhythms of yielding and resistance with its intersecting invocations of illness, gender, and sexuality. When Arcite is lovesick for Emelye, his ability to resist Theseus blurs and weakens. Less literally,

captivity is a common metaphor for romantic love in these texts, but how this metaphor operates shifts depending on the gender and sexuality of the participants. Griselda and Spenser's shepherd Coridon are both peasants whose class affects their ability to yield or resist. Griselda ends up yielding as vassal as well as wife to Walter, while Coridon's escapes from captivity barely engage with the yield-or-die discourse even as the higher-ranking Calidore participates fully. Malory's Palomydes, the Saracen knight, struggles to operate in sync with the discourses—including the yield-or-die discourse—of the English, Christian culture that surrounds him. Christian religious discourse in general, like the discourses of romantic love, particularly complicates yield-or-die language because of its own complicated understandings of surrender (to sin, to Christ) and resistance (to Satan, to God). Christianity rarely valorizes pure resistance but rather prefers yielding to the correct captor—God. Thus Redcrosse's travails in the first book of *The Faerie Queene* involve a series of near-yieldings (to Orgoglio, to Despaire) before his more appropriate yielding to imprisonment by Patience, which restores to him the power to defeat (resist) the un-Christian dragon at the book's climax.⁴ Such discourses of religion, class, and romantic love (which itself incorporates discourses of gender, sexuality, and even medicine) intersect to generate complex, disruptive syncopations within the yield-or-die discourse, syncopations that can be explored but not reduced to simple explications. I will attempt explorations of many of these syncopations throughout this project.

⁴ At least two monographs have been devoted to literal and metaphorical intersections between Christianity and captivity, particularly in the form of enslavement: Dale B. Martin's *Slavery as Salvation* and Jennifer A. Glancy's *Slavery in Early Christianity*. David Brion Davis also deals with these intersections extensively in *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (see, for example, chapter 3, "Slavery and Sin: The Ancient Legacy" [pp. 62-90] as well as his comments on "the Christian Servant" throughout part II). Many of these authors' conclusions interact productively with—if not outright support—my own; they provide an expansive discussion of captivity in Christian thought.

Captivity Scholarship

My methodological focus on close reading foregrounds primary texts. The vast range of secondary literature on captivity, and on medieval and early modern English literature, is in no way irrelevant, but I am not advocating a certain theoretical or historicist lens. I have ranged widely among existing secondary works while researching this project and what follows is a synopsis of captivity and captivity-adjacent scholarly conversation that is relevant to my discussion even as it does not always guide it: this conversation contextualizes my argument even though I may only rarely refer to these works again.⁵ I encourage readers to put my arguments in dialogue with the works I mention here and other scholarship. Although I have found no existing analysis that duplicates my argument nor one that thoroughly undermines it, I am already aware of provocative moments of intersection (some of which I will briefly mention here, others of which will receive greater exposition in specific analyses later), and I am sure others exist.

Over the past century, scholars examining captivity in medieval and early modern England (and, more broadly, Europe) have explored myriad aspects of this topic, establishing a strong foundation of work. One of the most famous foundations that anyone now working in this area must acknowledge is Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault focuses upon the use and control of the captive as a tool of state power, arguing that in the medieval and early modern periods, management—and sometimes display—of the captive's body allowed the state to demonstrate that power to its citizens while, with the rise of the penitentiary in the eighteenth century, the state's basis of power evolved to depend on knowledge about the captive. Foucault offers a thought-provoking and frequently plausible

⁵ To keep this synopsis feasible, I will not additionally summarize the centuries of existing scholarship on each of my canonical primary texts. I may touch on certain of those studies at relevant points later, but, in general, I will trust that such scholarship is well-known and easy enough to track down on its own.

narrative that accounts neatly for the post-Enlightenment rise in penal confinement (as opposed to torture or spectacular execution).

Foucault's argument addresses selfhood mostly in context of the power the modern state gains by comprehending and attempting to expose, heal, correct, or normalize the captive's internal sense of identity. In subsequent works, Foucault identifies a dynamic similar to such modern panoptical knowledge in late classical and medieval Christian culture, which urges complete knowledge (and confession) of the self in order to become aware of, and sorry for, the inevitable inner workings of sin and moral failure. This confessional dynamic can become a source of institutional power, as the Church attempts to normalize its population, but also a source of consolation for those people who accept the dynamic's logic.⁶ In sum, at the risk of oversimplifying Foucault, he tends to examine the power of cultural and governmental institutions to make the selfhood of a captive or any political subject public and knowable for the sake of normalizing it.

My study focuses tightly on specific, individual agents—indeed, on fictional characters in literature—rather than on groups or institutional structures, so many of Foucault's insights operate on a larger scale than my own, still meaningful but outside the range of my close-up perspective. Boethius, to take an archetypal captive character, might be said to demonstrate Foucault's arguments in two ways: his body is executed as a display of Theodoric the Great's sovereign power, while his sense of self is interpenetrated by the exterior cultural forces of classical stoicism and Christian *contemptus mundi* with the result that he feels both spiritually liberated and moved to leave a semi-confessional record of his own thinking errors and enlightenment. When I zoom in to the level of the individual characters in this narrative, however, what becomes significant is that Boethius's relatively internal experience defies and rebukes the characters who inflict his physical and publicly understood suffering. We might say

⁶ Foucault explores these and related ideas throughout the latter half of his career in works including, but not limited to, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, and the lectures recorded in *Technologies of the Self*.

that, by writing his influential *Consolatio*, Boethius exerts a normalizing judgment (to twist Foucault's phrase from *Discipline and Punish* [182-3]) upon Theodoric the Great. He does not succeed at triumphing in fact over Theodoric, of course, but Boethius's self-narrative is the one that survives, and in his paradigm-establishing text, the unnamed presence of Theodoric merely haunts the margins, by implication one of the excluded souls to whom Lady Philosophy does not speak.

As this example shows, perhaps the most interesting way my work comes into dialogue with Foucault is that I highlight the ways a Foucauldian power dynamic can offer power to the *captive*, sometimes even at the expense of the captor's or captors'. In his essay "The Subject and Power," Foucault argues that a "power relationship" is an uneasy dynamic between the empowered and the overpowered, in which the overpowered retains an ongoing potential for resistance. If the empowered obtains complete submission, the "power relationship" ends in favor of a stable condition of victory; similarly, if the overpowered erupts into full-fledged rebellion, no "relationship" persists. Foucault's understanding of victory in this essay resonates with my concept of yielding, a state of absolute surrender. Further, the living tension within Foucault's power relationship is arguably recognizable in many instances of what I call resistance—which I define as an ongoing potential to resist—although I define violent, physical actions as resistance as well (Foucault distances physical force from "power," which, for him, is a more abstract, socially constructed ability to guide another's actions—therefore, once a struggle turns physical, it ceases to be a "power" struggle) (789-94). Foucault's model in this essay does not map precisely onto my arguments, but clearly there are areas of overlap.

A second essential theorist of captivity and related issues is Giorgio Agamben, whose work, like Foucault's, is relevant to my own even as it does not harmonize perfectly. Agamben's concept of the *homo sacer*—the human being cast into a "state of exception" outside the law and its protections, deprived of a political or social identity—helped nudge me toward my understanding of the "illegible" characters I examine in chapter 4 even as the two categories

have turned out to be quite different.⁷ As with Foucault, Agamben's insights recede from my work because the characters I explore are fictional and their public life and efficacy is of less interest to me than their sense of their own selfhood (I am interested more in the existence of a character's subjective self-narrative than in his or her political agency). Nonetheless, Agamben's focus on the figure excluded from standard cultural discourses called my attention to captive characters excluded from the discursive categories of yielding and resistant within the texts I explore. I will return to Agamben's ideas and, in particular, to his *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, briefly in chapter 4, when I will also revisit the related field of trauma studies.

Enslaved people experience a particularly profound form of captivity, and thus theories about and histories of enslavement are essential to my project. The legacy of classical enslavement haunts the literature of medieval and early modern England, with the figure of the slave often standing as a figure of ultimate captivity; to draw a rough equivalence, where we might now place Foucault's institutional subject of the panopticon or Agamben's *homo sacer*, these texts place the slave. Historians and theorists alike debate the extent to which literal slavery continued to persist into the northern European Middle Ages. The general consensus is that while it very slowly faded as an institution or crucial economic force in the centuries during and after the collapse of Rome, it never entirely vanished from cultural consciousness and, depending on how we choose to define it, it may not have vanished completely in fact, either (Anglo-Saxons in England enslaved people at least until the Conquest [Barrow 23, Dockès 238-9]). Enslavement certainly persisted throughout the Middle Ages more obviously in Mediterranean regions (Dockès 204, 238) and, as England became increasingly involved in Mediterranean trade in the early modern period, England also became increasingly involved

⁷ Agamben first explores this figure in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* and continues to examine it in later works.

again with slavery as a fact, not merely a concept.⁸ The idea of enslavement is crucial to understandings of captive selfhood in medieval and early modern English literature; it provides a kind of extreme of self-loss against which other experiences of captivity and coercion are compared.

Those other experiences of captivity abound. Broad historical studies of the prison as a dedicated space or institution often follow *The Oxford History of the Prison* in supporting conventional (and Foucauldian) wisdom that the prison came into its own as a penal institution in the long eighteenth century. This view is generally important and accurate, in the sense that purpose-built prisons and the idea of a prison sentence itself as punishment became far more prominent in this period—but this view can also eclipse the very real use of prisons (whether purpose-built jails or rooms or sections of castles) as part of the judicial system in medieval and early modern England. Ralph B. Pugh’s enormously detailed *Imprisonment in Medieval England* thus remains a valuable survey to establish the great variety and importance of prisons and prison-like spaces in the earlier period.⁹ *Imprisonment in England and Wales: A Concise History* (by Christopher Harding et al.) does not deviate radically from Pugh’s observations in

⁸ I discuss enslavement in more detail in chapter 2. Two major historians and theorists of enslavement throughout Western history are David Brion Davis, especially for his essential *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, and Orlando Patterson, whose *Slavery and Social Death* highlights issues crucial to my analysis. Joseph C. Miller’s *The Problem of Slavery as History* offers an important additional commentary on Davis’s and Patterson’s insightful generalizations with its reminder that varieties of enslavement are always historically particular and not universally determined by a single model; classical scholar Moses I. Finley similarly observes ways in which twentieth-century ideologies have informed (and sometimes biased) studies of slaveholding societies in *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*. Specific to my period, Pierre Dockès offers a Marxist-inflected survey of *Medieval Slavery and Liberation* while Agnes Wergeland’s 1916 study *Slavery in Germanic Society During the Middle Ages* remains a useful introduction and source of primary-text references. For sources relevant to early-modern Mediterranean enslavement, see my discussion of scholarship on Barbary captivity, below.

⁹ More recently, Jean Dunbabin’s *Captivity and Imprisonment in Medieval Europe: 1000-1300* (a broad survey) and Guy Geltner’s *The Medieval Prison: A Social History* (focused on Italy) explore imprisonment in medieval Europe. Although written for a popular rather than academic audience, Byrne’s *Prisons and Punishments of London* is a convenient catalogue of and introduction to London’s major historical prisons.

its medieval section, but also provides one of few recent dedicated discussions of early modern English imprisonment before moving on to later periods.¹⁰ Of note particularly are its comments on the rise of public institutions for forced labor (in response, in part, to the perceived vagrancy crisis of the sixteenth century); the original Bridewell, opened in 1556, and its descendants are forerunners of the correctional and penitential houses that would become standard forms of imprisonment in the long eighteenth century (65-73).

Although I do not address it further here, imprisonment for debt was an important additional cause of legal—though non-penal—captivity in the periods I study. It had been a fact of English life since at least the thirteenth century (Pugh 45), but rose to greater prominence—arguably even to crisis levels—in the early modern period. Among other scholars, Amanda Bailey addresses some of the puzzling and unique aspects of debt bondage in *Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England*, which explores both legal history and English dramas that overtly stage debt.

War and other political conflicts also often produced prisoners. Combatants might be taken for ransom, which, as M. H. Keen explores, was an event both emotional and personal (born in a moment of battlefield surrender) and also rational and legal (governed afterwards by tradition, contractual exchange, and law).¹¹ In *Hostages in the Middle Ages*, Adam Kosto argues that hostage-taking was particular to the Middle Ages for its emphasis on physical control of bodies as guarantees of behavior (versus other legal or economic guarantees); Kosto notes that, as guarantees for someone else, hostages form an unusual category of captives who are not held for reasons related to their own actions. Gwen Seabourne's *Imprisoning Medieval Women*

¹⁰ An additional chapter-length survey of early modern English imprisonment is “The sixteenth-century prison” (pp.8-28), chapter 1 of Ahnert's *The Rise of Prison Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, a book I discuss in more detail below.

¹¹ Keen comments on captivity in warfare throughout his *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* but especially in chapter 10, “The Law of Ransom” (156-85), an extensive and useful study of the conventions as well as the laws surrounding the ransoming of combatants.

offers an important addition to prison scholarship in general—her work, like Pugh’s, is an impressive survey of documentation about female prisoners, although she limits her study to non-judicial situations—and her focus on women imprisoned during war and related political crises provides an essential reminder that women as well as men suffered captivity during such times.

Increasingly in the early modern period, capture for ransom or enslavement in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire became a threat to English people in the Mediterranean region, and so became, also, an intensifying topic of discussion at home.¹² The cross-Mediterranean trade in captives has been the subject of many excellent studies, especially in recent years.¹³ Scholars have examined in detail how these instances of captivity among foreign others—especially religious others—were perceived as unusually threatening to a prisoner’s identity. To “turn Turk,” a commonplace term from the period, implied that the prisoner not only had changed in a variety of profound ways (adopting a new religion, new political loyalties, or even new sexual behaviors), but also sometimes had changed willingly and permanently rather than

¹² As Jarbel Rodriguez explores in *Captives and their Saviors in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, cross-Mediterranean ransom and enslavement were well-known in earlier periods on the Iberian Peninsula. Worth noting, too, is that earlier English crusading activities provided examples of medieval captivity in the Islamic world—if of a slightly different flavor—to English history and literature.

¹³ Samuel Chew’s 1937 history *The Crescent and the Rose* is still worth citing as a study that helped highlight the issue of Barbary and Ottoman captivity for modern scholars. More recently, a representative but incomplete list of books on the subject would include Clissold’s *The Barbary Slaves* (a straightforward history that, among other sources, draws on surviving accounts by captives; chapter 9, “The English Slaves,” is especially relevant); Colley’s *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (a study that focuses more on Britain’s later imperial history to show how the experiences of captive Britons complicated the empire’s self-definition); and Weiss’s *Captives and Corsairs* (an examination of France’s experiences with Mediterranean captivity from the early modern period through the mid-nineteenth century that explores not only French citizens taken captive abroad but also foreign captives enslaved in France; Weiss’s deep archival research and detailed appendices documenting numbers of enslavements and redemptions are especially notable).

unwillingly and temporarily.¹⁴ This issue of a prisoner's loss or preservation of crucial markers of identity is, of course, central to my project.

Other situations and interactions relate to captivity even as captivity *per se* is not necessarily the most prominent part of the experience. In instances of rape or torture, for example, traumatic physical suffering overshadows but does not negate the role of captivity in the experience. The question of what defines a late medieval understanding of the crime of *raptus*—which may involve seizure or abduction rather than or in addition to our modern understanding of rape—highlights the association of rape with captivity.¹⁵ Torture, also, requires an element of captivity; while I rarely focus in detail on torture in my argument, the extensive body of theoretical and historical analysis on the topic intersects with and departs from my work in myriad ways.¹⁶

¹⁴ Daniel Vitkus, a major scholar of the intersections between the Islamic world and early modern English literature, discusses the phrase “turning Turk” throughout his scholarship (including in his book-length study *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*; his Introduction to his edited edition of *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* is a shorter summation of his scholarship to date and addresses the term “turning Turk” throughout, but especially on pp. 3-4). In *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624*, Jonathan Burton also succinctly introduces the concept of “turning Turk” (29-32) before exploring it in detail throughout the rest of that study.

¹⁵ The collection of essays edited by Robertson and Rose, *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, provides a range of examinations of this topic in relation to some of the authors (Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare) I examine.

¹⁶ Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* remains important background for thinking through torture even as its universalizing thesis rightfully faces skepticism. The spotlight Scarry shines on pain's role outside of pure medical discourse (in particular, its role in the political realm during torture or war, and further, its role in the sufferer's sense of self) helps pave the way for arguments like mine. Langbein's *Torture and the Law of Proof* offers a history of torture's intersections with the legal systems of medieval Europe and, particularly, early modern England. Tracy's *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature* explores historical evidence and depictions of torturous violence in (among other texts) saints' lives, romances, *The Canterbury Tales*, and the works of Marlowe and Shakespeare (notably two works I examine closely in chapter 3: *Edward II* and *Richard II*) to argue that torture was probably less prominent in fact than these texts might have us believe; Tracy's suggestion is that English texts, in particular, often define English nationhood *against* those who would use torture. Finally, Mills's *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* offers a related argument from a more theoretical perspective, using theories of gender, sexuality, and spectacle to discuss portrayals of suffering martyrs (as well as scattered additional examples) and to assert,

Other, usually less physically violent, ostensibly more consensual experiences of confinement and limitation also bear meaningful similarities to the captor-captive dynamics I will be observing even as they move farther from obvious, literal captivity. Religious enclosure in general has qualities of confinement and obedience that call to mind captivity; anchoritic enclosure specifically is a radical entrance into “Godes prisun” (*Ancrene Wisse* 2.692).¹⁷ Monasteries also often had literal prison cells for offending brothers, and some records exist of nuns who were imprisoned, too (Pugh 374-83). Histories and discourses about martyrdom often connect literal captivity and torture with religious experience (with the suffering of the martyr as an extreme version of the holy suffering brought about by milder religious enclosures and privations).¹⁸

The secular structures of feudalism and bastard feudalism alike depended on hierarchical relationships that—as I will explore in chapter 2—also resemble the bonds of power and dependence in captivity. Rhetoric of service and lordship deriving from these systems

like Tracy, that a popular conception of the Middle Ages as an unusually brutal time deserves reexamination. All of these scholars comment upon how the embodied violence of torture can tell a story and can thus be used to advance agendas related to identity, but all also tend to explore these issues in the context of collective identities such as those of nationhood or religion.

¹⁷ Two essay collections edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Anchorites, Wombs, and Tombs* (co-edited with Mari Hughes-Edwards) and *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold*, provide a good starting point for exploring recent scholarly discussions about the relevance of enclosure to medieval Christianity (although both focus on anchoritic experience, both contextualize anchorites within a larger eremitic tradition and introduce a range of ways to consider religious enclosure). Linda Georgianna takes on the question of selfhood and anchoritic enclosure in a period earlier than mine in *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the Ancrene Wisse*; Georgianna sees the *Ancrene Wisse* “transforming the traditionally self-negating solitary life into a highly self-conscious journey through human experience” (6). Cary Howie’s *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature* is less a formal study than a highly theoretical meditation on intimacy (of reading as well as of bodies), gender, and touch in primarily, but not exclusively, religious literature.

¹⁸ Alice Dailey’s *The English Martyr from Reformation to Revolution* is a useful introduction to this topic in medieval and early modern English history and imagination; Dailey’s historical formalist approach and her definition of martyrdom as “not a death but a story that gets written about a death” (2) make her project particularly compatible with mine—both of us analyze the importance of narrative to the suffering self/character—even as our areas of focus are different.

persisted in the early modern period even as the systems themselves declined in political and economic importance.¹⁹ The power of language itself to bind a person is relevant in many of these instances, from a prisoner surrendering on a battlefield to an aspiring monk taking vows: oaths, contracts, and other words of commitment are woven throughout the captivities I explore.²⁰

A last—and crucial—area of existing scholarship directly connected to my project is the study of intersections between prison and literature. This area can be subdivided into two overlapping categories: studies of texts written by captive authors and studies of prison as a topic or trope in literature. The first category has seen expansive scholarship. Ioan Davies, in *Writers in Prison*, takes a centuries-spanning approach (examining writers from Boethius through a host of twentieth-century figures) to introduce and explore many issues that come up again and again in texts related to prison: among them violence and trauma, prison as metaphor (particularly as religious metaphor), and of course how and why the prisoner narrates his or her experience. Crucial to Davies's argument is a repeated insistence that prison writers be taken on

¹⁹ To summarize all or even most scholarship on feudalism, bastard feudalism, and related rhetoric would take a book in its own right. Some of the texts that have informed my work include a group of twentieth century classics (Bloch's *Feudal Society*, Barrow's *Feudal Britain*, Ganshof's *Feudalism*, and Duby's *The Three Orders*); K. B. MacFarlane's *England in the Fifteenth Century: Collected Essays* for his work on bastard feudalism; *The Rusted Hauberk* (ed. Purdon and Vitto) for additional thoughts on feudalism's waning period; and the essays of *Feudalism: New Landscapes of Debate* (ed. Bagge, et al.) for recent reconsiderations of, among other questions, the usefulness of feudalism itself as a concept. The rhetoric of lordship and service that dominates the late Middle Ages and persists into the early modern period is a discourse meaningfully rooted in feudal ideas. Kate Mertes's essay "Aristocracy" (pp. 42-60) and Rosemary Horrox's essay "Service" (pp. 61-78) in Horrox's edited collection *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes* together introduce these topics well. Curry and Matthew's edited collection *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages* examines the range of meanings service might have in that period, while in *The Aesthetics of Service in Early Modern England* Elizabeth Rivkin performs a similar task for a later time, analyzing diverse depictions of service in early modern prose and plays.

²⁰ Richard Firth Green's valuable study *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* explores the history of verbal oaths and the concept of troth/truth itself in medieval England. Canfield's *Word as Bond in English Literature from the Middle Ages to the Restoration* is a broader survey that notes a variety of occasions in which vows and similar statements play key roles in literary plots.

their own terms rather than swept up in a generic “romanticization of the cell” as a place of retreat, spirituality, and creativity (22). Some prisoners may indeed experience prison as a site of meaningful, productive suffering, but some see it as emblematic of the world’s nihilism or inherent violence; some use it to realign themselves with key values of their culture while others use it as a marker (for better or for worse) of their incompatibility with such values. Even for the fictional characters I examine, Davies’s cautions against universalizing are important. Rivkah Zim’s wide-ranging exploration *The Consolations of Writing: Literary Strategies of Resistance from Boethius to Primo Levi* arguably risks precisely such universalizing by taking a deliberately anachronistic approach to discuss commonalities in writings by prisoners over centuries, in particular how prisoners of conscience use writing as resistance not only against political ideas or foes, but to sustain their own sense of self. Zim allows for a range of resistances and suggests, as I do, that an ongoing sense of selfhood is, itself, a kind of resistance to the self-erasing violence prison attempts to inflict.²¹

Book-length studies of medieval and early-modern prison writing and captivity narratives, specifically, are still relatively sparse, but that is changing. Joanna Summers’s *Late Medieval Prison Writing and the Politics of Autobiography* reads James’s *Kingis Quair*, Charles d’Orleans’s English works, and a few lesser-known poems to argue that these authors structured their autobiographical texts to portray themselves in politically advantageous ways (for instance, they self-consciously incorporate Boethian references to align themselves with his esteemed wisdom and virtue). Ruth Ahnert’s *The Rise of Prison Writing in the Sixteenth*

²¹ Another wide-ranging study, the essay collection *Great Books Written in Prison* (edited by Regan), is introductory rather than deeply intensive, but deserves a mention because it discusses two authors relevant to my period that are not always prominent in other examinations of prison writing: Cervantes and Malory. Studies of captivity narratives (as distinguished from prison writing) tend to focus more on American than English texts but often address similar issues, including the connection between captivity and (often national or religious) identity. As one example, in “The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative,” Tara Fitzpatrick makes a compelling case that Puritan captivity narratives—with their emphasis on the suffering and godliness of an isolated person (often a woman) in the wilderness—not only affirmed Puritan ideals of individual dependence on God but also contributed to the larger American myth of selfhood forged by solitary trials in the wild.

Century makes (as its title reveals) a bold claim that not only is there a noticeable increase in prison writing at this time, but the writing itself shifts from medieval models (almost always paying some debt to Boethius, as Summers observes) to more Protestant-inspired forms as prisoners explore and articulate their experiences.²² Daniel Vitkus shines a spotlight on English captivity narratives from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in his anthology *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*, which makes many of these narratives accessible to a modern audience for the first time while also offering editorial insights on their contents. To generalize, I hope not too unfairly, all these scholars of prison writing and captivity narratives—texts by imprisoned authors—find evidence that such writing supports and even generates the selfhood of the captive (either after the fact or during the imprisonment), a major point that is foundational to my thesis, as well.²³

A second category of literary study involving captivity is the analysis of captivity (or prison specifically) as a topic or a trope, the category to which my work here belongs. This area of study needs advancement; some of its major commentary so far comes from historians of the

²² Though eclipsed by these more recent studies, Pendry's somewhat idiosyncratic but thorough survey of *Elizabethan Prisons and Prison Scenes* also serves as a useful jumping-off point for specific mentions of prison in Elizabethan literature.

²³ The twentieth- and twenty-first-century phenomenon of prison Shakespeare—programs in which incarcerated people perform Shakespeare—has grown large and successful enough to inspire both literary and judicial/sociological research; prison Shakespeare is tangential to my work but it deserves a mention in this discussion of prisoners making art informed by their experiences of captivity. Recent scholarly studies include Pensalfini's *Prison Shakespeare* (written by a drama scholar who also runs a prison Shakespeare program) and Herold's *Prison Shakespeare and the Purpose of Performance* (which combines case studies of existing programs with a more literary/historical argument that Shakespeare's plays—written in a time when the task of penitential reformation had newly moved from the institution of the Church onto the individual or even into the theater's quasi-ritualistic space—are unusually well-suited to speak to prisoners undergoing life in a modern "penitentiary"). Although I do not discuss prison Shakespeare elsewhere in this dissertation, I am struck by its intersections with my own concerns. As Pensalfini comments, "Participants commonly report that Prison Shakespeare programmes have helped them to 'find their own voice'" (141); both books repeatedly (and with nuance) circle back to evidence that the process of performing Shakespeare helps participants explore, enrich, and even empower their own self-narratives, their own sense of how they see themselves.

prison offering brief comments on literary depictions of prisons as part of larger historical studies.²⁴ For example, *The Oxford History of the Prison*, Jean Dunbabin (in *Captivity and Imprisonment*), and Guy Geltner (in *The Medieval Prison*) all offer basic chapters on imprisonment in literature.²⁵ W. B. Carnochan, writing in *The Oxford History*, offers a concise, useful, centuries-spanning introduction to Western prison literature, focusing on the genre's ability to slip between bodily imprisonment and mental limitation, thus becoming a vehicle for discussing a vast range of human encounters with confinement. Dunbabin and Geltner both focus primarily on prison's shifting metaphorical connections with Christian purgation, Purgatory, and Hell. As these chapters suggest and as I have already mentioned, literal and figurative ties between captivity and Christianity run deeply and broadly throughout medieval and early modern literature and have received sustained scholarly attention: enslavement and Christian identity are profoundly intertwined (in addition to the Church's fraught relationships with literal enslavement, Christians are metaphorically considered freed from enslavement to death and sin but also urged to be slaves to Christ), and the apocryphal Harrowing of Hell—a prominent event in the medieval Christian imagination—depends upon a vision of hell as a prison.²⁶ Captivity is a crucial and common trope in Christian writing.

One of the most essential extant commentaries on literature about prison is John Bender's *Imagining the Penitentiary*, which argues that the rise of novelistic portrayals of selfhood in the long eighteenth century paralleled and quite possibly helped to motivate the rise

²⁴ Davies's *Writers in Prison*, which I have already mentioned, is an exception to this rule; throughout the book, Davies comments not only on texts written in prison but also analyzes how many of those texts incorporate prison and prison experiences as literal or metaphorical topics.

²⁵ *The Oxford History*'s chapter is "The Literature of Confinement" (pp. 381-406) written by W. B. Carnochan; Dunbabin's is "Imprisonment and the Medieval Imagination" (pp. 159-69); Geltner's is "The Prison as Place and Metaphor" (pp. 82-99).

²⁶ I have already mentioned Martin's *Slavery as Salvation* and Glancy's *Slavery in Early Christianity*. For the Harrowing of Hell's associations with prison, see MacCulloch's *The Harrowing of Hell* and Tamburr's much more recent *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*.

of the penitentiary system. Bender explores how novels' pretenses of making transparent the processes of psychological and moral development relate to prison reformers' goals of accessing and correcting the psychology and morals of their prisoners through control and manipulation of their experience. He also discusses how many of the novels pioneering such presentations of selfhood also deal extensively—either literally or metaphorically—with prison itself. According to Bender, the post-Enlightenment conception of selfhood as accessible and malleable ultimately leads to an impersonal reign of Foucauldian institutional power. The state replaces the captor, and captivity itself is understood as an experience of transparency and subjection to an impersonal institutional observer shared not only by juridical prisoners but also by all citizens (228).

One of Bender's key points is that "the penitentiary [is] the extreme case . . . of the narrative construction of self that the realistic novel portrays as normative" (84). I, of course, consider a more broadly defined "narrative construction of self" to be of critical importance to much earlier experiences of imprisonment. While our projects are meaningfully different—examining different periods, different kinds of captivity (Bender focuses on juridical and debt-related imprisonment), and even different understandings of narrative selfhood (Bender's is more narrowly defined as a post-Enlightenment ideal of the constructed subject)—Bender's study is certainly one of the most useful to read in its entirety alongside my own. Although I did not conceive of it in this way, my project could almost serve as a prologue to his. Our stress on the connections between the literary construction of character and the psychological experience of selfhood, and our sense that captivity brings these connections into focus, complement one another.

My disagreements with Bender's argument are frequently the predictable complaints of a scholar working with similar subject matter in a different period: Bender overlooks or diminishes significant medieval and early modern precursors to the phenomena he studies. For example, his assertion that early-modern "old-style prisons" were ritualistic or carnivalesque

“liminal space[s]” because they allowed people of all kinds to mingle while awaiting trial or punishment paints an overly uniform picture of a history that, of course, had a great deal more nuance (26-7, 64, etc.). More significantly, when he argues (generally persuasively) that the deliberate, systematic imposition of novelistic narratives onto prisoners is a post-Enlightenment development, he is far too quick to dismiss earlier, varying, and intricate connections between imprisonment and penitential self-awareness and reform, especially those belonging to the centuries-long Boethian tradition and those built deeply into Christian discourse.

My dissertation provides some of this context, and in so doing it enriches rather than contradicts Bender’s major points. The novelistic, scrutinizing, institutional discourses Bender explores appear to erode (but never quite destroy) the yield-or-die discourse I explore. For example, Bender’s discourse of the penitentiary takes as one of its foundational ideas that new narratives can be imposed on prisoners by means of controlling their environment and experiences. Thus, even as it upholds and expands upon the yield-or-die discourse’s understanding of captivity as an experience in which a self may be re-written radically by another, the more modern discourse erases the relevance of yielding, the conceit that a prisoner must *choose* to be re-written before such re-writing can happen. That erasure seems important to me: alongside the rise of Bender’s more novelistic, constructed, arguably modern sense of self is a decline in appreciation for the power of that self to act on its own behalf or, indeed, to resist imposition of narrative from the outside. As a second example, although Bender asserts that his definition of “liminality does not posit change in personality but change in status” (27), his “liminality” nonetheless overlaps my concept of illegibility (which does connote change in personality as well as status). What Bender calls “liminality” in the experiences of Defoe’s captive characters strikes me as a later evolution of illegibility’s confusion of self-narrative.²⁷ As

²⁷ “I degenerated into Stone,” says Moll Flanders of her first reaction to Newgate; “I turn’d first Stupid and Senseless, then Brutish and thoughtless, and at last raving Mad as any of them were” (qtd. in Bender 45). For Bender, this passage is about the “liminality” of the old-style prison (45). That said, Moll’s speech is also full of specific illegibility markers that, in older texts,

these examples indicate, my project may provide some new perspectives on Bender's text and expand the conversation he has contributed to so greatly on the intersections between literature, selfhood, and captivity.

Scholarship about medieval and early modern prisons, captivity, and related experiences is, clearly, extensive, and the survey I have given here is by no means exhaustive. These works and the ongoing conversation to which they contribute form helpful background to my own extended argument even as they will now, for the most part, recede into that background.

A Cautionary Note

I have already touched on this caution, and will again, but it merits a dedicated section of its own as well. Because the discourse I examine is generated by the yield-or-die crisis in the belief that such a crisis is profoundly characterizing for the captive, it is rooted in a dangerous assumption: that a reply given under such extreme stress is reflective of authentic selfhood. The discourse assumes that the answer to "yield or die" is permanently characterizing (and that even the non-answers I will explore in chapter 4 therefore reflect a meaningful loss of self). This assumption is deeply unreliable, not because a captive might answer with a self-aware, calculated lie (as I will discuss in chapter 3, the discourse is capacious enough to account for that possibility), but because characters'—or indeed people's—answers may provide no information whatsoever about their identities, and certainly do not lock them into an unchanging set of ethically inflected traits. Yielding is often more coerced than characterizing; even a heartfelt

consistently connote the self-narrative confusion of a prisoner who has faced, but not yet answered, the yield-or-die demand (I discuss these markers in detail in chapter 4). As Bender discusses, this state finds its end when Moll attains not spiritual enlightenment (which Bender feels would be the traditional, older outcome) but "self-consciousness," "thought," and "private awareness" (46). In my terms, Moll's illegibility ends when she rediscovers her narrative power. Not being a Defoe expert, I will not venture upon a more detailed analysis in this context, but I feel confident that the yield-or-die discourse is informing Defoe's text here even as he is also exploring more modern ways of narrating the self.

surrender today does not destroy the possibility of heartfelt resistance tomorrow; yielding and resistance exist on a continuum of behaviors rather than being binary opposites; and crucially none of these behaviors need carry universal ethical inflections.

Nonetheless, the assumptions of the yield-or-die discourse haunt our ways of thinking even today when we blur the lines between tactical surrender and the moral quality of cowardice, or automatically assume that the action of fighting back is heroic. What we colloquially call victim-blaming is rooted in the idea that anyone who does not clearly and unceasingly resist captivity must be, in some way, the kind of (weak, fickle, lazy, morally suspect) person who always yields. Prisoners of war face concern that, because they technically chose captivity over death, they could be—and probably were, and probably remain—broken, won over, or brainwashed by their captors; abused spouses face suspicions that because they haven't left, they must secretly enjoy or deserve abuse; people unable to speak publicly and clearly (that is, legibly) about a traumatic captivity face worries that they are too intrinsically damaged to ever again summon the coherent selfhood necessary to command political or social agency. What the discourse suppresses is that the answer or non-answer to “yield or die” need not be characterizing at all. Indeed, it may be *meaningless* outside of its immediate, practical context. In conclusion, when—for example—I explore Lucrece's self-narration of her rape as an act of cowardly yielding, that is an example of the discourse being limiting, cruel, and false, not an assertion that we should read a victim of captivity and rape as cowardly.

On the one hand, this goes without saying.

On the other hand, it cannot be said enough.

Chapter 2: Yielding

At the end of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Lucilius, a supporter of Brutus, plays a battlefield trick on his opponents. He claims to be Brutus, luring the forces of Mark Antony to seize him instead of their true target. Upon his capture, Lucilius acknowledges his deception and gloats to Antony:

I dare assure thee that no enemy
Shall ever take alive the noble Brutus;
The gods defend him from so great a shame!
When you do find him, or alive or dead,
He will be found like Brutus, like himself. (5.4.21-25)²⁸

One straightforward meaning of Lucilius's words is that Brutus will kill himself before enduring the shame of capture. An equally important meaning of Lucilius's words is that yielding—being taken alive—would transform Brutus into someone other than himself.

Lucilius, unlike Brutus, *has* just yielded. A soldier has instructed him to “Yield, or thou diest,” and Lucilius has answered, “Only I yield to die,” urging the soldier to kill him in his disguise as Brutus on the spot (12-14). Lucilius thinks he's being clever, yielding rather than dying in combat to make sure he has a chance to proclaim his false name and thereby mislead his enemies. The soldier, however, hearing that a major enemy leader has just surrendered, refuses Lucilius's offer and summons Antony instead. Lucilius makes his gloating speech, but Antony sees through the ruse and explains to the soldier:

This is not Brutus, friend, but, I assure you,
A prize no less in worth. Keep this man safe,
Give him all kindness; I had rather have

²⁸ All citations to works of Shakespeare refer to texts as they appear in *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

Such men my friends than enemies. (26-19)

Crucially, Lucilius is no longer like Lucilius, like himself. He has yielded under a false name with a goal of heroic death in the service of battlefield misinformation, but first the soldier who captures him rejects that goal; then Antony negatively identifies him (as who he is *not* rather than who he *is*); and finally Antony dictates a future for the prisoner that runs precisely counter to the prisoner's plans: he won't be killed, and instead may even be won over to service of his former foe. Having yielded, Lucilius is now a "prize"—at best, a "man"—without a name or mission.

This incident sums up the nature of yielding in late medieval and early modern English literature. In such an unconditional surrender, a character chooses not only to become the prisoner of another, but more deeply to give up his or her self-narrating power to join and serve the narrative of another. Self-narrating power is what makes Brutus "like himself," and its loss is why Lucilius's goal suddenly has no momentum and, instead, Antony can imagine enjoying Lucilius's friendship. Lucilius serves the narrative of his captors from the moment he yields. At a narratological level, captives who yield sincerely are rarely protagonists. They rarely drive the story's action or (significantly) constitute its moral center. The consequence of this narratological fact is that most yielded characters are de-prioritized, even erased, within texts; stories focused on prisoners who yield are rarely told, then or now.

Yielding is always depicted as a *choice*, highlighting the agency and individuality of the prisoner-to-be even while those very qualities may be about to vanish. While sometimes subtle, these flashes of personal agency in minor characters as well as major are a refrain that insists not only on the validity and importance of selfhood and choice, but also on the ability of life-or-death choices to *reveal* selfhood. Yielding to save one's life is not, in these texts, a pragmatic gesture that anyone might make under duress. It is a *choice* that springs out of, and reveals, character. Within the yield-or-die discourse, a choice to yield means a permanent surrender of self-narrating power. A character who yields then exists only to support the narrative of his or

her captor in these texts with only a few rare (and carefully justified) exceptions. Just as the moment of yielding expresses something profound about the new prisoner's self-narrative, the choice to yield, once made, irrevocably suppresses that self-narrative.

Yielding can be honorable or dishonorable, a division which undermines any clear understanding of yielding as the inferior choice and resistant death or freedom as the admirable choice. Post-yielding captivity is not always terrible and undesirable, and resistant freedom is not always celebrated and desired. Instead, while dishonorable captivity is a dreaded fate, honorable captivity is frequently not only acceptable, but even beneficial, improving a prisoner's social status even as it erases his independent selfhood. The line between the two depends on the captive's motivation for yielding. To yield in service of some high ideal or (more commonly) out of respect for the captor's merit is honorable. To yield out of fear of death is dishonorable. Lucilius, for example, explicitly yields "to die," expecting to save Brutus's life rather than his own, and thus yields honorably; he will receive "kindness," protection, and possibly friendship from his captor. Had he yielded only to save himself from death at the soldier's hands, he would likely be treated as a dishonorable coward instead. In sum, the English late medieval and early modern cultural imagination depicts yielding as a choice, as a permanent loss of power over self-narrative, and as either honorable or dishonorable. The yield-or-die discourse depicts individual character and self-narrating power as forceful but fragile qualities revealed in the moment of capture and vulnerable to loss in that same moment.

Enslavement and Vassalage

An examination of two closely related topics—classical and early medieval enslavement, and early medieval vassal homage—will clarify how yielding attains its permanent, characterizing quality and why the thin but decisive line between dishonorable and honorable yielding exists where it does. Although both of these practices were almost entirely obsolete in

any widespread or practical sense by Chaucer's era—let alone Shakespeare's—both gave rise to vocabulary and concepts that lasted well beyond their own times. Indeed, the discourses (as distinguished from day-to-day practices) of slavery and vassalage are, in a sense, direct ancestors of the yield-or-die discourse I examine here. They share the common motif of bringing one person under the lifelong control (physical and narrative) of another.

The fine distinctions between dishonorable and honorable servitude play out etymologically: Latin's *servus*, meaning "slave," becomes "servant" (of My Lord, of the Church) and today's "service professional." The classical world, with its heavy economic dependence on actual enslavement, struggled to keep dishonorable and honorable servitude as distinct as possible (not always successfully), but by the early post-classical period, linguistic and conceptual slippage was intensifying. As Marc Bloch writes of early European feudal duties, vassal obligations "were generally called 'service' (*servitium*). Not so long before, the word would have horrified a free man. In classical Latin it was used only in the sense of slavery; the only duties compatible with freedom were *officia*. But by the end of the fourth century *servitium* had lost this original taint" (150). "Service" does not so much lose its taint of enslavement as acquire new, more honorable connotations as well. Over a thousand years after the period Bloch examines, Malory uses "servant" and "service" to connote vassalage as he imagines King Arthur doling out rewards following his Roman campaign.²⁹ Later, Galahad is the honorable "servant of Jesus" during the Grail Quest (509).³⁰ The word's ignoble roots persist, however, whenever

²⁹ For example, the Winchester manuscript, edited by Shepherd, imagines the knights pledging "their hertes and servyse" to the King (150), while Caxton's text, edited by Sommer, additionally describes Arthur bestowing "londes and royammes vnto his seruauntes and knyghtes" (182). Citations to Malory refer to Shepherd's edition unless otherwise noted.

³⁰ This reference to Galahad as Christ's "servant" hints at the Church's major role in revising the word's connotations not necessarily away from enslavement *per se* but certainly away from the dishonor of secular slavery: to think of oneself as "Christ's slave" would be entirely acceptable for high-ranking noblemen or Church officials. As Davis observes in *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, "For the Romans the servile character was synonymous with everything lowly and vicious; Christianity raised obedience, humility, patience, and resignation

Malory refers to “servants” who dress, feed, and otherwise assist gentlefolk (201, 234, etc.). Marlowe, a century later, resurrects the slavish connotations of the word as Barabas calls the enslaved Ithamore his “servant” in *The Jew of Malta* (3.4.15).³¹ In Part 1 of *Tamburlaine the Great*, by contrast, Marlowe deploys “service” to mean vassalage as Techelles swears fealty (a very temporary fealty, it turns out) to Cosroe: “With duty and with amity we yield / Our utmost service to the fair Cosroe” (2.3.33-4). Buried within all these services, whether they consist of honorable vassalage or lowly labor, lurks the slave’s absolute loss of power to self-narrate his or her identity.³²

Over the course of his broad study *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson argues that the brutal and permanent domination of an enslaved person is supported by two assumptions. The first is that slavery is a *chosen* substitute for death; Patterson explains that “[a]rchetypically, slavery was a substitute for death in war. But almost as frequently, the death commuted was punishment for some capital offense, or death from exposure or starvation.” He continues, “[t]he condition of slavery did not absolve or erase the prospect of death. Slavery was not a pardon; it was, peculiarly, a conditional commutation. The execution was suspended only as long as the slave acquiesced in his powerlessness” (5). Throughout his study, Patterson examines complex variations on this logic from across a wide variety of cultures, but in each case, the person who agrees to serve in exchange for life and safety must face the “dishonor” of choosing a lower hierarchical position and potentially humiliating service—unconditionally—over literal death. Perhaps these prisoners were once people with agency and honor, but their

to the level of high virtues” (85). (See also Martin’s *Slavery as Salvation* and Glancy’s *Slavery in Early Christianity* for extended discussions.)

³¹ All citations to the works of Marlowe refer to the Penguin edition of *The Complete Plays*, ed. Romany and Lindsey.

³² Davis also comments on this aspect of Bloch’s work, noting of early feudalism that “servitude and dependencies of various kinds were modeled on the prototype of hereditary slavery, and such words as *servus*, *Knecht*, and *vassus*, which had originally implied unlimited bondage, acquired new connotations of status, rights, and willing service” (37).

surrender is characterized within a slave culture as a moment of radical personal revision, making them inherently *slavish*: cowardly and servile. Even those born into slavery can, in theory, be dishonored under this logic for their “acquiescence” to their situation—if they were truly brave and honorable, goes the logic, they would rebel and escape, even if death were the result. Because they don’t, they must be slavish by nature.

This logic carries over smoothly to the yield-or-die discourse I examine. Characters enter the crisis of captivity still possessing power over their own self-narratives, and if they yield out of fear of death (thus setting aside all “higher” motivations), they are presumed to make a characterizing choice that reveals them to be personally weak, fickle, cowardly, and arguably even lazy. These are the dishonorable traits of a stereotypical slave. Extending this logic further, even suicide becomes preferable to shameful captivity because it proves the same willingness to die rather than yield in fear of death. Casca’s grim Roman comment in *Julius Caesar* that “every bondman in his own hand bears / The power to cancel his captivity” assumes that suicide is always a reasonable option to avoid dishonor (1.3.101-2). Again, failure to risk death rather than submit to dishonor can mark a character as slavish.

According to Patterson, the second assumption that underlies enslavement is that an enslaved person is “nationally alienated”: torn not only from his or her original family and associated birthrights but also forbidden from truly establishing a new family line (or birthrights for his or her children). The idea of natal alienation speaks less to *how* self-narrating power is lost (through yielding) than to what that loss means. Enslaved people were, of course, frequently separated from their parents, children, and birthplaces or refused full rights of marriage, but additionally, they were considered cut off from family names, inheritances (both monetary and otherwise), and—in certain cultures—family gods (5-8). Patterson comments that slaves were often re-incorporated into their master’s community in liminal ways (they were not, Patterson emphasizes, outlawed or outcast [48-9]). They were frequently re-named by the master (54-8) and sometimes treated as having “quasi-filial” ties to the master’s family (for example, they

might refer to the master as “father”) (63-5) or be incorporated in special ways by the culture’s religion (66-70). This re-incorporation resembles—but is not—adoption. Combining this alienation with the slave’s existence under a conditionally commuted death sentence, Patterson arrives at the “social death” of his study’s title: “Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master,” and because he was “[a]lienated from all ‘rights’ or claims of birth, he ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order” (5). The slave exists conceptually as a living body but not as a social or political participant. The yield-or-die discourse pushes this slightly further, suggesting that slaves not only lack public agency but also self-narrating power—even their internal identity is now written by someone else. Slavery connotes a fearful (therefore dishonorable) choice to submit to both service and natal alienation—a choice to give up self-narrating power for oneself and quite possibly one’s descendants—rather than to die.

Early medieval European and Mediterranean cultures relied on warfare and capital punishment as their major sources of slaves, meaning that this idea of slavery-as-commuted-death was clearly visible. The Merovingians and Carolingians enslaved prisoners of war, as did certain late medieval and early modern Italian states (Patterson 114).³³ By the early modern period, prisoners of war and victims of kidnapping were commodities in a slave/ransom economy that spanned the Mediterranean and haunted popular culture. Linda Colley, collating various sources, estimates that, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century (preceding the English Civil War), sea assaults and raids even into English and Irish villages by North African forces led to the capture of “8000 or so English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish captives”

³³ Patterson also makes a compelling argument that most of Northern Europe developed systems of penal slavery (especially involving galley service) over the course of the Middle Ages and early modern period that didn’t end completely until the nineteenth century (44-5, 127-8). While his call for scholars to consider these systems to be formal institutions of slavery is valid and important, the systems themselves are less immediately relevant for my project because they were not necessarily conceptualized as slavery by those involved, particularly in the later centuries with which I am concerned.

alone (50). This number, of course, excludes not only other European captives, but also Islamic people enslaved in return by Europeans; as Nabil Matar cautions, “innumerable others simply disappeared into slavery,” making complete tallies of the total number of captured people throughout the region impossible (14).³⁴ Medieval and early modern Europe were not slave cultures to the same extent that Rome or the pre-Civil-War United States were, of course, but both the idea and (to a lesser extent) the reality of enslavement were alive and well throughout these periods.

The two Dromios in Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors* provide a fairly straightforward literary example of the yield-or-die discourse’s assumptions about enslavement. The enslaved twins were purchased in infancy from their “exceeding poor” parents by the father of the twin protagonists to serve his sons (1.1.54-7). While this enslavement does not have an obviously violent beginning (the Dromios are not, for example, prisoners of war), their family’s poverty hints that the alternative to their enslavement was death by starvation. Their parents made the choice to yield them into captivity out of fear for their lives. The first line spoken by either Dromio is a joking threat to run away from his master. After Antipholus of Syracuse tells his Dromio to “Get thee away,” Dromio replies that “Many a man would take you at your word / And go indeed, having so good a mean” (1.2.16-8). Antipholus’s easy confidence in his slave’s lack of seriousness and Dromio’s choice not to make good on the threat despite the violence he—and his brother—endure at their masters’ hands underline Dromio’s acquiescence to his enslavement, thus characterizing him as slavish, lacking an honorable desire for liberty or death. In the same scene, as Dromio of Ephesus initiates the play’s farcical misunderstandings by his arrival, references from both Dromio and Antipholus begin to pile up that depict Dromio as a text in which his master’s story, not his own, is written (an ironic implication, in this case, because this Dromio is addressing the wrong Antipholus): Antipholus calls Dromio “the

³⁴ Matar’s comment appears in his Introduction to Vitkus’s edited anthology of captivity narratives, *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England*.

almanac of my true date” (41), and Dromio, calling himself “penitent for your default” (52), punningly characterizes himself as an object bearing “scours” (65) and “marks” (82-3) that record not his errors, but Antipholus’s (65). Merely in these introductory scenes, then, we see the slave brothers’ ostensibly chosen acquiescence to and support of their masters’ narrative.

By contrast, vassalage also begins in a kind of yielding and maintains uneasy similarities to enslavement, but the discourse surrounding it works hard to emphasize its inherent honor and distance it from the shame of the slave. The process of becoming a lord’s vassal varied widely across regions and time periods during the many centuries when such practices existed in European cultures. Rather than generalizing too broadly about feudalism (a suspect term, implying too easily a unified and recognized political-economic structure that, in fact, would not have been recognized as such by people at the time³⁵), I will generalize slightly more narrowly about vassalage only, or what L. F. Ganshof calls “the personal element in feudalism” (69). Vassalage practices are a particular set of medieval European procedures for initiating people (usually men) into personal hierarchies with one another that offer advantages to participants on both sides. Although the relationship bears some connection to Roman systems of patronage, the medieval vassal tie came to prominence in the post-classical period as a pragmatic, local human system: one person needing the protection of a more powerful person and offering service in return (Bloch 148, 219). Variations on this theme might involve warriors seeking to cement their loyalty to a chief (154-5); people guilty of crimes making reparations to their victims (or their victims’ powerful kin) (130); and, crucially, conquered people surrendering to a victorious new ruler (171). The foundational ritual that sealed this relationship of protection-for-service was the act of homage, in which the vassal-to-be, usually kneeling, placed his hands

³⁵ Scholarly discontent with the term *feudalism* is well known. A. J. Pollard’s “Introduction: The Fifteenth Century in History” (1-16) in his *Late Medieval England 1399-1509* offers a efficient summary in the evolution of understandings about this period. Major issues about feudalism as a concept, specifically, are succinctly summarized in the essay collection *Feudalism: New Landscapes of Debate* (Bagge, et al., eds.), especially in the editors’ Introduction (1-13) and in Susan Reynolds, “Fiefs and Vassals after Twelve Years” (15-26).

between his lord's hands (the *immixtio manuum*) and committed himself to be his lord's man for the duration of their lives (Bloch 146, Ganshof 72-5).

Homage has roots in enslavement. Bloch glances at this point when he notes the appropriation of the word *servitium* from its classical sense of a slave's duties to its medieval sense of vassal's duties. Equally worth noting is that the word "vassal" derives from *vassus*, which meant "slave" to the Merovingians before slowly transitioning to its more honorable meaning of a dignified (even noble) lord's retainer by the eighth century (Ganshof 5). The language used for the homage ceremony, starting with the term *homage* itself and incorporating countless close variations on the phrase "his lord's man," presents the ritual as that of a man submitting himself to the control and even possession of another (Ganshof 74, 82, Le Goff 251). Jacques Le Goff emphasizes that even the word *man/homo*, in grammatical isolation, connoted a position of service: "in a society in which the *man* had long been quite insignificant relative to the *dominus*, the earthly lord being image and representative of his heavenly counterpart, the term indicates subordination, with the specialized senses of vassal on one end of the social scale of *homines*, and serf on the other" (251-2).

In addition to the language of homage, the central physical act of the rite—the lord's taking of the vassal's hands in his own—not only has straightforward symbolic significance as an act of claiming a body, but also has traceable historical connections to rituals of enslavement. In Anglo-Saxon England, the joining of hands expressed subordination between a wide variety of classes, including between master and slave (Bloch 151). An especially close variation of this ritual in Anglo-Saxon England was the master taking the slave's head into his hands, while early medieval Germanic custom put the slave's head under the master's arm and required him to don a collar (Patterson 52-3). As late as the fourteenth century, variations on homage were used to transform free men into serfs, especially in France (Bloch 161, Ganshof 81).

More broadly, the origin of the vassal relationship in an exchange of service for protection echoes the exchange of service for deferred execution at the core of enslavement.

Homage was thus, in its basic sense, “a rite of pure subordination” that increasingly required additions—oaths of fealty, mutual kisses, and investiture—to make it seem honorable enough for people of higher rank to accept (Bloch 180). Specifically, the oath of fealty required the vassal to swear before God—upon the gospel or upon relics—to be loyal to the lord he served; this oath could be made specific to a particular office and might be periodically renewed (Ganshof 75, Bloch 145-7). Ganshof argues that the addition of the oath of fealty served as a mark of status, a way to highlight the vassal’s honorable and ongoing gift of himself and to separate that gift from any slavish connotation. While homage was a one-time act that brought one man into the possession of another for life, the oath offered an opportunity to emphasize the vassal’s willing and contingent loyalty (28). Kissing remains a slightly puzzling part of the ceremony, with Ganshof arguing that it was “not essential” nor unique to vassalage but still a useful visual symbol, like the joining of hands, “calculated to impress itself on a spectator” (78-9); Le Goff, by contrast, places great emphasis on the kiss as an embodied sign of the two men’s equality which complicates their relationship as man and lord and paves the way for the lord to gift his vassal with land or other possessions in reciprocity for the vassal’s service (252-3). Bloch argues that the kiss, “by placing the two individuals on the same plane of friendship, lent dignity to the type of subordination known as vassalage” (162).

Finally, the act of investiture constituted the clearest statement of the lord’s respect for and desire to reciprocate his vassal’s service because it was the ritual by which the lord bestowed the fief (land or property) upon the vassal (Ganshof 125-7). The addition of the investiture (the giving of the fief) not only signified the lord’s respect for his vassal but also, arguably, again elevated the vassal to more equal footing, since the fief could be seen as an equal, reciprocal response to the vassal’s service, lending the exchange the flavor of a contractual agreement in which both sides had clear obligations (in theory, this also gave vassal as well as lord the ability to repudiate the contract if those obligations were not fulfilled) (Ganshof 126-8, Le Goff 253-3).

Overall, the additions to homage—the oath, the kiss, and the investiture—moved the ritual farther from its enslavement-like roots in the seeking of protection from a powerful lord. An eighth-century commentary attributed to Paul the Deacon, for example, distinguishes between slaves and vassals on the grounds that the vassal’s oath of fealty removes a slavish taint: “The slave serves his lord because of fear that he might be whipped. The vassal serves his lord because of his faith by which he has promised to serve him, so that he won’t be found treacherous.”³⁶ I am by no means suggesting that all—or even most—homage was actually performed out of fear, but rather that the markers of “honorable” vassal service (that is, the characteristics of the oath—ongoing, mutual, verbal) gain particular significance insofar as they work to signify the vassal’s respect for the lord’s merit and to *deemphasize* any sense that the vassal is yielding unconditionally out of fear or coercion.

Honorable vassalage may also have carried uneasy connotations of Patterson’s concept of natal alienation. Le Goff, in particular, makes an extended argument that “[t]he essential reference model for the symbolic system of vassalage was a familial model, a kinship system” (256) because of its resemblance to rituals for adoption or transfer of inheritance (256-63). As slaves might call a master “father,” so early Frankish lords called both slaves and vassals their “boys” (Bloch 155-6). Such quasi-filial ties are not unique, of course, to enslavement and vassalage, nor are they an essential characteristic of a yielded captive’s relationship with a captor. They are of interest to me, however, because they gesture toward that which I *do* call an essential feature of yield-or-die discourse, namely the captive’s chosen surrendering of self-narrative in favor of joining the captor’s narrative. Language of adoption can signify this personal submission, this experience of being rewritten by another.

³⁶ “*Servus servit domino suo propter timorem ne flagelletur. Vassallus servit seniori suo propter fidem suam, quam professus est illi servire; ut non inveniatur fallax.*” The second sentence is quoted and translated by Ganshof (29), to whom I am thus indebted for the reference and for an assist with my translation of the entire comment.

Like the discourse of yielding, then, the discourse of early vassal homage has a quality of permanent submission, the effects of that single ritual lasting throughout the lifetimes of both participants. Homage is also less mutual than other aspects of vassalage. While it is technically an exchange (service for protection), embedded in that exchange is a profound inequality of power between the men (only one is deemed able to protect the other). Further, although homage may include an element of verbal consent, it is primarily a physical, embodied act, with the servant's hands clasped within the lord's. Finally, this gesture resembles the gesture that creates a slave. By contrast, the oath of fealty suggests an ongoing, renewable commitment between the two men; an implication exists that loyalty and obedience must be continually deserved by the lord for the oath to remain alive. Already, this helps the oath exhibit a more mutual character than homage, which is further accented because the oath can be adjusted, like a contract, to terms both men accept, and it paves the way for investiture, where the vassal's loyalty is truly repaid by tangible goods. The line between simple homage and homage *plus* a fealty oath thus helps to define the line between dishonorable and honorable yielding, between enslavement and vassalage. The line is a blurry one, but it exists.

Like classical enslavement, many of these aspects of vassalage were centuries outmoded by the time of Chaucer and, two centuries later, Shakespeare. Vassalage had evolved over the centuries along with the feudal structures of which it was part. The system—what vestiges of it arguably survived into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—now had far less emphasis on exchanges of land and physical defense from violence and far more emphasis on exchanges of monetary fees, general patronage, and service across a wide spectrum of social, political, economic, and legal interaction. The contingent two-way contract, not lifelong unchanging homage, ruled the day. My point, however, is that the discourses of shame, honor, oaths, and service were slower to fade than the economic and political practices with which they were once intertwined, especially in the literature (often about aristocratic men, often looking backward to

an older age) that I examine here. The fact of vassalage was obsolete by this time, but the ideal of vassal-style service, born out of respect and merit, lingered.

As Rosemary Horrox writes, the concept of *service*—indeed, the word itself—remained crucial to conceptualizations of societal order in the late medieval period (61). In the complex hierarchies of the period, one person could be both servant to higher-ranking lords and master of servants beneath him (Horrox 63). The rewards for service were, of course, often material, but were usually expressed as “good lordship,” meaning a kind of general patronage and sharing of influence and honor (66-68). Particularly notable is the late medieval conceptual division between honorable and menial service. Horrox explains:

This is not a distinction based on function (although it may sometimes look as though it is), but on the status of the servant. The menial servant has no independent standing aside from the performance of his task; the honourable servant has. It is the difference . . . between the servant pouring wine on the lower tables in the king’s hall and the servant pouring wine on the top table. The job is the same, but the servant on the top table will be a landowner; his harassed counterpart further down the hall will be of humble status, reliant on his job in the royal household to earn a living. (63)

Here, once again, the line between honorable and dishonorable service rests upon whether it is motivated by regard for the lord or mere survival. The servant’s duties become honorable, and move away from slavish *servitium*, the more they are offered out of respect rather than the need to earn a living.

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the system we call feudalism was even more remote from everyday reality. Still, its residue lingered in the culture in the form of an ongoing discourse of service rewarded by good lordship. As Keith Wrightson comments, pragmatic capitalism (for example, the rise of land enclosure [Wrightson 141]) often trumped feudal behaviors in practice—but the discourse remained. For example, Wrightson quotes an early

seventeenth-century landlord urging his son to treat a tenant family generously because “the father and the sones have done good sarvis to this houes” (67); *service* carries deeply traditional weight in this sentence.³⁷ The literature of the period, as Elizabeth Rivlin explores in *The Aesthetics of Service in Early Modern England*, continues to depict personal relationships between lords and servants of various degrees in which loyalty and commitment to old-fashioned ideals combine with the self-interested action of both parties to drive the partnership. While political, legal, and economic interactions actually became ever more recognizably modern, the discourse of service lingered.

The blurriness between slavish and vassal service—the potential dishonor, personal re-writing, or erasure that is hidden within all “service”—thus persists across centuries, appearing, for example, even in Shakespeare’s references to vassals. Sonnet 26 borrows the honorable fealty of vassalage as a metaphor for affection: the speaker begins, “Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage / Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit . . .” (1-2). Here, the speaker serves out of respect for the lord’s worthiness and hopes to receive similar respect in return (12). In *Measure for Measure*, Isabella deploys the term to describe her honorable obedience to the Duke: “O, give me pardon, / That I, your vassal, have employ'd and pain'd / Your unknown sovereignty!” (5.1.385-7). The word’s connotations begin to waver a little as Richard II accuses Bullingbrook and Northumberland of “lift[ing] your vassal hands against my head” (*Richard II* 3.3.89) when they ought to be kneeling in fear of his kingship (72-4). The term still, here, refers to noblemen, but Richard is reminding his hearers specifically of the embodied signs of a vassal’s submissive homage (hands, kneeling), and suggesting that fear and awe should motivate this submission. Northumberland, speaking for Bullingbrook, retorts by emphasizing Bullingbrook’s willingness to renew his service through oaths *if* he is given his rightful inheritance. In essence,

³⁷ Wrightson is quoting J. Bankes and Eric Kerridge (eds.), *The Early Records of the Bankes Family at Winstanley*, Chetham Society, 3rd series, vol. 21 (1973); the page number of this comment on service is unspecific but appears in the range 23-36.

Northumberland pushes past the language of homage into the more honorable, mutual, and contingent language of fealty and even investiture (101-20).³⁸

The word “vassal” slips toward its slavish roots as Lear demotes Kent from “vassal” to “miscreant” and then “recreant” while banishing him (*King Lear* 1.1.161-67); Kent’s return in disguise further reduces him to offering Lear only “service / Improper for a slave” (5.3.220-2). The slippage is clearer still in *The Rape of Lucrece*, as Shakespeare figures Tarquin’s lusts equally as “stragglings slaves for pillage fighting, / Obdurate vassals fell exploits effecting” (428-9), a metaphor that sets up Lucrece’s parallel accusation that Tarquin’s shameful thoughts are at once “slaves” (659) and “low vassals to thy state” (666). As a final example, Bullingbrook, now King Henry IV, slings the term “vassal” as pure insult toward Hal in *1 Henry IV*, using it to mean only “cowardly,” the quality of someone who yields because of fear:

Thou that art like enough, through vassal fear,
Base inclination, and the start of spleen,
To fight against me under Percy’s pay,
To dog his heels and curtsy at his frowns,
To show how much thou art degenerate. (3.2.124-7)

Despite the intervening centuries and the unfathomably complicated cultural history within them, the concept of honorable vassalage built on mutual, shared merit *and* this concept of “vassal fear,” a dishonorable state that leads a man to surrender to another for life or safety, are both still available in early modern England. Dishonorable “vassal fear” might just as easily be called “slavishness.”

³⁸ In chapter 4, in which I examine Richard II as an illegible character, I explore this moment in context of the larger disruption that Richard’s particular instability causes to the conventional rhythms of the yield-or-die discourse. Richard’s significance aside, the rebellion of sworn vassals that the play depicts is in itself, of course, a major disruption to the discourse’s general rule that yielding is permanent. Anxiety about Bullingbrook’s act of usurpation haunts the *Henry IV* plays; in addition to the shocking transgression of overthrowing a king, he has also illustrated the destabilizing fact that yielding, of course, need not be permanent at all.

All the assumptions I have delineated—that yielding is a characterizing choice rather than a pragmatic method of survival; that yielding is permanent; that yielding can be honorable if performed out of idealism or respect; that yielding to save one’s life is “slavish”—are, of course, aspects of the yield-or-die *discourse* rather than unshakeable truths. Perhaps the best way to pause and acknowledge both the unfairness *and* cultural dominance of this discourse in action is to listen to people who actually faced the crisis of death or imprisonment.³⁹ John Fox’s narrative of his and his shipmates’ capture by Barbary corsairs in 1563 works hard to avoid accusations of yielding, and, specifically, of dishonorable yielding as it describes the men’s defeat in a shipboard battle, beginning with the death of the courageous boatswain:

. . . he fell down, bidding them farewell and to be of good comfort, encouraging them likewise to win praise by death rather than to live captives in misery and shame, which they hearing, indeed intended to have done, as it appeared by their skirmish. But the press and store of the Turks was so great that they were not able long to endure but were so overpressed that they could not wield their weapons, by reason whereof, they must needs be taken, which none of them intended to have been but rather to have died, except only the master’s mate, who shrunk from the skirmish like a notable coward, esteeming neither the valor of his name nor accounting of the present example of his fellows. (qtd. in Vitkus 60)

The narrator repeats twice that the men *intended* to die, a key point to indicate that they intended to resist rather than yield to unworthy captors and, further, that they did not fear death. This point establishes them as desiring to maintain control over their self-narratives (note the emphasis on earning and protecting “praise,” “name,” and “example”); the narrator insists they were only taken because they were so thoroughly surrounded that they literally could not raise

³⁹ I present John Fox’s narrative here as the voice of an “actual” captive while mindful of the facts that the authorship of his first-person account is by no means clear, and further, that any text claiming autobiographical truth is, of course, still self-narrative rather than objective fact. Fox’s story nonetheless can gesture toward captivity discourse operating in a sphere beyond the poetry of Chaucer or the drama of Shakespeare.

their weapons to fight. Crucially, in other words, Fox and his shipmates never *choose to yield*. There is no moment of intentional, characterizing surrender. The unfortunate mate serves as a foil, highlighting the “example of his fellows” by his failure to follow it, illustrating that a dishonorable coward is one who acts upon fear of death. The image is one of men physically overcome, denied a fair chance at death in battle, and unwillingly bound. The anxiety to establish the men’s unyielding, honorable characters in this passage points to the cultural pressure to fight to the death rather than yield to a foe who does not merit such yielding. There is no allowance here for a pragmatic, temporary yielding that might allow someone to live to fight another day.

The lines I am drawing in this chapter—between those who choose to yield and those who don’t, and between those who yield honorably and those who yield dishonorably—are artificial lines created by the yield-or-die discourse. Combing through more accounts like Fox’s, written by and about actual slaves, captives, and even vassals will expose the lines’ artifice easily. To yield absolutely unconditionally, in true unthinking fear, and then rise up in rebellion to reclaim one’s life later is not just a factual possibility but even, itself, a good story. Nonetheless, as I noted in the Introduction, it is a story that Western European culture (and its child-cultures around the world) does tell as frequently as we might. We still claim allegiance to an ideal of liberty or death. We still don’t entirely or easily trust victims of crimes who didn’t fight back—we want to rule out the victim’s own complicity, weakness, cowardice, even laziness (moral or physical) before we take him or her seriously. We, as a culture, have a hard time conceptualizing a victim who has, apparently, *chosen to yield* his selfhood, her self-narrating power to another for hours or years . . . then turned around and gotten out . . . and who expects now to be taken seriously as a self-narrating subject. Readers in the medieval and early modern periods had a hard time with this, too.

The dominant myth of the yield-or-die discourse, the one that informs this chapter and grounds the rest of this dissertation, is that yielding is a choice, and the choice, once made, is

irrevocable. Yielding out of respect for a captor is honorable, signifying personal merit and good judgment even as it removes personal narrative power. Yielding to save one's life is dishonorable, signifying that captive is morally lazy or cowardly. Homage is for life. Slavery, once accepted, marks one as perpetually slavish. In texts by authors as diverse as Malory, Spenser, and Marlowe, this logic holds firm.

Honorable Yielding: The Pattern

Malory's *Morte Darthur* displays such a diversity of yielding characters that their formulaic concessions tend to become mere background noise. The moment in which a knight puts his sword to another man's throat and demands surrender is commonplace in Malory's source texts, as well. In what follows, I set aside detailed discussion of Malory's many sources and his interactions with them, as well as the near-certainty that Malory composed his book while in prison himself (a tempting biographical detail to exploit in a study like mine); instead, I treat Malory's *Morte* as a collection of representative examples of imprisoned characters.⁴⁰ At

⁴⁰ Malory's biography is famously mysterious; several potential Thomas Malorys exist who could have written the book, but scholarly consensus has settled on Sir Thomas Malory of Warwickshire, who was imprisoned for criminal and political reasons multiple times throughout his life. P. J. C. Field, one of the preeminent voices in recent Malory scholarship, explores Malory's probable biography in his *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*; Anne F. Sutton's article "Malory in Newgate: A New Document" discusses her discovery of Malory's signature as witness on a legal document signed in Newgate jail in 1469, near the end of the time he would have been writing the *Morte*, and Roberta Davidson's "Prison and Knightly Identity" is an attempt to unite biography with literary analysis, reading the *Morte* as belonging to the genre of prison writing. For discussion of Malory's many source texts and his relationships with them, see Field's *Malory: Texts and Sources* and Norris's *Malory's Library*. One of the most vexed and well-discussed questions about Malory is whether his intent with the *Morte* was to tell a unified, novel-like single story or to provide a collection of related but separate tales. Eugène Vinaver helped to spark this debate merely by calling his edition *The Works* [plural] of *Thomas Malory*, though he also argued for his belief in the disunity of the tales in detail. Since then, the question of unity has been debated and reframed in countless ways; Fiona Tolhurst offers a good short history of this controversy at the opening of her article "Why Every Knight Needs His Lady" (133-6). My treatment of Malory's book as a set of examples of captive characters does not rely on either stance to be correct: the yield-or-die discourse is a common thread throughout the long text even as it may be deployed in different ways at different points.

the outset, however, I can't resist noting that Malory himself does seem personally interested in the act of yielding. In his retelling of Arthur's conquest of Rome, for example, Malory adds references to yielding to his source material, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*.⁴¹ Where the Marshal of France warns simply of mass killing and destruction by the Roman army in the source poem (lines 1231-62), Malory elaborates that the beleaguered French are about to "yelde hem all at onys, bothe the bodyes and townys" (125) in the face of the Roman threat. Surrounded by Arthur's army, Lucius declares in the poem that his men have no choice "But [to] fight with our fomen, for flee may we never" (line 2020); in Malory's version, Lucius "myght nat ascape; but other to fyght other to yelde hym, there was none other boote" (134).⁴² At least, then, the claim that Malory maintains a greater awareness of yielding as an option than some of his sources may be fair, even if the use of such a claim is only to contribute to romanticized speculation about the historical Malory: did his own status as a prisoner—repeatedly captured—lead him to recall the importance of yielding in his writing? We can't know. What we know is that the complicated text that bears his name offers much fodder for an examination of yielding beliefs and practices.

In the world of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, yielding is closely (often explicitly) linked with the formation of social bonds, especially vassalage. Straightforward examples of this process are scattered throughout the text, but are slightly more heavily concentrated in the earlier sections (those which center upon Arthur himself, Gawayne, Balyn and Balan, Launcelot, and Gareth), because these sections and characters are more invested in the production of Arthur's rule and, by extension, the creation of vassals to sit at his Table. Trystram's long section—focused on a

⁴¹ Citations to the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* refer to line numbers in the poem as it appears in the online edition of *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, edited by Benson and revised by Foster.

⁴² Additional instances of Malory adding a mention of yielding to his source material appear in Malory pp. 129 (c. ll. 1560-80 in the *Alliterative Morte*) and 138 (ll. 2276-7 in the *Alliterative Morte*).

Cornish knight and uninvested in the construction and maintenance of any stable king (for Trystram, Arthur is tangential and Mark is unworthy)—more frequently depicts battles that end informally: losers are left bruised or unconscious but technically unyielded (326, 335, 340, etc.); niceties are lost in the chaotic ebb-and-flow of tournament fighting (321, 395, etc.); or the two men mutually yield (an unusual circumstance I will discuss in more detail later).⁴³ Yielding then takes on religious significance in the Grail quest and judicial significance as the tragedy of Launcelot and Gwenyvere and the treachery of Mordred come to the fore.

Broadly defined, honorable yielding, the topic of this section, is any yielding not motivated by fear of death; most commonly, it is a yielding out of respect for the captor's merit, an act that resembles entry into vassalage. "Honorable" is, of course, a challenging word to define, as is "worshipful," Malory's preferred term for a very similar if not equivalent concept.⁴⁴

⁴³ Many of the moments in Trystram's narrative that do feature formal yielding involve victors other than Trystram who have more interest in supporting a king's court; Launcelot accepts formal surrenders, for example, on 286, 287, and 292. Kenneth Hodges has explored the creation of knightly bonds and political communities in the *Morte* in several studies. Chapter 4 of his *Forging Chivalric Communities*, "Regional Politics" (79-108), includes Trystram in an analysis of the *Morte*'s depiction of contradictory *codes*, rather than *a code*, of chivalry, and the implications of this contradiction for Arthurian unity. Hodges's related article "Why Malory's Launcelot Is Not French" focuses on Arthur's attempts to generate community amidst the regional differences that divide the lands across which the story takes place. In his article "Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur' and the Political Geography of Fifteenth-Century England," Robert L. Kelly considers how Malory's readers may have understood the text's depiction of Arthur subduing rebellious provinces on his borders.

⁴⁴ The nature of knightly "worship" in Malory has prompted much comment. Generally, "worship" and "honor" are used interchangeably in scholarly conversation, a practice I follow. For example, Beverly Kennedy equates the two (for example, on p. 2) and argues throughout her book *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* that different categories of knights define worship/honor in different ways that are all nonetheless grounded in courage to risk death in defense of their particular honorable values. Lisa Robeson expands our understanding of worship by examining "Women's Worship: Female Versions of Chivalric Honour" in the *Morte*, concluding that women's honor places a greater emphasis on sexual restraint and obedience to men, but resembles men's in its emphasis on nobility, loyalty (both to specific people and to Arthurian values), and support of chivalric achievement (though for women, this support is indirect). In a complex discussion of the intersections between name, reputation, characterization, and worship early in his *Malory's Book of Arms*, Andrew Lynch argues persuasively that "worship" is founded on knightly skill and courage (43-4) and directly linked to "identity" (10) but that it is also essentially public (bestowed by more worshipful characters and even worshipful readers [10]) and not necessarily derived from a character's consistent

For the purposes of my discussion, I understand both honor and dishonor to be rooted in Patterson's understanding of the essential *dishonor* of the enslaved person. By "choosing" the total humiliation, dependence, and obedience of slavery over death, the slave loses honor (which therefore connotes not only public esteem but courage, power, and autonomy).⁴⁵ In the yield-or-die discourse, dishonor is born in fear of death. A frightened knight who surrenders at sword's point or a lady who is raped because she fails to resist unto death or kill herself are both dishonored in this sense.

An illustrative instance of honorable yielding in Malory occurs during the Roman episode when the Saracen Sir Priamus encounters Gawayne. Although the two men are well matched in terms of physical prowess (each nearly kills the other), Priamus eventually calls a halt to the battle and offers to help heal Gawayne's wounds if Gawayne will help him convert to Christianity (141). That this action has the flavor of yielding is not immediately clear (Gawayne seems more in danger of death at this moment, and the trade of bodily for spiritual healing suggests mutual exchange), but Priamus's behavior after this initial conversation is that of a yielded captive with his new lord. After offering the deal, Priamus suffers a moment of anxiety before confirming that Gawayne is a nobleman and a knight, because "I had levir have be toryn with foure wylde horse than ony yoman had suche a loose wonne of me, other els ony page other prycker sholde wyne of me the pryce" (142), expressing concern that he has misjudged

behavior over the course of the book (as Lynch says, "the special discursive status of name as worshipful reputation deforms the patterns [of behavior] and devalues what they tell us": that is, Lancelot's capture with Guinevere or killing of Gareth are "devalued" as indicators of dishonor because Lancelot's name is fundamentally honorable [14]). Lynch's argument forms a good counter-balance to my own understanding of honor/worship as deriving from a character's more intimate experience of preferring death to dishonor, but at a basic level we are in general agreement that, in Malory, honor has roots in battlefield courage, identity/self-narrative and honor go hand-in-hand and, once established, honor cannot be easily lost (we are meant to understand Lancelot as honorable and in possession of narrative power as long as he does not yield out of fear of death).

⁴⁵ For details, see Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* chapter 3, "Honor and Degradation" [77-101] as well as his introductory comments on the subject at pp. 10-13.

Gawayne's merit and been "won" by a less than worthy victor. Finally, Gawayne introduces Priamus to Arthur as "a good man of armys" who is "yolden unto God and to me." That Priamus occupies the status of a yielded character is now clear.

Priamus's self-narrative will now support and be absorbed into not Gawayne's narrative, but Arthur's, because Gawayne is Arthur's vassal (Priamus reappears only briefly in the list of Arthur's knights who attempt to heal Sir Urry just before Arthur's final slide into tragedy [641]). Priamus does not retain any particular individual identity, but his honor (in the text's terms) is magnified by his yielding nonetheless. He has yielded out of respect for admirable captors—God and Gawayne—not out of fear of imminent death. The distinction from average Roman prisoners of war (who have yielded to save their lives) is made complete by Arthur's immediate recognition that something is different about Priamus. Busy dispensing with other anonymous captives, Arthur takes one look at Priamus and is struck with wonder, commenting that "presonere is he none lyke" (147). Priamus is unlike the other Roman prisoners because his primary captor is the Christian God, and he has chosen his worldly captor, Gawayne, out of a positive desire to join Gawayne's (and thus Arthur's) narrative. Equally crucially, he has chosen *well*: with one act he has joined his self-narrative to the highest possible sacred and secular figures in the text's world—and thus he has moved from an experience of rebellious isolation (battling Arthur while "so hauté in my herte I helde no man my pere" [142]) to honorable vassalage in service of the text's most admired characters.

The world of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* takes inspiration, in part, from Malory's *Morte*, creating resonance between the two romances even though Spenser's allegorical poem is a vastly different text.⁴⁶ In his "Letter to Raleigh," Spenser famously states that the purpose of his

⁴⁶ Carol Kaske's article "Chivalric Idealism," Kenneth Hodges's articles "Reformed Dragons" and "Making Arthur Protestant," and Andrew King's book *The Faerie Queene and Middle English Romance* all contribute to a growing scholarly conversation about intersections between Malory and Spenser. Prominent in this conversation (especially in Hodges's and King's contributions) is a focus on *The Faerie Queene's* generic status as *romance* rather than (or, at least, in addition to) allegory. Kaske interrogates how knights in both works negotiate chivalric

romance is to “fashion a gentleman or noble person,” a claim that suggests the poem works to transfer knowledge of key cultural discourses to its readers (714).⁴⁷ Of course, I do not anachronistically claim that Spenser intended to transmit the yield-or-die discourse exactly as I have identified it, but its prominence in his text suggests its relevance to the discourses Spenser did set out to explore.

Una’s lion offers one of the best early examples of straightforward honorable yielding. The sight of Una’s “beautie” and “simple truth” so affects the lion that he performs a lion’s version of homage, kissing her feet and licking her hands (I.iii.6.1-5). Spenser emphasizes repeatedly that the proverbially brave and “kingly” lion (8.4)—although joining Una’s narrative—has done so affirmatively, without compulsion. He now possesses “yielded pryde and proud submission” (6.6), does her “humble service” (9.7), and Una comments that “mightie proud to humble weake does yield” (7.3) (crucially, the lion has yielded although he is physically stronger). The paradoxical phrases underline the situation of the honorably yielded vassal who serves an admirable narrative.

As I observe throughout this chapter, the plays of Christopher Marlowe tend to push to extremes situations that Malory and Spenser (despite the fantastic settings and idealistic values of their stories) usually deal with more locally or pragmatically. Marlowe’s use of the yield-or-die discourse frequently involves depicting extreme instances of the discourse at work, testing its ability to function at its limits and, as a result, calling attention to the existence of the discourse itself. Marlowe’s plays explore the differences between honorable yielding (into noble service

identity while dealing with inevitably less-ideal circumstances, while Hodges and King both also address how Malory and Spenser explore ideas of English identity when adapting older Continental romances.

⁴⁷ I quote from the edition of the “Letter” on pp. 714-8 in Hamilton’s edition of *The Faerie Queene*. Greenblatt’s comments dominate discussion of Spenser’s deployment of the early-modern verb “fashion”—see especially pp. 157-70 of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* for Greenblatt’s most straightforward historical contextualization of Spenser’s statement.

and vassalage) and dishonorable yielding (into shame and enslavement) with particular, even exaggerated, clarity.

In Part 1 of *Tamburlaine*, for example, Tamburlaine formalizes the discourse's fundamental requirements for honorable yielding—that the yielding must be motivated by respect, not fear of imminent death—with his system of colored encampments. Only in the first stage of a siege, when his tents are white, may his foes expect honorable treatment when they yield. If they fail to respond to the signifiers of his greatness quickly and, instead, wait to yield until they face death—that is, if they allow days to pass while Tamburlaine's tents turn first red, then black—Tamburlaine will enslave or kill them, not invite them to his service as honored supporters (4.1.49-63). Tamburlaine's tents may seem shocking in their simplicity and rigidity, but the appearance of extremism they offer arguably derives from how clearly they communicate the rules, not from how radical the rules are.

Although it occurs before the introduction of the colored tents, Theridamas's early surrender to Tamburlaine in Part 1 is one of the plays' few examples of honorable surrender on these extreme terms. The encounter begins as both men eye each other with admiration across the field of battle. In a sense, each observes the other and, through that observation, is able to “read” and admire the other's self-narrative. Theridamas, studying Tamburlaine's physical appearance as well as his display of wealth, interprets—correctly—that this man plans to “dare the gods” or “pierce Avernus' darksome vaults” in his brave ambition (1.2.154-61). Tamburlaine, studying Theridamas, comments that “Noble and mild this Persian seems to be, / If outward habit judge the inward man” (162-3) and calls to Theridamas,

Art thou but captain of a thousand horse,
That by characters graven in thy brows
And by thy martial face and stout aspect
Deserv'st to have the leading of an host? (168-71)

Here the act of reading the “characters graven” upon his foe’s face becomes explicit.

Tamburlaine suspects that this man might make a powerful vassal and, accordingly, issues his invitation: Theridamas can enter his service honorably or face battle.

Crucially, Tamburlaine’s long speech at this moment focuses little on threats. While he boasts that Fortune and the gods will defend him from harm, he says nothing about Theridamas being defeated or humiliated; that’s not the point. After all, if he wins Theridamas through Theridamas’s fear, he has won a slave, not a vassal. Instead, Tamburlaine emphasizes the honor, power, and opportunities that he can offer (172-209). His two existing lieutenants, Techelles and Usumcasane, chime in with additional endorsements focused on the rewards they expect from their service to Tamburlaine, doing their part as vassals to enhance their lord’s self-narrative (214-23). Usumcasane, in particular, stresses his anticipation that Tamburlaine’s self-narrative will, indeed, gain worldwide fame; he imagines that defeated soldiers with “fearful tongues . . . shall confess, / “These are the men that all the world admires” (221-3).

Theridamas reacts to this verbal and visual display of Tamburlaine’s identity like a transfixed audience member at a command performance. “Not Hermes, prolocutor to the gods, / Could use persuasions more pathetic” (210-1), he comments in response to Tamburlaine’s initial, lengthy speech. The word “pathetical” is a particularly fascinating choice in this context. First, because “pathetical” suggests the formal rhetorical tactic of *pathos*, it suggests an awareness on Theridamas’s part (in conjunction with the reference to Hermes as the gods’ professional spokesman) that he is being influenced by the power of highly ordered, skillfully deployed language. Theridamas’s comment is also, subtly, metatheatrical, pointing gently at the ornate rhetorical construction of Marlowe’s entire play. More specifically, “pathetical” connotes overpowering emotion—not logic or morality. Tamburlaine’s carefully constructed self-narrative derives its power not from cool reason (it is not a logical proof), but from the generation of strong feeling in its hearers.

The powerful feeling generated within Theridamas is not fear but temptation, not aversion to death but desire for a richer life. His yielding is inspired by his desire to join Tamburlaine's narrative: "What strong enchantments tice my yielding soul?" he wonders (1.2.224-5). In his moment of yielding, Theridamas thus emphasizes that he surrenders out of respect for the narrative (text and spectacle) that Tamburlaine projects:

Won with thy words and conquered with thy looks

I yield myself, my men, and horse to thee,

To be partaker of thy good or ill

As long as life maintains Theridamas. (1.2.228-31)

Theridamas describes himself as a prisoner of war, a captive "won" and "conquered" who must "yield," but he also stresses that his yielding and captivity (in the form of vassalage) are voluntary, even pleasurable. Some critics even see his strong language here as participating in the tradition of using captivity imagery to speak of falling in love.⁴⁸ That a strong resemblance exists and adds to the ambiguous intensity of the men's relationship is true, but the language is not fundamentally metaphorical: Theridamas faces a literal army, he is literally yielding. His words describe the profound experience of honorable yielding—out of genuine admiration—into service of another's self-narrative.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Greenblatt, for example, calls this exchange "a more passionate love scene than any with Zenocrate" (213)—hyperbolic but not entirely false. I address the language of love captivity in more detail later in this chapter.

⁴⁹ Many critics have commented insightfully on the diverse connections between Tamburlaine's speech and identity, often using this scene with Theridamas as a major example for their arguments. In "Language and Action in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*," David Daiches offers a useful summation of ways in which Tamburlaine's rhetoric develops into a kind of deed in its own right, so that the line between powerful words and physical violence or manifestations of greatness blurs almost into irrelevance across the course of the play. Greenblatt highlights Tamburlaine in his chapter on Marlowe in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (pp. 193-221), arguing that the conqueror's repetitive, performative speeches and actions—as well as his series of escalating, vague goals—aid him in "defining himself in genuinely radical opposition to the order against which he wars" (210). There are other critical discussions of similar issues as well, rightfully; the two *Tamburlaine* plays are rich veins for such mining. My argument here is simply that Marlowe is also drawing upon the yield-or-die discourse specifically as part of the

Honorable Yielding: Syncopations

The incidents collected in the *Morte* often explore pragmatic chivalric dilemmas, situations in which the yield-or-die discourse is muddied or complicated by the inevitable messiness of knightly life. Pragmatism's interventions cause syncopation in the ideological rhythms of the discourse. In contrast to the pure rigidity of Tamburlaine's color-coded tents, the discourse in Malory's book is usually more flexible, bending to accommodate specific cases without fundamentally destroying the underlying rhythm.

An early sequence centered on Gawayne establishes the yield-or-die rhythm and then syncopates it, in the process educating Gawayne on the values and judgment he ought to hold as a member of Arthur's Table. Setting out on a quest, Gawayne encounters two knights who yield to him easily and honorably, without a fight; he sends them onward to Arthur's court to serve the king (66-7). Second, he encounters another knight who explicitly refuses to yield after Gawayne unhorses him; in a battle on foot, Gawayne kills the knight (67). Both of these situations involve orthodox outcomes. The two yielded knights experience the honorable fate of joining Arthur's grander narrative, while the third knight chooses to die resistant rather than yield. Gawayne next finds himself in conflict with Sir Blamoure, who, after a bloody fight, "cried mercy and yelded hym," begging Gawayne "to save hys lyff" (68). In other words, having encountered honorable yielding and honorable resistance, Gawayne now encounters dishonorable yielding—yielding out of fear of death. The rhythms of the yield-or-die discourse are steady so far.

Now, however, two disruptions occur. Gawayne is angry and refuses to accept Blamoure's yielding, which leads to a terrible mishap: Blamoure's lady interposes her body

language-action blurring that Daiches identifies as well as the self-fashioning that Greenblatt charts. The act of yielding is physical and verbal, *and* it affects the self-narrative of both parties profoundly.

between her lord and Gawayne, and Gawayne kills her by mistake. Emotional excess and the intervention of a third party into the usually two-person interaction of yielding have unsettled the process. Gaherys, who has been accompanying his brother, declares Gawayne shamed and offers a didactic moral to the incident: “ye sholde gyff mercy unto them that aske mercy, for a knyght withoute mercy ys withoute worship.” Chastened, Gawayne offers Blamoure mercy. After a token resistance, Blamoure agrees, as he did before, to yield “for feare of dethe” and vows to go tell his story to King Arthur (68). Gaherys’s lesson on a basic rule of the yield-or-die discourse—a rule that would have helped avoid the tragedy caused by the disruptions of anger and the unexpected lady—has helped restore the usual rhythm.

But Gawayne’s educational adventure isn’t over yet. Next, he experiences the yield-or-die discourse from the other side, as a prisoner. That night, he and Gaherys are assaulted by knights who, like Gaherys, criticize Gawayne’s lack of mercy to Blamoure (“a knyght withoute mercy is dishonoured”). Gawayne does not yield in this fight even when he and Gaherys are “in juparté of their lyves,” but he *does* yield when four ladies intervene and stop the combat on the condition that Gawayne and Gaherys “yelde them as presoners” (69). Whether this surrender represents a newfound respect for the sudden intervention of ladies into his affairs is unclear, but because Gawayne isn’t obviously yielding in fear, his yielding can pass as honorable. He is now a prisoner of the ladies, and his self-narrative is subject to incorporation into their own.

In a sense, Gawayne has yielded to the concept of “ladies,” generally, rather than these specific characters. These ladies remain unnamed as they establish Gawayne’s noble lineage and dismiss him back to Arthur’s court with his promise to bear the body of the woman he killed with him (69). After Gawayne tells his story at court, Gwenyvere in particular passes judgment upon him, ordering that “for ever whyle he lyved to be with all ladyes and to fyght for hir quarels, and ever that he sholde be curteyse, and never to refuse mercy to hym that askith mercy” (70). Theoretically, through this experience of captivity, Gawayne is more deeply bound to the rules of the yield-or-die discourse as well as the chivalric law of respect for ladies (as expressed in the

famous Round Table oath shortly afterward, the knights must “gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy . . . and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes sucour, strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them” [77]). Whether Gawayne lives up to this oath with complete success across the entire book is highly debatable (to put it mildly), but Malory stresses the persistence of Gawayne’s revision at least once, when he adds a brief exchange to his source text. In Malory’s version of a discussion about prisoners of war, Gawayne in particular reminds his king that “hit were shame to sle knyghtes whan they be yolden” [129, see lines 1559-88 in the *Alliterative Morte* for comparison]). In the early sections of the *Morte*, at least, Gawayne thus becomes a better vassal to Arthur after his educational brush with the yield-or-die discourse.

Gawayne’s reminder to his king occurs during the Roman war, as does a debate arising out of a collision between pragmatism and the unwritten laws of the discourse: whether yielding to avoid death can be honorable (or even essentially meaningless, non-characterizing) when it is motivated not by fear but by coolly rational consideration. On the battlefield against overwhelming odds, for example, making the calculation that throwing one’s life away is pointless (or even detrimental to the cause) perhaps need not characterize one as irrevocably cowardly. Arthur takes this position as he laments the loss of several knights who died in a particularly bloody battle. Arthur tells the survivors that if they had all abandoned that fight “ye had loste no worshyp—for I calle hit but foly to abyde whan knyghtes bene overmacched.” Launcelot’s rebuttal is swift: “Not so . . . the shame sholde ever have bene oures,” he insists, a claim echoed by his fellows, who declare that “knyghtes ons shamed recoverys hit never” (133). The subject is not closed; the debate resurfaces throughout the *Morte*. For example, Sir Dynadan, Malory’s most pragmatic knight, later echoes and expands Arthur’s view. Arguing that “hit is ever worshyp to a knyght to refuse that thyng that he may nat attayne,” Dynadan suggests not only that honor need not be lost in such a case, but that honor can be *increased*

through clear-sighted awareness and acceptance of facts instead of idealistic suicide missions (348).

Much later, the knights on the Grail quest (except Galahad!) must learn to accept that which they “may nat attayne.” Ector has a dream-vision in which he and Launcelot recognize that they “seke that we shall nat fynde” (539); a hermit insists to Ector and Gawain that the Round Table and chivalry itself are rooted in “humilité and paciens” rather than prowess, worship, and victory (appearances to the contrary . . .) (541); and Lancelot must learn how to accept defeat in battle (536, 538) before achieving even a glimpse of the Grail. These religious experiences, of course, are governed by explicitly Christian values rather than the more secular, honor-based values of the rest of Malory’s text, but that doesn’t mean they are entirely unrelated. Across the entire long book, the question of what a knight should do when he cannot hope to attain victory remains unresolved: should he die in resistant battle? surrender pragmatically? turn the other cheek in Christian humility? Ultimately, the text seems to endorse something like Dynadan’s self-awareness, even in context of the Grail. Knights must be constantly alert to their circumstances, judging when to fight to the death and when to yield, choosing neither unthinkingly.

Whereas yielding to avoid death at the end of a losing battle is paradigmatically dishonorable in the yield-or-die discourse, it can thus still be honorable in Malory’s pragmatic world, as long as the losing knight makes clear that his life-saving choice to yield arises not out of unthinking fear of death but rather out of a rational calculus that resistance unto death is unnecessary in this case (or, during the Grail quest, out of religious conviction). The foe may be admirable enough, the cause of battle unimportant enough, or the fortunes of war transparently and impersonally ridiculous enough that the prisoner-to-be can reasonably conclude that surrender carries no risk of permanent, characterizing shame. In these cases, yielding to avoid death can be honorable or even so nearly meaningless as to escape most of the consequences to

self-narrative of even honorable yielding. This pragmatic syncopation to the rhythm requires that the knight not act out of fear.

The example with which I opened the Introduction illustrates this pragmatic twist on honorable yielding. When Trystram kills a lord and lady who maintained a “wycked” custom at their castle that cost the lives of many guests (258), the couple’s respectable son, Sir Galahalt, hurries to the scene and challenges Trystram to battle. After “halff a day” of fighting, Trystram gains the upper hand (259). But just as Galahalt is “nye myscheved, lyke to be slayne,” Galahalt’s ally, the King with the Hundred Knights, comes to the rescue, loosing those hundred knights “freyshly uppon Sir Trystrames.” Exhausted from battle, seeing this onslaught of new foes, Trystram yields to avoid death. According to the yield-or-die discourse, by making this choice at this moment, Trystram risks characterization as a coward in service to Galahalt’s self-narrative.

How Trystram’s yielding takes place, however, negates that risk:

[Trystram] wyste well he myght nat endure; so, as a wyse knyght of warre, he seyde unto Sir Galahalt the Haute Prynce, “Syr, ye shew to me no kyndenesse for to suffir all your men to have ado wyth me, and ye seme a noble knyght of your hondys—hit is grete shame to you.”

“So God me helpe,” seyde Sir Galahalt, “there is none other way but thou muste yelde the to me other ellys to dye, Sir Trystrames.” “Sir, as for that, I woll rather yelde me to you than dye, for hit is more for the myght of thy men than of thyne handys.” And therewithall Sir Trystrames toke his swerde by the poynte and put the pomell in [Galahalt’s] honde. (260)

The narrator’s editorial comment that Trystram’s action belongs to “a wyse knyght of warre” implies that such clarification might be necessary to distance this instance from countless ones like it in which yielding to avoid death is cowardly rather than “wyse.” The comment reinforces the emphasis on Trystram’s calm, experienced, considered perspective, and his action thus reads less as fearful and more as pragmatically thoughtful. He considers the situation, criticizes

Galahalt for Galahalt's failure of proper chivalric behavior, and decides that, in this particular circumstance, the sacrifice of his life isn't warranted. Such consideration removes the taint of cowardice from his action and moves his yielding into the honorable category because it is not motivated by fear.

Trystram's criticism of Galahalt, in particular, joins forces with the narrator's commentary to ensure that Trystram does not appear mindlessly frightened of his foe in any conventional sense. By explicitly casting Galahalt as both shameful (because he is acting outside the norms of chivalric convention) and not personally a source of danger ("hit is more for the myght of thy men than of thyne hands"), Trystram narrates a story in which his yielding is not only honorable but aberrant and abstract, occurring only because the usual rules have already been disrupted, and distanced from the insignificant person of his captor. In this understanding of the situation, his yielding is *at worst* honorable and, at best, simply irrelevant.

Events indeed prove that Trystram's self-narration of his circumstances negates yielding's usual characterizing power. Galahalt defends Trystram from the oncoming knights (ordering their assault to cease) and declares his sympathy for Trystram's cause in the conflict, despite the fact that moments earlier he was fighting Trystram to the death over the very personal issue of the killing of his parents. He then explicitly frees his yielded prisoner with the absolutely non-directive command "ye shall go where ye woll," asking only one condition: "so ye woll promyse me to go unto Sir Launcelot and accompany wyth hym" (260). This minor condition represents the small remaining cost of Trystram's yielding, the nominal support he must still grant to his captor's narrative power over him, but his response undercuts even this minor cost. "I promyse you," Trystram agrees, "as sone as I may, I woll se Sir Launcelot and infelyshyp me with hym, for of all the knyghtes in the worlde I moste desyre his felyshyp" (261)—in other words, Galahalt has merely insisted that Trystram do something he already wants to do anyway. Trystram's goal of joining forces with Sir Launcelot further proves to be long deferred ("as sone as I may" is a conveniently flexible commitment): not until Trystram and

Launcelot meet disguised at the Castle of Maidens tournament does the narrative begin to focus on this goal. The ultimate, atypical results of Trystram's choice to yield are that Sir Galahalt concedes to Trystram's view of events and presents Trystram with an objective that, over the long term, will power Trystram's own narrative journey. In this case, "a wyse knyght of warre" circumvents the yield-or-die discourse's characterizing power by yielding pragmatically, rather than fearfully, to avoid death.

Gareth flirts with an even more utilitarian version of honorable yielding when he asks for lodging at a castle when benighted on a quest. The lord of the castle isn't home, but the lady of the castle says Gareth is welcome to lodging on the condition that "wheresomever thou mete hym [the lord] . . . thou muste yelde the to hym as presonere." Gareth asks the lord's name, and then agrees: "I shal promyse you in what place I mete youre lorde I shall yelde me unto hym and to his good grace, with that I undirstonde that he woll do me no shame; and yf I undirstonde that he woll, I woll relece myself and I can with my spere and my swerde" (220). Gareth has no objection to the lady's demand—he seems to believe that becoming a man's prisoner is a reasonable price to pay for a night's lodging—*provided that* his captor-to-be will not dishonor him. By ensuring that he will yield not out of fear but rather out of respect for his captor (therefore meeting the conditions of honorable surrender, carefully distanced from any hint of slavishness), Gareth also ensures that he will only join an admirable narrative. Indeed, Gareth meets the castle's lord a few days later and immediately explains the promise he has made. The lord is chivalrous enough, instead, to wish a joust, which Gareth wins, further proving that Gareth has no need to fear this man. At this point, the roles of the two characters are reversed. The lord yields to avoid death and formally swears to serve Gareth as a vassal, and Gareth orders him to report to King Arthur's court "and sey that I, Sir Gareth, sente you thydir" (222). By assigning this storytelling, fame-spreading mission to his new servant, Gareth incorporates the

man into service of his own (and Arthur's) self-narrative.⁵⁰ Gareth's initial offer to yield in exchange for lodging is seemingly so pragmatic that, like Trystram's yielding to Galahalt, it effectively drains the situation of characterizing power—the lord responds to Gareth's offer by negating it. After this fresh start, the discourse functions normally.

Pragmatic accommodations for quirks of knightly life are one way the yield-or-die discourse is syncopated in Malory's text; during the quest for the Holy Grail, religion introduces additional syncopations.⁵¹ The Grail section repeatedly figures service to God as holy vassalage or, indeed, outright captivity entered through honorable yielding. Although hermitages appear throughout the book, the Grail section repeatedly and strikingly emphasizes the *enclosed* quality of holy spaces. Percivale visits a monastery that takes the form of “an house closed well with wallys and depe dyches” that itself contains “a pew closed with iron” (523), and Sir Bors visits “an abbay which was closed with hyghe wallis” (551). Hermits themselves in this section tend to be enclosed anchorites—and anchoresses. Percivale discovers his aunt living as a “recluse” in an anchoritic structure where “he kneled at hir wyndow and the recluse opened hit and asked Sir Percivale what he wolde”; discovering he is her nephew, the woman “commaunded the gatis to

⁵⁰ Storytelling at Arthur's court by prisoners about their capture is a crucial tool for the victor to construct public and honorable self-narrative—worship—within Malory's world. Andrew Lynch links this storytelling to Malory's more general interest in depicting characters talking and writing about noble deeds (47), “giv[ing] as much prominence to the story of recognition and approbation as to the deeds of arms themselves,” in a way that creates knightly reputation (54-5). I would add that it therefore becomes a unique aspect of the yield-or-die discourse as Malory's text uses it: the storytelling is a particular way that yielded captives support their captors' self-narratives in this world.

⁵¹ Scholars may never settle the debate over whether Malory's treatment of the Grail story is more or less secular than its sources (or more or less orthodox). Fiona Tolhurst summarizes the history of this debate—begun in its modern form with Vinaver's assertion that Malory consistently adjusted his sources to make them more secular—and the textual puzzles that provoke it in the first pages of her article “Slouching towards Bethlehem: Secularized Salvation in *Le Morte Darthur*” (127-32). Tolhurst goes on to argue for the sensible moderate position that Malory's project is not aggressively one-sided but is rather “a sometimes-awkward attempt to reconcile conflicting Arthurian sources” that “reflects both his strong interest in earthly life and his concern that knights of the world achieve salvation” (132). The collisions of the yield-or-die discourse with Christian discourse that I identify do tend to generate “sometimes-awkward” syncopations between secular and sacred values even as yielding also provides an important model for the humble self-surrender to God required by Christianity.

be opyn, and there he had grete chere" (521). Launcelot, too, is counseled at a forest chapel by "a recluse, which had a wyndow that she myght se up to the awter"; she calls to him as he rides past to get his attention, and he must come over to her window in order to converse (536-7). The window to the altar is an especially distinct architectural sign that this is an anchorhold, while the woman's summoning of Launcelot implies that she, like Percivale's aunt, also has a window onto the outside world through which she can converse with passers-by. Both these characters (or, perhaps, this single same character in two different scenes; the text isn't clear), as well as the religious folk living in the enclosed abbeys and monasteries, have entered a holy enclosure not unlike captivity. They are God's willing prisoners. As such, they serve formally as narrative devices to explicit the knights' experiences and direct their next moves, and readers can understand them as speaking on God's behalf.

The visions of Sir Gawayne and Sir Ector, and the corresponding interpretations of these visions by Nacien the hermit, also build a connection between captivity and holy virtue. These visions, appearing almost in the middle of the section, provide a general summary of the events and values of the Grail quest. Gawayne's vision centers upon a herd of bulls "that were proude and black," except for three that are white or mostly white; these three white bulls are also "tyed with two stronge cordis" (539). Nacien explains that the bulls represent Round Table knights, and the three white bulls the knights who will achieve the Grail. "And why tho three were tyed by the neckes," he adds, "they be three knyghtes in virginité and chastité, and there ys no pryde smytten in them" (542). The cords, the mark of captivity, signify the moral restraint and humility appropriate to men yielded to the Christian God. Both Ector and Gawayne have also witnessed a hand with a bridle holding a candle (539); the bridle signifies "abstinens" from "dedly synne" and is thus another symbol of morally improving confinement (543). Between the enclosed holy folk and the bound bulls, the Grail quest takes place amid repeated images of holy captivity.

The text also tends to use the word “yield” in this section to describe the act of committing to a religious life. For example, once freed of his suffering by Galahad’s intervention, the Maimed King “yelded hymselffe to a place of religion of whyght monkes, and was a full holy man” (584). Percivale, likewise, “yelded hym to an ermytayge oute of the cité, and toke religious clothyng” in the Holy Land after the achievement of the Grail and Galahad’s death (587). These are straightforward moments of honorable yielding in which these characters commit themselves to supporting the Christian narrative.

At other points, Christian discourse complicates the yield-or-die discourse. For example, yielding to God (or God’s representatives) may carry all the implications of handing over one’s self-narrative to one’s captor, but it does not necessarily result in the same erasure of a character’s earthly narrative power. Galahad remains a protagonist-level character, and arguably his companions do as well.

Bors, Percivale’s unnamed sister, and Galahad all perform acts that borrow aspects of secular yielding to emphasize their commitments to serve God. Bors encounters his vengeful, enraged brother Lyonell during his testing by God and tries to prevent a fight through a yielding-like gesture (Bors “kneled downe tofore hym to the erthe, and cryed hym mercy, holdyng up both hys hondis”), but Lyonell rejects this offer and demands that he fight or die (553). Bors tries a second time to yield, and the narrative voice gives us access to his inner awareness so that we understand he acts out of respect, not fear:

Whan Sir Bors sye that he must fyght with his brothir othir ellis to dye, he wyst nat what to do; so hys herte counceyled hym nat thereto, inasmuch as Sir Lyonell was hys elder brothir, wherefore he oughte to bere hym reverence. Yette kneled he adowne agayne tofore Sir Lyonelles horse feete, and seyde, “Fayre swete brothir, have mercy uppon me and sle me nat, and have in remembraunce the grete love which oughte to be betwene us two.” (554)

This incident echoes Gawayne's enraged mishap with Blamoure, in which Gawayne's refusal to accept Blamoure's surrender leads to his accidental murder of Blamoure's lady. Indeed, this incident amplifies Gawayne's experience. Lyonell's rage is more intractable than Gawayne's, Bors's yielding more honorable than Blamoure's (Bors attempts to surrender because God does not want him to harm a brother, not because of fear; he tells Lyonell that "I am nat aferde of you gretely; but I drede the wratthe of God" [556]), and two characters (a priest and another knight) intervene and are deliberately killed by Lyonell for doing so. By this point, not only Lyonell's rage but also Bors's determined Christian cheek-turning have warped the usual yield-or-die rules out of all recognition. Finally, after two men have died for him, Bors decides he must fight back against Lyonell, but God has the final word. A miraculous voice in a flame-like cloud stops him before he can strike and orders him to abandon the fight. Bors obeys. He has proven himself a committed vassal of God through his willingness to obey—to surrender to—Christian rules of conduct even at the risk of his own (and others') brutal death. His self-narrative exists to support God's. Though the standard rules for honorable yielding have been generally twisted out of recognition, at some basic level the scene proves that Bors is honorably yielded to God.

Percivale's sister not only risks death to obey God's will but actually dies in Christlike surrender at the castle where only a royal maiden's blood can cure the castle's mistress of leprosy. After being ordered under threat of violence that she "muste yelde . . . the custom of thys castell" (570), and determining that she considers the cause worthy of her own bloodshed, Percivale's sister agrees that "I shall yelde you youre custom" (572). (The word "yelde" here primarily serves as a simple synonym for "give," but it inevitably also connotes surrender, especially because the inhabitants of the castle are willing to enforce their demand with battle.) In complying, Percivale's sister dies for her faith; she and the maidens who have given their lives before her have been "martirde" (573). Like Bors's pacifism, Percivale's sister's deed resembles an extreme version of honorable yielding. Both surrender to ordeals of Christian service out of respect for their God rather than fear of death—indeed, both push this aspect of honorable

yielding to its limits by yielding *in expectation of death*, and Percivale's sister actually carries this out. She makes clear the benefits she expects to gain—"I shall gete me grete worship and soule helthe, and worship to my lynayge" (572)—conflating secular honor with sacred salvation as if both are served by this yielding.

After his sister's death, Percivale writes "a lettir of all that she holpe them as in stronge adventures" (572), an act of recording her self-narrative that, nonetheless, is now no longer in her own voice. Then the heroes place her body into a drifting boat. The rudderless boat is a medieval emblem that invokes a variety of meanings centered around the soul's passive dependence on God to navigate worldly life and reach heaven; it seems especially appropriate here because of that essential passivity.⁵² Percivale's sister, having yielded, has surrendered her self-narrative to God. Whatever afterlife she may have will be written by her brother and her God, not by her.

Galahad, unlike his fellows, cannot be said ever to yield during his earthly journey in any clear sense. Instead, he has fully yielded to God before he arrives in the narrative as an adult. He is "the servant of Jesus" from the quest's beginning (509) to the quest's end (586), when he "hylde up his hondis towarde hevyn"—again the vassal-like gesture of submission—as he sees the Grail and prepares to die. He also arguably goes beyond acting as God's vassal in this way by acting almost as God: that is, he speaks and provokes responses as if he were Christ himself—rather than Christ's servant—at key points.⁵³ Perhaps the most explicit example of this likeness

⁵² V. A. Kolve examines the rudderless boat of Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* in the context of these medieval Christian uses of the image in chapter 7 of *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*. Elizabeth Robertson builds on Kolve's discussion by arguing that the image of the rudderless boat is "specifically a gendered one," connoting a more feminine version of spirituality ("The 'Elvyssh' Power of Constance" 175). Meg Roland's article on "The Rudderless Boat" motif in Malory argues that the text combines spiritually symbolic boats with more conventional late-medieval warships and emergent modern understandings of geography as part of a larger merging of the genres of romance and chronicle. James Nohrberg proposes that a similar image from *The Faerie Queene*—Phædria's uncontrolled craft in II.vi—belongs in the context of a more secular but clearly related (and equally antique) tradition in which the boat (or its pilot) symbolizes Fortune (294-311).

⁵³ Stephen H. A. Shepherd's notes to his edition of the *Morte* highlight a number of these references to Christ. For example, Galahad's first words to the Arthurian court are "Pees be with

to Christ is an exegetically inclined hermit's insistence that Galahad's liberation of the Castle of Maidens be read as a type of Christ's liberation of humanity: "the Castell of Maydyns betokenyth the good soulys that were in preson before the Incarnacion of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste . . . and I may lykyn the good knyght Galahad unto the Sonne of the Hyghe Fadir that lyght within a maydyn and bought all the soules oute of thralle" (516).⁵⁴ Becoming a Christ-figure is, in a sense, the truest expression of Galahad's *service* to Christ. He has supportively joined Christ's narrative so thoroughly that he acts like Christ—deploying Christ's narrative power—in the lives of his fellow characters and also functions as a formal allegorical type at the level of literary construction. His self-narrative becomes God's so thoroughly that his words and actions occasionally blur into those of his master. Such a blurring is, as I discuss shortly, also one of Marlowe's favorite ways to narrate yielded men: Ithamore blurs into Barabas, Gaveston into Edward.

Seen in the context of this sacred yielding practiced by the successful achievers of the Grail, Launcelot's experiences during his Grail quest function not merely to teach him specific virtues of humility and patience, but also to obtain his (imperfect) yielding to God and thus pull him into service of God's (or at least Galahad's) narrative—and away from his secular loyalties. I discuss Launcelot's complicated self-narrative (his "unstableness," as Nacien calls it [543]) during the Grail quest in more detail in the context of illegibility, but for now let it be said that this process does work upon him to a certain extent. After he painfully renounces both Gwennyvere and worldly pride, Launcelot obeys a mystical voice that tells him to "entir into the

you" (499), which echoes Christ's words of greeting to his disciples after the resurrection (John 20:19). After Galahad liberates the imprisoned Earl Hernox (569), the nobleman's reaction may be meant to suggest Simeon's response to meeting Christ (Luke 2:28-30).

⁵⁴ Karl Tamburr points out that the hermit identifies the Incarnation (not the more expected Harrowing of Hell) as the deed which liberates the imprisoned souls, thus performing a conventional late-medieval conflation between the descent of Christ into a human body and the descent of Christ into hell; this particular version of that conflation does, however, give the Incarnation unusual "military overtones that are generally associated with the Harrowing of Hell" (161).

firste shippe that thou shalt fynde,” which he obediently does, entering “a shippe withoute sayle other ore” that turns out to be the same uncontrollable craft that bears Percivale’s dead sister. Launcelot joins in her passivity, drifting according to the will of God rather than directing his own narrative. As long as Launcelot remains passive—behaving as God’s yielded servant—he remains involved in the Grail quest. But he struggles with this submission, and it is, in the end, his undoing. At Carbonek, as he raises his sword to fight the lions guarding the door, a mystical voice urges him to pass the lions passively, without attempting to defend himself, as a show of trust that God “myght more avayle the than thyne armour in what *servyse* that thou arte sette in.” Launcelot picks up the key word in that statement as he replies, “now se I that Thou holdiste me for one of Thy *servauntes*” (576, emphasis mine in both quotations). The divine voice identifies Launcelot as a Godly vassal like Galahad, not an independent agent who ought to take self-directed action, and Launcelot’s response stresses his understanding of that vassal status.

Inside the castle, Launcelot still struggles to suppress his own initiative. Finally, Launcelot sees a literalized version of the Eucharist: the priest celebrating mass holds up not a wafer, but a man—Christ. Launcelot (sensibly, I always think) fears that the priest is about to fall over from the weight of the young man, and seeing “none aboute hym that wolde helpe hym,” bursts into the room in an attempt to help the priest. In a kind of spiritual explosion, the entire vision flashes out of existence and Launcelot is left unconscious for days (576-7). Launcelot’s crime, if we take the text at its word, is not pride this time; he is spurred by compassion or perhaps a resurgence of his prior secular chivalric obligations to assist the weak. While this motivation is ethical, it transgresses his current narrative role and Christian duty as vassal to God. At this crucial moment, the unlikely fusion of the yield-or-die logic with Christian values means that Launcelot fails to win the Grail not specifically because of his love for Gwennyvere or his worldly pride, but because—unlike the Grail achievers—he fails to yield completely.

Alone among the knights, Launcelot seems able to join the sacred narrative while never quite renouncing the secular one, and his conditional vision of the Grail is an appropriate

reward for his incomplete yielding. After the Grail Quest, Launcelot's role as Arthur's vassal is also never quite as straightforward or total as it was before. His attempt to yield to God means that he leaves aside his service to Arthur's narrative, and once he also fails in perfect service to God, he seems to regain his own narrative power. He may continue to insist (convincingly) that he loves Arthur and will not personally war with him, but his self-narrative and Arthur's diverge in the final sections of Malory's text. Galahad repeatedly describes Launcelot as "unstable," a word that fittingly describes Launcelot's singular ability to yield incompletely or temporarily, and it is this quality of "unstableness" that I examine in more detail in chapter 4.

Spenser, in his *Faerie Queene*, intensifies the pressures of both pragmatism and Christianity on the yield-or-die discourse.⁵⁵ In addition to these disruptions, some of the most consistent and fascinating syncopations that Spenser explores involve gender and sexuality. Spenser allows intersections between gender, sexuality, and yielding to destabilize expectations about all three.

Spenser's highlighting of gender difference between captor and captive tends to run parallel with his insistent attention to an element of the captor-captive relationship that is also present in Malory (subtly) and Marlowe (more obviously): yielding can connote sexual availability. Launcelot's imprisonments in Malory, for example, are usually provoked by or provoke an awareness of Launcelot's desirability (though Launcelot, as we shall see in chapter 3, resists rather than yields). The language Marlowe uses for Theridamas's honorable yielding to Tamburlaine resembles language of romantic love. Indeed, masculine expressions of love for vassals or fellow knights often sound very similar to expressions of love for courtly paramours; as Marlowe in particular reminds us, intersections between yielding and romantic love can certainly occur between characters of the same gender. When Spenser places opposite genders

⁵⁵ Kaske's article on "Chivalric Idealism" introduces the clash of ideals and praxis in both the *Morte* and *The Faerie Queene* with special attention to the crisis of being asked to fight for a false cause; she argues that both Malory and Spenser treat principles as important guidelines that, nonetheless, may occasionally be ignored for the greater good.

into the captor-captive dynamic, however, the equation of yielding and sexual availability claims attention most overtly.

As a knightly figure often mistaken for a man, Britomart can participate in the battlefield ritual of yielding in a way that seems almost conventional. When she assists Redcrosse against six attackers, for example, she defeats three, Redcrosse knocks down one, and the final two “yield, before she did them smight” (III.i.29.6). These two knights recognize Britomart’s worthy cause and “matchlesse might” before their own lives are directly endangered. The text is unclear whether all six knights or merely these two go on to become Britomart’s vassals, but most likely, all six swear loyalty to her: “we your liegemen faith vnto you plight,” they say, as “vnderneath her feet their swords they mard” (30.5-6). These knights, however, previously served the seductive lady Malecasta and are themselves lustful; further, Malecasta’s customs dictate that any knight who defeats her servants will win her, too, so the knights yield to Britomart at least in part because Britomart has won their mistress—presumably as a lover (26-7). Britomart’s new prisoners are all sexually available to her even though she chooses not to enforce this aspect of her lordship nor even reveal her true gender. The knights experience “affections bace” and “rashe desires” for her even as fear of her knightly prowess prevents them from acting on these desires (46.1-5), an important inhibition that keeps Britomart from being as available to her yielded servants as they are to her. Malecasta aggressively makes herself available to her new (apparently male) lord: when subtler flirtations fail, she climbs into bed with the sleeping Britomart (60-1). Finding Malecasta in her bed, Britomart leaps up and draws her sword; Malecasta screams at the discovery that the knight who won her is a woman—and a dangerous one; and the six knights race in to discover that their lover is in danger from their new lord. Confusion and anger ensues, ending as one knight wounds Britomart before fleeing in terror with his fellows from the wrath of Britomart and Redcrosse (62-7). The scene is both farcical and allegorically significant (Britomart is mildly wounded in this lustful setting, suggesting her feelings for Artegall), but it also illustrates how gender and sexuality can complicate even a

seemingly straightforward yielding transaction. In this case, Britomart's femininity, heterosexuality, and chastity mean that she cannot (and will not) engage in all the signifying activities of lordship that this particular castle's custom allows her, and her prisoners, unaware of her full self-narrative, are thus unable to comprehend (and join) it. The farcical climax—in which Britomart's new sworn vassals turn violently against her—shows the complete failure of this particular instance of yielding.

Britomart usually plays the role of captor rather than captive in *The Faerie Queene*. Amoret is the reverse, more commonly finding herself in the captive role. She illustrates the close connections between the identities of yielding vassal and wedded wife. Amoret is won by Scudamour when he invades the Temple of Venus (IV.x), conquers its defenders, and eventually claims Amoret as his "spoyle" (55.9, 58.3, etc.), ignoring her pleas for "her wished freedome" (57.5). Notably, in this first encounter, Amoret does not yield to Scudamour (we might compare her resistance here to the resistance she will later offer Busirane [which I discuss extensively in the following chapter]). As time passes, however, "her louing hart she linked fast / In faithfull loue" to Scudamour (III.vi.53.3-4), an act Scudamour characterizes as yielding: "Once to me yold, not to be yolde againe," he declares (xi.17.4). The conventional marital figure of linked hearts offers Amoret a rare hint of agency here, as it implies that she actively chose and enacted the linking; Scudamour then identifies this choice as yielding. Amoret's marriage to Scudamour thus resembles conventional honorable yielding. Out of love, she chooses to surrender herself to Scudamour.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Spenser's marriage poem "Epithalamion" generally presents a lighter-hearted picture of marriage (appropriate for its genre), but flirts briefly with captivity imagery when the speaker refers to his new bride as "the triumph of our victory" and celebrates winning "the glory of her gaine" (243-4). Coupled with the depiction of the bride's traditional virginal reticence (with her "modest eyes abashèd," "[u]pon the lowly ground affixèd" because she does not "dare lift up her countenance too bold" [159-62] thanks to her "proud humility" [306]), the image of a Roman triumph where once-proud, now yielded captives are led in chains by their new lords may flicker briefly into being. As I will discuss, Marlowe's *Gaveston* uses a similar image to describe his relationship with Edward II: "I think myself as great / As Caesar riding in the Roman street / With captive kings at his triumphant car" (171-3).

Scudamour's comment also emphasizes the permanent nature of yielding. According to Scudamour, having yielded to him, Amoret either cannot or will not yield to anyone else. This assertion seems proven across her later adventures, in which she repeatedly faces threats of rape and seduction (Spenser, dismayingly, tends to elide one into the other)—but she never gives her love to anyone else, and is usually spared the worst sexual assaults by unexpected plot twists and interventions from other characters. Her passivity—always led or fleeing, never choosing her own direction; always the patient rather than the agent—is the passivity of a yielded character who lacks self-narrating power. While requiring passivity, Amoret's status as already-yielded also acts as a protective talisman that helps her to resist Busirane (late in Book III) and the horrifying Saluage Man (IV.vii). Not only is she loving and loyal to her husband, but she is also, in a sense, under the protection of his narrative. Scudamour may prove incompetent as a rescuer, but the alchemy of yielding within the story's world nonetheless safeguards Amoret's loyalty, while the narrative role of yielding (and Amoret's allegorical role) protect her loyalty at a formal level, as well. Put more bluntly, her status as yielded prevents her from being raped despite being twice captured by two different allegories of lust. Amoret can be wounded by lust, even tortured by lust, but as long as she doesn't *yield* to it, she can't be outright raped. This disturbing logic is threaded throughout the yield-or-die discourse: rape is connected to the concept of yielding, carrying an implication that it, like yielding, is chosen and therefore characterizing.

The dishonor associated with rape is a version of the dishonor associated with slavery. The underlying assumption is that anyone choosing to endure slavery or rape (or both) rather than die obviously possesses a dishonorable (cowardly, immoral, lazy) nature to begin with and thus deserves the irrevocable shame of dishonorable yielding. Amoret, having yielded to the more admirable Scudamour out of love, has already yielded in an honorable way, ensuring that she is characterized as honorable herself. Consequently, the dishonorable yielding demanded by her subsequent captors horrifies her and—almost mystically—never comes to pass.

The profound offensiveness of this twisted logic—that commitment to virtues (Amoret’s loyalty, Britomart’s chastity) can prevent rape, and that enduring rape indicates the survivor’s failure of commitment to such virtues—I hope needs no elaboration.

The greatest moments of confusion for Amoret, and the greatest threats to Scudamour’s possession of her, arise when she finds herself in a position to yield to additional honorable characters such as Britomart or Arthur. She is never, strictly speaking, the captive of either of these characters, but when they rescue her from terrible fates, their actions resemble lords offering vassals protection or captors sparing the lives of defeated captives on the battlefield, and Amoret’s responses affirm those likenesses. After Britomart rescues Amoret from Busirane, for example, Amoret falls at her feet and declares her willingness to serve Britomart because of Britomart’s great merit:

Ah noble knight, what worthy meede
Can wretched lady, quitt from wofull state,
Yield you in lieu of this your gracious deed?
Your vertue selfe her own reward shall breed,
Euen immortal prayse, and glory wyde
Which I your vassall, by your prowesse freed,
Shall through the world make to be notifyde . . . (III.xii.39.2-8)

Even as Amoret expresses her sense of debt to Britomart, she does what she can to repay it by offering herself as Britomart’s new “vassall” who—significantly—will work to support and enhance Britomart’s public narrative.

Spenser plays the consequences of this impulsive, honorable yielding to Britomart as comedy, depicting Amoret’s concern that she may owe her apparently male rescuer the sexual service that yielding in *The Faerie Queene* especially tends to include. Amoret believes that “no seruice” could be too great to repay Britomart’s heroism, but “dread of shame, and doubt of fowle dishonor / Made her not yeeld so much, as due she deemed” (IV.i.8.5-7). Amoret runs into

a similar problem when she travels under Arthur's protection, enduring "feare of shame" because she is "like vassall bond" to the great knight (IV.ix.18.5-7). The word "like" is probably important here, stressing that Amoret has not formally yielded to Arthur in the same sense that she has to Scudamour and Britomart. Her experience is similar, but the distinction between being a vassal and being *like* a vassal is highlighted by the detail that only Britomart becomes a serious target of Scudamour's jealousy. Amoret's husband laments his wife's plights, but never particularly worries that she will yield consensually to her abductors; by contrast, he is easily (and correctly, to a point) persuaded that she might yield to Britomart (IV.i.49-54). Amoret is indeed the rare character who can yield honorably to two people of relatively equal rank—to Scudamour and to Britomart. She yields honorably to Scudamour as his wife and to Britomart as her vassal, but the line between "wife" and "vassal" is thin indeed, as Amoret's worries about the service she owes to Britomart reveal.

Marlowe blurs this line to the point of erasing it in his *Tamburlaine* plays with the character of Zenocrate, Tamburlaine's prisoner-wife. The encounter with Theridamas that I have already discussed takes place as an interruption to another crucial encounter early in Part 1: Tamburlaine's capture of Zenocrate. Zenocrate's surrender to Tamburlaine is more complicated than Theridamas's, less strictly honorable (that is, less clearly motivated by respect), but ultimately just as absolute. Immediately after waylaying Zenocrate and her travelling companions, Tamburlaine assumes that she is already irrevocably his possession, declaring that she "*must* grace his bed" (1.2.37, italics mine). But Zenocrate initially resists him, making clear that this is not a love-at-first-sight situation in which her desires meet his as equals. She asks to be allowed to continue on her way (7-16), defies his expectations of military success as long as he treats innocents (such as herself) poorly (68-70), and asks him to "at least admit us liberty" (71). Her supporter Agydas proposes—less bravely but still reasonably—that the wealth Zenocrate and her companions carry might serve as "ransom to our liberties" (75). Tamburlaine rejects the ransom offer because his love for Zenocrate makes her priceless to him, and the exchange is

then suspended by the arrival of Theridamas, who provides the playworld's exemplum of unproblematic honorable yielding to Tamburlaine. To this point in the scene, although her supporters have attempted to begin negotiations, Zenocrate has offered Tamburlaine resistance, not yielding.

When Tamburlaine returns his attention to Zenocrate, he offers her an ostensible choice that lays out a template for all yielding across both plays, explaining "If you will willingly remain with me / You shall have honours as your merits be— / Or else you shall be forced with slavery" (1.2.254-6). These lines spell out with harsh precision the "choice" between honorable and dishonorable yielding. In either case, captivity is assumed: Zenocrate will remain with Tamburlaine one way or another. The choice is simply whether to yield pre-emptively, before physical force is required (as Theridamas has just modeled), or not.

Zenocrate's supporter Agydas knows exactly what response to make: "We yield unto thee, happy Tamburlaine," he states immediately and formally (257).⁵⁷ Tamburlaine, however, isn't satisfied until he hears Zenocrate's personal answer to his impossible choice. And her answer is fascinating, because she manages to unite both categories of yielding—willing and unwilling, vassal and slave—within her paradoxical words: "I must be pleased perforce, wretched Zenocrate!" (259), she says, and the scene ends. In essence, she declares that she is yielding honorably, "pleased" to join Tamburlaine's narrative, but also that she has this pleasure only because she has been forced to.

Tamburlaine's demand and Zenocrate's reply stress the bleak absurdity of her choice/non-choice. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Shakespeare pushes a similar choice/non-choice into outright comedy when the band of outlaws give Valentine their ultimatum: if he

⁵⁷ Later, after Agydas dares to question his master, Tamburlaine will order his suicide by silently sending him a dagger without a word spoken, and Agydas will obey, having understood his master's intent purely through facial expressions and the deadly gift. Despite his disobedience, he has (in yielding) joined Tamburlaine's narrative, and now reads his captor's wish so clearly that he has no choice but to obey instantly (3.2).

agrees to lead them, they promise that “We’ll do thee homage and be rul’d by thee, / Love thee as our commander and our king,” but if he refuses, “thou diest” (4.1.64-6). Valentine, taking the outlaws’ advice to “make a virtue of necessity” (60), agrees to rule. Theseus applies this concept more broadly and solemnly at the end of Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* when he argues that “[t]o maken vertu of necessitee” is better than “to stryve” fruitlessly against the absolute universal rule of “Juppiter, the kyng” (3035-42).⁵⁸ Making a virtue of necessity—electing to be “pleased perforce” with a captor’s demand—is a valid if sometimes absurd method of honorable yielding. The yielding character surrenders with at least the dignity of pragmatic, clear-sighted resignation to the inevitable defeat—rather than with foolish, panicked fear when the inevitable comes to pass. In this sense such yielding is not unlike Trystram’s behavior as “a wyse knyght of warre” in yielding to Galahalt.

This *technically* honorable yielding allows Tamburlaine to elevate Zenocrate to queenly status over the course of the two plays. Her reluctant surrender makes her entry into captivity very different from Theridamas’s much more pleasurable and heartfelt experience of yielding in the same scene—we seem meant to contrast the two. Nonetheless, as the plays develop, Zenocrate becomes as committed to Tamburlaine as Theridamas. She longs to be spiritually one with Tamburlaine (she implores her own “life and soul” to “unite you to his life and soul, / That I may live and die with Tamburlaine!” [3.2.21-4]), a yearning that reflects the yielding character’s unity with the captor’s self-narrative. By the time she dies in Part 2, Zenocrate is a devoted and loving wife, having belonged to Tamburlaine’s narrative and grown increasingly subservient to and supportive of his selfhood since her paradoxical surrender in the second scene of Part 1. Over time, the wholeheartedness of Theridamas’s honorable yielding and the grudging technicality of Zenocrate’s amount to the same thing in Marlowe’s world: obeying Tamburlaine’s rigid use of the yield-or-die discourse is all that matters. Thoughtful, pre-emptive yielding leads

⁵⁸ Throughout this dissertation, all quotations from the works of Chaucer refer to the texts as they appear in *The Riverside Chaucer*.

to better, more honorable outcomes than fearful, sword's-point yielding. That this is true for both Tamburlaine's vassal and his wife suggests the applicability of the discourse to both relationships.

Mutual Yielding

An uncommon application of the language of honorable yielding occurs when two characters yield mutually out of respect for each other. In Malory and Spenser, this shared surrender allows knightly combatants not only to resolve a conflict but, more deeply, to unite themselves in friendship. In Marlowe's *Edward II*, the language of mutual yielding helps to characterize Edward and Gaveston's affection.

Of course, mutual yielding is a paradoxical concept within the logic of the yield-or-die discourse. Somehow, each character must surrender his self-narrative in support of the other's, giving up his independent identity while simultaneously having that identity empowered by the support of his yielding comrade's. In practice, the two characters tend to remain distinct and in possession of individual narrative power; mutual yielding does not mean that the two characters' trajectories are necessarily joined. Instead, mutual yielding seems to assert an especially important kind of likeness. Each character recognizes and honors a self-narrative so much like his own that they may almost be interchangeable.

This deep likeness is a common characteristic of medieval and early modern concepts of friendship, traceable through intermediary sources back at least as far as the pithy aphorism Aristotle quotes that a "friend is another self" (228). A host of Christian and Neoplatonic arguments agree that true friendship amounts to something very like the sharing of one soul among bodies.⁵⁹ Book IV of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is, of course, devoted to friendship and

⁵⁹ For details, see Charles G. Smith's *Spenser's Theory of Friendship*, which quotes an array of classical, medieval, and early modern variations on the sentiments that friends are other

explores this quality of likeness extensively. Also essential to an understanding of mutual yielding is the medieval concept of sworn brotherhood, a recognized relationship in which usually aristocratic men swore friendship, support, and allegiance to each other. Sometimes this alliance seems to have been intended to reconcile parties in conflict or accomplish other pragmatic goals, but sometimes it was simply born in mutual affection (Brown 365, 374; Bray 35-41).⁶⁰ It could be formalized with written documents and oaths sworn before witnesses, often in a religious context (with relics or in a church). The ceremony might include a kiss or an exchange of gifts (Bray 17, Brown 359-62, 364). Unlike other oath-based relationships (marriage, vassalage) that require one party to be subordinate to the other, sworn brotherhood stresses the honorable equality of its participants.⁶¹

References to profound likeness and sworn brotherhood occur alongside moments when two characters yield honorably and mutually to each other. Malory's Trystram is involved in several examples of this practice. Towards the end of a long, exhausting, furious combat with Sir Lamerok—supposedly to the death over a matter of previous insult—Trystram compliments his opponent by saying he has never battled such a great knight, and adds that “hit were pité that ony of us both sholde here be myscheved.” Lamerok's response ends the fight immediately:

selves (43-6) and that friends share one soul (37-42). Nohnberg's *Analogy* also discusses this context (608-24).

⁶⁰ Brown's "Ritual Brotherhood in Western Medieval Europe" is a succinct introduction to the historical evidence for this relationship; Bray's *The Friend* is a deeply nuanced examination of medieval and early modern friendship that incorporates extensive discussion of ritual brotherhood throughout. Both authors—Bray more extensively—make a point of cautioning repeatedly against jumping to conclusions about the motives for and meanings of sworn brotherhood (were these relationships political? economical? based in platonic friendship? sexual?): our modern understanding may simply miss the point sometimes.

⁶¹ As Elizabeth A. R. Brown puts it, "Ties of ritual brotherhood were grounded in fraternal equality between the participants, and informed by expectations of mutual, reciprocal obligations. Thus, they were fundamentally different from those of marriage . . ." (380).

“Sir,” seyde Sir Lamerok, “for youre renowne and your name I woll that ye have the worship, and therefore I woll yelde me unto you.” And therewith he toke the poynte of hys swerde in hys honde to yelde hym.

“Nay,” seyde Sir Trystrames, “ye shall nat do so, for well I know youre profirs are more of your jantilnes than for ony feare or drede ye have of me.” And therewithall Sir Trystramys profferde hym hys swerde and seyde, “Sir Lamerak, as an overcom knyght I yelde me to you as a man of most noble proues that I ever mette.”

“Nay,” seyde Sir Lamerok, “I woll do you jantylnes; I requyre you, lat us be sworne togydirs that never none of us shall affir thys day have ado with other.” And therewithall Sir Trystrames and Sir Lamorak sware that never none of hem sholde fyght agaynste othir, for well nother for woo. (293)

Trystram’s gracious acknowledgement that Lamerok’s yielding is *not* rooted in “ony feare or drede” stresses the deed’s honorable status. Instead, each man admires the other’s self-narrative (“youre renowne and your name”) enough to be willing to join it. Their parallel words and actions stress their likeness, and their oaths elevate the exchange in a way we are probably meant to understand indicates sworn brotherhood. That said, because their yielding is mutually offered, in the end neither character surrenders narrative power to join the other’s self-narrative. Both, instead, continue their independent adventures. Although they have committed to a mutual oath, they have no significant further influence on each other’s lives. They continue to speak highly of each other, and in a later meeting “ayther toke othir in armys and made grete joy of other” (365), but their stories—their selfhoods—remain basically distinct.

Trystram and Launcelot have a similar moment of mutual honorable yielding that leads to slightly more engagement in each other’s plots. Although Merlin has predicted that the two will fight a great battle, they begin it without knowing each other’s identity. The battle is long,

and the two men are equally matched. Finally, they exchange names, and each man, horrified to realize that he has been fighting someone he admires, yields:

And therewyth Sir Launcelott kneled adowne and yeldid hym up his swerde; and therewithall Sir Trystram kneled adowne and yeldid hym up his swerde—and so aythir gaff other the gré. And than they bothe forthwithall went to the stone and set hem downe uppon hit, and toke of their helmys to keele them, and authir kyste other an hondred tymes. (344)

Dynadan adds important detail to this picture of mutual yielding when he later describes these events to Palomydes: “by bothe their assentys, they were made frendys and sworne brethirne for ever; and no man cowde juge the bettir knyght” (358). Launcelot and Trystram are sworn brothers (perhaps the hundred kisses echo the kiss of the brotherhood ceremony), and in terms of their martial prowess, at least, they seem to be perfectly matched.

Ostensibly, this moment of mutual yielding and affection serves to bring Trystram—at last—into King Arthur’s fellowship (a fellowship Arthur has sought and Trystram has avoided). Immediately after this battle, Trystram comes to Camelot “by love, and not by force” (346) (unlike most of Launcelot’s other conquered foes, who come “by force”), and Arthur persuades Trystram to accept a seat at the Table (345). By yielding to King Arthur’s vassal Launcelot, Trystram has in effect honorably yielded to Arthur himself. Significantly, however, Malory never pictures Trystram doing homage or swearing fealty to Arthur; Trystram’s loving mutual yielding with Launcelot is the only tie that binds him to Arthur, and this indirect, reciprocal tie proves weak. Trystram never betrays either Launcelot or Arthur, but because he has retained his own self-narrating power—surrendering it neither to Launcelot nor Arthur—his personal concerns remain foremost, and he continues to motivate his own plot. In fact, later, Arthur effects a reconciliation between Trystram and King Mark that allows Trystram to leave Camelot and return home to Cornwall. When Launcelot (correctly) points out Mark is likely to betray and kill Trystram, Arthur defends his action by saying he was acting in response to Trystram’s “desyre”

and “wil” (367). The Cornish knight is no simple vassal of Arthur’s, and his narrative path, driven by his own goals, departs from Arthur’s court almost as soon as it has entered it.⁶² Launcelot’s trajectory, too, is not meaningfully influenced by his brotherly yielding to Trystram, although his affection remains firm. Mutual yielding allows Malory to let the three knights he considers most successful in the worldly realm—Launcelot, Trystram, and Lamerok—form an affectionate brotherhood rather than competing for the chance to subordinate one another either feudally or narratively.⁶³

Spenser puts mutual yielding to similar use with his multiple major virtuous knights in *The Faerie Queene*.⁶⁴ The exchange that most resembles Malory’s occurs between Redcrosse and Guyon, who are about to enter deadly battle when the sight of each other’s admirable shields moves them to beg each other’s mercy in parallel stanzas (II.i.27-28). Now “both at one” (29.1),

⁶² In his analysis of nationalism—and lack thereof—in the *Morte*, Kenneth Hodges points out that Trystram’s non-Englishness is a major factor in his narrative independence: “Trystram’s regional ties are strong enough that he resists induction into the Round Table fellowship” (“Why Malory’s Launcelot . . .” 565). The text illustrates Trystram’s resistance by never depicting him yielding formally to Arthur himself.

⁶³ Gawayne provides an additional example of Malorian mutual yielding when he and Marhaus agree to stop fighting, kiss each other, and “[swear] togedyr eythir to love other as brethrine” (98). More remains to be said about the role of knightly friends and sworn brothers (especially in light of Bray’s work) in Malory’s *Morte*. Elizabeth Archibald’s article “Malory’s Ideal of Fellowship” explores Malory’s frequent use of the word “felyshyp” to describe idealized bonds that unite both pairs of knights (such as Launcelot and Trystram) and the Round Table as a whole. Richard Sévère’s “Galahad, Percival, and Bors: Grail Knights and the Quest for Spiritual Friendship” argues that the ability to participate in “spiritual friendship,” as defined in a treatise on the subject by Aelred of Rievaulx, is a requirement for achieving the Grail; Sévère indirectly engages with Bray’s work (because Bray also examines Aelred’s treatise), but not on the issue of sworn brotherhood.

⁶⁴ Spenser’s major knights also easily form relationships of friendship and sworn brotherhood *without* mutual yielding. Arthur and Redcrosse formally cement their relationship in a ceremonial way that connotes the swearing of brotherhood with “gifts” and “pledges” (I.ix.18-19). Guyon and Britomart meet in a fierce battle that ends with Guyon being persuaded he can’t win, at which point they exchange vows of mutual respect and support, an exchange in which Arthur also joins, so that all three are “with that golden chaine of concord tyde” (III.i.9-13). The commonplace image of the chain may faintly hint at mutual imprisonment, but for the most part this episode moves from battle to sworn brother- (and, secretly, sister-) hood without a clear moment of mutual yielding. The friends Amyas and Placidus already share inward and outward likeness before we meet them (IV.viii.55), and in an echo of mutual yielding, Placidus endures imprisonment for his friend’s sake (57-60).

“[w]ith right hands plighted,” they exchange “pledges of good will” (34.2), leaving them “knitt in one consent”—sharing a likeness powerful enough that Archimago, seeking to harm Redcrosse, spontaneously shifts to seeking harm against Guyon instead (II.iii.11.8-9). Mutual honorable yielding gives rise to this likeness and sworn brotherhood.

A more complicated example occurs in Book IV’s exploration of friendship, when Cambell and Triamond’s lengthy battle seems likely to lead to both their deaths. Their ultimate fate is foreshadowed when they both strike with lethal force and temporarily kill each other: as both fall, “each to other seemd the victorie to yield” (iii.34.9). Each man’s separate magic lets him rise up and resume the fight, and at this point Spenser stresses that they are both so exhausted that, for both, “life it selfe seemd loathsome, and long safetie ill” (36.9). Their disinterested attitude toward death derives from weariness rather than self-conscious courage, but it also reminds us how far either man is from yielding out of fear and prepares for the sudden intervention of Cambina, who personifies the moment when knights like Trystram and Lamerok are suddenly stricken with the need to throw down their swords and swear love and admiration. With a name that connotes “combiner” or “exchanger” (Hamilton 274) and bearing her “rod of peace” depicting “two Serpents . . . Entrayled mutually” and “together firmly bound” (42.1-4), Cambina finally succeeds in parting the combatants by striking them with the rod and then offering them each a sip of a happiness-inducing potion. When struck, Cambell and Triamond drop their swords and freeze “like men astonisht” whose “mighty spirites [are] bound with mightier band” (48.4-7). Their astonishment makes sense in context of the immediate action, of course, but may also recall both the shocked, rhetorical questions Malory’s knights gasp when they learn each other’s identities (“‘Alas,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘what have I done?’” and “‘A Jesu,’ seyde Sir Launcelot, ‘what aventure is befall me!’” [343-4]) and also, more basically, the moment of blank crisis that follows the yield-or-die demand. (No one has verbally asked these characters to yield, of course, but being whacked by someone who amounts to the personification of mutual yielding may be the equivalent of the yield-or-die demand in this

case.) Cambina's potion then inspires their "sudden change" into true friendship and, indeed, sworn brotherhood: "Instead of strokes, each other kissed glad, / And louely halst from feare of treason free, / And plighted hands for euer friends to be" (49.2-5). Spenser repeats that this "sudden change" is a "great maruaile" (49.6-8), calling attention to the crucial role of magic (and presumably divine grace) in the creation of this friendship. Malory's greatest knights also tend to shift from enmity to love in the blink of an eye. Great merit, once recognized, invites yielding; yielding means a swift and absolute surrender of one's self-narrative; and thus mutually recognized merit and mutual yielding mean that identities can be exchanged and combined in the manner of true friendship almost as soon as they are recognized.

Britomart and Artegall's long relationship ends in marriage, and therefore also with a conventional implication that Britomart yields unilaterally to Artegall. I will discuss these characters more extensively later; in this context their first face-to-face meeting is relevant because it adapts and adjusts the language of mutual yielding both to suggest that their romantic love includes an element of friendship and also to hint that this encounter is not as mutual as it appears. As they battle, Artegall damages Britomart's helmet and exposes her face, the sight of which strikes him much as Cambina's rod struck Cambell and Triamond: "His powrelesse arme" loses its grip on his sword (IV.vi.21.3-7), "And he himselfe long gazing thereupon, / At last fell humbly downe vpon his knee" to beg forgiveness (22.1-2). Britomart wants to keep fighting until she sees Artegall's face, but then she, too, drops her sword and experiences a long moment of astonishment (26-27).

To this point, the encounter is following the script for mutual yielding, but now it begins to diverge. Scudamour and Glance, looking on, both playfully characterize Artegall as the only yielding figure. Scudamour teases that now the kneeling Artegall will "liue a Ladies thrall" (28.8), while Glance urges Artegall, whom "womans hand / Hath conquered," to submit to the "band" of love (31.2-8) and tells Britomart to "Graunt him your grace"—if he is obedient (32.5-6). Much later, in Book V, Artegall will literally become a lady's thrall, but here, the one-sidedness of the

teasing conceals the fact that Britomart was stricken as well as Artegall. Indeed, Artegall's one-sided yielding is mostly (like most metaphorical references to male characters "held captive" by love) a fiction—exaggerated in jokes and maintained because Britomart, following the rules of decorum, conceals her passion so that Artegall must court her properly. Spenser exposes the true state of things with the paradoxical metaphor he chooses for that courtship: "with meeke service" (like a yielded vassal), Artegall "lay / Continuall siege vnto her gentle hart" (not like a yielded vassal at all) (40.3-4). Artegall's warlike assault finally ends when Britomart "yeilded her consent / To be his loue, and take him for her Lord" (41.7-9). In a sense, each has yielded to the other, beginning with their mutual astonishment at each other's faces, but the delay and difference in tone between Artegall's comic status as her "thrall" and Britomart's serious willingness to recognize him as "her Lord" hint that ultimately, this will be less a friendship of equals than a marriage of man and submissive wife.⁶⁵

Marlowe's *Edward II* offers an extended and complicated exploration of male friendship, sworn brotherhood, and possibly romantic or sexual affection in its depiction of the relationship between King Edward II and his beloved "favorite," Gaveston. As Alan Bray cautions, the characters' relationship exhibits many conventional gestures of male friendship that did not necessarily connote a sexual affair, so we must not too quickly read homosexuality into Marlowe's play (187-9). Bray adds, however, that Edward and Gaveston's friendship lacks two key elements that "are precisely those that ensured that the intimacy of these conventions would be read in an acceptable frame of reference": first, social near-equality, and second, a bond that is clearly "personal, not mercenary." The importance of these two elements is born out in the examples from Malory and Spenser I have discussed here, in which mutual yielding (and

⁶⁵ Richard Mallette discusses Britomart and Artegall's meeting in the context of Reformation discourses of companionate marriage, which tended to "bring to the forefront of cultural consciousness this paradoxical ideology: each marriage partner is recognized as equal to the other, and they share in all things, yet one rules and the other obeys" (131). Mallette makes the important point that the sequence's progression from what I call mutual yielding to Britomart's one-sided yielding mirrors this larger paradox within the marriage discourse.

subsequent friendship and brotherhood) is founded on and also generates close similarity, if not equality, of honor and merit. Gaveston's low birth (the main verbalized complaint of the play's rebel noblemen) and the hints (including in his introductory scene) that he expects prestige and material gain from his connection to the king open up the possibility that this friendship is not as conventional as it seems (190-1). Bray argues that the charge of sodomy carried connotations not merely of sexual misconduct but of political and religious rebellion, making it an "anarchic crime" (186) in opposition to the stabilizing functions of masculine friendship. Marlowe thus allows this threat of anarchy (sexual, political, religious) to haunt his play and motivate the barons' rebellion even as he avoids giving us enough details to evaluate exactly how conventional the characters' friendship and (historically attested [27-8]) sworn brotherhood really is.

Language of yielding—sometimes mutual, sometimes not—between Edward and Gaveston contributes to this troubling confusion. Edward, of course, begins the play in the nominal position of liege lord over the other characters, and thus Gaveston yields to him in the sense of doing him homage. "My knee shall bow to none but to the king," he declares in his opening soliloquy (1.20), expressing not only his arrogant determination to despise other nobles who outrank him but also, straightforwardly, his expectation of honoring his feudal loyalty to Edward. Gaveston and Edward are both eager to identify Gaveston's role at court as that of a cherished, high-ranking vassal; Edward showers him with titles in an attempt to solidify this framing (1.153-5). Mortimer and his fellow rebellious nobles, enraged by Gaveston's sudden rise, offer a contrary framing. While not denying Gaveston's homage, they attempt to identify Gaveston not as a vassal, but as a "slave" (2.25, 9.19). The two roles—honorable vassal, dishonorable slave—thus again reveal their threatening proximity in this linguistic war over Gaveston's status. Warwick and Mortimer, respectively, identify Gaveston as the king's "ignoble vassal" (4.16) and "abject villain" (punning on "villien," again calling up feudal associations), echoing Mortimer's initial label of Gaveston as a "slave." Everyone concurs that Gaveston is the

king's yielded servant. The question is whether his service is of the honorable or dishonorable variety. At stake is the extent to which Edward and Gaveston are similar enough in rank, honor, and merit to possess a conventional friendship.

Marlowe never particularly resolves this conundrum unless Gaveston's manner of death can be called a final verdict on his honorable status (rather than a mere inconsistency regarding historical facts of execution). After Mortimer promises him either the common, lowly fate of hanging or the more noble fate of beheading (9.19-24), Warwick decrees he will be beheaded (26-8). Gaveston himself concludes, however, "That heading is one, and hanging the other / And death is all," (30-1), seeming to negate the difference and leave his status ambiguous to the last. He has yielded himself to Edward's service, but the exact nature of that yielding remains debatable.

Gaveston imagines Edward as also having yielded to him, which would make their relationship one of mutual submission. In the play's first scene, after dismissing a trio of men who wish to do him "service" (a moment in which Gaveston disdains all feudal relationships except his own with Edward), Gaveston imagines that he will soon fill Edward's court with "Musicians that with touching of a string / May draw the pliant king which way I please" (1.50-2). Musical strings become a bridle or leash that Edward wears while Gaveston leads him. Upon rejoining Edward in England, Gaveston revisits the conceit, stating that the king's affection for him causes him to "think myself as great / As Caesar riding in the Roman street / With captive kings at his triumphant car" (1.171-3). The two figures offer an image of Gaveston—as Caesar, as kinglike—leading Edward as his captive.⁶⁶

The combination of Gaveston's feudal yielding with Edward's metaphorical captivity suggests that a relationship of mutual yielding may exist. This suggestion is supported by

⁶⁶ Edward abruptly changes the subject after this line of Gaveston's, offering a provocative lack of response to such an ominous, arguably treasonous simile: the moment could teasing, threatening, or something else entirely. Gaveston's line could even be delivered as a sly aside, unheard by the king.

Edward's descriptions of the friendship, which emphasize sharing, exchange, and similarity (if not outright sameness) between the two men. The play's first words, though spoken by Gaveston, are Edward's, in a letter he has sent, meaning that the play opens with the doubled voices of both men speaking at once: "My father is deceased; come, Gaveston, / And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend" (1.1-2). Edward presents himself as, first, only recently freed from his own feudal submission to his father's rule, and second, as co-ruler of England with Gaveston. The ostensible king does not claim solitary kingship, and perhaps never has; he elevates Gaveston to full equality immediately. Once Gaveston arrives at court, he attempts a gesture of feudal loyalty that Edward rejects firmly:

Kiss not my hand;

Embrace me, Gaveston, as I do thee.

Why shouldst thou kneel? Knowest thou not who I am?

Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston. (1.139-42)

The similarity of this embrace to the embraces of mutually yielded knights in Malory is evident, and Edward's declaration that he and Gaveston are the same person cements the idea that the two mutually share one self-narrative (and, like Spenser's knightly friends, one soul). Edward speaks of Gaveston this way throughout the remainder of Gaveston's life, suggesting that Gaveston's arrest is an assault on him, too (4.35), and later commenting "They love me not that hate my Gaveston" (6.37).

Edward's vision of perfect mutuality, however, repeatedly collides with consensus reality in the rest of the playworld. His unique status as king disrupts the idea that anyone could truly be equal to him—or that his yielding to anyone could ever be appropriate—despite his attempts to offer Gaveston full access to his kingly guard, treasure, seal, and name (1.165-9). Even Gaveston, facing arrest, can only advise Edward and lament his own lack of royal status ("Were I a king—" he begins, before Mortimer cuts him off with yet another denigration of his low birth) (4.26-9). Mutual yielding fails to work its complete, Cambina-esque magic in this case.

Worse, after Gaveston's execution, as the king adopts Spencer into a Gaveston-like intimacy and civil war breaks out, the language of shared selves reappears to describe that war: "kin and countrymen," laments Isabella, "[s]laughter themselves in others, and their sides / With their own weapons gored" (17.7-8); Isabella also calls Mortimer "the life of Isabel" (22.15) when she essentially gives her permission for Edward's murder. Mutuality, a sense of shared selves, is now associated with civil war (the suicide of the body politic) and regicide: the violence that marks a collapse of stable society. The failure of Edward's friendship with his other self is mirrored in his country's suffering.

The language of shared selves appears one final time in the play's closing moments as the young, newly crowned Edward III accuses Mortimer of murdering Edward II, declaring, "Traitor, in me my loving father speaks / And plainly saith 'twas thou that murdered'st him" (26.41-2). The image of father and son speaking with one voice echoes the doubled voice that begins the play (Gaveston reading Edward's letter) even as it highlights how much more easily this version of mutuality—founded in kinship and equality of rank, perfectly accounted for by societal convention—can be achieved. This traditionally appropriate understanding of shared selves promises a restoration of normalcy in the kingdom even as it poignantly recalls Edward's and Gaveston's friendship.

Edward and Gaveston's is thus a problematic mutual yielding, a stretching of the convention past what it can reasonably bear. Gaveston's yielding to Edward—in the form of traditional homage—is muddled by the other characters' insistent confusion over Gaveston's degree of honor (is he a noble vassal, a slave, or, as Edward would have it, an equal?). Increasing the confusion, Gaveston attempts to define himself both as Edward's yielding vassal *and* as Caesar leading his yielding prisoner Edward in triumph. Edward, correspondingly, attempts to level the differences of status that separate them by elevating Gaveston socially while re-naming himself "another Gaveston." Ultimately, however, this relationship remains an unequal yielding between unequal partners, and it fails. Gaveston's status is perpetually murky, and Edward's

unwillingness—from the play’s opening lines—to assert the dominating self-narrative of a solitary, unyielding king leads to the series of crises in leadership and political order that drive the tragedy.⁶⁷

Dishonorable Yielding: The Pattern

Yielding becomes dishonorable when it is motivated primarily by fear, especially fear of death. To an extent, the dishonor can be relative: fairly mild if the captor chooses not to impose shameful consequences, fairly severe if important commitments and values are betrayed in the process, and so forth. Malory often applies the label “recreant” to those who yield shamefully, out of fear. That word, usually defined as “coward” or similar, hints etymologically at a degree of shaky, flexible belief that suits the characters whom Malory labels in this way. “Recreant” doesn’t suggest someone who holds to the wrong ideals (a *miscreant*) but rather someone who re-believes, re-thinks, revises, even re-creates himself—someone, in my terms, who abandons his self-narrative—too easily or for the wrong reasons.

Some of the best examples of Malory’s equation of dishonorable yielding with recreancy are negative, in the sense that the knight in question is vowing *not* to surrender in such a way. These examples tend to occur in the context of trials by combat, battles in which each knight’s behavior and choices directly represent a particular and high-stakes point-of-view. Indeed, the logic of the trial by combat depends upon the yield-or-die discourse’s ability to characterize participants as not only winners and losers, but also as heroes (ethically right and good) and recreants (ethically wrong and villainous). For example, Trystram initiates his knightly adventures with the single combat against Sir Marhalt to defend Cornwall from Ireland; just before this formal battle begins, Trystram orders his servant to tell King Mark that “I woll never be yoldyn for cowardyse. . . . And yf so be that I fle other yelde me as recreaunte, bydde mye eme

⁶⁷ As I discuss in detail in chapter 4, Edward’s behavior over the course of the play increasingly becomes, in terms of the yield-or-die discourse, illegible.

bury me never in Crystyn buryellys” (235). The equation between fearful yielding, abandonment of a key principle (Trystram’s support of Cornwall’s rights), and recreancy is clear here.

Trystram’s suggestion that he be deprived of Christian burial if he yields dishonorably is both a rhetorical flourish emphasizing his confidence and also a suggestion of the radical loss of self-narrative dishonorable surrender would cause him. The Christian aspects of his identity (presumably spanning intimate details of baptismal naming, public participation in mainstream culture, and even ethical connotations of goodness) would be lost along with his freedom and commitment to Cornwall.

Recreancy comes up in another trial by combat when Trystram fights to defend King Anguish from a murder charge brought by Blamoure de Ganys and his brother Bleoberys.⁶⁸ Trystram, assured that Anguish is in the right (and probably biased, because Anguish is La Beale Isode’s father), vows to the king that “I shall dye in your quarell rathir than be recreaunte” (253). On the other side of the field, Blamoure swears to his brother that “shall I never yelde me nother sey the lothe worde: . . . rather shall he sle me than I shall yelde me recreaunte” (254). The knights are swearing that they will never consent to revision of the belief they have chosen to support—especially out of fear of death. They will not allow this combat to characterize them poorly.

Trystram wins the physical battle decisively, but Blamoure holds to his vow, telling Trystram to “sle me, other ellys thou shalt never wynne the fylde, for I woll never sey the lothe worde.” Trystram, impressed by this “knyghtly” attitude, asks Anguish and the combat’s judges to show “mercy” to Blamoure. Bleoberys chimes in by noting that, although Trystram has beaten Blamoure bodily, Trystram “hath nat beatyn his harte”: Blamoure will die rather than change his belief. This point is a crucial one that I will return to in detail in my discussion of captive

⁶⁸ Blamoure de Ganys is presumably not the “Blamoure of the Maryse” who earlier yielded “for feare of dethe” to Gawayne after Gawayne killed his lady (68). Even if he is, no evidence suggests that he carries the taint of that dishonorable yielding into this scene, which makes sense given that Malory’s “Hoole Book” rarely depicts unified character arcs, especially for minor characters (697).

resistance: mere physical defeat or confinement is *not* the same thing as yielding, which requires (to use Bleoberys's term) the heart's consent. This conflict ends without yielding and especially without recreancy, as Anguish agrees to show Blamoure "mercy." In essence, he and the brothers retain their opposing self-narratives, but also choose to be reconciled.

The word "recreaunte" is prominent in Arthur and Accolon's early battle, as well, as Accolon demands that Arthur "yelde the to me recreaunte" (Arthur refuses) (88) and then, when the tables turn and Arthur has Accolon at sword's point, Accolon himself vows "never to be recreaunte" and refuses to yield. Like Anguish and Blamoure, the two men end up reconciling through Arthur's "mercy" (90) without either yielding. "Mercy" operates rather like theological grace in these scenes, bypassing justice and transcending the necessity for a legal resolution to the original conflict. The combat has characterized both participants as honorable, after all, which perhaps allows the facts of the case to be overshadowed by the participants' acknowledgement of each other's broader virtue. Pragmatically, too, mercy allows for the incorporation of diverse points of view into Arthur's court. Such "mercy" is also a useful narrative tactic for bringing closure to a fight that otherwise could not end.

Launcelot's trial by combat with Mellyagaunce over Gwenyvere's suspiciously bloody bed illustrates an outcome in which the man physically defeated *is* willing to renounce his own self-narrative and adopt the victor's.⁶⁹ Mellyagaunce, losing the battle, begs Launcelot to "take me as yolden and recreaunte" (638). The word "recreaunte" thus has a particular pattern of appearance in representations of these trials by combat, emphasizing its connotation not only of cowardice, but of the specific act of betraying a formal commitment to a certain narrative.

⁶⁹ I circle back to Malory's captivity-rich version of the Knight of the Cart story for various reasons throughout this dissertation, so a brief reminder of the episode's plot may be in order: Sir Mellyagaunce abducts Gwenyvere and her retinue of knights; Launcelot comes to the Queen's rescue and secretly sleeps with her; Mellyagaunce accuses Gwenyvere of committing adultery with a member of her retinue (but not with Launcelot); Launcelot vows to defend Gwenyvere in a trial by combat; Mellyagaunce fearfully imprisons Launcelot in hopes of avoiding that fight; Launcelot escapes and defends Gwenyvere by killing Mellyagaunce (625-38).

Outside of trials by combat, the betrayal of more personal—rather than legal or political—commitments can be cause for recreancy. Gareth tells the scornful Lyonet that “I have undirtake to Kynge Arthure for to encheve your adventure; and so shall I fynyssh hit to the ende—other ellys I shall dye therefore” (183)—this is language of a formal commitment, much like Trystram’s and Blamoure’s before their conflict. Later, Gareth challenges Lyonet to “rebuke me no more; and whan you se me betyn or yoldyn as recreaunte, than may you bydde me go from you shamfully. But erste, I let you wete, I woll nat departe from you” (190). Sir Bromell, a rival for Elaine of Corbin’s love, makes a “promyse” before Elaine to hold the bridge into Corbin for a year and a day “for Sir Launcelot sake,” then promptly jousts with Sir Bors over the bridge, loses, and yields to save his life. Bors requires him to report to Sir Launcelot at court “and yelde the unto hym as a knyght recreante” (466-7). Bromell’s consent to this plan seals his status as not merely yielded, a prisoner, but also as recreant; to save his life, he must adopt a goal of his captor’s that is opposed to the promise he so recently made.

Recreancy, with its suggestion of too-easy personal revision, can in fact become a tool of resistance, a method of slipping out of a captor’s grasp rather than a result of true dishonorable yielding. For example, I argue in chapter 3 that King Mark’s style of recreancy is resistant: he “yields” rather than yields, falsely claiming to surrender while actually having no intent or expectation of serving his captor. For now, note that Mellyagaunce’s trial by combat with Launcelot does not actually come to an end with Mellyagaunce’s offer to yield to Launcelot as recreant. Launcelot, secretly wanting to “be revenged upon hym,” instead offers to continue the fight weaponless and with a bound arm; Mellyagaunce leaps up eagerly to accept these new terms. Launcelot promptly kills him, so Mellyagaunce’s renewed resistance is token at best, but the fact remains that his resistance *is renewed*, an unusual occurrence that reflects the slippery power of recreancy. Remove the source of fear and the recreant’s seemingly characterizing choice can be reversed. Mellyagaunce thus dies unyielded, fighting to prove Gwenyvere’s guilt. Gwenyvere is still exonerated by Launcelot’s victory (and Mellyagaunce is still shamed by

accepting such uneven terms for battle), but the outcome is nonetheless muddier than the queen's straightforward exoneration in the earlier trial over the poisoning of Sir Patryse (in which Sir Mador, defeated by Launcelot, yields completely to the narrative Launcelot represents, even endorsing the literal inscribing of that narrative as historical truth on Patryse's tomb) (596-7). Malory's connection of recreancy with dishonorable yielding offers a hint that the slavish devotion the yield-or-die discourse expects from shamefully yielded captives is unrealistic. The nature of a re-believer is inherently more flexible than that. Even without any permanent dishonorable yielding by Mellyagaunce, of course, this trial by combat still works most of its characterizing magic on characters and readers alike—Malory treats Launcelot's victory as re-establishing the lines between heroes, virtuous queens, and villains after the confusions of Gwenyvere's abduction.

Spenser parodies dishonorable yielding—and thus highlights its paradigmatic qualities through comic exaggeration—when Trompart yields to Braggadochio in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*.⁷⁰ Braggadochio, newly puffed-up after stealing Guyon's warhorse, enacts a mockery of combat by galloping fiercely up to the lounging Trompart. Trompart, terrified by this sudden arrival, “fell flatt to ground for feare . . . crying Mercy loud” (II.iii.6.8-9). In reply, Braggadochio bellows a fantastically embellished yield-or-die demand:

Vile Caytiue, vassall of dread and despayre,
Vnworthie of the commune breathed ayre,
Why liuest thou, dead dog, a lenger day,
And doest not vnto death thy selfe prepayre.
Dy, or thy selfe my captiue yield for ay;

⁷⁰ In addition to this parody, Spenser's characters also speak more straightforwardly of the evils of dishonorable yielding. “Dye rather,” Artegall lectures Burbon, “then doe ought, that mote dishonour yield” (V.xi.55.9), and Calidore expands the point in the oath he requires of Tristram when Tristram becomes his squire. Echoing Malory's Round Table oath (77), Tristram must swear “Faith to his knight, and truth to Ladies all, / And neuer to be recreant, for feare / Of perill, or of ought that might befall” (VI.ii.35.1-4).

Great fauour I thee graunt, for aunswere thus to stay. (7.4-9)

Thus asked the characterizing question, Trompart immediately declares himself “your humble thrall” (8.2). Braggadochio orders him to “prostrated fall, / And kisse my stirrup; that thy homage bee,” whereupon Trompart casts himself “as an Offall, / Streight at his foot in base humilitee, / And cleeped him his liege, to hold of him in fee” (8.5-9). Being, respectively, a braggart and a flatterer, Braggadochio and Trompart attempt to flavor the exchange with the honorable language of an aristocratic feudal relationship (Trompart is a “vassall” who performs “homage” to his “liege”). Spenser, however, undermines this high tone by describing Trompart as “Offall” and “base,” while, even before Trompart yields, Braggadochio calls him a “vassall of dread and despayre,” implying that Trompart possesses the slave’s characteristic of *being slavish* (the kind of fearful person who always yields). Trompart confirms that implication by yielding to avoid death. The scene works as a parody not only because of its hyperbolic tone but because the characters use the *language* of honorable yielding to describe the *action* of dishonorable yielding. The structure of this parody also suggests—once more—the dangerous proximity of vassalage to slavery.

More than any other texts I examine, Marlowe’s plays depict dishonorably yielded characters at length and in detail. One particularly well-developed example is Ithamore, the slave Barabas purchases in *The Jew of Malta*. Much analysis has rightly asserted that Ithamore represents only the most obvious of the many ways humans commodify each other in this play, but, in my discussion, I wish to focus less on his status as a commodity and more on his status as a dishonorably yielded supporter of Barabas’s self-narrative.⁷¹

⁷¹ David H. Thurn provides a good introduction to many of these commodifications in his “Economic and Ideological Exchange in Marlowe’s ‘Jew of Malta.’” He argues that the play’s practice of “reducing everything to a single financial and semiotic currency” allows even the revenge genre itself to connote economics and exchange. Barabas’s “power over commercial exchange mirrors his power over dramatic exchange, a consequence of Marlowe’s explicit rendering of the play’s action in terms of the marketplace” (165)—but ultimately that power slips because Barabas cannot keep his subversively massive surplus of either wealth or vengeance completely under his personal control.

Ithamore's entry into captivity happens offstage, before the action of the play begins: he is a survivor of a Mediterranean sea battle (2.2.9-18). Although the ship he was aboard seems to have been a Turkish galley ship, presumably rowed by slaves, Ithamore does not seem to have been one of their number before his capture; he asserts that he previously spent his time "binding galley-slaves" (2.3.207), suggesting that he was a slaver, not a slave. This last detail may not be true—Ithamore's self-description is, as we will see, suspect—but slave or slaver, Ithamore was certainly captured in a sea battle and is, thus, a prisoner who ostensibly chose captivity rather than death. By the harsh yield-or-die logic, and in the absence of mitigating information, that so-called choice means that he has yielded dishonorably to his captors.⁷²

That Ithamore has already yielded off-stage (rather than resolved to resist) is also clear because he possesses a yielded prisoner's narrative blankness when Barabas purchases him. He tells Barabas that "my birth is but mean, my name's Ithamore, my profession what you please" (2.3.168-69), with that word "profession" sliding ambiguously between its various connotations of professional trade, religious faith, and even speech itself. His skin is a slate upon which his owners write for their own ends (first his price [4], then an ownership brand [134]). Barabas reinforces this blankness by advising Ithamore to "be thou void" of all emotion except glee "when the Christians moan" (172-75). An interesting change, however, comes over Ithamore after Barabas professes his own activities in the infamous speech detailing his stereotypically Jewish evils. Ithamore immediately replies with a speech of his own, claiming not only to be a slaver but to have inflicted various other evils upon Christians, also (205-15). This exchange

⁷² Ithamore's fate reminds us that capture at sea in the Mediterranean was a real concern at the time Marlowe was writing this play (see the work of Clisshold, Colley, Weiss, and Vitkus). It closely resembles the narrative of John Fox that I quoted at length early in this chapter: recall that Fox, also captured in a sea battle and subsequently enslaved, goes to great lengths to stress his and his shipmates' courage and unwillingness to be taken alive. Presumably, Fox's insistence on his honorable behavior is meant to distance him from any association with a character like Ithamore, whose capture confirms his slavish nature. Again, as Fox's story shows, the yield-or-die discourse imposes cruelly illegitimate judgments onto survivors who don't deserve to be characterized by what they have endured.

lends itself to a range of interpretations—is Ithamore telling the truth? lying to win Barabas’s favor? even parodying the grotesquely stereotypical words of his new master? For my purposes, what matters is that the yielded Ithamore becomes an echo of the captor he now serves. Enslaved, Ithamore loses his own self-narrative (his “profession”?) and becomes absorbed into Barabas’s.

As the play progresses, Ithamore’s absorption becomes so complete that Barabas calls him “my love . . . thy master’s life, / My trusty servant, nay, my second self,” that last term, again, highlighting Ithamore’s lack of individual identity (3.4.14-15). This language recalls Edward’s similar description of his own identity relative to Gaveston: “Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston” (*Edward II* 1.142). Both speeches are about relationships that involve some style of yielding. While Edward describes himself as “another Gaveston,” implying that *he* has joined *Gaveston’s* self-narrative, Barabas describes Ithamore as “my second self,” implying that Ithamore has joined *his*. Edward’s declaration thus seems more radical: the king declares that he yields to a man of lower class (after that man has also yielded to him). Barabas, by contrast, declares that a man of lower class belongs to him. Barabas’s assertion is simply an extreme declaration of a typical, post-yielding captor-captive bond, in which the vassal or slave has joined his master’s narrative to the extent of vanishing within it, renamed and re-narrated by the master to whom he has yielded. Recall that feudal or slavish bonds sometimes borrowed the language of familial ties, with vassals treated as “boys” or sons and slaves calling masters “father” and taking on the family’s name. Barabas’s language to Ithamore participates in this tradition. Without taking away from the fact that his words are provocatively extreme, and, in their similarity to Edward’s, potentially suggest friendly (in Bray’s sense of the term) or homoerotic overtones, Barabas’s shared-self language remains more conventional than Edward’s.

Additionally, while Edward underlines his commitment by giving Gaveston the royal seal and all the authority that goes with it (1.167-9), Barabas is careful never to elevate Ithamore by giving him similar tools of real power. Although he declares Ithamore his heir and offers him

money and the household keys, he then hesitates and returns to giving orders, thus hinting that his promises may be empty: “Here, take my keys. I’ll give ’em thee anon. . . . But first go fetch me in the pot of rice . . .” (3.4.42-50). Presumably, onstage, Barabas offers the keys and then snatches them back, revoking the grant. His other promises are, similarly, not fulfilled. Barabas soon comments wryly about his slave that “Thus every villain ambles after wealth, / Although he ne’er be richer than in hope” (3.4.53-4), and Ithamore continues to identify Barabas as “master” (3.4.51, 55, etc.). Both men seem conscious of the fact that Barabas’s declarations have made little practical change to their relationship. The language of trust and adoption has little to do with elevating Ithamore and more to do with confirming Barabas’s conception of his slave as a convenient extension of himself.

Ithamore’s rebellion against Barabas at the instigation of Bellamira arguably points to a self-narrative that has been repressed, not destroyed, but because his obedience to Bellamira is so immediate, to the point that she and Pilia-Borza literally dictate (narrate) his words of blackmail to Barabas, he seems less to have rediscovered his own identity and more to have attached himself to a new captor’s self-narrative (4.2.69-81). Having given up his selfhood in his initial yielding, Ithamore is now, at best, a parasite seeking a new host-identity.⁷³ In the end, Barabas poisons Ithamore for this betrayal and uses the slave’s death as cover for his own faked death and escape from the Maltese prison (5.1); even Ithamore’s death is thus an inferior reflection of and support for Barabas’s more significant self-narrative.

Dishonorable Yielding: Syncopations

In endeavoring to describe paradigmatic examples of dishonorable yielding, I have already illuminated a few examples of syncopation, as well: the instability of recreancy, the ways

⁷³ Orlando Patterson would object to my figurative language; he argues persuasively for the re-definition of *masters* as parasites (334-37).

enslavement can occasionally sound affectionate and even mutual. As with honorable yielding, the major syncopation Malory's text explores is the collision of pragmatic concerns with the idealized requirements of the yield-or-die system. Spenser's text, too, is fascinated by this collision, but also continues to examine how gender and sexuality disrupt the discourse's patterns. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays invoke similar syncopations even as they also test the discourse's outer limits.

Most of the incidents of yielding in Malory's text are probably dishonorable in a technical sense: they occur at the end of a fight, when the loser yields to avoid death. As I have already discussed, a "wyse knyght" can convert such yielding into an honorable or even meaningless event by carefully stressing the rationality of his choice. More commonly, however, an opponent yields dishonorably to one of Malory's major characters—Launcelot, for example—and is briskly dispatched to court to tell his story and join the Round Table. The text isn't particularly concerned that the Round Table might thus be filled with slavish or recreant knights; such captives perform a minimal function of supporting their captor's self-narrative and then merge into more general support of Arthur's rule. For example, Balyn and Balan force King Royns to yield to avoid death (they "wolde have slayne hym, had he nat yelded hym unto hir grace") and hand him over to Arthur, who asks Royns "Who wanne you?"—an objectifying question that elicits, from Royns and Merlin, a summary of Balyn and Balan's greatness (49). Royns serves Arthur for the rest of the text. Marhoute defeats and orders a recalcitrant duke to "yelde hym, other he wolde sle hym," causing the duke, when he understands that "he myght nat ascape the deth," to yield with his sons and report to Arthur's court (108). An entire collection of Launcelot's conquests arrives at court at Pentecost, where their combined stories serve to conclude Launcelot's first major section of the narrative with a resounding reinforcement of his identity: "And so at that tyme Sir Launcelot had the grettyste name of ony knyght of the worlde, and moste he was honoured of hyghe and lowe" (176-7).

Gareth defeats a string of colorful knights on his quest with Lynet; these prisoners kneel and perform “homage” to Gareth (187), becoming his feudal servants, but Gareth is careful to specify that they must also “yelde you unto Kynge Arthure, and all your knyghtes, if that I so commaunde you” (188), thus emphasizing that Arthur, as his lord, is also essentially theirs. (I have quoted here from the example of the Grene Knyght, but the first Rede Knight [189-90], Sir Persaunte [193], and the Rede Knyght of the Rede Laundys [200-1] all follow the same pattern with much the same language.) Pragmatism matters most. Within the story’s world, especially at these early stages, these incidents provide Arthur’s Table with much-needed members, and formally, these plot devices establish the relative prowess of the various characters.

Gareth also gives the yield-or-die discourse an interestingly vicious (though not unprovoked) twist. After “the Grene Knyght cryed hym mercy, and yelded hym . . . and prayde hym nat to sle hym,” Gareth essentially forces Lynet to answer the yield-or-die demand on the knight’s behalf. He behaves “lyk as he wolde sle” the prisoner—regardless of the prisoner’s yielding—unless Lynet pleads for the man’s life. Gareth claims that he does this out of the duty he owes Lynet (“for I woll nat make hir wroth, for I woll fulfyllle all that she charyth me” [187]), but Lynet recognizes that Gareth is actually forcing her into the disempowering position of, in a sense, yielding to him herself by begging for the knight’s life: “I woll never pray the to save his lyff,” she insists, “for I woll nat be so mucche in thy daunger.” She knows that Gareth is the captor in this situation, and anyone who asks him for leniency is acknowledging his power. In the end, Lynet does beg for the knight’s life. Gareth then forces her to repeat the performance with every additional knight he defeats, with Lynet making her request more promptly each time (see, for example, 190 and 193). Gareth’s actions may be cloaked in courtesy, but they also constitute a process of humbling the prideful Lynet, repeatedly requiring her to yield by proxy for a series of dishonorably defeated knights.

Gareth’s defeated knights, meanwhile, quickly have their dishonor veiled beneath the honorable language of feudal vassalage—“homage” (187) and “feawté” (190)— that helps

accomplish the elevation from enslavement to vassalage, diluting the fact of their fear of death and need of protection beneath their participation in these rituals. Gareth's willingness to use this language and incorporate these men into his own and Arthur's service provides the crucial ratification that makes this elevation stick. Under the terms of the system, he would not have to (as we will see, Tamburlaine doesn't), but pragmatically both Gareth and the Round Table need vassals more than they need slaves. Dishonorable yielding thus does not preclude the collection of vassals for service to Arthur's ideals; indeed, it is frequently a pragmatic tool to strengthen and enforce those ideals (as Gareth uses it both to humble the prideful and incorporate outsiders).

The vast subject of ransoming prisoners in war is also rooted in a pragmatic need to control and make use of people who yield—technically dishonorably—on the battlefield. As I have already discussed, during the Roman war Arthur and his knights debate the honor of yielding when overwhelmed in battle, suggesting that the yield-or-die discourse must sometimes accommodate itself to the chaos, inevitable danger, and relentless pragmatic requirements of warfare. Many otherwise honorable men will likely yield to save their lives in the press of battle, and in Malory, ransom surprisingly works to mitigate the dishonor of that choice much as the language of vassalage does for Gareth's prisoners.

At its foundation, the choice is still a dishonorable one. The battlefield prisoner not only yields to avoid death but also gives his body to his captor as a commodity to be bought and sold—that is, he becomes someone not unlike a slave. In this way, ransom remains another submerged link back to the threat of slavery that lurks beneath all yielding. In Malory's text, however, ransom only happens to noble characters and no suggestion is made that it resembles enslavement. Indeed, in the Roman episode, an ethics of ransom emerges that works to endorse the honor and virtue of gentlemen held for money despite the dishonorable origins of their captivity. As Arthur and his knights engage in mass battles against Rome's knights and Saracen allies, they engage the question of ransom and establish principles that guide their actions: first,

greedily seeking rich-looking men to capture for ransom in the midst of battle—instead of focusing on defeating the king's enemies—is "nat knyghtly" (131) (though it does sometimes happen, Malory comments in an authorial aside, blaming it upon "envy" and hypocrisy [137]—indeed, ransom was a key economical motive and means for warfare historically).⁷⁴ Second, killing a *worthy* prisoner who has successfully yielded is shameful (129), but no prisoner's offer to yield should be accepted if that prisoner is *unworthy*. At the war's end, Arthur bans his men from accepting any additional Roman or Saracen prisoners "for golde nothir for sylver" because non-Christians and the Christians who stoop to cooperate with them are shameful and thus "the man that wolde save them were lytyll to prayse" (137-8). Arthur's concern in making these rules seems to be preserving the honor of his men, the captors, lest they be shamed by prioritizing their greed. The rules, however, also suggest that, at least in principle, any prisoner taken for ransom by Arthur's knights has some recognizable honor or worth apart from the wealth he represents. He may be surrendering in a technically dishonorable way, but simultaneously the Round Table knight accepting his surrender is conferring on him a perverse stamp of approval.⁷⁵

Ransom creates a fundamentally temporary bond of obligation between captive and captor. The captive renders money, rather than loyalty and service, in exchange for protection from death, and this support from captive to captor ends when the money is paid. Historically, of course, prisoners could be held for decades awaiting ransom payments, but the temporary nature of the captivity is nonetheless important. In the yield-or-die discourse, yielding is permanent, and the shame of dishonorable yielding is therefore permanent. Ransom introduces a syncopation into the system, a way for characters to evade these permanent consequences,

⁷⁴ David Wallace's description of Chaucer's own experience of capture and ransom in *Chaucerian Polity* is a useful illustration of the collision between the ideal (an honorable lord-vassal-style relationship between captor and captive) and the pragmatic (contractual and economic considerations) that the ransom experience entailed (35-6).

⁷⁵ King Mark, predictably, is less interested in ideals than Arthur and more focused on the economic use of prisoners' ransoms to rebuild after a war: "Kynge Marke toke of hem many presoners to redresse the harmys and the scathis, and the remenaunte he sente into her contrey to borow oute their felowys" (377-8).

based in the understanding that battlefield yielding is too common and justifiable to be profoundly dishonorable. This pragmatic understanding goes beyond Malory's *Morte*. As Maurice Keen observes, it intersects with the legal discourse surrounding ransom as well. Ransom agreements could be held invalid if captors sought to instill fear and suffering in their captives after leaving the battlefield. Keen comments:

At first sight [this standard] would seem a problematical one; the imminent fear of death was, after all, what induced a man to give his faith as a prisoner.

Bartholomew of Saliceto resolves this difficulty. Fear, he says, is the natural condition of the battlefield, and so it is a natural and lawful condition of all contracts to pay ransom. Off the field, however, fear is an unnatural condition, and a contract made in fear is then involuntary, and so invalid. (180-1)

The naturalness of fear on the battlefield necessitates ways to mitigate the permanent dishonor that yielding in fear would normally create.

As in Malory, the most common variation on dishonorable yielding in *The Faerie Queene* is the situation in which a character yields to save his life but, because he yields to a more honorable man, he actually improves his honor even as his self-narrative vanishes. In Malory, this process gains Arthur more vassals; in Spenser, this process allows virtuous captors to show the power and worth of their self-narratives. Many of the best examples of this merely technical dishonorable yielding appear in Book VI, perhaps hinting at their dependence on that book's virtue of courtesy. After all, such yielding depends utterly on the victor's courtesy to spare the prisoner overt dishonor; the prisoner has, by yielding, forfeited his power to narrate and also, by yielding out of fear of death, committed himself to the dubious care of a captor who may or may not be worthy of respect and who may or may not grant him respect. For example, when Calidore battles Crudor early in Book VI, he quickly gains the upper hand, forcing Crudor to "stoupe to ground with meeke humilitie" (i.38.9) and then pressing his advantage until he has unlaced Crudor's helm and is prepared to deliver the death-blow. Crudor, "seeing, in what

daunger he was plast, / Cryde out, Ah mercie Sir, doe me not slay, / But saue my life, which lot before your foot doth lay.” (i.39.7-9)—he yields out of “dread of death” (43.2). Calidore somewhat reluctantly accepts the surrender on the condition that Crudor promise to observe the chivalric code respectfully in the future (by ending his castle’s disrespectful customs, dealing nobly with knights, defending ladies, and so forth). Essentially, Calidore both shows courtesy to Crudor and imposes courteous behavior upon him. Crudor seals this commitment by becoming Calidore’s vassal, offering his “faithfull oth” and “true fealtie” (44.1-4). The entire transaction exemplifies the process in which a combatant yields in a technically dishonorable way, but gains honor afterward by joining his captor’s narrative.

Yielding’s implication of sexual availability raises the difficulty of depicting any woman’s technically dishonorable yielding ending in greater honor. The cultural anxiety that she may have lost her chastity in the exchange tends to be omnipresent. That said, after Calidore literally defeats Crudor, he defeats Crudor’s lady Briana in metaphorical combat as well: she is “ouercome” when “his exceeding courtesie . . . pearst / Her stubborne heart with inward deepe effect” (VI.i.45.2-4). She throws herself at Calidore’s feet and “Her selfe acknowledg’d bound for that accord / By which he had to her both life and loue restord” (45.8-9), committing herself to the same terms of surrender that have saved Crudor. One stanza later, Spenser clarifies that she is “bound to him [Calidore] for euermore” (46.8). Very arguably, Briana’s yielding is actually *honorable*. Her life is not technically in danger, and her yielding is inspired by Calidore’s courtesy. The metaphorical piercing of her heart that “ouercome[s]” her and the fact that Crudor yielded dishonorably, however, edge her actions toward the more fearful variety of surrender. The ambiguity is not hugely important, however, because, by joining Calidore’s honorable and courteous narrative, Briana becomes more honorable and courteous herself, “wondrously now chaung’d, from that she was afore” (46.9).

Later in Book VI, Arthur mirrors Calidore’s conversion of a wayward knight and lady with a more extreme one of his own when he encounters the selfish, murderous Turpine and his

somewhat more virtuous lover Blandina. Unlike Crudor, however, Turpine is irredeemable. Turpine's first conflict with Arthur ends in confusion as Turpine's lady Blandina yields to Arthur while Turpine himself is unconscious (VI.vi.30-31). Arthur treats Turpine as an ashamed, yielded character in this scene (33), but crucially, Turpine's own yielding has actually been deferred—a fact I explore in more detail in chapter 4—allowing him to evade Arthur's attempt to control his identity. Instead, Turpine begins contemplating revenge against Arthur, but is too cowardly to carry it out personally, leading to his recruitment of the naïve Enias to do the deed for him. When Arthur confronts him for this crime, Turpine reacts with a silent gesture that amounts to decisive yielding: “the cowheard deaded with affright, / Fell flat to ground, ne word vnto him sayd, / But holding vp his hands, with silence mercie prayd” (vii.25.7-9). Arthur proceeds to emphasize Turpine's now slavish status, placing his foot on Turpine's neck “in signe / Of seruile yoke” before “letting him arise like abject thrall” so that Arthur can call him “recreant” (26.4-8). Perhaps because Turpine seems unable to speak out loud, Arthur forces Turpine's body rather than his voice to signify its new allegiance to Arthur's narrative, first by lying beneath Arthur's foot “in signe” of his slavish nature and, second, by being formally baffled (visibly shamed, usually hung upside-down) as a “picture” and “ensample” of recreancy, a mere narrative tool Arthur's (and Spenser's) story (27.4-5).⁷⁶ This time, Arthur's re-narration of Turpine sticks.

Crudor's and Turpine's surrenders in Book VI are incidents in which a male character's yielding is assisted or supported by his lady. Women are also more directly involved in the captor-prisoner relationship in *The Faerie Queene*. I have already discussed ways in which female characters, such as Amoret, yield honorably, though always with an intimation of sexual availability that may sometimes confuse matters. By contrast, I actually find few examples in *The Faerie Queene* of women yielding dishonorably in the sense I have identified in this study.

⁷⁶ Michael Leslie comments on the historical practice of “baffling and degradation” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (78-9).

We might expect to see dishonorable female characters such as Duessa or Acrasia surrendering out of cowardly fear when they are finally cornered or captured, but they actually tend to resist their captors. They may be bound in chains, but they do not verbally (or silently, like Turpine) surrender. Such a surrender, after all, would imply that they become sexually available to their captors—but if Acrasia becomes *more* sexually available to Guyon upon her capture, Guyon’s honor may be compromised, too. Spenser seems to prefer to present these female characters as bound but defiant, thereby closing down the possibility that they might be a source of temptation to their virtuous captors. Female recreant sexuality (that is, flexible in the “recreant” sense—easily redirected) seems more threateningly infectious than, for instance, Turpine’s recreant cowardice.⁷⁷

That said, *The Faerie Queene* repeatedly depicts men yielding dishonorably to women. And when the roles are reversed in this way, the sexual availability of *male* prisoners becomes visible. Earlier, for example, I discussed Britomart’s adventure at Malecasta’s Castle Ioyeous, in which she defeats several of Malecasta’s knightly followers. Before Britomart disrupts the Castle’s custom, the procedure in place is that any passing knight who lacks a lady must enter Malecasta’s service (or, presumably, die); any passing knight who loves a lady must renounce her in favor of Malecasta or die; and any passing knight who resists this treatment, fights Malecasta’s men, and wins will win Malecasta herself (which is what Britomart does). Malecasta has, in other words, arranged the situation so that she will never be without lovers, even if she hypothetically ends up in the yielding role in the relationship (III.i.24-30).

Malecasta’s existing knights have all, by implication, gone through this process and yielded to her—and, by implication, they have probably yielded dishonorably, either by choosing to serve a “wanton” (41.7) and “fickle” (47.6) lady rather than die, or betraying former lovers and

⁷⁷ Spenser’s Phædrria, in II.vi, does possess this flexible, dangerously infectious sexuality (as does Duessa in I.vii and elsewhere), but not in the context of having yielded dishonorably to one of Spenser’s heroes and thus joined his self-narrative in more intimate identification. In their dangerous states, they tend to appear as potential captors, not captives. Cymochles, for example, “yield[s]” to Phædrria (II.vi.8.5), while Redcrosse and Guyon must work to resist similar fates.

commitments by surrendering to save their own lives. That these knights are dishonorable is further established by Redcrosse's willingness to resist the custom to the death ("death me liefer were, then such despight, / So vnto wrong to yield my wrested right" [24.4-5]), which Britomart wholeheartedly endorses ("For knight to leaue his Lady were great shame, / That faithfull is, and better were to dy" [25.3-4]). In this case, then, male characters yielding dishonorably to Malecasta become sexually available to her.

The giantess Argante offers an even clearer version of this dynamic. As the Squire of Dames tells Satyrane:

. . . ouer all the countrie she did raunge,
To seeke young men, to quench her flaming lust,
And feed her fancy with delightfull chaunge:
Who so she fittest findes to serue her lust,
Through her maine strength, in which she most doth trust,
She with her bringes into a secret Ile,
Where in eternall bondage dye he must,
Or be the vassall of her pleasures vile,
And in all shamefull sort him selfe with her defile. (III.vii.50.1-9)

Crucially, Argante's physical defeat and restraint of her male prisoners is *not* the stated source of their shame. When she captures Satyrane, for example, she knocks him unconscious, then seizes and binds him, disallowing him an opportunity at that point to make the characterizing choice to yield or die (42.6). Her former prisoner the Squire of Dames is, similarly, bound in chains (46.6) but remains determined "[t]hat thousand deathes me leuer were to dye" than yield to her (51.5; whether he would succeed at living up to this proud statement, given his copious interest in women, is doubtful, but he hasn't *yet* chosen to yield). The moment of truth for Argante's prisoners comes after their physical capture, when she offers them the characterizing choice between death "in eternall bondage" or "shamefull" life as her "vassall." Here again is the choice

that creates slaves: the choice of dishonorable life over extinction. And Argante's slaves serve her sexually, making explicit the connection between yielding and sexual availability.⁷⁸ The shame they thus bear is the same that the yield-or-die discourse pushes upon raped women, built on the false premise that being raped rather than killed resisting represents a kind of dishonorable yielding—a dishonorable *choice*.

The enchanter Busirane's dishonorable yielding to Britomart contrasts these other incidents of men surrendering to women. After Britomart “[s]o mightly . . . smote him, that to ground / He fell halfe dead” (III.xii.34.1-2), she offers him the characterizing choice at swordpoint: either obediently use his magic to release and heal Amoret “and liue, els dye undoubtedly.” Busirane elects to “yield him selfe right willing to prolong his date” (35.6-9). He frees and heals Amoret, after which Britomart binds him with the same chain he used on Amoret, “[a]nd captiue with her led to wretchednesse and woe” (41.6-9). This is the last appearance of Busirane in *The Faerie Queene*. While we could, perhaps, interpretively twist Britomart's re-use of Amoret's chain into suggesting a faint hint of Busirane's sexual availability to Britomart (the chain was formerly meant to force Amoret into sexual submission; does it now do the same to him?), the text offers no additional support for this view. Rather, having joined Britomart's narrative by yielding in fear to her, Busirane obeys her, is shamefully bound by her, and then vanishes completely—perhaps the best, if silent, commentary on his (ir)relevance to Britomart's self-narrative of chastity. The power of Britomart's narrative is to extinguish his utterly.

While Malory and Spenser explore pragmatic ways to mitigate the absolute shame of dishonorable surrender—or, especially in Spenser's case, to link that absolute shame with sexualized service to one's captor—Marlowe examines the extremes of the discourse with Ithamore and in his two *Tamburlaine* plays. Tamburlaine has no interest in using homage or

⁷⁸ Argante's behavior echoes that of Malory's Sir Turquine, repeatedly discovered bearing bound and helpless knights across his saddle back to his dungeon where he will strip them naked and beat them with thorns (154-5). Malory does not make Turquine's sadism explicitly sexual, but Spenser arguably adopts the basic image and then highlights the implication of sexual threat within it.

ransom pragmatically to rehabilitate the honor of prisoners who surrender out of fear on the battlefield or while under siege. Once the reason for surrender shifts from respect for Tamburlaine's merit to fear of Tamburlaine's wrath, the results of such surrender will be dire. Consequently, Tamburlaine's military conquests breed slaves. While "millions of souls" (Part 1 5.1.463) in opposing armies are killed by Tamburlaine's forces, their leaders, almost without exception, survive and are dragged into Tamburlaine's presence as prisoners. Technically dishonorable yielding has occurred by implication before each of these scenes: off-stage, during the fight, a moment has come when each of these kings has chosen captivity over death on the field of battle. Tamburlaine's treatment of them accords with the ruthless logic that this choice characterizes these men as shameful and, indeed, slavish.

For example, the Turkish Emperor Bajazeth and his wife both trust that Tamburlaine, having captured them in battle, will offer them freedom in exchange for ransom (a reasonable expectation—if this were the Roman War in the *Morte*). Both ask, and Tamburlaine declines absolutely—"Not all the world shall ransom Bajazeth." Instead, he orders them to be bound; they are now "slaves" (3.3.231-32, 261-71). He tells Bajazeth, shortly after, that "Thy names and titles and thy dignities / Are fled from Bajazeth and remain with me" (4.2.79-80), suggesting that Bajazeth's honor—and, I would argue, his self-narrative—now belong to and support Tamburlaine's identity.⁷⁹ Similarly, after capturing four Turkish kings offstage in a parallel

⁷⁹ Prince Hal invokes a similar idea in *1 Henry IV* when he responds to his father's accusation that Hal's "vassal fear" and [b]ase inclination" will cause him to join (yield to) Hotspur's rebellion (3.2.124-6). In his fiery response, Hal insists that "Percy is but my factor . . . / To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf; / And I will call him to so strict account / That he shall render every glory up, / Yea, even to the slightest worship of his time, / Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart" (147-52). The metaphor is mercantile, but the message underneath is that Hal expects to absorb Hotspur's self-narrative into his own. Embedded in Hal's words is the characterizing choice he expects to offer Hotspur: "render every glory up" (yield), "Or I will tear the reckoning from [your] heart" (or die). Of course, Hotspur's honor allows only the latter, but he seems to agree with Hal that his defeat means Hal "hast won" his "proud titles" (5.4.79). At this point, however, Hal himself abandons that implication, telling Hotspur's body, "take thy praise with thee to heaven!" (99). Although Hal has certainly enhanced his own honor in killing such a powerful and honorable foe, he has *not*, according to the strict terms of the yield-or-die discourse, won Hotspur's self-narrative into service of his own: Hotspur died unyielded.

moment in Part 2, Tamburlaine identifies them as “sheep-like” and “slaves” (4.1.76-77).

Tamburlaine goes on, in both cases, to make spectacular displays of these slaves to further enhance his own fame and, thereby, his own self-narrative. Bajazeth is locked into a cage, serves as Tamburlaine’s footstool, and endures cruel jokes as Tamburlaine tries to force him to eat (Part 1 4.2, 4.4) so that “The ages that shall talk of Tamburlaine, / Even from this day to Plato’s wondrous year, / Shall talk how I have handled Bajazeth” (4.2.95-97). The four Turkish kings, similarly, become the infamous “pampered jades” who, bridled into silence, draw Tamburlaine’s chariot as visible signs of his “name and majesty” (Part 2 4.3, etc.).

All dishonorable yielding has the potential not merely to characterize someone as *shameful* but also to result in public *shaming*. As we have seen, Arthur makes a public display of Turpine in *The Faerie Queene*. Malory’s Launcelot requires most of his prisoners to tell the stories of their capture before Arthur’s court, a humbling experience even if the men can expect to become Round Table vassals thereafter; Launcelot especially requires the lady-murdering and dishonorably yielding Pedyvere to display the evidence of his crime before Gwenyvere, who sends him onward to the Pope in public penance (175-6). Ithamore’s display in the slave market is also in this category. The display of Tamburlaine’s kingly prisoners is an extreme version of this part of the discourse.⁸⁰

Tamburlaine also taunts his captives about their choice to suffer at his hands rather than die, essentially forcing them to re-commit themselves to each new humiliation rather than risk death. He torments his “pampered jades” about their enslavement in this way, telling them:

If you can live with it, then live, and draw

⁸⁰ That same display is also an extreme version of the Roman triumph. Marlowe’s allusions in the *Tamburlaine* plays to the spectacular victory processions of the classical world are so complex and effective that Anthony Miller, in *Roman Triumphs and Early Modern English Culture*, declares: “No early modern English text makes more comprehensive or more historically informed use of triumph than Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* plays, nor does any treat the triumph with such a disconcerting combination of bedazzlement and scepticism” (83). Miller’s elegant contextualization and analysis of Tamburlaine’s triumphs is worth reading in its entirety and complements my discussion here (83-92).

My chariot swifter than the racking clouds.

If not, then die like beasts and fit for naught

But perches for the black and fatal ravens. (Part 2 4.3.20-23)

Neither option is good, but choosing life—demonstrating an ignoble willingness to “live with” dishonor for any length of time—repeatedly deepens the narrative of slavish humiliation.

Tamburlaine’s “pampered jades” confirm that death would be more honorable: Orcanes insists that he would rather die “than we should draw thy chariot, / And like base slaves abject our princely minds / To vile and ignominious servitude,” and the King of Jerusalem asks

Tamburlaine for a sword, “[t]hat I may sheathe it in this breast of mine. / A thousand deaths could not torment our hearts / More than the thought of this doth vex our souls” (5.1.139-46).

Their claims are bold and would seem to disprove that they have slavish, death-fearing natures, yet they never carry these claims out. In a play where words need the support of deeds to gain currency and importance (Tamburlaine’s boasting speeches match his actions), the captive kings’ words are ultimately empty.

Their words are especially undermined first by the fact that they allowed themselves to be captured in battle (their initial response to the characterizing choice was, by implication, slavish), and second, by the context in which they make these brave speeches. In this scene, before Orcanes and Jerusalem enter pulling Tamburlaine’s chariot, we have witnessed the proud words of the Governor of Babylon as his city faces assault by Tamburlaine. When a man suggests surrender, the Governor rebukes him by drawing the standard equivalence between cowardice and slavishness: “Villain, respects thou more thy slavish life / Than honour of thy country or thy name?” (5.1.10-11). The Governor continues calling all who advise yielding (or even quick suicide rather than painful defeat) “cowards” and “slavish” (43, 46) on the grounds that these people are dishonorably choosing, even begging for, “shame and servitude” over honor (37). Even after he is defeated, captured, and facing Tamburlaine himself, the Governor speaks as proudly as Orcanes and Jerusalem: “Do all thy worst. Nor death, nor Tamburlaine, / Torture, or pain can

daunt my dreadless mind” (112-13). So far, the Governor is masterfully deploying the conventional yield-or-die discourse to highlight his own honor. But a moment later, when he is actually faced with torture and death, the Governor suddenly and poignantly changes his tune, offering a ransom of gold: “Save but my life, and I will give it thee” (118). His brave words meant little, after all, and his surrender comes too late to save himself. To take Orcanes’s and Jerusalem’s claims at face value is difficult with this exchange coming immediately before them. And the two kingly prisoners continue, after all, to pull the chariot. Having not been executed for refusing to perform such work (or a similar act of proud defiance), they live to be inherited by Tamburlaine’s son (5.3.202-03).

In Part 1, Bajazeth and his wife Zabina endure similar repeated humiliations—with the difference that they do, ultimately, kill themselves. When Tamburlaine orders his new prisoner Bajazeth to serve as his footstool, Bajazeth claims that he would rather die: “First shalt thou rip my bowels with thy sword / And sacrifice my heart to death and hell / Before I yield to such a slavery.” Tamburlaine repeats his command, calling Bajazeth “Base villain, vassal, slave,” and adding the threat that, if Bajazeth disobeys, Tamburlaine will order his body “torn” apart and “scattered” (4.2.16-25). In response to this repetition of the yield-or-die choice, Bajazeth obeys.

After enduring many torments, Bajazeth and his wife Zabina kill themselves to avoid prolonging what they call their “shame,” “slaveries,” “servitude,” and “thralldom” (5.1.236, 241, 254, 261). This deed hints that they retain or recover just enough self-narrating power to make a final, terribly grim stand against further humiliation—a stand the pampered jades never make. Zabina, mad or delusional at the moment of her death, even enters an imaginary world of her own with her last words (“Make ready my coach, my chair, my jewels” [317-8]). Her luxurious fantasy is faintly comparable Shakespeare’s Cleopatra’s determination to wear her robe and crown as she kills herself, and the delayed suicides of both Bajazeth and Zabina are faintly comparable to that of Shakespeare’s Lucrece (I will discuss both these characters in detail in chapter 3). Marlowe’s playtext thus allows these humiliated, enslaved prisoners to recover their

narrative power just long enough to make the choice of death. Horrific and bleak as this recovery is, it arguably subverts the yield-or-die discourse. If Zabina dies believing she's setting off in the comfort of her coach, she has, in that small way, overthrown Tamburlaine's narrative control.

That said, Cleopatra's and Lucrece's suicides are resistant because they have not, unlike Bajazeth and Zabina, already yielded convincingly (and repeatedly) to enslavement. Further, Tamburlaine's reaction on learning of the suicides tends to undermine the hint that his power over his yielded prisoners has been at all abridged. He calls their bodies "sights of power to grace my victory" and "objects fit for Tamburlaine, / Wherein as in a mirror may be seen / His honour, that consists in shedding blood" (5.1.474-7). In his opinion, the corpses have become even more like paradigmatic slaves, inanimate objects that function as extensions of (or mirror) his own strong identity. Certainly, as well, the public aspect of Bajazeth's and Zabina's identities is irrecoverably ruined. Their spectacular humiliations have continued long enough to imprint themselves on the playworld's history (and the play-audience's vision): their "slavish" lives become a narrative that persists into even Part 2, when their son, Callapine, longs in particular for "all the world [to] blot our dignities / Out of the book of base-born infamies" (3.1.19-20). The language of correcting a manuscript—re-writing a story—is particularly telling: again, narrative is crucial, and Bajazeth's and Zabina's self-narratives have been permanently co-opted by and for Tamburlaine. They, and the other captive kings, have been instantly reduced not merely to enslavement, but to slavishness, in the off-stage moment when they yielded on the battlefield.

That conclusion seems extreme and excessively rigid because it is, but that's the point: the yield-or-die discourse *is* extreme and excessively rigid. What has happened to these kings off-stage is the same event that happened to Ithamore—a capture in battle leading to enslavement. The kings' fate is simply more public and spectacular. By contrast, after learning the secret of Macduff's birth—and thus learning that he's likely doomed—Shakespeare's Macbeth models the ideally honorable response a king might make in such a situation:

MACDUFF. Then yield thee, coward,
And live to be the show and gaze o' th' time!
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
Painted upon a pole, and underwrit,
"Here may you see the tyrant."

MACBETH. I will not yield,
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
And to be baited with the rabble's curse. (5.8.23-9)

Facing not only the characterizing choice but the threat of spectacular public humiliation, Macbeth, unlike the kings in the *Tamburlaine* plays, chooses to die resistant.

That said, of course, Marlowe is not Shakespeare. Marlowe's texts so completely avoid moralizing that to judge whether the plays endorse the cold-hearted discourse operating within them is difficult. The stray example of the resolute Olympia, the Captain's wife who kills herself upon capture rather than become Theridamas's wife (which would be slavery under another name), suggests that such resistance is, at least, *possible* in the playworld (Part 2 3.4 and 4.2). Her action might constitute a rebuke to the kingly prisoners who choose shameful life over death, and even to Bajazeth and Zabina, who struggle to attain Olympia's instant and ironclad resolve. I will return to Olympia in the chapter on resistance, but for the moment, suffice it to say that her presence in the text certainly does nothing to excuse or mitigate the "slavishness" of *Tamburlaine's* kingly captives. Instead, her death stands as a counter-example to their lives, a brief flash of moral commitment in Marlowe's otherwise amoral world.

Whether she also stands as a counter-example to *Tamburlaine's* own beloved Zenocrate is more complicated. Olympia certainly occupies a Zenocrate-like status in Theridamas's view. His speeches toward and about her are echoes of *Tamburlaine's* about Zenocrate (again, as a vassal, he replicates and supports his lord's self-narrative rather than crafting his own), and this authorizes us to compare the two. While they differ in their response to the crisis of captivity

(Zenocrate yields honorably; Olympia resists), they are meaningfully similar in that both ultimately retain honor. Pushing further into speculative abstraction, I am tempted to argue that Olympia's resistance is enabled by the male characters around her. Being married, she has already in a sense "yielded" off-stage (as Amoret has yielded to Scudamour), and she is now captured by Theridamas, who himself has already yielded to Tamburlaine. Perhaps Olympia is able to resist because her captor's narrating power is not his own and therefore not powerful enough to overcome *her* narrating power, which already belongs to her husband and is being tugged, gravity-like, into his narrative of honorable death. Speculation aside, Olympia's primary role in my discussion at this point is as a foil to the "slavish" characters, a reminder that choosing death before dishonor is possible in this playworld.

Marlowe's interactions with the yield-or-die discourse thus take place at its extremes. Edward II and Gaveston take the idealized image of equal knights yielding mutually to each other and stretch it past the bounds the playworld's culture can bear. The *Tamburlaine* plays, by contrast, feature a protagonist who implements an especially ruthless codification of the implied traditional conventions. Tamburlaine's colored tents spell out with extreme clarity the stage at which a prisoner can yield out of respect, with hope of honor, and the later stages where yielding can only be out of fear, and can only lead to enslavement. Correspondingly, the yielding that occurs within this system has extreme results. Theridamas's honorable yielding flirts with language that sounds more like a lover than a vassal, while across the two plays Tamburlaine reduces kings to abject enslavement with regularity, effecting possibly the most radical demotion his culture is capable of. (His own rise from shepherd to emperor is a similarly radical shift in class.) In *The Jew of Malta*, Ithamore lives through an onstage slave market and then lives out the conventional consequences of enslavement; that is, he loses his selfhood.

Marlowe stages the physical humiliations and losses of agency that enslavement brings with exceptional attention across these plays; these stagings put enslavement before the audience in clear-cut, undeniable relief. Neither Ithamore nor the Emperor of Turkey is exempt

from the system. Marlowe's universe within these plays is shocking in its stark ruthlessness, but not because he is introducing new rules and customs that unsettle previous conventions. What Marlowe does, rather, is make the old rules—the rules in Malory—so obvious, rigid, and spectacular that their horror becomes plain. Marlowe's famously excessive, ambitious heroes generate that excess in part by pushing seemingly unremarkable discourses and systems to their outrageous limits. The result can feel subversive, either for depicting a character seeking to break out of commonplace discursive boundaries or for shining a light on the inhumanities or absurdities of these discourses—or both. As Barabas does for early capitalism and Edward II does for male friendship, Tamburlaine in particular does for the system of yielding and resistance.

Love as Captivity

By this point, I have already discussed several examples of the yield-or-die discourse operating to describe romantic love: in *The Faerie Queene*, Amoret's marriage to Scudamour is figured as yielding, while Artegall and Britomart arguably yield mutually before (as I argue) he takes a more dominant role over his fully yielded beloved. Spenser's "Epithalamion" briefly imagines the groom at the head of a Roman triumph. The relationships Marlowe portrays between Tamburlaine and Theridamas, and Edward and Gaveston, take on sexualized overtones in part because the language that the characters use invokes captivity to describe their affections. As these examples suggest, while love captivity language is usually metaphorical, it sometimes appears in situations where some literal event of yielding is happening as well. In the gender-biased worlds of these texts, heterosexual love, much like captivity, inducts two people into a hierarchical power relationship. That occasional literal overlap might occur between the two experiences makes a kind of unsettling sense.

Unlike the mutual yielding that leads to friendship, which requires both characters to yield honorably to each other, love captivity tends to allow only male characters to yield honorably. By contrast, female characters yield only after much delay and with some (metaphorical or literal) enforcement, making their surrender strictly *dishonorable*. Further, a male lover declaring himself to be his lady's captive almost never experiences the formal repercussions of being a yielded character. The lover, despite the so-called yielding, retains narrative power and his self-narrative continues to function. The lover gains the honor of quasi-surrendering to a worthy lady without suffering the loss of narrative power.

The story of Pelleas and Ettarde, as told in Malory, offers an example of this trope pushed to absurdly literal lengths. The admirable Pelleas loves the proud Ettarde fervently despite her repeated rejections. He has won a tournament for her, turned down advances from other willing ladies, moved into a priory near her castle, and begged repeatedly for her affection, all for naught. Now, “every weke she sendis knyghtes to fyght with hym, and whan he hath putt hem to the worse, than wolle he suffir hem wylfully to take hym presonere, because he wolde have a syght of this lady” (102). That Pelleas defeats the knights before yielding to them is, of course, essential for his retention of honor: he is not yielding out of fear of death, a point he stresses (103). His fellow knights, including Gawayne, acknowledge his chivalrous behavior, and Gawayne even embarks on a spectacularly failed attempt to trick Ettarde into loving Pelleas (Gawayne and Ettarde end up sleeping together, a betrayal Pelleas responds to with an unfailingly chivalrous choice not to kill them sleeping) (104). In the end, Ettarde dies of magically induced lovesickness for Pelleas after he rejects her in favor of the sorceress Nynyve (105-06). Pelleas's narrative, in other words, wins. Despite his apparent—even excessive and repetitive—yielding, he retains narrative power while Ettarde loses hers. The situation is usually the same in cases where the captivity remains figurative for the male lover. He chooses the trope, and he retains power over it. If his lady refuses to accept him, he often characterizes her as exhibiting an arbitrary cruelty similar to a knight who refuses to accept the honorable surrender

and service of a good man—both are merciless, tyrannical, and deserve whatever loss of power and identity they eventually incur.

By contrast, when a text invokes captivity language to describe a female lover's yielding to a male character, her submission is usually much more like that of a literal prisoner truly yielding: she becomes subservient to his narrative. Indeed, these relationships usually lead to the "bond" of marriage, with its attendant social obligations, again like a defeated prisoner truly yielding to a new lord. Further, whereas a male character's yielding is an act of personal agency motivated by a proactive choice to align himself with the woman he desires (Pelleas defeats Ettarde's men, *then* surrenders "wylfully"), a female character's yielding usually verges on the dishonorable, slavish version of yielding out of fear of death. Such surrender is usually metaphorical, but the metaphor carries the heft of true dishonorable yielding within it: women who yield to love are figuratively besieged, undermined, and assailed—imagery of women as towns under siege is especially popular—until they fall in love at the point of the figurative (usually) sword. Even Britomart first encounters her feeling of love for Artegall as if it were a battlefield enemy. Her nurse advises her:

Against [love] strongly striue, and yield thee nott,
Til thou in open fielde adowne be smott.
But if the passion mayster thy fraile might,
So that needs loue or death must bee thy lott,
Then I auow to thee, by wrong or right
To compas thy desire, and find that loued knight. (III.ii.46.4-9)

No advice from a lady's nurse would be complete without such bawdy overtones, but the metaphor is first martial and specifically about dishonorable yielding: that is, about giving up on a battlefield only to avoid "death." As we have seen, when Britomart meets Artegall, she refuses to reveal her true feelings and "yeeld" until he brings her "vnto a bay"—until he corners her like

a hunter about to kill his prey (IV.vi.41). Tamburlaine's Zenocrate, like Pelleas, simply literalizes the metaphor: she is Tamburlaine's unwilling prisoner before becoming his bride.

Thus, male love captivity leaves the yielded prisoner of love in an honorable, even fairly powerful position—and such yielding rarely has real consequences for self-narrating power. Female love captivity does not. The subtle variations in the love-captivity metaphor for male and female characters, then, reproduce more obvious cultural demands for women's submission. This is the pattern, at least, established at the intersection of the yield-or-die discourse and descriptions of love captivity. Every pattern has syncopations and exceptions, and more remains to be said about instances in which a male character, for example, finds himself surrendering at the end of a grueling metaphorical love-siege.⁸¹

Spenser's Artegall and Radigund

I have, to this point, resisted discussing one of the most fascinating episodes of captive yielding in *The Faerie Queene* because it so utterly defies neat categorizations of honorable and dishonorable yielding that it almost seems intended to do so: the Amazonian Radigund's enslavement of male knights in Book V is Spenser's challenge to easy conclusions about the nature of yielding. The hero of Justice, Artegall, challenges Radigund to single combat, loses when he finds himself unable to commit lethal violence against his feminine opponent, and must consent to become one of her slaves. He remains enslaved until Britomart saves him. In

⁸¹ Georgia Crampton comments on love imagery as part of her larger study of the topos of *agere et pati* in both Chaucer and Spenser, examining particularly the nuances of agency within love-language that often claims an experience of passion (in all its senses, including both passive suffering and being overcome by emotion) (*Condition of Creatures* 162-77). V. A. Kolve's *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative* locates the love-captivity imagery in the *Knight's Tale* in the context of the medieval allegorical tradition of the prison of love (91-9). A detailed examination of this tradition in connection with the yield-or-die discourse is beyond the scope of my immediate project but promises to be worthwhile.

this sequence, many of the points I have already discussed are in play at once, offering a compelling chance to analyze their intersections and a useful case study to conclude this chapter.

The section seems to suggest that dishonor can be a *natural* fate in a imperfect world, unavoidable even by honorable heroes such as Artegall, especially when women are involved (V vi.1.1-9); simultaneously, however, the section lays the blame for dishonor squarely on the shoulders of Radigund for her *unnatural* dominance—she is a “Tyranesse” (vi.11.2) who is defying “wise Nature” by claiming a power to which women are not entitled (v.25.3). One relatively straightforward interpretation is that Spenser is reenacting the tragedy of Eden, in which a woman’s illegitimate seizure of power destroys God’s perfect creation and brings about a fallen world where men’s dishonor becomes natural.⁸² The implications of this theological logic, however, rattle the structures of chivalry and feudal hierarchy—and the yield-or-die discourse—showing them to be shakier than the rest of the text might suggest.

The section begins as Artegall encounters the knight Terpin (initially called Turpine, but apparently different from the character in Book VI), chained and blindfolded, being dragged to his own hanging by a mob of warlike women who insult him as they go. There is no way to read Terpin’s initial appearance as anything other than terribly dishonorable—he is a prisoner of women being escorted to a common criminal’s execution. Artegall has his sidekick Talus drive off the women, then questions Terpin, revealing an assumption that whatever has happened, Terpin must have *chosen* some version of dishonorable yielding and, in so doing, given away his knightly self-narrative: “Or haue you lost your selfe, and your discretion . . . ? / Or haue ye yeelded you to proude oppression / Of womens powre . . . ?” Even if Terpin is simply a victim of ill fortune or “heauens hard direction,” Artegall adds, why “lead your selfe vnto your owne

⁸² The dishonorable yielding in this section may recall the Eden myth, but it is very different from the honorable yielding Christians are meant to grant to God. The *Morte’s* Galahad serves God out of respect, and even Launcelot’s apparently shameful humiliations occur because he is endeavoring to yield to God out of love, not fear. Terpin’s and Artegall’s humiliations in Book V, by contrast, result from their inability to locate a perfectly honorable response to the challenge that the (Eve-like?) Radigund represents.

decay?” (iv.26.2-9). Artegall is incapable of parsing the sight before him without concluding that he is no longer looking at the Terpin he knew. Terpin appears shamed, and the only explanation is that he has chosen to yield to such shame, meaning he must have “lost [him] selfe.”

Terpin’s story, however, upends these assumptions. Terpin explains that, upon hearing reports of the Amazonian warrior Radigund and her female followers shaming the knights of the Faerie Queene’s court, he set out to stop her. Specifically, he explains that Radigund is systematically capturing knights and then causing them to yield dishonorably to her power:

First she doth them of warlike armes despoile,
And cloth in womens weedes: And then with threat
Doth them compell to worke, to earne their meat,
To spin, to card to sew, to wash, to wring;
Ne doth she giue them other thing to eat,
But bread and water, or like feeble thing,
Them to disable from reuenge aduenturing. (31.3-9)

That Radigund compels her captives to obey her “with threat” is crucial to their slavish dishonor. The mention of the prisoners’ food certainly suggests that Radigund fears revolt and weakens her prisoners accordingly, but it also reminds us that these prisoners do continue to eat and to obey rather than starve to death as a form of resistance.

Terpin continues his explanation, saying that Radigund hangs any prisoner who, “through stout disdain of manly mind,” refuses to yield to this treatment (32.1). This is why Terpin was being dragged to the gallows: because, although he was physically “ouercome by her in fight,” he then *refused* to yield dishonorably to Radigund—unlike all the other enslaved knights—but “rather chose to die in liues despight, / Then lead that shameful life, vnworthy of a Knight” (32.6-9). Artegall was correct that Terpin has made a choice that led to his fate, but this choice was to resist honorably rather than to yield dishonorably. That such a choice could lead to the shameful gallows rather than to a clean death by sword’s stroke is a shock to the chivalrous

world of *The Faerie Queene* and accounts for Artegall's initial confusion. Radigund has disrupted the almost all-powerful, comforting narrative logic that requires an unyielding (or honorably yielding) captive to meet with no shameful treatment.

Artegall vows revenge for this outrage immediately. Furthermore, he sets about revising the dishonor that Radigund has, in defiance of the discourse's rules, inflicted on Terpin. Artegall promises Terpin that "Fortune will your ruin'd name repaire" (34.8) and allows Terpin (only now, after Terpin's situation is clear!) to remove the "yron fetters" that are not merely marks of neutral captivity but also shameful "badges of reproach" (35.3-4). Such a revision is only possible because of Terpin's resistance; his self-narrative still remains fundamentally under his power. If the revision works, Artegall will have helped to rectify an unsettling, but temporary, hiccup in the usual yield-or-die system.

For a time, this revision does seem effective, although Radigund's deeds continue to put an unnerving strain on the system. When Artegall and Terpin join in battle against Radigund's forces, Radigund seeks out Terpin especially to punish him for his "contempt" of her, a desire that further proves that his resistance was real and troubling to her (40.5). Radigund strikes him unconscious, thus depriving Terpin of any choice in what happens next—he can neither yield nor resist and thus, as I will discuss in chapter 4, he is illegible (39.9). Unable to compel him to yield shamefully, Radigund attempts (as she did with the hanging, when he resisted her) to put him under her narrative power regardless, shaming him performatively by placing her foot on his neck (40.2-3). This gesture is the same one that Arthur will later use effectively to shame the similarly named Turpine. *Turpine* has, however, chosen to yield dishonorably to Arthur, which allows Arthur's narrative gesture to convey the meaning he desires. *Terpin*, by contrast, remains unyielded, and can thus be rescued by Artegall—which quickly occurs (41.1-9).

At this point, however, the system begins to break down catastrophically. Seeing too many of her followers killed in battle, Radigund resolves to face Artegall in single combat instead. She offers Artegall terms for that combat, including the requirement that "If I

vanquishe him, he shall obey / My law, and euer to my lore be bound, / And so will I, if me he vanquish may" (49.1-4). These terms might appear simply to codify the standard convention for yielding, especially in a trial by combat: the victor's narrative wins. What these terms crucially exclude, however, is an option for the loser to choose death rather than obedience. In Malory, a knight entering such a combat might swear "never to be recreant," meaning to die rather than ever yield to the victor's narrative; even after Trystram defeats Blamoure, Blamoure refuses to concede the issue. Radigund's terms appear to disallow that option, instead mandating that physical defeat essentially requires the loser to yield.

When Artegall accepts the terms for the battle (51.4), he thus agrees that, if he loses, he will submit to a situation he has already been warned, and declared for himself, means profound "shame" (34.4). He should know better, but he does agree, and the battle soon commences. Eventually, Artegall strikes Radigund unconscious (v.5.11). As with Terpin's loss of consciousness, this detail is crucial because it deprives Radigund of the opportunity to yield to him in that moment, as she presumably would feel pressured (by the agreed-upon terms as well as by the fear of death) to do. Instead, Artegall is preparing to kill his foe when, in removing her helm, he finds his "hart / Empierced" by pity for her beautiful, pained face (v.13.1-2). This metaphorical violence represents Radigund's most decisive blow against him, and is the means by which she defeats him. When she revives, Artegall is utterly unwilling to fight her. As the terms require, he instead offers to "yield" to her (16.6). Radigund, as she has done before with Terpin, turns his yielding into a public spectacle, forcing him to hand over his shield in sight of her followers (16.8-9) and to accept a blow from the flat of her sword "In signe of true subiection to her powre" (18.1-2).

Artegall's yielding is visually impressive but full of confusion and paradox. Half of its "signes" mark it as honorable: Artegall yields out of pity for Radigund's beauty and respect for the pre-agreed terms at a moment when he certainly need not fear his own death (a point stressed at 17.6-9). Further, his yielding resembles his yielding to Britomart, which was

honorable and led to Britomart's parallel yielding to him in return (IV.vi.21-22, 41). Radigund's striking him with her sword's flat even arguably derives from the ceremony of knighting or the gesture of a lord creating a vassal rather than the more humiliating gestures she offers to Terpin. Spenser's language wavers on the question of whether Artegall's yielding is honorable, however, stating that "[s]o was he ouercome, not ouercome" (V.v.17.1) and suggesting that Radigund's ceremonial sword-blow means that "as her vassall [she] him to thraldome tooke" (18.3)—another play on that fine line between vassal and the less honorable identity of slave. To clinch the ambiguities, Radigund finally succeeds at hanging Terpin, who unlike Artegall *has never yielded* to Radigund's dishonorable treatment, but nonetheless ends his part in the tale "full shamefully" (18.4-9).

To decide whether either Artegall or Terpin had any real means to avoid shame at Radigund's hands is almost impossible. Even if Artegall had killed Radigund when he had the chance, he would bear the "shame" that he believes knights who attack women endure (24.1-4). Spenser seems to suggest that *any* yielding or *any* resistance all lead equally to shame in this no-win situation. If that is so, the yield-or-die system—and the narrative power of the characters within it—is meaningless. If Marlowe's presentation of extremes suggests *why* this discourse deserves subversion, Spenser here shows exactly *how* to accomplish that subversion.

This threat of instability, indeed of meaninglessness, haunts Artegall's subsequent enslavement. Subjected to Radigund's standard treatment—that is, dressed in women's clothes and forced to do women's work—Artegall derives a certain comfort from thinking of his situation as a virtuous ongoing choice rather than as a permanent shameful result of the last choice he will ever make. He insists that he is choosing to be patient in the face of ill fortune rather than giving in to despair (38.1-9), and his situation, Spenser explains, "his noble heart did gall" (26.3). Both of these details offer the picture of a captive who has not really yielded at all to his captor's narrative, but who rather endures his suffering with patience in hope of future liberty. This is a choice I will examine in more detail in chapter 3; it is the kind of internal resistance modeled by

Boethius. That said, Artegall's patient resolve centers around his choice "Her to obey, sith he his faith had plight" (23.8), and Spenser suggests that this choice, made at the beginning of his captivity, is permanent rather than open to reconsideration: Artegall "might haue had of life or death election: / But hauing chosen, now he might not chaunge" (26.5-6). These details suggest that Artegall has consented to serve Radigund's narrative—that he has yielded and may no longer resist. The truth is somewhere in the middle.

To muddle matters further, the section begins to emphasize differences between interior truth and exterior appearance, as both Radigund and Clarinda attempt to conceal their growing love for Artegall through dissimulations that lead almost to farce, and Artegall in his turn equivocally promises that he will reward any kindness they might show him. Artegall distrusts Clarinda, "[w]hose hidden drift he could not well perceiue" (37.2), but in turn "faire semblant did her shew, / Yet neuer meanth he in his noble mind, / To his owne absent loue to be vntrew" (56.1-3). After all of Radigund's attempts to signify Artegall's submission—and, indeed, after he has offered his formal surrender—he finds himself sliding into a situation where neither he nor his captors are completely transparent. Whose narrative is dominant is becoming unclear. The discourse is blurry.

I will return to this part of Artegall's enslavement in more detail in chapter 4, because it flirts with the condition of illegibility. Ultimately, however, Radigund's defiance of traditional gender roles serves as the text's scapegoat for the larger breakdown in meaning around her; the unnerving blurriness can be resolved by reducing her narrative power and ultimately killing her. Radigund finds herself falling in love with Artegall, and Spenser piles on metaphors of her own yielding to describe her changing attitude toward her slave. Radigund is tempted to "yeeld free accord / To serue the lowly vassall of her might, / And of her seruant make her souerayne Lord" (27.6-8), and she suffers the standard "wound" caused by love until its pain forces "her proud minde [to] conuert / To meeke obeysance of loues mightie raine" (28.5-8). Coupled with Spenser's homily in his narrator's voice about women's natural status as the bound servants of

men (25.1-8, with a afterthought in line 9 to exempt Queen Elizabeth!), the section begins to build momentum around a single simple answer to all its complexities. Traditional gender roles must be restored, and—in Radigund’s lovesickness—are in fact asserting themselves in defiance of all her intentions.

The gender-bending Britomart endured a reversal very like this one that resulted in her yielding to Artegall. When, in this section, she rides to his rescue, kills Radigund in combat, and rescues Artegall, her response to seeing her beloved knight dressed as a woman seems suggest that she, too, understands the primary problem to be an upheaval of gender roles. Seeing Artegall, Britomart is “abasht with secrete shame” and looks away (38.3-4); she begs him for an explanation of the “wondrous change” that has “robde you of that manly hew” he once had (40.1-9). Then, without waiting for an answer, she rushes him back into his old clothes and armor, at which point she feels “reuiu’d, and ioyd much in his semblance glad” (41.9). Britomart’s main concern is restoring Artegall’s manly appearance.

Her insistence that he has suffered a shameful and profound change, her ability to redress that change herself, and her own joy at his restoration—not to mention his silence in this passage—all combine to remind us that Artegall is wearing women’s clothes because he yielded into this shameful situation. This problem can’t simply be solved by male clothing; according to the yield-or-die discourse, it shouldn’t be solvable at all, because yielding is permanent. As Radigund’s conqueror, Britomart essentially inherits the enslaved Artegall and, as his new lord, can rewrite him as she desires. Having accomplished this revision, *she* is revived by his appearance—he supports her narrative, rather than the reverse. The unnatural disruption of gender roles brought about by Artegall’s yielding, in other words, will take more radical narrative work to resolve. Accordingly, in the following days, Britomart ensures that all the Amazons return “to mens subiection” (42.7) before looking on passively herself—and, at a formal level, fading permanently from Spenser’s narrative—as Artegall resumes his primary adventure (44.1-9). The Amazons, and the cross-dressing Amazon-like Britomart, neatly restore

themselves to traditional obedient roles, yielding honorably (without further coercion) to male political and narrative dominance.

In this section and in its resolution, then, Spenser cracks open one of the deepest and most dangerous assumptions underlying the yield-or-die discourse, namely, that dishonor is always a captive's characterizing choice and always permanent. Under this assumption, a slave deserves dishonor because he has "chosen" enslavement instead of death. And a woman can never really be raped; she can only ever choose to yield rather than die. Artegall's fate—and, perhaps just as much, Terpin's—call this assumption into question. What force *actually exists* to stop any tyrant, of any gender, from shaming—through servitude, torture, rape—even those captives who resist him or her? Is it honorable enough that Terpin goes to his death knowing, in his own mind, that he has always resisted the captor who has thrice beaten him physically and who now executes him in a manner that signifies criminal dishonor? Can such interior resistance retain meaning when, in the end, the adverb *The Faerie Queene's* narrator attaches to Terpin's dying is "shamefully"? What does resistance by a physically overcome captive actually mean?

This is the question to which I turn in chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Resistance

In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, after being musically and verbally "assail'd" at length by her brutish suitor Cloten, Imogen finally emerges from her bedroom to set him straight (2.3.39). She attempts to reject his suit artfully, but Cloten lacks the wit to understand her refusal and objects that "This is no answer" (93). Imogen then tells him in no uncertain terms that she detests him, a speech she introduces with the comment, "But that you shall not say I yield being silent, / I would not speak" (94-5).

That comment suggests a few crucial qualities of the resistance this chapter explores. First, resistance is born in self-narrative, within a character, and does not *require* physical or verbal performance to exist. A captor may feel that he has gotten "no answer" to the yield-or-die demand, but that doesn't mean his captive hasn't made the characterizing choice within herself. As a corollary to that point, any assumption that lack of communication or affect means a character must be yielding is risky and potentially erroneous. That said, of course, making both yielding and resistance legible prevents misunderstandings and clarifies the characterization of the resistant person both in the story's world and beyond. In other words, Imogen isn't speaking out to bring her resistance against Cloten's proposals into being—it already exists—but rather to make that resistant as legible as possible to her dimwitted tormentor. In chapter 4 I explore characters whose response to the yield-or-die question remains illegible not merely to their fellow characters, but to the audience as well, denying us the ability to assume we know what that response (if any exists) might be. In this chapter I examine characters who, like Imogen, are legibly resistant to readers and viewers and, usually, to their fellow characters as well.

If to yield means to give one's self-narrative over to a captor, then to resist is to deny a captor narrative power over one's identity. Resistance means either keeping narrative power for oneself or, in some cases, being already yielded to a different captor (Amoret's marital yielding to Scudamour helps prevent her from yielding to her later captors). It is about defying the

current captor's desire for that power, not necessarily about keeping that power personally. Resistance therefore isn't necessarily a sign of a character's innate or interior "freedom" in a modern sense. It can be—the emphasis is sometimes on a character's desire to be free of convention or oppression—but it can also be a sign of a character's prior commitments or bondage.

Further, even independent characters who resist in order to preserve their own liberty are typically labeled in the negative—they have *not* yielded, they are *unconquered*. Texts thus use resistance less to reveal the character trait of independence *per se* and more to reveal traits such as courage, loyalty (to values or preexisting relationships), strength, endurance, canniness, stubbornness, or even self-centeredness. Both virtuous and villainous characters can and do resist and are characterized by the act, and even the worst villain tends to retain a kind of primal honor within the yield-or-die discourse by refusing to yield slavishly. (That said, such honor erodes to nothing if his resistance, like that of Malory's King Mark, is enacted through false yieldings.) Resistance can also characterize villains as intractably evil or selfish when yielding would, in fact, mean joining the narrative of more honorable or virtuous character. King Mark's repeated choices to resist joining Arthur's self-narrative and, by extension, the Round Table's community underline his poor moral judgment.

Resistance to a captor thus often carries a connotation not of expansive freedom, but of being *closed*: the body closed against rape, the mind closed against persuasion, the soul closed against sin, the city closed against siege. Indeed, one of the threads running through this chapter is the use of chastity as both a tactic and a figure for resistance. As Spenser makes explicit, yielding connotes sexual availability, and so resistance sometimes connotes the opposite. The virgin may thus be a figure for the unconquered resistor; the spouse who is chaste (in the sense of monogamous) may be a figure for a captive resisting due to prior yielding.

Whereas my previous chapter relied on the categories of honorable and dishonorable yielding, honor tends to figure less prominently in discussions of resistance. As I have

mentioned, resistance is usually honorable in some basic sense in the yield-or-die discourse. It always carries the risk of physical suffering and death, and so will rarely accrue the suspicion of cowardice that, I have argued, allows some surrenders to be labeled dishonorable. The question of honor is sometimes replaced with a question of *justification*, and, when it arises, this question usually has a quieter and more nuanced textual presence than honor-based concerns do in scenes of yielding. Justification does not, therefore, form a major structuring component of this chapter's argument in the same way that honor did in chapter 2, but it will arise periodically. In particular, justification tends receive narrative attention when resistance in the yield-or-die sense collides with moral or religious discourses: is a virtuous hero justified in lying as a resistance tactic? is a Christian justified in *not* turning the other cheek or *not* imitating Christ's passive surrender? Context matters enormously in these situations, as does a character's ability (or, at a formal level, the narrator's ability) to explain his or her actions.

A connection between resistance and death is a final general characteristic of resistance. The characterizing question tends to be phrased as "yield *or die*," after all, not "yield or resist." The actual binary opposite of yielding is best summarized as resistance-unto-death, meaning that the captive choosing not to yield is prepared to die rather than join the captor's self-narrative. Bodily annihilation is preferable to loss of identity. On these terms, death becomes an absolutely valid—indeed foundational—resistance tactic itself, while willingness to die rather than yield is a basic requirement for any resistance in this discourse. Signs of and references to death haunt other resistance tactics as well, even when literal death is a distant possibility.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the most embodied, physical, and externally clear methods of captive resistance—those that prevent or end the circumstances of captivity—because these offer the most familiar starting-point: prisoners rescued, warriors who refuse to yield in battle, prisoners who escape, and captives who actively choose death (especially suicide) as an alternative to captivity. I will then examine what I am broadly calling *expressional* methods of resistance. These tactics, while still embodied and legible to other characters in the

text, serve to express the captive's resistance (that is, to reiterate the captive's existing self-narrative) rather than achieve physical freedom. Among these methods are the setting of conditions or negotiating of terms, written or verbal expressions of defiance or complaint, a captive's legible affect or physical behavior, and other instances in which a text simply enables other characters to detect the captive's defiant attitude—to know, as Sir Bleoberys says of his brother Sir Blamoure in the *Morte Darthur*, that although a captive may be physically bloodied and decisively defeated, the apparent victor “hath nat beatyn his harte” (255). The final variation of expressional resistance that I examine involves the complicated tactics of equivocation and deceit—the projection of a false self-narrative. I then conclude the chapter with a close reading of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and its picture of Palamon and Arcite's many complicated—and ultimately temporary—resistances to their captor Theseus.

Reasons and tactics for resistance, of course, overlap and mingle with one another. A captive may practice many of them over the course of a single imprisonment. For the sake of clarity, I am imposing artificial order on these tactics so that I can explore each one in detail and fulfill my primary goal of revealing patterns of resistance in these texts. Although I will of course point out some intersections and syncopations—and I conclude the chapter with a more holistic examination of complicated resistance in a single text—more will undoubtedly remain to be said about how the patterns I explore can be disrupted and subverted. For now, from spectacular rescue to a narrator's quiet omniscient remark that a captive secretly prays for escape, this chapter covers the entangled ways in which a character physically defeated and circumscribed can nonetheless maintain narrative power.

Rescue

The figure of the rescuee exists in a middle zone between yielding and resisting. Occasionally the rescuee has yielded to his or her captor, and the rescue takes the form of a

transfer of narrative power from captor to rescuer, with the prisoner remaining passive and lacking in self-narrative. Sometimes the rescuee has yielded to the rescuer (or the power represented by the rescuer, as, for example, Launcelot represents King Arthur) long before capture, and so the rescue is simply a matter of restoring the prisoner to his or her *rightful* lord. Rescuees rarely recover narrative power for themselves after a rescue because the experience is too similar to yielding (in that, in both cases, the captive's life is in the hands of someone else to save or destroy). When rescuees do recover narrative power, the prerequisite is usually that they have remained at least technically unyielded to their captor, and texts often exert a great deal of work to establish and explain their recovery.

The language of rescue in these texts suggests the concept's underlying ambiguity. Grammatically, the captive is the object of rescue-related verbs, not the subject. More deeply, the words used for the concept reflect the varying degrees to which the captive's narrative power might be relevant (or not). "Rescue" itself often connotes an act of taking or seizure of a person *or a thing* (of battlefield spoils, for example), not carrying so obviously its modern weight of liberating a human being.⁸³ "Deliverance"—one of Malory's preferred words for the concept along with "rescue"—similarly suggests movement of the captive between captor and rescuer, or between captor and freedom, but the movement need not be *from* captivity *to* freedom. A person can also "deliver" himself or "be delivered" *into* captivity (Malory writes that Balan and Balyn, for example, "delyverde" the yielded King Royns as a prisoner to Arthur's porters [49]; Gwenyvere is "delyverd" by her father to Arthur for marriage [63]).⁸⁴ When invoking deliverance

⁸³ The O.E.D.'s etymology of "rescue" reflects this sense of the word: "*re-* *re-* *prefix* + *escourre* to shake, to shake out or down, to seize."

⁸⁴ Historically, a periodic legal session held to dispose of the prisoners held in a particular jail was also known as "gaol delivery." In this context, again, the word might connote a kind of movement (the idea being to empty the jail by dealing with the pending cases represented by its inmates) but not necessarily freedom (prisoners convicted of crimes would be punished following a delivery, not freed). Pugh explores the medieval English procedures in three detailed chapters (spanning pp. 255-314). Harding, Hines, et al. summarize the practice as it continued well into the early modern period (77).

specifically as the experience of being set free, Malory sometimes qualifies it as “good delyveraunce.” Most poignantly, writing on his own behalf, he asks the reader “to pray for hym that this wrote, that God sende hym good delyveraunce sone, and hastely” (227), a prayer he repeats at the end of his book (698). The qualifier reminds us that there are kinds of deliverance that are not necessarily “good.”

“Redemption,” another word used for rescues across these texts, connotes exchange or even purchase, and thus may particularly suggest that the redeemed captive either belongs to or owes a debt to his or her redeemer. Gawayne acknowledges this sense of debt when he chastises his brothers for their scheming against Launcelot. Listing the many times that Launcelot has “rescowed” them, Gawayne declares that “methynkis suche noble dedis and kyndnes shulde be remembirde” with loyalty (647). Less commonly, Malory also uses the word “borow” with a similar and now obsolete meaning of “ransom” or “redeem.”

In the deep (or sometimes transparently shallow) background to many of these instances of rescue, deliverance, or redemption is, of course, the Christian mythology of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. Beginning in the Pauline epistles and other early Church writings, Christic redemption was analogized as *both* an act of rescuing sinners from the prison of sin *and* the redemption of slaves by purchase.⁸⁵ The Christian connotations are most relevant to my discussion here in two ways. First, they reinforce the idea that rescue is often less about pure liberation than about a transfer of control over the captive from captor to rescuer (redeemed

⁸⁵ Martin and Glancy, in their respective books, explore the figurative language of Christian slavery in detail and, in particular, locate its specific connections to the practices of classical enslavement that inspired it. Glancy, for example, examines how Christ could be figured flexibly as liberator, slave master (over his followers, whom he has bought), and slave himself (96-101); Paul, she points out, portrays “Christ as one who has secured the manumission of the formerly enslaved” but also suggests that Christ has not so much *freed* his followers as “become their new owner” (99). The tradition of understanding hell as a prison from which Christ’s redemptive death liberates sinners is also relevant here: MacCulloch traces the history of imagery of Christ breaking open a prison-like hell to deliver captive souls within (217-26), and Tamburr addresses Christ’s role as liberator throughout his study of medieval English Harrowing-of-Hell imagery (I cite Tamburr more extensively shortly).

sinners are yielded to Christ's self-narrative). Second, they offer a means of justifying rescue when such justification seems necessary. To compare a rescue to Christ's redemption of sinners or his Harrowing of Hell helps legitimate that rescue, especially in a culture where patient suffering—without escape—is also Christlike behavior worth emulating. Spenser, for example, offers this justification for redeeming captives when Redcrosse, recovering at the house of Holinesse, meets the fourth of seven "Bead-men":

The fourth appointed by his office was,
Poore prisoners to relieue with gracious ayd,
And captiues to redeeme with price of bras,
From Turkes and Sarazins, which them had stayd;
And though they faulty were, yet well he wayd,
That God to vs forgiueth euery howre
Much more then that, why they in bands were layd,
And he that harrowd hell with heauie stowre,
The faulty soules from thence brought to his heauenly bowre. (I.x.40)

The fourth bead-man's work is based on one of the standard Christian works of mercy (based on Christ's list in Matthew 25.35-41), the duty to visit prisoners. The duty is expanded here, however, beyond simply visiting into, first, giving relief (a predictable expansion in medieval and early modern England, when giving alms to prisoners was a common twist on the "visiting" requirement⁸⁶) and, second, actually *redeeming* prisoners even if they are "faulty." Spenser is touching on the contemporary problem of Barbary captivity here, but more broadly, he is suggesting that the rescue of prisoners—even those bearing some guilt—is a Christlike act of bestowing grace, akin to the Harrowing of Hell itself. Throughout *The Faerie Queene*, in fact, Spenser compares scenes of rescue to Christlike redemption of prisoners in hell.

⁸⁶ For charitable donations to prisoners and prisons, see Harding, Hines, et al. (29-30 for the medieval period, 89 for the early modern period).

This virtuous act of rescue is available to either gender. In romances such as Malory's *Morte* or Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, we may imagine the knight in shining armor rescuing the damsel in distress as the quintessential rescue scene. Such scenes are certainly common, but in the romances, women also commonly rescue men. These examples partake in the ambiguities I have just identified, but often with a gendered twist. A man rescued by a woman usually owes her some form of loyalty. He is expected to love her, kiss her, or do other service for her that is at least reminiscent of a courtly lover or chivalric lady's champion. In the background of some of these cases, too, where the female rescuer is explicitly a virtuous virgin, there may be a potential connection to the Virgin Mary and the cluster of miracle stories in which she rescues imprisoned knights in implied exchange for a demonstration of their devotion to her.⁸⁷ Such male rescuees almost never actually *yield* their self-narratives to their female rescuers, but the resemblance of the service they owe to the service of yielding can be cause for some textual anxiety.

Thus, while rescue enacts resistance against a captor—the captor's plans are resisted and overthrown by the rescuer—it is also potentially an attenuated resistance by the imprisoned character, who may not have initiated it, and who may move only from domination by the captor to domination by the rescuer. As I now begin to examine specific examples of rescue, I will thus counter-intuitively start with prisoners who really don't belong in this chapter at all: prisoners who have already yielded either to their captor or to someone else. I will then move to examples of middle-ground prisoners who exhibit more active resistance as a part of their rescue, and I will conclude with scenes of the rescue of fully resistant characters.

The Roman episode of Malory's *Morte* depicts several minor characters who yield on the battlefield only to be rescued by their comrades. The rescue of these now-yielded men is framed

⁸⁷ See Peter Whiteford's 1990 edition of Wynkyn de Worde's *The Myracles of Oure Blessyd Lady* for examples of two such stories. In the first, an imprisoned knight refuses to be seduced by a lady named Maria because her name reminds him of his "reuerence of the moder of God," at which point Mary herself frees him (47). In the second, a knight prays for help to Mary, whereupon she "lyghtned þe pryson, & loused his cheynes & opened the dore, & so delyuered hym withoute ony knowledge of the kepers, and walked with hym in the nyghte a dayes iourneye, & so he escaped the daunger of his enemyes" (47).

more an act of revenge by the rescuers for their loss than a restoration of the prisoners' self-narratives. When Sir Bors and Sir Berell, "though they loth were," are "yolden and takyn" by the Romans in the heat of battle (128), the text plays up the incident as a motivating factor for Arthur's *other* knights. Gawayne and Idres, in particular, react essentially as if Bors and Berell have been killed. Gawayne suffers "sorow oute of mesure for these two lordys" while Idres, learning that Bors and Berell are "ceased of werre," laments "Alas . . . this is to much shame and overmuche losse!" These phrases evoking excess appear elsewhere when Malory is speaking of grief.⁸⁸ Further, Idres warns that once King Arthur learns the news, "he woll never mery be tyll this be revenged." After additional lamentation for the captives that starts to sound downright elegiac ("There was never a bettir knyght that strode uppon a steede"), Gawayne finally acknowledges that the two captives are still alive and vows to "reskew hem that so lyghtly ar ledde us fro" (128).

The rescue follows, but the text gives primary focus to Gawayne's and Idres's killings of the captors, emphasizing the element of vengeance over the element of liberation. Bors and Berell remain utterly passive even after they are rescued. Gawayne simply kills the Roman "that lad Sir Bors," and moments later he himself has "lade away Sir Bors": Bors is simply led one way and then another. Berell's rescue is even more sketchily implied. Idres kills his captor, and later we discover a liberated Berell assisting Arthur in guarding Roman prisoners (129). In the Roman episode, at least, Bors and Berell have yielded—which is, of course, permanent—so their rescue is about their rescuers, not them. Although their obedience and narrative service may be transferred from their captors to their rescuers (and ultimately to Arthur), they do not recover self-narratives themselves.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ For example, on pp. 46, 58, and 659.

⁸⁹ Assuming this character is, in some sense, the "same" Sir Bors who, as Galahad's companion and Launcelot's kinsman, plays a major role in later sections of the book, then my assertion here is evidence for Malory's disinterest in unifying his collection of stories into a whole (complete with novelistic character arcs), and/or for the book's characteristic pragmatism.

A later—and greatly expanded—example of a similar dynamic is the relationship between Prospero and his “slaves,” Caliban and Ariel, in *The Tempest*. According to the logic of enslavement, Caliban and Ariel serve Prospero out of fear rather than respect. Prospero threatens Caliban repeatedly with magically induced “cramps” and “aches” (1.2.369-70, also 326-31 and 346), causing Caliban to concede that “I must obey” (372). Caliban’s attempted rebellion against Prospero with Stephano and Trinculo—much like Ithamore’s attempted rebellion against Barabas—involves his attempted transfer of loyalty to new masters rather than a bid for autonomy: his “slavish” need for others to write his story remains intact. At first, Caliban believes that Stephano and Trinculo are spirits sent by Prospero to hurt him, reinforcing his slavish relationship to the magician (2.2.70-1). When he decides that they are *not* Prospero’s messengers, he sees them not as potential allies but as new masters or even gods (125-6). Caliban’s song of delight in “freedom” from Prospero is thus founded on the fact that “Caliban / Has a new master” (160-2). Just as Ithamore’s “profession” is first dictated for him by Barabas and later by Bellamira (who dictates his blackmail letter), so Caliban’s enslavement is reinforced first by Prospero’s magic books and, later, by Stephano’s bottle of sack, the “book” he orders Caliban to kiss in mockery of an oath (of fealty?) (2.2.109). These literal and metaphorical references to texts underline the narrating power that Ithamore and Caliban have surrendered.

Finally, like Ithamore, Caliban ultimately fails to rebel successfully. For Caliban, even as he plots rebellion, his domination by Prospero continues to exist for him in the present tense: “I *am* subject to a tyrant” he says (3.2.37, my emphasis). Just as Barabas kills Ithamore, Prospero reclaims Caliban. In the context of Caliban’s enslavement, Prospero’s multi-faceted and deservedly famous line “this thing of darkness, I / acknowledge mine” most basically functions to re-assert his ownership of Caliban’s self-narrative (5.1.273-5).

In terms of the yield-or-die discourse, the character “Bors” from the later books unquestionably possesses self-narrating power and is thus no longer affected by this yielding.

In his most imperious scenes, Prospero treats Ariel much like Caliban—Caliban is a “thing of darkness” and Ariel is a “malignant thing” (1.2.257) and a “slave” (270). Ariel’s milder attempt at rebellion—questioning his master—is squelched with threats of imprisonment and torture from Prospero, causing Ariel to obey out of fear (294-6). Significantly, Prospero promises Ariel freedom, distancing the spirit from other slaves I have discussed (especially Caliban), but even the reality of this manumission is compromised for the play’s audience because we never see it enacted. Ariel remains enslaved as the play ends, ordered to provide fair winds for the nobles’ journey to Naples before he can be finally free. Caliban, even more ambiguously, receives no promise of freedom from Prospero (although we may struggle to imagine that Prospero intends to bring him to Italy). In *The Tempest*, one enslaved character is promised a freedom unfulfilled on-stage, while the other’s fate is entirely murky. In this sense, the play upholds the yield-or-die discourse’s understanding of enslavement as permanent.

My discussion of *The Tempest* here is deliberately misplaced, belonging more accurately to my previous chapter because both Caliban and Ariel are yielded characters. Caliban, in particular, follows a relatively straightforward trajectory into enslavement. After arguably yielding honorably to Prospero out of respect when they first meet (1.2.333-9), his attempted rape of Miranda results in his physical domination by Prospero and slavery as a substitute for a death sentence (he was “Deservedly confined into this rock, / Who hadst deserved more than a prison” [360-2]). His captors speak of him as inherently debased, of a slavish character (for example, at 351-60). Shakespeare invites us to question this ruthless logic—the logic that dishonorable yielding erases self-narrating power absolutely and permanently—by putting words of rebellion and speeches of unexpected beauty (and regular meter!) into Caliban’s mouth. Ultimately, however, Caliban, like Ithamore, never truly escapes his master’s narrative control.

Ariel is the reason I have placed this discussion here, because, like Sir Bors in Malory’s book, Ariel has been *rescued* by Prospero, not defeated by him. Ariel, however, reveals how easily rescue can blur into new captivity. In both cases, the rescuer/captor possesses the power

to bestow life or death on the rescuee/captive. Prospero leverages this power to make Ariel his servant, treating Ariel not as free but as conditionally released from imprisonment in the cloven pine, a release Prospero is willing to revoke if he doesn't receive obedience (1.2.294-6). As Caliban is conditionally spared death, Ariel is conditionally spared torturous imprisonment.⁹⁰ Possibly, Prospero's domination of Ariel in this way is supported by Ariel's history as a "servant" of the witch Sycorax (271), whose imprisonment of Ariel created the need for rescue in the first place. Ariel, like Bors, could be a yielded character first "led" one way by Sycorax and then "led" another way by Prospero. Troublingly, however, Ariel seems to have resisted Sycorax, not yielded to her. She punished him with the torturous cloven pine for "Refusing her grand hests" (274).

Because Ariel was willing to endure the cloven pine rather than obey "abhorred commands" (273), Ariel arguably obeys Prospero now *not* out of fear of the same punishment but because he has more respect for Prospero's commands than he did for Sycorax's. This respect would mean that Ariel's surrender to Prospero is born of admiration, not fear, and would place Ariel in the category of honorably yielded servants. That said, the need for Prospero to quell Ariel's questioning and complaints with threats throughout 1.2 nudges Ariel toward a more slave-like dishonor. To categorize Ariel's yielding to Prospero as neatly honorable or dishonorable is impossible (and unnecessary).⁹¹ The crucial point is that *rescue* has functioned for Ariel almost exactly as *defeat* has functioned for Caliban. Both experiences lead to servitude.

⁹⁰ As I discussed in chapter 2, Orlando Patterson defines enslavement as a "conditional commutation" of the death a captor has in his power to bestow (5). The commutation lasts as long as the enslaved person yields to their captor's control.

⁹¹ Andrew Gurr argues that Ariel and Prospero employ technical terminology of apprenticeship or indentured servitude to describe their relationship. Such relationships would exist in a liminal zone between the honorable and dishonorable categories I have so far examined. In theory, an apprentice or indentured servant "yields" honorably into service out of respect for the master's craft expertise or other worth. In practice, such yieldings also presumably take place out of deep necessity for subsistence-level support and are maintained by threats of punishment, moving them closer to situations where the servant serves because of fear, not respect. I have chosen not to examine apprenticeships or indentured servitude in this

The troubling final scene of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* threatens to push this uncomfortable dynamic to its breaking point. Proteus insists on trying to “rescue” Silvia from the outlaws and then requests that Silvia reward him with “but one fair look” (5.4.19-25). So far, Proteus is demanding a very mild version of the service rescuees can be asked to pay to rescuers. Silvia, however, doesn’t want to be rescued and declares: “Had I been seized by a hungry lion, / I would have been a breakfast to the beast, / Rather than have false Proteus rescue me” (33-5). In other words, she reacts as if she is being asked to yield (rather than to accept help), and she replies with conventional resistance, saying she would rather die. Rescue and captivity are already blurring. In this sense, Proteus’s horrifying escalation—he next declares that “I’ll woo you like a soldier, at arms’ end, / And love you ‘gainst the nature of love,—force ye” (57-8)—is more logical, if no less upsetting. Rescuing someone is so dangerously proximate to taking someone prisoner (complete with the sexual availability that captivity sometimes connotes) that Proteus can make the conceptual leap between rescue and *raptus* easily.

Because a rescue scene so easily places the narrative spotlight on the rescuer, it can also function to characterize that rescuer as the story’s secular or sacred hero. On the battlefield in *Henry IV* Part 1, Hal rescues his father the king, who is losing a fight against Douglas. Hal sweeps in, drives off Douglas, and is greeted by his father with the words, “Thou hast redeemed thy lost opinion, / And showed thou mak’st some tender of my life, / In this fair rescue thou hast brought to me” (5.4.47-9). Although King Henry IV obviously is not going to enter literal or figurative captivity to his son as a result of this rescue (by contrast, he asserts a right to judge his son’s worth), the moment serves to characterize Hal and enhance his self-narrative, not his father’s. The king’s narrative role as supporter of his son’s identity is on display at the moment of his rescue.

study merely because the texts I am examining do not contain many useful examples of such characters, but these categories of quasi-captivity—as Ariel’s case intimates—nonetheless occupy an interesting space, worth further exploration, in context of my overall argument.

In Malory, the knights and ladies Launcelot rescues from various prisons usually celebrate and strengthen his worshipful self-narrative just as they might if Launcelot had, instead, defeated them in battle.⁹² Prisoners rescued by Galahad convert to Christianity (508) or are restored to virtuous living (514). Galahad's Christian self-narrative is thereby reinforced by these episodes, especially when a hermit interprets Galahad's deeds as a type of Jesus's liberation of humanity from sin. As Jesus "bought all the soules oute of thralle: so ded Sir Galahad delyver all the maydyns oute of the woofull castell" (514). Rescue can also, of course, be the motivating task that drives a main character's plot. Gareth must rescue Lyonesse; Redcrosse must rescue Una's parents. In all these cases, the rescued captives are essentially passive recipients of the rescuer's actions. They are not delivered into freedom so much as they are delivered into the rescuer's self-narrative, becoming followers (in a worldly or religious sense), spouses, or simply "yielding" the rescuer thanks and gifts of gratitude. Rescue is, in sum, an ambiguous experience for prisoners that carries the risk of ongoing subservience. Both yielding prisoners (such as Sir Bors) or formerly resistant prisoners (such as Ariel) may end up yielding to and serving their rescuers. At the very least, rescue represents a moment of narrative power for the rescuer, not the rescuee.

As a result of this ambiguity, texts must do extra work to clarify when and how a rescued prisoner retains narrative power. Such extra work is another way to explain and contextualize the elaborate ceremony Britomart enacts of "restoring" herself and the women of Radigund's city "[t]o mens subiection" when she rescues Artegall (V.vii.42.6-7), after which Spenser inflicts the ultimate act of narrative violence against her by dropping her from the poem entirely. Her sudden disappearance recalls the similar disappearance that she inflicts on Busirane following his dishonorable yielding in Book III (which I discussed in chapter 2); in both cases, Spenser depicts yielding's immense power at a formal level by ending the yielded character's

⁹² See, for example, the rescues on pp. 162-3 (after which the rescuees return to court where, along with prisoners Launcelot has taken, "they all honoured Sir Launcelot" [176]), 165-6, and 261.

appearances in the poem. Britomart's last act is to bid farewell to Artégall as he sets off on his next quest, a mission that will not end "Till he redeemed had that Lady thrall" (V.vii.45.8). Artégall's conventionally gender-appropriate role as rescuer of ladies (in this case Irena) is restored, but more generally, his self-narrating power *as rescuer* is restored. As I have explored, this rare resumption of significant narrative power by a yielded and rescued character requires a great deal of narrative work to support it.

Artégall excepted, most instances in which a rescuee retains self-narrating power begin with that rescuee's refusal to yield to his or her captor—the foundational requirement of a resistant character—and the rescue responds to that resistance. A particularly interesting sub-category of such rescues are those that Spenser associates with the Harrowing of Hell.⁹³ Spenser tends to use Harrowing imagery to characterize the *rescuees* as well as the *rescuers*. Such imagery characterizes (and allegorizes) Redcrosse, for example, as a wayward prisoner of sin who nonetheless remains technically unyielded and can therefore be rescued by the grace of Christ.

⁹³ As the many sample texts within Tamburr's *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* suggest, a great deal more could be said about intersections between Harrowing imagery (and theology) and the yield-or-die discourse. After all, a central theological and dramatic question of the Harrowing is the status of the prisoners Christ rescues—have they yielded (through Adam and Eve) to Satan, or are they righteously resistant prisoners? Does Christ claim them legally or simply seize them like battlefield spoil? Are they liberated or do they become slaves of Christ? etc. I am reluctantly setting aside that exploration for now as beyond the scope of this project, but an examination of such intersections in the late-medieval cycle plays' depictions of the Harrowing, for example, would be fascinating (see Tamburr's discussion pp. 119-41). For now, I will focus on Spenser's use of the Harrowing. Tamburr explores post-Reformation survivals of the mythology in chapter 6, "The Sixteenth Century and its Legacy" (170-90), and argues that the Harrowing's imagery suited Spenser's project despite its Catholic origins first because its heroic presentation of Christ is "ideal for a knightly romance" (179) and second because it converts easily to "a tropological level of meaning whereby the grace of Christ conquers the ignorance of the New Law to release the individual from the darkness and confinement of sin," an interpretation also explored by other Protestant writers (180). Spenser's most radical use of the imagery, Tamburr concludes, is when he deploys it to reflect the triumph of Protestantism over Catholicism (181-2). For another take on the connections between Redcrosse's imprisonment by Orgoglio and the Harrowing, see Nohrnberg (182-9 and 273-6), who locates these connections within a larger network of Christian, Jewish, and classical pagan imagery of imprisonment in and release from the underworld.

Although he has been slipping steadily into ignorance and sinful action because of the deceptions of Duessa, Redcrosse attempts to resist Orgoglio's onslaught in book I. He weakly takes up his sword and, though "hopelesse," starts to battle the giant (I.vii.11.4). Redcrosse is spared death in this unequal fight by "heuenly grace" (12.3): the giant's blow merely knocks him unconscious, enabling Duessa and Orgoglio to imprison him in the giant's deepest dungeon. The grace of unconsciousness, as I discuss in more detail at the beginning of chapter 4, allows Redcrosse to skip the yield-or-die question, leaving him technically unyielded. Indeed, in subtle ways, we see signs that he is a resistant prisoner, one who prefers to die rather than join his captor's narrative. For example, his weapons and armor, carried away from the scene of his capture by Una's dwarf, remain legible signs of his unyielded, knightly self-narrative. They "speake his prowesse" as the "heauie record of the good *Redcrosse*" (vii.48.4-8). Una either mystically hears or imagines Redcrosse crying out for rescue (viii.28.9), and even Redcrosse's words to Arthur through the dungeon's grate—"O who is that, which bringes me happy choyce / Of death" (38.3-4)—are, in a chivalric context, the words of a hero deprived of and desiring his option to choose death over imprisonment (that is, to exert narrative power) even as they may also be warning signs, in a Christian context, of despair.

Redcrosse's subtle resistance is bolstered by the manner of his rescue, where Arthur plays the role of Christ harrowing hell and thereby redeeming Redcrosse.⁹⁴ Arthur arrives to begin the rescue with a trumpet blast from his squire that shatters the gates of Orgoglio's castle (I.viii.3-4), a Biblical image that calls to mind Christ's traditional arrival in hell, as he shouts for entry and bursts open the gates. Arthur defeats Orgoglio with help from his mystical shield, which casts a blinding light, again a feature of the coming of Christ into hell (viii.19). Arthur's dispatching of Orgoglio and Duessa's beast recalls Christ's defeat of Satan (viii.20). Even Redcrosse's voice crying for aid—weak though it is, heard only by Una—may suggest the

⁹⁴ My discussion in this paragraph is indebted to Tamburr's explications of these central elements and iconography of the Harrowing myth (see, for example, 5-13 and 104-9).

traditional motif of souls pleading with Christ for redemption. Working together, these references to the traditional Harrowing story frame Redcrosse as a resistant prisoner by definition—like the Old Testament figures who, having not yielded to Satan, can be redeemed by Christ.

That said, after his rescue, Redcrosse faces a long reconstruction of the self-narrative he has nearly lost (first by only faintly resisting his captors, second by being the object of Arthur's act of rescue). Una's assessment of his state upon his release is telling: she blames ill fortune "That of your selfe ye thus berobbed arre" (viii.42.8). He has not chosen to *yield* himself, precisely, but his selfhood has been *stolen*, and reclaiming it will take time and effort. The process begins when Redcrosse exchanges gifts with Arthur (ix.18-19), a gesture that establishes them as brotherly equals rather than as servant and lord (that is, their relationship is more like Trystram and Launcelot's than Ariel and Prospero's). Redcrosse's escape from Despaire (which I discuss in the next section) and recovery in the House of Holinesse accomplish the rest of his reclamation. Most famously, of course, these sequences allegorize the journey of a sinner from near-despair over his prior failings back to faith in grace and conformity to Christian guidelines, but for my purposes they also, explicitly, depict Redcrosse recovering his selfhood. Contemplation's explanation to Redcrosse of his name, heritage, and destiny as St. George culminates this process (I.x.64-8): "himselpe he gan to fynd" (68.1). Only after he has fully recovered his self-narrative in this way is Redcrosse fit to become a rescuer in his own right and save Una's parents.

Spenser deploys Harrowing imagery during that rescue, too, and additionally in Book VI as Calidore rescues Pastorell. The dragon dies as Redcrosse pierces its mouth, recalling Christ's triumphantly destructive entry into the mouth of hell (I.xi.53); dawn breaks in the kingdom (xii.2); "the brasen gate" of the city is thrown open (xii.3); everyone rejoices (xii.4). Pastorell believes "her self in hell" surrounded by "damned fiends" while imprisoned in the brigands' cave (VI.x.43); Calidore breaks down the locked doors (xi.43); Pastorell, who "long had lyen dead," is

“again aliue” after Calidore saves her (50).⁹⁵ The Harrowing references here are mostly doing allegorical work for Spenser’s larger project, but they also endorse these acts of rescue as particularly noble and these rescuees as righteously unyielded.

That prisoners freed by a type of Harrowing must be technically unyielded may be surprising. We might expect that even characters who have yielded to their captors can be rescued in such an episode, because theological grace would seem to be precisely at its most powerful when overcoming the profound narrative and spiritual barrier that *yielding* to a Satanic captor (i.e. sin) would represent. Indeed, Spenser comes close to making this claim during the Despaire episode when he invokes the image of dishonorable battlefield yielding to explain how no one can avoid sin without God’s help:

What man is he, that boasts of fleshly might,
And vaine assuraunce of mortality,
Which all so soone, as it doth come to fight,
Against spirituall foes, yields by and by,
Or from the fielde most cowardly doth fly?
Ne let the man ascribe it to his skill,
That thorough grace hath gained victory. (I.x.1.1-7)

Crucially, however, Spenser never quite says that grace can restore a character who has dishonorably yielded—rather, he asserts that grace prevents such yielding. And indeed, this is what has happened in the examples I have been discussing: neither Redcrosse, Una’s parents, or Pastorell yields to their respective captors at any point. While passive, or while coming right up to the brink of yielding, they have technically remained resistant, never actually completing the act of surrender. They can, thus, be rescued and restored to self-narrating power. But even grace

⁹⁵ Calidore’s earlier defeat of a tiger is also a reference to the Harrowing: the tiger’s mouth is “wide gaping like hell gate” (VI.x.34.6) and Calidore defeats it (actually, implausibly, beheads it) with “his shepherds hooke” (36.1), a weapon reminiscent of Christ’s symbolic role as shepherd coupled with Christ’s bearing of the vexillum (the cross staff or standard) during the Harrowing.

cannot—or will not—rescue a character who has *consented* (because yielding is a choice) to become sin’s prisoner.

Spenser’s portrayal of grace’s relevance to a prisoner’s rescue thus amplifies and complicates orthodox understandings of theological grace in post-Reformation England. As Richard Mallette points out, the ancient Christian commonplace of humans as prisoners of sin provided a vivid figurative way for early modern religious writers to explore and debate the role of grace: when people are rescued sin’s prison, how much does their own effort or desire matter, and how much of the rescue is dependent on the aid of God? Mallette argues that Redcrosse’s essential passivity in his rescue by Arthur is a relatively orthodox presentation of the Reformist position that rescuees can do nothing to help themselves—or even desire rescue—unless and until God’s grace assists them (2-3). The yield-or-die discourse adds the detail that while Redcrosse may be helpless to stir himself or even wish for freedom, he has also not consciously and consensually yielded to his evil captors. In this case, the human prisoner is confined and inhibited by sin, but has not willingly given his allegiance to it. That Redcrosse has been spared such yielding only by “heuenly grace” (12.3)—because he lost consciousness while battling Orgoglio (not because he was capable of heroically resisting Orgoglio by himself)—would then, at least in a more assertively Calvinist sense, be a mark of his election. The elect cannot *yield* to sin even as they cannot resist or escape it without the intervention of God’s grace.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Mallette introduces his book *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England* with a brief argument that Spenser’s prison imagery over the course of *The Faerie Queene* “migrate[s] ever more distantly from its Reformation grounding in disputes about the will” and the role of grace, so that by the time Calidore saves Pastorell, “the issues of free will, so distant from their theological origins in Book I, are reexamined under a nontheological aegis” (4-5). I would add that Redcrosse and Pastorell do share one crucial similarity, which is that neither yields to their captors. In both cases, this non-yielding is enabled by a combination of incomplete but visible defiance on the character’s part and the assistance of circumstance—that is, of grace. Exactly how the self-sufficiency of human choices (free will) and dependence upon the gift of God (grace) worked together to enable salvation was, as Mallette explores throughout his useful study, a major point of theological contention during and after the Reformation. Redcrosse’s adventures, read through the yield-or-die lens, might suggest the workings of a prevenient grace that was available to defer a person’s characterizing choice or rescue him once he has made the choice to resist sin, but that could be rejected (rendered unavailable) by the free choice to yield

In general, the inherently passive role of the rescuee in any rescue scenario creates ambiguities that narratives must do particular work to resolve. As the rescues of Bors or Artegall show, even a yielded, technically unresisting prisoner can be rescued, though the restoration of self-narrative to such a prisoner is a truly rare incident (Britomart, who sacrifices her narrative power to restore Artegall's, is the best example I have found). Rescue can lead to the former prisoner yielding to the rescuer, as Ariel does. Resistant rescuees may be merely technically unyielded but otherwise fairly passive (such as Redcrosse, whose passivity illustrates a key theological point). Finally, rescue that leads to freedom and renewed narrative power is often followed by a period in which the rescuee's selfhood seems shaky or lost and must be explicitly re-asserted. Redcrosse, his selfhood stolen, faces the blankness of despair; Artegall is nearly unrecognizable to Britomart; Serena, captured by cannibals and rescued by Calepine, refuses to speak (ostensibly out of shame for her nakedness) or reveal her name at first, so that "all night to him vnknown she past" (*FQ* VI.viii.51.6) until day reveals her identity. These moments of anxiety over identity suggest the threat that not only imprisonment but also rescue represents to the selfhood of these characters.

Escape

Escape is straightforward, embodied resistance, defined not by words, affect, or internal resolution but rather by a physical avoidance of confinement. Captives who wish to escape must be affirmatively resistant, a quality that separates escapees from rescuees within the context of the yield-or-die discourse.⁹⁷ In other words, they must make a choice to retain narrative power

to sin. As William H. Marshall similarly concludes from his examination of Spenser's treatment of the sacraments, Book I's presentation of grace would then be essentially in accord with orthodox Anglican theology ("Calvin, Spenser, and the Major Sacraments" 99-100).

⁹⁷ The unnatural rigidity of my semantic choices in this section should already be clear, and it will quickly become clearer as I categorize as "escape" incidents that the texts themselves often

(through escape) at all costs rather than yield to a captor. Both captives who escape on their own and captives who have help must exhibit resistance in this way. When the yield-or-die discourse is active, help only arrives after escapees have already made their resistance manifest.

Of course, escape in a literal sense is also a narrative option for characters who flee *because* they fear death, not because they defiantly prefer death to captivity. Spenser's Coridon "escap[es] craftily" from the brigands who have captured him (VI.xi.18.6), motivated by desire to avoid death at their hands and the "feare" that seems to chase him even after he is safe (xi.27.4-6). His escape, however, is not a *resistant escape* within the terms of the yield-or-die discourse. Coridon is not acting in response to an explicit or implicit yield-or-die situation; the characterizing choice is not in effect. (Even if he were responding to the question, running away in fear of death is a non-answer to the question's binary proposition, more akin to the illegibility of chapter 4 [ordered to "yield or die," Coridon would be replying, "neither"]). The brigands themselves are anarchically disinterested in the conventions the discourse imposes on captors to either pose the choice or spare the lives of those who yield. In their initial assault, they seemingly indiscriminately "murder" some of the pastoral characters and "spoil" or "carr[y] captiue" others away (x.40-41); later, at the time of Coridon's escape, they murder more of their captives as part of an internal squabble (xi.17-18).

Despite the brigands' disinterest in the proprieties, the high-born Calidore and Pastorell are able to maintain behavior within the bounds of the yield-or-die logic even during this episode. As I have discussed, he rescues (harrows) her from the hell of captivity. Pastorell, meanwhile, is the kind of female character whose pre-existing loyalty to Calidore and determination not to be raped seems to protect her from being raped (that is, because she refuses to yield, she cannot be "dishonored"). With a "constant mynd," she resists the brigands' Captain despite his attempts to win "her loue" with "looks," "words," "gifts," and "threats" (xi.5.2,

call rescue or deliverance. I use the word "escape" to emphasize that these are cases in which the captive retains active narrative power (escapees are active grammatical subjects; rescuees are the passive objects who "are rescued").

4.7-9). She survives greedy slavers, the brigands' murderous brawl, and "wretched thraldome" without yielding and therefore, apparently, without sexual assault (xi.13-24) until Calidore responds to her resistance with rescue.

That the yield-or-die discourse seems to work for the highborn characters in this episode even as the lowborn characters disregard it parallels Book VI's larger pattern of distinctions between noble and common.⁹⁸ This disparity seems to suggest that the yield-or-die discourse belongs to the noble, the civilized, the courteous, whereas it is essentially irrelevant to Coridon's captivity with the brigands. Spenser presents the discourse's conventions here as if they are natural to the gentry. In one way, this presentation elevates the discourse by connecting it exclusively with honorable, highborn characters. Coridon's poignant speech after his escape seems to suggest mostly that he feels what we would call survivor's guilt today, but also that he recognizes that death with his comrades would have been a "better" (higher, more noble?) choice. Lamenting "That euer I did liue, this day to see, / This dismall day, and was not dead before" (29.2-3), he elaborates:

. . . better were with them to haue bene dead,
Then here to see all desolate and wast,
Despoiled of those ioyes and iollyhead,
Which with those gentle shepherds here I wont to lead. (32.3-9)

In a larger sense, however, this section's selective application of the yield-or-die discourse to highborn characters, presenting it as social "courtesie" rather than universal truth, is a profound subversion of the discourse. The characterizing question claims to characterize *everyone*—dishonorable, lowborn slaves and princely heroes alike. Indeed, it requires such inclusivity in

⁹⁸ As the narrator comments early in Book VI, courtesy is intimately connected to class division and may, itself, consist in the decorum each class "bear[ing] themselues aright / To all of each degree . . . / For whether they be placed high aboue, / Or low beneath, yet ought they well to know / Their good . . . / Great skill it is such duties timely to bestow" (VI.ii.1.3-9). As Hamilton comments in his editor's introduction to Book VI, the virtue of courtesy "is natural" to Calidore and Tristram, which reflects their high birth (15). If the yield-or-die discourse operates here as an aspect of courtesy, then it, too, is tied to class distinctions.

order to identify honor in contrast to slavishly fearful yielding. If brigands and shepherds—and, for that matter, women such as Radigund, who shames Terpin despite his resistance—simply exist outside of the discourse’s context, then the characterizing power of the yield-or-die demand may fail whenever it attempts to reach past upper-class, gender-role-conforming men. Again, here, Spenser questions and undermines patterns that elsewhere he upholds, exposing the arbitrary artificiality of this system of thought and action.

With Coridon as a reminder that these patterns are artificial, we can settle in to examine the patterns themselves. The swashbuckling hero fighting through his foes to freedom is the most obvious example of an escape storyline that enables a celebration of the escapee’s abilities and narrative power. In the simplest sense, knights who “had levyr dye than to avoyde the fylde” (*Morte* 318) may face the yield-or-die choice on the battlefield, choose resistance, and either free themselves on the spot or die in combat like Macbeth, refusing to cry “Hold, enough!” (5.8.34). A somewhat more involved but still paradigmatic example is Launcelot’s climactic escape from Gwenyvere’s chamber when he is caught there by Mordred, Aggravayne, and their twelve followers in the *Morte*. Hammering on the door, the armed posse declares Launcelot “takyn” and orders him to “Com oute . . . thou shalt not ascape!” (649), making the yield-or-die stakes clear even before the men add, “lat us into thys chambir, and we shall save thy lyff” (650). Resisting that order almost certainly means death for both lovers, and they know it. Gwenyvere concludes that if Launcelot fights, he is “lykly to be slayne” and Launcelot, unarmed, frets that he will be “shamefully slayne for lake of myne armour.”⁹⁹ Gwenyvere’s life is on the line, too; if Launcelot is killed, Gwenyvere risks being burned at the stake (649).

⁹⁹ The adverb “shamefully” here probably describes the actions of Mordred’s men. Launcelot does not fear that *his* death will be shameful (moments later, he opts for death to avoid shame). He is, rather, frustrated that his opponents are shamefully denying him a fair fight. As he spells out moments later, his lack of armor denies him a last opportunity to add worship to his self-narrative “that men myght speke of my dedys or ever I were slayne” (650). His opponents might grant him that honor, apparently, but are choosing to withhold it. Of course, what’s actually happening is the timeless formal storytelling tactic of underlining the impossibility of what the (super)hero is about to accomplish—but Launcelot doesn’t know that.

Nonetheless, both Launcelot and Gwennyvere affirmatively opt for resistance. Indeed, Launcelot's determination to fight is accelerated by his awareness that every second he delays strengthens Mordred's narrative while diminishing his own. The posse's shouting voices are deliberately raised "that all the courte myght hyre hit." Mordred's label for Launcelot, "Traytour knyght," will overpower Launcelot's own identity if Launcelot yields or even allows this shouting to continue. He thus quickly makes his resistant choice, declaring, "better were deth at onys than thus to endure thys payne" (649); Gwennyvere follows his lead by declaring that she "woll never lyve longe aftir thy dayes" and is prepared to "take my dethe as mekely as ever ded marter" if Launcelot is killed (649-50). From this moment on, they are resistant characters.

Launcelot momentarily keeps that fact secret from the men outside, only announcing—equivocally—that he's about to open the door. He allows one knight to enter, slams the door, kills that knight bare-handed, and arms himself. Having accomplished that much, he finally makes his resistance known to the men outside by declaring "ye shall nat preson me thys nyght" and advising them to go away until a proper trial by combat can be arranged to settle the issue. In a sense, he turns the tables and urges them to yield rather than die (650). When they offer him resistance in return, Launcelot steps out, kills all of them but Mordred (who flees), and escapes the castle to his own lodgings and supporters (650-1). The episode needs little further analysis: Launcelot faces the choice to yield or die, chooses to risk death by resisting, and then succeeds at escaping.

Earlier in Malory's book, Trystram enacts a prototype of Launcelot's escape when his jealous cousin Sir Andret—accompanied by the requisite twelve knights—catches him in bed with La Beale Isode. Unlike Launcelot, Trystram is actually captured, "takyn nakyd abed . . . and so was he bounde hande and foote and kepte tyll day." Crucially, we don't see him surrender, meaning that his resistant self-narrative remains technically active. Trystram being so "secretly and suddeynly" assaulted that the characterizing question gets skipped is, like unconsciousness, a narrative workaround to avoid posing that question to the story's hero at a moment when

either answer would, effectively, *end* that story (269). Paradoxically, this unusually overwhelming physical defeat—Trystram surprised, naked, outnumbered, with a lady’s safety to consider, and thus bound before he can lift a hand—empowers his resistance by removing the initial need for the yield-or-die question to be asked.

Still bound, Trystram is led to “jugemente” (that is, execution) the next day at “a chapell that stood upon the see rockes.” Surrounded by a large guard of knights, Trystram scolds Andret for bringing “shame to all knyghthode” by executing him “shamfully” while he is defenseless (269). Like Launcelot, Trystram isn’t nearly as worried about death as he is angry about not dying in honorable combat; he intimates that he would be more than happy to fight a single combat if Andret weren’t too cowardly to do so (270). Although he doesn’t spell out explicitly that he would prefer to die than in any way support Andret’s self-narrative, Trystram’s assertion of his own self-narrative throughout this scene (and thus his resistance to Andret’s) is consistent. He speaks of his service to Cornwall, his record of knightly success, his disapproval of Andret’s behavior, and his confidence that he could defeat Andret in battle. In response to Trystram’s defiance, Andret draws his sword to kill his prisoner. Trystram promptly bursts his bonds, grabs the sword, kills Andret and ten others, and barricades himself in the chapel long enough to wrench bars out of its window and leap down the cliff to the rocks below (270). From an apparently inauspicious (but paradoxically empowering) beginning, Trystram’s resistant captivity concludes with one of the most violent and spectacular escape scenes in all of Malory.

Spenser offers versions of this same basic pattern featuring a female escapee throughout the first half of Florimell’s sufferings in books III and IV of *The Faerie Queene* (the second half of her sufferings will become relevant later). As he tends to do, Spenser foregrounds the sexual threat inherent in capture and imprisonment as Florimell escapes a series of sexually inflected pursuers. She first appears as she flees to escape the lecherous Foster (III.i.15-17). Arthur and Guyon, struck by her beauty, join the pursuit ostensibly to help her (18) but Florimell fears Arthur is dangerous and flees him, too (iv.48-51). After taking shelter with a witch, Florimell

sneaks away to escape “mischiefe” from the witch or the witch’s lustful son (vii.18.4). In response, the witch sends a terrifying hyena “that feeds on wemens flesh” to pursue Florimell and either capture or kill her (22.8). Florimell signals her resistance to all these captors straightforwardly by her desperate flights from each, but the crisis comes to a final point when, with the hyena closing in, her horse reaches the point of exhaustion and the sea cuts off her escape route.

Trapped (not unlike Launcelot and Trystram, despite the wide gulf in their characters and circumstances otherwise), Florimell has reached a final yield-or-die crux at the conclusion of all these pursuits, and she makes the resistant choice to die. Unable to keep running, and feeling that capture means “yield[ing] her selfe to spoile of greedinesse” (25.5-6), Florimell races for the water “to drowne her selfe . . . / Rather then of the tyrant to be caught” (26.7-8). As she reaches the water’s edge, however, she discovers a boat with its owner, a fisherman, asleep within. Florimell jumps in, “and with the ore / Did thrust the shallop from the floting strand: / So safety fownd at sea, which she fownd not at land” (27.7-9). Like Malory’s heroic knights, cornered and having made a choice to die resistant rather than surrender, Florimell still takes forceful advantage of the chance to live.

Such heroic willingness to die rather than yield is usually the prerequisite for captives to receive assistance in managing escapes. Help often doesn’t arrive until after captives assert their resistant choice. This pattern appears in many escapes by Malory’s major knights. The young Arthur, for example, has several early brushes with battlefield defeat and the threat of yielding, but he is aided in escaping such a fate *after* he refuses to yield. King Pellynore inflicts an arguably embarrassing defeat on the young king early in the text, first felling him in a joust and then beating him in a swordfight. When Pellynore demands that Arthur yield or die, however, Arthur gives the defiant response that “dethe ys wellcom to me whan hit commyth. But to yelde me unto the, I woll nat.” Arthur makes a last brave attempt to overcome Pellynore, but Pellynore gets the best of him again and “wolde have smytten off hys hede” except that Merlin intervenes,

first with words and then, when that doesn't deter Pellynore, by casting Pellynore into a magical sleep (36). That King Arthur himself has been bested in hand-to-hand combat and saved by Merlin may seem ignominious, but what matters here is Arthur's attitude of resistance, which enables the continuation of his self-narrative and seems almost to activate Merlin's assistance. The pattern repeats itself when Arthur does battle with Accolon. Only after Arthur, near defeat, defies Accolon and declares his willingness to die does the Damesell of the Lake abruptly enter the narrative and, with her magic, turn the tide of battle in Arthur's favor (88-9).

This pattern of expressed resistance followed by the sudden appearance of help also happens to female characters. Chaucer's Custance is famously passive throughout most of the *Man of Law's Tale*, but near the story's conclusion, her rudderless boat washes up on a strange shore where she must fight off a potential rapist who comes aboard. The standard pattern is subtle here, hidden beneath Custance's characteristic passivity, but present. As the attacker forces his way onto Custance's small boat, he declares that "he sholde / Hir lemman be, wher-so she wolde or nolde" (916-17). In response, Custance expresses resistance first, on a technicality, by not yielding; second, by crying unhappily; and third, by physically reacting in such a way that he must struggle with her:

Hir child cride, and she cride pitously.
But blisful Marie heelp hire right anon;
For with hir struglyng wel and myghtily
The thief fil over bord al sodeynly,
And in the see he dreynte for vengeaunce;
And thus hath Crist unwemmed kept Custance. (919-24)

In response to Custance's resistance, Mary and Christ intervene to assist.¹⁰⁰ This incident could, of course, also qualify as a "rescue"—an appropriate term for a generally inactive character saved

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Robertson points out that, in Chaucer's sources, Custance more clearly "prays for aid from God" to activate this divine assistance; Chaucer, slightly more ambiguously, merely

by divine intervention—but the narrator insistently defines Custance as a resistant figure in his subsequent commentary. The narrator asks us to recall that God aided David against Goliath (932-38) and Judith against Holofernes (939-44) before concluding “So sente he might and vigour to Custance” (945). David and Judith are both clearly resistant characters who take assertive, violent action to defy would-be conquerors. If Custance belongs in their company in this moment, then she also belongs in King Arthur’s: defying a would-be captor in battle and receiving, in response, unexpected help.

Florimell’s next ordeal after fleeing the hyena in *The Faerie Queene* is similar to Custance’s: having escaped the monster by leaping into a boat, she finds herself adrift at sea. In the boat with her is its owner, a sleeping fisherman. When he wakes up, he lusts after the woman in his boat and, after an escalating series of violations, “Beastly he threwe her downe” to attempt rape (III.viii.26.8). In a passage with a few verbal echoes of Custance’s battle, Florimell “strugled strongly both with foote and hand . . . And cride to heuen, from humane helpe exild” (27.3-5). In response, “the heauens of voluntary grace . . . Doe succor send to her distressed cace” (29.2-4). Like the Virgin Mary helps Custance, the divine being Proteus appears and saves Florimell.¹⁰¹ Once again, the pattern repeats. Florimell resists, and *then* receives assistance to escape.

These cases of assisted escape involve characters who are threatened with captivity (broadly defined; rape/*raptus* is a kind of capture) but achieve liberty before captivity culminates in longer-term physical constraint or prison. Escapes from prison, however, are strikingly similar, following essentially the same pattern over a more extended period of time. For example, Malory’s Launcelot is always captured unyielding, by magic or trickery, enabling him to be a resistant captive. Once a prisoner, Launcelot reliably asserts his willingness to suffer

notes that she cries (“The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance 162-3). Either way, in terms of the yield-or-die discourse, she exhibits unhappiness and thus resistance.

¹⁰¹ More accurately, and unlike the Virgin Mary, Proteus saves Florimell temporarily before becoming her captor in his own right. I will return to this incident.

and die rather than yield to his captors' will—an assertion that activates helpers to assist him in escaping. After being captured unconscious by Morgan and her fellow queens and waking up in prison, for instance, Launcelot faces the delayed yield-or-die choice: “Now chose one of us, whyche that whou wolte have to thy paramour,” says Morgan, “other ellys to dye in this preson.” Launcelot acknowledges that the choice is “a harde case,” but declares that “had I lever dye in this preson with worshyp than to have one of you to my paramoure” (155).

After this declaration, as he endures “grete sorow” alone in his cell, a damsel brings him food and offers to set him free on the condition that he repay the favor by aiding her father in a tournament. The damsel's offer at first appears similar to the offer of Launcelot's captors. She, too, offers Launcelot a choice between doing her will or dying in prison, saying “and ye woll be ruled by me, I shall helpe you oute of this dystresse.” But Launcelot has already made his resistance—founded in a willingness to die—manifest, so we can presume that fear of death does not motivate his actions now. Additionally, two details separate the damsel's offer from the queens' and allow Launcelot to accept her help with his self-narrative intact. First, while Launcelot feels that the queens' offer will cost him “worshyp,” he believes the damsel's promise that *her* offer will *not* cause him “shame nor velony.” Second, Launcelot adds a condition of his own, refusing to agree to the damsel's plan until after she reveals the name of her father—King Bagdemagus—whom Launcelot recognizes as “a noble kyng and a good knyght” (156). Because of these two details, Launcelot's consent to receive assistance is narratively founded on his desire for honor and his willingness to aid someone he respects, not on any fear of dying in prison. Further, he exerts narrative power by transforming his agreement with the damsel from a passive purchase of freedom into an active, specific, self-aware choice to play the hero's role in rescuing, in turn, a weaker (but still honorable) man. (Redcrosse and Artegall also immediately follow their rescues by, in turn, becoming rescuers.) The damsel escorts Launcelot “oute of twelve lockys,” brings him to his horse and armor, and Launcelot's escape is complete (156).

Even so, I am tempted to read what happens next as evidence of the cost of such an assisted escape—perhaps even Launcelot cannot receive such help without a little self-narrative damage. As soon as Launcelot rides away from the damsel, he gets lost. He “never coude fynde no hygheway, and so the nyght fell on hym.” He ends up taking shelter in an empty pavilion, falling asleep inside only to find himself embraced and kissed by Sir Belleus, who has returned to the tent and thinks “that his lemman had layne in that bed” (156). The incident is an eerily comic mix-up that nearly results in Belleus’s death when the two men draw swords. Of course, Launcelot swiftly defeats Belleus and dispatches him to join the Round Table, resuming his usual procedure of sending his captives to support his self-narrative at court. The fact that Launcelot’s first experience after rescue is to be physically lost and mistaken for a different person, however, may hint at the threat to his self-narrative that he has just (mostly) survived.

Launcelot undergoes a similar experience much later in Malory’s text, during the Knight of the Cart episode. Mellyagaunce, presumably reluctant to meet Launcelot in the trial by combat, tricks him into stepping on a trapdoor that drops Launcelot into a dungeon. Imprisoned (having skipped the characterizing question), Launcelot’s only hope of escape is, again, a damsel who brings his meals. This time, the damsel wants him “to have layne by her” (635), adding that, if he sleeps with her, she will help him escape. Confident that his absence at the trial will be understood as involuntary and that another knight will take his place, Launcelot declares, “ye shall nat feare me; and if there were no mo women in all thys londe but ye, yet shall nat I have ado with you.” The lady insists that he will be shamed, but Launcelot seems unmoved, replying, “As for worldis shame, now Jesu deffende me; and as for my distresse, hit ys welcom, whatsomever hit be that God sendys me” (636). Launcelot refuses to yield to the lady out of fear of death, earthly shame, or physical suffering.

As a result of Launcelot’s resistance, the damsel is forced to negotiate with him rather than dictate unconditional terms. Her next offer, on the morning of the trial, is far more moderate: “and ye wolde but onys kysse me, I shulde delyver you and your armoure, and the

beste horse that was within Sir Mellyagaunce stable,” she tries. Launcelot agrees: “I may do that and lese no worshyp—and wyte you well, and I undirstood there were ony disworshyp for to kysse you, I wold nat do hit” (636). This exchange echoes Launcelot’s negotiation with King Bagdemagus’s daughter, in which he agrees to the price of escape only after the terms are adjusted to suit him. Again, therefore, he keeps control over his self-narrative even during the precarious process of receiving assistance in a prison-break.

Launcelot’s escape from Mellyagaunce’s dungeon is not immediately followed by an incident in which his identity continues to be threatened (he does not wander, lost, into another pavilion of red sendal). Instead, he cuts straight to the rehabilitative act of becoming a rescuer himself. He rides directly to court, reveals himself, kills Mellyagaunce, and even sees the record of these events inscribed on Mellyagaunce’s tomb (636-38). Malory follows this episode with the brief but moving story of Launcelot’s miraculous healing of Sir Urry, which, among other things, serves to suggest divine endorsement of Launcelot’s identity as “the beste knyght of the worlde” (639). The events following Launcelot’s second escape with a damsel’s help, in other words, repeatedly (anxiously?) confirm and amplify his self-narrative. Both scenes of escape establish a pattern wherein Launcelot preserves his self-narrative by stating a willingness to suffer rather than yield and then negotiating his escape. The incidents that follow may hint at residual concern for the solidity of Launcelot’s identity, or they may simply be part of the ebb and flow of anonymity and fame that constitutes one of the deep structuring rhythms of Malory’s book.

Two incidents in which Trystram is captured by King Mark and then escapes are useful additions to this discussion. Like Launcelot, in both these examples, Trystram is captured unyielding. In the first incident, he is wounded after a tournament and falls asleep (apparently drugged by Mark), at which point Mark orders “hym to be caryed to another castell; and there he put hym in a stronge preson” (401). The circumstances of the second capture are vaguer: “by treson Kynge Marke lete take hym and put hym in preson” (403). In the first, more elaborate incident, Trystram endures some time in prison while, outside, various allies react to his loss. La

Beale Isode, anxious about his disappearance, recruits Sir Sadocke to search for him; Sadocke, learning of Trystram's imprisonment, attacks King Mark and ends up inciting other knights to rebellion against the king's injustice (401-2). Mark's inventive response to this threat of civil war is to create fake letters from the Pope ordering him to join a crusade. He forwards these letters to Trystram in prison with the offer "that, and he wolde go warre upon the myscreauntes, he sholde go oute of preson and have all his power with hym" (402). Although the details are different, the underlying pattern is similar to Launcelot's imprisonments. The unyielding knight is given an offer of highly conditional release.

Like Launcelot, Trystram refuses to accept the offer unconditionally and especially out of fear. He points out that the "Pope's" letters only call for Mark, not himself, to join the crusade, and orders Mark's messenger to "telle hym, traytoure kynge as he is, I woll nat go at his commaundement, gete oute of preson as well as I may, for I se I am well rewarded for my trewe servyse" (402). Mark immediately creates more fake letters that demand Trystram's personal involvement in the mission, but Trystram "aspyed they were of Kynge Markes countirfetynge" and continues to sit in prison rather than accepting release on such terms. His actions illustrate the ability of a prisoner to resist a captor simply by refusing to accept the captor's narrative—counter-intuitively, by *remaining* in Mark's custody, Trystram *resists* Mark's narrative and thus retains his own self-narrating power. Launcelot did the same with Queen Morgan. After Trystram demonstrates his resistance, his opportunity to escape arrives from an unexpected quarter. Sir Percivale arrives in Cornwall "to seke aftir Syr Trystram; and whan Sir Percivale harde that Sir Trystram was in preson, he made clerly the delyveraunce of hym by his knightly meanys" (403).

The text perhaps hints that Trystram may be beholden to Percivale for this assistance when Trystram offers—conditionally—to keep Percivale company ("And ye woll abyde in this marchis, I woll ryde with you"). Percivale, however, declines the offer, saying "in thes contreyes I may nat tary" and thus freeing Trystram from any obligation to accompany him. Instead,

Percivale visits Mark's court to berate the king for imprisoning Trystram, a speech that serves to reinforce Trystram's identity as "now the knyght of moste reverence in the worlde lyyng" (403). Percivale, in other words, supports Trystram's self-narrative rather than the reverse. By refusing King Mark's offers and remaining in prison, Trystram has established his firm resistance and earned an escape that is remarkably free of any impingement on his own identity.

The second incident of captivity follows immediately as King Mark locks Trystram up again "by treson" (403). Once again, La Beal Isode (like Launcelot's several damsels) is instrumental in his escape, but this time Trystram himself initiates her involvement. While she mourns for his most recent arrest, he writes to her from prison and promises that he will travel to England with her if she will prepare a ship (403-4). This conditional promise repeats the pattern in which the captive participates in his own escape by setting the terms of his freedom. Launcelot will only accept freedom if it suits his honor, and Trystram, previously, has refused a conditional release from Mark but accepted unconditional freedom from Percivale. Isode swings into action, recruiting her allies to imprison Mark while freeing Trystram, and the lovers sail to England (404).

In Malory, then, major characters survive the potential loss of narrative power inherent to rescue by taking charge—to a greater or lesser degree—over the circumstances and costs of that rescue and thereby transforming it into *escape*, an exertion of their own self-narrative. The involvement of women in many of these examples is a fascinating detail: in the *Morte*, "damsel helps knight escape" is as much a recurring motif as "knight rescues damsel." That said, I have chosen my words for these motifs carefully. Knights *escape* (with help), but ladies *are rescued*, meaning they do not necessarily express resistance or negotiate over terms of escape with their rescuer first. Even Gwenyvere—who is as close as the book comes to a female protagonist—simply tells Launcelot that "if ye se that as tomorne they woll pute me unto dethe, than may ye rescowe me *as ye thynke best*" (651, emphasis mine), giving her rescuer narrative power over her fate in a way Launcelot or Trystram would never tolerate. Subtly, these mixed-gender

rescues thus serve to support the self-narratives of male characters (whether as escapees or rescuers) while undermining the self-narratives of female ones.

On the Renaissance stage, the verbal components of escape—expressions of resistance, negotiations between captives and accomplices—receive greater emphasis. As *Tamburlaine's* Part 2 begins, Callapine—son of Bajazeth, Tamburlaine's imperial prisoner in Part 1—has been “detained by cruel Tamburlaine” in prison (1.2.4). He must persuade his jailer, Almeda, to help him escape to a ship that is waiting for him nearby. Unlike, for example, Launcelot with his damsels, Callapine has received no conditional offer of help from Almeda that he must modify in order to assert his own narrative power. In this case, Almeda is (sensibly) terrified of reprisals from Tamburlaine, so Callapine's task is to assert his self-narrative so powerfully that Almeda will decide to support it. They both seem to know that the scene is going to turn on the power of words. Callapine promises that “were I now but half so eloquent / To paint in words what I'll perform in deeds, / I know thou wouldst depart from hence with me” (9-11). The following dialogue is light, punning, but it also reveals that Almeda is nervous about the power of Callapine's unchecked words:

ALMEDA. Not for all Afric. Therefore move me not.

CALLAPINE. Yet hear me speak, my gentle Almeda.

ALMEDA. No speech to that end, by your favour, sir.

CALLAPINE. By Cairo runs—

ALMEDA. No talk of running, I tell you, sir.

CALLAPINE. A little further, gentle Almeda.

ALMEDA. Well sir, what of this? (12-18)

This final capitulation by Almeda to Callapine's speech marks Almeda's capitulation to Callapine's self-narrative. Callapine cuts loose with thirty-four of Marlowe's mighty lines, constructing a vivid story about the details of his pending escape and the riches and power he will shower upon Almeda in recompense for his help, and concluding with the rhetorical

promise, “And more than this, for all I cannot tell” (19-53). Almeda’s response is comically blunt: “How far hence lies the galley, did you say?” (54). He’s persuaded; now he’s just figuring out the details. Moments later, he swears to see Callapine freed or die trying (67-73), and Callapine’s successful escape follows. In this assisted escape, as in all my examples, the prisoner’s resistance—his or her assertion of an ongoing self-narrative—activates a helper. This particular example especially highlights the *narrating* component. Callapine’s description of his escape brings his real escape into being.

Several of Shakespeare’s women—imprisoned by fathers attempting to control their marriages—enact variations on this model of recruiting accomplices for escape. Juliet’s resistance to her father and Paris inspires her Nurse’s aid; Imogen’s resistance to her father and especially to Cloten, followed by her willingness to die rather than endure Posthumus’s slander, activates Pisanio’s aid in *Cymbeline*; Silvia’s speech to Elgamour begging his help in evading marriage to Thurio in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* inspires him to declare: “I give consent to go along with you, / Reaking as little what betideth me, / As much I wish all good befortune you” (4.3.39-41). These more romantic, less militaristic escapes still follow the basic pattern wherein a character’s expression of resistance is a necessary prerequisite to offers of help; yielded characters receive no such offers.

Most of these characters who escape captivity with assistance share, with Malory’s Launcelot, an odd experience in the aftermath of that escape. Their identities seem to become briefly shaky despite the fact that they have just reinforced their self-narratives through resistance. Custance is more adrift than ever after her escape from the rapist: her boat travels “Somtime west, and sometime north and south, / And sometime est, ful many a wery day” (948-49) until the narrator turns away from her temporarily to focus on the story’s men (“Now lat us stinte of Custance but a throwe” [953]). Florimell finds herself in the hands of Proteus—an explicitly unstable, changeable character—and soon disappears into a dark dungeon (III.viii.41), vanishing from the narrative for many cantos while the False Florimell takes her place. Juliet

experiences her ill-fated deathlike sleep as part of her escape; Imogen adopts her successful masculine disguise. Not all assisted escapes correlate with a threat to and recovery of the escapee's identity, but that so many do is fascinating; escape *with help*, like rescue, acts temporarily to destabilize the escapee's self-narrative at a local level even as, in the bigger picture, it solidifies that same self-narrative and remains a clear act of resistance.

Death

Death is closely linked to escape within the yield-or-die discourse. The decision to escape is, after all, a decision to risk death rather than yield, so death is merely the realization of that risk and thus, itself, another kind of escape. Like escape, however, death needs to be clearly identified as an affirmative, resistant choice in order for it to act as a support, rather than a negation, of a character's self-narrative. By contrast, deaths that follow yielding or that, in related ways, carry out a captor's wish as opposed to a captive's take on the uneasy connotations of despair, dishonor, and the Christian sin of suicide. Bajazeth, for example, kills himself long after yielding to Tamburlaine, and his narrative remains tainted by dishonor.

The Faerie Queene's Book I explores these nuances during and after Redcrosse's imprisonment in Orgoglio's dungeon. As I have already discussed, Redcrosse barely manages to remain technically resistant during this captivity until he is rescued by Arthur, and his self-narrative must then undergo a long period of rehabilitation. The greatest crisis Redcrosse faces during this period of destabilized identity is his confrontation with Despaire. While tempting Redcrosse to suicide, Despaire reminds Redcrosse of Orgoglio's "dungeon deepe" in which he recently "for death so oft did call" (I.ix.45.5-6), implying an equivalence between Redcrosse's desire for "choyce / Of death" while imprisoned and the suicide he now considers. In fact, however, the two death-wishes are more conceptually separated than Despaire wants Redcrosse to realize. The first, Redcrosse's desire for death while captive, is a wish for self-narrating power,

for agency to take an action that would represent defiance of Redcrosse's captors by resisting the long-term imprisonment they have inflicted upon him. Such a death would be Redcrosse's "choyce," a final assertion of self-narrative, akin to refusing to yield on the battlefield and being slain as a result.

The second death-wish doesn't belong to Redcrosse at all—it isn't part of his self-narrative. At the beginning of the encounter with Despaire, Redcrosse himself calls Despaire the "authour of this fact" (referring to the crime of a previous knight's suicide) (37.7), labeling Despaire as a captor who writes the final actions of his yielding captives for them. In the verbal battle that follows, Despaire very nearly wins narrative power over Redcrosse as well when "his speech . . . as a swords poynt through his hart did perse" (48.2-3), and Redcrosse begins to feel "trembling horror" and to "quaile" with fear (49.3-5). If Redcrosse obeys Despaire's suggestion in order to end this existential fear, then his death would constitute the act of *dishonorable yielding* to Despaire—a yielding out of fear into a narrative not his own.

When Despaire offers Redcrosse a variety of implements to kill himself and orders him to "choose" which to use (50.8), his reminder of Redcrosse's earlier "choyce" is both valid and misleading. Both choices promise to be legitimate last expressions of self-narrating power, responses to the great question of whether to yield or resist—but the earlier choice would be to resist, whereas this choice would be to yield. Now, facing Despaire, Redcrosse doesn't choose an implement on his own, a seemingly passive response that actually (like battlefield unconsciousness) defers the choice a little longer, leaving him still technically resistant. Despaire must hand him a dagger (51.1-3), an important clue that Despaire, not Redcrosse, is authoring the scene. As Redcrosse accepts the dagger and prepares to stab himself, he is—finally—preparing to yield. Una's salvific intervention is not only a reminder of the importance of Christian hope but also a chivalric exhortation never to yield out of fear: "Fie fie, faint hearted knight," she chastises him, and frames the rest of her speech about grace in words that also—crucially—remind Redcrosse of the value of courage (52-3). His escape from Despaire owes as

much to Una's implied reprimand against dishonorable yielding as it does her reprimand against theological sin.

A strict Christian interpreter might, with theological accuracy, label both of Redcrosse's death wishes as near-suicides and thus near-sins. Spenser treats this fact seriously, allowing the Christian discourse to intersect with and complicate the yield-or-die discourse in this moment. From the yield-or-die standpoint, however, Redcrosse's wish for the option to die while captive is mitigated by the work that wish does to characterize him as still (barely) honorable and resistant. His acceptance of Despaire's instructions, by contrast, would constitute fearful yielding and cost him both honor and self-narrative. The two discourses might disagree over how Redcrosse's first death wish characterizes him (it is sinful but honorable), but they are in agreement that his second, if fulfilled, would mark him negatively—it is sinful and shameful.

Spenser's exploration of the suicide's location at the intersection of sin and honor is somewhat rare in the texts I examine here. More commonly, these texts tend to dodge the issue of Christian sin when they are using willed death to characterize someone as honorably resistant. The resistant captive might die by someone else's hand after refusing to yield, or the character (indeed, the entire culture of the story's world) might not be Christian. For example, the Captain of Balsera and his son die in non-suicidal resistance to Tamburlaine's assault on their city in Part 2 of *Tamburlaine*. When Theridamas demands that the Captain "yield up thy hold to us" (3.3.16), the Captain fires back, "Why, do you think me weary of it?" (17) and soon, more formally, declares "Were you, that are the friends of Tamburlaine, / Brothers to holy Mahomet himself, / I would not yield it. Therefore do your worst" (35-7). This being a *Tamburlaine* play, Balsera is quickly and completely conquered. The Captain dies, resistant to the last, from the injuries he sustains in the assault, and his wife Olympia immediately decides to kill herself and her son as well. She asks her son for his consent, and he replies that if she won't kill him, he'll do it himself to ensure that "The Scythians shall not tyrannize on me" (3.4.29). Marlowe makes clear that the boy enthusiastically shares his parents' determination to die rather than live in

shameful captivity. The extreme commitment of the Captain and his son allows them to rank among the very few characters in either *Tamburlaine* play who stand—even in defeat—in unchanging defiance of Tamburlaine’s self-narrative.

Saying “do your worst” to an armed foe in a position to offer the yield-or-die choice is such a decisive and bold response that texts sometimes use it to question the value of such a character’s extreme commitment to resistance. The choice can mark the character as not only honorable, but rigid and one-sided, perhaps to a fault. For example, in Malory, Palomydes defeats the minor character Corsabryne and offers the characterizing question: “Yelde the . . . or thou shalt dye.” Corsabryne throws back defiance and urges Palomydes to “do thy warste,” so Palomydes cuts off his head. Corsabryne—a non-Christian, like Palomydes—dies in a cloud of “stynke” so terrible that “there myght nobody abyde the savoure,” an affirmation from the heavens that the unbaptized knight dies damned (397). On the text’s biased terms, Corsabryne dies resistant—to a fault. The supernatural sign at his death affirms his total resistance to the text’s dominant spiritual and political authority as embodied in the Christian King Arthur. Meanwhile, his death leads to a conversation among the other characters about Palomydes’s more nuanced attitude about converting to Christianity. The rigidity of Corsabryne contrasts with and highlights the flexibility of Palomydes.¹⁰²

Shakespeare makes a similar move during the complicated battle sequence that concludes Part 1 of *Henry IV*. Sir Walter Blunt is so loyal to King Henry that he dresses and acts as one of several Henry-surrogates on the battlefield in order to mislead the enemy. Sure enough, Douglas confronts and fights with Blunt, believing him to be the king. When Douglas wins the fight, he promises to kill his foe “Unless thou yield thee as my prisoner” (5.3.10), to which Blunt responds, “I was not born a yielder” (11). Blunt’s statement is a reminder of the characterizing

¹⁰² Palomydes is not merely more spiritually flexible than Corsabryne—he is also more flexible within the yield-or-die discourse. In fact, his interactions with yielding and resistance are so complicated and ambiguous that I will discuss him in detail as an example of “Illegibility” in chapter 4.

power of the question: he believes that to surrender would expose him as “a yielder,” as if yielding were a permanent, stable trait. In response, Douglas kills Blunt. Hotspur enters and exposes Douglas’s mistake, a conversation that underlines Blunt’s true identity and loyalty to the king (and thereby underlines Blunt’s unyielded self-narrative). A moment later, Falstaff discovers the corpse and offers his own grim elegy: “Soft, who are you? Sir Walter Blunt. There’s honor for you” (32-3). The dead man’s resistant death both solidifies his straightforward identity as an (overly?) honorable vassal and makes him (like Corsabryne is for Palomydes) a foil for the far more complicated and flexible character of Falstaff.

Death after choosing not to surrender in battle carries no intimations that it is sinful suicide. Another way texts dodge the issue of suicide’s sinfulness is by telling stories set in classical Rome, where, at least within the story’s world, the yield-or-die discourse need not ever intersect with Christian discourse. For the pre-Christian Cassius in *Julius Caesar*, for example, suicide is not merely honorable but even divinely sanctioned. As he imagines Caesar’s imminent imperial ascension, Cassius comments:

I know where I will wear this dagger then;
Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius.
Therein, ye gods, you make the weak most strong;
Therein, ye gods, you tyrants do defeat;
Nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass,
Nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron,
Can be retentive to the strength of spirit;
But life, being weary of these worldly bars,
Never lacks power to dismiss itself. (1.3.89-97)

The Roman characters from both Chaucer and Shakespeare in the following discussion tend to agree with Cassius’s understanding of suicide as an act of resounding resistance to would-be captors.

Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* develops this idea extensively through the suicides of the title characters in defiance of Caesar after his successful invasion. Both Antony and Cleopatra dread what they consider to be the inherent dishonor of starring as Caesar's captives in a triumphal procession.¹⁰³ Antony describes himself from the third-person perspective of a watcher (his friend Eros) "window'd in great Rome," seeing Antony

. . . with pleach'd arms, bending down
His corrigible neck, his face subdu'd
To penetrative shame, whilst the wheel'd seat
Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded
His baseness that ensued. (4.14.72-77)

The disassociation in Antony's description—already the "I" is missing—stresses that, in this imagined scenario, his self-narrative is gone. The physical imagery of the passive body (subdued, penetrated, led) and the connotations of permanence called up by "branded" complete the picture of a perpetually lost, yielded self.

Antony is envisioning this loss because he wants Eros to help him escape it—he is trying to persuade Eros to kill him. Antony seems unable to manage a clean escape via death, however; his attempts to exert narrative power throughout this sequence are muddled, as if his self-narrative is already compromised. First, Eros engineers his own escape instead, killing himself to "escape the sorrow / Of Antony's death" (94-95). Left to his own devices, Antony attempts suicide without complete success, a confusing failure that at least enables an ultimate death

¹⁰³ Anthony Miller's *Roman Triumphs and Early Modern English Culture* is a comprehensive study of Elizabethan and Jacobean appropriations of the Roman triumph. His chapter 7, "Shakespeare and Stuart Drama" (128-48), explores the various uses Shakespeare makes of triumphs in his Roman plays. (Earlier, Miller also notes Shakespeare's transposition of triumph into a more politicized English setting in *Henry V* [79-80].) Of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Miller notes the diversity of references to triumph (many of which I mention in my discussion as well) and argues that, against the background of this general motif, Shakespeare "eventually sets up Caesar and Cleopatra as rival triumphal claimants" (134), a rivalry Cleopatra wins through both "satirical sharpness" (135) and the death which she stages as an ultimate triumph even as it also "robs Caesar of his triumphal prize"—the Egyptian queen he would have liked to display (136). Miller's analysis of the play thus sits comfortably alongside my own.

scene in Cleopatra's arms. As countless scholars have observed, by this point in the play Antony's identity seems to be at the end of a long process of dissolution.¹⁰⁴ In my terms, he has metaphorically yielded to Cleopatra, even imagined himself as the object of *her* triumph ("Chain mine arm'd neck," he has recently urged her, adding "Ride . . . triumphing" upon his heartbeat [4.8.14-6]). By the time of his suicide, he has also succumbed to the false narrative Cleopatra has imposed on him about her death. His attenuated ability to accomplish his goals thus implies a loss of self-narrating power to his lover rather than to Caesar. His awkward death allows time for Cleopatra to reveal the truth and reconcile with him, but even their final words relentlessly underscore Cleopatra's narrative dominance. She refuses to let him finish his sentences ("Let me speak a little," he asks her, and moments later he must request, "One word, sweet queen" [4.15.42, 45]), and she makes clear that she won't follow his final order to submit herself to Caesar. Nonetheless, he dies with a final declaration of his self-narrative, telling Cleopatra to remember him as "the greatest prince o' th' world, / The noblest" who dies without shame (54-56). Antony's is an imperfect but still unquestionably effective escape from captivity to Caesar.

While Antony personally fears the idea of being led in triumph, Cleopatra receives several external threats of this fate in addition to imagining it herself—the image of Cleopatra marched through the streets of Rome is a running motif throughout the play's second half. Even Antony threatens her with it when he believes she has betrayed him:

. . . Let [Caesar] take thee

¹⁰⁴ In the process of making a psychoanalytic argument that Antony's dissolving sense of self relates to melancholy, Cynthia Marshall's "Man of Steel Done Got the Blues" also provides a good quick history of critical thought on this issue (386-8, 392). Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr.'s chapter "My oblivion is a very Antony" in *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama* (88-108) also summarizes major criticism while offering a nuanced argument that the play understands identity itself—what I would call self-narrative—to consist of inconsistency, so that Antony's supposed dissolution is not a falling-away from an ideal masculine and Roman self but rather a revelation of how identity really works (only Cleopatra, however, grasps this truth). Ultimately, for Sullivan, the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra "reveal multiplicity as the fundamental condition of identity" (105). Translating Sullivan's conclusion into my terms, if the characters' self-narratives seem fractured or multiplied in death (both suicides mingle "Roman" and "Egyptian" qualities, for example), that is a *success*, not a failure, of Antony's and Cleopatra's narrative power.

And hoist thee up to the shouting plebians!
Follow his chariot, like the greatest spot
Of all thy sex; most monster-like, be shown
For poor'st diminutives, for dolts . . . (4.12.33-39)

Later, Caesar is publicly conciliatory to Cleopatra, but privately he reveals that his goal is only to prevent her from killing herself so that he can indeed display her in a triumphal procession (5.1.64-66). No wonder, then, that Cleopatra seems even more haunted by this possibility than Antony was, vowing to Caesar's negotiator that "I will not wait pinion'd at your master's court" and declaring,

. . . Shall they hoist me up,
And show me to the shouting varlotry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring! rather make
My country's high pyramides my gibbet,
And hang me up in chains! (5.2.52-62).

Her last images also involve public, shameful display—seemingly much like a triumph (and even more uncomfortable!)—but because Cleopatra imagines them taking place in her own country and, simply, because they are *her* invention, her narrative, she finds them less distasteful than the prospect of becoming a prop for Caesar's self-narrative. Despite reassurances from Caesar's messengers that she will be well-treated, her concerns led her to press for the truth from Caesar's comrade Dolabella, asking, "He'll lead me then in triumph?" to which Dolabella responds, "Madam, he will, I know't" (5.2.109-10). Cleopatra's fears of being marched through the streets of Rome have just been confirmed. If she was contemplating the idea of yielding, she now abandons it.

The Roman triumph is a dramatic externalization of the fate of all yielded prisoners: the fate of becoming a servant to the captor's self-narrative. Cleopatra's final, famous speech to her women on the subject calls specific attention to the *narrative* and *performative* revision and erasure that she would endure as a captive:

Saucy lictors

Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers

Ballad 's out a' tune. The quick comedians

Extemporally will stage us, and present

Our Alexandrian revels: Antony

Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see

Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness

I' th' posture of a whore. (5.2.214-21)

The moment is famously metatheatrical, winking at the Jacobean company—and, specifically, the boy-actor—bringing Cleopatra to life on London's South Bank, but the imagery also works within the story's world to remind us that Cleopatra fears the loss of narrative power that comes with yielding.¹⁰⁵ To defy this loss, she narrates her suicidal escape into the "liberty" (237) of death with an array of identity-enhancing detail. She re-imagines the circumstances and clothes herself accordingly: "Show me, my women, like a queen; go fetch / My best attires. I am again for Cydnus / To meet Mark Antony" (227-29). As her death nears, she moves farther into a narrative of her own invention, one that glorifies her (indeed, that presents Antony as a supporter of her self-narrative) and diminishes her would-be captor:

Methinks I hear

Antony call; I see him rouse himself

¹⁰⁵ Of Cleopatra's metatheatrical reference to a boy actor, Miller comments that the speech "brings together, indeed equates, Caesar's Roman triumph and Shakespeare's English play, with its boy Cleopatra. In setting Rome on the English stage, Shakespeare contributes to England's appropriation of the triumph, displaying Rome as a trophy of English culture . . ." (*Roman Triumphs* 135).

To praise my noble act. I hear him mock
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come!
Now to that name my courage prove my title!
I am fire and air . . . (283-89)

Death becomes “a lover’s pinch” (295) and the lethal asp becomes “my baby at my breast” (309).

Cleopatra’s death—more clearly so than Antony’s—is thus an escape driven by and further enhancing her own narrative power, and its metatheatrical element calls unusual attention to the ways formal narrative construction relates to the construction of selfhood. “Beguil’d” (323) and forced “To see perform’d the dreaded act which [he] / So sought’st to hinder” (330-331), Caesar is left a spectator, not an author, forced to accept the lovers’ self-narration rather than rewrite them himself. Standing over Cleopatra’s body, he attempts to make the moment about him, but the best he can achieve is a kind of equality, not dominance, as he declares, “their story is / No less in pity than his [Caesar’s] glory which / Brought them to be lamented” (361-63). His final order is for the honorable “great solemnity” of a funeral procession (366), not the triumphal procession he had wanted.

The captives I have presented so far who escape into death—from Malory’s minor character Corsabryne to Cleopatra—do so to avoid a public, even politicized, re-writing of their self-narratives into support for someone else. Corsabryne’s determination to die rather than yield is arguably the most private, and even in his case, yielding would mean submission to a new feudal authority as well as (probably) conversion. The Captain’s son fears that Tamburlaine’s troops will “tyrannize on me”—putting a politicized spin on torture and humiliation. Cleopatra, obviously, fears a similar kind of tyranny, a public re-writing that will support Caesar’s narrative rather than her own.

The unpleasant trope of women characters killing themselves (or otherwise bringing about their own deaths) in response to the threat or actuality of rape belongs in this discussion

as well. While ostensibly much more private almost by definition, rape in these texts is comparable to the tyranny or triumph that the captives I have already discussed die to escape because it threatens to inflict a loss of self-narrating power and is frequently paired with a larger disruption of the surrounding masculine power structure.¹⁰⁶ Women who kill themselves to avoid rape (or, in Lucrece's case, who kill themselves to assert their own self-narrative after rape) solidify clear, straightforward identities as honorable, chaste women, comparable to male characters whose deaths on the battlefield mark them as honorable, loyal men.

Chaucer offers several versions of this trope across his works, including the *Physician's Tale* and the story of Lucrece in *The Legend of Good Women*. In the unsettling *Physician's Tale*, the knight Virginius kills his chaste daughter Virginia to prevent her from being enslaved and raped by the scheming, evil judge Apius, who has leveled false charges against her and her father. In prior versions of this story, Virginia is almost entirely passive. Chaucer's version adds the detail that Virginius consents to her murder ("Yif me my death, er that I have a shame" [249]), but the killing could still easily be classed as a "rescue" rather than an "escape" according to my use of the terms.¹⁰⁷ That said, Virginia's avoidance of captivity and rape is not merely private; it also brings about the victory of her self-narrative over the false narrative Apius has attempted to impose. As soon as Virginius makes his daughter's death public, he finds "a thousand peple" ready to protect him from the judge's retribution, because now "knowen was the false iniquitee" (260-62). Before Virginia's death, this resistance is nonexistent or, at least, irrelevant: Virginius

¹⁰⁶ The story of Lucrece in all its incarnations is specifically linked to the public issue of the fall of the Tarquins and the future rule of Rome. Coppélia Kahn sums up these links in the stories of Lucrece and Virginia, both of which I discuss here (55-7). Throughout his article "Rape and Republicanism in Shakespeare's Lucrece," John Kunat offers a useful summary of and contribution to the existing scholarly conversation about *Lucrece* and republicanism, exploring how the poem plays out Elizabethan debates about the relevance of republican ideals and fears of tyranny in their own time.

¹⁰⁷ Jill Mann discusses Chaucer's changes on this point in her edition of *The Canterbury Tales*, page 964, note 226. Of Virginia's choice, Crampton comments that while "the tale's appeal may be a dubious compound of sentimentality, lubricity, and gore," Virginia "is also an actor as well as victim" who "faces her fate and chooses—the crucially human *act*—as the 'litel clergeon,' for instance, is never seen to do" (195).

repeatedly insists that Virginia's death is the only solution to the problem of Apius's lies. As soon as she is dead, however, a crowd materializes to throw Apius in prison, because they "anon had suspect in this thyng" and "wisten wel that [Apius] was lecherus" (263-66). The resistance expressed by Virginia (such as it is) and by her father (grotesque as it is) functions to overturn Apius's narrative and assert theirs, instead. The lack of meaningful psychological or plot-based logic to support Virginius's insistence on killing his daughter and the crowd's sudden support lays bare the narrative mechanism undergirding the story. Resistance of any kind prevents the would-be captor Apius's self-narrative from winning and allows the triumph of Virginia's—or, rather, Virginius's—self-narrative instead.

Chaucer's Lucesse is much more of a protagonist than Virginia and her death is more clearly a resistant *escape* rather than a rescue. That she believes such an "escape" is her best response to rape is, of course, horrifying. In terms of the yield-or-die discourse, however, this response is also unusual, because it reveals that the rape itself has not already destroyed Lucesse's narrative power. Too often in this discourse, rape is equated with yielding as if the mere fact of its occurrence constitutes an answer to the yield-or-die demand. Its accomplishment thus characterizes the victim as having chosen (even merely in fear, to avoid death) to support her captor's self-narrative.¹⁰⁸ Lucesse's story, at least, engages this issue in a more nuanced way even as it upholds troubling fundamental anxieties about victims being dishonored. Rape in this story functions more like the physical confinement or torture any prisoner might endure even if resistant. Like Redcrosse remaining technically unyielded even

¹⁰⁸ For example, captured by the Saluage Man (a personification of lust) in *The Faerie Queene*, Amoret asks her fellow prisoner Æmylia how she has "Thine honor sau'd, though into thraldome throwne" (IV.vii.19.4-5), with the implication that rape is a truly dishonorable (because yielding) fate that can still be avoided. The old woman imprisoned with them, who is raped, is later revealed to be "A foule and lothsome creature" and thus "A leman fit for such a louer deare" (34.4-5), further suggesting that rape is a variation of yielding that incorporates its victim into service of the captor's self-narrative—in this case, the imprisoned old woman has become a hateful extension of her captor. In Part 2 of *Tamburlaine*, Olympia and Theridamas characterize rape similarly as yielding (I discuss this in more detail shortly); Proteus's rape threat to Silvia—"I'll force thee yield to my desire"—also reflects these unpleasant ambiguities (*Two Gentlemen* 5.4.59).

after he is captured and confined by Orgoglio, Lucesse remains technically unyielded through her rape. For both characters, how they respond to their extreme situation, not the situation itself, constitutes their answer to the yield-or-die demand. For Lucesse, escape through death is a resistant answer.

Chaucer, following Ovid, has Tarquinius order Lucesse to be silent during his assault or he will kill her—a variation of the usual “yield or die” question. Lucesse is at first silent in response because, as the narrator explains, “she hath no myght” to speak: “What shal she seyn? Hire wit is al ago. / Ryght as a wolf that fynt a lomb alone, / To whom shal she compleyne or make mone?” (1796-99). This silence, however, is not necessarily the silence of yielding to Tarquinius (as Shakespeare’s Imogen says, silence is not necessarily yielding). Lucesse’s behavior seems more to reflect the initial shock of captivity, the astonished moment of illegibility that some captives endure when faced with the yield-or-die demand. Her lost “wit” represents a self in crisis, unable to give a characterizing answer, not a self surrendering. Indeed, seconds later, Lucesse’s initial crisis passes and she speaks resistantly—“She axeth grace, and seyth al that she can” (1804)—registering her lack of willingness to yield by violating Tarquinius’s order not to make noise. She has, subtly, answered his first challenge with a choice to resist.

Tarquinius answers this resistance with a threat specifically against Lucesse’s self-narrative, promising to kill both Lucesse and a stable boy and put them in bed together so he can claim to have caught and killed them in an adulterous tryst: “And thus thow shalt be ded and also lese / Thy name, for thow shalt non other chese” (1810-11). Chaucer does not precisely frame this as a demand that Lucesse yield *or else* Tarquinius will escalate to this destruction of her reputation, but that is almost certainly the implication. Chaucer’s major source, Ovid’s *Fasti*, makes clear that this is a yield-or-die (with dishonor) choice for Lucretia. Ovid’s Lucretia refuses to be moved “by prayers, by bribes, by threats” until finally Tarquin threatens to frame her for adultery, at which point, “she yielded” (“*succubuit*”) “overcome by fear of infamy,” and Tarquine

sparing her from that particular dishonorable death.¹⁰⁹ Faced with this twisted variation on the characterizing choice (now even more of a non-choice than usual), Chaucer's Lucesse is in an impossible position. Whether she yields or resists, her self-narrative—at least as publicly known—seems lost. Tarquinius appears to have cut off even the escape route into death.

Lucesse's involuntary response to this new characterizing question is to retreat into shocked illegibility once again:

She loste bothe at ones wit and breth,
And in a swogh she lay, and wex so ded
Men myghte smyten of hire arm or hed;
She feleth no thyng, neyther foul ne fayr. (1815-18)

In this mimicry of death, Lucesse reveals that Tarquinius has not, in fact, actually shut off all escape routes. Lucesse is shielded from consciously experiencing the physical trauma of rape, but crucially she is shielded, also, from engaging with the so-called choice Tarquinius gives her. Chaucer has deviated substantially from Ovid here; in Ovid, Lucretia yields. In Chaucer, she receives the narrative grace of unconsciousness (like the "heuenly grace" that sees Redcrosse knocked unconscious by Orgoglio instead of being killed or forced to yield). This moment is an example of unconsciousness providing a self-narrating character with a crucial deferral of her answer to the yield-or-die demand. Lucesse's swoon creates space for later resistance.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ The Ovid lines I quote are derived from James G. Frazer's translation of the *Fasti* (specifically of *Fasti* 2, the section between lines 784-813) and from the editor's note for lines 1812-26 of *The Legend of Good Women in The Riverside Chaucer* (which appears on p. 1070 and provides Ovid's Latin: "*Succubuit famae victa puella metu*").

¹¹⁰ Carolyn Dinshaw (who points out that Lucretia doesn't lose consciousness in Livy's version, either) argues that Lucesse's swoon is one of a series of Chaucerian adjustments to his source texts in the *Legend of Good Women*, all of which combine to create a catalogue "enervated, passive heroines, put into unfamiliar positions and strange places by men, [who] don't have even basic motor control of their own bodies" (75). Dinshaw's argument for this pattern of adjustment is persuasive, and I share her disgust with a patriarchal culture that celebrates suicide by women (properly interpreted and evaluated by male onlookers, of course) as a major means of feminine "self-defining or self-signifying" (77). I would simply add that Lucesse's swoon *also* participates in a less gendered pattern of unconsciousness in response to

That later resistance takes the form of Lucesse's reassertion of her own narrative power. Although she again struggles temporarily to speak when the time comes to tell her husband and kin about the rape, "atte last of Tarquyny she hem told / This reful cas and al thys thing horryble" (1837-38). She conveys her plight so effectively to her audience that "Al hadde folkes hertes ben of stones, / Hyt might have maked hem upon hir rewe" (1841-42). Her listeners then become speakers, trying to persuade her that they "forgave yt hyr" and the rape "was no gilt"; to prove this they "seyden hir ensamples many oon" (1848-50). In a way, however, this sensible and compassionate response is also an attempt to re-write Lucesse's self-narrative, to alter her view of the situation, and she is having none of it: "Be as be may,' quod she, 'of forgyvyng, / I wol not have noo forgyft for nothing" (1851-53). Whatever else they signify about Lucesse's attitude, her last words represent insistent *self*-narrating, full of emphatic repetition, before she stabs herself to death. In the aftermath of this death, Chaucer underlines Brutus's verbal carrying-forth of Lucesse's self-narrative:

And openly the tale he tolde hem alle,
 And openly let cary her on a bere
 Thurgh al the toun, that men may see and here
 The horryble ded of hir oppressyoun. (1865-68)

The narrator adds a further reminder for our benefit that all this is "as Tytus [Livy] bereth witness" (1873), expanding the verbal storytelling into a textual and historical record as well. Lucesse's escalating escapes—counter-intuitively into silence, unconsciousness, and finally death—mark her resistance to Tarquinius and thus the triumph of her own self-narrative.

Olympia, the wife of the defiant—and dead—Captain of Balsera and his son in Part 2 of *Tamburlaine*, wants from the moment of her family's death to kill herself, too, but Theridamas and Techelles take her prisoner first and prevent her suicide. Where Lucesse's resistance takes

the yield-or-die demand (as I discuss later, Palamon and Arcite are Chaucerian participants in this pattern). Her swoon may thus suggest both feminine passivity *and* an ungendered moment of narrative grace that enables an ongoing self-narrative; two discourses (at least!) intersect here.

the form of silence and then a simple assertion of truth, Olympia's mixes together several tactics, and thus she appears as a kind of refrain throughout this chapter. My focus here is on Olympia's determination to die rather than allow the Scythians to (as her son puts it) tyrannize on her, a resistance that reverses Lucesse's trajectory from private to public. Olympia's resistance begins in the political realm with the capture of her city and winds up with her captor, Theridamas, attempting to impose a sexualized and domestic narrative on her. He sets her up as a kind of Zenocrate to his Tamburlaine, seeming to expect that once he takes her prisoner ("you must go with us. No remedy" [3.4.79]), she, like Zenocrate, will yield ("Come willingly, therefore" [84]). Once imprisoned in Theridamas's tent, however, Olympia vows to kill herself "Rather than yield to his detested suit" (4.2.5-6). Along with the literal fact of her imprisonment, her body has become a "prison" from which her "troubled soul" longs to escape (34-5). Frustrated by her refusals to accept his attempts at seduction, Theridamas threatens "some other means to make you yield"—presumably rape (51), at which point Olympia deploys a stratagem to trick him into stabbing her to death. She has escaped both her prison and Theridamas's attempts to take over her self-narrative.

From the swashbuckling deeds of Launcelot, Trystram, and even Custance, to Redcrosse's wish for a "choyce of death" and Lucesse's and Olympia's engineering of that choice, all these escapes are underwritten by the character's determination to die rather than yield. Indeed, all resistance is underwritten by this determination. Shakespeare's version of *The Rape of Lucrece* highlights that fact in an unusual way, and accordingly makes an appropriate final example for this discussion of death-as-escape. In Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, Tarquin offers his captive an utterly twisted version of the characterizing question, so that even if Lucrece's response seems technically resistant, she decides that she must re-narrate her experience in order to give a resoundingly resistant answer—death—to the yield-or-die demand.

Many major plot points of the Lucrece story remain relatively consistent across the various retellings, but the moment of Lucrece's response to Tarquin's implied or explicit yield-

or-die question seems to be a point subject to considerable revision. Ovid depicts Lucretia yielding, while Chaucer causes her to swoon and thus defer her answer. Shakespeare complicates the moment even further. To begin with, Tarquin twists the characterizing question in a way that reverses its traditional framing. Tarquin describes Lucrece's options as if *yielding* will continue her narrative power and her honor, while *resisting* will cause her to lose narrative power and suffer shame. If Lucrece "yield[s]," Tarquin insists, no one ever needs to know that the rape occurred, which will spare Lucrece's family from shame and from "[t]he blemish that will never be forgot, / Worse than a slavish wive" (526-37). In essence, he claims, Lucrece's honorable public identity (and her ability to narrate that much of her identity, at least) will remain intact. If she resists, however, Tarquin threatens her with the "slavish" rewriting and dishonor normally associated with yielding. He will frame her for committing adultery with "some worthless slave" (515) and her family will endure hearing her "trespass cited up in rhymes, / And sung by children in succeeding times" (524-25). Tarquin also claims that Lucrece will be "the author" of her own shame if she resists—muddying the waters still further with that reference to narrative power—when in fact he is imagining a situation in which Lucrece does no authoring whatsoever (he frames her; "children" sing "rhymes" about her). On the surface, Tarquin is offering an unpleasant but clear choice: yield and no one ever needs to know; resist and he'll kill Lucrece and destroy her reputation. This surface-level ultimatum, however, with its language of yielding and honor, denial and slavishness, exists in place of and on top of the deeper, older convention of the traditional yield-or-die choice. It is a perversion of that choice.

Lucrece, therefore, "[p]leads in a wilderness where are no laws / To the rough beast that knows no gentle right / Nor aught obeys but his foul appetite" (544-46). These lines critique Tarquin generally for setting aside his rationality in favor of brutish cruelty, but more specifically they imply the chaotic violation Tarquin has inflicted upon the "laws" of the yield-or-die discourse.

Lucrece's plea aims to restore the traditional roles of honor and dishonor to the situation. Throughout her long speech, she returns to a refrain that suggests Tarquin's various selves are in combat with each other, with his honorable/rational self at risk of yielding to his "foul desire" (574). She speaks to his dishonorable side as if she is addressing a villain who has captured and is attempting to force the honorable side of Tarquin into slavish yielding: "Hast thou put on his shape to do him shame? . . . Thou wrong'st his honor, wound'st his princely name" (597-99). Imagining how the honorable Tarquin's self-narrative will be permanently erased if he surrenders to his baser self, Lucrece argues that "princes are the glass, the school, the book / Where subjects' eyes do learn, do read, to look" and that Tarquin, if he yields, will become a "school" and text in which "Lust" can "read lectures of such shame" (615-18). Turning her address to his honorable side, she urges him to resist such dishonorable yielding and, instead, force his baser self to yield to him. "Hast thou command? By him that gave it thee / From a pure heart command thy rebel will" (624-25), she suggests, and continues, "I sue for exil'd majesty's repeal / Let him return . . . / His true respect will prison false desire" (640-42). If Tarquin's honorable self surrenders, she warns, "So shall these slaves [his appetites] be king, and thou their slave" (659). Throughout this extended figurative address, in addition to her straightforward appeal to Tarquin's better self, Lucrece strives to re-assert a traditional understanding of the links between honor and resistance, slavishness and yielding, that Tarquin has attempted to disrupt.

Tarquin interrupts Lucrece just as she again calls upon language that would remind him of conventional understandings of honor and yielding: "So let thy thoughts, low vassals to thy state—" she begins, and Tarquin finally cuts her off with "No more . . . I will not hear thee" (666-67). Lucrece's argument has come too late. From the moment Tarquin saw her, his rational self began fighting a losing battle against his lust, and it has, by now, already yielded. His more honorable self has become "fancy's slave" (200) via an extended metaphor in which his eyes and

affections, although “servile” and “slavish” themselves (295, 299), have usurped control over him. Tarquin’s feminine-gendered rational soul has, in sum, been overthrown:

. . . her subjects with foul insurrection
Have batter’d down her consecrated wall,
And by their mortal fault have brought in subjection
Her immortality, and made her thrall
To living death and pain perpetual. (722-26)

Thus triumphant, the base side of Tarquin silences Lucrece and simply re-states his twisted version of a demand for surrender, promising again to shame her only if she resists.

In this moment, Ovid allows Lucretia to surrender, and Chaucer sends Lucesse into a swoon. In Shakespeare’s version, Tarquin puts out his torch and wraps Lucrece’s head in her nightclothes; specifically, he “control[s]” and “entombs” “her voice” in response to her “cries,” “her outcry,” and “her piteous clamors” (677-81). Despite the reference to the tomb, the scene is upsettingly, violently vital. Literally, Lucrece is making enough noise to threaten the concealment of the crime, so Tarquin must muffle her. Within the conventions of the yield-or-die discourse, Shakespeare’s Lucrece makes her ongoing unwillingness to surrender clear—at a basic level, she *resists*.

Her response also bears some resemblance to that of Chaucer’s Lucesse. Once in darkness and gagged, Lucrece becomes temporarily hidden and silenced, unable to make a characterizing choice even if she wanted to. The mention of her “entomb[ed]” voice is later joined by the narrator’s commentary that “Such danger to resistance did belong / That dying fear through all her body spread, / And who cannot abuse a body dead?” (1265-67). Her “fear” is caused by her awareness of the “danger” of “resistance,” but crucially it leads to this temporary state of deathlike shock (which is either actual unconsciousness or something very similar) rather than to dishonorable yielding. Her experience is dreadful, but her initial resistance and

refusal (or insensate inability) to yield out of fear allow her to retain self-narrating power after the rape.

That said, Lucrece seems to understand her own experience as something uncomfortably like dishonorable yielding. In the immediate aftermath of the rape, she speaks of herself as if she has, indeed, been re-written by a captor to whom she has yielded:

The light will show, character'd in my brow,
The story of sweet chastity's decay,
The impious breach of holy wedlock vow;
Yea, the illiterate that know not how
 To cipher what is writ in learned books,
 Will cote my loathsome trespass in my looks.

The nurse to still her child will tell my story,
And fright her crying babe with Tarquin's name;
The orator to deck his oratory
Will couple my reproach to Tarquin's shame;
Feast-finding minstrels, tuning my defame,
 Will tie the hearers to attend each line
 How Tarquin wronged me, I Collatine. (807-19)

Lucrece depicts Tarquin as having done wrong, but describes herself as culpable, too, as if she has made the choice to yield and thus deserves to be narratively “couple[d]” to her captor. Like Cleopatra, Lucrece imagines that now she will be written by others. In Lucrece's case, her overwritten identity appears first in her own face and then expands outward, becoming public property.

But—as with Cleopatra—this detailed nightmare is only in Lucrece's imagination. She hasn't actually yielded, and gradually, as she continues to ruminate, she begins to exert more

powerful self-narration. In her long apostrophes to Opportunity and Time, she imagines (even authors) alternate versions of events in which Tarquin fails to commit his crime. Then she curses Tarquin, a major move toward re-asserting the power of her own words (966-1015). Although she then dismisses her complaints and cursing as “idle words” and vows to take action (1016), this long speech has shown a steady trajectory toward reclaiming her own narrative power. She now must make that reclamation real.

Lucrece’s suicide, however troubling, is, in her own self-narration, a resistant escape. “Her honor is ta’en prisoner by the foe” (1608), she believes, leaving her captive in the “poison’d closet” (1669) of her body. Like Hecuba in the depiction of Troy that she studies, Lucrece feels her “life imprison’d in a body dead” (1456). By contrast, after she stabs herself, she is free: “That blow did bail [her soul] from the deep unrest / Of that polluted prison where it breathed” (1725-26). Lucrece’s suicide is resistant on this basic level, but something more profound also occurs.

More than merely staging a metaphorical prison break, Lucrece is re-narrating the crucial, confused moment when her resistance to Tarquin was not as clear as she would have liked. He posed a lawless, distorted version of the yield-or-die question, and she answered him with nonverbal resistance (crying out until he muffled her) and then ambiguous shock. She now structures her own death as if she is being asked, clearly, to yield or die, and she chooses death: an ultimate assertion of both *self*-narrating power and also the power to narrate *Tarquin’s* identity as well, solidifying his status as slavish, that of a man who has yielded dishonorably to his own worst instincts.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ My entire discussion of Shakespeare’s *Lucrece* in this section obviously participates in the long-term scholarly debate about the intersections between rape, gender, rhetoric, and self-authoring/self-performance in this poem. This debate explores whether Lucrece’s extensive uses of language (literally speaking and writing, metaphorically signifying with facial expression or in her death) serve to empower her or merely to reflect her embeddedness in and erasure by patriarchal discourse. Coppélia Kahn and Nancy Vickers make feminist arguments for the latter position. Kahn argues that the poem locates Lucrece as a possession of her husband, so that the rape is presented as “an affair between men” (54) in which Lucrece tells her story and “dies not to save her honor but to save Collatine’s. Indeed, her honor is Collatine’s” (63). Vickers adds that the poem is framed throughout by particularly masculine rhetorical structures (such as the

Lucrece begins this process by complicating her own (I would argue, inaccurate) belief that she has already permanently yielded. She addresses her own hand, accusing it of “yielding” to Tarquin because it did not “scratch her wicked foe” (1035-36); separating her hand from the rest of her prepares for her later statement that her “mind . . . never was inclin’d / To accessory yieldings” (1656-58).¹¹² In the same address to her hand, she simplifies the options she now faces into shameful life or honorable death (1032-33). She recalls that she “fear’d by Tarquin’s falchion to be slain” (1046), but now asserts that “I need not fear to die” (1052). By implying that she still has a chance to answer the characterizing question honorably, she also implies that any answer she may have apparently given before was not complete or valid. She is now asking herself to yield or die, and she is preparing to answer with a hero’s honorable choice of death.

Lucrece’s planning is accompanied by images of—and anxiety about—women’s narrative power. Lucrece, as I mentioned, doubts the efficacy of her “idle words” (1016), but she makes the “decree” (1030) to kill herself, decides that “[m]y tongue shall utter all” (1076) to her husband as

blazon), and that “Shakespeare’s ‘Lucrece’ closes as it opened, as men rhetorically compete with each other over Lucrece’s body” (107). Joel Fineman contributes to the idea that Lucrece’s language is fundamentally out of her control, influencing and speaking for the poem’s male characters and male author, in his fantastically detailed study of (among other particulars) chiasmus as the poem’s dominating figure and halting, deferred action as the poem’s dominating rhythm. While many points raised by these scholars are persuasive and undoubtedly true, I argue that, in terms of the yield-or-die discourse, Lucrece’s use of language and self-narration remains under her control throughout; she deploys it to strengthen and project her self-narrative after Tarquin’s attempt to make her yield. That the yield-or-die discourse is, itself, patriarchal means that Lucrece cannot be said to escape the misogynistic ideology that governs her world, but within that frame, she seizes and holds all the narrative power she can. My argument thus agrees most closely with that of Amy Greenstadt in her article “‘Read it in me’: the Author’s Will in *Lucrece*.” Greenstadt, too, believes that Lucrece achieves profound narrative power by the poem’s end, a power that Greenstadt persuasively likens to the early modern author’s finishing and publishing of a text (and, indeed, to Shakespeare’s publication of *Lucrece*).

¹¹² The separation between her hand and heart also recalls Tarquin’s separation between his yielding rational heart and his victorious appetites. Indeed, when Lucrece returns to the imagery, she orders her “faint heart” to “[y]ield to my hand, my hand shall conquer thee: / Thou dead, both die, and both shall victors be” (1209-11). Subtly, her imagery here is disconcerting, both because her “hand” has already committed the dishonorable yielding in her earlier figuration, and because her heart’s yielding recalls Tarquin’s heart’s yielding—a shameful case—a little too closely. Perhaps this moment is one of several hints that Lucrece’s suicide is, itself, an act of passion over rationality.

a crucial part of her plan, imagines herself joining Philomel “that sing’st of ravishment” by promising “I’ll hum on Tarquin” (1128-34), and develops an extended metaphor of her coming declaration and suicide as a “testament” (1183) and “will” (1198) in which her husband can “read . . . in me” both her restored honor and the need to take revenge on Tarquin (1191-97). Her doubt is overshadowed by these images of verbal, musical, and textual narrative power.

As if to counterbalance this imagery, the poem’s narrator comments:

. . . men have marble, women waxen minds
And therefore are they form’d as marble will;
.....
Then call them not the authors of their ill
No more than wax shall be accounted evil,
Wherein is stamp’d the semblance of a devil. (1240-46)

The context of this commentary is Lucrece’s inability to conceal her miserable state of mind from her maid, who then weeps in empathy without knowing what is wrong. The narrator seems to be saying not only that Lucrece can’t be held accountable for her rape (the correct conclusion supported by sexist reasoning), but, further, that she has no meaningful control over her own self-narrative at any point: “Though men can cover crimes with bold stern looks, / Poor women’s faces are their own fault’s books” (1252-53). Women are not “authors” but rather highly legible “books.” Lucrece’s legibility is, indeed, about to become critically important, but the narrator’s digression otherwise seems misplaced, because Lucrece is taking on more and more of an “authoring” role as her plan develops.

Soon after this commentary by the narrator, in fact, Lucrece literally calls for “paper, ink, and pen” to write a letter summoning her husband home. Shakespeare describes her composition of that letter as a vigorous process of consideration, revision, imagination, and emotion—in short, a process of authoring:

. . . she prepares to write,

First hovering o'er the paper with her quill.
Conceit and grief an eager combat fight,
What wit sets down is blotted straight with will;
This is too curious-good, this blunt and ill:
 Much like a press of people at a door,
 Throng her inventions, which shall go before. (1296-1302)

The letter she eventually sends is “short” and carefully crafted so that “Collatine may know / Her grief, but not her grief’s true quality” because “the life and feeling of her passion / She hoards, to spend when he is by to hear her” (1311-18). Her actions are sincere but also performative, authorial; she is scripting her self-narrative.

Lucrece’s meditation on the depiction of the fall of Troy continues to elaborate on her narrative ability. The men in the image, especially Ajax and Ulysses, are highly legible: “The face of either cipher’d either’s heart, / Their face their manners most expressly told” (1396-97). *They* are like books, their faces clearly broadcasting their feelings. While studying the images of the defeated Trojans, by contrast, Lucrece again takes on an authorial role as “[s]he lends them words, and she their looks doth borrow” (1498). In sum, the many assertions of Lucrece’s narrative power (and even the book-like legibility of Ajax and Ulysses under her gaze) forcefully contradict the narrator’s insistence that women cannot be authors. I am tempted, in fact, to understand the narrator’s statements as unreliable, disproven by what follows, which would mean that Lucrece seizes narrative control over the poem’s meaning from its ostensible poet.¹¹³

¹¹³ By contrast, other analysts tend to see the narrator’s comments on “women[’s] waxen minds” (and women’s status as legible objects rather than authors) as especially *reliable*, even as Shakespeare’s own point-of-view (Kahn 67); Fineman offers the lines as an example of the repetition of “w” and “m” that he considers a characteristic encoding of Shakespeare’s authorial signature [49]). Greenstadt takes the narrator’s comment seriously, too, but suggests that, in context, it points to women’s heightened ability to access oratorical displays of emotion (58). None of these scholars accounts straightforwardly for the contradiction between the narrator’s comments and the language that highlights Lucrece’s authoring behavior that follows it.

By the time her husband and kin arrive to witness her suicide, Lucrece's narrative power is firmly established. Even her initial hesitation and sighs, before she can bring herself to speak, only serve as an anticipation-building pause that seizes control over her audience: "Collatine and his consorted lords / With sad attention long to hear her words" (1610). Lucrece's subsequent speech contrasts sharply with her husband's "speechless woe" (1674) and progresses from describing Tarquin's crime through asserting her own innocence of mind until it culminates in a command to her male audience. She orders them to revenge her ("now attend me: / Be suddenly revenged upon my foe" [1682-83]) and insists upon oaths to this effect before she will name her rapist (1688-96). Her narrative power is now expanding to encompass her audience, recruiting them to serve her self-narrative with oath and deed. She then interrupts the increasingly invested knights as they "promise aid . . . / Longing to hear the hateful foe bewray'd" (1697-98). Her interruption itself asserts her power even though she is ostensibly asking them for answers to her plight. "O speak," she demands of them, having just cut off their speech, "How may this forced stain be wip'd from me?" (1700-01). Her audience members—to their credit—"all at once began to say / Her body's stain her mind untainted clears" (1709-10). Again, she cuts off and disregards her audience's words, turning away and declaring that "no dame hereafter living / By my excuse shall claim excuse's giving" (1714-15). Horrifying as her internalized misogynist logic may be to a modern reader (and it is), Lucrece is nonetheless again expanding the reach of her self-narrative throughout the story's world. Her husband and kin have become her passive audience, swearing the oaths she wishes them to swear while lacking power to sway her from her chosen course; now she imposes her self-narrative onto an imagined future female audience as well. Her audience's present attention and future deeds are under her power and in service of her identity.

All that remains is for Lucrece to name Tarquin and stab herself, which she does. Her final words clinch her re-creation of the moment when Tarquin first threatened her. Instead of facing the unconventionally twisted version of the yield-or-die question that Tarquin actually

offered, she now has the option to yield to the knights' narrative (that she may live free of shame thanks to "her mind untainted") or die with honor. Further, as she metaphorically narrates her suicide, Tarquin is the one holding the knife, so that imaginatively he offers the honorable escape of death that he should have offered in fact: "He, he, fair lords, 'tis he, / That guides this hand to give this wound to me" (1721-22). Having given herself a second chance, Lucrece chooses death before yielding; she escapes the "polluted prison" of her body (1726) and solidifies her honorable identity much like a knight refusing to yield on the battlefield.

In almost all instances of escape, the resistant captive must first exhibit this willingness to suffer and die rather than yield self-narrating power. Escape and death are two oddly interchangeable outcomes for physical resistance. As Launcelot puts it before escaping from Mordred's loud posse, "better were deth at onys than thus to endure thys payne" (649). Female characters usually show similar fatalistic defiance, as when Florimell resolves to drown herself rather than face capture, but these characters often face the added threat of rape as a particularly gendered form of dishonor. With the threat of rape can come a twisted version of the yield-or-die question, in which a woman's non-options are to yield to seduction or be raped and publically dishonored as a result. Unable to trust would-be captors to offer an honorable death, these women often opt for suicide and usually must, in the process, exert exceptional narrative power over their male captors in order to achieve honorable death-escapes at their hands: Olympia must trick Theridamas, and Lucrece must re-write Tarquin. However it is enacted, the fundamental willingness to die rather than yield enables escapes and also marks deaths under these circumstances as escape rather than despair.

Expressional Resistance

Rescue, escape, and willed death lead to the end of captivity for the prisoner, even if only by removing the captive to a different subordinate position (from one captor to a more preferred

one) or into death. Expressional resistance, by contrast, may or may not result in the end of the unwanted captivity, but it nonetheless constitutes a major tactic for asserting self-narrative power. Many of the examples of physical resistance I have already discussed are framed as expressional as well as physical endeavors—Shakespeare’s *Lucrece* being only one of the most obvious—reminding us once again that narrative power over selfhood (rather than, necessarily, “freedom”) is the most fundamental possession at issue in any experience of captivity. Expressional resistance, therefore, is any form of resistance that focuses on the battle for narrative control between captive and captor.

General examples of expressional resistance appear often in martyr narratives when the martyr—who will not achieve worldly, physical freedom—debates with and outwits his or her tormentor, winning support from audiences within and beyond the story’s world. Chaucer’s martyr Cecile makes explicit the verbal aspect of this battle when she rebuts her captor Almachius’s accusations against her and her fellow Christians:

. . . with a wood sentence
Ye make us guilty, and it is nat sooth.
For ye, that knowen wel oure innocence,
For as mucche as we doon a reverence
To Crist, and for we bere a Cristen name,
Ye putte on us a cryme and eek a blame. (450-55)

This scene is a battle for narrative between captor and captive in which both characters—but especially the captive—are highly conscious of the expressional nature of the fight. Almachius, Cecile points out, is attempting to make her self-narrative—her Christian “name”—a crime by *saying* it is one, both rhetorically in this debate and legally through law. She argues that his “sentence” (with its range of Chaucerian meaning) is irrational (“wood”), while her self-narrative is better aligned with a consensus reality even he shares (“ye . . . knowen wel oure innocence”). Her rhetorical move frames Almachius’s narrative as either insane or hypocritically false even as

her truth is similarly founded on words, vested in a “Cristen name” that she and her comrades believe is so “vertuous” that they “may it nat withseye” (456-7). Later in the scene, she again verbally conjures an audience that shares her narrative, her version of reality: “It is a shame that the peple shal / So scorne thee, and laughe at thy folye” (505-06), she says of his idol worship. The *Tale*’s text never makes clear whether this audience literally exists in the story’s world, but Cecile comes close to narrating it into being.

Cecile’s action throughout the *Tale* is almost exclusively verbal—she preaches, argues, and wills her possessions and house to the Christian cause before dying. Her most material victory over Almachius comes after his executioner tries and fails to behead her, leaving her “half deed, with hir nekke ycorven” (533). She remains miraculously able to speak in her characteristically powerful way for three days afterward, arranging matters exactly as she wants them, narrating her resistance to Almachius until the moment of her death. She is killed by her captor, but, on the battleground of self-narrating expression, she’s won.

In this section, I will define and examine a range of more specific methods for expressional resistance: negotiation, complaint, legible patience, affective resistance, and various kinds of deceit. To reiterate an important disclaimer, I do not intend for my divisions between methods in the following discussion to suggest that prisoner-characters choose only a single form of resistance and stick to it; most characters, of course, employ a range of methods either in succession or simultaneously. For example, obviously martyr tales also depend heavily on the concept of resistant death—that is, the martyr’s chosen willingness to die rather than yield to his or her tormentor—but I have used Cecile to introduce expressional resistance rather than including her in the previous section with Olympia and Lucrece. To introduce resistance tactics as clearly as possible, I am imposing a degree of artificial separation and order upon them.

Negotiation

Negotiation refers to a conditional, tactical surrender—in which the prisoner retains self-narrating power and the potential for later resistance—as distinct from the true, absolute yielding of chapter 2. Yielding, as I define it, is unconditional. The conditions a prisoner negotiates, by contrast, are that prisoner’s ongoing, living narration from within captivity. They open up a space, however narrow, for that prisoner to resist (and even exert control over) a captor’s narrative.

Negotiations were a vital and common aspect of historical English medieval and Renaissance imprisonment, a fact not frequently evident from their relatively scant portrayal in many of the texts I examine. All three major categories of imprisonment—custodial, punitive, and coercive—might lend themselves to negotiation at some stage, whether in a personal, legal, or even international context. For example, in contrast to Malory’s idealistic portrayal of ransom practices in the *Morte* (where knights yield unconditionally and ransom is smoothly assumed), M. H. Keen reveals how critical negotiation was to actual ransom practices. Such captivity demanded negotiation on a number of issues, most obviously the ransom’s price (Keen 156), but additionally how the prisoner was to be treated (157-58), if he could be paroled to raise the funds, how a possible parole would be enforced (164), and even whether he was a lawful target for capture in the first place. Keen observes that some knights offered to yield only “if I may be lawfully taken,” formulaically stating a condition at the very outset which “put the onus of proof on the captor” to establish in later negotiations that the new prisoner was an eligible and appropriate target for ransom (178). In general, the ransom agreement between captor and captive was commonly cemented by written contracts as well as, when necessary, letters of

parole and other documentary evidence of the prisoner's bondage (167-69). Similar complicated opportunities for negotiation surround many varieties of imprisonment.¹¹⁴

Negotiation, by definition, disrupts absolutes. It has almost no place, narratively, in the scenes of capture from chapter 2 (however much it would have been available in their real-life equivalents). Within the yield-or-die discourse, yielding is a kind of idealized experience, an absolute loss of self-narrative. Depictions of yielding are invested in *absolute* characterizations of the prisoner as *the kind of person who yields*, whether honorably or dishonorably. These yieldings are unconditional.

Then again, two buried conditions exist even in these most absolute yieldings: honorable yielding is predicated on the condition that the captor's merit is worth the captive's respect, while dishonorable yielding is predicated on the condition that the captor will spare the captive's life. Setting a condition related to the captor's merit is thus a useful basic way for a captive facing dishonorable surrender or death (that is, a captive who has refused to surrender out of respect for the captor and is now about to be fatally defeated) to haul his act of yielding back into the honorable category from the brink of dishonor. At the end of *Tamburlaine's* Part 1, Zenocrate's father, the Sultan of Egypt, does just this when he is dragged into Tamburlaine's presence after his army is beaten. Out of love for Zenocrate, Tamburlaine has bent his usual rules and plans to treat this prisoner well, always assuming that the prisoner consents to the arrangement: "Twas I, my lord, that gat the victory," Tamburlaine warns the Sultan, "And therefore grieve not at your overthrow" (5.1.445-6). In an echo of his daughter's paradoxical

¹¹⁴ Starting points for more information on the role of negotiation in a variety of medieval and early modern English imprisonments include (but are by no means limited to): Green on various forms of arbitration and other resolutions to civil and criminal disputes (see his discussion of the formalizing of such arrangements in the late Middle Ages, for example, at pp.177-82); Kosto for negotiations surrounding hostages (the entire book deals with these issues; chapter 2, "Varieties and Logics of Medieval Hostageship" [24-48] is a good general introduction); Bailey on conditions built into early modern debt bonds (79-85 and throughout); and Weiss for particular vivid details about prisoner exchanges and ransom arrangements between Europeans and the Ottoman Empire and North Africa (34-37 offers several examples of seventeenth-century prisoner negotiations; others appear throughout her book's first few chapters [1-71]).

comment when she yielded to the conqueror, the Sultan acknowledges that he “Of force must yield” (481)—but he also makes that surrender conditional. He will yield, he says, “If, as beseems a person of thy state, / Thou hast with honour used Zenocrate” (483-4). He implies that, if he finds out Zenocrate has been abused, he will die flinging defiance at her abuser. Zenocrate and Tamburlaine confirm that his condition has been met, and the Sultan is thus able to yield honorably to Tamburlaine out of respect for Tamburlaine’s gentlemanly behavior (496-7). Tamburlaine rewards him with promises of power and prestige. In this case, the setting of a condition does not enable any realistic future resistance. The Sultan is yielding and joining Tamburlaine’s narrative. By carving out space for potential resistance, however, he has managed to change his own reasons for yielding from dishonorable fear of death to respect for his captor.

The distinction between honorable yielding and resistant negotiated surrender is arguably only visible in a teleological sense. If the character intends to yield out of respect, and expects the yielding to be permanent (or equally if the audience has these expectations whether or not the character does), then he or she yields honorably. If the character intends to set conditions to retain self-narrating power and enable future resistance—and does so—then he or she is using the resistance tactic of conditional surrender. The text’s ethical framework is determinative, as well. If the captor is honorable or good on the text’s terms, then the action is almost always honorable yielding. If the captor is dishonorable or evil on the text’s terms (and especially if the captive is, by contrast, virtuous), then the action is almost always a resistance tactic.

In Malory, for example, conditional, negotiated surrender is a tactic heroes use to resist villains. A useful example of this situation occurs in the early episode of Arthur’s battle with Accolon. Arthur’s ordeal begins when he falls asleep in a mysterious ship, only to awaken “in a durke preson, heryng aboute hym many complayntes of wofull knyghtes” (84). Captured unconscious, Arthur has been denied the yield-or-die choice, leaving his potential for resistance active if, as yet, unexpressed. He learns from a fellow prisoner that their captor is Sir Damas,

“the falsyst knyght that lyvyth, and full of treson, and a very cowarde” who is withholding lands from his virtuous younger brother, Sir Outlake (84-5). Outlake has challenged Damas to single combat over this conflict, and so Damas “hath dayly layne a wayte wyth many a knyght with hym,” capturing adventuring knights and imprisoning them until one of them agrees to fight in his cause. If only one will fight, all will be released, but Arthur’s fellow prisoner declares that “many good knyghtes hath deyde in this preson for hunger” because “this Damas ys so false and so full of treson, we wolde never fyght for hym to dye for hit” (85). This is, so far, a situation of absolutes. Sir Damas’s evil is established through his cowardice about fighting his own battle, his unjust imprisonment of other knights, and the cruel, even deadly conditions in his dungeon. His honorable prisoners are resisting his evil through the absolute method of flat refusal ending in death; he may have denied them a proper yield-or-die moment on the battlefield, but by refusing his later demands, they effectively choose death anyway.

Arthur’s dilemma within the story’s world appears to be that he must also make this absolute choice between yielding dishonorably (choosing to serve the shameful Damas rather than die) and resistant death. At a narrative level, the dilemma is equally stark: the story’s most important character (not only the motive force behind other characters’ adventures but also a narrative-driving protagonist in this sequence) seems about to lose either his self-narrating power or his life. Within this crush of absolutes, however, Arthur opens space for his narrative and literal survival through negotiation. When a messenger-damsel presents Damas’s offer, Arthur responds with a minimal but meaningful conditional agreement: *if*, he says, “I may be delyverde, and all thes presoners, I woll do the batayle,” adding also, “and I had horse and armoure” (85). These conditions don’t seem like much; Arthur’s fellow prisoner has already privately explained that freedom for all is Damas’s offer to any knight who takes up his cause. By stating them preemptively as if they were his own conditions, however, Arthur effectively makes them his own, thus retaining a bare minimum of control over his own narrative. He may even accomplish an additional adjustment by reversing the implied sequence of events: while

Damas's offer is presented in the form of *if* a knight fights, *then* the others will be released, Arthur's offer is that *if* the knights are released, *then* he will fight.

When Arthur is brought to see Damas, their meeting takes the form of a mutual negotiation rather than a demand from captor to captive. The two men enact a "coveaunte" sealed by Damas's oath to uphold Arthur's terms as well as Arthur's oath "to do the batyle to the uttermoste" (86).¹¹⁵ As if to accent the smooth, subtle undermining of Damas's narrative power that is taking place, Arthur's condition is met first. The other knightly prisoners are "brought oute of the durke preson into the halle and delyverde, and so they all abode to see the batayle" (86). From this point forward, Arthur continues to regain narrative power until his true identity is affirmed and he dictates the resolution to the situation (91). The moment when he makes his consent to Damas's demands conditional is the moment when this empowering process begins.

In the Knight of the Cart episode, Gwenyvere engages in a similar negotiation to maintain narrative power despite capture. Again, the necessity for her resistance arises because of a dishonorable action. Sir Mellyagaunce has "layn in awayte for to stele away the Quene" and finally sees his chance when she goes Maying with "no men of armys with her but the ten noble knyghtis all rayed in grene for maiynge." Mellyagaunce ambushes this lightly armed party with "eyght score men, all harneyst as they shulde fyght in a batyle of arest" (626). When he demands surrender, Gwenyvere and her knights respond with conventional resistance, asserting their preference for death. Gwenyvere declares "I had levir kut myne owne throte in twayne rather than thou sholde dishonoure me" and her men add that "rather than ye shulde put the Quene to a shame, and us all, we had as lyff to departe frome owre lyvys; for and we othyrwayes ded, we were shamed for ever" (627). With that, the fight begins. Forty of Mellyagaunce's men are dead and six of Gwenyvere's "dolefully wounded" before Gwenyvere offers a highly conditional surrender. She agrees to go with Mellyagaunce "uppon thys coveaunte: that thou save [the

¹¹⁵ Arthur's promise here is also equivocal: he agrees to fight the battle, but says nothing about his true identity or the fact that he will use his kingly power to adjudicate the situation in favor of Outlake *after* fighting the battle.

knights] and suffir hem no more to be hurte, wyth thys that they be lad with me wheresomever thou ledyst me, for I woll rather sle myselff than I woll go wyth the, onles that thes noble knyghtes may be in my presence” (627). Mellyagaunce agrees at once, and in so doing, accepts Gwenyvere as a resistant rather than a yielding prisoner.

The word “covenante” performs the same work here as it did in Arthur’s exchange with Damas, reframing the encounter from one of absolute submission to one of mutual negotiation. Gwenyvere repeats that she will still choose death before accepting imprisonment without her conditions, which marks her position as honorably resistant; she concedes for the compassionate purpose of saving her knights, not out of fear of death. Sir Pelleas, speaking presumably for her entire bodyguard, also asserts that her knights remain unafraid of death and surrender only due to her orders, not their own worries (“Madame . . . we woll do as ye do, for as for me, I take no force of my lyff nor deth” [628]). His words not only assert his ongoing honor, but also his ongoing loyalty to *Gwenyvere*’s narrative rather than his captor Mellyagaunce’s. Mellyagaunce makes one of his many errors of judgment in accepting these people as his prisoners. They may be surrendering their bodies, but he has no power whatsoever over their self-narratives, and their ability to resist remains active.

Mellyagaunce’s precarious narrating power becomes evident at once, as he instructs “the Quene and all her knyghtes that none of hir felyshyp shulde departe frome her” during the ride to his castle, because his greatest fear is that Launcelot will learn of the abduction and come to the Queen’s rescue. Gwenyvere’s response to this order is immediate and completely defiant:

. . . pryvaly she called unto her a chylde of her chambir whych was swyfftely horsed, of a grete avauntayge.

‘Now go thou,’ seyde she, ‘whan thou seyst thy tyme, and bear thys ryngge unto Sir Launcelot du Laake, and pray hym as he lovythe me that he woll se me and rescow me, if ever he woll have joy of me—and spare nat thy horse,’ seyde the Quyene, ‘nother for watir nother for londe.’ (628)

The page seizes his chance and bolts successfully, leaving Mellyagaunce with the unsettling knowledge that the escape “was by the Quyenys commaundement for to warne Sir Launcelot” (628). Once at his castle, supposedly the seat of his own power, Mellyagaunce continues to obey the Queen’s demand that her knights remain with her, “for the booke seyth Sir Mellyagaunte durste make no mastryes for drede of Sir Launcelot” (628).

Although Launcelot and Gwennyvere will face further ordeals before this episode is over—Launcelot’s murdered horse and infamous cart ride, the lovers’ unfortunately obvious night together, Mellyagaunce’s accusation of treason and dishonorable imprisonment of Launcelot—in a sense, their ultimate victory over Gwennyvere’s would-be abductor is sealed the moment Mellyagaunce accepted her initial conditions and, with them, her ongoing power to resist him. Indeed, that ultimate victory is shaped, repeatedly, by negotiation. Mellyagaunce continually tries for the absolute (from his initial demand that Gwennyvere surrender to his own later attempt at unconditional surrender to Launcelot) only to be met with negotiations from both Gwennyvere and Launcelot that lead to his downfall (Launcelot lures Mellyagaunce with a “large proffir” into fighting to the death after Mellyagaunce attempts to yield [638]). His narrative is continually overpowered by theirs.

The threat that negotiation represents to a captor’s power is an important consideration for both loyalists and rebels in Part 2 of Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* when the two sides parley before battle. The rebels are likely to lose, and know it, while John, Duke of Lancaster, is confident that he can lead the king’s forces to victory. The rebels’ most realistic hope lies in negotiation. They must get John to accept their terms for peace—to grant them ongoing narrative power, including the political agency to complain to the king—before they retreat back into obedience. While Hastings complacently believes that such a peace will be “as firm as rocky mountains” (4.1.186), Mowbray warns his fellow rebels that any negotiated settlement will leave King Henry uneasy about future rebellions and watching their behavior over-closely because “every slight and false-derived cause, / Yea, every idle, nice, and wanton reason, / Shall to the

King taste of this action” (4.1.187-90). Indeed, Mowbray’s fears prove prescient. John enters the negotiations only as a tactical move in a larger plan for absolute victory. He equivocates during the parley, persuades the rebels to dismiss their army, and then orders the ringleaders seized for treason, destroying the resistance value of the intended negotiation in favor of wiping out the rebel leadership. Resistance through negotiation can be countered by refusal to accept the negotiation; when the tactic is countered, the prisoner must turn to other methods.

Plaint and Patience

Resistant suffering can be loosely subdivided into two styles with much overlap: suffering that is expressed and amplified verbally and physically, which I will call “plaint,” and suffering endured with quiet resolve, which I will call “patience.” Suffering expressed through plaint is manifested through the character’s written or verbal expression within the story’s world; its self-narrating quality is usually clear. Patient suffering manifests more through experience and behavior than words, with the patient character’s endurance visible primarily to him- or herself, readers, and (if invoked) God.

To discuss the experience of suffering as a tactic for resistance may seem strange because suffering is definitionally passive, an action received rather than an action initiated. *How* suffering is experienced, however, can be a tactical choice—and, further, can have results that function as effective resistance whether the character can be said to be making “tactical choices” or not. Resistant suffering positions the captive as the hero in a narrative where he or she endures whatever the captor inflicts rather than yielding to the captor’s narrative. In such a story, the captor is characterized as cruel, unkind, even tyrannical. Just as importantly, the captor is constructed *relative to the captive*, not the other way around. The captor remains supporting cast, the antagonist to the captive’s protagonist. As a result, the captor is narratively marginalized by a captive’s resistant suffering, relegated to a secondary role in the captive’s self-

narrative and, also, deprived of means to change the situation. Most of the tactics I have identified so far can be blocked, at least to some extent, by a captor. Escapes can be prevented, negotiations refused. But increasing a resistantly suffering captive's torment will—as any evil tyrant in a martyr legend learns—only increase that captive's narrative power.

Georgia Crampton's detailed and insightful study *The Condition of Creatures: Suffering and Action in Chaucer and Spenser* provides valuable background for my discussion of suffering, plaint, and patience. Crampton traces the ancient “topos *agere et pati*, to do and to suffer” from Homer through *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Faerie Queene* (1) and explores how authors use this binary opposition as a major characterizing and structuring device (13, 28-31, 41). This opposition complements but does not map directly onto the binaries of resistance and yielding that I explore, largely because action and patience are states a protagonist may experience cyclically over the course of a narrative (without the sense of permanence that accompanies paradigmatic yielding; Crampton in fact links the *Knight's Tale's* other cyclical imagery to cycles of “suffering and action” [91]). Further, unlike yielding, suffering can characterize a figure as honorable and self-narrating, even if it is “a different way to be heroic” (32-3). Crampton observes that, in the early modern period, “readers spotted a model of suffering in the *Odyssey* to match that of action in the *Iliad*” (35), and for both medieval and early modern readers, “if to act was to express the image of God the Father, Prime Mover, Pure Act, to suffer was to take on the image of His Son, who suffered so extremely” (33). The suffering of Odysseus and Christ enhances, rather than erases, their self-narrating power. The same is true for the sufferers I examine here.

My “plaint” should not be confused with the literary genre of “complaint,” which in the later Middle Ages takes on specific (if still highly debated) qualities of public remonstrance or even political demand that can also shade into the satirical. Elaborate complaints by lovers

constitute a variation of this genre.¹¹⁶ Complaint certainly shares a kinship with more formally constructed complaints—it also carries a quality of making suffering public, and usually of condemning those causing the suffering—but my idiosyncratic diction is meant to stress that “plaints” are local speeches by characters in larger literary contexts, not full-fledged examples of an independent genre. At most, these are moments when the genre of complaint intersects with the yield-or-die discourse because the text is borrowing markers of the genre to reveal a character’s resistance; more generally, I define plaint as almost any first-person verbal description of a captive’s suffering.

A plaint almost always highlights suffering that could be redressed. It is either meant to be heard and acted upon or, at least, to express longing for relief rather than hopeless resignation. By imagining a circumstance where the pain suffered could (and should) be alleviated, the complainer positions him- or herself as the victim of injustice or cruelty by someone else. Whether the captive intends it or not, plaints are usually heard by other characters within the story’s world. They tend to find audiences within the text as well as outside it. Thus when a prisoner complains, her words may appear to admit passivity or powerlessness (she can’t help herself; she can only voice her plaint), but the *narrative* work she is accomplishing is forceful and effective. Other characters hear, accept, and act upon complaints, in the process acknowledging and accepting the prisoner’s self-narration. At a formal level, similarly, a plaint

¹¹⁶ See John Peter’s *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* for a survey of the complaint genre that covers the late Middle Ages and early modern period; one of Peter’s main argumentative goals with the book is to distinguish complaint and satire as different genres, each with distinctive features. For Peter, complaint and satire share goals of exposing public problems, but complaint is more “conceptual,” “allegorical,” and “impersonal” than satire (9), and it “is corrective and clearly does not despair of its power to correct” (10). Peter suggests that complaint arises out of Christian adaptations to classical satire (answering satire’s purpose of criticizing while mitigating its aggressiveness) as well as out of the prophetic voices of the Old Testament (21-4). An ostensibly less political subgenre is the lover’s complaint, examples of which include those Kelly Quinn examines throughout her article “Mastering Complaint” or that Heather Dubrow explores in *Captive Victors* (as part of a discussion on Shakespeare’s “Lucrece”) (143-51).

usually works to build an audience's sympathy for the captive—and create antipathy toward the tormentor.

Although not a prisoner, Chaucer's Wife of Bath has an insightfully cynical take on the use (or in her case, arguably abuse) of complaint in her *Prologue*. To manage her three old husbands, she dominates them with the power of her own narrative, pushing them into the false role of misogynist cheaters while performing the jealous or wronged wife herself. She explains to her fellow pilgrims:

I koude pleyne, and yit was in the gilt,
Or elles often tyme hadde I been spilt.
Whose that first to mille comth, first grynt;
I pleynd first, so was oure werre ystynt.
They were ful glade to excuse hem blyve
Of thyng of which they nevere agilte hir lyve. (387-92)

The speedy deployment of her complaints is one method by which the Wife maintains her power. Speed is probably especially necessary for her because she is well aware that she does not have facts on her side; as we will see, speed is less necessary when prisoners are obviously suffering and their captors make no pretense otherwise. The Wife's phrasing—she “koude pleyne, *and yit*” was actually guilty—suggests that the very act of complaining (in addition to the contents of the complaint) conventionally signifies innocence. The Wife expects her audience to be surprised that she, though guilty, is willing and able to complain.

Although she admits that she uses complaint manipulatively to foster an appearance of innocence, the Wife suggests that she also complains to protect herself from danger. If her manipulations had ever failed, she says, she would have “been spilt,” a strong word connoting brutal death or destruction that pairs with the “werre” she imagines between herself and these

husbands.¹¹⁷ This imagery of marriage as violent warfare is, in context, mostly comic, and it suits the Wife's larger theme of marriage as a competition for sovereignty. The Wife hints, however, that she could be in genuine danger if her narrative dominance is lost and her various marital indiscretions exposed (indeed, real violence does break out between her and her fifth husband [788-802]). She deploys plaint manipulatively to foster a fictional innocence, but she also relies on the value of plaint to protect her from real abuse. Plaint, the Wife makes clear, is not mere passive expression of suffering. It is a powerful tool for defensive—even for offensive—self-narration.

Plaint appears in a variety of contexts throughout the *Morte Darthur* as well, predictably in the mouths of characters with less expressed self-awareness about their actions than the Wife of Bath. Many of the instances are relatively formal political complaints to King Arthur for redress of injustice, speeches that expect and usually receive swift action to correct the problem. For example, at his crowning, “many complayntes were made unto Sir Arthur of grete wronges that were done syn the dethe of Kyng Uther,” all of which Arthur addresses briskly (11). Arthur's imprisonment by Damas opens with Arthur awakening in the dungeon “heryng aboute hym many complayntes of wofull knyghtes” (84). These knights feel unable—morally and physically—to liberate themselves, but they register their resistance to Damas through plaint. Unlike the lords and ladies complaining of injustice at Arthur's crowning, these prisoners have no expectation that their complaints will bring swift results. Some have been in prison for years, and none ask or expect Arthur to solve the problem. They are, however, unknowingly speaking to the King, providing him a report of their own innocence and Damas's egregious crimes. Arthur's carefully negotiated and resistant agreement to fight for Damas on the condition that all the prisoners be freed can thus be read as a kingly response to a complaint of injustice: he has a duty

¹¹⁷ Allow a groan-worthy pun on “spilt”—an alternative Middle English spelling for “spelt,” the grain—and the Wife's apparently commonplace reference to grinding at the mill becomes more ominous, too: this isn't merely a race between two would-be grinders, but a race where the loser, like grain, is ground up.

to help them. Indeed, at the end of the episode, Arthur orders Damas to compensate the former prisoners “of all their harmys that they be contente” and warns that if “ony of them com to my courte and complayne on the, be my hede thou shalt dye therefore” (91). The knights’ private complaints in prison are now explicitly linked to public, political complaints to the king at court. Addressed to a powerful and sympathetic listener, complaint can achieve this kind of decisive, material result.

Sometimes the powerful and sympathetic listener is actually the captor. When Gawayne’s inexperience and overconfidence leads to his injury and imprisonment early in the text, he laments aloud: “‘Alas!’ seyde Sir Gawayne, ‘myn arme grevith me sore, that I am lyke to be maymed,’ and so made hys complaynte pyteuously.” The next day, “one of the foure ladyes that had herd hys complaynte” arrives and, while chastising Gawayne for his errors, nonetheless also arranges his release (69). Similarly, when Trystram is imprisoned by Sir Darras, he falls ill, leading to a famously poignant passage—apparently added by Malory (himself a prisoner)—on the particular misery of being sick in prison: “whan skynes towchith a presoners body, than may a presonere say all welth ys hym berauffte, and than hath he cause to wayle and wepe—Ryght so ded Sir Trystram” (327). His fellow prisoners, even his nemesis Palomydes, join him in “makyngre grete sorow” over his suffering, and a damsel carries word of the prisoners’ “mournynge” and Trystram’s danger to Darras. Darras, who until now has seemed content to keep the men captive as punishment for Trystram’s killing of his three sons, lets them go, telling Trystram “me repentis of youre sykenes” and “hit shall never be seyde that I, Sir Darras, shall destroy such a noble knyght as ye ar in preson” (332). Darras’s concern for his self-narrative (“hit shall never be seyde”) is especially telling. Trystram’s suffering—and the amplification of that suffering when Trystram and his fellows “wayle and wepe” and make “grete sorow” in a way that others (the damsel) can notice—threatens to give Darras a villain’s reputation. During their imprisonment, even Trystram concedes that Darras has treated them “but as a naturall knyght ought to do,” but allowing his prisoners to suffer to the point of death (or, strictly speaking,

allowing such a thing to “be seyde” about him) would compromise Darras’s knightly identity. Darras suddenly acknowledges that Trystram’s actions in battle were motivated “by fors of knyghthode” rather than malice; the episode resolves as the differences between captor and captive, complainer and audience, dissolve into shared acknowledgement of each other’s knightliness. The complaints of Trystram and his fellow prisoners push Darras to change his behavior.

A final group of prisoner’s complaints in Malory’s text consists of the interjections by Malory’s authorial voice calling attention to his own status as “a knyght presoner” (112) and requesting prayers from his readers “that God sende hym good delyveraunce sone, and hastely” (227). These brief comments are more stoic than the lamenting and weeping of the imprisoned characters I have already examined, but they fit the category of “complaint” due to their expectation of an audience and their hope of material results. The first of the interjections may perhaps be even more specific than the relatively general prisoner’s prayer for release. Malory comments: “And this booke endyth whereas Sir Launcelot and Sir Trystrams com to courte. Who that woll make ony more, lette hym seke other bookis of Kynge Arthure or of Sir Launcelot or Sir Trystrams; for this was drawyn by a knyght presoner . . .” (112). To read a causal connection between the first point (readers should seek elsewhere for more of the story) and the second (this particular text was made by a prisoner) is not necessary, but is certainly plausible. Malory seems to suggest that, as a prisoner, he has difficulty gaining access to the sources he needs to continue. By doing so, he alerts his readers to the particularized suffering that is the lack of books, and perhaps slyly hints that readers who wish his project to continue should take action on his behalf. This comment occurs early in the book, so if it is a specific complaint, it is also trace evidence of a complaint somehow answered: Malory seems to have gotten access to more sources. In general, the mentions of unhappy imprisonment by the book’s narrative voice join the complaints of virtuous imprisoned characters within the story’s world, subtly suggesting that the narrator, too, is an upstanding hero suffering unjustly.

In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser depicts an elaborate prisoner's plaint when Florimell is imprisoned by Proteus in Book III. Florimell's imprisonment is profoundly isolating. She is already lodged in Proteus's remote undersea dwelling-place when "Downe in a Dongeon deepe he let her fall" after she refuses his attempts at seduction (III.viii.41.8). Spenser's narrative voice pronounces Florimell's resistant commitment to chastity to be worthy of "endlesse fame" (43.7) before abruptly announcing that while he doesn't want to "leau[e] [her] in this wofull state," he's going to switch focus to another plot. Florimell doesn't reappear until late in Book IV. Her lengthy imprisonment in the depths is thus mirrored by the poem's formal construction—a textual version of Persephone's six months in Hades.

Florimell enters this enforced silence as a resistant prisoner, and when Spenser finally returns to her, she re-enters the text as an overheard "lamentable voice of one, / That piteously complaind her carefull grieffe" (IV.xii.5.2-3). Florimell is still resistant, although she opens her complaint by declaring her belief that no one—not even the gods—can hear her:

Though vaine I see my sorrowes to vnfold,
And count my cares, when none is nigh to heare,
Yet hoping grieffe may lessen being told,
I will them tell though vnto no man neare:
For heauen that vnto all lends equall eare,
Is farre from hearing of my heauy plight;
And lowest hell, to which I lie most neare,
Cares not what euils hap to wretched wight;
And greedy seas doe in the spoile of life delight. (6.1-9)

Florimell is near despair in this moment, as her assumption that even heaven won't hear her reveals, but she maintains hope that plaint may at least ease her suffering. Plaint is a choice she makes to help herself in a bad situation, and it thus positions her as a self-narrating character pushing back against the forces harming her. In this limited sense, plaint requires no hearer

within the story's world to be effective, and formally, it characterizes Florimell as still affirmatively resistant.

The substance of Florimell's complaint further reveals her ongoing possession of narrative power. Her speech re-casts the events of her flight from a series of foes and her ultimate imprisonment by Proteus as a unified story of her unrequited love for Marinell. Previously, readers have learned that Florimell's unrequited love did, indeed, cause her to set out in search of Marinell, but specifically because she heard that he was dead or wounded (III.v.9 and 10). Florimell's version of the story, in her complaint, overlooks Marinell's possible death (which Spenser's narrator earlier cited as her motivation) and instead positions him as a figure with ongoing power to oppose her and, indeed, as her captor in this situation. In Florimell's narration, Proteus receives no mention; instead, Marinell's indifference is Florimell's prison: his "hard rocky hart" (IV.xii.7.3) echoes the "hideous clieffe" and "rocky stone" in which she is confined (xii.5.1, 7). This version of Marinell is, if not literally Florimell's jailor, in possession of both literal and figurative means to free her. She argues that "blame it is to him, that armes profest, / To let her die, whom he might haue redrest" (8.4-5), and sadly concludes:

But ô vaine iudgement, and conditions vaine,
The which the prisoner points vnto the free,
The whiles I him condemne, and deeme his paine,
He where he list goes loose, and laughes at me.
So euer loose, so euer happy be.
But where so loose or happy that thou art,
Know *Marinell* that all this is for thee. (11.1-7)

Marinell's life-threatening injuries are no longer part of Florimell's narrative, nor is Proteus, her literal captor. In her rewriting, Marinell now has the means to free her, and Proteus is fading from view.

Plaint tends to find a receptive audience even when the prisoner complaining does not expect to be heard. Although the knights who complain to Arthur in Damas's prison don't know who their audience is or what his reaction might be, he turns out to be an especially efficacious listener. And, although Florimell anticipates no audience for her resistant complaint, Marinell himself is walking on the beach and overhears her (5.1-3, 12.1). In a sense, the Florimell's narrative power brings him to that place at that time. Her original quest "neuer to returne againe, / Till him alieue or dead she did inuent" (III.v.10.3-4) now seems to carry a tantalizing double meaning in the word *invent*—certainly "to find," but also, perhaps, "to narrate into being, to create." At least, her plaint wins her audience's complete sympathy:

His stubborne heart . . .
Was toucht with soft remorse and pittie rare;
That euen for grieffe of minde he oft did grone,
And inly wish, that in his powre it weare
Her to redresse (12.4-8)

Although Marinell accepts Florimell's narrative, however, he is unable to help her directly.

Instead, Marinell becomes a kind of proxy-Florimell (one of several in the text, of course), who shares and amplifies her suffering. Soon after his first experience of feeling sorry for her (12.8-9, 13.1-2), Marinell becomes a figurative prisoner himself. Cupid, who "tameth stubborne youth / With iron bit, and maketh him abide, / Till like a victor on his backe he ride," enchains Marinell with the same lovesick fate of Chaucer's Troilus and countless others (13.3-9). Marinell acts now as if "he had lost him selfe, he wiste not where" (17.3), looks "nothing like himselfe" as the lovesickness takes hold (20.5), and meditates on Florimell's suffering while in his mother's undersea home "[i]n solitary silence far from wight" (19.1-9), replaying Florimell's complaint in a location that mimics her prison. Where Proteus, Florimell's nominal captor, is replaced by Marinell in her imagination, so Cupid, Marinell's nominal captor, is a stand-in for Florimell herself. Marinell yields to love for Florimell, and thus underlines a meaningful difference

between the two lovers: Florimell is a resistant captive, continuing to narrate, while Marinell behaves as a yielded captive, taking on the narrative of another and seeming to lose himself in the process. Although he calls himself “the author of her punishment,” even that statement accepts *her* narrative as truth, and he goes on “with vile curses, and reprochfull shame / To damne him selfe by euery euill name” (16.4-5), positioning himself as the villain in her complaint. Perhaps his yielded state is the reason he cannot rescue his paradoxically imprisoned captor. Because he lacks the narrative power to “inuent” a means to free her (16.1), he can only support her story and share her experience.

The power of Florimell’s plaint reverberates farther. The echo chamber that is Marinell duplicates and thus amplifies her suffering, so that his mother Cymodoce becomes distressed about her son’s suffering and her inability to help him. Via Cymodoce’s saddened voice, the plaint echoes out further, first to Tryphon the healer, who fails to solve the problem; then to Apollo the doctor, who diagnoses lovesickness but cannot cure it; then to Neptune, who listens to Cymodoce “plaine” (30.2) and acts upon her “humble suit” for Florimell’s release (29.6); and finally to Proteus, who receives Neptune’s order and, while “griued” himself by it, obeys it. Florimell is free.

Plaints, even from isolated undersea prisons, tend to find an audience.

Like plaint, patience can bring about material help for the prisoner when it finds an audience, but such help is a side benefit compared to patience’s central work of reinforcing the prisoner’s narrative. Patience is often defined in opposition to plaint—patient characters never complain—but in fact the two tactics perform similar work within the yield-or-die discourse. Patience is quieter, but accomplishes similar results in a similar way. It almost always constructs and solidifies a narrative in which the prisoner is suffering wrongly, enduring heroically, and therefore resisting—in mind rather than in body—whoever is inflicting the pain.

Patience as understood in late medieval and Renaissance England derived from the interwoven strands of classical Stoicism and Christian *imitatio Christi*. As Georgia Crampton

comments, patience deriving from Christ's Passion could represent "an alternative heroic ideal" to more aggressive, agential approaches: "It was a model transcendent but open to all, urged upon all, a prize for which mere Christian wayfarers, too modest to set out for a golden fleece, might compete. Patience . . . took for its unique exploit not the deed but the ordeal" (33). Gerald J. Schiffhorst describes the virtue's evolution in the Middle Ages and Renaissance by commenting that patience "came to mean something other than Stoic fortitude or passive endurance; it was seen as an active virtue and a positive response to God's will in time of suffering" (2).¹¹⁸ He continues, "patience has a sacrificial power to transform evil," and "[t]he term implies not only physical and spiritual endurance but an expectation for someone to help or for something to happen" (3).

Patience, then, is an active choice about how to respond to suffering. Further, the suffering it responds to is conventionally unjust, in the tradition of Christ's suffering (9). Ralph Hanna explores Augustine's emphasis on this moral element of patience: without a moral component, Augustine argues, the ability to endure pain is mere "hardness" or "heedlessness." True patience exists in the context of a "virtuous cause" as the patient person endures "persecution for righteousness' sake" as in the eight Beatitude (70). More specifically, beginning at least with Boethius's *Consolatio*, patience is a quality affiliated with virtuous prisoners. Schiffhorst notes several allegorical depictions of Patience from the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which she appears bound or manacled (14, 16, 20, etc.). Patience thus

¹¹⁸ Crampton introduces Christian and Stoic backgrounds to patience (*Condition of Creatures* 28-39). The 1978 essay collection edited by Schiffhorst, *The Triumph of Patience*, from which much of this background material is drawn, remains an excellent introduction to medieval and Renaissance understandings of the virtue, with essays by Schiffhorst, Ralph Hanna III, Elizabeth D. Kirk, Priscilla L. Tate, and Albert C. Labriola that discuss the history of patience and its specific depiction in iconographic works as well as in the Pearl-poet's *Patience*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Robin Waugh's *The Genre of Medieval Patience Literature: Development, Duplication, and Gender* updates the conversation with a particular focus on female patience figures. Additionally, Jill Mann's many commentaries on medieval literature are sprinkled with insightful comments on patience; her *Feminizing Chaucer* is a notable example of such a work.

characterizes its practitioner as active, committed, and virtuous, upholding a resistant self-narrative despite oppression.

Patience's potential as a resistance tactic in an implied or explicit power struggle is summed up in the proverbial phrase *patiens vincit* and its variations. Chaucer explores patience's ability to conquer at several points in his works. The Parson, for example, comments that patience is an attitude belonging to virtuous—indeed, Christlike—people in opposition to difficulty and evil:

. . . pacience is thilke vertu that suffreth debonairely alle the outrages of adversitee and every wikked word. This vertu maketh a man lyk to God, and maketh hym Goddes owene deere child, as seith Crist. This vertu disconfiteth thyn enemy. And therefore seith the wise man, "If thow wolt venquysse thyn enemy, lerne to suffre." (659-60)

The Parson envisions an active combat with an enemy—perhaps not physical battle, but combat nonetheless—in which patience is the weapon of the victorious. One of Malory's hermits hints at a similarly forceful conception of the virtue when he insists that the Round Table fellowship has only endured so long because its chivalric strength is "founded in paciens and in humilité" (541). The hermit isn't claiming that Launcelot knocks opponents down with patience rather than with a spear, but patience is nonetheless associated with the forceful power of righteous knights.

A demonstration of patience is an assertion of a particular self-narrative—that of righteousness and innocence opposed to wickedness—which, if accepted by an audience, can win support for the patient character much as plaint does. The Franklin, introducing his *Tale*, anticipates the Parson's proverbial wisdom when he comments, "Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn, / For it venquysseth, as thise clerkes seyn, / Thynges that rigour sholde nevere atteyne" (773-75). His *Tale* then explores the virtue's power in its own idiosyncratic context. Dorigen is not a literal prisoner, but her oath to Aurelius leaves her "wrapped" in Fortune's "cheyne" once he apparently fulfills its outrageous conditions (1355-56): she must allow him to sleep with her

rather than break her word. Her husband Arveragus exhibits the *Tale's* most obvious patience when he resolves that "I wol my wo endure— / Ne make no contenance of hevynesse" (1484-85). His patience preserves Dorigen's "trouthe" (1597)—her word, her integrity, in many ways her self-narrative itself. Already joined as husband and wife, they are jointly bound by Dorigen's oath and must jointly maintain their integrity within this bondage. When Dorigen presents herself to Aurelius, she adds plaint to patience ("allas, allas!" [1513]), and he is suddenly stricken by "greet compassioun / Of hire and of hire lamentacioun, / And of Arveragus, the worthy knyght" (1515-17). He tells Dorigen, "I se his grete gentillesse / To yow, and eek I se wel youre distresse" (1527-28), and releases her from her promise. He has been vanquished. Seeing and hearing Dorigen's plaint, and understanding Arveragus's patient "gentillesse," has caused him to see them as virtuous victims. In response, he imagines for himself—and rejects—the role of villain who would "doon so heigh a cherlyssh wrecchednesse / Agayns franchise and alle gentillesse" (1523-24). Patience conquers decisively in this instance by winning over the oppressor to the support of his former victims' narrative.¹¹⁹

Shakespeare frequently depicts women wielding patience as a weapon against high-ranking male oppressors, using precisely the power that *As You Like It's* Duke Frederick fears Rosalind possesses: "her smoothness, / Her very silence, and her patience / Speak to the people, and they pity her" (1.3.77-79). For example, Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* and Leonato in *Much Ado About Nothing* are suspicious, temperamental patriarchs who fall into the role of oppressor

¹¹⁹ Jill Mann makes the bold but plausible declaration that "'Patience conquers' is at the heart of the *Canterbury Tales* and much of Chaucer's other work besides" ("Chaucerian Themes" 67). In her article "Wife-Swapping in Medieval Literature," Mann comments that the *Franklin's Tale* "celebrates . . . the power of a commitment to 'trouthe'—the power of the kind of blind surrender that Chaucer calls patience—to awaken a response in the human heart, a response that matches the initial self-surrender and transforms what had seemed a deadlocked situation into harmony and happiness. It is in this conception of the miraculous power of 'trouthe' to remake the world in the image of the self-sacrificing hero/heroine that the *Franklin's Tale* most nearly resembles [other texts Mann has been examining]" (111). Although Mann's use of "surrender" does not, of course, mesh well with my particular definition of the word, her underlying point—that the *Tale* illustrates patience's ability to preserve and even promote the sufferer's self-narrative—is foundational to my argument.

over the women in their lives when they (falsely) feel betrayed. Hermione and Hero endure captivity because of these leonine men (Hermione is literally imprisoned; Hero is “secretly kept in” while falsely accused [4.1.203]). In *The Winter’s Tale*, Hermione asserts her trust in patience at her trial, declaring that

. . . if pow’rs divine
Behold our human actions (as they do),
I doubt not then but innocence shall make
False accusation blush, and tyranny
Tremble at patience. (3.2.28-32)

Hermione’s statement is a reminder that sometimes the main witnesses to patience within a story’s world are “pow’rs divine.” Resistant patience need not be publically visible to the captor or anyone else, and for many years, Hermione’s isn’t. That said, in Hermione’s case, the divine powers find useful human assistants such as Paulina, who enables Hermione to convert her words at her trial into years of (patient) waiting before the triumph of her self-narrative over Leontes’s “[f]alse accusation” in the play’s last scene.

In *Much Ado*, the Friar instructs Hero to “have patience and endure” (4.1.254) in the hope that her she “[s]hall be lamented, pitied, and excus’d / Of every hearer” (216-17). One of those hearers is Leonato, who becomes persuaded of his daughter’s innocence while she is being patient: without much expressed motivation for the change, he simply begins to believe in her while she is hidden away. The death-like confinement, inactivity, and silence of patience is, here, a mysterious but still powerful mechanism for re-claiming a self-narrative threatened by a powerful captor.

This power of patience to champion a captive’s self-narrative can only truly be unlocked when the captive *chooses* to be patient. If patience is to be empowering, it must be a choice, a story the captive, like Hermione, elects to tell. When well-meaning allies counsel patience, by contrast, the sufferer is likely to reject the idea; worse, when oppressors insist that those they

torment be patient, patience becomes a tool of the enemy. The uselessness of advising patience is a trope that goes back to the Book of Job, in which Job's friends try—and fail—to persuade him to accept his misery without complaint.¹²⁰ Leonato rebukes his brother for giving such advice in *Much Ado*, observing that

. . . 'tis all men's office to speak patience
To those that wring under the load of sorrow,
But no man's virtue or sufficiency
To be so moral when he shall endure
The like himself. (5.1.27-31)

He concludes that “there was never yet philosopher / That could endure the toothache patiently, / However they have writ the style of gods” (35-37). Leonato objects not only to bystanders counseling patience but also to the utility of patience itself; he imagines it to be a product of lofty rhetoric, nothing more. Benedict's earlier exhortation for him to “be patient” in response to the accusations against Hero did no good, either (4.1.143).

Leonato's bristling at advice to be patient is the response of a powerful man. In his case, such advice is irritating but (because of his relative freedom and agency) harmless to him. Externally imposed patience carries more potential for harm when it is turned against prisoners by captors. For example, I have been comparing Hero to Hermione as if Hero's patience originates, like Hermione's, in her own narrative, but this is a shaky assumption. Hero never declares herself patient. The friar instructs her to be so, and she apparently consents. Patience helps to vindicate her, but does little to enhance her already somewhat vague self-narrative, partly because whether she makes a characterizing choice to be patient is unclear. In a more extreme situation, imposed patience becomes a captor's tool for forcing a prisoner into passive

¹²⁰ Eliphaz, for example, advises Job to accept that “man is born unto trouble” (5.7) and patient expectation of God's help is the only remedy (5.8-27). Job fires back, “What is my strength, that I should hope? And what is mine end, that I should prolong my life? . . . To him that is afflicted pity should be shewed from his friend” (6.11-14).

yielding rather than a captive's tool for maintaining a resistant self-narrative. These instances of false patience may look a great deal like the real thing, but the distinction is simple if subtle. False patience is imposed from without, narrated *for* the prisoner rather than *by* the prisoner, whereas true patience belongs to the prisoner's own self-narrative. Being told to have patience is not the same thing as having patience.

In addition to "*patiens vincit*," a second commonplace phrase is thus associated with patience, and especially with imprisoned patience—*patience perforce*. The oxymoronic force of this phrase should be clear by now, and captive characters use the phrase with grim awareness of its contradictions. I have elsewhere noted Zenocrate's ambiguous agreement to be "pleas'd perforce"; similarly, Shakespeare's Richard III advises Clarence to "have patience" in prison, to which Clarence responds, "I must perforce" (*Richard III* 1.1.116). "Patience perforce" speaks to the dangerous fact that prisoners can indeed be forced into situations that look like patience, situations in which they must wait, silenced, whether they have yielded or continue to resist.

Within the yield-or-die discourse, obeying an order to have patience essentially means yielding to the one giving the order, and so such "patience" no longer has any quality of resistance to it. In these situations, *defying* an outsider's exhortation to patience becomes the resistance tactic. The Duchess of Gloucester in *Richard II*, faced with John of Gaunt's decision to be patient under Richard's rule, worries that the decision signifies "despair" rather than "patience" (1.2.29), and adds a revealing additional comment: "That which in mean men we entitle patience / Is pale cold cowardice in noble breasts" (33-34). Cowardice connotes dishonorable yielding; the Duchess believes that John is capitulating to Richard out of fear while claiming to embrace a narrative of patience endurance. A similar issue arises near the end of Marlowe's *Edward II*. King Edward, captured and held at Killingworth Castle by agents of Mortimer, is urged by his noble jailor Leicester:

Be patient, good my lord, cease to lament.

Imagine Killingworth Castle were your court,

And that you lay for pleasure here a space,
Not of compulsion or necessity. (21.1-4)

Coming from Edward's own imagination, this suggestion might be an excellent resistance tactic to maintain a self-narrative during imprisonment (Lear proposes a similarly patient narrative to Cordelia [5.3.8-19]). Coming from Edward's *captor*, though, this suggestion is an insidious temptation to yield to that captor's narrative. Edward, who has earlier flirted with the idea of a patient approach to his sufferings (fantasizing about retreating into a philosophic, contemplative life [20.12-21]), now rejects Leicester's suggestion because "The griefs of private men are soon allayed, / But not of kings" (8-9); instead, Edward wants to "plain me to the gods" or "revenge me" rather than be patient (22, 24).

Both Edward and *Richard II's* Duchess of Gloucester hint at a class dimension to their rejections of patience. The Duchess reserves "patience" for "mean men" but rejects it for "noble breasts," while Edward suggests that Leicester's advice can only work for "private men," not "kings." Whereas Leonato finds patience simply unrealistic, the Duchess and Edward consider it beneath them. As characters such as Hermione and the Round Table knights (with their prowess "founded in paciens") show, noble sufferers can demonstrate patience. What Leonato, the Duchess, and Edward reject is actually *imposed* patience—false patience—and the yielding that it implies. Their comments point to a broader societal form of imposed patience, in which the privileged exhort the oppressed to endure suffering without complaint as a means of *repressing* resistance rather than enabling it.

Thus, just as prisoners must sometimes reject a captor's attempt to impose patience upon them if they wish to remain resistant, so must characters suffering under broader oppressions similarly reject patience. Marlowe's Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*, wealthy but excluded from Malta's Christian power structures, rejects the suggestion of patience in this way. As the play opens, the Christian governor Ferneze demands half the wealth of the island's Jewish residents, with conversion to Christianity and seizure of all their goods as penalties for

those who resist. Most of the Jewish characters agree at once, which Barabas characterizes as yielding dishonorably, saying his fellow Jews are “base slaves” (1.2.215) who “basely thus submit” (80) and “yield to their extortion” (178). Barabas himself resists through complaint and later through his various revenge schemes. In response to Barabas’s declaration that he is a righteous man being wronged by the Christians (which is an assertion of Barabas’s self-narrative), Ferneze attempts to impose patience to quell Barabas’s resistance: “If thou rely upon thy righteousness, / Be patient, and thy riches will increase,” he advises piously (122-23). Like Leicester to Edward II, Ferneze hopes to characterize submission falsely as virtuous patience and thus obtain obedience. The plan works on the other Jewish characters, who—now serving the narrative of the man to whom they have yielded—repeatedly urge Barabas to “be patient” (170, 200). Barabas doesn’t fall for it. He imagines himself like a prisoner of war “that in a field amidst his enemies, / Doth see his soldiers slain, himself disarmed, / And knows no means of his recovery” (204-06), but, with the metaphorical sword at his throat, he begins to plot his resistance rather than yield (220).

Gender oppression also uses false patience as a tool. While chosen patience can be a powerful resistance tactic for female characters (such as Hermione) because it requires no action that violates idealized norms of feminine behavior, it frequently becomes abusive when imposed from without. Female characters who point out the problems of imposed patience, however, tend to be presented as comic, just as Barabas is intended to be outrageously manipulative. While noble characters (the Duchess of Gloucester and Edward II) are allowed uncomplicated rejections of imposed patience, these texts tend to complicate similar rejections by oppressed characters by making those characters comic or amoral. For example, Shakespeare places a forceful denunciation of imposed patience in the mouth of the shrewish (or more sympathetically, beleaguered) wife Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors*. Adriana is irritated by her husband’s unpredictable behavior, so her virtuous sister Luciana counsels her: “A man is master of his liberty: / Time is their master, and when they see time, / They’ll go or come; if so, be

patient, sister” (2.1.7-9). Adriana replies, “Why should their liberty than ours be more?” (10), igniting a debate between the sisters in which Luciana argues that wives owe their husbands patient obedience while Adriana insists, essentially, that the unmarried Luciana is attempting to impose patience in a situation she doesn’t truly understand. Adriana finally settles for giving her sister an angry warning:

. . . thou, that hast no unkind mate to grieve thee,
With urging helpless patience would relieve me;
But if thou live to see like right bereft,
This fool-begg’d patience in thee will be left. (38-41)

As Barabas sees his fellow Jews, Adriana sees her sister as speaking for the oppressor, imposing patience-as-capitulation. By the end of the play, Adriana will be publicly rebuked for her impatience, making her an unreliable moral voice within the play’s world, but her frustrated exposure of imposed patience as a weapon of patriarchal dominance continues to resonate.

Predictably, the Wife of Bath has an even more self-aware commentary on the use of patience in gender-based power struggles. “An housbonde I wol have,” she declares, “Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral” (154-55), that loaded word “thrall”—essentially “slave”—suggesting the submission that follows yielding. Among her many strategies for keeping her husbands fully under her narrative control is imposed patience. She counsels her aging husbands:

Ye sholde been al pacient and meke,
And han a sweete spiced conscience,
Sith ye so preche of Jobes pacience.
Suffreth alwey, syn ye so wel kan preche
.....
Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees,
And sith a man is moore resonable

Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable.

In this case, there are two layers of *false* patience in existence, both used to oppress: the false patience “preche[d]” by the husbands, presumably in an ineffectual attempt to persuade the Wife to “bow,” and the false patience subversively appropriated and imposed by the Wife in her much more successful attempt to dominate her husbands. To what extent we are meant to endorse the Wife’s rejection of patience (or Barabas’s, or Adriana’s) must remain unclear. The Wife’s words, however, at least unquestionably illustrate the complex uses of *patience perforce*.

Spenser’s allegorical character Patience, a physician-for-the-soul who heals the spiritual wounds Redcrosse has suffered at the hands of Duessa and Despaire, sums up the complex workings of true patience. Patience achieves Redcrosse’s healing by imprisoning him “priuily / Downe in a darksome lowly place far in” (I.x.25.6-7) and tormenting him with sackcloth, scant food, whipping, and other torments (26-7). Redcrosse’s passivity while being tormented by Patience risks making him look like a yielding victim upon whom patience is imposed rather than a resistant hero who elects to behave patiently. Spenser, however, suggests that Redcrosse consents to this particularly painful cure. At the time he entered the House of Holinesse, the knight “chose the narrow path” (10.4), and Patience’s role as a doctor implies that the sequence is one in which Redcrosse accepts treatment that will help him. In this case, the narrative of patience shifts from that of a prisoner demonstrating his virtue by enduring suffering inflicted by evildoers to, more simply, a prisoner enduring suffering in order to become virtuous. Still, the underlying work remains the same—the prisoner lays claim to a self-narrative that positions him as virtuous. Patience’s allegorical name and role also imply that Patience-the-character represents Redcrosse’s own internal patience. Indeed, without much difficulty, Redcrosse’s patient imprisonment can be interpretively expanded to suit more of a *patiens vincit* model as a battle against evil, in which his enemy is the sin within him and his patient choice to endure the cure allows his triumph. If an external character were truly forcing Redcrosse to be patient, he *couldn’t* be patient. True patience must be a choice made by the patient character.

As Chaucer did, I will give the Parson the final word on patience and its false, imposed shadow: “Of pacience comth obedience, thurgh which a man is obedient to Crist. . . . And understond wel that obedience is parfit whan that a man dooth gladly and hastily, with good herte entierly, al that he sholde do” (673-74). The comment, with its emphasis on patience’s connection to obedience, raises the specter of yielding submission rather than patient resistance, but the Parson’s stress on internal attitude and motivation is a reminder that true patience is self-narrated by the sufferer’s “good herte,” not imposed. A yielding prisoner obeys a captor’s imposition of false patience out of respect for or fear of that captor; the captor’s narrative is dominant. A patiently resistant prisoner, by contrast, may also seem obedient, but also possesses a firm internal narrative in which the captor may very well be identified as a cruel or unjust tyrant unworthy of respect. In this case, the prisoner’s narrative of virtuous suffering remains dominant. *True* patience, like *plaint*, is a resistance tactic.¹²¹

Affective Resistance

Plaint and patience are culturally labeled and endorsed tactics for communicating a prisoner’s resistant self-narrative. Whether through the use of the actual words “plaint” or “patience” or through deployment of obvious markers of these practices (lamenting speeches, references to longsuffering endurance), these texts invoke *plaint* and *patience* as specific ways to amplify a prisoner’s resistance, especially when that resistance is not being amplified by physical struggle or escape.

A more nebulous, but related, variety of resistance tactic is what I will call “affective resistance.” In this case, a prisoner’s appearance somehow performs resistance to onlookers without recourse to speech or to the recognizable tropes of *plaint* or *patience*. Affective

¹²¹ My discussion of patience in this chapter notably contains not one word about the emblematically patient Griselda of Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale*, but I will give her patience extensive discussion—in chapter 4.

resistance usually requires active interpretive work by an audience, whether that audience is a fellow character or the text's narrative voice. Someone other than the prisoner must "read" the prisoner's appearance and identify its resistant meaning. Like patience, this affective resistance barely, if ever, requires either physically aggressive or verbal expressions of defiance from the prisoner. The prisoner's appearance does the work.

The narrator of Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* goes out of his way to stress that Custance, falsely accused of murder, has no conventional means to assert her innocence and must rely on a miracle: "Allas! Custance, thow hast no champioun, / Ne fighte kanstow nocht, so weylaway!" (631-2) he laments, continuing, "but if Crist open myracle kithe, / Withouten gilt thou shalt be slayn as swithe" (636-7). His comment seems hyperbolic, in that almost all the local citizens testify to Custance's virtue and probable innocence, but Custance herself agrees with the narrator that without divine intervention, she will be doomed (643-44). Custance gets her miracle, but only after King Alla is repeatedly moved to give her the benefit of the doubt by her appearance alone. When he first sees her, "[t]he kynges herte of pitee gan agryse, / Whan he saugh so benigne a creature / Falle in disese and in mysaventure" (614-16). Already, something about Custance's appearance provides the king with an accurate impression of her true self. He accepts that she *is* an innocent fallen upon hard times. Soon after, the narrator offers this stark simile in a direct address to his audience:

Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face,
Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad
Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace,
And swich a colour in his face hath had,
Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad
Amonges alle the faces in that route?
So stant Custance, and looketh hire aboute. (645-51)

The passage has little to do with explicit resistance, but its evocative depiction of the distinctive sight of *the prisoner*—especially the prisoner facing execution—is too compelling to ignore. A prisoner has a striking affect—frightened, distressed, and absolutely distinct—an appearance that Custance shares in this moment. The narrator goes on to insist that Custance’s prisoner-like appearance ought to inspire a single response, “routhe on hir adversitee” (654), and indeed Alla is stricken with “swich compassioun / As gentil herte is fulfild of pitee, / That from his eyen ran the water doun” (659-61). He is moved to insist that Custance’s accuser swear on the Gospels to the truth of his statement, which leads to the miraculous signs that Custance is innocent. Custance’s resistance here is purely affective. She maintains awareness of her own self-narrative (her innocence), and something in her face broadcasts that narrative to those around her, winning her the powerful support she needs.¹²²

During her captivity at the hands of the sorcerer Busirane at the conclusion of *The Faerie Queene*’s Book III, Spenser’s Amoret similarly displays resistance through her affect. Amoret’s captivity is brutal. Busirane restrains and violates her body (arguably sexually—symbolically if not actually) by placing her behind various magical defenses, binding her to a pillar, and cutting open her heart. His goal, however, is not merely to assert physical dominance over her—rather, his tortures are intended “to make her him to loue” (III.xii.31.6). This demand moves beyond her body and into the realm of Amoret’s internal sense of self, her self-narrative. Busirane is not content with controlling Amoret’s physical body; he wants her to yield, to abandon her previous self-narrative and adopt his.

¹²² My argument here owes a debt to and expands upon Elizabeth Robertson’s point in “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance” that Custance’s appearance—specifically her face—“generates power, the power to convince Alla of her probable innocence, and, more importantly, the power to convert” (163). Against critics who see Custance as completely passive or powerless, Robertson argues that “Constance’s relationship to action is obscure. She inspires extreme and often irrational violence in others, but she herself is neither an instigator nor a perpetrator of that violence. She triumphs over others, but she chooses neither to suffer nor to triumph” (161). In other words, in my terms, Custance’s power is affective, the ability to maintain and even project a self-narrative without particular action.

Busirane externalizes his desire to re-write Amoret's self-narrative by surrounding her with texts—tapestries and other visual arts, a masque, and writing—that depict lovers as prisoners of war who have yielded to Cupid. The tapestries and other artworks within Busirane's stronghold are especially straightforward:

. . . all *Cupids* warres they did repeate,
And cruell battailes, which he wilome fought
Gainst all the Gods, to make his empire great;
Besides the huge massacres, which he wrought
On mighty kings and kesars, into thraldome brought. (xi.29.5-9)

Cupid in these tapestries is a Tamburlaine of love, bringing kings and gods alike into slavery to his own narrative, exactly as Busirane wishes to do to his captive. Similarly, the masque of Cupid, which happens each night, is an explicitly theatrical procession “as on the readie flore / Of some Theatre” and “fit for tragicke Stage” (xii.3.5-9)—again, Spenser emphasizes its quality as a narrative. In this masque, Cupid's followers surround him as he rides before his newest prisoner, Amoret, just as a conqueror would display his captives in a triumphal march. Amoret occupies the role in this triumphal procession that Cleopatra kills herself to avoid in the final scene of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: a publicly displayed captive, proof of and decoration for her captor's dominance. By inserting her physically into this dramatic enactment of the narrative he wishes her to accept, Busirane attempts to conquer Amoret's self-narrative as well as her body.

Amoret, however, resists. She refuses to yield to Busirane and give up her existing loyalty to Scudamour. Britomart, her soon-to-be rescuer, watches the triumphal procession and sees Amoret displaying her own, very different text when at last she appears:

She dolefull Lady, like a dreary Spright,
Cald by strong charmes out of eternall night,
Had Deathes owne ymage figurd in her face,

Full of sad signes, fearfull to liuing sight. . . . (19.4-7)

Amoret's face signifies death. On one level, this is because she is near death from Busirane's supernatural torments; her two escorts hold her up and force her to walk "forward still with torture" although "her weake feete could scarcely her sustaine" (21.5-8). On another level, Amoret's display of death in her affect evokes the resistant prisoner's fundamental commitment to death before yielding. Amoret has no ability to attempt suicide, let alone fight Busirane, but the writing of death in her affect accomplishes similar work. She is prepared to die before yielding to Busirane's narrative.

Amoret's deathlike affect wins her audience to her side. Spenser's narrative voice encourages this, interjecting interpretive comments that reinforce our sympathy for Amoret and our dislike of Busirane: "O ruefull sight," he says of her wounds, and he calls the blood that "was to be seene" covering her skin "[t]he worke of cruell hand" (20.5, 8). The narrator's emphasis on sight and seeing also reminds us that Britomart, the audience within the story's world, is watching this display from her hiding place. She already intends to rescue Amoret, but presumably this spectacle reinforces her determination. Busirane's attempt to narrate Amoret's yielding is already failing in the judgment of the scene's narrator and audience.

This textual struggle of signs and stories between captor and captive reaches its culmination as Britomart enters the inner chamber of the stronghold to discover the tableau of Amoret standing chained to a pillar with Busirane in front of her:

And her before the vile Enchaunter sate,
Figuring straunge characters of his art,
With liuing blood he those characters wrate,
Dreadfully dropping from her dying hart,
Seeming transfixed with a cruell dart,
And all perforce to make her him to loue. (31.1-6)

Much has been made of the sexual implications of this scene, but it is equally a culminating scene of Busirane's unsuccessful assault on Amoret's identity. If there is a better literalization of a captor's attempt to rewrite a captive's self-narrative than Busirane attempting to write his desired outcome into existence with his captive's blood as his ink, I have not found it.

The sequence resolves as Britomart attacks and, in response, Busirane knocks over his "wicked bookes" before lunging to kill Amoret (32.1-7). Symbolically, Busirane's assault ends as his books fall. He gives up his narrative and, arguably, concedes to his captive's, attempting to bring about the death whose "ymage" and "signes" Amoret has already displayed as her own. A few stanzas later, at the point of Britomart's sword, he "yield[s] him selfe" to Amoret's knightly rescuer (35.9). Now Britomart's dishonorably yielded prisoner (as I discussed in the previous chapter), Busirane obeys her orders to heal Amoret. Then his many "texts" (the tapestries and murals) throughout his stronghold appropriately vanish (42.1-5), as does Busirane himself—fading out of Spenser's story as his narrative power disappears.

That these two characters demonstrating affective resistance—Custance and Amoret—are both female is probably not a coincidence. As my discussion has moved from physically aggressive tactics through verbal resistance and into this very subtle affect-based resistance, more women have appeared as primary examples. Feminine resistance in these texts is often less about physical battles or verbal negotiation and more about plaint, patience, and affect—a predictable of the intersection between the yield-or-die discourse and discourses about feminine abilities and decorum. This generalization is a trend, however, not a law. The Wife of Bath aggressively refuses to yield to her husbands, and Redcrosse's passivity sometimes makes his resistance almost as subtle as Amoret's even as Britomart engages in knightly physical activity. Additionally, because resistance is an absolute state—there are no degrees of greater and lesser resistance—Amoret's "signes" of "Death" resist Busirane to the same extent that Launcelot's killing of the men sent to arrest him resists Mordred. If less aggressive resistance tactics tend to be associated with women, that does not mean women's resistance is less powerful than men's.

Even famously passive characters such as Custance and Amoret can offer full-fledged resistance signified only through their facial expressions.

Deception

Deception is, in one sense, the most forceful form of captive resistance possible within the yield-or-die discourse because it requires the captive not merely to protect or assert her own self-narrative, but to impose narrative confusion or revision onto the *captor's* self-narrative. Unlike many of the other defensive tactics I have explored, deception is thus offensive as well as protective. It deliberately projects a false narrative onto the captor.

The two forms of deception I will focus on in this section—lying and equivocation—involve a temporary split between a captive's visible or public self-narrative and her internal private one. The visible narrative is false while the internal one remains authentic. Such inner authenticity is a crucial component of resistance in this way because it proves that the captive's self-narrative remains intact. It will thus usually be certified in some way for the audience by a narrator's voice or a character in the story's world. In other words, the examples I explore in this section are cases where the deception is clearly legible *as deception* to the audience.

Even when it is legible to the audience, such a division of the self into false surfaces and true depths inevitably brushes up against ethical concerns. Can a "true" knight ever acceptably lie? Can an "honest" woman ever acceptably deceive? The texts wrestle with these questions. Usually, the verdict they offer is a highly qualified "yes." The ethical ambiguities of lying and equivocating do not stop virtuous as well as malign characters from using deception to protect their own self-narratives from domination by captors. The ends tend to justify the means. Telling a lie for virtuous reasons is acceptable; telling a lie for evil purposes is not. Within the space of a few lines in the *Physician's Tale*, for example, the narrator celebrates *both* Virginia's total lack of performative pretension ("No countrefeted termes hadde she / To seme wis" [51-

52]) *and also* her “ful ofte” recourse, “of hir owene vertu,” to pretended illness in order to escape spending time with disreputable people (61-64). Deception in service of indecorous pretension is not acceptable for the virtuous Virginia, but deception in service of avoiding bad influences is fine.

As Richard Firth Green explores in *A Crisis of Truth*, the word(s) “trouthe”/“truth” went through a period of complex, multiple, shifting meanings in the fourteenth century, and certainly the word had not arrived at a single stable meaning even by Shakespeare’s time. “Trouthe” in its older sense denoted public, consistent fidelity to honorable or virtuous ideals and people—something different and more personal than its modern sense of “factual accuracy.” Chaucer’s Virginia, for example, tampers with “truth” in the sense of “fact” when she feigns illness, but she simultaneously upholds her personal “trouthe” by protecting her consistent virtue. Throughout the texts I examine here, standards for appropriate deception may be relative and flexible, and the texts treat individual moments with varying levels of anxiety (sometimes another character or narrative voice will provide a clarifying ethical perspective, sometimes not). For the most part, the *legibility* of these deceptions to the audience helps to reassure us that, for example, a character’s interior narrative remains virtuous even if her outer narrative becomes briefly false as she lies or equivocates. She isn’t lying to *us*. Her “trouthe” with *us*—the audience—is unbroken; her characterization remains consistent.

At the end of the *Morte*, for example, Gwenyvere tells lies to evade capture. Mordred has already used deception to consolidate his rule over England, forging false letters that say Arthur has died overseas in his war with Launcelot. Mordred then announces that he will marry Gwenyvere. The Queen is “passyng hevvy” about this demand, which, if she complies, will mean yielding to Mordred’s lordship as well as to the semi-incestuous union. In response, Gwenyvere lies to Mordred: she “durst nat discover her hart, but spake faayre, and agreed to Sir Mordredys wylle.” She asks Mordred if she may go to London to purchase items for the wedding, “and bycause of her fayre speche,” Mordred trustingly consents. Gwenyvere promptly barricades

herself in the Tower of London with men and supplies, enabling her to avoid the wedding (679). Mordred lays siege to the Tower and seeks “by fayre meanys and foule meanys” to possess Gwenyvere, but she now offers him the conventional answer of a resistant character, preferring death to yielding: “she answerd hym shortely, opynly and pryvayly, that she had levir sle herself than to be maryed with hym” (680). Deception, in this case, buys time for Gwenyvere to escape by briefly leading Mordred to believe that she has yielded to his self-narrative. The narrator’s careful tracking of the difference between Gwenyvere’s internal unhappiness and external “fayre speche,” and the emphasis on her clarity of expression once she is in the Tower, work to keep her true self-narrative legible to the reader. By the end of the passage, we are assured that she is presenting a unified self-narrative (both “opynly and pryvayly”) once again.

In Part 2 of Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, Olympia experiences the fate Gwenyvere lies to avoid: she becomes a war widow taken prisoner by a man who insists on marrying her. Once captive, Olympia exerts various means of resistance against Theridamas’s demands. She attempts a variation on plaint, asking Theridamas to pity her grief and kill her to free her “troubled soul, / Which beats against this prison to get out” (4.2.33-36). She also, like Amoret, “look[s] like death” (4), and she attempts simply to oppose Theridamas’s narrative of love with an obsessive narrative of her own, saying her grief “Forbids my mind to entertain a thought / That tends to love.” She must instead “meditate on death” (22-26), and she insists (in terms that evoke writing and narrative), “No such discourse [of marriage] is pleasant in mine ears / But that where every period ends with death / And every line begins with death again” (46-48). Theridamas, unmoved, changes the nature of his demand from consensual love to rape, which he characterizes as yielding: “I’ll use some other means to make you yield. / Such is the sudden fury of my love, / I must and will be pleased, and you shall yield” (51-53). Here, again, is the terrible logic that being raped represents a kind of dishonorable yielding (because a truly resistant victim would find a way to die first).

Olympia is prepared for this possibility. She has already made her secret back-up plan legible to the audience in a soliloquy that opens this scene. Speaking in the second person, she orders herself to “Devise some means to rid thee of thy life / Rather than yield to his detested suit / Whose drift is only to dishonour thee” (5-7). When she can’t find a ready means to resist via suicide, she vows to “[l]et this invention be the instrument” of her death, at which point Theridamas enters (13). Olympia’s word “invention” refers to the dialogue with her captor that follows, suggesting that the conversation is a fiction she is composing and controlling—a scene she is scripting—to uphold her own self-narrative by means of suicide. Even before Theridamas’s rape threat incites the most outrageous part of her deception, the audience understands that we are seeing a performance in service of a secret (but, to us, clearly articulated) goal. By the time Olympia lures Theridamas into stabbing her to death with a lie about magical protective ointment, we understand both that she is lying and why.

The scene is remarkable because it makes explicit the role of a character’s narrative power (or “invention”) to resist a captor, and further because it illustrates deception’s offensive quality. Olympia persuades Theridamas to accept a ridiculous story and, in so doing, to enter service of her narratives: both the fictional narrative of the ointment as well as her own self-narrative in which she is virtuous and he is cruel. As Theridamas realizes he has just killed Olympia, he identifies himself as a “Villain” who has “murderèd my love” (82-83) while Olympia is a “queen of chastity” (96) now gracing the underworld with her glorious presence. He accepts the terms of Olympia’s self-narrative, in which she is the hero and he is the evildoer. The effect doesn’t linger past this scene—he has not formally yielded to her—but the temporary destabilization of Theridamas’s sense of self in this moment is the product of Olympia’s deceptive resistance.

Spenser presents a more extreme and permanent overthrow of a captor’s self-narrative by a deceptive captive in *The Faerie Queene’s* Book IV, when Amyas is captured by the monstrous tyrant Corflambo and Corflambo’s beautiful but immoral daughter Pœana. Amyas’s

captivity begins as a gender-flipped version of Amoret's or Olympia's in the sense that his captor demands his love, but he refuses to give it. Pœana is free and powerful to a fault: she is "too loose" (IV.viii.49.9) and enjoys visiting "the prison in her joyous glee, / To view the thralls, which there in bondage lay" (52.2-3). She "woo[es]" Amyas by offering him "libertie" in exchange for "his loue" (52.8-9). At the outset, then, Pœana possesses power to experience and project her own self-narrative, strolling through the prison as through a market and attempting to purchase a kind of yielding erotic love with the currency—liberty—she can share or withhold. She projects her narrative in an additional powerful way, as well: her harping and singing have such power that they potentially sway her listeners to her side (ix.6.1-9).

Amyas is thus confronted with a powerful captor who wants him to yield. He responds to this crisis with deception:

He though affide vnto a former loue,
To whom his faith he firmly ment to hold,
Yet seeing not how thence he mote remoue,
But by that meanes, which fortune did vnfold,
Her graunted loue, but with affection cold
To win her grace his libertie to get. (53.1-6)

The narrator of this speech is Amyas's loyal friend Placidus, who is telling the story to Arthur, Amoret, and Amyas's betrothed Æmylia. Placidus repeatedly emphasizes in these lines that Amyas is committed to Æmylia and is pretending love for Pœana only with the goal of escaping. In other words, we are carefully made privy to the nature of and justification for the prisoner's deception. As Placidus recounts, Amyas's initial foray into untruth gains him a limited victory. Pœana allows him to walk in the garden under the guard of the jailer-dwarf (54.1-9).

At this point, Amyas's strategy of deception makes an unexpected expansion: it begins to pull in his allies as if by its own gravitational force. Amyas's friend and look-alike Placidus arrives at the palace-prison having heard "tydings" of Amyas's plight and feeling "Full inly sorie

for the feruent zeale, / Which I to him as to my soule did beare” (55.1-4). The men’s physical resemblance speaks allegorically to the joined souls of true friends, and their bond allows Placidus to function as an extension of Amyas’s self-narrative. (While not strictly begun in a moment of mutual yielding, this friendship otherwise exhibits the qualities of such a relationship that I discussed in chapter 2.) Thus, even before he intends to deceive anyone, Placidus begins to follow his friend’s lead by deceiving his friend’s captors. He is mistaken for Amyas and thrown into Amyas’s cell, where the two are reunited. Placidus, now deliberately assisting his friend, pretends to be Amyas, flirts with Pœana in her garden, and then escapes with the dwarf. Far from abandoning his friend with such an escape, Placidus is acting on behalf of—arguably *as*—Amyas.

Amyas’s deceptive strategy then expands to a third ally: Arthur. Having killed Corflambo, saved Placidus, and heard Placidus’s tale, Arthur gains entrance Pœana’s palace-prison using deception, setting Corflambo’s dead body on a horse with the live Placidus laid across the saddle like a recaptured prisoner. When the castle gates are opened for the returning lord Corflambo, Arthur walks in, too (ix.3-4). Amyas, who originally resisted Pœana by imposing a minor false narrative upon his captor (pretending to flirt with her), now imposes, with the help of Placidus and Arthur, the much more damaging false narrative that her father has recaptured her favorite prisoner and must be allowed back into the castle.

By joining Amyas’s resistance and acting as extensions of his self-narrative, both Placidus and Arthur expose themselves to the risk of sharing Amyas’s captivity. Placidus, of course, suffers this imprisonment outright when he shares his friend’s cell. Arthur, too, feels the lure of Pœana’s endangered but still potent self-narrative when he enters her garden, hears her singing, and, “halfe rapt, began on her to dote: / Till better him bethinking of the right, / He her vnwares attacht, and captive held by might” (6.7-9). Arthur’s overwhelmingly powerful self-narrative prevails, and he seizes Pœana, but the word “rapt”—with its multiple connotations of

captured/raped/enraptured—underlines that Arthur experiences a rare brush with captivity in this moment.

Pœana is now physically Arthur's prisoner, and the method of her defeat is emphasized when even after her capture, she sees Corflambo's corpse and "cald to him for aide," falling for the false narrative imposed by her prisoner and his allies even after it has served its purpose (7.1-2). Pœana realizes her error, but it is too late. Her ability to impose her narrative on others is overthrown; where she once could enthrall men with her voice, now "her plaints" are "all in vaine" and "might not preuaile" (7.8). She can only passively look on as her former prisoner, Amyas, is reunited with his rescuers and Æmylia.

Spenser is reversing the characters' roles. Pœana is now the prisoner of her former prisoner's ally Arthur, and Arthur sets about attempting to impose his narrative upon her—attempting to make her yield. Where she allowed Amyas the limited freedom of walking in her garden, Arthur similarly "enlarge[s] free" "that captiue Lady faire" to the extent that he allows her to sit with the happy lovers and their friends (13.1-3). She resists joining their pleasure, clinging to her grief and, thus, to her narrative (13.4-9). Arthur then tries a more assertive approach, persuading her to revise herself according to his values: "He with good thewes and speaches well applyde, / Did mollifie, and calme her raging heat" (14.6-7) to such an extent "That all men much admyrde her change, and spake her praise" (16.9). Pœana yields to Arthur.

Arthur already controls her body and her material estate (the castle and its wealth); he now controls her self-narrative. Pœana's is an honorable yielding. After a period of resistance, she has surrendered out of respect for Arthur's moral wisdom. Arthur follows this triumph by promising Placidus all of Pœana's former power and wealth if Placidus marries her; this apparent bribe can also be read as a feudal lord installing a new vassal, Placidus, on a newly conquered estate. Placidus yields to Arthur, accepting Arthur as his lord and, in turn, becoming Pœana's lord and husband (15.9). The reversal of Pœana's status is now as complete as it can be. Once Amyas's captor, she is now essentially the yielded captive of Amyas's doppelganger

Placidus. Amyas's initial strategy of deception—a small narrative imposition onto his captor—has expanded throughout the episode not only until he is free, but also until his captor's self-narrative has been permanently rewritten. This reversal expands Olympia's temporary imposition of narrative onto Theridamas and illustrates the offensive power of deception.

Virtuous characters may thus tell lies as a resistance tactic; villainous characters, of course, do so too. Again, the audience is usually privy to the fact of the lie—we are not deceived. The lies told by evil characters tend to have more culturally disruptive scope, potentially involving false professions of religious faith, feudal homage, and the like. Villainous lies are often thus threats to societal stability in addition to being captive resistance. Not only do such lies enable villains to escape and thwart their—usually virtuous—captors, but also to escape and thwart the cultural systems their captors depend on.¹²³

Custance's first evil mother-in-law in the *Man of Law's Tale*, for example, believes that her son's conversion to his wife's Christian faith will mean "thraldom to oure bodies and penaunce" (338). She isn't wrong, either: Custance, speaking from within a Christian culture, has already lamented that "Wommen are born to thraldom and penaunce" (286). The difference is that Custance accepts—we might say honorably yields—to this version of captivity while her mother-in-law elects to resist. The mother-in-law instructs her followers to "feine us Cristendom to take" (351), after which, at the feast celebrating the Custance's arrival, they butcher the unsuspecting Sultan and his men (429-30). These false conversions audaciously challenge the reliability of Christian conversion and baptism as stable functions. Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*

¹²³ More could be said about characters framed as virtuous who nonetheless tell culturally disruptive lies. Such characters are unusual but provocative. For example, the Princess in *The King of Tars* (a text outside the scope of this study) makes a false conversion to Islam, a deception that threatens to subvert the concept of conversion itself in the romance. The text, which of course is bigoted in favor of Christianity, characterizes the Princess's act as supportive of her original religion (and validates Christianity's correctness with miracles). We are presumably meant to understand that the Princess's false profession only invalidates *Islamic* conversion, not the practice of conversion in general. Still, her deception is a radical one for a heroic character to commit.

similarly features Barabas repeatedly eluding and undermining Malta's Christian rulers (his oppressors if not outright captors) by teasing them with false conversions from his daughter (1.2.279-303) and himself (4.1.51-133).

Malory's King Mark is not only a clear villain but a prolific liar, and his lies trespass onto the yield-or-die discourse's most hallowed ground: Mark lies about yielding. For example, in a nighttime joust, Mark and his comrade Sir Andred are both unhorsed by Gaherys, who then poses the characterizing question, demanding that they "yelde them and telle their namys, othir ellis they sholde dey." Mark, who "was aferde of Sir Gaherys" even before meeting him in combat, is pre-empted from speaking by Andred, who reveals Mark's kingly identity and warns Gaherys "therefore be ye ware what ye do." Gaherys, already irate because Mark has previously committed "false treson . . . undir youre semble chere," is not impressed by this warning, even when Mark asks him to "Save my lyff" and clarifies Andred's caution: "concoider that I am a kyng anoynted." Mark is trying to escape the conflict without technically answering the yield-or-die demand. Instead, he suggests that his anointed status deserves special treatment.¹²⁴ Even the villainous King Mark thus hesitates to lie outright about the tremendously important matter of yielding. Gaherys, however, rejects Mark's argument and resumes the fight, contending that Mark has forfeited special treatment by not behaving as honorably as a king should. In the end, Gaherys prevails: "Kyng Marke yelded hym unto Sir Gaherys," kneeling and swearing on his sword not to "be ayenste arraunte knyghtes" and in particular "to be good fryende unto Sir Trystram, if ever he cam into Cornwayne" (330).

¹²⁴ Mark's attempt to dodge yielding to Gaherys actually raises a fascinating issue. An anointed king's subject demanding that king's surrender is both politically and theologically dicey—a subject Marlowe and Shakespeare examine extensively in *Edward II* and *Richard II*, respectively, and which Malory explores much earlier when Accolon, a knight "of the ryall courte of Kyng Arthure," earns the label "traytoure" for, among other crimes, posing the yield-or-die demand to Arthur (90). Gaherys, however, is not Mark's subject or vassal and therefore isn't a traitor. The men joust as errant knights rather than in a more formal context. Ultimately, Gaherys's stance that Mark deserves to die for disgracing his anointing is quite possibly intended to be our stance, as well.

The incident is relatively minor, and whether by coincidence or design, Mark's oath even holds for a time if understood strictly by the letter and not by the spirit. He generally resists initiating battles with knights errant (though he is goaded or tricked into such battles by Dynadan and others), and his next major attempt to kill Trystram takes place on English, not Cornish, soil (346). Later, however, he abandons even technical adherence to his oath and resumes persecuting Trystram in Cornwall (400 and onward), ultimately murdering him (641). Although the text doesn't explicitly characterize Mark's yielding to Gaherys as a lie, Gaherys's recollection of Mark's previous dishonesty suggests that his word is unreliable. That Mark is later capable of violating the terms of his oath to Gaherys confirms that he has not surrendered his self-narrative to Gaherys's power. Despite this apparent yielding, Mark remains able to resist.

The next time Mark lies about yielding, the setting is grander, the stakes are higher, and Malory makes Mark's intent to deceive clear. After committing various outrages in England, Mark flees Arthur's court, pursued by Launcelot, who is under orders to return Mark to Arthur rather than kill him. When Launcelot catches up with Mark, Mark surrenders immediately: "whan Kynge Marke knew that hit was Sir Launcelot, and cam so faste uppon him with a speare, he cryed than alowde and seyde, 'I yelde me to the, Sir Launcelot, honorable knyght'" (356). Both the immediate action (the emphasis on Launcelot's speed and spear) and the larger context (Mark is reliably a coward) make clear that Mark's yielding is dishonorable. His unknighthly behavior continues as he "tumbled adowne oute of his sadyll to the erthe as a sak; and there he lay styll, and cryed, 'Sir Launcelot, have mercy uppon me.'" This action puts him in the same category of shameful knights as Sir Pedyvere, who "felle to the erthe and gryped Sir Launcelot by the thyghes and cryed mercy" after murdering a lady Launcelot was protecting (175). Pedyvere, however, takes his yielding seriously, fulfilling its terms and, ultimately, becoming a reformed knight. Mark, by contrast, is only performing a yielding he has no intention of fulfilling.

Malory spells out this deception once Launcelot returns Mark to King Arthur's presence. Mark makes an excessive show of his dishonorable surrender. He casts away his arms and armor,

falls “flatte to the erthe at Kynge Arthurs feete,” declares himself utterly at the King’s mercy, and adds that “my lorde Sir Launcelot brought me hydir by fyne force, and to hym am I yolden to as recreaunte.” Arthur declares, “ye ought to do me servyse, omayge, and feauté,” to which Mark replies that he will do whatever Arthur asks. Arthur “withhylde Kynge Marke as at that tyme” (357)¹²⁵ In a crucial addition to the scene, however, the narrator observes that Mark is “a fayre speker, and false thereundir” (357). Mark’s formal, dishonorable surrender into custody of the King is a lie.

That lie enables Mark’s ongoing resistance against Arthur—a villain’s resistance against a hero, to be sure, but effective resistance nonetheless. Mark endures with apparent good grace a period of “grete lawghynge and japyngge” from the rest of Arthur’s court (363), and then Arthur, conditionally, sets him free to return to Cornwall. Arthur’s requirement is that Mark swear to “be a good lorde unto Sir Trystram . . . and . . . take hym with you into Cornwayle and lat hym se his fryndis, and there cherysh hym for my sake.” Mark not only makes this promise, but swears it on the Gospels. Malory clarifies for our benefit, however, that “Kynge Marke thought falsely, as hit preveded aftir; for he put Sir Trystram in preson, and cowardly wolde have slyne hym” (366). Launcelot and Trystram’s other supporters join the reader in this awareness of Mark’s deception: “well they wyste that Kynge Marke wolde sle or destroy Sir Trystram” (366). Indeed, Launcelot chastises Arthur for letting “the man of moste worshyp that ever cam into youre courte”—Trystram—fall into the hands of “the moste cowarde and the vylaunste kynge and knyght that is now lyvyngge.” Launcelot next warns Mark directly that if he breaks his word, he will answer to Launcelot. When Mark piously informs Launcelot that he will not break his promises, Launcelot fires back: “Ye sey well . . . but ye ar called so false and full of felony that no

¹²⁵ The O.E.D. and the M.E.D. agree that “withhold,” in this context, may mean to engage a person in (feudal) service (O.E.D. definition 4b, M.E.D. def. 3c), or it may mean more simply “to keep in bondage, custody, or under control” (quoting O.E.D. def. 3, also M.E.D. def. 2c). The ambiguity between these two meanings seems appropriate for the context: Arthur isn’t eagerly making this dishonorably yielded “dystroyer of my knyghts” a trusted vassal, but he isn’t throwing him in a dungeon, either. He is accepting Mark in a general sense as his captive/servant.

man may beleve you” (367). Despite Launcelot’s concerns, Mark and Trystram return to Cornwall, where Mark promptly sets about scheming to kill Trystram. Not only does Mark’s resistant deception endanger Trystram, it also undermines Arthur’s narrative power and, therefore, Arthur’s kingly power within the story’s world. Were Mark’s yielding sincere, Arthur would gain a tributary king and, with him, straightforward control over Cornwall. Because Mark’s yielding is false and he remains resistant, Arthur not only loses him but—not coincidentally—Trystram as well. Trystram’s departure in this scene is the end of his brief and tenuous residence as part of Arthur’s court (which he began after his mutual yielding with Launcelot [344-5]). Even Arthur’s plan to protect Trystram after this departure—to extend his good lordship from afar by ordering Mark to provide it in his stead—fails because it is founded on the resistant Mark.

Malory does not comment on Arthur’s interior beliefs in this passage—we know that Mark is lying, and that Launcelot sees it and is angry about it, but we don’t know what Arthur thinks. To what extent Mark has successfully deceived Arthur is therefore unclear. What matters is that Mark has gone from groveling prisoner, mocked by the court, to a free character once again; his self-narrative is intact. Further, Arthur’s ambiguous characterization in this scene is, itself, an indication that Arthur is not exerting a great deal of narrative power over these events. His response to Launcelot’s warnings is strikingly passive: “Sir, hit was his [Trystram’s] owne desyre . . . and therefore I myght nat do wythall, for I have done all that I can and made them at accorde” (367). Trystram’s self-narrative, too, is inconsistent in this sequence. Although Arthur says Trystram desired this outcome, the narrator claims that, in response to the knights’ worries about how this deal endangers Trystram, “Trystram toke suche a sorow that he was amased” (366). The concluding image of the passage is still mixed: “with grete dole Kynge Marke and Sir Tristram rode togyders; for hit was by Sir Tristrams wil and his meanes to goo with Kynge Marke—and all was for the entente to see La Beale Isoud” (367). Trystram’s mixed emotions can be reconciled in many ways, of course, either narratively or simply on the grounds that the

Morte is not especially invested in clear psychological continuity. Within the context of the yield-or-die discourse, Mark's deception has caused the two men who have the power to hold him at court—Arthur and Trystram (whose “desyre” Arthur claims to obey)—to let him go. In the process, his narrative briefly attains greater coherence and force than theirs, a fact that undermines Arthur's political control over Cornwall and ultimately costs Trystram his life.

While both heroes and villains lie to resist captors, only heroes usually bother to equivocate—to speak technical truths that nonetheless give their hearers the wrong impression. Equivocation seems to carry less moral cost than outright untruth. In his exploration of the historical role of verbal quibbles in medieval oaths, Richard Firth Green concludes that “straightforward verbal equivocation seems generally to have been regarded as a perfectly legitimate tactic” (113).¹²⁶ Certainly—especially in a trial setting—an equivocator risked being called out as such by his opponent and asked to swear more specifically about the issue in question, but successful equivocating was a method for maintaining *trouthe* in that older sense of personal consistency and fidelity. Swearing to a very precisely worded, equivocal oath was a way to *avoid* lying.

Green analyzes one of the most obvious instances of equivocation in Malory in this historical context. During the Knight of the Cart episode, when Mellyagaunce accuses Gwenyvere of committing adultery, Launcelot seizes an opening Mellyagaunce gives him to equivocate. Mellyagaunce has accused the Queen of sleeping with one of her wounded knights from the outer room. In fact, she slept with Launcelot—not one of those knights. Launcelot is thereby able to swear, upon fear of God's vengeance if he fights in a wrong quarrel, “that thys nyght there lay none of thes ten knyghtes wounded with my lady, Quene Gwenyver; and that woll I prove with myne hondys, that ye say untrewly in that” (634). Launcelot, indeed, fights and wins the resulting trial by combat as if he is fighting for the truth with God's approval. His

¹²⁶ Green refers to equivocation throughout *A Crisis of Truth*, but his discussions at 112-20, 249, and 288-92 especially inform my analysis here.

equivocation saves Gwenyvere from execution for treason and himself from loss of personal trouthe. Launcelot's equivocation is "a perfectly legitimate line of defense," concludes Green. He adds, "in a bilateral legal context the onus was evidently on . . . opponents to expose [equivocation's] flaws in court" (114). If Mellyagaunce doesn't recognize and expose what Launcelot is doing, that's Mellyagaunce's problem.

Equivocation offers the captor a false narrative as a way to resist that captor's narrative. I use the word "offers" with care: whereas outright deception *projects* a false narrative—Olympia *tells* Theridamas that the ointment will prevent wounds—equivocation less assertively offers or allows the captor to misunderstand the situation and accept a false narrative that has never explicitly been stated. When a captor misunderstands in such a way, the captive scores a victory in the battle for self-narrating power.

A second, less famous instance of equivocation in Malory occurs during the brief tale of Sir Alysauindir. Injured in battle, Alysauindir is taken by Morgan le Fay to one of her castles where she makes him an offer: if "ye promyse me by youre knyghthode that this twelvemonth and a day ye shall nat passe the compace of this castell," then she will heal him. Alysauindir makes the promise, but he quickly comes to experience his time in her castle as captivity, telling a visiting damsel, "I stonde as a presonere be my promyse" (385). His situation is unusual in that he has, strictly speaking, not yielded to Morgan in any permanent sense, but nonetheless he has agreed to act like a yielded prisoner—that is, he has adopted her words, the oath she asked of him, as his guiding narrative for a year. His misery is only heightened when the damsel informs him that Morgan "kepyth you here for none other entente but for to do hir plesure whan hit lykyth hir" (385). Like Launcelot before him, Alysauindir recoils at the idea of sleeping with Morgan, but having given his word, he cannot leave without dishonor.

The damsel, however, is standing by to aid Alysauindir much like damsels often aid Launcelot. She offers, "and ye wolde love me and be ruled by me, I shall make your delyveraunce with your worship." The final clause is crucial—she is offering not only his freedom, but the

preservation of his honor. Alysaunder, apparently having learned nothing about making rash promises in exchange for help, agrees at once. The damsel's solution turns on the precise wording of the oath Morgan has imposed on her prisoner. The damsel's uncle is willing to attack and raze the Morgan's castle to the ground, ending Morgan's occupancy and handing the property over to the control of the damsel herself. Alysaunder can wait in the castle's garden while this attack occurs, "[a]nd than," the damsel concludes, "may ye kepe the rome of this castell this twelvemonth and a day, and than breke ye not youre othe" (386). Alysaunder remains, arguably, "a presonere be my promyse," but the meaning of "my promyse" has shifted so far from Morgan's intent that she can no longer be considered his captor. Her narrative power has been overthrown along with her residency of the castle by the damsel's ability to quibble with the wording of the oath.

The damsel's demands that Alysaunder "love . . . and be ruled" by her never particularly materialize and certainly do not represent a threat to Alysaunder's narrative power. The two mutually enjoy "plesaunce as hit pleased them bothe" (386) before the castle is destroyed. Afterward, Alysaunder keeps the castle grounds for the year, jousting with many knights, demanding that they yield to him, and even falling in love with a different damsel named Alys, activities belonging to a knight with general narrative power. The original damsel steps in forcefully only once, and even then her action is in support of Alysaunder's honor. When Alysaunder falls into a reverie staring at Alys, Mordred deviously attempts to lead him off the castle grounds "to have shamed hym" (387). The original damsel, in a spectacular moment of Britomart-like knightly prowess, arms herself, jumps on a horse, "gate a naked swerde in hir honde," races up to Alysaunder, and delivers "suche a buffet that hym thought the fyre flowe oute of his yghen" (388). In this instant, she might appear to behave as a kind of jailer, enforcing Alysaunder's confinement, but in fact she is upholding Alysaunder's narrative against Mordred's attempt to impose shame upon it. In a loose sense, she rescues Alysaunder from captivity at Mordred's hands. Alysaunder's self-narrative, reclaimed from Morgan through the equivocal

manipulation of his original oath, remains under his control.

These equivocations in Malory take the form of delicate manipulations of language, careful quibbles on precisely what is said. A second form of equivocation was made famous in early modern England in a treatise attributed to the Jesuit Henry Garnet: equivocation in the form of mental reservation, the practice of speaking only part of the truth out loud and “reserving” the rest in the mind, so that the speaker remains honest before God even while truncating his verbalized answer. Garnet’s treatise introduces the concept with this example: “beyng demaunded whether John at Style be in such a place, I knowinge that he is there in deede, do say neverthelesse ‘I know not,’—reserving or vnderstanding wthin myselfe these other wordes (to th’end for to tell you). . . . [P]art of it is expressed, part reserved in the mynde” (9).¹²⁷ Garnet intends mental reservation to be a resistance tactic for Catholic captives (or potential captives), allowing in particular priests and their recusant supporters to mislead and evade the Protestant English authorities seeking to jail and even execute them. The captive’s self-narrative is preserved intact, under the ratifying eye of God, while the captor is deceived by the projection of a misleading statement.¹²⁸

In literature of the period, the ratifying eye of the reader or audience shares or substitutes for this God-like perspective, having an access to the equivocator’s self-narrative that other characters do not enjoy. *The Jew of Malta* predates Garnet’s *Treatise of Equivocation*,

¹²⁷ References to the *Treatise of Equivocation* refer to page numbers in Jardine’s 1851 edition. Jardine does not formally attribute the document, which was published anonymously, to Garnet; he summarizes questions about the *Treatise*’s authorship on xiii-xxii. For convenience, and in accord with most scholarly practice today, I refer to Garnet as the author.

¹²⁸ In *Medusa’s Gaze*, Lowell Gallagher describes and analyzes debates about mental reservation in Elizabethan and Jacobean England (63-75). (My analysis here is also undoubtedly indebted to my participation in Professor Gallagher’s graduate seminar at UCLA in spring 2008 on the topic of “English Catholic Diaspora Cultures: 1580-1645,” in which we discussed equivocation extensively.) Green notes variations on the practice that predate Garnet’s *Treatise* in *A Crisis of Truth*, including one example involving an accused Lollard (289-92). Todd Butler’s “Equivocation, Cognition, and Political Authority in Early Modern England” comments on how the debate over equivocation and mental reservation reflected larger questions of the political subjectivities of private citizens and kings in early modern England.

and Marlowe's Barabas is not particularly motivated to preserve his honesty before God, but his deceptions of the Christians and Turks who oppress him nonetheless often take the form of equivocations, especially mental reservations, that superficially resemble Garnet's example. Barabas also simply lies, but his delight in scheming seems to embrace the particular challenges of wordplay and reservation that equivocation offers. His exchange at the slave market with Lodowick is full of reserved asides, and in fact he warns the audience at the outset that the following dialogue will prove him to be a canny trickster: "Now will I show myself to have more of the serpent than the dove; that is, more knave than fool" (2.3.36-37). Himself scheming to get "a sight of Abigail" (33-34), Lodowick asks Barabas, "canst help me to a diamond?" Barabas answers out loud, "Oh, sir, your father had my diamonds. / Yet I have one left that will serve your turn." The neutral, even seemingly humble statement links Ferneze and Lodowick, reminding us that the son as well as the father is in a position to oppress Barabas. Barabas then adds in an aside to the audience, "I mean my daughter—but e'er he shall have her / I'll sacrifice her on a pile of wood" (49-53), explaining both his metaphor and his secret plans even as he hides the full meaning from Lodowick.

Barabas practices even clearer mental reservations as the scene progresses. Lodowick asks if the diamond is "pointed," which slides into the word "appointed" as Barabas replies, "Pointed it is, good sir—[*aside*] but not for you" (60-1). Barabas continues, "I will give 't your honour—[*aside*] with a vengeance" (67-8), and when Lodowick chastises him for his comments about the nuns who now inhabit his house, Barabas insists that he acts with "a burning zeal, / [*aside*] Hoping ere long to set the house afire" (87-9). Having reminded us that Lodowick is, like Ferneze, Barabas's oppressor, Barabas then lets us enjoy the comedy of a seemingly compliant captive-figure simultaneously tricking his captor into believing a false story while maintaining full control of his internal self-narrative.

Mental reservation, for both Barabas and Garnet, is a means to uphold a self-narrative, not fracture it. As Green comments, one of the major medieval and early modern debates over

equivocal language was whether, as a legal matter, to honor the speaker's exact words or the listener's reasonable interpretation of those words (117-9). Todd Butler explores how this debate expands into a question of where selfhood is generated and located—in a person's inner experience, or in that person's public, knowable identity? Butler comments:

Though much contemporary criticism has rightly centered upon the divided subjectivity implied by the necessity to use equivocal speech, we should also note that, at least in theory, equivocation argued not for a split speaker but for a potentially powerful and fundamentally coherent one. Mixed propositions like those involved in mental reservation retain their expressive integrity precisely because, from the standpoint of the *speaker*, the mind and its expressions are fundamentally unified. (135)¹²⁹

This unification is not only possible “in theory” but also in literature. Barabas's equivocal asides—in which the audience sees and shares his private selfhood—serve to strengthen and unify his characterization, not to fracture it. We see him clearly even as Lodowick and his other enemies misunderstand him and fall prey to his powerful narrative scheming.

The principle holds true for the characters I have examined who lie as well as those who equivocate. Olympia tells us her plans, so we understand her better; Malory clarifies Mark's interior villainy. Deployed as resistance tactics, lying and equivocating *strengthen* a prisoner's unified self-narrative even if only readers are privy to the whole truth.

Chaucer's Arcite and Palamon

Chaucer's version of the story of Arcite and Palamon—noble cousins who, captured on the battlefield and imprisoned by Theseus, become rivals for the love of the beautiful Emelye—

¹²⁹ Butler's comment is complemented by Gallagher's observation that “[t]he linguistic subversion of mental reservation” points to the existence of an interior “conscience” that could remain “invisible” to outsiders (74).

both depends upon and calls into question many specific resistance tactics as well as the fundamental division between resistance and yielding. It thus makes a useful case study with which to conclude this chapter. Of the three men in the *Knight's Tale* whose self-narratives are in conflict—Theseus, Arcite, and Palamon—all are honorable; none is a clear-cut ethical villain on the text's terms. The captives (the cousins) resist their stern captor (Theseus), at least for a time, but their reasons for resistance, like his reasons for holding them in the first place, are strangely devoid of specifics: very little is at issue beyond the fact of the imprisonment itself. The *Tale* is a text in which the yield-or-die discourse operates upon plot and characters without particular ethical inflection or additional context; the three main characters struggle with each other for narrative dominance although little else seems to be at stake. Arcite's and Palamon's resistance is real, but unlike the other examples I have explored in this chapter, it ultimately decays gradually into yielding. While Theseus thus wins the contest for narrative power in the end, as first Arcite and then Palamon come to serve his narrative, the lack of concrete reasons for the imprisonment, the resistance, or the yielding contributes to the *Tale's* oft-recognized and still haunting evocation of a universe ordered by a vast, cold, and quite possibly amoral fate.

As the *Tale* opens, the narrator presents Theseus as a worthy hero and the character whose self-narrative motivates the events of the story. Then, during a victorious battle against the Thebans, Theseus's men capture Arcite and Palamon. Crucially, Arcite and Palamon do not yield to Theseus or his soldiers. They are captured while unconscious from their injuries ("Nat fully quik ne fully dede" [1015]), and they are thus incapable of answering the characterizing question. Theseus's heralds recognize them "by hir cote-armures and by hir gere" as "of the blood royal / Of Thebes" (1016-9) and carry these two noble prisoners to Theseus's tent.

The cousins have dodged the yield-or-die demand initially, but we would not be unreasonable to expect them to face it (in some form) relatively soon. Arthur, captured during a magical sleep in Malory's Accolon episode, soon gets an offer from his captor, Sir Damas, that amounts to "assist me or die" (85); even Tamburlaine's most unfortunate prisoners can be said

to face the question as Tamburlaine taunts them with their willingness to suffer humiliation rather than die (Part 2 4.3.20-4). Historically, prisoners in the cousins' situation might find themselves agreeing to raise ransom or serving as hostages for the obedience of the Thebans. In sum, prisoners captured in combat—fictional or factual—tend to be held for a stated purpose, and they tend to face a moment in which they (explicitly or implicitly) yield to that purpose or voice their resistance at the risk of death.

Chaucer's Theseus, however, gives no reason for holding the cousins. He simply dispatches Arcite and Palamon back to his Athenian home "to dwellen in prisoun / Perpetuelly—he nolde no raunsoun" (1023-4). There, according to Theseus's orders, the cousins live "in a tour, in angwissh and in wo . . . For everemoore; ther may no gold hem quite" (1030-2). This repeated emphasis on Theseus's denial of ransom is one of Chaucer's additions to his major source, Boccaccio's *Teseida*.¹³⁰ That Chaucer allows his otherwise honorable and even virtuously heroic Theseus to opt for this absolute confinement of unyielded noble prisoners is strange. Theseus's denial of ransom has caught the attention of scholars since at least Stuart Robertson in 1915, who argues that the refusal of ransom signifies Theseus's noble disinterest in mercenary gain (229). In 1947, Henry J. Webb conversely contends that the refusal is evidence of Theseus's ignoble tyranny (291-2). Debate about this detail continues into the present, no doubt because the question relates to the larger challenge of interpreting Theseus's character: is he honorable or tyrannical? a classical philosopher or a pre-Christian lost soul?¹³¹ As I have shown repeatedly, the relationship between captor and captive, and especially the yield-or-die demand itself, is a narrative tool for characterization, but in this case Chaucer doesn't use it to add clarity about

¹³⁰ Chaucer refers to Theseus's disinterest in ransom twice more (at 1176 and 1205). That Chaucer seems to find "raunsoun" a convenient rhyme for "prisoun" is worth considering as a pragmatic factor in its repetition.

¹³¹ For example, Stephen H. Rigby, in his 2008 book *Wisdom and Chivalry*, argues that the denial of ransom is appropriate in this case based on medieval precedent and thus does not suggest that Theseus is a tyrant (207-8).

either Theseus or his prisoners. The struggle between this captor and his captives for narrative power is instead prolonged, allowing Chaucer to open up complex narrative possibilities rather than limiting them.¹³²

Because Theseus makes no honorable agreement with these prisoners, he cannot allow them any degree of trust or liberty. Arcite and Palamon pass years in Theseus's "chief dongeon" (1057), a tower with a "gayler" (1064) and windows "thikke of many a barre / Of iren greet" (1075-76). They are chained; Palamon wears "fettres on his shynes" (1279). This is no relatively hospitable experience of chivalrous captivity. This is difficult, painful, and exhausting imprisonment in which the captives lack both physical agency and any sort of negotiation with their captor.

The cousins' first response to their circumstance is a self-aware suffering manifested through plaint and expressions of patience. In other words, although they haven't been asked the characterizing question, they choose resistance. Palamon, "this woful prisoner" (1063) and "[t]his sorweful prisoner" (1070), self-narrates his misery by "compleynge of his wo. / That he was born, ful ofte he seyde, 'allas!'" (1072-3). This description is a relatively stock version of complaint, but embedded within it is the implication that Palamon would rather be dead (or at least unborn) than captive: a resistant stance. When Palamon cries out as he glimpses—and is struck by love at first sight for—Emelye, Arcite assumes that the sound is a further expression of imprisoned woe. Arcite's response is to offer complaint's more stoic counterpart, patience, to Palamon as a self-narrating tactic:

For Goddes love, taak al in pacience

Oure prisoun, for it may noon oother be.

¹³² Crampton's analysis of Theseus's denial of ransom is similar to my own. With her focus on the opposition between action and passivity, she argues that Theseus's behavior needs no specific motivation because Chaucer is using it to mark him as a man of action in opposition to the passive cousins: he is "one who does things rather than one to whom things are done" (48-51). Her two chapters on the *Knight's Tale* in *The Condition of Creatures* are, in general, sensitive readings that work well alongside my own even as, ultimately, we are reading through meaningfully different lenses.

Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.
Som wikke aspect or disposicioun
Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,
Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn;
So stood the hevене whan that we were born.

We moste endure it; this is the short and playn. (1084-91)

Much like Boethius, to whom he sounds similar, Arcite marginalizes his specific captor from his self-narrative, naming Fortune or Saturn rather than Theseus as the cause of his suffering. Theseus's imprisonment of the cousins begins to look less like his own particular action and more like mindless service to greater powers, an appearance strengthened by his confusing denial of ransom. He may be acting not as a captor in his own right, but rather as a mere tool of Fortune. The cousins have begun asserting resistant self-narratives, but Theseus seems strangely removed from the yield-or-die discourse in which his captives are participating.

Palamon, believing Emelye to be Venus, next seizes upon hope for a more physically assertive form of resistance, asking the supposed goddess to provide "help that we may scapen" from confinement (1107). If the cousins' captor—still vaguely defined—denies escape, Palamon hopes that "Venus" will provide some other redress (and thereby acknowledgment) of the injustice they suffer:

. . . if so be my destynee be shapen
By eterne word to dyen in prisoun,
Of oure lynage have som compassioun,
That is so lowe ybrought by tirannye. (1108-11)

Palamon's reference to "tyrannye" may be the closest either man comes to identifying Theseus as their captor, and even it has a vague referent. The tyrant in question may be Theseus or may be the "eterne word" of Fortune or the stars. The vagueness continues to keep Theseus marginalized. The word "tyrannye" nonetheless performs major work for Palamon's self-

narrative by positioning him and his family as victims of wrongdoing. At this point in the *Tale*, as the cousins enter their ultimately fatal argument over Emelye, they have also established themselves as well-characterized resistant captives within the yield-or-die discourse. They consider themselves virtuous victims of a tyranny that transcends whatever political justifications might be (but aren't) stated for their imprisonment. They are unhappy; they want to escape.

The cousins' sudden, overwhelming love for Emelye is, itself, a sign of their resistance to captivity, an argument Kolve makes in *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*:

The two young knights fall in love with Emelye for her beauty, unmistakably, but for the beauty of her freedom most of all. They cannot describe her—for they cannot see her—apart from the liberty and ease of her movement. From within prison they fall in love with a creature who seems to incarnate a condition the exact opposite of their own.

Indeed, we are made to see this gratuitous decision to love—this act of pure will—as their only available expression of something within them still free, not limited by prison walls, leg-irons, or exile. The affirmation of some freedom, no matter how tenuous, is essential to their survival as fully human beings. (90)¹³³

Kolve succinctly lays out two interrelated ways that the cousins' passion is resistant: first, it represents a love for freedom itself, and second, it represents an assertion of self-narrating power (the power to love).

¹³³ Kolve's chapter "*The Knight's Tale* and Its Settings: The Prison / Garden and the Tournament Amphitheatre" (85-157) illuminates the *Tale's* prison imagery and its contribution to the deep "sense of human limitation" upon which the *Tale* depends (86). My discussion of the characterization of the *Tale's* captor and captives uses my own idiosyncratic lens but tends to support Kolve's well-known analysis. Crampton's analysis of much of the same imagery in her chapter "Feasts Perturbed and Prisons: Image in the Knight's Tale" (76-112) predates Kolve's and is just as useful for its insights on the manner in which the *Tale's* prison imagery "spirals about and through the poem, encompassing more and more aspects of life until it seems to impinge everywhere, to enclose all festivals, all griefs, and define all human actors as pathetic sufferers" (93).

From this point on, I will discuss Arcite and Palamon separately, as their self-narratives break apart depending on when each man sets aside his resistance and, ultimately, yields to Theseus. Arcite's self-narrating power weakens first and never fully recovers. He does not initiate his departure from Theseus's prison: the "requeste and preyere" of Perotheus, a mutual friend of Theseus and Arcite, persuades Theseus to release Arcite contingent on Arcite's exile (1204). This arrangement arguably resembles the rescues I discussed at the beginning of this chapter (Arcite could even be said to activate Perotheus's assistance indirectly simply by choosing to resist). That said, when Arcite accepts his captor's terms—especially when those terms displease Arcite, which they do—then an exchange that resembled rescue becomes yielding. The slide between rescue and yielding is quick but meaningful. Arcite makes a formal deal with his captor, not his rescuer: "This was the forward, pleyedly for t'endite, / Bitwixen Theseus and hym Arcite" (1209-10). The terms of that deal—that Arcite be cast out from Theseus's dominions perpetually, on pain of death—are a variation on the characterizing question itself: Arcite has the choice to accept the terms or die.¹³⁴ Arcite accepts.

From this point in the poem on, reading Arcite as a yielded character is both possible and useful. Chaucer makes the unusual choice to continue providing Arcite's point of view even as Arcite loses control over his self-narrative, and in so doing Chaucer subverts the yield-or-die discourse's usual erasure of yielded characters' perspectives.

Arcite's experience after this yielding is most immediately one of profound self-loss: "death he feeleth thurgh his herte smite," and he considers suicide (1220-2). Further, rather than feeling liberated, he feels that "[n]ow is my prisoun worse than biforn" (1224). Chaucer has adjusted his sources at this point, excising martial adventures in favor of emphasizing Arcite's

¹³⁴ The text doesn't directly address whether Arcite has the option to decline the deal altogether and return to prison, but the narrator suggests that he does not, commenting, "Ther nas noon oother remedie ne reed; / But taketh his leve, and homward he him speede" (1216-7), an action that immediately causes Arcite "greet . . . sorwe" (1219). Theseus seems to have ordered Arcite into exile, limiting Arcite's choices to accepting that exile or disobeying it upon pain of death.

ongoing passivity (Crampton 70, n.13).¹³⁵ Internally and externally, Arcite ceases to be the resistant character he was before. His lament about inevitably misguided human hopes and prayers—in which he comments that “We witen nat what thing we preyen heere; / We faren as he that dronke is as a mous” (1260-1)—is also a lament for narrative power, which depends on some degree of basic belief in a knowable sense of the self’s motivations, goals, beliefs, history, and hopes. Arcite is disturbed by the disunity between his former desires and his current misery:

. . . I,
That wende and hadde a greet opinioun
That if I myghte escapen from prisoun,
Than hadde I been in joye and parfit heele,
Ther now I am exiled from my wele.
Syn that I may nat seen you, Emelye,
I nam but deed; ther nys no remedye. (1268-74)

His self-narrative contains a fracture caused by the crisis of yielding; he feels “deed.”

As time passes and Arcite neglects sleep, food, and drink, his appearance becomes deathlike (1361-4). Between his mental experience of disunity and this physical misery, Arcite ceases to be recognizable to other people just as he is unrecognizable to himself: “So feble eek were his spiritz, and so lowe, / And chaunged so, that no man koude knowe / His speche nor his voys, though men it herde” (1369-71). His “habit and eek disposicioun” are “turned . . . up so doun” (1377-8). Arcite has lost control over both the internal and external aspects of his identity.

According to the strict letter of the poem, Arcite’s collapse is partly caused by lovesickness, which the narrator calls “the loveris maladye / Of Hereos.” Stricken by the sight of Emelye, Arcite is dying at least in part because of her absence, a perfectly reasonable medieval

¹³⁵ Crampton argues, in general, that Arcite is a more passive character while Palamon is more active—but that the distinction doesn’t matter much because Chaucer is exploring humanity’s ultimate position of passivity in a world beyond mortal control (70-5).

diagnosis. Even the narrator, however, believes that lovesickness does not account for all of Arcite's misery; something "lyk manye, / Engendred of humour malencolik" is also involved (1373-5). I argue that Arcite's lovesickness—at least this extreme version of it, beyond what he felt in prison—is also a result of his yielding. When he first saw Emelye, Arcite said then, too, that unless "I may seen hire atte leeste weye, / I nam but deed" (1121-2). He felt strongly enough about his love to turn "traitour" to his sworn brother Palamon (1130), declaring "Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan, / Than may be yeve to any erthely man" (1165-6). But when Theseus offers him terms *that demand exile*, Arcite signs on, despite having said both that absence from Emelye would leave him all "but deed" and that the breaking of masculine bonds for her sake is acceptable to him. In other words, Arcite acts against his own previous self-narrative by yielding.

Arcite's resolution to return to Athens in disguise may look like an act of renewed resistance against Theseus. As he prepares to return from exile, he declares, "Ne for the drede of death shal I nat spare / To se my lady that I love and serve; / In hire presence I recche nat to sterve" (1396-8). His deceptive return is indeed resistant in some ways, reminiscent perhaps of King Mark's ability to shake off having yielded to Gaherys or Arthur. The return violates Arcite's deal with Theseus, temporarily projects a false narrative (that Arcite is a servant named "Philostrate") that Theseus accepts, and accomplishes Arcite's goal of seeing Emelye—all at the risk of death. The argument that Arcite recovers his narrative power here (and thus that Chaucer treats the rules of the discourse unusually flexibly) is reasonable and worth acknowledgment.

That said, I suggest that Arcite's resistance is diluted almost to meaninglessness by a few additional details. First, the idea to return doesn't originate with him. Instead, it comes via a visitation from the god Mercury, who tells Arcite, "To Atthenes shaltou wende, / Ther is thee shapen of thy wo an ende" (1391-2). Mercury's tone is deterministic. Arcite *shall* go, and the end of his suffering will be ordained for him there. Mercury might almost say, "There the end of your story will be written for you." Arcite is not self-narrating in this moment.

His Athenian disguise, donned to deceive Theseus, also leads him straight into Theseus's service. He starts out as a poor laborer, offering "his servyse" at the castle gate (1415), works for a time as Emelye's page (1427), and then becomes so respected that Theseus offers him "worshipful servyse" (1435) as his "squier" (1440). Philostrate becomes Theseus's vassal, his sworn man; Arcite is behaving as a yielded servant. His earlier consent to Theseus's terms has a gravitational pull, tugging him into this particular "disguise" that actually reflects the truth of their relationship. Arcite's narrative continues to be fractured, too. On the one hand, he is happy with his comfort and proximity to Emelye; on the other hand, he laments that "now I am so caytyf and so thral, / That he that is my mortal enemy, / I serve hym as his squier povrely" (1552-4). Arcite arguably acknowledges his yielded role with the powerful word "thral." In the sequence that follows this lament—as Palamon challenges him in the grove and Theseus then intervenes and proposes the battle for Emelye—Arcite is responsive rather than active, answering Palamon's challenge but otherwise saying nothing once Theseus (already his lord) arrives on the scene. Palamon does all the talking in the grove.

Although Palamon remains in prison longer than Arcite, he also remains resistant longer than Arcite. His sustaining mode of resistance is the plaint with which he began, a tactic he continues after the departure of Arcite. Palamon's wide-ranging complaint "[w]han that he wiste Arcite was agon" (1276) begins with a fantastic projection that Arcite, now free, will raise an army, invade Athens, and marry Emelye (1285-9). In misunderstanding Arcite's (yielded) misery, Palamon is essentially imagining what he (still resistant) would do in Arcite's place—a plan he briefly re-asserts when, upon his escape, he decides to wait until nightfall before returning to Thebes to gather an army (1480-6). His jealousy of Arcite is simultaneously an expression of his own resistant wishes, his own self-narrative.

He next shifts to a complaint against the "cruel goddes that governe / This world with byndyng of youre word eterne" (1303-4). Superficially, his complaint against the gods resembles lovesick Arcite's equivalent complaint about the misguidedness of human prayer only a few lines

before. Both lament the way the universe works; both in different ways begin to identify earthly life as a prison (the motif Theseus will bring home in the text's concluding lines). Arcite is lamenting human failures to understand their own desires and needs as well as gods do, however, while Palamon laments the cruelty and injustice of the gods. Palamon is narrating the same story he has from the start of his imprisonment, in which tyranny oppresses "innocence" (1314), allowing "a serpent or a thief" live freely while "I moot been in prisoun" (1325-8). Palamon remains confident in the consistency of his identity despite his captivity. While Arcite accepts instruction from Mercury, Palamon lists the gods who have wronged him by name (1328-33). This world may be a prison, but he can identify—and resist—his jailors.

While the disguised Arcite serves Theseus, Palamon remains for seven years in prison, a fate the narrator calls "martirdom" (1460). Arcite also uses the word, thinking of "wrecched Palamoun, / That Theseus martireth in prisoun" (1561-2) as he wanders in the grove. Explaining how Palamon is a martyr in a strict sense is a little difficult, mostly because he is not obviously suffering for any clear cause (here, again, Theseus's arbitrary imprisonment of the cousins matters; if he were holding them in prison because they were asked and refused to renounce loyalty to Thebes, for example, they would be more clearly martyrs). Palamon doesn't call himself a martyr, but his self-narrative all but characterizes himself that way: he is an innocent victim of injustice, suffering needlessly at the hands of a tyrant. A martyr is, fundamentally, a deeply resistant figure. The word—coming from the narrator and from Arcite—endorses Palamon's view of his experience. His self-narrative is strong enough that his rival Arcite within the story's world and the narrator at the formal level of textual construction both echo and even extend it with the "martyr" label.

Palamon's departure from prison, like Arcite's, is enabled by the help of "a freend," but there the similarities end. Palamon's nameless friend receives one brief mention. Otherwise the action belongs to Palamon himself. After giving his jailer drugged wine, "Palamoun, / By helpyng of a freend, brak his prisoun / And fleeth the citee" (1467-74). Palamon makes no deal

with Theseus—nor even, as far as we know, with the “freend.” After this vigorously active jailbreak, he travels as far as he can by night and then, as day breaks, conceals himself to contemplate his plans for war (1476-87). Everything about his departure from prison is more self-directed and purposeful than Arcite’s.

Whereas Arcite has mixed emotions and generally reactive behavior in the pivotal scenes in the grove, Palamon continues to exert his single-minded self-narrative—right up until the moment he doesn’t. Arcite enters the grove with his lamentation over his fractured sense of self (“I dar noght biknowe myn owene name” [1556], he says, after sorrowing over the devastation—which he tellingly calls the “confusioun”—that the gods have caused to his entire lineage [1545]). Arcite wraps up his speech with another review of his love for Emelye, and then collapses “in a traunce / A longe tyme” before rising again (1572-3). From his words to his collapse, Arcite seems like a man overcome. By contrast, Palamon bursts from hiding after Arcite regains his feet and, somewhat comically, demands that Arcite yield or die: “thogh that I no wepene have in this place,” he blusters, “I drede noght that outhur thow shalt dye, / Or thow ne shalt nat loven Emelye. / Chees which thou wolt, or thou shalt nat asterte!” (1591-5). Even unarmed, newly escaped, jumping out of a bush, Palamon takes the active role of posing the yield-or-die choice. In this particular moment, in terms of the discourse, he steps into the captor-role relative to Arcite. Arcite chooses to resist this particular demand for yielding, and instead he offers (with grim chivalric courtesy) to return with armor and weaponry for his rival.

From this point onward—including the entire scene of Theseus’s intervention—Arcite has no direct dialogue. Palamon’s reaction to Theseus’s arrival, by contrast, is almost excessively transparent and verbose. To Theseus’s demand that the men identify themselves, Palamon offers a long speech in which he declares both himself and Arcite to be Theseus’s mortal foes (1724, 1736), announces their love for Emelye, makes a full “confessioun” of his name and prison break, and repeatedly demands death for them both at Theseus’s hands:

Ne yif us neither mercy ne refuge,

But sle me first, for seinte charitee!

But sle my felawe eek as wel as me;

Or sle him first. . . . (1720-3)

His over-eagerness—and Theseus’s taken-aback response (“This is a short conclusioun. . . . / It nedeth noight to pyne yow with the corde” [1743-6])—is almost comic, but I read it, too, as a long overdue answer to the question Theseus never asked. Palamon never got to answer “yield or die”—not on the battlefield, not for seven years in prison. What he says now, fervently and repeatedly, is that he chooses “death” (1739). He frames this death as “deserved” (1741) as if for a crime, but the crime in question is pure (or political) resistance rather than a moral or criminal breach. He is Theseus’s “mortal foe.” He “hath thy prisoun broken wikkedly” and is not afraid to die for it (1735-6).¹³⁶ He has broken Theseus’s peace and Theseus is within his rights to punish him with death just as he would be within his rights to slay him on the battlefield—a fate Palamon is *very clear* that he invites and does not fear.

Palamon’s speech is resistant self-narration. Further, it is *aggressive* self-narration. He is attempting to impose his own narrative onto Theseus, to verbally muscle the Duke into giving Palamon the clean death he deserved at the outset and to destroy Palamon’s rival in the process, too. Theseus, indeed, nearly falls for it, accepting Palamon’s “confessioun” at face value and declaring, “Ye shal be deed, by myghty Mars the rede!” (1744-7). The women’s tearful pleas for the cousins to be spared give Theseus a chance to think about the situation, however, and he privately rewrites Palamon’s confession into something milder. Anyone, he reasons, would “delivere hymself out of prisoun” given the chance, and Palamon’s “repentaunce” and

¹³⁶ The word “wikkedly” hints that Palamon has suddenly decided that his escape *was* actually an evil deed or crime, but this is so inconsistent with his firm belief in his own virtue both before and after the escape that I suggest giving the word its somewhat more morally neutral meanings of “Causing harm or pain, harmful, destructive; distressing” (M.E.D. definition 2a) or “fierce, violent” (M.E.D. definition 2b). The adverb adds force to Palamon’s general message that he is a determined and potentially destructive foe of Theseus.

“humblesse” deserve mercy (1766-81). After a long speech of his own, then, Theseus makes both men an offer:

And ye shul bothe anon unto me swere
That nevere mo ye shal my contree dere,
Ne make werre upon me nyght ne day,
But been my freendes in all that ye may,
I yow foryeve this trespas every deel. (1821-5)

Theseus’s offer to be “freendes” is an honorable and generous one; it is much more than he has ever offered before, and perhaps even invokes the kind of equal male friendship that amounts to sworn brotherhood.¹³⁷ His requirement that the cousins cease to oppose him in war is also reasonable, but ominously implies a renunciation of the cousins’ Theban duty to oppose the Athenian duke. Theseus’s exact intent with this offer—to create a relationship of equals or of vassals—is, typically, unclear. Overall, however, the cousins conclude that “his axyng” is “faire and weel,” and in response, they “hym of lordshipe and of mercy preyde” (1826-7). Crucially, their response goes beyond his request that they cease to be his enemies. Instead they ask for his lordship—they yield to him, honorably, out of respect.

Arcite is merely ratifying his earlier, unhappy, less honorable yielding. Palamon, however, surrenders his self-narrative in this moment. His surrender carries all the markers of honor. He has proven his willingness to die, and changes his mind only once his would-be lord demonstrates admirable behavior and offers a request that is “faire and weel.” From this point

¹³⁷ As it is for my discussion of friendship and sworn brotherhood in relation to mutual yielding in chapter 2, Alan Bray’s *The Friend* is useful background reading here. I have not dwelled on the fact that Arcite and Palamon are sworn brothers as well as cousins, but Palamon comments twice that Arcite is his “brother / Ysworn ful depe” (1131-2) and “to my conseil sworn” (1583). This fact makes their falling-out over Emelye all the more catastrophic. Bray notes briefly that the cousins’ sworn brotherhood is “one of the anachronisms by which Chaucer translated the ancient Greece of his story into the social conventions of fourteenth-century England” (32), and later adds that the *Tale* participates in a tradition of stories about brotherhoods tested by the interference of women (198). Theseus’s invitation to be “freendes” may or may not carry all this weight with it.

on, both Arcite and Palamon are Theseus's men. The Duke can send them forth to gather armies for their combat over Emelye (as Palamon dreamed of doing) with complete trust (and "withouten raunson" [1849]). He knows they will return, and return *not* to overthrow Athens but to engage in a carefully regulated tournament.

Emelye herself deserves attention in this discussion of imprisoned resistance in the *Knight's Tale*. The *Tale's* narrator downplays both Emelye's and Ypolita's origins, but the Amazonian sisters were conquered in battle by Theseus, so that Ypolita in particular literalizes the common metaphor of a woman "asseged" by a suitor until she yields (881). Emelye is, in this sense, a prisoner at Theseus's court even though she is better treated than Arcite and Palamon. Her actions and words in the poem link her to the imprisoned cousins (especially to Palamon, interestingly). As she "rome[s] up and doun" in Theseus's enclosed garden, for example, Palamon sees her while he is "romynge to and fro" in his cell (1069-71).¹³⁸ Later, when Emelye prays to Diana before the tournament that will decide her fate, her words echo Palamon's first prayer to her when he believes her to be Venus and asks for help to escape (1104-11). Like Palamon, Emelye prays for escape. She wants to avoid marriage to either man and instead "to walken in the wodes wilde"—an image of freedom that contrasts with her circumscribed pacing in Theseus's garden (2309-10). Also like Palamon, however, Emelye's prayer makes allowance for a fate she can't control. Her qualifying words ("if my destinee be shapen so / That I shal nedes have oon of hem two" [2323-4]) and Diana's confirmation that her marriage is ordained "by eterne word write and confermed" (2350-1) both echo Palamon's similar qualification to his prayer for escape ("... if so be my destyne be shapen / By eterne word to dyen in prisoun" [1108-9]). These links between Emelye and Palamon function primarily to emphasize fate's

¹³⁸ Kolve argues that Chaucer's stress on this shared act of "roaming" illustrates not only the connection between Emelye and the cousins (especially Palamon) at the moment their love begins, but more specifically suggests that the cousins fall in love with Emelye precisely because of "the liberty and ease of her movement"—a liberty and ease they lack (88-90). Over the course of the poem, however, movement "to and fro" comes more ominously to connote the limited movement of all people in the "prisoun of this lyf" (*KT* 3061, Kolve 156-7). Kolve's overall argument agrees with mine: Emelye and Palamon are both prisoners.

overwhelming power over them both, but secondarily, they underscore that both characters are prisoners—not only of fate, but of Theseus.

The *Tale* also participates in the tradition of figuring romantic love as, itself, captivity, which adds an additional layer of metaphorical imprisonment to its characters' confinements. Theseus himself, for example, claims to have been a "servant" of Cupid, "caught ofte in his laas" (1814-17), an ironic image given his marriage to his literal prisoner Ypolita (866-8). The Temple of Venus, where Palamon prays as the "trewe servant" of Venus (2235) for escape from the "helle" and "harmes" of his unrequited love (2228-32), is similarly decorated with images of "loves servantz" who, like Theseus, "caught were in hir las" (1923-51). In chapter 2, I noted that love-captivity metaphors tend to present men as honorably yielded vassals of their lovers while women tend to yield to love dishonorably, at the figurative point of the sword. The imagery in the *Knight's Tale* conforms to these patterns. Theseus and Palamon are honorable "servantz," like vassals, who choose such imagery for themselves.

Both Palamon and Arcite speak of Emelye, by contrast, as someone they must force to yield to love rather than someone who might yield willingly. Palamon's vow to Venus to "holden werre alwey with chastitee" (2236) brings metaphorical violence into his pursuit of the determinedly chaste Emelye. Arcite similarly sums up the stakes of the upcoming tournament: "er she me mercy heete, / I moot with strengthe wyne hire" (2398-99). Both frame their imminent battle with each other as, also, a battle to defeat Emelye: not merely to win her as a trophy, but to force her self-narrative to yield to theirs (giving up her "chastitee" in favor of "mercy"). As Theseus won Ypolita in battle, now the cousins set out to win Emelye (and it seems to work—when Arcite wins the tournament, suddenly Emelye "caste[s] a frendlich ye" his way [2680]). The gendered patterns that are generally true of love-captivity imagery in the period are subtle but also true in the *Knight's Tale*. The cousins are captive to Emelye only figuratively and honorably, serving her like admiring vassals, while Emelye is literally captive to Theseus and figured, also, as a reluctant prisoner forced to yield on the battleground of love.

One effect of this additional captivity imagery is, as Kolve argues, to support Theseus's ultimate assessment that everything in "this lyf," even love, is always a "foule prisoun" (3061).¹³⁹ More specifically, the imagery (and the fact of her initial captor during the Amazonian war) makes Emelye yet another prisoner held by Theseus without clear reason who, after a long period of resistance, eventually yields not so much to him, but to the "Fortune" that dominates the poem's world (2681-2). She (and Ypolita) have more in common with the cousins than with Theseus.

Theseus's narrative power truly comes into its own after Arcite and Palamon yield to him, as he prepares for the massive tournament. The tournament is markedly performative, a pageant staged and—to a great extent—scripted by Theseus, who designs the venue and adjusts the rules as he sees fit.¹⁴⁰ Considered in light of the cousins' yielding, this quality of the tournament emphasizes that Theseus's narrative power is now ascendant over Arcite and Palamon. He has never posed a truly clear, characterizing version of the question to either of his prisoners (though his order of exile to Arcite and his offer of mercy to both cousins both come close), but now that they have voluntarily yielded to him, they are actors in his drama, characters in his self-narrative.

That said, Theseus's last-minute rule change, in which he orders the tournament to be non-lethal, once more prevents the cousins from truly facing the yield-or-die demand. The question is, in once sense, now emptied of meaning anyway, because the men have yielded to Theseus already. Its absence—however sensible and merciful—is nonetheless another reminder that Arcite and Palamon are barred from this meaningful expression of selfhood. Neither man

¹³⁹ Kolve discusses the *Tale's* imagery of love captivity in the context of the medieval allegorical tradition of the prison of love (91-8).

¹⁴⁰ In "The Engaged Spectator," Lawrence M. Clopper explores how Chaucer's depiction of this tournament sits at an intersection of lore about classical Roman games and combats; tournaments, processions, and other civic and royal spectacles of Chaucer's day; and medieval clerical discourse against spectacle and theater. Theseus's tournament is thus an "equivocal" spectacle that both celebrates nobility and hints that such a celebration is carefully scripted and not completely admirable (139).

will become a martyr to his love of Emelye on the battlefield just as they were never clearly martyrs for their loyalty to Thebes; Theseus will not allow such behavior.

Overcome at the tournament, Palamon does his best to manage his defeat in these limited circumstances. Hurt and seized, “by the force of twenty is he take / Unyolden, and ydrawen to the stake” (2641-2; the “stake” is the site prisoners are to be taken). Theseus declares the fight over. “Unyolden,” in this context, means that Palamon has not renounced his love for Emelye—which will prove important. After Arcite is struck down by the gods and lies dying, Theseus holds “revel al the longe night” with the tournament guests, and in particular he issues a proclamation emphasizing that both sides in the battle deserve to be honored and even considered victorious (2717). The narrator offers a lengthy explanation of Theseus’s logic, which centers on the thesis that

. . . to be lad by force unto the stake
Unyolden, and with twenty knyghtes take,
O persone allone, withouten mo,
And haryed forth by arme, foot, and too,
And eke his steede dryven forth with staves
With footmen, both yemen and eek knaves—
It nas arretted hym no vileynye;
Ther may no man clepe it cowardye. (2723-30)

On its face, this statement is a straightforward summation of the difference between being captured yielding or unyielding. Even if Palamon’s resistance here threatens to descend into farce (knives? grabbing his *toe*?), his capture is honorable. Again, the remnant of self-narrative he is fighting for here is his love of Emelye, not his entire self, but he has certainly retained that remnant. Theseus thus spends the night Arcite is dying reminding all of Athens that Palamon never surrendered. Maybe Theseus is simply being a good lord to both men; maybe he is making

sure the city understands that Arcite's understudy is also still honorable and utterly committed to Emelye. At the very least, the narrator seems anxious to assure *us* that this is the case.

In the poem's most painful passage, the dying Arcite reveals that he still feels as lost as he felt after he yielded into exile. "What is this world? What asketh men to have?" he wonders (2777). After Arcite's death, Theseus steps in to narrate what has happened: Arcite has "with honour up yolden . . . his breeth" (3052) in order to leave "this foule prisoun of this lyf" (3061). Escape, for Arcite, seems fated to require yielding and the painful, muddled, dim awareness of the loss of self that comes with it. The *Tale's* narrator leaves him in oblivion: "I kan nat tellen wher" (2810).

After additional delay, Palamon ultimately wins Emelye, but he does so as Theseus's vassal, and with his marriage, the political consequence of his yielding to his city's enemy finally asserts itself. Theseus's reason for orchestrating the marriage is that he and his "parlement" have decided they want to "have fully of Thebans obeisaunce" (2970-74). The marriage will cement Theseus's power over Thebes at last. Palamon's story, beginning with the unconsciousness that delays the question of whether he will choose to yield or die, has been a series of deferrals: the deferral of the "yield or die" question; the deferral of ransom negotiations or other contact with his captor; the deferral of yielding itself, as Palamon resistantly maintains his self-narrative of innocence wronged by tyranny for years; the deferral of political implications for his yielding. These deferrals end at last with his marriage, which solidifies his status as Theseus's man.

We might say that, of the three protagonists to begin the *Knight's Tale*, Theseus is the last left standing. (Behind him stand the gods, or Fortune.) Chaucer orchestrates a difficult, rare configuration of characters: the honorable captor and the honorable (and resistant, at least for a time) captives. We are not clearly aligned against one or for the other, in part because Theseus tends to evade the aspects of the yield-or-die discourse that would characterize either himself or his prisoners as protagonists and antagonists, good and bad. Theseus is an inexplicable captor to

Arcite, Palamon, and Emelye, and in this sense he functions more as a pure agent of Fortune himself, lacking motivations intelligible to humans and against whom temporary resistance is possible but ultimately meaningless. Within this empty system, Chaucer nonetheless finds the fiery resistance of Palamon and the unusual, important voice of a yielded character. Arcite's breakdown of selfhood not only shows how confusing the loss that accompanies yielding can be, but also suggests that selfhood is never actually gone. Arcite's self-narrative is in shambles, and he—he *himself*—knows it.

In the grim world of the *Knight's Tale*, governed by cold fate, resistance is perhaps always temporary. Theseus himself is only a vassal or slave of destiny, making a "virtu of necessitee" (3042) much like Zenocrate must be "pleased perforce." Resistance is not, however, pointless. As Theseus assures his people after Palamon's defeat in the tournament, the knight's "unyolden" status makes him as much a victor as Arcite, even before he marries Emelye, because it shows him to be brave and committed. Chaucer's complicated treatment of resistant prisoners emphasizes the difficulty—to the point of impossibility—of absolute, uncompromised resistance, even as it proclaims the honor and ongoing self-narrating power that any resistance, however small, can sustain.

Chapter 4: Illegibility

This chapter begins with a word about characters being knocked unconscious. Arcite and Palamon are not the only characters to suffer this fate and then wake up in prison. A glance back over the episodes I have examined so far reveals many more. Chaucer's version of the Lucrece story adds the detail that she passes out just before being raped. In Malory, Damas captures Arthur after the king falls into an enchanted sleep arranged by Morgan Le Fay; Morgan captures Launcelot under the apple tree in the same way. King Mark seizes Trystram as Trystram sleeps. *The Faerie Queene's* Redcrosse winds up in Pride's dungeon after Orgoglio knocks him out on the battlefield. Satyrane, Terpine, and Timias are also taken unconscious; the lady Serena is captured by cannibals while asleep. In *The Tempest*, Prospero's magical storm leaves the lost seafarers strewn unconscious along the island's shores, after which Prospero can easily lure Ferdinand into captivity; in *Cymbeline*, Imogen is pressed into Roman service after the arriving legions discover her asleep.

Within a story's world, unconsciousness obviously makes the act of seizure and imprisonment easier on the captor (Morgan Le Fay can capture the greatest worldly knight without him so much as lifting a finger). More importantly, and more problematically for the captor, unconsciousness defers the crucial question of whether the prisoner will yield or resist to the death. In this sense, unconsciousness is a plot device that allows a text to imprison (rather than kill) an unyielded character. Redcrosse, battling Orgoglio, seems doomed either to yield dishonorably or die as the combat begins (he feels "hopelesse," "inwardly dismayde," "faint," and "feeble" as he enters the combat, as if he is on the brink of giving in to either fear, physical collapse, or both [I.vii.11.4-8]). The narrator tells us that "heuenly grace" is all that prevents the giant's blow from crushing Redcrosse to death (12.3): Redcrosse dodges the giant's mace, but the "winde" generated by the blow leaves Redcrosse unconscious, "all his sences stoonde, that still he lay full low" (12.9). Rendered a "slombred sencelesse corse," he is taken prisoner (15.6).

“Grace” functions here most obviously by making Redcrosse “wary” of the coming blow (12.5), thereby saving him from death, but, as I mentioned in chapter 3, Redcrosse’s collapse into unconsciousness is a kind of grace as well, allowing him to dodge not only death, but also yielding.

As Arcite’s and Palamon’s trajectories demonstrate, complex narrative possibilities result when the yield-or-die question is skipped in this way. How the prisoner will answer that question is still in doubt, and the prisoner’s self-narrative thus remains flexible. Arcite and Palamon soon reveal themselves to be resistant, at least for a time. Skipping the characterizing question enables this resistance, as it does in most of the examples above. Counter-intuitively, then, knocking a character unconscious or subjecting him or her to a (usually magical) sleep is a tool that creates narrative expansion rather than closure. That this captured-unconscious trope defers closure may explain why it appears so commonly in romances or romance episodes, where wandering and deferral are generic traits. While other scholars who have studied sleep in romance tend to focus on its anti-heroic qualities (its connotations of passivity or emotionality), I thus suggest that sleep or unconsciousness at the moment of capture is also a stroke of narrative grace that potentially can *enable* future heroism. In such a context, yielding would be the true, characterizing opposition to forceful action; unconsciousness is far less characterizing and keeps more options open.¹⁴¹

Illegibility is my term for the status of a prisoner who enters this unconscious state—literally or figuratively—and *does not promptly leave it*. An illegible prisoner retains indefinitely

¹⁴¹ Garrett A Sullivan, Jr. identifies and examines the link between sleep and romance in his book *Sleep, Romance and Human Embodiment: Vitality from Spenser to Milton*. Many of his analyses and conclusions fit comfortably alongside mine, including his argument that sleep is often antithetical to a more epic, heroic trajectory (i.e., sleep is a sign that an epic Aeneas-figure is being diverted into a romance episode by a Dido-figure). My suggestion that unconsciousness can also open potential for future resistance against captors, however, complicates his conclusions in the context of heroes captured while asleep or otherwise unconscious. Similarly, my conclusions complicate—but perhaps also add an additional organizing principle to—Megan Leitch’s attempts to assess ethical inflections of sleep and swooning in Malory (see her article “Sleeping Knights”).

the ambiguous qualities of a “slombred sencelesse corse,” giving no legible commitment either to yielding or resistance and, indeed, often fracturing the yield-or-die question’s binary, characterizing power. Arguably, of course, every captured character experiences temporary illegibility in the time between the asking of the question and the character’s answer, but most commit quickly to yielding or resistance; this chapter is about those who take longer. To be truly illegible, such a character must be unreadable in this sense to us, the audience, as well as to characters within the story’s world. Olympia is “illegible” to Theridamas in the sense that he is unable to assess her degree of resistance accurately, but we know where she stands. By contrast, illegible characters resist our attempts to understand, too.

Modern Analogues

Before examining illegibility in my primary texts, a brief comment on modern understandings of similar phenomena will be useful. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Giorgio Agamben’s explorations of bare life and the *homo sacer* as well as the work of trauma scholars have both informed my concept of the illegible captive. In particular, Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* considers the specifically modern captivity of the concentration camp and the profound challenges of testifying to the horrors of that experience, as exemplified by the work of survivor Primo Levi and others. Agamben’s text agonizes over but sensitively and wisely does not try to account perfectly for the figure known in the camps as the *Muselmann*, the prisoner who appears to have lost self-awareness, even language, and to exist only as a technically still-alive body. For Agamben, this figure relates to his own understanding of the *homo sacer* as well as to Foucault’s understandings of modern political power and its ability to construct selfhood; “the *Muselmann*,” says Agamben, is “the final biopolitical substance to be isolated in the biological continuum,” the farthest a human being can be pushed out of the political and social order without literally being killed (85).

Agamben's study explores testimony from survivors in which they recall seeing such people wandering the camps, seemingly heedless of interpersonal relationships, ethical or spiritual matters, or even their own physical survival.¹⁴²

That the camps produced such figures contributes to the dilemma of witnessing and testifying to the Shoah, because, theoretically, a *Muselmann*—apparently one of the greatest victims—is beyond cultural constructs such as language and therefore cannot communicate about his or her experiences. Agamben unites several quotations from Levi to make this point: Levi calls the *Muselmänner* “the complete witnesses” even as he also comments that they have no “story” (qtd. in Agamben 33-4). Agamben devotes his book to the exploration of this profound problem but also, intentionally paradoxically, falls silent at the end of the book in favor of transcribed testimonies by self-identified *Muselmänner*, speaking subjects describing individual lived experiences of self-loss (166-71). While not mitigating the horrors within the rest of Agamben's book and within these statements themselves (both horrors that can be spoken and those that remain undescribed), the effect of these concluding testimonies is slightly, strangely hopeful—if it is “hopeful,” that is, to see proof that humans who have seemingly ceased to be people (losing language, memories, motivations, selfhood) actually can both return to a state of speaking selfhood and also communicate memories of their time of self-loss.

The level of self-loss and inability to convey lived experience which Agamben so carefully explores resembles my concept of illegibility. The illegible captive cannot be characterized, behaves as if the yield-or-die demand is unimportant, is literally or figuratively unconscious, and troubles an audience who cannot understand or interpret him or her. As Levi says of the *Muselmänner*, such illegible characters do not seem to have “stories”—self-narratives—at least none that are active and understandable. That said, these troubling figures also have not surrendered into obedience to or support of their captors' narratives. They neither collaborate

¹⁴² Agamben offers examples and discussion of such recollections throughout *Remnants of Auschwitz*, but see pp. 41-8 for his introduction to the concept of the *Muselmann* (including, on 44-5, the possible etymology of this odd term).

nor resist. Instead, they appear in a suspended state, and, as the testimonies that close Agamben's book suggest, their inability to be legible, to speak, may last for some time but is not necessarily permanent.

Even as I note these similarities, I do not wish to draw reductive and disrespectful equations between the late medieval and early modern fictions I study and the complex reality of the Shoah. A slight but perhaps illuminating resemblance exists, nothing more, between centuries-old characters who are literally or metaphorically unconscious of the yield-or-die demand and these modern figures who endured a prolonged experience of self-loss in the camps.

A second and closely related connection worth mentioning is the similarity between characteristics of illegibility as I define it and characteristics of trauma as defined by modern psychology. This connection, too, is anachronistic (and crosses borders between literature and psychology, discourse and lived experience), but with those cautions firmly in place, the comparison offers some insight into how breakdowns in narrative power can affect both characters and people. In the Introduction, I discussed the contemporary understanding of trauma as a disruption to the brain's normal recording of autobiographical memories, and of trauma therapy as the revising of the self's narrative to incorporate the traumatic event. Similarly, within the limits of the yield-or-die discourse, entering captivity initiates a crisis in the captive's self-narrative that must be resolved by revision: either the revision of yielding ("I accept that my narrative is now controlled by my captor") or of resistance ("my captor is the antagonist to my protagonist"). Failure to give a clear answer to the demand means, in some sense, failure to incorporate the trauma of captivity into the captive's internal autobiography—and this is illegibility. The yield-or-die discourse, then, allows for (even—to put it more radically—*creates*) a response something like what contemporary experts might call trauma, a breakdown in the self's ability to remain anchored to the logic of narrative.

As psychiatrist Bessel von der Kolk says, when traumatized, the brain fails to apply its normal "symbolic capacity" and even its storytelling ability to "lie and distort," abilities that

usually allow it to integrate memory into autobiographical narration. Instead, the trauma sufferer is left with vivid but context-free memories of an intensely emotional experience (qtd. in Caruth 155).¹⁴³ Some of the qualities of traumatic memory include fragmentation, a sense of doubleness or multiple selves, numbness, a sense of disassociation (from the body, from one's self), repetition and other time distortions, and alternations between numbness and vivid intrusive memories.¹⁴⁴ These symptoms unquestionably resemble the qualities of the illegible characters I will spend the rest of this chapter discussing, but I am not suggesting that we should see a depiction of medieval trauma in *Griselda* or early-modern trauma in *Barnardine*, nor that these characters are centuries-old versions of Agamben's *Muselmänner*. Rather, perhaps these similarities originate in the way that narratives—at least narratives in Western-European-derived cultures—behave when any of their basic characterizing functions are disrupted. The self-narratives of literary characters and the autobiographical memories of the self both rely on such meaning-making tools. When the characterizing yield-or-die question goes unanswered or the brain's analytical, integrative centers are disabled by traumatic experience, the resulting self-narratives show similar structural effects.

Unstableness, Blankness, and Deferral

Artegall's encounter with Burbon and Flourdelis in *The Faerie Queene's* book V provides a good introductory glimpse into the workings and major markers of illegibility. In a battle to rescue his lady Flourdelis from her captors (a mob working for the tyrant Grandtorto), Burbon has lost his shield despite the shield's special value:

¹⁴³ van der Kolk argues that mere re-telling of the traumatic event, to a listener or in a written text, is not necessarily enough to *integrate* that event into the brain's autobiographical narrative; he advocates re-integration treatments that engage the body and emotions in addition to the brain's analytical center.

¹⁴⁴ For discussion of these symptoms, see Crespo and Fernández-Lansac's full article as well as Caruth (pp. 141, 155-9, 191-200 and throughout).

. . . they his shield in peeces battred haue,
And forced him to throw it quite away,
Fro dangers dread his doubtfull life to saue;
Albe that it most safety to him gaue,
And much did magnifie his noble name.
For from the day that he thus did it leaue,
Amongst all Knights he blotted was with blame,
And counted but a recreant Knight, with endles shame. (xi.46.2-9)

Even setting aside the relevant political allegory (Burbon as Henri de Burbon and his shield as his Protestantism), the passage calls to mind dishonorable yielding. Motivated by fear of death, Burbon sacrifices the self-narrating power of his shield in order to save his life, earning him the title of “recreant.” Artegall then must rescue him from the mob, further suggesting that Burbon has lost narrative agency by his actions. Artegall interprets Burbon’s actions in precisely this way, and chastises him accordingly: “All perill ought be lesse, and lesse all paine / Than losse of fame in disauentrous field; / Dye rather, than doe ought, that mote dishonour yield” (55.7-9).

Artegall’s admonishment restates the principle that distinguishes honorable and dishonorable yielding clearly.

Burbon, however, has a different version of events. He insists that his loss of the shield (and the surrender of self-narrative it suggests) was a tactical deception—a method of resistance. Burbon believes that dropping his shield will help him obtain his goal (54.3-6) and insists that its loss is temporary:

. . . for yet when time doth serue,
My former shield I may resume again:
To temporize is not from truth to swerue,
Ne for aduantage terme to entertaine,
When as necessitie doth it constraine. (56.1-5)

Especially because the “shield” is, allegorically, a religious profession, the text undoubtedly invites us to view Burbon’s actions as questionably moral at best (as I noted in discussing deception, true heroes rarely deceive on matters such as homage or religious faith). Burbon may be more of a King Mark than an Olympia, his resistance motivated by fear of death and his deception trespassing on matters of enormous cultural import. Additionally, he explains his motivation *after* Artegall (and we) have seen him throw away the shield and interpreted it as dishonorable yielding. Usually, virtuous deception is legible as such from the moment it begins; this time, we’re asked to re-interpret what we’ve seen, which inevitably creates a greater sense of instability in our understanding of events. Many aspects of Burbon’s actions are, in other words, questionable and temporarily hard to interpret. Burbon, however, retains and articulates a clear self-narrative. He understands himself to have engaged in pragmatic deception in service of his own ends. Ethically and honorably questionable he may be, but his self-narrative is *not* illegible and, indeed, not surrendered to anyone else. We may misunderstand him initially, but the text eventually makes clear where he believes he stands. For this reason, he is a deceptive character engaged in resistance, not an illegible one.¹⁴⁵

By contrast, Flourdélis—the imprisoned lady (or, allegorically, city of Paris) whom Burbon wants to rescue—is an illegible character. Burbon describes her as “mine owne loue, though me she haue forlore, / Whether withheld from me by wrongfull might, / Or with her owne good will, I cannot read aright” (49.7-9). This statement raises the open question of whether Flourdélis is yielded or resistant. Her response to the yield-or-die question (if a response exists) is unreadable.

¹⁴⁵ In *Medusa’s Gaze*, Lowell Gallagher discusses Burbon’s behavior in the context of “the casuistical principle of *dolus bonus*, the good deceit, which by definition blurs the strict conceptual boundaries demarcating truth and falsehood” (191-2). Gallagher comments that, while Artegall sees Burbon’s honor as straightforwardly public (indeed, as extant in the shield itself), Burbon’s perspective calls our attention to the relationship between honor and “interiority and intentionality” (193). We may debate Burbon’s ethics, but his interior sense of his self-narrative remains intact in the scene.

Burbon nevertheless tries to provide an interpretive reading of Flourdelis's behavior, stating that "to me her faith she first did plight" (50.1), a gendered variation of yielding, but then Grandtorto "[e]ntyced her" (5) so that now she "to my foe hath guilefully consented" (8). Burbon concludes, "Ay me, that euer guyle in wemen was inuented" (9). His interpretation raises more questions than it answers, such as whether Flourdelis's "guyle" has been used against him or Grandtorto (who was deceived?), and indeed whether Burbon is seeing "guyle" here only because he himself has just used a similar tactic (the temporary setting-aside of his shield) to resist his foes. His additional descriptions of the situation do nothing to clarify Flourdelis's motives: "she by force is still fro me detayned, / And with corruptfull brybes is to vntruth mistrayned" (54.8-9). Is she a resistant prisoner, held "by force"? Or has she yielded—in error or out of corruption—to Grandtorto?

When Artegall and Burbon succeed at rescuing Flourdelis, her reaction remains illegible: "Her halfe dismayd they found in doubtfull plight, / As neither glad nor sorie for their sight" (60.4-5). Her stance on being rescued is absolutely unclear. Although she was earlier "Crying, and holding vp her wretched hands / To [Burbon] for aide" (44.8-9), she now answers Burbon's greeting by "backstarting with disdainfull yre" and refusing to respond enthusiastically to his words, perhaps a sign that she resents his arrival but also a *negative* response in the sense of being null or empty. She seems to perform "no" without further explanation. After Artegall lectures her—much as he did Burbon—on the evils of sacrificing her constancy and honor for "a strangers loue" and "guiftes of gold" (63.1-9), we get our only glimpse into Flourdelis's thoughts when the narrator says, "Much was the Ladie in her gentle mind / Abasht at his rebuke, that bit her neare" (64.1-2). Beyond this glimmer of emotional response, Flourdelis can find no "answere" to Artegall's charges; in the terms of the yield-or-die discourse, she cannot "answere" his implied demand to concede to his interpretation of events or voice a counter-interpretation. Instead, she stands blankly, "hanging downe her head with heauie cheare," "amaz'd, as she amated weare," seemingly confused, giving no support to her own identity or anyone else's (64.3-5). We still

don't know whether she retains a self-narrative of her own or has given her narrative power either to Burbon, Artegall, or Grandtorto. Burbon ends up loading her onto his horse "whiles she no whit gainesayd" and leaving with her, "nor well nor ill apayd" (64.8-9). Her appearance ends, as it began, in a negative *not-this-nor-that* zone of illegibility for characters, narrator, and audience alike.

Illegible characters disrupt their own self-narration, the battle for narrative power around them in the story's world, a text's formal reliance on yielding and resistance as characterizing choices, and ultimately our ability to understand what's going on. How has Flourdelis's imprisonment affected her? What is the meaning of her behavior for her relationship with Burbon—or for the underlying allegories? Has Artegall's pious chastisement affected her? If not, what does that say about Artegall's narrative power and mission as the Knight of Justice? By not clearly yielding to or resisting Grandtorto and his mob, Flourdelis has entered a state not unlike unconsciousness, her characterization becoming blurry and hard to read.¹⁴⁶

The actions—more accurately, non-actions—of illegible characters are more "behavior" or "style" rather than "tactics" because illegibility is not visibly a tactical choice. Part of illegibility is the lack of observable intentionality behind it. Illegibility happens; whether it is willed or not is a mystery, part of the illegibility itself. To help clarify this unclear topic, I have identified three major qualities of illegibility with which to structure this discussion: unstableness, blankness, and deferral.

¹⁴⁶ At the same time, illegibility sometimes adds to the illusion of a character's psychological reality for the audience. As we grasp after and imagine motives and explanations that might unify the strange behaviors we see, we assist the author by constructing a phantom selfhood operating within these characters. One of the most psychologically real-seeming moments in all of Shakespeare is Desdemona's inexplicable dying declaration that "Nobody; I myself" is responsible for her murder (5.2.124). As we wonder what details of her psychological inner life cause her to say that, we create the illusion of that psychological inner life. Desdemona's words are not strictly illegible in terms of the yield-or-die discourse, but their provocative contradiction is a quality that illegible characters usually also share, and a powerful literary tool in its own right.

I call the first quality “unstableness” with reference to Malory’s Launcelot, one of its practitioners.¹⁴⁷ Unstable captives, faced with the yield-or-die demand, will disrupt the question’s characterizing function by answering, implicitly, “both.” They oscillate back and forth between surrender and resistance, never settling long enough to be pinned down. More rarely, they may over-yield, offering more than their captor has asked for. Such excessive yielding becomes resistant when it surprises or even disrupts the captor’s expectations or self-narrative: the captive thus simultaneously both yields *and* resists. Unstableness in a character may manifest as an ability to yield and resist multiple times (regarding the same or different captors) without the usual permanent consequences. Notably, unstable characters *can* answer the yield-or-die question legibly: the confusion arises because they may legibly yield in one scene and legibly resist in the next. Characters with this quality are often described—by themselves, by fellow characters, or by the narrator—as indecisive, inconstant, wavering, or the like. More subtly, descriptions of unstable behavior may invoke doubleness and paradox in various ways, through oxymoron or both/and statements. More unusually, a connotation of excessiveness (as in excessive yielding) enters the description as well: these characters may exceed conventional boundaries.

Unstable illegibility results when the character is interpretable as contradictory; *blank* illegibility results when the character is not clearly interpretable at all. Practitioners of blankness answer the yield-or-die question, or the threat of that question, with an implicit “neither.” They are often literally or figuratively unconscious. They evade making the characterizing choice—in fact they sometimes even evade being asked the question in the first place—leaving their fellow

¹⁴⁷ The hermit Nacien says that Launcelot’s attempt to “forsake synne” during the Grail quest is admirable, “[a]nd ne were that he ys nat stable—but by hys thoughte he ys lykly to turne agayne—he sholde be nexte to encheve [the Grail] sauff Sir Galahad, his son; but God knowith hys thought and hys unstableness” (543). I discuss Launcelot in detail later in this chapter. In the meantime, I adopt Nacien’s term to describe captives with an ability “to turne agayne”—yielding one moment, resisting the next. (Beverly Kennedy observes that Nacien’s term derives from the writings of Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton, “for whom the adjective ‘stable’ describes the true lover of God” [265-6]).

characters and us at an interpretive loss. (Note that the verb “evade” implies more intent than is necessarily attributable to such characters—often they seem to evade the choice by pure chance.) The self-narratives of these blank figures cease to be legible with reference to the characterizing question unless and until they emerge from the crisis of identity that entry into captivity creates. In a sense, they practice what the law might once have called refusal to plead. This silent refusal to choose a characterizing plea of either innocence or guilt was punished in medieval and early modern England by pressing the prisoner to death beneath a mound of stones, a fate that links its victims to the blank, unreadable rock they resemble. Whereas unstableness usually allows for legible yielding and resistance (in confusing co-existence), blankness is more completely illegible. Signs of blankness in a character include: literal unconsciousness; other situations in which a character’s mind is disassociated from the text’s consensus reality (the character is mad, drunk, deceived); a character speaking a foreign language or behaving in foreign ways; silence, especially from or surrounding the illegible character; a character with a striking lack of affect; a character negatively described by what she is *not* rather than what she is (or described as “nothing”); descriptions of the character as shocked, astonished, or amazed; and imagery that links the character to stone or other inanimate or dead objects. Blankly illegible characters act stunned into stony non-responsiveness.¹⁴⁸

Deferral is a slightly less common style of illegibility, but no less powerful. A deferring character replies to the yield-or-die demand with an answer that amounts to “not now.” Again,

¹⁴⁸ Of Spenser’s Redcrosse, Crampton observes that “*Amazement* is a key word for the knight. . . . [E]vents frequently dumbfound, confuse, or astonish him, immobilize him” (121, italics in original). Crampton suggests that this reflects Redcrosse’s persistent role as patient rather than agent (particularly visible between the encounter in which Orgoglio knocks him unconscious and his final battle with the dragon), which renders him a passive sufferer of events even as he remains the poem’s protagonist. Crampton’s broad understanding of passivity/patience as suffering or receiving action means that all captives almost definitionally exhibit some version of such passivity; yielding, resistant, and illegible prisoners can all find themselves being *done to* instead of *doing*. Crampton’s specific comments on Redcrosse’s amazement, however, especially her observation that his amazement at Despaire represents “a paralysis of will,” identify a particular kind of passivity in the knight that I would call temporary illegibility, occurring at moments when he faces a variant of the yield-or-die demand and does not clearly answer (127).

crucially, such a response need not be legibly intentional—sometimes deferral is willed and sometimes it just *happens*, as Malory's Palomydes will amply demonstrate below. Deferral happens when a character stalls, hides, or runs away from the characterizing question, or when interruptions to the moment of crisis force its delay. The concept of time is obviously essential to deferral, and so language that focuses on time, repetition, and eternity, especially language of slowing, delaying, or suspending time, can also be an indicator that deferral is happening.

A quick review of Flourdelis will immediately indicate that these categories, like all of the categories I have identified in this study, overlap. Flourdelis seems to have yielded both to Burbon and to Grandtorto, and she wavers between characterization as a yielded prisoner and a lady requiring rescue, making her unstable. When Artegall and Burbon do rescue her, however, she becomes strangely silent, almost stunned, and Spenser describes her as "*neither glad nor sorie*" and Burbon's reaction as "*nor well nor ill apayd*" (italics mine). Her illegibility has shifted from "both" to "neither," from unstable to purely blank. Flourdelis herself shows few specific signs of deferral (as I said, it is a rarer quality), although Burbon's suggestion that he has been attempting to free her repetitively for a long time (51.3-9) at least hints at the kind of suspension of time that a character's illegibility may cause.

The captive characters I examine in this chapter all exhibit various mixtures of these qualities of illegibility. Indeed, the illegibility of each differs in style and outcome so much that structuring this chapter as a series of close readings of individual characters makes the most sense. I have organized these case-studies chronologically from Chaucerian through Shakespearean characters, restoring an order I have mostly ignored in this study otherwise. This ordering can serve as a reminder of the span of time over which these texts were written even though I remain unconvinced that any clear evolution is taking place—in terms of the yield-or-die discourse, Chaucer's *Griselda* and Shakespeare's *Barnardine* have more similarities than differences.

Illegibility is a disruptive quality, even a deconstructive one, breaking down neat divisions between yielding and resistance and sometimes even calling into question the validity of the entire discourse. Illegibility may be temporary and situational or permanent. That said, illegibility is also a definable quality with identifiable markers and a specific origin: the moment when, either literally or in some broader or more figurative sense, a captive does not clearly answer the yield-or-die question. Illegibility is born in a particular interaction between a captive and captor. This reliable origin is important to remember because illegibility has a final quality of infectiousness: it can bleed outward from the non-answering captive to affect proximate characters and plot elements. As we will see, for example, the illegibility of Malory's Palomydes sometimes infects Trystram; once Marlowe's Edward II enters illegibility, most of his kingdom temporarily succumbs to it, too. Even in these cases, however, illegibility is not a generalized quality of confusion. It is a specific kind of narrative disruption emanating outward from the breakdown of the yield-or-die question's characterizing function.

Chaucer's Griselda

Griselda of Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* is never a literal prisoner, but she formally yields to her husband and feudal overlord Walter at the time of his marriage proposal, identifying herself as both yielded wife and yielded vassal. As she describes it later, on the day of her marriage, she "[l]efte . . . my wyl and al my libertee" in her husband's hands (656). And yet. The amount of interpretive confusion surrounding her characterization—beginning in the world of the *Clerk's Tale* with Walter's uncertainty about his wife's thoughts and feelings, extending into the world of *The Canterbury Tales*' frame story as the pilgrims debate the *Tale*'s moral, and continuing through modern scholarship—indicates that this yielding has failed to perform its function

straightforwardly.¹⁴⁹ Walter is not sure that Griselda now fully supports his self-narrative, nor are the pilgrims, nor are we. Griselda, rather than being a straightforwardly yielded character, is an illegible character, exhibiting unstableness and blankness throughout her *Tale*.

Her yielding is excessive—and therefore hints provocatively at resistance—in several ways. First, even before Walter asks her to marry him, Griselda is arguably already doubly yielded: first feudally to Walter along with all his other subjects (“obeisant, ay redy to his hond, / Were alle his liges, bothe lasse and moore” [66-7]), and second filially to her father Janicula (who, himself, is also yielded to Walter). In his marriage proposal, which is less a real question and more a rhetorical gesture with no doubt about the answer, Walter reminds both father and daughter of the obedience they already owe. Walter speaks *for* both Janicula (“al that liketh me, I dar wel seyn / It liketh thee” [311-312]) and *for* Griselda (“As I suppose, ye wol that it so be” [347]), assuming that their self-narratives are already in service to his own. Further, he reminds Janicula that “[t]hou lovest me, I woot it wel certeyn, / And art my feithful lige man ybore” (309-10) and makes sure Griselda knows that “[i]t liketh to youre fader and to me / That I yow wedde” (345-46). This conversation represents a liege lord presuming that his already-yielded peasants will support his wishes. Janicula’s response is that of a character who has indeed already yielded his self-narrative to his lord, leaving him no room for personal opinion: “my willynge / Is as ye wole, ne ayeynes youre likynge / I wol no thyng, ye be my lord so deere” (319-321). By the time Griselda yields to Walter as his wife, then, she is already a yielded character several times over, which undermines the act’s usually solitary quality. Normally, to yield once is

¹⁴⁹ I cite several of these differing modern interpretations of Griselda as my discussion progresses. Charlotte C. Morse’s “Critical Approaches to the *Clerk’s Tale*” catalogues well the dizzying array of interpretations as of 1990, and her own comment probably speaks for most of us: “In reading the published criticism on the *Clerk’s Tale*, I have found myself sympathizing with almost all of the interpretations of the tale. . . . I remain convinced of the exemplary character of the story and of the seriousness with which Petrarch and Chaucer offer Griselda as an example, though Chaucer alone, in his apparently subversive endings, recognizes the multiple uses to which readers may put her example.” Morse then proposes her own suggestion—that Griselda shares a kinship with “pagan philosophers, courtier-bishops, and fourteenth-century saints”—itself a compound, contradictory interpretation of the character (79).

to yield absolutely and permanently, which is what gives such surrender a great deal of its narrative force. If Griselda already lacks a self-narrative, how can she yield *again* to Walter?

Emphasizing her repetitive yieldings, and thus the ways she is already narratively bound to these men, Griselda consents to marriage using similar language to her father: “as ye wole youreself, right so wol I,” she tells Walter, swearing to be true to his elaborate demands for her obedience even if it kills her (361-64). In fact, however, Griselda does not merely yield to Walter exactly as he wills. Rather than mirroring his demands with precise acquiescence to each, she yields excessively, answering his demand for obedience in “word” and “contenance” (356) by adding that she will obey him in “thought” as well (363).¹⁵⁰ Griselda certainly yields—but by yielding more than Walter asked for, she paradoxically asserts an ongoing narrative power of her own. Walter’s response becomes a refrain in the *Tale*. “This is ynogh, Griselde myn” (365), he says, attempting to re-assert the importance of his judgment on the matter as well as his newfound possession of her.¹⁵¹

Even if we read anxiety into that silencing statement by Walter, still, from this point, we can plausibly interpret Griselda to be a fully yielded, captive-like wife. Walter orders her stripped and re-dressed in the street—“translated,” in Chaucer’s famous word (385). As Carolyn Dinshaw has thoroughly explicated, this translation connotes profound re-writing; it is “a

¹⁵⁰ Linda Georgianna’s article “The Clerk’s Tale and the Grammar of Assent” addresses many major twentieth-century examinations of this detail and sits well alongside my argument here. Her particular interpretation of this moment is that by adding “thought” into the conditions of yielding and thereby “internalizing the demands of the contract, Griselda moves her assent beyond the bonds of the law, beyond Walter’s power (and ours) to scrutinize or *avyse*” (802). Griselda’s “extravagant” yielding (803) and subsequent extravagant obedience to Walter’s demands leave political and moral rationality behind as they accrue a “radical spiritual force” (806) that ultimately wins Walter’s “wonder” and “pity” (815). Georgianna argues that the text encourages us to glimpse—and not seek rational explanation for—something illogical and religiously sublime in Griselda’s excessive surrender. Relevant to my argument is Georgianna’s general point that Griselda’s yielding does not (as conventional yielding would) erase her ability to affect Walter’s self-narrative.

¹⁵¹ Jill Mann’s insightful comments on the uses of “inogh” in the *Clerk’s Tale* (and its sources) form useful background here: “In one sense it represents a point of balance between extremes. But in another sense ‘ynogh’ is itself a superlative; it indicates ‘outrance’—fullness, abundance, satisfaction to the utmost limits” (“Satisfaction and Payment” 35).

masculine hermeneutic gesture performed on the woman” (Dinshaw 133), and Walter’s torturous testing of Griselda is, for Dinshaw, his attempt to “translate” her further by exposing her nature and, eventually, putting another woman in her place (as a translated word takes the place of the original) (143-44). Dinshaw’s view of translation is similar to my concept of a captor’s re-writing of a captive’s self-narrative. I would qualify Dinshaw’s important emphasis on gender roles in the *Clerk’s Tale*’s acts of translation, however, by adding that the connotations of rewriting here are typical of *most* yielded captives losing self-narrating power to captors within the yield-or-die discourse. Griselda’s increasingly shocking ability to abide by her husband’s monstrous demands is, in this sense, no different than Theridamas’s complete transfer of loyalty upon yielding to Tamburlaine or Pedyvere’s translation from shameful wife-killer to a “holy man” of “grete goodnesse” (176) after yielding to Launcelot. Even when Walter claims to be murdering her children or casting her out, Griselda’s replies, like her response to his marriage proposal, suggest a lack of her own self-narrating ability. She describes her married role in the unromantic terms of yielded service (“I nevere heeld me lady ne mistresse, / But humble servant to youre worthynesse” [823-4]); she is Walter’s “owene thyng,” and therefore “Ther may no thyng . . . / Liken to yow that may displese me” (504-6). Griselda’s appalling acceptance of the apparent murder of her children may simply illustrate the effects of yielding: she no longer possesses enough individual identity to do anything else.

In that sense, Chaucer accomplishes the useful and profound task of teasing out the truly terrible implications of literary depictions of yielding. He shows us exactly how inhuman such a yielded character becomes, unable to express any meaningful urge to defend a beloved infant child from a murderous husband. The pilgrim audience’s skeptical reactions—which tend to stress the implausibility of Griselda’s extreme obedience—remind us that the entire construct of yielding identity-loss is a mere fiction of the yield-or-die discourse. Exposure of literary yielding’s unrealistic, unattainable excesses is crucial work the *Clerk’s Tale* accomplishes.

But this key aspect of Griselda's story also grants a haunting, illegible quality to the text. If Chaucer's *Tale* shows us that absolute yielding seems both inhuman and unrealistic, then we begin to see a confusing void where a character and a recognizable literary trope used to exist. By becoming an epitome of yielding—or beyond, yielding multiple times and excessively—Griselda also strains the system's rules past their breaking point. She loses the transparency that yielded characters usually exhibit (especially to their captors) and instead becomes unreadable to Walter, pilgrims, and audience alike. According to the rules of the yield-or-die discourse, Walter, her captor, should know her heart (her self-narrative) intimately, but instead he finds her increasingly alien.

Griselda's status grows even more complicated due to a few hints that she (and her father Janicula) may, in fact, still be technically resistant, still in possession of self-narratives. As I noted, both Janicula and Griselda respond to Walter's marriage proposal with words that indicate their surrender of narrative power to him: they declare that their wills match his own. But much later, after Walter has sent Griselda home in disgrace, the narrator reveals that Janicula's initial response to Walter concealed his actual concerns:

For out of doute this olde poure man
Was evere in suspect of hir mariage;
For evere he demed, sith that it bigan,
That whan the lord fulfild hadde his corage,
Him wolde thynke it were a disparage
To his estat so lowe for t'alighte,
And voyden hire as soone as ever he myghte. (904-10)

Janicula seems to have obeyed Walter for reasons other than a will perfectly in accord with Walter's own. In the moment of the proposal, more subtly, the narrator depicts Griselda "[w]ondrynge upon this word, quakyng for drede," an emotion decidedly *not* precisely aligned with Walter's will (358). In other words, when Walter proposes, Janicula is skeptical while

Griselda is confused and scared, but both speak as already-yielded possessions of Walter anyway. Calling their responses resistance via deception is too strong—the text does not provide decisive clarification that father and daughter intend to deceive their lord—but these suggestions that Janicula’s and Griselda’s respective self-narratives differ from their external performances suggest that some potential for resistance remains with them.

To detect an ongoing self-narrative in Griselda’s references to her unhappiness about Walter’s behavior is also possible. For example, her warning to Walter that he should avoid “tormentynge” his second bride with “adversitee” as he has her frames his actions as relatively voluntary and hurtful (1037-43)—as if Griselda doubts his claims to have tormented her only reluctantly because of the will of his people (480-90, 625-38, 800-1). Dinshaw argues that Griselda claims personal power (or, specifically, that the Clerk represents her as doing so) by both aligning herself with allegorical meanings and expressing her own individual lived experience, so that we cannot forget that she is a human woman as well as an object for translation and allegorization. Dinshaw considers this a feminine (and feminist) strategy, existing in opposition to Walter’s more dominant “masculine hermeneutic gesture” (Dinshaw 146-47). I consider it something akin to a captive’s strategy of resistance: the assertion of narrative power. When Walter rejects her, Griselda declares that she will return to her father and live out her life as a “wydwe clene in body, herte and al” (836). Her plan for a new self-narrative figuratively kills off Walter, erasing him from any ongoing role in her new life of virtuous widowhood. This behavior looks like captive resistance, as if Griselda is refusing to allow Walter to re-write her utterly, and is, arguably, re-writing *him* instead. Again, however, Griselda has also explicitly yielded. This is unstable illegibility in action: via excess and contradiction, she seems somehow yielded *and* resistant.

Griselda’s most legendary trait is, of course, her patience—the narrator extolls her as “this flour of wyfly pacience” (919) and the pilgrims’ debate about her significance focuses on the word (1149, 1177-82). This patience, too, is unstable. As I commented in the previous chapter,

patience has two opposing forms: it is a tool of the oppressor when the oppressor imposes or recommends it, but it is a powerful means of narrative resistance when it originates with the captive in defiance of the oppressor. Griselda's patience is a troubling and paradoxical blend of both these forms. First, Griselda's patience appears to be mostly imposed by Walter. She doesn't self-characterize herself with the word. Instead, the term first appears in the mouth of Walter as he begins his terrible testing: "Shewe now youre pacience," he tells Griselda, as he informs her of his plan to have their daughter killed (495). He orders her to "[b]eth pacient" again when he claims to be sentencing their son to death (644). Patience, specifically, is clearly part of the narrative Walter wants to impose on his yielding wife; it is thus not a resistance tactic on Griselda's part.

That said, Walter is arguably less *imposing* patience on his wife than *exposing* an innate patience she always possessed. During his second commentary on Walter's unnecessary testing, just before Griselda gives up her son, the outraged Clerk comments that "wedded men ne knowe no mesure, / Whan that they fynde a pacient creature" (622-3). Here, embedded in a critique of Walter's *lack* of self-control, Griselda's patience seems to be a pre-existing quality that has somehow triggered Walter's excesses. Neither the Clerk nor I argue that Walter's abuse is Griselda's fault for being patient, of course—rather, this statement is a bare, early hint that her patience is a quality that doesn't originate with Walter and that brings out his worst impulses.

Further, even though "pacience" is Walter's word, not hers, Griselda's patient behavior seems to escape Walter's control and become, instead, resistant and self-narrating. Although he has ostensibly ordered the behavior, Walter reacts to Griselda's displays of patience like an affected audience, full of wonder and pity, rather than a narrating captor. When he announces that he has killed their son, Griselda's calm amazes him:

And whan this markys say
The constance of his wyf, he caste adoun
His eyen two, and wondreth that she may

In pacience suffre al this array. . . . (667-70)

Later, he “wondred, evere lenger the moore, / Upon hir pacience,” which is so profound he might almost believe she has no human feeling (687-88). Yet again, after Walter rejects her as his wife, Griselda makes a long speech that the narrator claims exemplifies her “pacience” (813). This speech, as I commented previously, can be read as a subtle condemnation of Walter’s behavior; indeed, it can be read as deploying *resistant* patience, carefully framing the captive as an innocent sufferer of tyranny. Once more, its result is to leave Walter feeling “routhe and . . . pitee” (893). Walter’s reactions—lowering his eyes, feeling wonder and pity—are not those of a successful captor, confident in his captive’s willing obedience. They become, rather, increasingly appropriate for the audience of a martyr story judging the heroine to be an unjustly suffering victim. At the *Tale*’s end, Walter once more recognizes “her pacience” and also realizes that he is not merely an audience for her innocent virtue but also the villain in her narrative of suffering. He sees that “he so ofte had doon to hire offence” (1044-6), and he finally tells her the truth about his schemes, beginning with the same words he used to conclude her (excessive) yielding: “This is ynogh, Grisilde myn” (1051). As in that initial yielding, Griselda has given no evidence that she intends to resist him, and yet her self-narrative has shown a strange power to survive the usual erasure that yielding brings. Walter’s phrase once again implies an attempt to contain excess and re-assert control. Griselda’s famous patience is *unstable* patience, both yielding and resistant.

Unstableness is the first quality of illegible prisoners; blankness is the second, a quality Griselda also possesses. The concern that motivates Walter to test his wife’s loyalty is precisely his *inability* to understand her character, as if he can’t read or see her clearly. Within the artificial limits of the yield-or-die discourse, yielding ought to be a characterizing act—it should enable Walter to know his wife absolutely because her will should be nothing but “as ye wol yourself,” and indeed her *self* should be merely a supporting echo of his own—but Griselda’s credulity-straining yielding fails to characterize her for her captor-husband. Instead, Walter “in

his herte longeth so / To tempte his wyf, hir sadnesse for to knowe” (451-2). “[S]adnesse,” a key word throughout the *Tale*, connotes a firm, permanent, solemn constancy like that which yielding is supposed to create and sustain in the captive—a constancy Walter inexplicably doubts. Also, as Derek Brewer has observed, Chaucer tends to use “sad” as “primarily, and paradoxically, an *anti-expressive* word, or rather, perhaps, an expressive word used to signify the absence of the expression of feeling” (42).¹⁵² Griselda’s sadness becomes a mysterious, blank quality that Walter finds unacceptably unclear.

Walter’s reiteration and expansion of his rationale, years later, continues to suggest that he has doubted the efficacy of Griselda’s yielding. He explains that he has tested her “feith” (marital and feudal loyalty), her “benyngnytee” (probably here meaning meekness, pliability) (1053), her “stedfastnesse” (like “sadnesse,” a word suggesting permanent commitment) (1056), her “wommanheede” (the only overtly gendered quality he tests, a broadly vague one that may, here, connote wifely submission) (1075), her “purpos” (her intention), and her “wille” (a word of complicated meaning in medieval biological, philosophical, and medical discourse, but consistently connoting a self’s desire, needs, and again, intention) (1078).¹⁵³ Walter wants to

¹⁵² Although “sad” suggests anti-expression, Brewer adds that it also seems to connote trothe/truth, a word intimately connected with authentic selfhood: “sad” implies neither non-existence of self or deception, but rather a steadfastly contained self (*Chaucer: The Poet as Storyteller* 45). In “Satisfaction and Payment,” Mann expands Brewer’s discussion of sadness in the *Tale* by exploring the word’s additional connotations of “satisfaction,” “Stoic self-sufficiency,” or Middle English “suffisaunce”—a connotation that connects Griselda’s “sadness” directly to the poem’s refrain of “ynogh” (39-41). Mann argues that critics who “take Griselda’s ‘sadnesse’ . . . as due to the absence, rather than the control, of emotion” are missing the point Chaucer makes about the depth of Griselda’s feelings (42). If, as I suggest here, “sadnesse” is a way of describing illegibility, then both these scholars offer important support for the idea that illegibility does not mean an *absence* of self-narrative, but rather an *unreadable* self-narrative.

¹⁵³ The M.E.D. provides useful background here. Of particular interest, see “feith” def. 5, esp. 5(b) and (c); “benignitee” def. 1(a); “stedfastnesse” def. 1(a), 1(c), 5(a); and “purpos” def. 1(a). Most of the many definitions of “wille” add nuance to Walter’s explanation. Both “purpos” and “wille” can be used in the context of narration, a subtle but appropriate detail. “Purpos,” for example, may mean “The theme of a discourse; the subject matter of a narrative, as opposed to a digression” (def. 3[a], for “wille” in this sense, see 5[c]).

expose his wife's inner motivation and goals (her self-narrative) to establish if she is permanently loyal (yielded) to him. He isn't sure whether her yielding is effective and sincere.

Griselda begins exhibiting prominent symptoms of blankness at the time of Walter's marriage proposal. As he asks her the feudal-marital equivalent of the yield-or-die question, she enters a crisis state in her own self-narrative, her identity becoming shaky and indeterminate. Her initial reaction to Walter's arrival introduces her constant/blank "sadness": she kneels "with sad countenance . . . stille" (293). The gesture is clearly yielding but, in its straight-faced silence, simultaneously uncommunicative. After Walter makes his marriage proposal, both Griselda and Janicula react with astonishment. Janicula is "astonyed so / That reed he wax; abayst and al quakinge / He stood" (316-18). Griselda is also "astoned . . . with ful pale face" (337-40), left "quakinge for drede" (358). On one level, both peasants are frightened and shocked by the arrival of their lord and his unexpected demands. On a deeper level, this astonishment, like literal or figurative unconsciousness, connotes the crisis of self-narrative that captives enter when faced with a yield-or-die question, a frozen ambiguous state that can only be resolved by a clear, characterizing answer.

For Griselda, the astonishment stretches out into a blankness that never ends despite her subsequent yielding. She continues to be "sad" throughout the long period of Walter's testing. "Sad" is a key descriptor of Griselda's unchanging expression throughout the *Tale*, appearing, for example, when Griselda loses her daughter (552, 564, 602), her son (693), and her status as Walter's wife (754). In particular, Walter's observation after taking Griselda's son highlights how ambiguous her "sad" expression is: her "paciencie" and "sad visage" lead him to think that, if he weren't so sure of her maternal love, she would seem to be reacting with "malice, or . . . cruell corage" (687-95). This silent blankness with which Griselda greets Walter makes her persistently difficult to read. At the moment when Walter decides to set aside his testing and reveal the truth, he observes Griselda to be "sad and constant as a wal" (1047), as if Griselda has become almost inanimate, so insensible as to be stone-like. His revelation of his deceptions then

causes a return of Griselda's astonishment as she is stricken with "mazednesse" (1061).

Griselda's sadness and astonishment are two aspects of the same illegible state: both reflect a kind of insensibility or disruption to clear self-narrative.

Finally, at the moment she learns the truth, Griselda also succumbs to literal insensibility: she faints twice (1079-80, 1098-1108). Griselda's unconsciousness appears late in her captivity rather than at the moment it begins (unlike the characters I mentioned at the opening of this chapter who are captured unconscious, rendering them temporarily illegible). In her case, this major physical marker of illegibility appears in the final scenes of her *Tale*, suggesting again how persistent her illegibility is. The second fainting spell unites Griselda's "sadness" to her overwhelmed astonishment: "in hire swough so sadly holdeth she / Hire children two," that bystanders have trouble freeing the children from their unconscious mother's arms (1100-03). On one hand, this image is movingly emblematic, as the mother's unshaken love transcends even her swoon to grasp her children close. On the other hand, this image also calls to mind the blank, wall-like implacability that has unnerved Walter and us throughout the *Tale*. It was Griselda's nearly inhuman sadness that made Walter flirt with the idea that she *didn't* love her children, and here the bystanders struggle to pry her arms loose as if the embrace may be more eerie than poignant. The reaction of the audience within the story unites these two responses as "many a teere on many a pitous face / Doun ran of hem that stooden hire bisyde; / Unnethe abouten hire myghte they abyde" (1104-6): the people weep with pity . . . *and* find the tableau difficult (arguably unsettling?) to remain near. This reunion scene is not straightforwardly comforting and conciliatory.

After this second swoon, Griselda soon "hath caught agayn hire contenance" (1110), an ambiguous phrase that probably simply indicates a return from unconsciousness to her usual "sadnesse" but, to some scholars, hints at performativity rather than sincerity.¹⁵⁴ The Clerk

¹⁵⁴ Gail Ashton, for example, argues that the line depicts Griselda resuming a performance of Kristevan mimesis after a rare moment of self-disclosure ("Patient Mimesis: Griselda and the

stresses that the couple lives happily ever after “in concord and in reste” (1129). We might conclude that, after spending the *Tale* illegible, Griselda has moved fully into the conventional yielding role. Illegibility, however, continues to haunt the text, as the Clerk transitions abruptly from his happy ending to a disclaimer that “[t]his storie is seyde nat for that wyves sholde / Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee, / For it were inportable” (1142-44). The Clerk’s initial comment is negative: wifely submission is *not* what the story is about, Griselda’s behavior is *not* to be emulated. There’s a blank indeterminacy here. The *Tale*’s “envoy” begins with the even more abrupt announcement that “Grisilde is deed, and eek hire pacience, / And bothe atones buried in Ytaille,” and then it warns men not to expect their wives to be like Griselda (1177-82). This dismissive reduction of Griselda and her emblematic patience to a dead-and-buried corpse is the culmination of Griselda’s blank illegibility: if we accept the dubious judgment of the “envoy,” she is a definitively expressionless, permanently unconscious, pointlessly unreadable object.

In a general sense, if yielding and resistance are tools of characterization that help make clear both a character’s self-narrative and the overall narrative of the text, illegibility as I define it is an anti-tool, making characterization obscure and often derailing the text’s (in this case, we might say the Clerk’s) sense of overall narrative *telos*. Griselda’s illegibility muddles narrative for her fellow characters, the listening pilgrims in the frame story, and readers alike. I have already noted how, within the story’s world, Walter’s inability to understand his wife apparently motivates his testing. The text depicts other characters reacting with confusion and uneasiness to Griselda as well. The “folk” and “peple” who populate Walter’s kingdom may appear fickle (as the narrator insists [995-98]), but their changeability also reflects their role as the audience for an unclear story. They, too, are not sure what to make of Griselda. Her illegibility, or more accurately her fellow characters’ *responses* to that illegibility in the form of Walter’s testing and the people’s confusion, threaten over the course of the *Tale* to disrupt the smooth progress of

‘Clerk’s Tale.’” *The Chaucer Review* 32 [1998]: 237). Seen this way, this moment is another hint of Griselda’s unstableness: despite her prominent yielding, Griselda retains some ability to resist (in this case via deception, projecting a false countenance to conceal her true self-narrative).

Walter's rule, from the adjudication of disputes and the loyalty of the people to the smooth transition of power from Walter to his heirs.¹⁵⁵

The narrating Clerk tends to insist that Griselda is more legible than Walter thinks. In introducing his heroine, he declares that "in the brest of hire virginitee / Ther was enclosed rype and sad corage" (219-20), seemingly giving us a clear look into the hidden depths of Griselda's soul and pre-emptively revealing that the "sadnesse" Walter struggles to "knowe" is indeed present. Later, the Clerk repeatedly underlines the gratuitous, unnecessary quality of Walter's tests: they are "merveillous" and "[n]edelees" because Walter "hadde assayed hire ynogh bifore, / And foond hire evere good" (454-7). Against all the illegible qualities I have discussed, however, the Clerk's insistence that Griselda is a knowable character begins to feel inadequate, and as the text progresses, the Clerk more frequently tells us how Griselda "seems" than how she *is* (500, 715) and presents his own statements about her interior as speculation rather than fact ("I deeme that hire herte was ful wo," for example [753]). Griselda's illegibility thus begins to affect the narrative voice describing her.

Chaucer makes the narrative impact of Griselda's illegibility truly explicit, however, through the reactions of the pilgrim audience in the frame narrative. The *Tale* ends in a famous wreck of interpretation, as the pilgrims struggle to decide what significance Griselda embodies. As I have mentioned, the Clerk gestures toward attaching a moral to the end of the story, but in addition to introducing it negatively (describing what the story does *not* mean), he then trips over his own meaning. He argues that men and women should imitate Griselda's patient example when confronted with trials from God (1145-62), but this explication of the *Tale* uncomfortably links the confused and cruel Walter (who struggles to "knowe" his wife) with an

¹⁵⁵ Griselda's role as peacemaker among the kingdom's citizenry appears at 428-41, before Walter's testing begins. The passage depicts an unusually public version of Griselda, engaged in mediation and even rule while Walter is absent. While the narrator never explicitly says that Walter's testing ends this role for Griselda, readers see only a more private, domestically focused Griselda after Walter begins his cruelty. At a narrative level, then, Griselda's public role and the benefits she brings to the kingdom are disrupted by Walter's response to her illegibility.

omniscient and loving God. The Clerk must clarify this awkward linking, noting that God, unlike Walter, allows people to suffer “[n]at for to knowe oure wyl, for certes he, / Er we were born, knew al oure freletee”; God has more divine reasons for human suffering (1155-61). Next, the Clerk concedes, the patience his story illustrates may not even be possible or realistic (1163-69). His moralizing falls flat.

More confusion follows. The “*envoy de Chaucer*,” which follows the Clerk’s explication, seems to recapitulate the Wife of Bath’s views on marriage as it urges women to be as *unlike* Griselda as possible and instead defeat their husbands on the marital battlefield (1177-12). The Host’s comment suggests that he has absorbed precisely the moral that the Clerk disclaimed: he jokes that he wishes his wife could learn from Griselda’s quiet obedience. (The fact that there are significant manuscript discrepancies in this section of *The Canterbury Tales* only adds to the muddle.¹⁵⁶) Griselda’s husband, her fellow citizens, the Clerk, and the pilgrim audience for her story all struggle to “read” her decisively. Chaucer, indeed, seems presciently to depict the reactions of real readers of the *Tale*, who, to the present day, continue to debate Griselda’s characterization and the meaning(s) of her story.¹⁵⁷ This disruption is the narrative power of an illegible character.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas J. Farrell reviews the major textual debates in his article “The ‘Envoy de Chaucer’ and the *Clerk’s Tale*.”

¹⁵⁷ For example, Brewer asserts that “[t]he story of Griselda is designed to recommend a heroic Christian stoicism which sacrifices self and personal feeling to steadfast commitment to principle” (42), while Mann suggests that “it is in fact Griselda, not Walter, who gives us the truer image of the God who suffers not only the cruelty that men inflict on him but also the cruelty that they inflict on each other” (“Satisfaction and Payment” 43). Dinshaw contends that any such seeking after morals misses the *Tale’s* true purpose, which is to reveal how the excisions and exclusions inherent to narration and translation mimic the excisions and exclusions of feminine and other marginalized voices in all social discourse: Griselda thus represents how patriarchal discourse silences women (154). And so forth.

Malory's Launcelot

Chaucer's Clerk arguably tries and fails to impose legibility on Griselda, and this failure, allowed to stand in the text, reveals that some illegible characters simply stay that way in the minds of fellow characters and would-be interpreting readers alike. Malory's text tends to work harder to achieve narrative closure for its two major illegible characters—Sir Launcelot and Sir Palomydes—giving them both scenes of yielding in a Christian context to close out their stories. As I explore with first Launcelot and then Palomydes, this closure, while stronger than Griselda's, is still only debatably successful following the illegibility they have demonstrated previously.

Launcelot occupies many roles in Malory's retelling of his long and complex biography; I have already discussed some of these earlier in this study. In encounters with most of the text's minor characters, Launcelot is resistant when captive but more commonly holds the dominant captor role himself. His illegibility—what other characters often call his “unstableness”—arises when the Grail Quest, and the yield-or-die pressures that come with it, begin to intrude upon Launcelot's world. I am not the first to comment upon how conflicting secular and sacred loyalties slowly rip apart Launcelot's “worship” and selfhood over the course of Malory's book.¹⁵⁸ The lens of the yield-or-die discourse, however, reveals that Launcelot's crises of selfhood originate in moments when he responds illegibly to some variation on the characterizing

¹⁵⁸ Although I disagree with Beverly Kennedy's assertion that Malory's knights can be neatly grouped into categories such as “Heroic,” “True,” and “Worshipful,” her book is otherwise a detailed exploration of the varying values and styles of chivalry among which Malory's knights must navigate. Kennedy feels that Malory endorses as successful the compromises Launcelot makes between secular and spiritual demands in order “to live the mixed life in the world” (275). Dorsey Armstrong, by contrast, argues that “[t]he *Morte* wants to represent these ideals [of Christianity and chivalry] as theoretically compatible, but when deployed in the text they often jostle against and conflict with one another” (107); for Armstrong, Launcelot is caught up in these contradictions and never completely resolves them, standing rather as a sign of their “vexed relationship” (123).

question. Launcelot repeatedly displays variations on illegibility while navigating the conflicting demands of various captor-figures.

Launcelot's Grail experiences begin as he sleeps with Elaine in an illegible state of drunken darkness and end as he lies in an illegible state of blissful-yet-punitive coma. After these events, he is far less tethered to the narratives of Arthur, God, or Gwenyvere, no longer acting as a clear and reliable supporter of any of those three (defying Arthur's law, falling away from "the promyse and the perfeccion" of the Grail [588], and interspersing his rescues of Gwenyvere with quarrels and abandonment). Even as his actions within the yield-or-die discourse become more legible once again (for example, he resists Mellyagaunce and Mordred through escape), his illegibility during the Grail quest has left him powerfully positioned as an independent, flexibly characterized figure whose strong narrative power provides major momentum in the final sections of Malory's book.

A great deal of the obscurity in the Grail Quest sections is not so much illegibility as I define it but rather part of a larger thematic mood. The Grail is literally and figuratively "coverde" from worldly eyes (503) because "hit ys the secrete thynges of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste" (542). The Quest is thus a quest for clearer sight, as Gawayne makes clear at the outset in vowing to seek the Grail "tyle I have sene hit more opynly" (503).¹⁵⁹ Darkness, confusion, silence, and unanswered questions are inherent parts of the Grail quest's divine mysteries. While not all instances of obscurity in these sections relate to captive illegibility, Launcelot's captive illegibility is one variation of obscurity that appears in connection with the Grail.

Launcelot's previously relatively clear characterization—and specifically his relatively clear loyalties—begin to fracture and break soon after he first sets foot in Corbin, the town and castle where the prophetic King Pelles and the covered Grail reside. As if to heighten the

¹⁵⁹ Christ tells the three successful Grail knights, "I woll no lenger cover me frome you, but ye shall se now a parte of my secretes and of my hydde thynges" (583); Galahad's quest is fulfilled primarily by a clear sight of the Grail after his arrival in Sarras, when, as he says in the Grail's presence, "I se that that hath be my desire many a day" (586).

contrast with what follows, Launcelot's entry into the town highlights his existing identity. He is recognized by the townsfolk as "Sir Launcelot, the floure of knyghthode" (462) and he takes the powerful rescuer role in saving Elaine from the boiling cauldron (463).¹⁶⁰ After everyone sees a vision of the Holy Grail in King Pelles's castle, however, Pelles and the enchanter Brusen conspire to trick Launcelot into sleeping with Elaine (464).¹⁶¹ Mised and drugged, he sleeps with a woman he believes is Gwenyvere in a dark dungeon-like room where "all the wyndowys and holys . . . were stopped" (465). While not literally an instance of captivity, the episode resembles a captive experience (indeed, it resembles rape). Comparing it to Launcelot's earlier imprisonment by Morgan le Fay heightens this resemblance: in both cases, Launcelot is drugged by a female enchantress, put into a dungeon or dungeon-like space, and held for the purpose of winning him as a lover.

Where Morgan cast Launcelot into a magical sleep (a brief interval of illegibility), then offered him the characterizing choice once he awoke, however, Brusen lies to and then drugs Launcelot until he becomes "so asoted and madde that he myght make no delay." No characterizing question is ever posed, and he would not be in a state (being both deceived and drugged) to answer with meaningful agency if it were. In the morning, having "remembryd hym" after the night's self-loss, Launcelot opens the window and ends the "enchauntemente," regaining his self-awareness. He does not, however, seem to regain a consistent attitude toward what has happened. He believes both that he has actively done wrong (he feels "shamed" and thinks he has "done amyse") *and* that he is a passive victim of a "false traytours" by whom he has been "betrayed" (465) and "disceyved" (466). One minute he is so angry that he is prepared to kill the naked Elaine (465); the next he not only allows that he "woll forgyff" her but even

¹⁶⁰ In her article on this episode, "Naked as a nedyll": The Eroticism of Malory's Elaine," Yvette Kisor reminds us that Malory never explicitly identifies the woman in the cauldron as Elaine; Kisor summarizes scholarly debate on this question (56).

¹⁶¹ Elaine herself is a relatively passive figure, following her father's "commaundemente to fullfyll this prophecie" of Galahad's conception (466).

embraces and kisses her (“for she was a fayre lady,” Malory explains) (466). This mixture of responses is a fairly psychologically plausible response to Launcelot’s experience—and this mixture is also illegible, as Launcelot vacillates between yielding and resistant attitudes toward what has happened. As he leaves, Elaine’s last comment to him in this scene is a request— “se me as sone as ye may . . . owghe me youre good wyll”—to which he does not respond (466).

A few odd details follow immediately upon Launcelot’s departure and combine to echo the current fragility of his self-narrative. First, a sudden cluster of Launcelot-surrogates enters the text. Galahad is born and named after his father (“bycause Sir Launcelot was so named [Galahad] at the fountayne stone”). A suitor for Elaine, Bromell, arrives and wishes to replace Launcelot in Elaine’s heart; failing that, he vows to hold the local bridge “for Sir Launcelot sake” and kill Launcelot if they meet. Launcelot’s nephew Bors then arrives, defeats Bromell in Launcelot’s stead, and accepts his dishonorable yielding on the condition that Bromell “go unto my lorde Sir Launcelot . . . and yelde the unto hym” (466-7). The son has Launcelot’s blood and birth-name; the suitor for the woman Launcelot has slept with longs to take over Launcelot’s role (either through love or violence); the nephew fights Launcelot’s battle for him and accepts the prisoner’s yielding on Launcelot’s behalf. Launcelot himself has left, but quasi-Launcelots (child, lover, warrior) spring up to take his place—and two of them are at odds with each other.

In a final crucial detail, Bors explains Launcelot’s absence during all this time: “this halff yere he hath bene in preson wyth Quene Morgan le Fay” (467). The text says nothing more about this new imprisonment of Launcelot by Morgan (Launcelot eventually reappears at Camelot), but such an extended period of literal captivity following his experience with Elaine is thematically appropriate in several ways. Launcelot’s experience with Elaine, as I noted, resembles his earlier captivity with Morgan, and now that resemblance is recalled. Further, the lack of information about this imprisonment (how was he captured? is he resistant?) means that it functions narratively not to characterize Launcelot but rather to hide him away and defer his participation in events. Elaine has asked him to “se me as sone as ye may” and, having borne

their son, wonders “where Sir Launcelot ys” (467); Bromell is staking out the local bridge awaiting a battle with his rival. Launcelot’s imprisonment means that he simply skips these events and any characterizing responses he might make to them. Bors takes his place, defeating Bromell and meeting Galahad. This six-month imprisonment is an illegible imprisonment, both strictly because we are not told if Launcelot yields or resists Morgan (although we can, of course, guess) and more broadly because it temporarily erases him from the story’s world.

When Launcelot, Elaine, and Gwenyvere next meet at Camelot, Launcelot’s illegibility is not resolved but rather deepens. Gwenyvere has a conversation with Launcelot that resembles a yield-or-die demand:

Than the Quene sente for Sir Launcelot and bade hym com to her chambir that nyght—‘Other ellys,’ seyde the Quene, ‘I am sure that ye woll go to youre ladyes bedde, Dame Elayne, by whome ye gate Galahad.’ ‘A, madame!’ seyde Sir Launcelot, ‘never say ye so, for that I ded was ayenste my wylle.’ ‘Than,’ seyde the Quene, ‘loke that ye com to me whan I sende for you.’

“‘Madame,’ seyde Sir Launcelot, ‘I shall nat fayle you, but I shall be redy at youre commaundement.’” (471)

Gwenyvere may not be holding a literal sword to Launcelot’s throat, but she is certainly asking him to make a characterizing choice between herself and Elaine. Launcelot attempts to give her a decisive and, in a loose sense, yielding reply, emphasizing his obedience. His answer characterizes him as loyal to her, and yet, with Brusen’s help, Elaine deceives Launcelot into her bed again that night, leaving Gwenyvere to conclude that he is “false” (471-2). Once again, Launcelot has proven unable to either yield to or resist Elaine clearly.¹⁶²

¹⁶² To elaborate, I apply the rules of the yield-or-die discourse loosely here. Conventional gender roles alone would deny Gwenyvere or Elaine the cultural or physical power to pose a true characterizing question to Malory’s greatest worldly knight. As I discuss in chapter 2’s section on love captivity language, courtly love can borrow the language of yielding to suggest that male characters “yield” honorably to women they admire; in many ways, this is the kind of yielding Gwenyvere and Elaine seek from Launcelot here. That said, as I noted in chapter 2’s

This time, when he discovers that he has been tricked, Launcelot's response is to become even more illegible than he did after his first night with Elaine. He suffers a complete and involuntary loss of self-narrating power, the kind of silence that typifies blank illegibility. He gets out of bed "as he had bene a wood man," manages to say only the single word "Alas" in response to Gwenyvere's fury, drops "downe to the floure in a sowne," and finally awakens only to leap out a window, "and so he ranne furth he knew nat whothir, and was as wylde woode as ever was man, and so he ran two yere, and never man had grace to know hym" (472). The last time this happened, he vanished for six months into Morgan's dungeon; this time, he loses his mind for two years. Both are retreats into blankness, during which Launcelot can neither serve nor resist either lady (or anyone else) because he lacks the ability to make such a characterizing choice. The women, despite their conflict, mutually affirm this shared loss: "'Alas,' seyde feyre Elayne; and 'Alas,' seyde the Quene, 'for now I wote well that we have loste hym forever'" (473).

Launcelot's experiences while suffering—and recovering from—this insanity continue to underline his illegible inability to make characterizing choices. Most straightforwardly, after a bout of aimless violence, he falls into an exhausted sleep and is captured unconscious (and therefore illegibly) by Sir Blyaunte. Blyaunte orders him imprisoned and nursed back to physical health, but these ministrations fail to help Launcelot "know hymself" (481).¹⁶³ Launcelot eventually wanders away from Blyaunte's custody and turns up once more in Corbin, where, unrecognized by people who once called him on first sight "Sir Launcelot, the floure of knyghthode" (462), he is adopted into King Pelles's household as the fool (483). In both these cases, Launcelot's captors struggle to read the text his body presents. Blyaunte's servant observes that the prisoner "resembelyth muche unto Sir Launcelot" (481), while the people of

discussion, such yielding is always to a large extent figurative only, and never activates the full narrative consequences of true yielding. Interestingly for Launcelot here, however, this situation's resemblance to yielding, especially in the context of his recent quasi-captivity by Elaine, pushes him into a deeply illegible response.

¹⁶³ Blyaunte's home is called "Castell Blanke"—a beautifully appropriate if entirely coincidental name (it certainly means "white" in this context).

Pelles's castle conclude from his strong, scarred body that "he had bene a man of worshyp." He can be half-read, but not decisively identified. Then, as Pelles's fool, Launcelot is given a new robe and "arayed lyke a knyght," causing the onlookers to be struck by his noble appearance. When his madness began at Camelot, he was dressed only "in hys shurte" for bed (472). The knightly clothing he now receives at Pelles's court may help "translate" him—like Griselda—back into a knight. While wearing this robe, Launcelot is finally recognized by Elaine (483), setting in motion his cure by the Holy Grail (484). These attempts by others to read and even contribute to Launcelot's identity trace—or enable—the gradual return of Launcelot's own legible self-narrative.

Significantly, however, even after regaining his sanity, Launcelot remains illegible with respect to the increasingly pressing question of whom he serves: Gwenyvere (and by extension, the worldly court of King Arthur) or Elaine (and by extension, the otherworldly powers associated with King Pelles, especially the Grail). His primary style of illegibility shifts from blankness—the drunken, deceived, maddened states in which he could not make characterizing choices—to deferral and the "both/and" contradictions of unstableness. Declaring himself "banysshed" from Arthur's England (thereby deferring any encounters with his king and queen), Launcelot asks Elaine and Pelles to give him a place to live. He offers a doubled justification for this request, saying that because of Elaine "I have had mucche care and angwyshe" (as if she owes him housing in recompense), but adding that "I know well I have done fowle to you" by threatening her in the morning upon discovering the bed trick (as if he owes her his company in recompense). Launcelot and Elaine settle into a castle on "an ilonde beclosed envyrowne with a fayre watir, depe and layrge," both a strong, defensible position and an enclosed, secretive space. Launcelot renames it "the Joyus Ile," a name that echoes Launcelot's actual castle of Joyus Garde—but where Joyus Garde is a place of shelter for the text's true lovers (Trystram and Isode [404] as well as Launcelot and Gwenyvere [654]), Joyus Ile is a place where Launcelot pines alone over a shield symbolizing himself and Gwenyvere. Despite "ony myrthis that all the ladyes

myght make hym—he wolde onys every day loke towarde the realme of Logrys, where Kynge Arthure and Quene Gwenyver was; and than wolde he falle uppon a wepyng as hys harte shulde to-braste” (486). The inclusion of Arthur in Launcelot’s misery is a reminder that he is exiled not merely from his lover but from his lord and chivalric community. He has not offered to become Pelles’s vassal or to marry Elaine, either of which might formalize his new living arrangement (485). Joyus Ile is both his chosen new home and his place of captivity; a site where he appears to yield to Elaine and all she represents *and* a site where he appears to resist her.

In keeping with this illegible sense of paradox, Launcelot adopts the pseudonym “Le Shyvalere Ill Mafeete,” which Malory translates as “The Knyght That Hath Trespassed” (485). Launcelot has stated that he wants both his insanity and his apparent exile from court kept secret and explains that the pseudonym exists because “hyt lyste me nat to dyscover my name” (484-5), all of which adds to the atmosphere of general illegibility in this sequence. More particularly, the self-judgment implied in the nickname he chooses hints at—but does not explicate clearly—a self-narrative. Against whom has Launcelot trespassed? He states that he believes himself to have wronged Elaine by threatening her the morning after they first slept together, but his behavior at Joyus Ile (meditating each day on Gwenyvere and Arthur) seems more like a quasi-religious penance toward his king and queen than toward his lover. Whom he serves and why in this section is entirely unclear.

This illegible Launcelot becomes a precursor to the Grail itself as a quest object. He serves as a hidden, mysterious object of desire for the Knights of the Round Table rather than a quester in possession of narrative power himself. The quest for Launcelot begins among his kin at the urging of Gwenyvere but quickly expands to include more knights and gains the backing of Arthur as well, becoming a formal venture “to seke all Inglonde, Walys, and Scotlonde to fynde Sir Launcelot” (474). As Percivale—soon to be a Grail knight—explains, “I am in the queste to syke Sir Launcelot” and will not return to “the courte tulle that I have founde” him (478). Percivale and Ector, especially, have many adventures in this quest before arriving at Joyus Ile,

where Percivale battles Launcelot for two hours until the two finally exchange names. Launcelot struggles to defer the inevitable. He gives his pseudonym first, and after Percivale identifies himself, Launcelot only slowly divulges his real identity, first hinting “somtyme I was youre felawe” in the Round Table fellowship. Percivale presses the issue: “Sir knyght, whatsomever ye be, I requyre you uppon the hyghe order of knyghthode to tell me youre trew name,” whereupon Launcelot identifies himself (487). The exchange is typical of the romance trope in which two anonymous knights battle and then recognize each other, but within the constraints of the trope, Percivale takes the active, questing role while Launcelot engages in one last deferral of straightforward characterization.

Once Percivale and Ector’s quest ends in the discovery of Launcelot, the Elaine episode’s ambiguities come to a swift end. Launcelot’s experiences are no longer secret: “And there hyt was knowyn” what happened to him (488). Percivale and Ector correct what turns out to be Launcelot’s (willful?) misperception that he has been exiled. They insist that “Kynge Arthure and all hys knyghtes—and in especiall Quene Gwenyver—makyth suche dole and sorow for you that hyt is mervayle to hyre and se.” As if that’s not enough, Ector declares that “hyt hath coste my lady the Quene twenty thousand ponde, the sekyng of you!,” grounding the quest in explicit (and funny, following on the emotional and chivalric explanations already made) material terms. The men return to court, where “Sir Percyvale and Sir Ector de Marys began and tolde the hole adventures” of Launcelot’s madness and exile at Joyus Ile. The confusion and secrecy in which Launcelot has been living gives way to this public re-telling of his story to the court. His period of madness is now integrated into his overall narrative (489).

The sequence ends, however, on an ominous hint that some illegibility remains surrounding Launcelot. Arthur comments to Launcelot, “I mervayle for what cause ye, Sir Launcelot, wente oute of youre mynde. For I and many othir deme hyt was for the love of fayre Elayne . . .” (489). Arthur answers his own implied question, narrating a plausible—but inaccurate—detail into Launcelot’s public identity. Malory describes what happens next: “My

lorde,' seyde Sir Launcelot, 'yf I ded ony foly, I have that I sought.' And therewythall the Kynge spake no more. But all Sir Launcelottys kynnesmen knew for whom he wente oute of hys mynde" (490). Launcelot's reply to the King is hypothetical ("yf") and ambiguous (to what folly does he refer?); the King lapses into blank silence; and the narrator underlines the discrepancy between the public narrative of Launcelot's madness and the private truth. Arthur is Launcelot's liege lord, Launcelot his sworn vassal. Launcelot's courtly conflict between Gwennyver and Elaine—which he answered with illegibility rather than a characterizing choice—is mostly resolved, but now obscurity is creeping into the much more formalized service that Launcelot owes his king.

The Elaine episode prepares for the full-fledged Grail quest not only by revealing the circumstances of Galahad's conception, birth, and infancy, but also by introducing illegibility into Launcelot's self-narrative. That illegibility returns to haunt and characterize Launcelot during his quest for the Grail. As I discussed in chapter 2, the Grail is ultimately achieved by characters who yield clearly and decisively to God. Launcelot struggles to accomplish this yielding and manages only illegible half-answers and silences, continuing to be torn between giving his service to the world (Arthur's court, Gwennyvere, knightly "worship" itself) or to his God.

The Grail quest's language often frames God as a feudal overlord with yielded servants.¹⁶⁴ In this sense, God becomes almost a challenger to Arthur for the knights' ultimate loyalty, taking Arthur's vassals away into his own service. When Galahad arrives at court to signal the beginning of the Grail quest, Arthur reacts with sorrowful awareness that his Round Table fellowship will never be "holé togydirs" again in quite the same way (502). Once Gawayne and his fellow knights make a formal vow to seek the Grail, Arthur is "gretly dysplesed, for he wyst well he mught nat agaynesey their avowys," and he tells Gawayne, "ye have berauffte me the

¹⁶⁴ For example, as I discussed, Galahad is the "servant of Jesus" throughout the quest (509, 586, etc.). In addition, Percivale's temptations take the form of a demon-lady who tries to lure him into becoming her "man" (in the feudal sense), drawing him away from his "omayge" to Christ (527) and from "Goddys servys" in which he is "His trew champion" (526).

fayryst and the trewyst of knyghthode that ever was sene togydir in ony realme of the worlde” (503). Nacien the hermit further clarifies that this new “hyghe . . . servyse” that the knights will be performing demands that they leave ladies as well as king behind at court. To reduce Arthur’s elegiac mood at the beginning of the Grail quest to mere competitive awareness that God, like a more powerful liege lord, has taken his knights away is far too simplistic, but that is one strand of Arthur’s complex grief: his knights are swearing service to a different master.

From the moment Galahad reveals himself at court, Launcelot’s reputation (the public part of his self-narrative) is also shaken, a fact the text emphasizes with the arrival of a lady who laments, “A, Sir Launcelot, how youre grete doynge ys changed sytthyn thys day in the morne! . . . [F]or ye were thys day in the morne the best knyght of the worlde; but who sholde sey so now, he sholde be a lyer.” Galahad is supplanting his father as “the best knyght,” and the lady refers to this as “the change of youre name and levynge” (501). Launcelot seems modestly untroubled by this fact now, but it is an early sign of a shakiness in his self-narrative that will shortly again become full-fledged illegibility.

Just as Percivale’s “omayge” to Christ (527) is at stake in Percivale’s testing during the Grail quest, Launcelot is also facing God’s version of the yield-or-die demand. Launcelot’s answer (unlike Percivale’s) is illegible, resuming and magnifying the illegibility he first manifested during the pre-Grail Elaine sequence. One of the quest’s many hermits hints at the nature of God’s demand when he instructs Launcelot that, in light of Launcelot’s worldly successes, “there is no knyght now lvyng that ought to yelde God so grete thanke as ye . . . ye ar the more beholdyn unto God than ony other man to love Hym and drede Hym” (519). The hermit’s advice is fairly commonplace but also a reminder of the exchange inherent to yielding: Launcelot is like a vassal receiving benefits from his lord without offering service or gratitude in return. The hermit warns, “now Oure Lorde wolde suffir the no lenger but that thou shalt know Hym, whether thou wolt other nylyt” (520). Launcelot faces a reckoning with his much more powerful lord.

The text makes the lord-vassal nature of God's relationship with Launcelot clearest during a vision Launcelot has while sleeping at the foot of a cross in the wilderness:

. . . there com a man afore hym all bycompast with sterris; and that man had a crowne of golde on hys hede, and that man lad in hys felyship seven kynges and two knyghtes; and all thes worshipt the crosse, knelyng uppon their kneys, holdyng up their hondys towarde the hevyn, and all they seyde, "Swete fadir of Hevyn, com and visite us, and yelde unto everych of us as we have deserved."

Than loked Sir Launcelot up to the hevyn, and hym semed the clowdis ded opyn, and an olde man com downe with a company of angels and alyghte amonge them and gaff unto everych hys blyssynge and called them hys servauntes and hys good and trew knyghtes. And whan thys olde man had seyde thus, he com to one of the knyghtes, and seyde, "I have loste all that I have besette in the, for thou hast ruled the ayenste me as a warryoure and used wronge warris with vayneglory for the pleasure of the worlde more than to please me; therefore thou shalt be confounded withoute thou yelde me my tresoure." (534)

The kings in the vision represent Launcelot's ancestors, and the two knights are Galahad and Launcelot—with Launcelot the knight facing the divine reprimand (534-5).¹⁶⁵ The vision pictures Launcelot's relationship with God as one that ought to be the relationship of yielded vassal to lord. The men in the vision are organized into something like a feudal hierarchy, with the crowned king, his seven subordinate kings, and the two knights; the Godlike "olde man" arrives as an ultimate liege lord to bestow his love and protection on his loyal "servauntes." This lord

¹⁶⁵ This interpretation of the vision is given by another explicating hermit. Malory's text is abridged at this point, so that the details of the vision are slightly unclear (I am grateful to Shepherd's editorial note for identifying this problem in his edition of the text). The equivalent passage in Malory's source, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, more elaborately identifies the crowned man in the vision as Launcelot's ancestor King Celydoine, "verily a servant of Jesus Christ and God's true knight" (Matarasso's translation, 152). Celydoine's descendants—represented by the other kings—are also loyal vassals of God and Launcelot's virtuous forefathers. Malory's abridgement does not erase the feudal imagery and language essential to the vision.

accuses the Launcelot-figure of opposing him in metaphorical battle (“thou hast ruled the ayenste me as a warryoure”) before laying down something very like the yield-or-die ultimatum: “therefore thou shalt be confounded withoute thou yelde me my tresoure.” The word “yelde” here, of course, primarily means “give,” but the overall statement, in context, is a demand that Launcelot participate in a lord-vassal arrangement—yielding loyalty in exchange for the blessings God has given him—or face the consequences.

God’s demand hangs over Launcelot from the beginning to the end of the Grail quest. Launcelot answers it with unstableness and blankness, leaving him with the ambiguous selfhood of a captive who has not decided (or cannot decide, because agency is always unclear with illegible captives) whether to yield or resist. As the hermit Nacien explains to Gawayne about Launcelot, “And ne were that he ys nat stable—but by hys thoughte he ys lykly to turne agayne—he sholde be nexte to encheve [the grail] sauff Sir Galahad, hys sonne; but God knowith hys thought and hys unstablenessse” (543). Unstableness in this context is connected with an inability to sever connections to worldly relationships and goals. Launcelot’s unstableness is most prominently related to his desire for Gwenvyvere; Bors, by contrast, is “so stable that . . . he was never gretly correpte in fleysshly lustes” (544). More broadly, however, Galahad’s dying message to his father—“remembir of this worlde unstable” (586)—implies that true stability may be impossible for anyone with meaningful worldly connections (because the world itself is not stable), dooming Launcelot to unstableness unless and until he can yield himself entirely to God.

Launcelot’s unstableness is always closely related to deferral and blankness. His both/and wavering between devotion to the world and devotion to God often leaves him stranded in a suspended, dark, or silent state where neither world nor God seems particularly accessible. Early in the quest, after his initial defeat by Galahad and before he confesses even to loving Gwenvyvere, Launcelot is wandering alone in “a wylde foreyst” when he finds a stone cross at a crossroads. A nearby stone is inscribed with words, “but hit was so durke that Sir Launcelot myght nat wete what hyt was.” Not far from this literally illegible text, Launcelot discovers a

chapel with a beautiful, well-lit altar inside, “but he coude fynde no place where he myght entir.” Suspended between the night’s darkness and the chapel’s light, “passing hevy and dysmayed,” Launcelot lies down to sleep at the foot of the cross (517). During the night, a sick knight arrives at the cross, is healed by the Holy Grail, takes Launcelot’s helmet, sword, and horse, and leaves. Launcelot’s experience of this incident is heavy with dream-like paralysis. He is “half wakyng and half slepyng” and “slepte nat veryly” (517), but is so “overtakyn with synne, that he had no power to ryse” when the Grail appears. The newly recovered knight comments to his squire on the oddity of “thys slepyng knight” who “had no power to awake” and speculates that Launcelot is a member of the Round Table, but cannot guess his exact identity (518). Straightforwardly, the squire’s conclusion—“that he dwellith in som dedly synne whereof he was never confessed” (518)—is the correct diagnosis of Launcelot’s situation, but Launcelot’s ambiguous, nameless, middle state is also characteristic of blank illegibility.

Launcelot next hears a voice that proclaims him “more harder than ys the stone [meaning, here, a tree’s seed], and more bitter than ys the woode, and more naked and barer than ys the lyeff of the fygge tree” (518)—a clear Biblical condemnation of sin and spiritual obstinacy (which a hermit soon explains)—and also, again, an image of blank non-identity: objectifying a character as a lifeless, fruitless tree. While Launcelot is almost the moral and spiritual opposite to Chaucer’s Griselda in this moment, their blank, inanimate-seeming obstinacy (she’s a wall and he’s a bare tree) unites them. Both are illegible to the power that demands their service.

Later in his journey, Launcelot has another brush with both unstableness and blankness when he discovers a tournament of white knights battling black knights. Launcelot joins the side of the losing black knights “for to helpe there the wayker party, in incresyng of hys shevalry” (536). An anchoress later clarifies that this tournament symbolizes the conflict between worldly and spiritual values, explaining that the black knights signify sinners while the white knights are “good men” who have “chosyn chastité” (537). Launcelot thus aids the sinful side to increase his

own worship, a double error of poor judgment and pride. In the battle, the white knights surround Launcelot until he is “so faynt” and “so wery” that he is unable to “lyffte up hys armys for to gyff one stroke,” at which point they capture him and lead him away into the forest. Launcelot’s exhaustion is another variation on the blankness of unconsciousness or magical sleep, allowing him to be made captive without the characterizing question being posed. The encounter concludes without a resolution to Launcelot’s status. “Blessed be God that ye be now of oure felyship, for we shall holde you in oure preson,” the white knights declare enigmatically—and then they leave (“they leffte hym with few wordys”) (536). Launcelot is both part of their “felyship,” which implies the honor and comradeship of honorable yielding, *and* in their “preson,” which implies either dishonorable yielding (if it is shameful treatment) or resistance (if it is a means to hold him). Although he has just participated in a battle between foes who represent precisely the forces competing for his loyalty, Launcelot’s status at the end of that battle remains unstable.

The anchoress who explains the battle’s meaning to Launcelot warns him that God is “wrothe with you,” which confirms at least that Launcelot’s capture by the white knights does not mean he has successfully joined their fellowship (537). After this adventure, Launcelot seems resolved to practice humility and obedience. At the river Mortays, he endures a swift and silent defeat by an anonymous attacker (“Withoute any worde [the knight] smote Sir Launcelottis horse to the dethe; and so he paste on”). Again, the encounter does not allow for the characterizing question to be asked or answered, but Launcelot’s response—simply to thank God for the incident—implies a degree of acceptance (538). He has ceased to struggle—for the moment—and is prepared to accept God’s narrative rather than fighting for his own worship. The text leaves Launcelot in this moment of submission for a long, suspended time, turning to the adventures of other knights on the quest before rediscovering Launcelot sleeping on the river’s bank (573). In context, this period of sleep and narrative deferral emphasizes Launcelot’s newfound passivity more than strict illegibility (he awakens in an ongoing spirit of obedience to

God that persists until his final vision of the Grail). Still, such passivity contrasts with the more clear-cut tests that Grail achievers such as Bors and Percivale face in which they decisively commit to God's service. Launcelot may have ceased resisting God—and thereby offered an implied surrender—but he hasn't positively yielded to God, either.

Launcelot's inability to yield completely is finally proven when his quest ends at the castle of Carbonek. Entering the castle, he faces a last series of tests that all represent versions of the characterizing choice, asking him to choose between loyalty to the world and loyalty to God. As I discussed in chapter 2, he is confronted by two lions and draws his sword to protect himself, whereupon a voice accuses him of error: "man of evylle feyth and poure byleve, wherefore trustist thou more on thy harneyse than in thy Maker? For He myght more avayle the than thyne armour in what servyse that thou arte sette in" (575-6). Launcelot sheathes his sword, thanks God, and adds, "now se I that Thou holdist me for one of Thy servauntes" (576). Not only does he interpret the voice's word "servyse" as confirmation that he is, indeed, God's vassal, but he speaks as if this is the first such confirmation he's gotten ("now se I"). Having never achieved a clear moment of yielding to God, Launcelot seizes on this moment as a characterizing substitute. As he makes his way through the castle, however, his yielding remains problematic. He tries to force open a shut door before remembering that he must ask God to open it, instead. His self-narrative then interferes for the last time when he races into the Grail chapel—which he has been forbidden to enter—to help the overburdened priest. He prays for permission as he does so ("Fayre Fadir, Jesu Cryste, ne take hit for no synne if I helpe the good man whych hath grete nede of helpe" 577]), but his act is defiant. The unstable Launcelot is trying to have it both ways: to simultaneously yield (as his prayer suggests) and self-narrate (by making his own decision to act).

Launcelot's final "both/and" response to God's last yield-or-die test is punished, appropriately, by blankness. Blasted by divine "breeth" like "fyre," Launcelot "felle to the erthe, and had no power to aryse, as he that had loste the power of hys body, and hys hyrynge and

syght.” He seems to retain just enough awareness to feel “many hondys whych toke hym up and bare hym oute of the chambir doore and leffte hym there, semyng dede to all people,” but by the time the castle’s residents discover him in the morning, he is nothing but an illegible body that has mysteriously appeared overnight in their home: “so they loked uppon hym, and felte hys powse to wete whethir were ony lyff in hym; and so they founde lyff in hym, but he myght nat stonde nother stirre no membir that he had.” They put Launcelot in bed, while “one seyde he was on lyve, and another seyde nay, he was dede.” Malory’s syntax echoes Launcelot’s doubled/blank state: “nat . . . nother,” “one seyde he was . . . and another seyde nay.” On the advice of a devout old man, the people care for Launcelot for twenty-four days while “ever he lay styll as a dede man.” Like his period of madness earlier in the text, Launcelot again spends a period of time lost to himself and unreadable by those around him.

Illegible unconsciousness can be a kind of narrative grace, as I have discussed, when it spares a main character from making a story-ending choice between yielding and resistant death. By falling unconscious in his battle with Orgoglio, Spenser’s Redcrosse is spared such a choice and kept alive to experience the theological grace that Una urges him to accept. Launcelot’s unconsciousness here at the end of the Grail quest is similarly a mark of grace within the frame of his struggle to become God’s servant through yielding. While his failure to yield completely might merit death, he is instead stunned into speechless unconsciousness for weeks and his quest for the Grail ends with his answer to God’s yield-or-die question indefinitely deferred. Launcelot’s experience while unconscious is appropriately paradoxical and indescribable, not clearly one thing or another. He is sorry to awake because the experience is pleasant (“I was more at ease than I am now”), but he also “thought hit was ponyshemente for the foure and twenty yere that he had bene a synner.” He is unable to explain his sleep in detail to the people of the castle, telling them that he saw “grete marvayles that no tunge may telle, and more than ony herte can thynke—and had nat my synne bene beforetyme, ellis I had sene mucche more”; he is aware that Christ has further “grete mervayles of secretnesse” that he could not witness (577).

What he has seen, he cannot recount, and there was more he could not see. The grace of illegible unconsciousness has spared him from decisive yielding or resistance and left his characterization open for further development. He remains an unstable self with a seeming inability to obey God: poignantly, after awakening, he notices that his caregivers have taken off the hair shirt he was wearing as penance, meaning that he has “brokyn his promyse unto the ermyte” who imposed that penance and thus involuntarily disobeyed divine orders once again (577).

As his part of the Grail quest concludes, Launcelot regains much of his accustomed worldly identity just as he did at the conclusion of the Elaine sequence. Echoing his words upon wakening from madness during that section, he asks where he is and learns his location (577). He dresses (starting with the hair shirt), and the restoration of his clothing allows a restoration of his public identity: his hosts suddenly “knew hym well that he was Sir Launcelot, the good knyght—and than they seyde all, ‘A, my lorde Sir Launcelott, ye be he!’ And he seyde, “Yee truly, I am he” (578). Mirroring the very end of the Elaine sequence, Launcelot’s Grail quest ends in Arthur’s court with the story of his adventures being told to the king and queen (579).

The epilogue to Launcelot’s story comes at the end of his life when, after decades of deferral, he yields fully to God. After Arthur’s death, Launcelot makes one last attempt to persuade Gwennyvere, now a nun, to live with him, but she refuses. In response, he vows to become a hermit-priest. Gwennyvere, justifiably, suspects that his promise will prove unstable, saying, “But I may never beleve you . . . but that ye woll turne to the worlde agayne” (692). Launcelot insists that Gwennyvere’s love has always been his strongest tie to “the worlde” and reiterates his promise that, with that tie now cut, he “must nedys take me to perfection, of ryght” (692) (a choice of words that hints interestingly at coercion, as if yet again, his interactions with the divine are not fully under the control of his own legible choice). They separate, and Launcelot discovers the very hermitage where Arthur has been (probably!) buried. With his beloved irrevocably lost and his feudal lord dead, Launcelot asks, “Alas, who may truste thys

world?”—perhaps finally accepting his son’s warning against “this worlde unstable.” He joins the chapel’s brotherhood and, until his death, “servyd God day and night with prayers and fastynges” (693). With that service, Launcelot finally, firmly renounces the world and, with it, the causes of his illegibility: not only the world’s inherent unstableness but also the world’s function as a captor-figure competing with God for Launcelot’s loyalty. Launcelot, at last, dies as a legible vassal of God, his death marked by visions and signs of his holiness (696), his life narrated in his brother Ector’s eulogy, and “his vysage . . . layed open and naked, that al folkes myght beholde hym” until his burial (696-7). Launcelot’s yielding to God follows a lifetime of deferral, unstableness, and blankness before its accomplishment.

Malory’s Palomydes

No character in Malory’s book—or perhaps in any of the texts I examine—circumvents, defies, and exposes the limits of the yield-or-die discourse more often than Sir Palomydes. To catalogue every incident in which his thoughts, words, or actions challenge the system would be nearly impossible: his adventures as a whole form a strikingly effective deconstruction of the yielding/resistance binary. Unstableness is one of Palomydes’s major qualities. He frequently seems to hold contradictory positions or possess paradoxical traits, exhibiting an inconstancy of characterization that allows him to slide from yielding to resistant and back again without apparent long-term consequences. Similarly, Palomydes has moments of blankness—silence, sleep, unconsciousness—as well as moments in which his behavior is simply unreadable. Deferral, too, haunts his behavior seemingly whether he wills it or not. In the secular arena, knights and kings, most notably Trystram, try and fail to subdue Palomydes into honorable or slavish service or, alternatively, to kill him as he resists. In a spiritual sense, too, the Saracen Palomydes is explicitly not Christian; throughout his adventures, various conversations and

incidents warn him that he ought to be baptized—to enter the formal service of God. He delays and circumvents this variation of yielding repeatedly while never offering clear resistance to it.¹⁶⁶

Palomydes's long relationship with Trystram is fraught with the unstableness and blankness of illegibility, so their strange, contentious association can guide my exploration of Palomydes's secular illegibility (I will come to his spiritual illegibility later). Immediately before Palomydes enters Trystram's life, Trystram, preparing to defend King Mark's interests in a combat with Sir Marhalte, reminds us of the rigidity of dishonorable yielding as he declares, "I woll never be yoldyn for cowardyse. . . . And yf so be that I fle other yelde me as recreaunte, bydde myne eme bury me never in Crystyn buryellys" (235). This reminder of the usual, *legible* yield-or-die ideology forms a stark contrast with what happens once Palomydes arrives.

Trystram wins his battle and, recovering from his wounds in Ireland, falls in love with La Beale Isode, who already has another suitor—Sir Palomydes, whom Trystram knows is "a noble knyght and a myghty man" (238). Trystram gives Palomydes a fall at a tournament, and Palomydes responds with what we will learn is a characteristic maneuver: feeling "sore ashamed," he "as prevayly as he myght . . . withdrew hym oute of the fylde." Private emotion, solitude, and deferral of combat are concepts that will arise again and again around Palomydes throughout this discussion; here, his departure attempts to evade a definitive, yield-or-die

¹⁶⁶ For a brief but effective contextualization of Palomydes within both Malory's Arthurian world and scholarly discourse, see Bonnie Wheeler's "Grief in Avalon: Sir Palomydes' Psychic Pain." Palomydes's doubled identities, in particular, have predictably inspired much valuable critical comment. For example, Andrew Lynch argues that Palomydes's "narrative significance is established by unusually mixed behavior which both departs from and asserts the public standard" (108-9) and, further, that "Palamides' impossible double identity—noble yet envious, 'well-conditioned' yet a 'fool' 'full of despite,' poses many problems to the discourse of prowess . . . and threatens to damage its effectiveness" (123). The Saracen knight's cultural and religious otherness has, especially, received much discussion in this context. Dorsey Armstrong declares that "[h]is otherness, his strangeness, is arguably the result of his split personality"—split, that is, between Saracen and Christian (113). In his article "Assimilating Saracens," Donald L. Hoffman explores more broadly how Palomydes-as-Saracen is both religiously and culturally "other" even as he also aspires (sometimes more fervently than local British knights) to assimilate to the values of Arthur's court (49-56). The entire issue of *Arthuriana* in which Hoffman's article appears (vol. 16, Winter 2006) is dedicated to the topic of "Saracens in Malory" and so contains additional comments on Palomydes in that context.

ending to the battle. Trystram, however, does not allow Palomydes to slip away. He follows and demands a more decisive confrontation, which he wins. The crucial moment thus arrives in which Trystram offers Palomydes the choice that ought to characterize him for the rest of the text:

So than Sir Trystrams bade hym yelde hym and do his commaundement,
other ellise he wolde sle hym.

Whan Sir Palomydes behylde hys countenaunce, he drad his buffettes so, that
he graunted all his askynges.

“Well, seyde Sir Tramtryste, “this shall be youre charge: fyrst, uppon payne of
youre lyff, that ye forsake my lady, La Beale Isode, and in no maner of wyse that
ye draw no more to hir—

“Also, this twelvemonth and a day that ye bere none armys nother none
harneys of were. Now promyse me this, othir here shalt thou dye.”

“Alas,” seyde Sir Palomydes, “for ever I am shamed.” Than he sware as Sir
Trystrames had commaunded him. (240)

The moment is worth quoting in detail because it is a textbook example of dishonorable yielding: Trystram repeatedly threatens death, Palomydes reacts out of dread, and the ostensible shameful characterization is permanent (“for ever”). Under the rules of the system, Palomydes has surrendered his self-narrating power to Trystram and should now function exclusively as a tool of Trystram’s narrative, a slavish supporter of Trystram in the story’s world and a supporting character with no narrative power at the formal level. This incident should be the last in which Palomydes makes his own decisions.

That doesn’t happen. Instead, this incident is merely the first appearance of Palomydes in Malory’s book, throughout which Palomydes’s actions toward Trystram and others will be motivated by an odd combination of his own self-narrative and respect for Trystram . . . when, that is, his motives for action are clear at all. This initial encounter—which looks so much like

absolute, shameful yielding—reverberates within but in no way destroys Palomydes’s self-narrative.¹⁶⁷

The next major meeting of the two knights occurs when Palomydes defies his promise to stop pursuing Isode (and thereby exerts narrative power he should not, in terms of the discourse, still possess). He maneuvers Mark into honoring a rash promise from Isode that forces Isode to leave the court with Palomydes (262-3). The event amounts to Palomydes abducting Isode, who, following the logic of escape that I discussed in chapter 3, seizes her first chance to run from Palomydes to “a welle” where “she had thought to have drowned herself,” proving her preference for death over captivity. As if activated by Isode’s defiance, another knight gives Isode refuge in his castle. Palomydes swiftly defeats that knight but finds himself locked out of the castle by Isode herself (264). At this point, Palomydes’s actions begin to lose characterizing coherence: after dismounting (a kind of putting-aside of a key aspect of knightly identity, his horse), he “sette hymselff downe at the gate, lyke a man that was oute of his wytt that recked nat of hymselff” (264). Here, Trystram, riding to Isode’s rescue, finds him: “Sir Palomydes sate at the gate and sawe where Sir Trystrames cam; and he sate as he had slepe, and his horse pastured afore him” (265).

The ambiguous narration emphasizes the weirdness of the scene. Palomydes explicitly *does* see Trystram arrive but also seems to be asleep—for some reason. Trystram’s faithful servant Governayle delivers a challenge, but now, the narrator says, Palomydes “was in suche a study he herde nat what he seyde.” Is Palomydes’s trance real or feigned? We can’t tell, nor can his fellow characters. Governayle informs Trystram that that Palomydes is either asleep “or ellys . . . madde”—even the exact nature of Palomydes’s semi-conscious state is unclear. Trystram sends Governayle a second time with a sterner challenge that the squire emphasizes by

¹⁶⁷ Lynch’s discussion in *Malory’s Book of Arms* of the Trystram section and, in particular, of “the problem of Palamides” (108-33) analyzes how the text produces Palomydes as a character with interiority—an unexpected development in Malory’s book—and addresses many of the same aspects of this character that I do here. His discussion generally agrees with and has helped me to sharpen my own.

prodding Palomydes with a spear, at which point “Sir Palomydes arose styly, withoute ony wordys, and gate hys horse anone.” The subsequent fight begins in eerie silence (265).

Doubleness (awake/asleep, asleep/mad) and blankness (sleep, silence, wordlessness) are Palomydes’s primary traits in this scene. As a result, a narrative haze conceals Palomydes’s attitude toward Trystram, who had previously seemed to force such a decisive yielding upon him. This meeting is their first since then, and yet the status of their relationship is mysterious due to Palomydes’s behavior.

Continuing the ambiguity, the fight ends inconclusively (although Palomydes is “mucher sorer wounded”) when Isode, fearing for Palomydes’s unchristened soul, tells Trystram to stop the fight prematurely for her sake. “I woll be ruled by you,” he agrees, reluctantly. Isode then orders Palomydes to take a message announcing the land’s four greatest lovers (Launcelot and Gwenyvere, Trystram and Isode) to Gwenyvere in Camelot. Palomydes’s first and only dialogue in the scene is his reply to Isode: “Madame, I woll obey your commaundement . . . whyche is sore ayenste my wylle” (266). Palomydes’s response might sound like yielding. If Isode’s judgment that he is going to lose the fight is correct, then he obeys her in part to save his life, and the message he agrees to carry pushes his self-narrative out of sight in favor of the people who have saved him. That said, his response is doubled and paradoxical. It echoes Trystram’s obedient words, a similarity that suggests both men are merely showing courtly respect to the lady they serve. Further, the syntax of his agreement is paradoxical—“I *woll* obey . . . ayenste my *wylle*”—recalling his earlier confusing behavior in the scene and leaving us with the impression that Palomydes’s “will” may be temporarily restrained but is by no means predictably under either Trystram’s or Isode’s control. Thus, as the sequence ends, Palomydes is neither yielded nor resistant in any clear sense.

Future interactions between Palomydes and Trystram continue to involve unstableness and blankness on Palomydes’s side. One crucial incident occurs during the tournament at the Castle of Maidens, when a squire arrives at a well to find “a knyght bounden tyll a tre, cryng as

he had bene woode, and his horse and hys harnys stondyng by hym.” The knight breaks free and rushes the squire with his sword. We will learn that this knight is Palomydes, but for this moment he goes unidentified, making him an eerie, blank figure who nonetheless echoes the earlier Palomydes who sat illegibly outside Isode’s safehouse, his horse nearby. Then, he was either feigning sleep, actually asleep, or mad; this time he is bound, crying, and possibly mad. We never learn, for certain, who bound him or under what circumstances—depriving this minor captivity of any characterizing power and adding to the prisoner’s blankness—and yet the binding quickly becomes irrelevant as Palomydes breaks free to rush the squire. One instant he is bound and weeping; the next instant he’s in vigorous, violent, potentially lethal motion.

The squire flees, tells his story, and Trystram sets off to rescue this mysterious “good knyght” from whatever hardship he is suffering, unwittingly beginning another inexplicable encounter with his strange nemesis. Arriving at the well, Trystram overhears and recognizes Palomydes as he laments some unspecified “falsehed and treson” that “Sir Bors and Sir Ector” have inflicted on him.¹⁶⁸ Then, famously, as Trystram watches, Palomydes “gate his swerde in hys honde and made many straunge sygnes and tokyns; and so thorow the rageynge he threw hys swerd in that fountayne. Than Sir Palomydes wayled and wrange hys hondys—and at the laste, for pure sorow, he ran into that fountayne and sought aftir hys swerde” (319). Other scholars have offered many persuasive explications of this scene, arguing that the “straunge sygnes and tokyns” might be markers of Palomydes’s Saracen otherness and noting that some of the narrative confusion here involves plot points that have been blurred in the transition from source texts to Malory’s version.¹⁶⁹ Taking the text at face value, I would simply add that this

¹⁶⁸ We might assume that Bors and Ector are the culprits who bound Palomydes to the tree, but Palomydes later comments that the King with the Hundred Knights has already “rescowed me frome Sir Bors de Ganys and Sir Ector,” implying that the tree-binding is a separate and still unexplained event (320).

¹⁶⁹ Lynch describes Palomydes’s fit as an “identity crisis” brought on by awareness of “Trystram’s superiority” (115). Armstrong attributes Palomydes’s gestures to a level of emotionality and expressiveness unique among Malory’s knights, arguing that “Palomides’s

moment again depicts Palomydes reacting illegibly to an incident of captivity. Neither the watching Trystram, nor the narrator's voice, nor we the readers can interpret the "straunge sygnes," identify the exact misdeeds of Bors and Ector, trace how Palomydes ended up in this plight, or sort out why Palomydes first rejects and then seeks his sword.

In the interactions that immediately follow this scene, illegibility, as if infectious, begins to mark Trystram's behavior as well. Trystram embraces Palomydes but refuses to identify himself (319). Palomydes doesn't recognize him but does review his history of interactions with Trystram, concluding that he longs to "fyght with hym" even though "Sir Trystram ys the jantyllyste knyght in thys worlde lyvyng" (a doubled, somewhat paradoxical sentiment). Trystram invites Palomydes to spend the night in his lodging, and throughout that evening "in no wyse Sir Trystram myght nat be knowyn with Sir Palomydes" (an instance of the knightly anonymity typical of romance, but in this context also of contagious illegibility). Palomydes, who can't sleep, slips away "prevayly" before dawn; and the episode comes to an ambiguous end (320). Trystram's illegibility to Palomydes, followed by Palomydes's secretive departure, prevent the fight Palomydes claims to desire. The yield-or-die discourse again cannot do its characterizing work.

The same theme continues to repeat with new variations. Trystram knocks Palomydes unconscious in a forest joust, a seeming victory that nonetheless ends in the narrative grace of

despair becomes so overwhelming that he is reduced to making bizarre gestures, unable to verbalize his anguished position. Palomides's inability to articulate what he is feeling—even as soliloquy, a mode particular associated with the Saracen knight—paired with the narrator's striking inability to describe exactly the 'straunge sygnes and tokyns' that he makes, suggest Palomides's radical difference from the other knights" and "points to Palomides's status as Other." Armstrong adds that Palomydes's indescribable gestures may be fruitfully compared to the indescribable Holy Grail, which is also, in a sense, foreign to the text's English chivalric culture (113-4); as I commented in my discussion of Launcelot, the Grail is (especially in relationship to Launcelot) characterized by obscurity and, arguably, illegibility. Sue Ellen Holbrook's article "To the Well" notes that Malory excises clarifying details from his source texts in this scene, but argues that Palomydes's behavior may, in some ways, connect him to his fellow knights (because it may recall the thrashing action of Malory's tournaments and the madness of Launcelot and Trystram, and because it earns Palomydes sympathetic reactions rather than pure disgust) (75-6).

unconsciousness rather than formal yielding (322). Palomydes experiences another episode of strange, illegible behavior as a result of this inconclusive encounter: “nyghehonde araged oute of hys wytte,” Palomydes attempts to follow Trystram but, “in hys woodnes,” he forces his horse to attempt to leap a wide river. Horse and rider fall into the water, the horse drowns, and Palomydes barely makes it to the riverbank, where “he toke of hys harnys and sate romynge and cryynge as a man oute of hys mynde.” Once again, Palomydes sits without horse or armor—markers of knightly identity that this time are not merely set aside but (in the horse’s case) literally submerged, swept away, lost—and seems unwilling or unable to access a clear self-narrative. He is found by a damsel who attempts to speak with him, but “he and she had langage togyder whych pleased neythir of them,” a wry understatement that also turns Palomydes’s speech into a vague negative space: it is unpleasing in unspecified ways (324).

Soon afterward, Trystram and Palomydes share an experience of literal imprisonment that, once again, fails to characterize Palomydes. At the castle of Sir Darras, Trystram recognizes but does not acknowledge Palomydes, while Palomydes again doesn’t immediately recognize Trystram (325). Then Sir Darras learns that Trystram has killed his sons in a tournament, a powerful moment of recognition that causes Darras to throw Trystram and his companions—Palomydes and Dynadan—into his dungeon. This captivity is distinctly about Trystram’s deeds and Trystram’s narrative (indeed, I discuss it as such as an example of plaint in chapter 3). Palomydes is involved tangentially because he is at the castle in Trystram’s company. On one hand, the incident suggests that Palomydes is in a yielded position after all, swept up in Trystram’s narrative rather than experiencing his own. He is imprisoned because of his association with Trystram and his supportive amplification of Trystram’s unhappiness helps gain Darras’s sympathy and their freedom. On the other hand, Palomydes spends the first part of their mutual imprisonment (after he knows who Trystram is) asserting his resistance to any yielding or friendship with Trystram: “every day Sir Palomydes wolde repreve Sir Trystram of olde hate betwyxt them.” Then Trystram falls sick and Palomydes abruptly changes his tune,

feeling “hevy for hym and comfort[ing] hym in all the beste wyse he coude” (327). Here, again, is the doubleness of illegibility—Palomydes seems to be yielding and resistant at the same time.

Malory’s text happens to augment this sense of doubleness by providing two separate versions of Palomydes and Trystram’s interaction in this prison. The first is that which I have just described: once in prison, Palomydes recognizes Trystram and, as a result, revisits their “olde hate” until Trystram’s sickness inspires Palomydes to feel sympathy and change his behavior accordingly. The second version of the same events appears later, after an intervening incident with other knights and King Mark. In this version, Palomydes distinctly does *not* recognize Trystram in prison when insulting him at first. He “brawled and seyde langayge ayenste Sir Trystram” until Sir Dynadan chastises him and reveals their fellow prisoner “ys Sir Trystram,” daring Palomydes to continue his insults now that he knows their object is present. Palomydes feels “abaysshed, and seyde lityll” (331), slipping into a minor version of his typical illegibility. Trystram speaks up with his own characteristic pragmatism, declaring that fighting Palomydes now would be pointless because their captor wouldn’t allow it, but he does not fear to fight Palomydes in the future. “And so they peaced hemselff,” Malory concludes, adding that after Trystram becomes sick, Palomydes joins Dynadan in sorrow for his suffering (332). This expanded version of the prison experience is less flattering for Palomydes—he doesn’t dare insult Trystram to his face, and his change of behavior is motivated less purely by compassion alone—but it preserves Palomydes’s illegibility through his silence in response to his cellmates’ reprimands. Whatever authorial choice or textual instability has led to this doubled narration of the prison episode, the doubleness itself—and the contradictions between the two versions—intensifies the mood of illegibility in this incident. We, as readers, lack a single clear narrative of this interaction and, in particular, of Palomydes’s role within it.

Palomydes yielded dishonorably to Trystram shortly after they met; his illegibility means that he hasn’t behaved as a traditionally yielding character since then, but the yielding moment happened. After this period of indecisive encounters, Palomydes suddenly yields *honorably* to

Trystram—out of respect, not fear—and yet this second yielding doesn't have clear, permanent results, either.¹⁷⁰ The moment, like the first, is worth quoting in detail. Trystram knocks Palomydes off his horse in a joust. Palomydes draws his sword to continue the combat and, again not recognizing his foe, declares his hatred for Trystram. Trystram then reveals himself by reveals and tells Palomydes to “do your warste!”

Whan Sir Palomydes herd hym sey so he was astoned. And than he seyde thus: “I pray you, Sir Trystram, forgyff me all my evyll wyll! And yf I lyve, I shall do you servyse afore all other knyghtes that bene lyvyng; and there as I have owed you evyll wyll, me sore repentes. I wote nat what eylyth me, for mesemyth that ye ar a good knyght; and that ony other knyght that namyth hymselff a good knyght sholde hate you, me sore mervaylyth. . . .” (414-5)

The word “astoned” often marks the shock that goes along with facing the yield-or-die demand—the shock that, continued indefinitely, becomes illegibility. Here, although Trystram has not precisely posed the characterizing question, he has certainly challenged Palomydes to fight to an ultimate conclusion of their differences. Palomydes's astonishment in response recalls his frequent bouts of illegible behavior when faced with Trystram and implies that Palomydes's self-narrative has (again) received the shock of facing the yield-or-die demand. This time, however, he moves past the shock quickly and yields, clearly and decisively, in language that anticipates the honorable “servyse” done by a vassal to a lord. That said, his comments also reveal that Palomydes is, in some ways, illegible to himself (“I wote nat what eylyth me,” he says, and “sore mervaylyth” that any good knight could hate Trystram as he did).

¹⁷⁰ Lynch offers a poignant and accurate description of Palomydes's repeated engagements with the act I call yielding, saying that “Palamides' lonely career is studded with dismissals, in which he becomes the object of another's intention: the bearer of defeat in his own person, and the victor's messenger” (110-1). Following this incident, Lynch agrees that Palomydes spends time as Trystram's “chief vassal” (119), but that the relationship fails to become either straightforward or permanent. Lynch describes this indeterminacy as “[t]he oddly unresolved situation of Palamides, unable either to submit to his betters, or to be destroyed by them” (122). In my terms, Palomydes is “unable” either to yield or die—he is illegible.

Trystram affirms that Palomydes is “a good knyght, for I have seyne you preved,” offering his own testimony about Palomydes’s identity before again offering to fight to settle any remaining grievances. Trystram seems to be seeking closure, and Palomydes seems to give it, repeating that “I woll do you knyghtly servyse in all thyng as ye woll commaunde me.” Trystram answers, “Sir, ryght so I woll take you,” and, apparently, Palomydes’s status as vassal to Trystram is sealed. Trystram’s verb “take” means most obviously a formal taking-into-service but bears a relevant connotation of capture as well. It also, possibly, hints at an act of tentative interpretation (as if Trystram is saying “I will choose to interpret your words as sincere”); to imagine Trystram wryly hinting at Palomydes’s unreliable relationship with yielding is tempting (415).

For a segment of the narrative after this incident, Palomydes does behave as Trystram’s vassal, serving Trystram’s narrative rather than his own. He pursues the adventure of the Red City only with Trystram’s blessing (418) and enters the tournament at Lonzep as a member of Trystram’s party (432). As that tournament progresses, however, Palomydes’s self-narrative seems almost inexorably to reassert itself. His ongoing fascination with Isode reappears as an ominous sign that he is still unable to set aside his competition with Trystram for her love (428, 435). He then yields to Launcelot to avoid an embarrassing defeat (436)—a moment that passes quickly but to which I will return at the very end of this discussion. Launcelot and Trystram share a brotherly bond, so Palomydes arguably isn’t straying too far by yielding to Launcelot (especially in the relatively playful setting of a tournament). Still, the moment dilutes his loyalty to Trystram and suggests, again, the ongoing presence of a self narrative that is capable of making the choice to yield or resist.

By the tournament’s second day, Palomydes is lying to Trystram in order to fight against him on the battlefield, a clear act of resistance. Trystram, realizing this, sets out to outshine his vassal (440-1). Trystram wins everyone’s acclaim, while Palomydes lapses back into a state familiar from their previous encounters; as Launcelot describes his behavior: “yondir ye may se

Sir Palomydes beholdyth and hovyth, and doth lytyll or naught. . . . [Y]e may se how Sir Palomydes hovyth yondir as thoughe he were in a dreame” (442). Once again, Palomydes has entered a vague, hesitant, hazy state in response to a fight he (probably) can’t win. Both Trystram and Launcelot, however, have no trouble continuing to interpret him. Trystram thinks to himself that Palomydes must be “wery of my company” (441) while Launcelot suspects that Palomydes “ys full hevvy that Sir Trystram doyth suche dedys of armys” (442). For the moment, Palomydes is still more legible than he used to be (at least to characters to whom he has recently yielded; by contrast, Launcelot has to explain Palomydes to Arthur).

Palomydes’s subsequent behavior, however, grows increasingly confusing, and gradually those observing him find that their interpretations differ from one another. As Trystram and Palomydes jockey for battlefield dominance through a muddle of disguise and counter-disguise, Isode watches from a high window (443) and observes “all [Palomydes’s] treson, frome the begynnyng to the endyng” (445). Isode later insists to Trystram that Palomydes is a “felonne and traytoure” who “wylfully . . . ded batyle wyth you” (446)—and the events, as Malory has narrated them previously, tend to back her up. Palomydes, however, has maintained plausible deniability throughout, and uses it now, insisting that he never recognized the disguised Trystram. Trystram, perhaps a little skeptically, accepts Palomydes’s version of events (446). Shortly after, King Arthur takes Isode’s side, accusing Palomydes of “unknyghtly” behavior, but Palomydes repeats that he didn’t recognize Trystram, and Launcelot affirms that such a misrecognition seems reasonable, “for I knew hym nat myselff” (447-8). With that endorsement, Trystram repeats that “I have pardouned hym, and I wolde be ryght lothe to leve hys felyshyp, for I love ryght well hys company.” Nonetheless, that night, the narrator tells us, “wyte you well, Sir Palomydes had grete envy hartely,” and cries sleeplessly until morning (448). The sequence is a jumble of competing attempts to interpret—and control—what’s happening, and none of them really seem to work.

The next day, Palomydes realizes that his hopes for glory at Trystram's expense are doomed, which activates his habitual response to any of his near-defeats by Trystram. He leaves the battlefield "waylynge, and so wythdrewe hym tylle he cam to a welle; and there he put his horse from hym and ded of his armoure, and wayled and wepte lyke as he had bene a wood man" (450). As usual—and rather than either yielding or resisting—he seeks solitude, lays aside his external markers of knightly identity, and behaves inscrutably. Later, he approaches Trystram once more and seems to offer Trystram resistance (calling him "traytoure"), but deferral rather than resolution is embedded in his threat that "if ever I may gete the . . . thou shalt dye" (450). He and Trystram part as enemies—but, in a final twist, Palomydes is as devastated to be separated from Trystram as from Isode because Trystram "was so kynde and so jantyll" (451). Palomydes simultaneously loves and hates, yields to and resists, Trystram.

Overall, Palomydes at Lonzep is a strikingly psychological and even compassionate portrait of "envy" (442, 448), as Palomydes simultaneously struggles to defeat and outshine Trystram while at the same time attempting to stay in Trystram's company. The qualities that attract him to Trystram are those that also make him envious, and he suffers real pain because of this. Additionally, the sequence is a strikingly psychological depiction of illegibility, the inability to yield or resist decisively. Palomydes wants two contradictory outcomes (or arguably doesn't even know what he wants); his fellow characters and even the narrator attempt to characterize his motives but end up mired in contradictions. On one hand, Palomydes has yielded (twice) to Trystram, but on the other hand he finds himself unable to stop competing with his lord, however hopeless that may be. At Lonzep, the combined admiration and aggression of envy becomes the combined yielding and resistance of illegibility.

The incidents that conclude Palomydes's secular adventures all suggest that his illegibility will never completely be resolved. First, Palomydes and his brother are assaulted by a group of knights who accuse Palomydes of killing their lord at Lonzep. On its surface, this scene suggests the clear-cut rigidity of yielding. The men "behylde Sir Palomydes and knew him" as

the killer; one of the knights repeats “I know hym well”; and the group declare to Palomydes that “thou arte knowyn!” (in terms of my discussion, this repetition of “knowing” is powerfully suggestive of legibility; for characters to say this of Palomydes is unusual). Palomydes and his brother lose the subsequent fight and are “takyn and yoldyn and put in a stronge preson,” where they are tried for the lord’s murder and Palomydes is convicted and sentenced to a shameful execution. At this point, despite being known and having yielded, Palomydes shifts—with the unstableness of illegibility—into resistant behavior, declaring that “and I had wyste of this deth that I am derved unto, I sholde never have bene yoldyn” (455). His statement implies that he has forgotten a kind of knightly due diligence, yielding without carefully researching his captors’ plans for him (compare his action, for example, to Trystram’s wisdom in yielding to Galahalt [260] or Gareth’s care in promising to “yelde me” to an unknown lord “with that I undirstonde that he woll do me no shame” [220]). Palomydes’s statement also, however, implicitly blames his captors for not making their plans clear to him so that he could have elected an honorable death in battle against them. Either way, the end result is a voiding of the yielding arrangement. Palomydes manages to open up space between his own self-narrative and his captors’, a space that makes room for a resumption of resistance. His captors continue to attempt to shame him by tying “his leggyis undir an olde steedis bealy” and leading him to his execution, imposing their narrative upon his body. Palomydes pushes back verbally, seizing an opportunity to complain to a passing knight as one nobleman to another. He addresses the newcomer as “my fayre felow and knyght” (emphasizing their mutual honorable status), speaking with regret of his wrongs against Trystram and Isode, and sending greetings to King Arthur and the Round Table (again emphasizing his honorable connections). Palomydes resists the shameful narrative imposed on him through this speech, which, among other things, insists upon his participation in an honorable chivalric community (456).

Palomydes’s narrative mostly wins out. The friendly knight, inspired by “pité,” runs for Trystram’s help, and Trystram immediately supports Palomydes’s interpretation of the situation,

saying, “Howbehit that I am wrothe wyth hym, yet I woll nat suffir hym to dye so shamefull a dethe, for he ys a full noble knyght.” Before Trystram can arrive, the execution party happens to pass Launcelot, who reacts as Trystram did, labeling the plight of the bound Palomydes a “mysseadventure” (suggesting accident or ill fortune) and declaring that “it were shame to me to suffir this noble knyght thus to dye and I myght helpe hym” (456). Palomydes has resisted the label of shameful, convicted murderer by instead invoking his status as a fellow of noble knights, and those noble knights respond accordingly, recognizing and acting upon the fellowship Palomydes has invoked. “Wyte thou well,” Launcelot concludes about the power of Palomydes’s self-narrative, “I, and ony knyght in this londe of worshyp, muste of verry ryght succoure and rescow so noble a knyght as ye are preved and renommed, thoroughoute all this realme, enlonge and overtwarte” (456). In sum, this incident marks another time and another way in which Palomydes has seemed to yield decisively only to slip away from his captors’ physical—and narrative—grasp.

After this event, Palomydes briefly reconciles with Trystram (again!) but falls ill with lovesickness for Isode. Like Arcite in the *Knight’s Tale*, Palomydes experiences lovesickness as a loss of identity: finding himself once again alone by a well, “in the watir he sawe his owne vysayge, how he was discolowred and defaded, a nothyng lyke as he was.” At first, his transformation is confusing even to himself, as he struggles to integrate this change into his self-narrative: “Lorde Jesu, what may this meane?” he asks, and continues, “A, Palomydes, Palomydes! Why arte thou thus defaded, and ever was wonte to be called one of the fayrest knyghtes of the worlde?” He only then makes a connection to his unrequited love for Isode. Captivity (or vassalage) is not obviously relevant to this scene, but it lurks in the background. Palomydes’s love for Isode is implicated in his strange blend of yielding and resistance to Trystram much as Arcite’s love for Emelye is implicated in his strange blend of yielding and resistance to Theseus (Arcite disguises himself as Theseus’s man in order to violate his exile and

see Emelye). Both characters are caught in semi-yielded relationships to male captor-figures when they are also overcome by lovesickness for women controlled by those captors.

Arguably, lovesickness itself is a variation on illegibility rather than merely an involved factor in these two cases. The love-captivity metaphors I discussed in chapter 2 generally imagine male characters yielding honorably, out of admiration, to ladies—with the crucial detail that the yielding is indeed *imaginary* (the man does not truly surrender control over his self-narrative, his selfhood, to the woman, especially when he's the one writing the sonnets using the metaphor in the first place). Female characters tend to be figured as yielding dishonorably—out of coercion or fear—when they are no longer able to defy their suitor-foe on the “battlefield” of love or lust. Within this metaphorical structure, Palomydes interacts with Isode much as he interacts with Trystram. When we first meet him, he is courting Isode and “in wyll to be crystynde for hir sake” (238)—not strictly employing a love-captivity metaphor, but certainly holding out the possibility of undergoing the self-revision of baptism because she wills it. Once Palomydes yields for the first time to Trystram, Trystram orders him to give up hopes of Isode (240), but Palomydes then abandons any pretense at passively “yielding” to Isode and instead attempts to make literal the woman’s version of love-captivity by abducting her “to lede hir and to governe her whereas me lyst” (263). No longer yielding, he briefly takes on the powerful role of captor before Isode escapes him (264). Palomydes’s semi-metaphorical yielding/resistant dynamic with Isode is then woven through his yielding/resistant experiences with Trystram throughout the rest of the tale, so that by the time he collapses, lovesick, by the well, his lovesickness reflects his inability either to yield metaphorically to Isode (so that he could, as her metaphorical vassal, receive “rewarde” or “bounté” for his service [459]) or to resist his love for her decisively. Arcite’s case is similar—he is also unable either to live out the metaphor of yielding to love or to resist the pull of that love. Both characters are stuck in an in-between space that might be called love-illegibility as well as lovesickness.

Palomydes's lovesickness leads to a challenge from Trystram and the two agree on the need for a decisive combat (459)—a climactic moment that then melts into deferral after deferral. Palomydes demands time to regain his strength. Then Trystram is injured by an errant arrow, forcing another delay (460). Then the two ride seeking and missing each other while adventuring (461). Then, at a narrative level, Malory abandons Palomydes and Trystram altogether, inserting the lengthy story of Launcelot's time with Elaine. Within the story's world, two years pass during this narrative digression, during which Trystram, at least, is so sidelined as to be oblivious to all the events involving Launcelot (Isode catches him up on the affair when he returns home from unspecified adventuring [490]).

This final deferral is fitting; delay so frequently surrounds Palomydes that it is a major motif of his adventures and a distinct feature of his illegibility. Sometimes, Palomydes deploys deferral as a deliberate tactic. For example, seeing Trystram approach in a forest, "he alyght and made a countenaunce to amende hys horse, but he ded hit for thys cause: for he abode Sir Gaherys that cam affir hym" (322). This deferral does no practical good; Trystram and Palomydes joust anyway (this is the fight in which Palomydes is knocked unconscious). More usefully, Palomydes sometimes breaks off a combat prematurely, while he is ahead, leaving his opponent feeling that a decisive conclusion has been put off. For example, he interrupts Trystram and Lamerok's moment of brotherly bonding when, while riding past in pursuit of the Questing Beast, "he smote downe Sir Trystramys and Sir Lamorak bothe with one speare—and so he departed . . . wherefore thes two knyghtes were passynge wrothe that Sir Palomydes wold nat fyght with hem on foote." Trystram in particular wants a rematch to "preve whether he be bettir knyght than I" (293). Palomydes later again surprises Trystram with a questionably honorable charge before Trystram is ready, giving Trystram a fall and then refusing to continue the conflict "at thys tyme" (314). Palomydes's refusal to finish these fights seems to leave him technically victorious, but the narrative voice (in the first instance) and Dynadan (in the second) comment that even great knights such as Trystram must occasionally suffer defeats at the hands

of lesser foes, arguing that “malefortune” has deprived Trystram of a rightful victory and suggesting that the incidents have no bearing on Trystram’s characterization as “the bygger knyght” (293). In other words, in both cases, incidents’ characterizing power is downplayed to the point of irrelevancy: Palomydes becomes an emblem of fortune rather than an actor in his own right. In other words, when Palomydes uses deferral as a tactic—which would seem to be an act of canny (if questionably honorable) resistance—the narrative nonetheless leaves him unconscious or erased in favor of fickle fortune.

More frequently, deferral is simply something that happens to and around Palomydes rather than an action he initiates.¹⁷¹ For example, he and Trystram repeatedly come to blows and are interrupted by onlookers, including Isode (265) and Dynadan and Gaherys (309), before reaching a decisive conclusion. Twice they schedule a major combat for a future date (itself an act of deferral) only to see that combat deferred further. The first time, Trystram unknowingly rescues an injured Palomydes from the perpetual pest Sir Bruce sans Pité; when each man realizes that the other is his “mortall enemy,” Palomydes insists that he must heal before their inevitable fight, so they set a future date to meet near Camelot (339). Following this initial deferral, Palomydes misses the appointment (343), later explaining that “I have a layrge excuse, for I was presonere with a lorde and many other mo” (358). This incident of captivity is otherwise not narrated (and therefore cannot be characterizing, making it, too, a minor moment of illegibility). Deferral piles upon deferral and illegibility upon illegibility, and this planned decisive combat between mortal foes never happens. The two knights’ second scheduled combat occurs at the end of their tale, as I have mentioned. In the case of the fights interrupted by onlookers and both these major scheduled combats, deferral simply happens rather than being

¹⁷¹ Lynch discusses Malory’s tale of Trystram overall as defined by deferral. After summarizing other critical comments on this issue in Malory, and on deferral as a generic marker of romance in general (79-83), Lynch argues that “a narrative desire to prolong, even to resist, the process of getting there” is essential to the text’s construction, and he urges us “to accept the massive dilation of event and the strong resistance to closure as irreducible features of the *Tristram*, distinctive narrative achievements rather than evidence of structural failure” (84).

willed by Palomydes (although Trystram sometimes sounds a little skeptical of that fact, even suspecting that Palomydes was the archer who shot him [460]). Other people intervene; Palomydes is imprisoned; Trystram is accidentally injured. If deferral were always clearly deliberate, then it could characterize Palomydes as either yielding (as, for example, when he yields to Launcelot to avoid a fight at Lonzep [436]) or resistant (as, for example, Sir Bruce resists capture by running from combat [482]). Instead, as an aspect of illegibility, deferral is not obviously interpretable as a tactic or deliberate choice by Palomydes—it simply accrues around him, and we (like Trystram) are left to wonder if any of it is under his control. He is a character who lives in the suspended crisis of illegibility, not the resolution of permanent yielding or resistance.

Malory's announcement of a return to the story of "Sir Trystram and of Sir Palomydes that was the Sarezen uncrystynde" (490) seemingly acknowledges that he has deferred not only Trystram's narrative, but also Palomydes's, and specifically the final battle between the two, which—at long last—happens immediately afterward. Appropriately, even this final battle begins in confusion and delay and ends indeterminately. When Trystram discovers Palomydes and makes an initial, reckless charge, Palomydes simply "stode styлле and byhylde Sir Trystram," provoking Trystram to demand an explanation for this unclear behavior: "Thou cowarde knyght, what castyste thou to do? And why wolt thou nat do batyle wyth me?" As he has since his second combat with Trystram (after the abduction of Isode, when he pretends to sleep), Palomydes is initially non-responsive to the conflict. In this case, however, we the readers are privy to Palomydes's thoughts, which he shares with Trystram as well and which are surprisingly straightforward. Trystram is rushing into this combat unarmed, seemingly full of "woodnes and . . . folly," and Palomydes is struggling with the chivalric dilemma of striking an unarmed opponent (491). They nearly again defer the fight, but then another knight agrees to loan Trystram his armor, and the fierce battle finally commences (492).

The fight ends unexpectedly in a manner that, once more, subverts the clarifying binaries of yielding and resistance. Trystram knocks away Palomydes's sword and—returning the favor of not fighting an unarmed opponent—encourages Palomydes to pick it up. Palomydes, instead, ends the fight. Although insisting that “As for to do thys batayle . . . I dare ryght well ende hyt” (meaning that he isn't stopping out of fear), Palomydes admits, “I have no grete luste to fyght no more” (a negatively constructed understatement). He comments that “ye have gyvyn me thys day many sad strokys—and som I have gyffyn you agayne” and announces that he would prefer to be “fryendys.” These references to exchange and friendship perhaps hope for a relationship almost like mutual yielding, but such equality doesn't exist here, as Palomydes acknowledges by also asking forgiveness for any outstanding grievances (494). Trystram declares that he forgives Palomydes, and the fight ends without a decisive victory. Arguably, Palomydes re-activates his honorable yielding by asking forgiveness and calling Trystram “my lorde” at the end of a fight he was probably going to lose, but the precise language of yielding—that Palomydes has not hesitated to use in the past—is absent (494). The two go to Arthur's Pentecost feast and then separate (in narrative terms forever, because this is the last time we encounter them together): Trystram back to Isode and Palomydes renewing the profoundly indeterminate pursuit of the Questing Beast (495). The ultimate status of their relationship has a veneer of friendly resolution but remains unsettled within the yield-or-die context. They are neither in conflict nor are they lord and vassal. The illegible Palomydes has never made a permanently characterizing choice when it comes to Trystram.

Obvious by now will be my omission, so far, of any discussion of Palomydes's long-delayed baptism, which is a crucial element of his interactions with Trystram and Isode from beginning to end as well as one of the most compelling aspects of his story in its own right. Palomydes's relationship with Christianity parallels his relationship with Trystram, in that it consists of a long period of illegibility that is (somewhat) resolved after his final battle. Palomydes is considering baptism as a sign of his loyalty to Isode from the time he first appears

in the tale (238). Later, when Palomydes kills Corsabryne and that “paynym” knight dies in a cloud of meaningfully hellish “stynke,” his fellow knights suggest that he receive his own baptism as soon as possible. Palomydes replies that “in my harte I am crystynde, and crystynde woll I be; but I have made suche a vowe that I may nat be crystynde tyll I have done seven trewe bataylis for Jesus sake. And then woll I be crystynde; and I truste that God woll take myne entente, for I meane truly” (397; the narrator later adds that achieving the Questing Beast is an additional condition of this vow [424]). At the end of their story, as they are about to defer their ultimate conflict once more, Trystram asks Palomydes why he remains unbaptized. Palomydes reiterates his explanation, adding, “I have but one batayle to do, and were that onys done I wolde be baptyzed.” Trystram is immediately galvanized: “as for one batayle, thou shalt nat seke it longe—for God deffende,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘that thorow my defaute thou sholdyste lengar lyve thus a Sarazyn!” (492). Within the story’s world, baptism is, of course, profoundly serious, yet here the two men are almost playing with it, Palomydes dangling the fulfillment of his vow like a temptation (much as he teased Isode with a promise to be baptized), Trystram leaping on the pretense for battle with what might be as much laughing good humor as deadly serious determination. Indeed, when the fight ends (inconclusively), Palomydes is baptized.

This additional instance of spectacular deferral contributes to Palomydes’s secular illegibility as well as indicating spiritual illegibility in its own right. First, the state of Palomydes’s soul becomes the reason that his second battle with Trystram ends inconclusively when Isode stops the fight because she fears his death while “he is nat crystened” (265). Her intervention prevents the conflict reaching a state where the yield-or-die question might be posed. Later, the same factor gains an almost talismanic quality when Palomydes challenges the brothers of the Red City. When the brothers taunt him—“Sir Palomydes, Sarezyn . . . we shall so handyll the or that thou departe that thou shalt wysshe that thou haddyst be crystynde!”—Palomydes responds with a cool boldness that verges on complacency, acknowledging that “as yet I wolde nat dye or that I were full crystynde,” but continuing, “and yette so aferde am I nat of

you bothe but that I shall dye a bettir Crystyn man than ony of you bothe” (425). Palomydes’s reply is difficult to parse with perfect clarity (appropriately). For example, does he mean that he is *already* a better Christian than these two usurpers, or that he is confident they will fail to kill him, allowing him to live until the day of his baptism? His confidence, however, is unmistakable: not unlike Barnardine in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* (about whom more later), Palomydes claims a strange certainty that he won’t die while his soul is in danger. Indeed, he wins the combat. The incident is not quite the same as Isode intervening out of fear for his soul, but unlike many other situations in which Palomydes eyes an opponent and worries about defeat, here his deferred baptism paradoxically becomes a reason that he expects to win this battle.

By contrast, in the final confrontation with Trystram, Palomydes seems to offer Trystram a reason to fight by invoking his nearly completed seven battles—in this case, the deferred baptism motivates a push toward a final, secular resolution of Trystram and Palomydes’s relationship. That said, the baptism is also a contributing factor in the inconclusive ending to the combat. When Palomydes stops the fight, he offers several secular reasons for a truce, but his concluding statement is an offer to go to church “thys same day” where he will be confessed and then Trystram may “se youreselff that I be truly baptysed.” Trystram agrees, and becomes one of his godfathers. Palomydes’s conversion is, in this sense, a tool to defer a more characterizing defeat for Palomydes in the physical conflict.

In addition to baptism’s role in deferring moments in which Palomydes might otherwise face yielding on the battlefield, the baptism itself is, of course, one of Palomydes’s greatest acts of deferral in its own right. Palomydes takes an illegible attitude toward the Christian God as well as toward secular lords such as Trystram—he neither yields to nor resists God, and leaves everyone around him completely confused in the process. The conditions of his vow (what does “seven trewe bataylis for Jesus sake” mean, exactly, when it includes such conflicts as the concluding joust with Trystram over their very worldly differences? is the Questing Beast part of the vow or not?) seem arbitrary and flexible. His assertion that “in my harte I am crystynde, and

crystynde woll I be” evokes the paradoxical doubleness of illegibility (he both is already and isn’t yet) even as it also connotes the more conventional theological concept of baptism of desire (the possibility that a pure longing for baptism can suffice if the sacrament is not completed before death). If baptism is a religious variation on yielding, Palomydes has faced Christianity’s characterizing question (*be baptized or spiritually die*) but not yet given a clear answer, instead remaining illegible in this spiritual sense as well.

Logically, then, his baptism at the end of the book of Trystram should resolve this particular illegibility. Much as his final conflict with Trystram *mostly* resolves their relationship but at the same time avoids any crystal-clear yielding or further companionship, however, Palomydes’s baptism has residual oddness as well, which becomes apparent when the conversion is situated in its larger narrative context. His baptism takes place amid the beginning of the Grail Quest, following the adventures of Launcelot at Corbin and preceding the arrival of Galahad at Arthur’s court. Malory makes the connection unmistakable when he describes Palomydes’s and Trystram’s arrival at court following the baptism: “[T]he Kynge and all the courte were ryght glad that Sir Palomydes was crystynde. And at that same feste in cam Sir Galahad that was son unto Sir Launcelot du Lake, and sate in the Syge Perelous” (494). But, Malory continues, “than Sir Trystram returned unto Joyus Garde; and Sir Palomydes folowed aftir the Questynge Beste” (495). The Round Table’s newest Christian explicitly does not participate in the Grail Quest, and further, he resumes a different quest with a far less stable meaning (earlier, achieving the Questing Beast was one of the pre-baptism requirements for Palomydes’s vow) or clear resolution (Malory never depicts his victory). Ostensibly, he has yielded to God, just as he has yielded to Trystram, but Sir Palomydes ends his major narrative appearances riding away from them both, independently pursuing his own aims, as if his yieldings have still had no permanent effects.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Hoffman points out and analyzes the striking connection/non-connection between Palomydes’s conversion and the beginning of the Grail quest, itself a conflicted event that will

Palomydes's story has a provocative—and arguably truly characterizing—epilogue: he reappears as a staunch supporter of Launcelot after Launcelot's affair with the Queen is exposed. When Launcelot flees Camelot, Palomydes is listed prominently among the knights who are identified by Bors as those “that woll holde with” Launcelot (652), who then remain with Launcelot through the siege at Joyous Gard (662-3), and who finally follow him into exile in France after having “made their avowis they wolde never leve hym for weale ne for woo” (670-1). Palomydes's relationship with Launcelot at this point is formally that of vassal and lord, as Launcelot reciprocates his knights' vow with a promise to share “my lyvelode and all my londis frely amonge you” and “to maynteyne you on my londys as well as ever ye were maynteyned” (671). The final mention of Palomydes in the *Morte* is when Launcelot makes him “Deuke of Provynce” (672). In the end, Palomydes is an honorably yielded supporter of Launcelot.

Hints of this outcome appear earlier. While on the adventure of the Red City, during the interval when he behaves most like a yielded vassal of Trystram, Palomydes makes the odd comment that “yff I be there slayne, go ye unto my lorde Sir Launcelot, other ellys to my lorde Sir Trystram, and pray them to revenge my dethe” (423)—most likely a throwaway line that nonetheless jostles Trystram's clear primacy. Similarly, when Palomydes is being led to his dishonorable execution, Trystram sets out to rescue him (from Joyous Gard, where he lives with Launcelot's permission) but Launcelot happens to intervene first and thereby claim the narrative power inherent in the role of rescuer (457). If these two incidents hint at Launcelot's ultimate displacement of Trystram as Palomydes's lord, an event at the tournament of Lonzepe spells it out, albeit subtly. Even as Palomydes's vassal relationship to Trystram breaks down over the course of that tournament, recall that he *yields to Launcelot* in the middle of it. After he

both raise Arthur's Round Table to its greatest heights and begin its destruction. In this moment, writes Hoffman, Palomydes “is no sooner assimilated into Camelot than he is erased” (57-8). Wheeler, by contrast, reads this disconnection as a sign that Palomydes's conversion is not especially religious but is, rather, a “chivalric decoration” whose irrelevance to the Grail quest reveals its “spiritual inauthenticity” (72). Both critics have a sense that the conversion is, in whole or in part, drained of meaning; I attribute this to Palomydes's illegible characterization.

angers Launcelot with a dishonorable attack, Palomydes pleads with the righteously vengeful knight, “I requyre the spare me as this day, and I promyse you I shall ever be youre knyght whyle I lyve—for, and yf ye put me from my worship now, ye put me from the grettyst worship that ever I had or ever shall have.” Launcelot graciously concedes that because Isode is present in the audience and Gwenyvere isn’t, “ye shall have this day the worship as for me” (436). Palomydes’s fast-talking surrender is plainly motivated by fear of defeat, but it remains technically honorable and tactically impressive: he yields before Launcelot poses the yield-or-die question (in a strict sense) and ostensibly out of respect for Launcelot’s greatness and a desire to save his own *honor* rather than his *life*. The incident passes without much consequence, but long after Palomydes rides away from Trystram, he reappears as Launcelot’s honorable vassal. Fittingly, the doubled, blank, deferred-and-deferring Palomydes ends up in service to the unstable Launcelot. Perhaps Malory’s two most illegible knights simply belong together.

Spenser’s Turpine and Artegall

Straightforward illegibility—insofar as a deconstructive avoidance of the yield-or-die question can be “straightforward”—is not as common in *The Faerie Queene* as in other texts, perhaps because Spenser’s project is so invested in exploring variations of and exceptions to yielding and resistance in the first place that illegibility becomes a commonplace accompaniment to these explorations, present but not central. Flourdelis, whom I discussed to introduce this chapter, is a relatively clear-cut Spenserian example of illegibility. By contrast, the two examples I will examine now both also served as examples of yielding in chapter 2. These characters—Artegall and Turpine—manage to thwart the yield-or-die question as well as answer it, and it is that thwarting I will discuss here.

Artegall’s enslavement by Radigund begins, of course, with his unquestionable yielding to the Amazonian tyrant. The narrative voice places heavy emphasis on Artegall’s personal

choice to yield, stating that his surrender is “of his owne accord,” “[o]f his owne mouth,” and “wilfull” (V.v.17.2-3, 8). In this sense, nothing about Artegall’s yielding is illegible. He makes a clear, characterizing choice to yield out of “ruth” for Radigund’s feminine beauty (13.6), proving his innate courtly gentleness toward women even while he also proves himself “warelesse” (17.4) by having consented to the terms of this combat in the first place—terms that will place him into shameful servitude no matter how honorable his yielding may be.

Decisive as Artegall’s yielding is, Spenser’s description of the event also contains a few textual markers that more commonly connote illegibility. For example, Artegall’s determination to defeat and kill his battlefield foe vanishes when he unhelms the unconscious Radigund and sees her face, a sight which strikes him with “straunge astonishment” (12.2). As usual, the word “astonishment” connotes a crisis of self-narrative, the kind of shock that elsewhere occurs when a character faces the yield-or-die question. As Radigund awakens, recovers decisively from her own post-“swoune” puzzlement (13.7-9), and renews her assault, Artegall prolongs his illegibility briefly by retreating before her wrath, deferring a clear outcome (14.5, 16.1-4). Soon after, however, he yields. That this yielding is preceded by an episode of illegibility is not particularly radical—presumably, *all* instances of yielding follow at least an instant of illegible astonishment marking the crisis of an interrupted self-narrative. Artegall’s instant is merely slightly extended.¹⁷³

The description of Artegall’s yielding—made elaborate by Radigund’s need to turn it into a public ceremony—contains elements of paradox. For the most part (as I observed in chapter 2),

¹⁷³ As editor A. C. Hamilton points out in a note to stanza 12—in which Artegall is astonished—Spenser’s narration here plainly echoes Artegall’s first meeting with Britomart, a combat in which he is similarly stricken when he sees his opponent’s beautiful face (IV.vi, stanzas 21-22 and thereabouts). In that case, as I discussed in the context of mutual yielding in chapter 2, Artegall’s illegible shock gives way quickly to an overwhelming urge to show “obedience” (21.8), and he falls to his knees almost immediately in what amounts to surrender; before the canto is out, Britomart has “yeilded her consent / To be his loue, and take him for her Lord” (41.7-8), matching and surpassing his informal surrender with a more formal act of honorable yielding. Artegall’s astonishment in his battle with Radigund takes longer to resolve and has a more complicated outcome.

the paradox in question is that Artegall's yielding is simultaneously honorable (out of respect) and dishonorable (because he knows it will lead to shame): the line "as her vassall [she] him to thraldome tooke" (18.3) plays on this paradox by connoting simultaneously the honorable state of vassalage and the dishonorable state of enslavement. While confusion over the honor of Artegall's yielding is not strictly the same as illegibility, another paradoxical statement that "So was he ouercome, not ouercome" (17.1) perhaps opens up a deeper, more significant both/and contradiction. The statement may simply sum up the nature of honorable yielding (in which the prisoner yields although not physically defeated), but it may also suggest that Artegall has yielded though unyielded—a much more illegible result. Overall, Artegall definitively yields, but his astonishment and the markers of paradox that frame the moment introduce just a whiff of illegibility's unstableness to the situation.

Over the course of Artegall's subsequent enslavement, Spenser accomplishes the rare and difficult task of undoing a decisive act of yielding as, with Britomart's help, Artegall ends up back in possession of his self-narrating power. One way to outline that process is to observe that, before his yielding, Artegall initially resists Radigund (resolving to battle her), then experiences an illegible shock (his astonishment), and then yields to her. Afterward, as her slave, he slowly reverses that trajectory, first behaving as a yielded prisoner, then again experiencing illegibility, and then finally becoming resistant once more. Early in his enslavement, when he is most fully yielded, Artegall's narrative seems thoroughly controlled by Radigund as she dresses him in women's clothing (V.v.20), displays his captured arms (v.21), and forces him to perform women's work (v.23). Artegall's response is "to obey, sith he his faith had plight, / Her vassall to become" (v.23:8-9). He chaffs under his situation but "hauing chosen, now he might not chaunge" (26.6) because conventional yielding is a final, permanent choice.

The turning point—when Artegall's yielded status begins to change after all—originates, appropriately, in his captor's self-narrative, not his own. As Radigund falls in love with Artegall, her experience is a figurative version of dishonorable yielding (as is often true when love-

captivity metaphors apply to women). Wounded by love, she resists it as if on a battlefield, refusing to “yeeld free accord, / To serue the lowly vassall of her might, / And of her seruant make her souerayne Lord” (27.6-8). Her pain only grows, however, until it forces her to submit: “She gan to stoupe, and her proud mind conuert, / To meeke obeysance of loues mightie raine, / And him entreat for grace, that had procur’d her paine” (28.7-9). As she explains, “the heauens” have forced her “[t]o thrall my looser life, or my last bale to breed”—in other words, to yield to love or die (29.9). The love captivity metaphors here gain intensity through their close association with the literal captivity in the sequence. Radigund even re-narrates her battlefield encounter with Artegall to emphasize the fact that Artegall spared her first, calling this “lending life” to her (32.5). Although she was unconscious at that instant, and therefore illegible rather than yielding, now she suggests that he rightfully possesses her, as if she had yielded after all. The love-captivity metaphor blurs into the literal experience of battlefield defeat. Although Artegall doesn’t know it yet, his captor has now yielded (dishonorably—to avoid death) to him.

The narrative disruption Radigund’s yielding causes is profound. Most essentially, it enables Artegall’s ultimate recovery of his own self-narrative. The first stage of this recovery continues without Artegall’s volitional involvement, as Radigund describes him in newly paradoxical ways. Radigund’s early fantasies of her new relationship with Artegall hint at the both/and doubleness of illegibility when she wishes that she could “vnbind” him while at the same time “bound to me he may continue still.” She wishes him to have “freedome” to show her “free goodwill” (which would require him to recover self-narrating power) while at the same time she wants him tied to her by affection (32.7-9).

Although he doesn’t yet know of his captor’s change of heart, Artegall’s behavior evolves at this point in the narrative from that of a yielded prisoner to something less legible. Clarinda tells him that he seems “drowned / In sad despaire, and all thy senses swowned / In stupid sorow” (36.5-6) before urging him to “wake thy dulled spirit, / To thinke how this long death thou mightest disinherit” (8-9). Her description suggests illegible blankness and death-like lack

of consciousness, with an added mention of the loaded word “despaire” (which, in Spenser, connotes a kind of yielding). Moments later, she wonders if he possesses the puzzling, obstinate stoicism of a “stonie mind” (39.1), linking him to an inanimate object (much as Griselda is like a wall and Launcelot like a dead tree). In sum, she describes Artegall as somewhat yielding but increasingly illegible. Arguing with her descriptions, Artegall denies that he is either despairing or unfeelingly stoic, instead claiming to be patient (“a courage great” must “beare / The storme of fortunes frowne, or heauens threat” [38.1-3]), a move into recognizably resistant self-narration. He then insists that he desires Radigund’s goodwill and (by extension) freedom (41-2). Not long after this, he begins deliberately to deceive Clarinda and, by extension, her mistress (56.1-3)—an obviously resistant tactic. Radigund’s secret yielding and the projection of illegibility onto him by his captors seems to restore some of his own power to self-narrate, and he moves quickly from illegibility into behaviors that are clearly resistant.

That said, Artegall remains in an ambiguous state, unable to free himself, until Britomart kills Radigund and rescues him. Despite the resistance he has by now demonstrated against Radigund, Artegall lapses back into illegibility—or even the self-loss of yielding—when Britomart arrives. His “deformed” appearance causes Britomart to look away, “abasht with secrete shame” (38.2-3), and to ask where the true Artegall is (40.1-8). He is unrecognizable, a visual cipher, and Spenser presents him as silent, unspeaking, expressing no desire or agency, until after Britomart’s entire program of restoration (that is, re-narration) is complete. At that point, finally, “[h]e purposd to proceed . . . Vppon his first aduenture” (43.8-9), exhibiting efficacious self-narrating power once more.

Spenser’s major achievement in this episode remains the recovery of a definitively yielded character to full self-narrating power. That process is so unusual and so odd, however, that illegibility haunts it at various stages. Usually, illegibility results when the yield-or-die question is not answered; in this case, it results because the answer proves unstable and, indeed, temporary. Arguably, this episode nonetheless reinforces the overall discourse by acting as an

exception to prove the rule. By this logic, Artegall's yielding is simply a result of the unnatural circumstance in which he has found himself, in which women—subordinate by nature, naturally yielded to men—briefly create chaos before the proper order re-asserts itself. That Radigund does seem to gain control over Artegall's self-narrative until *she* relinquishes it, and that Britomart must save Artegall, suggests that the power women gain in this sequence is real, however, even if it is also somehow unnatural. The entire episode unsettles, even if it ultimately affirms, the yield-or-die ideology, especially as it relates to gender roles.

The coward Turpine exhibits illegible qualities several times in Book VI—first with Calepine, then with Arthur—making him one of the best examples of the state in *The Faerie Queene*.¹⁷⁴ As Calepine is attempting to escort the wounded Serena across a river, Turpine, safely crossing the river with his own lady, Blandina, mocks Calepine's efforts (iii.30-32). After Calepine and Serena successfully cross the river, Calepine calls Turpine "Vnknighly Knight"—a rhetorically flashy insult that unwittingly foreshadows the oxymoronic both/and quality of illegibility—and demands that he lay down his arms forever or "iustifie thy fault" in combat (iii.35). Calepine thus issues a variation on the yield-or-die demand. Either Turpine must surrender to Calepine's narrative (in which he must lay down his arms, surrendering knightly identity) or he must resist Calepine by upholding his own self-narrative.

Turpine responds with a non-response: he laughs and rides away. Spenser's narration of his behavior highlights its illegibility:

The dastard, that did heare him selfe defyde,
Seem'd not to weigh his threatfull words at all,
But laught them out, as if his greater pryde,

¹⁷⁴ I also examine Turpine, like Artegall, in chapter 2, where I explore his ultimate surrender to Arthur as an example of dishonorable yielding. In that sequence, Turpine begs mercy, which Arthur grants, after which Arthur formally shames Turpine (VI.vii.25-7). In that discussion, I mention that the two characters have an earlier, more ambiguous encounter in which Turpine's seemingly inevitable yielding is deferred as part of a more extended period of illegibility. Here, I discuss that earlier episode.

Did scorne the challenge of so base a thrall:

Or had no courage, or else had no gall. (iii.36.1-5)

Turpine “seem[s]” thoughtless and laughs “as if” in “scorne,” or fear, or from lack of fighting spirit. His laughter is an interpretive problem, giving rise to multiple speculative explanations. He then leaves, “nought weighing what he [Calepine] sayd or did” (37.1), apparently as thoughtless in his departure as in his laughter. Turpine’s motive here is impossible to parse. Indeed, whether he *has* a motive or is merely “nought weighing” the incident at all is unclear. His is an illegible response to Calepine’s challenge.

While Turpine never faces another yield-or-die demand from Calepine (and so, strictly speaking, exhibits no further illegibility toward Calepine), he continues to frustrate Calepine in related ways. Calepine repeatedly attempts to communicate with Turpine in the chivalrous discourse (words and deeds) of courtesy, but Turpine refuses to speak the same language in reply, stifling meaningful interaction between the two men in ways that suggest the blankness and unstableness of illegibility even though captivity is not at stake. For example, Calepine seeks shelter at Turpine’s castle, but Turpine’s porter “shut[s] the gate against him in his face” (38.2). The porter explains that Turpine allows no errant knights entrance without a fight (38.9), but when Calepine agrees to battle if necessary, Turpine does “not his demaund approue” (42.4), cancelling his usual procedure. These blank, dead-end responses leave Calepine frustrated “[t]hat he could not thereof auenged bee” (43.6), fearful for Serena’s health, and facing the fact that his interactions with Turpine have been “all in vaine” (44.1).

The men’s final confrontation, the next day, begins as Turpine, on horseback, issues a yield-or-die challenge to Calepine, who’s on foot. Turpine shoves his spear into Calepine’s face and orders him to “stand, t’abide the bitter stoure / Of his sore vengeance, or to make auoure / Of the lewd words and deeds, which he had done” (48.4-6). Everything about this characterizing question is off-kilter, from Turpine’s discourteous challenge of an unhorsed foe to his upside-down description of their history (he claims Calepine has been rude to *him*). As a final touch,

Turpine apparently gives Calepine no time to answer, but instead immediately charges “at him, as he would deuoure / His life attonce” (6-7). Calepine is at a dire physical disadvantage, facing an irrational demand, and crucially deprived even of time to choose a characterizing answer. Turpine destabilizes the yield-or-die question even as he poses it.

Turpine’s misuse of the yield-or-die discourse goads Calepine into a strictly illegible response. Instead of answering, Calepine runs, evading the more decisive responses of either surrender or defiant death. The long, bloody chase lasts until an innately courteous Saluage Man arrives to drive off Turpine (iv.1-8), an event the narrator characterizes as something very like grace: “a wondrous chaunce his reskue wrought. . . . Such chaunces oft exceed all humaine thought” (iii.51.6). Like the narrative grace of unconsciousness, the Saluage Man ends the confrontation before Calepine must make a choice to yield or die. Turpine’s interactions with Calepine are thus framed by illegibility. First he laughs and rides away from Calepine’s challenge; then Calepine runs from him. In the meantime, Turpine has offered only the blankness of a closed door and a denied fight. Illegibility, here as with Malory’s Palomydes, seems almost infectious: as Trystram’s arrow wound causes him to contribute to the deferral of a final conflict with his mortal foe, Calepine’s flight and rescue mean he misses a final resolution with Turpine.

Turpine later responds illegibly to Arthur as well. When Arthur provokes Turpine into combat—and quickly seizes the upper hand—Turpine retreats into his castle, “thinking him to hyde” (VI.vi.28.4). This behavior is obviously cowardly, but it also constitutes deferral. Arthur pursues Turpine relentlessly, finally trapping him in a room with his lady Blandina. Turpine calls out “in vaine to her, him to bemone,” just before Arthur strikes him on the head, causing him to drop in a “senselesse swone” (30.5-7). Turpine, cornered, is saved from the yield-or-die moment by unconsciousness.

To read what follows as yielding in all but the strictest of senses is possible. Blandina, in terror, throws her “garment” over Turpine to hide him, and thus “[s]eem’d vnder her protection him to shroud.” Turpine’s position—hidden from his enemy beneath his lover’s skirts—is both

craven and, in the poem's gender-essentializing terms, emasculating. Blandina then kneels and begs Arthur "for grace," a plea Arthur grants out of pity for her (vi.31). Blandina seems to have yielded on Turpine's behalf, as his proxy. When Turpine awakens and cannot speak for fear, Arthur does indeed speak to him as a shamefully yielded captive, underlining especially that Turpine's life (and narrative) belong to him: "Vile cowheard dogge, now doe I much repent, / That euer I this life vnto thee lent, / Whereof thou caytiue so vnworthie art" (33.4-6). If Arthur can have "lent" Turpine life, then Turpine's life belongs to Arthur; this is the possessive language of yielding. Arthur details Turpine's failures and concludes with a fascinatingly amoral analysis of why Turpine's yielding is dishonorable. He declares that Turpine, having committed himself to criminal behavior, ought *at least* to have been willing to fight resistantly to the death to defend that behavior ("in approuance of thy wrong / To shew such faintnesse and foule cowardize, / Is greatest shame" [35.1-3]). Finally, Arthur curses Turpine to "liue in reproch and scorne; / Ne euer armes, ne euer knighthood dare / Hence to professe"—dictating Turpine's profession (in several senses) for the rest of his life (36.2-4). Arthur now treats Turpine as a slavish non-person upon whom he can inflict his own narrative will. His shaming speech attempts to impose closure onto Turpine's self-narrative.

Arthur successfully shames Turpine, but strictly speaking, Turpine hasn't yielded. He hasn't made a characterizing *choice*. Yielding by proxy doesn't work well within the yield-or-die discourse for the simple reason that the system is built around internal self-narrative, an inherently *self*-controlled currency.¹⁷⁵ Although Turpine appears dependent on Blandina in this scene (and even calls out for her help), he has almost certainly not formally yielded to her, and therefore she can't yield for him. Further establishing Turpine's ambiguous, illegible status in this scene is his ongoing deathlike silence in response to Arthur. Having been "shroud[ed]" by

¹⁷⁵ An exception to this rule could occur if the prisoner had already previously yielded to the proxy, in which case the proxy would hold all the narrative power in the situation (the system would allow for Launcelot to yield on behalf of his sworn vassals, or Barabas on behalf of Ithamore). Even these moments, however, are not common.

his lady while unconscious, he fearfully “lie[s] as dead” even after regaining his senses until Blandina urges him to stand up, which he does “in ghastly wize, / Like troubled ghost . . . / As one that had no life him left through former feare” (vi.32). Possibly this is a deathlike erasure appropriate to a yielded prisoner, but equally possibly it is the blankness of illegibility, barely removed from literal unconsciousness, an extended crisis in which Turpine’s self-narrative is suspended in ambiguity.

Proof that Turpine’s response here is illegible comes as the narrative soon reveals that Turpine possesses an ongoing ability and desire to resist Arthur. He is too cowardly to act immediately, but “His rancorous despight [he] did not releasse, / Ne secretly from thought of fell reuenge surceasse” (vi.43.8-9). Blandina, in retrospect, also turns out to have been engaged in deceit rather than true yielding. The narrator reveals that she knows “how to please the minds of good and ill, / Through tempering of her words and lookes by wondrous skill” (41.8-9), and devotes a full stanza to her “false and fayned” behavior, concluding that despite appearances, “Yet were her words but wynd, and all her teares but water” (42.1-9).

Turpine’s fear and incompetence soon betray him into Arthur’s hands again, but not before a last odd moment of infectious illegibility occurs. Turpine and his accomplice Enias discover Arthur “[l]oosely displayed vpon the grassie ground, / Possessed of sweete sleepe, that luld him soft in swound” (vii.18.8-9), his armor laid aside (19.3), seemingly “dead” (20.2). Arthur’s sleep here is narratively useful mostly to emphasize Turpine’s extreme cowardice and discourtesy (Turpine begs Enias to help him kill his defenseless enemy), but it is also one of those instances—like Trystram’s arrow-wound-based delay or Calepine’s flight—in which one character’s illegibility bleeds out and affects another. If Turpine murders Arthur in this moment, when Arthur can’t respond legibly to the threat, part of the discourtesy of that act would be its denial to Arthur of the choice to resist honorably. The Saluage Man awakens Arthur and the issue immediately becomes irrelevant, but the moment is an interesting footnote to Turpine’s previous illegible behavior. That behavior now comes to an end as Arthur, awakened, accepts

Turpine's silent but clear gesture of yielding (25.9). While Spenser's narrative explores wrinkles in and exceptions to the yield-or-die discourse, this case of illegibility, at least, receives a decisive conclusion. Arthur's subsequent dramatic shaming of Turpine, however, may hint at some residual anxiety about the power of the yield-or-die discourse to provide closure: Arthur wants to make very, very sure that Turpine is under his narrative control, and this time he succeeds (vii.26-7). Spenser's subversions of the discourse usually end with strongly imposed closure that seems to re-affirm the system's power, but not before they expose its fallibility—and, by extension, its artificiality.

Marlowe's Edward II

Marlowe's and Shakespeare's deposed kings—in *Edward II* and *Richard II*—reward comparison for many reasons.¹⁷⁶ One of these reasons is that both kings respond to the threat

¹⁷⁶ Countless critics have spent centuries comparing Marlowe and Shakespeare both in general and through these two plays specifically. One especially common, unanswered question—which bears no particular relevance to my discussion—is whether the creative relationship between the two men was that of hostile rivals, anxious influencers (per Harold Bloom's theory), or friendly colleagues. At the outset of his book *Shakespeare's Marlowe*, Robert A. Logan reviews these questions as part of general critical history in his first chapter, "Marlowe and Shakespeare: Repositioning the Question of Sources and Influences" (1-29). For his part, Logan questions the "critical tradition of a hostile 'rivalry,'" arguing instead that Shakespeare moves "toward an unabashed acceptance of Marlowe's influence" over the course of his career (2-3). In chapter 4, "*Edward II*, *Richard II*, the Will to Play, and an Aesthetic of Ambiguity" (83-116), Logan specifically summarizes the critical tradition comparing these two plays about deposed kings and argues that *Edward II*'s influence on Shakespeare's play is clear but difficult to pin down, being "both wide-ranging and particular" (85). For my purposes, Logan's most relevant observation may be his analysis of how both authors introduce "ambiguity" into their stories in order to challenge well-known histories as well as "standard notions of kings and kingship" (106-7). A second scholar who examines these connections is Charles Forker, whose article "Marlowe's *Edward II* and its Shakespearean Relatives" posits that "between them, Shakespeare and Marlowe established, and then experimented with, the chronicle history as an exciting new genre on the English stage" (61) (Forker's article also usefully summarizes previous scholarly comments on these authors and plays.) Roslyn L. Knutson's "The History Play, *Richard II*, and Repertorial Commerce" turns aside from detailed questions of the plays' content and craft in favor of locating *Richard II* along with *Edward II*, both history plays engaged with "the formula of the weak king" (74), within "a commercial cluster . . . gaining traction in the marketplace because of the familiarity of the audience with

and actuality of deposition with illegibility, refusing to give straightforward, characterizing answers to the uniquely royal variation of the yield-or-die demand—the demand to yield the crown. In both plays, the discourse of kingly sovereignty intersects with and syncopates the yield-or-die discourse. Being a medieval English king (or a fictionalized early modern version of one) makes yielding more complicated because a king is understood to possess, in my terms, doubled self-narratives: both his public, political identity as the divinely anointed sovereign (his “body politic”) and his private identity as a specific human being (his “body natural”). While the body natural will suffer from physical (and mental) weakness and eventually die, the body politic can transcend the human person and be vested in the next ruler to wear the crown. Ernst Kantorowicz’s influential book *The King’s Two Bodies*, which brought these ideas to the attention of modern scholars, in fact spotlights *Richard II* as a play particularly concerned with precisely this discourse of sovereignty. Kantorowicz argues persuasively that Richard’s long, slow decline represents the involved process of undoing his complex, multiple kingly identities until only the decidedly mortal man is left. Edward II’s decline in Marlowe’s play also reflects this discourse as Edward struggles to reconcile his kingly identity with his private self.¹⁷⁷ The yield-or-die demand, directed at one of these royal characters, thus immediately runs into the discourse of the two bodies, and syncopations result. Yielding itself becomes harder to accomplish in a clear-cut way, and kingly illegibility is more infectious than most, arguably

[their] theatrical kin” (76); Knutson suggests that *Edward II*’s repetorial “revivals periodically quickened the commercial dynamic between the two plays as *R2* itself was revived” (82).

¹⁷⁷ Although Kantorowicz doesn’t use Marlowe’s play as an example of the discourse of the king’s two bodies, other scholars have explored this possibility. As a recent example, Thomas P. Anderson’s article “Surpassing the King’s Two Bodies” argues that the conclusion of *Edward II*, and particularly the funeral procession featuring (Anderson imagines) an actor playing an effigy of the murdered sovereign, both stages and complicates the transference of Edward II’s sovereignty to his son: the dead/alive Edward II suggests the two bodies, dead man and living sovereign. In “Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in *Edward II*,” Claude J. Summers makes a related argument that the split between public and private identities is a crucial theme of the play (but Summers does not discuss the king’s two bodies discourse in particular).

because it transmits outward through the self-narrative of the body politic. I explore some of these disruptions in the pages that follow.

Marlowe's Edward II is resistant from the moment we meet him, although his resistance rarely takes the form of physical or martial defiance and thus often seems obscured. Further, coming from a king in the presence of his ostensible subordinates, even resistance can weaken that king's narrative power because of the role-reversal it implies. A king ought to be the sovereign captor-figure over his vassals, but resistance is, by definition, a response to a threat of domination by another. By resisting his barons, Edward implies that they have asked him to yield or die, meaning that his self-narrative as king, at least, is already in grave danger.

Initially, in defying his now-dead father's wishes by inviting Gaveston back to England (1.1-2), Edward takes a stand against the feudal loyalty he owed his father and attempts to assert his own sovereign power over the barons—that is, he attempts to step into the captor-role of liege lord over his vassals. In fact, when the barons defy him and haul Gaveston out of court, Edward lobs a yield-or-die ultimatum—"Stay, or ye shall die" (4.24)—which ought to be a moment when he solidifies his role as a character who *asks* the characterizing question instead of facing it himself. Instead, Edward fails to follow through on his threat (which Gaveston notes [4.26]), continuing to complain but allowing the barons to remove Gaveston.

Edward then allows himself to slip into a resistant role with his barons, speaking as if they have asked *him* to yield rather than the reverse. Although the barons are still attempting to characterize their removal of Gaveston as an act of loyalty to the realm (a manipulation of the facts, but a plausible one that upholds the existing hierarchy), Edward instead links himself to Gaveston so closely that he characterizes the barons' deed as an attempt to capture and depose *him*:

Nay, then lay violent hands upon your king.

Here, Mortimer, sit thou in Edward's throne;

Warwick and Lancaster, wear you my crown.

Was ever king thus overruled as I? (4.35-8)¹⁷⁸

Edward fails to maintain the kingly fiction that he ought to be the captor-figure over his vassals, instead narrating himself into a captive-like role.¹⁷⁹ The characters around him respond with confusion. Mortimer affirms his willingness to die rather than give up his plan to exile Gaveston as if resisting Edward's initial ultimatum of "Stay, or ye shall die" (40, 45-6), but Canterbury begins to react to Edward as if Edward is, indeed, in the captive-role, asserting his own power over Edward as the Pope's representative (51-3). Following that lead, Mortimer swings from answering a yield-or-die question to posing one, using excommunication in place of the threat of death: "Curse him if he refuse, and then may we / Depose him and elect another king" (54-5). Edward clearly replies to both Canterbury and Mortimer with resistance ("I will not yield / Curse me, depose me, do the worst you can" [56-8]), but already some damage is done. Canterbury escalates and clarifies the ultimatum ("Either banish [Gaveston] . . . / Or I will presently discharge these lords / Of duty and allegiance due to thee" [59-61]), assuming the captor-role more fully. That Edward's sovereign role complicates the yield-or-die discourse is already visible in these early scenes as the characters replace "death" in the characterizing question with excommunication and deposition. Edward is being threatened with the death of his spiritual and political selves rather than his physical body.

In this confrontation, Edward retreats from blunt defiance into the subtler resistance of deception, disclosing to the audience that "It boots me not to threat, I must speak fair" (62) and

¹⁷⁸ As I discuss in chapter 2, Edward and Gaveston's relationship contains elements of mutual yielding that reinforce their friendship and sworn brotherhood; the discourses of mutual yielding and friendship both allow for—if not demand—Edward's understanding of himself and Gaveston as, in many ways, one person. As I have commented previously, Alan Bray's *The Friend* provides important context to their relationship.

¹⁷⁹ Marlowe's passing mention of Edward's status as vassal to the King of France—a vassal, moreover, who lately "hath been slack in homage" (11.63)—is an additional instance of Edward facing rather than posing the yield-or-die question. Edward's slackness and subsequent decision to "parley" with the French King about the issue (71) imply that his response to France's demand for homage is a kind of diplomatic resistance, but the fact remains that, here again, he is in the position of answering rather than asking the question.

appearing to concede, although in actuality he immediately turns his thoughts toward scheming for Gaveston's return. Throughout the play's midsection, Edward continues to characterize himself as a resistant figure against the barons, whom he treats as would-be captors.¹⁸⁰ While this characterization is resistant, not (yet) illegible, it also already implies a strangely vulnerable self-narrative, coming as it does from a character who once demanded that his lords yield to his will or die. The early scenes of the play are an odd contest in which the characters compete to see who will ask the characterizing question and who will answer it. With his resistance, Edward steps into the receptive, answering role—the captive's role.

The fact of Edward's resistance thus fits uneasily beside the ostensibly superpowered self-narrative of kingship, and hints of unstableness and blankness flicker in his dialogue and actions throughout the play. Especially when faced with questions of resistance or surrender, illegibility haunts Edward's responses even as he remains, in a strict sense, resistant. He invokes the doubleness of paradox, wondering early on, "Am I a king and must be overruled?" (1.134) and "Was ever king thus overruled as I?" (4.38), struggling to reconcile a simultaneous experience of kingship and oppression as he faces his barons' yield-or-die demands. Striking temporary silences also punctuate his reactions to painful situations, suggesting illegibility before resolving into spoken resistance: "Anger and wrathful fury stops my speech," he declares to the barons (4.42); "with dumb embracement let us part" he urges Gaveston, because speech will make the parting more painful (4.134); "Oh, shall I speak, or shall I sigh and die?" he

¹⁸⁰ Edward's resistance to his barons takes many forms (including deceptive temporary concessions that do not amount to true yielding). For example, at 4.111-5, he vows eventual revenge (or, at least, reunion with Gaveston) and, in the meantime, urges Gaveston to endure "patiently," constructing the resistant narrative of patient suffering. After the barons murder Gaveston and threaten war unless he concedes to their demands (another yield-or-die moment), Edward defies them with martial resistance (11.159-83) and meets them on the battlefield with what they call "desperate and unnatural resolution" to oppose them (12.30)—a battle he wins. Facing defeat by the queen and Mortimer's larger force, Edward still remains technically resistant, proposing that he and his men "die with fame" in combat before his supporters hurry him to temporary safety (18.4-7). Hidden from his enemies in a religious house, Edward even flirts with a kind of Boethian resistance in which he does not yield but rather constructs a self-narrative of philosophical detachment from worldly concerns (20.8-21). At none of these points does he yield to the barons control over his own self-narrative.

wonders upon hearing the news of Gaveston's execution (11.122). None of these moments represent true illegibility—after all, the feelings motivating the silences are clear rather than unreadable—but these instances of uncertain silence suggest the greater blankness of illegibility nonetheless.

Throughout the play, Edward also repeatedly calls his own identity, especially his identity as king, into question, implying a persistent shakiness in his ability to self-narrate. As he does with the paradoxical questions above (“Am I a king . . . ?”), he twice begins otherwise decisive, seemingly characterizing statements of defiance with an ominous conditional: “If I be king, not one of them shall live” (4.105), and “If I be England's king, in lakes of gore / Your headless trucks, your bodies will I trail . . .” (11.135). His resistant self-narrative sounds strangely contingent. Elsewhere, he merges his own identity with externals, claiming “I from myself am banished” (4.118) when Gaveston is banished, and bidding his own “Life, farewell, with my friends” (20.98) when Spenser and Baldock are taken away for execution. His self-identity as king is conditional, and his self-identity as Edward is porous, merging with that of his friends.

When Edward does attempt more decisive, individually specific, even kingly self-narration—the kind of straightforward declarations of personal beliefs or intent that would mark him as an influential character of courage and resolution—Marlowe's playtext undermines him. For example, Edward strikingly rejects the conditional “if” that elsewhere troubles his speech when, flush from military triumph, he assures his followers that Mortimer has not escaped England: to Spenser's “if he be in England,” Edward replies, “If, dost thou say? Spencer, as true as death, / He is in England's ground” (16.19-22). In the previous scene, however, the audience has seen Mortimer safely in France, so we know Edward's confidence is mistaken, and a messenger soon delivers this information to Edward as well. The dramatic irony drains Edward's statement of self-narrating power as he unintentionally characterizes himself as mistaken and naïve; he is out of control of how he appears to the audience in this moment. Similarly, facing defeat on a later battlefield, Edward again strikes a self-determining tone by

vowing to “die with fame” rather than “fly and run away,” but when Baldock replies, “O no, my lord, this princely resolution / Fits not the time. Away!” (18.4-9), Edward apparently agrees and flees (he has no scripted reply, but in the next scene we are told “he fled” [19.1]). His “princely resolution”—self-narration that characterizes him as kingly—vanishes without verbal protest, and Edward’s will seems to merge with that of his less princely friends, Baldock and Spenser. Throughout most of the play, then, Edward is a resistant character (denying the barons control over his self-narrative), but his own control over his self-narrative is both voluntarily and involuntarily tenuous. He often cedes narrative power to his favorites, allowing the edges of his identity to blur into theirs, and when he doesn’t, Marlowe’s text occasionally undermines him anyway. The part of his self-narrative that involves his identity as king is especially uncertain from the play’s earliest scenes. As a result, by the time Edward faces his ultimate characterizing crisis—the demand that he yield his crown—he is already a character with a confusing identity. In the deposition scene and until his death, this confusion becomes true illegibility.

From the moment of his final capture onwards, Edward’s inconsistent self-narrative has one stable theme: dying. Within the yield-or-die discourse, of course, death is the ultimate resistant choice. That said, as I have also discussed, death can represent yielding when its impetus is surrender to despair or the desire of the captor. Lucrece’s death is resistant self-narration; Redcrosse’s death at the hands of Despaire (had it happened) would have been a yielding surrender. In contrast to both these categories, Edward’s interest in death is more ambiguous and seems to reflect an interest in the blankness of illegibility. Death, for him, is an ultimate deferral or non-answer, a means to evade answering yield-or-die questions for all time.

Edward’s self-narration begins to turn toward illegibility and the blankness of death just before he is captured. Hiding at a monastery, Edward’s statements transition from more conventional, resistant complaints and an attempt at Boethian patience (20.9-25) to a vaguer longing: “O, might I never open these eyes again, / Never again lift up this drooping head, / O, never more lift up this dying heart!” (20.41-3). The negative phrasing of this wish—*never, never*,

never, without clarity on what outcome Edward might positively desire—anticipates the blankness of illegibility. Edward's favorite, Spenser, worries that "this drowsiness / Betides no good" (42-3). He identifies the king's mood as a sleepiness, a tug toward unconsciousness, and picks up Edward's negative phrasing ("no good") to describe its ambiguous potential.

Immediately following this initial moment of illegibility, Edward's enemies—led by the Earl of Leicester—arrive and Edward resumes his more accustomed attitude of resistance (albeit non-physical resistance) throughout the remainder of his arrest and the first half of his deposition. Edward projects a consistent narrative about these events. He describes Mortimer and his followers as political and moral criminals and himself as their resistant prisoner, refusing to yield to their wishes and thus unwillingly but resolutely risking suffering and death at their hands. In defiance of the arrest and pending execution of Spenser and Baldock, Edward tells Leicester, "Here, man, rip up this panting breast of mine / And take my heart in rescue of my friends" (20.66-7), offering to die rather than see his favorites killed. He characterizes the arrest of himself and his men as an act of "hell and cruel Mortimer" not "[t]he gentle heavens" (74-5) and calls Mortimer "a tyrant" (91), framing himself by contrast as virtuous. He insists that his removal to Killingworth Castle means his own death (86-9), and, with the declaration "Unfeignèd are my woes," bids "Life, farewell, with my friends" as he enters captivity, treating his captivity and his friends' execution as essentially equivalent (96-8). Although Edward does not, for example, engage in martial resistance on the spot, battling to the death to save his friends or avoid his own arrest, he *narrates* his experience as if it involves a similar resistant courage, facing death unflinchingly if sorrowfully at the hands of a cruel tyrant.

Complicating Edward's resistant narration in this scene, however, is the absence of any demand that he yield or die. Leicester is, obviously, taking Edward prisoner ("Your majesty must go to Killingworth" [81]), but he paints a veneer of civil, even oblivious politeness over the facts of the situation, asking "My lord, why droop you thus?" (60) as if unaware that Edward has reason for sorrow (or drooping drowsiness), and offering, "Here is a litter ready for your grace /

That waits your pleasure . . .” (83-4). Edward’s response—“A litter hast thou? Lay me in a hearse, / And to the gates of hell convey me hence” (86-7)—may come across in multiple ways. On the one hand, he is translating Leicester’s bland words as a veiled “yield or die” demand and answering “I’d rather die, and I expect to.” On the other hand, especially with Spenser and Baldock standing by facing imminent executions, Edward’s response to his own imminent journey-by-litter sounds overwrought and needlessly ostentatious, out of touch with what’s really going on. He is striving to exert his narrative power on events, but how well he succeeds without Leicester’s cooperation is debatable.

By the beginning of the deposition scene, Edward’s narrative has won out in, at least, a limited sense. Leicester now admits that Edward’s sojourn at Killingworth is founded in “compulsion” in reality and “pleasure” only in imagination (21.2-4). Edward’s long response imagines a variety of resistance tactics to his imprisonment. His outrage inspires him “[t]o plain me to the gods” about his treatment (22) and to dream of violent “revenge” (24) before “sorrow” at his losses leads him to back to the “sad laments” of plaint (33-4). Aware that the nobles now expect him to abdicate, Edward also lays a curse on his crown should Mortimer achieve it (“if proud Mortimer do wear this crown, / Heavens turn it to a blaze of quenchless fire” [43-4])—another verbal act of clear resistance. Embedded in Edward’s resistance, however, is a continuation of the uncertainty over kingship that has threaded through his dialogue since the play’s first scenes: he wonders, again,

But what are kings, when regiment is gone,
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?
My nobles rule, I bear the name of king;
I wear the crown but am controlled by them. (26-9).

Edward is beginning to feel his way through the particular confusion the discourse of the king’s two bodies causes him in this situation. His political, public self-narrative is losing its power,

leaving him with markers of kingship that may or may not mean anything.¹⁸¹ This falling-away of meaning also begins to suggest the experience of illegibility, of being a “perfect shadow,” insubstantial and paradoxical.

Finally, Leicester poses the characterizing question to Edward: “Will you yield your crown?” (50). In response, the illegibility that has always lurked in Edward’s self-narrative becomes dominant at last:

Ah, Leicester, weigh how hardly I can brook
To lose my crown and kingdom without cause,
To give ambitious Mortimer my right,
That like a mountain overwhelms my bliss,
In which extreme my mind here murdered is.
But what the heavens appoint, I must obey.
Here, take my crown, the life of Edward too!
Two kings in England cannot reign at once.
But stay a while. Let me be king till night. . . . (51-9)

These opening lines of Edward’s response introduce illegibility markers that will continue throughout the scene: the unstable both/and assertions that allow him to oscillate between yielding and resistance (he objects, he agrees, he delays), the desire for deferral (“But stay a while”), and finally the blankness of a “mind here murdered.”

The statement “Here, take my crown, the life of Edward too!” (57) encapsulates well the both/and instability between yielding and resistance that Edward exhibits in this scene as well as the syncopation that sovereignty introduces into the yield-or-die discourse. Most obviously, Edward is yielding after his initial resistant complaint, but more deeply, he is also resisting by

¹⁸¹ Kantorowicz’s discussion of Richard II’s slippage from “from divine kingship to kingship’s ‘Name,’ and from the name to the naked misery of man,” which includes Richard’s loss of control over both the crown-as-symbol and his metaphorical identity as the sun, could easily apply to Edward in this scene as well (27-32).

equating “my crown” with “the life of Edward” so that the surrender of the crown means his death. He *is* his crown, in the sense that he *is* the body politic, the realm’s sovereign: with the crown’s loss, the king is killed. Edward thus suggests that Leicester has not demanded that he yield or die, but rather yield *and* die, draining the act of yielding of its life-saving meaning. Further, if Edward’s surrender is simultaneous with Edward’s murder, Edward arguably dies resistant, at the hands of enemies he identifies as such, even as he yields. The discourse of the king’s two bodies makes Leicester’s question almost incomprehensible as a yield-or-die demand.

Beyond this single line, Edward spends much of the rest of the deposition scene trying to have it both ways, alternately withholding the crown (for example at 74, 86, 98-102) and surrendering it (for example at 70 and 97) until he permanently gives it up (106-7). Even after he hands Leicester his crown, ostensibly fulfilling the terms of the demand to yield, Edward continues to self-narrate inconsistently. He chiefly frames himself as a wronged man deserving pity (119-20, 149) or revenge (140-3). He also hints, however, at a possible, if confused, sense of his own culpability and acquiescence to the situation (“Commend me to my son, and bid him rule / Better than I”) before falling back into uncertainty (“Yet how I have transgressed, / Unless it be with too much clemency?”) (121-3). The moment in which Edward literally yields the crown is almost lost amid the oscillation between yielding and resistance that he offers throughout the scene. Additionally, much as conflicts involving Palomydes (and especially decisive conclusions to those conflicts) are often delayed, Edward also imagines—and enacts, by speaking at length about it—a period of deferral in response to Leicester’s question. “Let me be king till night,” he first suggests, before fantasizing an infinite deferral:

Continue ever, thou celestial sun;
Let never silent night possess this clime.
Stand still, you watches of the element;
All times and seasons, rest you at a stay. . . . (64-7).

This endless stretch of frozen time would allow the question to be asked but never definitively answered.

Finally, the scene is punctuated with Edward's references to a blankness like insanity or death that possesses him. Already a "perfect shadow," Edward becomes a shadow "overwhelm[ed]" (over-shadowed? buried?) by a metaphorical "mountain" (54), doubly emptied and hidden, until he declares "my mind here murdered is" (55). To this imagery of a dead mind, a lost self, he adds a mention of his "strange despairing thoughts, / Which thoughts are martyrèd with endless torments" (79-80). His thoughts seem alien to him and, at the same time, those thoughts are dying by torture (with "martyrèd" and "endless torments" perhaps even paradoxically invoking both heaven—the destination of martyrs—and hell). At a crucial moment, when his son's welfare is threatened, he says "I have no power to speak" and briefly lets Leicester speak for him, two responses to extreme emotion that we have seen before (Edward has previously fallen silent and allowed others to speak for him), but also, in this context, two responses that contribute to the sense of a character losing personal coherency. After handing over the crown, Edward comments that "grief makes me lunatic" (114), a more clinical diagnosis of his feeling that his mind is dying and his thoughts are "strange."

Finally, as the scene moves to its conclusion, Edward settles into the attitude that will, generally, characterize him for the remainder of the play: an orientation toward death (foreshadowed by his "drowsiness" just before his arrest) that is neither precisely resistant nor despairing but rather a longing for a kind of vague non-experience (for example, at 145-7, 152-3). Tellingly, his first statement in this mode is "Come, Death, and with thy fingers close my eyes, / Or if I live, let me forget myself" (110-11). "Death" is not the priority, except as a means to the end of forgetting himself.¹⁸² His mind is "murdered" and "martyrèd" by others against his will *and* he strives to bring about his identity's loss in the form of death or forgetting: his agency and

¹⁸² Kantorowicz notes that Richard II enters a very similar "state of half-reality, of royal oblivion and slumber" as his deposition progresses, as if the degradation of his kingly self-narrative weakens him but does not cause an absolute death (29).

choice, his narrative power, are losing relevance in either their loss or their exertion. Instability and blankness are more important now.

Edward spends the interval after his deposition and before his death led about in secret, physically transformed, buried in darkness, and wrestling with his own self's meaning. Throughout this period, he can be understood as both an illegible character (caught between or outside the oppositions of yielding or resistance-unto-death) and as a "body natural" stripped of his former kingly identity and now struggling to identify and assert whatever remains of his narrative power.¹⁸³ Both discourses (yield-or-die and king's-two-bodies) now fail to characterize him clearly.

Edward manifests a vestigial resistance, complaining of his suffering and continuing to characterize Mortimer as its "hateful" cause (23.4-26). In particular, he pushes back against the narrative his keeper Gurney offers him. When Gurney advises, "Your passions make your dolours to increase," Edward re-narrates Gurney's words into the resistant statement of an innocent sufferer: "[t]his usage makes my misery increase" (15-6). Edward continues to play with the possibility that kingship is (still) part of his identity (30, 40), and he hopes for rescue from Kent (51). Despite uncertainty caused by ill-treatment and Lightborne's lies, Edward even labels his killer a "Villain" who "com'st to murder me" (25.45), attempting to persuade Lightborne out of the murderous "tragedy written in thy brows" (74). Edward's resistance in his final moments of life is attenuated, fearful, and even unclear (what, exactly, is he hoping for?)—but it is also distinct from yielding. Rather than believing Lightborne's narrative at face value, or agreeing to accept it (or Mortimer's) in exchange for life, Edward continues to narrate what's happening to him on his own terms, identifying and describing the "tragedy" of his final moments.

¹⁸³ Says Kantorowicz of Richard II near the end of Shakespeare's play, "It is a lonely man's miserable and mortal nature that replaces the king as King" (32).

This faint remaining resistance is hedged around and complicated by the markers of illegibility that accompany Edward until after his death. His captors, in a basic sense, work to make Edward unreadable to his fellow characters. To evade would-be rescuers, they move him “from place to place by night” (22.58) and force him to shave in order to alter his appearance (23.31-2). To young Prince Edward’s demand, “Let me but see him,” the Queen replies, “you know it is impossible,” although she denies that Edward is dead (22.94-8); “impossible” most obviously means “extremely impractical,” but also suggests the increasing erasure of the elder Edward’s visible presence in the world. This erasure culminates, before Edward’s murder, with his imprisonment and torment in the dark, below-ground sewers of Berkeley Castle, lost to the world.

Obscurity forced by fellow characters does not rise to the level of true illegibility by itself, of course. Edward’s self-narration must contribute as well, and it does. Continuing a pattern from the deposition scene, he wrestles with whether or not his motivations and actions have relevance or efficacy: “The wren may strive against the lion’s strength, / But all in vain, so vainly do I strive / To seek for mercy at a tyrant’s hand” (23.34-6), he declares, and similarly, at the moment of his murder, he comments, “I am too weak and feeble to resist” (25.108). Both these statements suggest that Edward continues to see himself as someone who would *like* to resist his captors, but he assumes such resistance is useless or impossible. He has lost confidence in the forms of non-physical resistance I explored in chapter 3, or, rather, such forms feel inadequate to his experience (as well they might, given his seemingly purposeless suffering). Marlowe frequently pushes the yield-or-die discourse to its limits and beyond—as in the *Tamburlaine* plays—and here the inadequacy of either yielding or resistance to Edward’s needs leaves him outside the system, and thus illegible within its context.

Corresponding to this breakdown of identity, Edward’s body becomes illegible to both its possessor and its tormentors. Edward himself expects to die of ill-treatment: he wonders during his worst imprisonment, “can my air of life continue long / When all my senses are annoyed

with stench?” (23.17-8). But the next scene finds Edward’s jailors flummoxed, with Matrivis commenting, “I wonder the king dies not” and going on to speculate that “He hath a body able to endure / More than we can inflict, and therefore now / Let us assail his mind another while” (25.1-12). The comment emphasizes the inexplicable survival of Edward’s body, and it also divorces Edward’s body and mind.¹⁸⁴ Edward affirms and expands this divorce: “My mind’s distempered and my body’s numbed, / And whether I have limbs or no I know not” (63-5). Mind and body are separate, both suffering, and losing whatever coherence united them. Where Edward’s “I”—his self-narrative—fits into this collapsing construct is unclear as well. Edward in this moment wishes for a dissolution that ends in death, but the wish, like his hopes for mercy, is out of his control to enact (66-7). Late in his last conversation with Lightborne, Edward asks, “Where is my crown? / Gone, gone, and do I remain alive?” (25.90-1). “[D]o I remain alive?” is a central question in Edward’s final days, both for him and also for his captors. The question encompasses Matrivis’s wonder at his prisoner’s inexplicable endurance, the king’s surprise that the body natural persists beyond the loss of the body politic, and most chillingly, Edward’s fundamental uncertainty about whether he is, at this moment, alive or dead. A character unsure if he is still alive is an illegible character indeed.

Edward’s final conversation with Lightborne is filled with illegible instability, as he oscillates between fear and trust, resistance to murder and a wish for death, even alertness and

¹⁸⁴ Thomas P. Anderson, discussing the ending of *Edward II* in light of Kantorowicz’s theory, comments of this detail: “The body’s resistance to death is a condition central to sacred kingship. For the mystical transfer of royal authority to occur, Edward’s royal dignitas must be separated from its profane context. What Marlowe gives us with the king’s abject treatment is a glimpse of how impossible such a separation is” (601). For Anderson, in other words, some residual strength of the body politic still lies within Edward and enables his surprising endurance. I could similarly argue that Edward’s illegible inability either to fully yield or fully resist, to fully live or fully die, is operating here. The two discourses could also be combined into an explanation that Edward’s body is not only kept alive by residual sovereign strength but pushed further into illegibility because of it: if sovereignty cannot be yielded, then Edward can’t yield even if he wants to, and therefore becomes illegible. I parse out such an explanation not to suggest that it is precisely what Marlowe intends (I doubt that), but to show how the intersection of the two discourses here can lead to syncopation and multiple resonating interpretations—even as, at the same time, both discourses are inadequate to Edward’s experience and thus also seem useless and meaningless.

sleep. His last words fit this pattern: “O, spare me, or dispatch me in a trice!” (25.111). The line no doubt shows us, wrenchingly, that Edward anticipates his torturous death and wishes, in the end, only to avoid that suffering. In that sense, Edward’s motivation is absolutely clear and deeply human. But the line is also one last both/and response to the false dichotomy posed by the demand to yield or die. Edward negates the question’s importance by asking for *either*, as if both outcomes are undifferentiated. All that is relevant to him is avoiding the unspoken third option of uncharacterizing, meaningless suffering. His request is not granted. Marlowe, in this moment, renders the entire discourse irrelevant. Edward may be illegible within its boundaries, but its boundaries are also inadequate to Edward’s experience.

The blankness of illegibility—or the inadequacy of discourse, a closely related problem—affect the staging of Edward’s murder scene in the play. Lightborne’s goal is an untraceable murder (per his conversation with Mortimer at 24.27-39) accomplished by a method is designed to leave no marks, and he fusses at Matrevis and Gurney to be careful “lest that you bruise his body” (25.113). Marlowe’s playtext, at this moment, has gaps as well. Lightborne has earlier issued horrifying but vague instructions to his assistants (29-35), but beyond that, the dialogue and stage directions during the act of murder are sparse and unclear. Of course, Marlowe presumably expects that his readers—and the company staging his play—know enough historical rumor to fill in the details, but exactly what an audience sees on-stage at this point (or what a given reader is capable of imagining) is ambiguous. The practical reasons for Marlowe’s uncharacteristic delicacy here are less relevant than the fact that the formal presentation of the murder has elements of blank illegibility that echo the protagonist’s own. A staging that maintained this ambiguity would seem appropriate as well. The playtext invites an odd, horrific, suspended moment in which the reader, denied clear information, is left with Edward’s

question: does he remain alive? The manner of his death is secretive, hidden, and blank, even at the formal level.¹⁸⁵

In addition, from Edward's deposition until his death, *all* self-narratives in the play's world become muddled and unclear as Edward's illegibility transmits outward to his fellow characters. Such a strong, wide-ranging transmission also happens in *Richard II* (as I shortly discuss) and may again reflect a connection between the man and the body politic—if Edward is illegible, his kingdom and its citizens become illegible, too. The play's characters engage in conflicting declarations and interpretations, equivocal language, and rumor as they battle among themselves for the power to tell the story of what's happening, with narrative clarity—let alone narrative dominance—always slipping out of their grasp. Edward's resignation of the crown incites, rather than settles, uncertainty. The issue of whether he has truly yielded or remains a resistant force is an interpretive problem with which the other characters struggle. Even while he exults in Edward's downfall, Mortimer characterizes Edward as resistant, an ongoing threat, telling Isabel that “now we hold an old wolf by the ears / That, if he slip, will seize upon us both / And grip the sorer, being gripped himself” (22.7-9). By contrast, the Bishop of Winchester announces that “The king hath willingly resigned his crown” (28), and Kent confirms that this is the public story of events when he comments, “I hear of late he hath deposed himself” (82). The public narrative is one of Edward's yielding abdication, making him no further threat to Mortimer's interests. Privately, however, the Bishop adds that the king still

¹⁸⁵ Numerous scholars have discussed how Edward's murder is scripted and staged, some agreeing with me that the text seems deliberately to obscure details and some arguing that all relevant stage directions are clearly implied by dialogue and that Marlowe thus intended a graphic depiction of the crime. For example, Robert A. Logan argues, with reference to Stephen Orgel's scholarship, that the play text does not support a detailed presentation of the manner of Edward's death (95-6). Anderson discusses both sides of the scholarly debate, pointing out that Charles Forker's edition of the playtext argues for a graphic depiction by adding stage directions calling for the murder and Edward's scream. For Anderson, the moment is provocative as an example of how outside historical knowledge animates and augments the play much as Edward's sovereign identity animates and augments his mere “body natural” (594-6).

has sympathizers and that Kent seeks to free him, suggesting that Edward remains a resistant figure (32-5).

This uncertainty in the narrative about Edward's loss of the crown gives rise to uncertain narration in related contexts. Isabel and Mortimer must work to conceal their true, murderous intentions from public view ("Finely dissembled. Do so still, sweet queen," Mortimer compliments her; she advises him in turn, "Use Edmund friendly, as if all were well" [22.73, 78]). Kent sees through their lies ("Ah, they do dissemble," [85]), only to have Mortimer remind him of his own changes of heart over the course of the play, accusing him, not without some justification, of being "[i]nconstant" and "false" (100, 103). Each of these major figures, like Edward himself, exhibits an unstable self-narrative at this point. In this vacuum of meaning following Edward's deposition, would-be leaders of the realm can and must strive not only for political leadership but for narrative power. Whoever controls the story of what has happened—whoever wins the audience's support, both with the play's world and beyond—will control the crown, whether he literally wears it or not. Consequently, Mortimer's decision to order Edward's murder is motivated primarily by concern that the narrative of a resistant Edward is gaining power with their mutual audience: "The commons now begin to pity him," he observes (24.2), so he plots to write his competitor-protagonist out of the story decisively, while obscuring his own authorial hand. In this context, Mortimer's famously equivocal order for Edward's murder—using unpunctuated Latin to carry a doubled and paradoxical meaning—suits not only Mortimer's deviousness but the playworld's general illegibility in this moment of unresolved crisis.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Critics analyze the breakdown of clear meaning during Edward's imprisonment from a variety of perspectives; there is much to say. For example, Marjorie Garber's article "Here's Nothing Writ" examines a pattern throughout Marlowe's plays of characters attempting to enact their will through writing that, while powerful, is always nonetheless incomplete, ambiguous, or subject to Marlowe's greater authorial power. She examines *Edward II's* Mortimer (and especially his "unpointed" letter) in this context (318-20). Ian McAdam's *The Irony of Identity* explores and expands upon critical comments that Mortimer transforms in the play's second half from a multidimensional character "into a stock Machiavellian villain" whose rhetoric loses

Marlowe's text emphasizes this narrative aspect of the battle for power through details of dialogue as his characters seize and revise each other's words. For example, much like Edward strives to re-narrate his experience to his jailors by appropriating and revising their assessment of his suffering (23.15-6), Kent, striving to represent the interests of his brother and nephew, finds himself in similar verbal jousts. After Mortimer seizes young Prince Edward, Kent confronts Isabel, insisting, "Sister, Edward is my charge. Redeem him." Isabel appropriates and re-narrates his statement immediately: "Edward is my son, and I will keep him" (22.115-6). When Kent tries to rescue the king, he demands, "Yield the king," only to be told, "Edmund, yield thou thyself" (23.55-6). Unwillingly seized and bound, hearing Gurney give orders to "convey him to the court," Kent attempts the language-appropriation strategy himself, firing back, "Where is the court but here? Here is the king. . . ." Matrevis, unmoved, replies, "The court is where Lord Mortimer remains" (58-61). The repetition of words in opposing contexts highlights the instability of the characters' language and the narrative nature of their battle.

That battle grows more heated and complex in the moments preceding the defiant Kent's execution, as Kent, Edward III, Mortimer, and Isabel struggle to determine whose voice matters. Again, characters appropriate each other's speech to revise each other's meaning:

MORTIMER. Strike off his head! He shall have martial law.

KENT. Strike off my head? Base traitor, I defy thee.

EDWARD III. My lord, he is my uncle and shall live.

meaning precisely because of its increasingly generic and formulaic qualities. McAdam suggests that, "[h]aving made a career of deconstructing his sovereign's agenda, [Mortimer] finds once the obstacle is removed that he himself stands for precisely nothing" (214). Whereas Edward's death scene is arguably emblematic but unquestionably wrenching, Mortimer's death scene is also emblematic (suggested by his speech about Fortune's wheel) yet empty of much emotional affect or impact (217). In "What are kings, when regiment is gone?," David Bevington and James Shapiro discuss myriad methods—but especially visual means—by which Marlowe depicts disruption, subversion, and absence of ritual and ceremony from the beginning to the end of *Edward II*; they note that "[t]he hollowness of ritual in the court of Isabella and Mortimer gives concrete and visible expression to the hypocrisy and to the suborning of secret murder that increasingly characterize their short reign" (275).

MORTIMER. My lord, he is your enemy and shall die. (24.88-91)

Edward III has just been crowned, but that ritual here turns out to be another unstable source of meaning—its results are illegible—when Mortimer immediately appropriates and re-contextualizes the new king’s first meaningful words. Realizing this, Edward III turns to Isabel and begs, “Sweet mother, if I cannot pardon him, / Entreat my Lord Protector for his life,” asking her to exert narrative power on his behalf, but Isabel replies only, “I dare not speak a word.” Edward’s response is puzzled and frustrated as he struggles to determine if his voice has power and, if so, what kind: “Nor I, and yet methinks I should command; / But seeing I cannot, I’ll entreat for him” (93-7). Mortimer’s narrative power is not absolute, either, as he asks those escorting Kent, “How often shall I bid you bear him hence?” (101). Kent and Mortimer then engage in one last verbal bout to determine whose speech—whose narration—will triumph today:

KENT. Art thou king? Must I die at thy command?

MORTIMER. At our command. Once more, away with him.

KENT. Let me but stay and speak; I will not go. (102-4)

In this narrative battle, Mortimer has the ostensible victory as Kent is dragged away for execution, his voice decisively silenced. Ominously for Mortimer, however, Kent dies resistant, a sign that Mortimer may have enough narrative power to order his death, but lacks the narrative power to make Kent yield to his perspective. Further, the new king labels this deed murder rather than legitimate execution (109). Edward III may lack sufficient power to stop his uncle’s death, but neither has he allowed Mortimer’s self-narrative to overwhelm his own.

Though Edward II remains illegible up to his murder, the absolute nature of death seems to impose an end to the instability spiraling out from the illegible king into the playworld. Edward’s death restores narrative stability. Plausibly, this stability results because Edward’s dying voice—the wordless “cry” that Matrevis worries “will raise the town” (114)—claims at the very last a decisively resistant stance, a scream that tells the world Edward dies unhappily at the

hands of enemies. Or perhaps the king's death mystically invests his son with legitimately inherent, even divinely empowered, kingship and the narrative power that goes with it (though this explanation seems overly providential in Marlowe's coldly pragmatic world). Certainly—and ironically—Mortimer's decision to treat the king as if he were still resistant (a powerful enough threat to merit removal by murder) helps to solidify the king's public characterization as resistant. Whatever the exact reason, in Marlowe's telling, Edward II's death immediately devastates Mortimer's narrative power and, instead, vests that power in Edward III. Matrevis confirms the murder to Mortimer by appropriating and revising Mortimer's words, a sign of Mortimer's loss of narrative control: to Mortimer's "Is't done?" Matrevis affirms it is, but adds, "I would it were undone" (26.1-2). Mortimer, in soliloquy, asks defiantly, "Let's see who dare impeach me for his death?" only to be accosted immediately by Isabel who tells him, "the king my son hath news / His father's dead, and we have murdered him" (14-6). Mortimer's words are being overwritten as soon as he can speak them, and Edward III is now the character capable of powerful narration that moves an audience. Isabel elaborates that the young king "vows to be revenged upon us both. / Into the council chamber he is gone / To crave the aid and succor of his peers." She concludes that "[n]ow, Mortimer, begins our tragedy" (19-23). Edward II saw his "tragedy written [by Mortimer?] in [Lightborne's] brows" (25.74), but now his son has claimed narrative power—verbally, with a vow and a speech to the council—and is about to write a tragedy of his own.

Edward III arrives on-stage at this point amid two quick and decisive acts of identification: a lord urges him to "[k]now that you are a king" and Edward greets Mortimer as "Villain!" (26.24-5). Roles are clear. "Think not that I am frighted with thy words" (27), Edward adds, dismissing Mortimer's previously formidable verbal power. He swiftly labels his father's death, like his uncle's, murder (28), and proceeds to narrate what will (and does) happen next:

. . . thou shalt die, and on his mournful hearse
 Thy hateful and accursèd head shall lie,

To witness to the world that by thy means

His kingly body was too soon interred. (29-32)¹⁸⁷

To Isabel's "Weep not, sweet son," Edward offers a final verbal appropriation, replying, "Forbid me not to weep" (33-4). Edward's newfound narrative power, he explains, exists in part because "in me my loving father speaks" (41). In a sense, his words are true; Edward II never absolutely abandoned resistance, and thus never absolutely abandoned his own self-narrative of being wronged, a narrative his son now picks up and carries forward. In another sense, Edward III's narrative power springs out of the void (not the strength) of his father's self-narrative. The illegibility of the father means that Edward III is free to characterize that father as resistant and wronged. Either way, in a practical sense, the play ends as Edward III seizes narrative as well as political control.

Even as these final moments depict the new king's consolidation of narrative power, however, the playtext hints that such power can never be absolute. Mortimer, for his part, dies with straightforward resistance to Edward's narrative, declaring that "I will rather die / Than sue for life unto a paltry boy" (56-7) and concluding his self-narrative with a proud, even Tamburlaine-worthy speech celebrating his own ambition (59-66). Edward may successfully (and correctly) label him a villain, but he cannot erase Mortimer's proud, self-determining courage. Isabel's narrating voice proves an even more overt threat to the young king. Her culpability for her husband's murder remains officially in question, the subject of "rumour" (a remnant of narrative instability in this newly stable world) (73), and her ability to narrate herself as an innocent victim retains enough power that Edward orders her removed quickly, because "[h]er words enforce these tears, / And I shall pity her if she speak again" (85-6). Even as Edward III writes a decisive ending to his father's story, one that labels Mortimer and

¹⁸⁷ Anderson's article on *Edward II* and the theory of the king's two bodies (to which I have referred throughout this section) is actually almost entirely focused on this funeral procession that Edward III arranges for his father; Anderson argues in detail that the visual procession emblemizes both father and son's mystical double identities.

(probably) his mother as the villains, he is reminded that resistance—in this case his mother’s—need not be physical to be effective. His mother may be his prisoner, but her ongoing self-narrative threatens the strength of his. *Edward II* ends on a note of fragile narrative clarity: Edward III’s story of what has transpired is acceptable and even, for the most part, correct, but his father’s illegibility and his mother’s resistance threaten to undermine his—and our—belief in that story nonetheless.

Shakespeare’s Richard II

Shakespeare’s Richard II is, like Edward II, a self-aware king capable of verbalizing his interior experience at length, and so, as he faces the yield-or-die crisis and its intersections with the discourse of the king’s two bodies, he can articulate for us the confusion of self-narrative that results. Unlike Marlowe’s Edward, however, Shakespeare’s Richard exhibits few or no hints of personal illegibility before the threat of deposition arises. Where Edward wonders aloud “if” he is king, and reacts to opposition as if he is being asked to yield or die, Richard seems to take his identity for granted—to a self-defeating fault. The suggestions of illegibility that do appear before the deposition scene occur when Richard provokes the behavior in others by disrupting the workings of the yield-or-die discourse in the play’s world. The disruption he causes enables Bullingbrook to take on a more powerful self-narrative and, later, deprives Richard himself of recourse to the full strength of the discourse’s characterizing power.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Richard disrupts another characterizing discourse—that of inheritance and primogeniture—when he seizes Bullingbrook’s inheritance for his own use. York warns him that if he empties inheritance of meaning, he will pay a price in the form of his own identity: Richard will “[b]e not thyself; for how art thou a king / But by fair sequence and succession?”; he will also, relatedly, “lose” his audience of “well-disposed hearts” (2.1.198-9, 206). Rebecca Lemon comments on this disruption to the play’s “discourse of inheritance” in *Treason By Words* (64). In general, Richard’s disregard for the importance of these discourses to the identities of his nobles also undermines his ability to *self*-narrate using the discursive power of such traditions.

The play's opening act roots its subsequent plot in Richard's subversion of the trial by combat between Bullingbrook and Mowbray. A trial by combat depends not merely upon physical strength but upon the characterizing power of the yield-or-die demand to give it the appearance of exposing truth; to yield during a trial by combat is not only to lose the trial, but also to characterize oneself as a dishonorable yielder—shameful, cowardly, even slavish.¹⁸⁹ Bullingbrook and Mowbray (and their respective partisans) see their conflict in these terms, using vocabulary that by now should seem very familiar. The Duchess of Gloucester, wife of the murder victim, hopes that Mowbray will be made “[a] caitive recreant” to Bullingbrook—that is, that he will be forced by fear of death into yielding to Bullingbrook's narrative (1.2.53). Mowbray agrees that his name and honor are as much at stake as his life, and that all will be lost if he fails to resist Bullingbrook in combat (1.1.167-9, 182-5). He further likens his participation in the combat to a “captive” experiencing liberation from “chains of bondage,” an appropriate metaphor for a character who has faced what amounts to a yield-or-die demand from Bullingbrook and who is determined to resist (1.3.88-9). Bullingbrook, who posed the challenge and is thus a more voluntary participant, also uses the conventional language of the yield-or-die discourse as he insists he will bite out his own tongue before allowing it to become a “slavish motive of recanting fear” (193). The battle's stakes are clear. Not only will the combat serve to adjudicate the charge Bullingbrook has brought, but it will also characterize one of its participants as an honorably resistant and self-narrating man and the other as a “slavish” “recreant.”

Richard, however, disrupts this heated but conventional setup, erasing its characterizing outcome and leaving its participants adrift. When he first objects to the potential conflict, he does so by asking both men to “Forget, forgive; conclude and be agreed,” urging closure not through decisive characterization but through blank forgetfulness and doubled, identical forgiveness and agreement (1.1.156). His later formal interruption of the ceremony of battle is

¹⁸⁹ I discuss these issues in relation to Malory's scenes of trial by combat in chapter 2.

arguably politically savvy, arguably merciful, arguably a gross betrayal of the rules of dramatic buildup that could rightfully enrage the play's audience, but in the context of yield-or-die discourse, it is also a muting of the straightforward characterization that was about to take place (1.3.119-39). The disruption leaves both Mowbray and Bullingbrook in the ambivalent position of exile, offstage and uncharacterized, their ultimate answers to "yield or die" deferred or forbidden.

Not surprisingly, then, they both exhibit signs of illegibility. Mowbray's reaction to Richard's intervention focuses on his sorrow and fear of being exiled to a country where he doesn't speak the language, a poignantly practical concern that is also a lament about a situation that renders him incomprehensible:

. . . now my tongue's use is to me no more
Than an unstringed viol or a harp,
Or like a cunning instrument cas'd up,
Or being open, put into his hands
That knows no touch to tune the harmony.
Within my mouth you have enjail'd my tongue,
Doubly porcullis'd with my teeth and lips,
And dull unfeeling barren ignorance
Is made my jailer to attend on me.
.....
What is thy sentence then but speechless death,
Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath? (1.3.161-73)

The passage, like Bullingbrook's threat to bite out his tongue, contributes to a motif of tongues in the first half of the play (itself a hint, of course, that the struggles being waged are narrative as

well as physical).¹⁹⁰ In this case, Mowbray's tongue is at the center of a complicated rush of figures that pile up alternatives with the unstable both/and quality of illegibility. The tongue is either a viol or a harp; it is either unstrung, or put away in a case, or in unskilled hands. Then Mowbray himself becomes a prison-cell for his tongue, a metaphor that adds blankness to unstableness: his body becomes the inanimate prison, "dull unfeeling barren ignorance" (an excessive string of words connoting blankness) is the jailer, and Mowbray's tongue merges with himself ("me") as the inmate. The result is not merely death, but unsignifying "speechless death." (Much later in the play, after he lapses into illegibility, Richard II also becomes, metaphorically, a double-natured inanimate building, both an "inn" and a "tomb" [5.1.12-3]). In this moment, Mowbray experiences the crisis of self-narrating power that is illegibility. Confined by oppressive "ignorance," he is left "speechless."

Bullingbrook is similarly cut loose from clear characterization by Richard's intervention, but his more optimistic response is a reminder that illegibility can be a state of unrealized potential as well as confusion. Bullingbrook's exile is more obviously a deferral than Mowbray's (that is, it is "a long apprenticeship / To foreign passages" rather than "jail" [1.3.271]), and his father, John of Gaunt, urges him to re-narrate the protean experience of illegibility in whatever way gives him the most comfort, even if it is untrue (for example: "say I sent thee forth to purchase honor, / And not the King exil'd thee" [282-3]). Bullingbrook seems to reject such re-narration as implausible in the moment, but soon shows himself willing to engage in more practical variations of exactly such creative self-narrating. Departing, he performs patient (therefore resistant, despite his stated loyalty to Richard) suffering in the eyes of the common people and even behaves as if he were the heir to the crown—a first suggestion of what will become his effective new identity (1.4.23-36). He later justifies his return to England by a verbal

¹⁹⁰ Rebecca Lemon associates these references to tongues with the play's exploration of the power and danger of verbal resistance to tyranny (61-2). I suggest that this association can be sharpened: the references to tongues help establish the ability (or inability) of various characters to retain narrative power and therefore to offer potential resistance.

quibble that is also a crucial act of self-renaming, insisting he is no longer the Duke of Herford, the title under which he was banished, but the Duke of Lancaster, the new title he has inherited from his father (2.3.70-1, 113-4). His reference to his “infant fortune” (66) and his insistence that York, his uncle, has essentially become his new father (117-8) add to the impression that his is a newborn identity created by his own narrative power out of the ambiguous illegibility of exile. Richard’s disruption of the characterizing ritual of trial by combat leaves both Mowbray and Bullingbrook as blank slates, narrative voids, which Bullingbrook is quick to turn to his advantage.

Illegibility is infectious. Richard’s inadvertent undermining of the yield-or-die discourse’s characterizing power weakens his own ability to insist on a clear self-narrative while it enables Bullingbrook gradually to revise his identity from Richard’s loyal vassal to Richard’s captor and king. In this context, York’s “neuter” response to Bullingbrook’s armed march across the country indicates not only York’s personal uncertainty and balancing of principle with pragmatism, but also the growing spread of illegibility in the realm (2.3.159). York could make a more characterizing choice to either yield to Bullingbrook or resist him, but instead he opts to defer such a decision with a “pause” and declares Bullingbrook’s side “[n]or friends, nor foes” (168-70) for the time being.

Richard first becomes aware that he is now on the receiving end of a yield-or-die crisis after his return to England, when Salisbury impresses on him exactly how great Bullingbrook’s military advantage has become.¹⁹¹ Richard’s response starts with shock and then oscillates between forms of resistance both martial and expressional. In his shock, he appears “pale and dead” before Aumerle urges him to “remember who you are,” motivating Richard to reply,

I had forgot myself, am I not king?

Awake, thou coward majesty! thou sleepest.

¹⁹¹ Richard has, arguably, already been inadvertently illegible in the face of Bullingbrook’s challenge by experiencing delay in his return to England: he is, laments Salisbury, “One day too late” for a chance at decisive victory (3.2.87).

Is not the king's name twenty thousand names?

Arm, arm, my name!" (3.2.79-86)

This brief instance of illegibility in response to the crisis carries the familiar markers of forgetfulness and unconsciousness that so many characters exhibit when they face the question. In addition, Richard's reference to metaphorical sleep recalls Edward II's drowsiness in a similar situation; his question, "am I not king?" is an ominous reminder of Edward's uncertainty on the same point.

In this moment, however, Richard snaps out of the crisis of illegible shock into straightforward resistance, determined to deploy his name—his self-narrative—in resistance to Bullingbrook. In the rest of this scene, although his oscillations of plans and moods hardly inspire either Richard's men or us with easy confidence (military victory is, increasingly clearly, out of reach), at no point does he explicitly or implicitly yield to Bullingbrook's narrative. Instead, Richard first explores philosophical and religious patience, arguing that acceptance of suffering and service to God now define his life (94-103). He then flirts with righteous anger while he believes his favorites have betrayed him, in the process suggesting that yielding to "peace with Bullingbrook" would be a sin worse than Judas's betrayal of Christ (aligning himself with Christ in resistance against evil) (126-34). Next in Richard's oscillation is his famous speech acknowledging his human frailty and urging his men to passive sorrow, but this grief-stricken speech remains resistant. Richard exerts his narrative power to script himself as a tragic sufferer in a monologue that stresses the act of narration itself: "Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs, / Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes / Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth"; ". . . let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings" (145-7, 155-6). He transforms his experience into one of many *exempla* of the falls of great men, part of a commentary on the inevitable human death that awaits all monarchs. The moralistic abstraction Richard deploys in this speech implicitly argues that Richard and Bullingbrook's fates are *not* determined by their individual strengths and merits, but rather that all great kings must

similarly fall. Further, one of Richard's "sad stories of the death of kings" is of kings who die "haunted by the ghosts they have deposed," Richard's most obvious hint that Bullingbrook is not exempt from the dance of death he imagines (158). This seemingly defeated speech manages, at least, to defeat Bullingbrook, too.

After a pep talk from his men, Richard oscillates briefly back to martial resistance (188-91), but a final round of bad news pushes him back toward what he calls "despair" (205). Despair, as Spenser showed us, is a kind of yielding that differs from a Lucrece-like resistant suicide. Richard's "despair" here is an ambiguous blend of yielding and resistance that marks the beginning of his period of sustained illegibility. On one hand, he seems to be setting aside narration and audience, demanding an end to conversation and ordering his army dispersed so that he may "pine away" (209). He claims to be yielding into service of personified "woe": "A king, woe's slave, shall kingly woe obey" (210). On the other hand, this is a speech full of imperious orders to his men, the fulfillment of which demonstrates Richard's ongoing narrative power. And by yielding to a figurative device he has himself invented—woe—Richard again resists yielding to Bullingbrook's narrative. Even this despairing speech is a faint act of resistant plaint, framing Richard as suffering hero still.

Once Bullingbrook surrounds and pins Richard in Flint Castle, he makes an offer that sounds like he is yielding to the King but that is, in fact, a veiled yield-or-die demand. Richard, who has before faced the characterizing question from a distance when he realized the inevitability of military defeat, now faces it in person. Bullingbrook declares himself

. . . hither come

Even at his feet to lay my arms and power,

Provided that my banishment repeal'd

And lands restor'd again be freely granted.

If not, I'll use the advantage of my power,

And lay the summer's dust with show'rs of blood

Rain'd from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen. . . . (3.3.38-44)

Bullingbrook's surrender to Richard is highly conditional—a tactic I identify in chapter 3 as a form of resistance—and, in context, cannot be yielding anyway. Richard hasn't asked Bullingbrook the characterizing question and does not hold him captive. The reverse is true. Bullingbrook's demand is for Richard to restore all his rights and titles—or else. Bullingbrook's ambiguous figurative musing, moments later, that, to Richard's "fire, I'll be the yielding water; / The rage be his, whilst on the earth I rain / My waters—on the earth, and not on him" (58-60), mimics his previous message to the king. It ostensibly describes Bullingbrook's yielding while concealing his threat to rain/reign (a well-studied pun).¹⁹²

In response to Bullingbrook's ultimatum, Richard declares himself "amazed"—like astonishment, an illegible reaction (72). As he then develops his reply, he once more oscillates between yielding (123-4) and resistance (129-30). Even within his moments of resistance, he oscillates between expressional resistance tactics (he seems to accept Aumerle's advice to "fight with gentle words" for now [131], and he continues to toy with Christian-inflected patience and to complain of his suffering [147-79]). Uncertainty about identity (expanding upon his earlier question, "am I not king?") becomes more prominent in his statements as well, as he speculates "if we be" or "if we be not" king (75-7) and later laments,

O that I were as great

As is my grief, or lesser than my name!

Or that I could forget what I have been!

Or not remember what I must be now! (136-9)

¹⁹² Jeremy Lopez discusses this speech—and its pun on rain/reign—in his extensive Introduction to *Richard II: New Critical Essays*. Lopez argues that the pun suggests Bullingbrook does *not* possess the kind of control over poetic language that Richard does. Here, suggests Lopez, Shakespeare depicts him accidentally revealing his true intentions even as he tries to sound conciliatory (36). I tend to see Bullingbrook's words as more self-aware than this, but either way, my major point stands: Bullingbrook's language contains veiled yield-or-die threats directed at Richard.

The speech unites the self-narrating confusion, longing for forgetfulness, and the listing of alternatives (“or . . . or . . . or . . .”) that all indicate illegibility.

More strikingly, at the core of the scene, Richard over-yields, offering Bullingbrook more than he demanded. Bullingbrook has, officially, only asked for his rights and titles at this point, but after agreeing to that demand (123-4), Richard goes further:

What must the King do now? Must he submit?

The King shall do it. Must he be depos'd?

The King shall be contented. Must he lose

The name of king? a' God's name let it go. (143-6)

He even verbally crowns his opponent as he asks Northumberland, “What says King Bullingbrook? Will his Majesty / Give Richard leave to live till Richard dies?” (173-4). Richard’s lapses into third person in these lines add to the illegible mood, both drawing attention to himself as a figure with impersonal, almost authorial power while, at the same time, disassociating him from his own *self*-narrative. Finally, of course, the play here and elsewhere insists on Richard’s metatheatrical scripting and performing of his own fall (“Down, down I come . . .” [178]) and Bullingbrook’s rise (“Up, cousin, up,” to which he adds the yielding phrase, “I am yours” [194, 197]).¹⁹³ The audience has little meaningful doubt at this point that Bullingbrook is happy with this outcome—Richard isn’t forcing him into anything he dislikes—but at the same time, Richard is forcing Bullingbrook away from veiled threats and diplomatic kneeling into overtly deposing the king. Like Griselda in the *Clerk’s Tale*, Richard paradoxically and resistantly asserts an ongoing narrative power of his own by yielding more than Bullingbrook has (yet) asked for.

¹⁹³ As Lawrence J. Ross comments in an aside to his book on *Measure for Measure*, *Richard II* seems to inaugurate Shakespeare’s interest in “politics as performance,” with Richard II and Bullingbrook both attempting “to impose their antagonistic interpretations of a political event in the public performance that enacts it” (121).

The scene ends in contradiction as Richard tells Bullingbrook, “What you will have, I’ll give, and willing too; / For do we must what force will have us do” (206-07). What does “willing” mean in the context of being forced? His words recall Zenocrate’s comment to Tamburlaine that “I must be pleased perforce” to be his prisoner/wife (1.2.259), also an open-ended paradoxical statement that resolves a stable meaning only as time passes and Zenocrate behaves in a consistently yielding way. Richard, in contrast to Zenocrate, continues to self-narrate. He follows his paradoxical declaration by predicting that Bullingbrook is about to order a journey to London, which Bullingbrook affirms; Richard declares, “Then I must not say no,” again both yielding to Bullingbrook’s plan while at the same time narrating that plan on Bullingbrook’s behalf (209). A wide range of performances could be layered onto Richard’s dialogue here (for example, he might be stoically resigned, full of clenched-teeth impotent rage, “speaking fair” while scheming, or almost childishly sulky) because the playtext does not establish whether Richard is yielding or resistant. His words may be yielding: supporting Bullingbrook’s self-narrative as accurately as Bullingbrook could wish (he even labels Bullingbrook his “heir” [205] as if accepting and supporting Bullingbrook’s earlier performance before the commoners as the kingdom’s next-in-line [1.4.35-6]). His words, however, may also be resistant: asserting a lord’s ongoing right to narrate his vassal’s actions for him.

Back in London, these problems persist and expand. The play’s clearest description of Richard as truly yielding comes in a report by York of events off-stage. York notifies Bullingbrook that Richard “with willing soul / Adopts thee heir, and his high sceptre yields / To the possession of thy royal hand” (4.1.108-10). York is trying to impose finality on the ongoing question of Richard’s status, insisting that Richard “yields.” After the confusing scene at Flint Castle, however, in which Richard surrounded this exact language with such ambiguity (“willing,” especially), such an off-stage yielding may seem to be hiding something.

By the time Richard offers Bullingbrook his crown with yet another oxymoronic, yielding/resistant phrase—“Here, cousin, seize the crown” (4.1.181)—he has already arguably

yielded twice, once when he over-yielded in Flint Castle and once off-stage, with York as witness. The repetition implies a failure of the yield-or-die discourse, because yielding, when effective, is simple, immediate, and permanent. Something about it isn't working in Richard's case. Bullingbrook attributes the failure to the lack of a sizeable and persuaded audience, and arranges this third yielding in hopes that if "in common view / He may surrender," then the ambiguity and "suspicion" surrounding these events can be resolved (155-7). Bullingbrook holds military and governmental power at this point, but he still lacks a clear-cut *narrative* victory. He needs a straight, characterizing answer from his captive.¹⁹⁴

He doesn't, of course, get one.

Richard's ambiguous offer to let Bullingbrook "seize the crown" begins a verbal sparring between the two characters over, first, whether or not Richard is yielding in his heart as well as in fact and, second, how this moment will be perceived by their audience of English subjects. The conflict is oddly the same as that played out between Walter and Griselda in the *Clerk's Tale*: what's in the captive's heart, and whose narrative will win the commoners' approbation? "I thought you had been willing to resign," says Bullingbrook, and Richard replies, "My crown I am, but still my griefs are mine"—again offering surrender even as he also insists on narrating himself as a wronged victim (190-1). Because Richard's answer is a non-answer, Bullingbrook must repeat the question: "Are you contented to resign the crown?" Richard's response confusingly puns on "ay"/"I" and adds an element of blankness into his paradoxical statements: "Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be; / Therefore no no, for I resign to thee" (200-2). In the midst of giving an unstable both/and answer to Bullingbrook's question, Richard's "I" loses—or

¹⁹⁴ A famous textual problem with *Richard II* surrounds this third (attempted) yielding scene in 4.1. Earlier editions of the play move quickly from York's report of Richard's off-stage yielding to the aftermath of Bullingbrook's coronation, while the play's fourth quarto and later editions include this expansion of 4.1 in which Bullingbrook publically deposes Richard. Genevieve Love's article "Going back to that well" summarizes and expands upon critical discussion of this textual puzzle. Richard remains illegible with or without the additional section, although the mystery surrounding the expansion is undeniably a happy coincidence for my purposes because it pushes the play into textual illegibility at a key moment of captive crisis. I discuss the expanded passage here because of its interesting additions to Richard's illegible behavior.

multiplies—its meaning.¹⁹⁵ In other words, when Bullingbrook poses the yield-or-die demand this time, “nothing” responds with the words “yes and no.”

Following those lines, Richard apparently yields to Bullingbrook for the third time. “I will undo myself,” he announces, an accurate description of the act of yielding (in which the self’s narrative is given to another). Then he continues:

With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths;
All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
My manors, rents, revenues I forgo,
My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny. . . . (4.1.207-13)

This speech ought to be decisive. Richard’s ritualistic, repetitious invocation of his own agency should stress that his yielding is a personal, considered *choice*, a last action representing his own self-narrative, just as the yield-or-die discourse demands. Then again, *before* this speech, Richard’s personal pronoun has already taken on a slippery, empty quality. If “I” is indeterminate, then Richard’s obsessive repetition of it (and its declined forms) in his yielding speech may drain that entire speech of straightforward meaning. To evaluate the speech’s efficacy, context will matter. If, subsequently, Richard supports Bullingbrook’s narrative, then his speech accomplishes the work of yielding. If Richard continues to resist—or to exist illegibly alongside—Bullingbrook’s narrative, then a third yielding has failed to characterize the men’s relationship decisively.

¹⁹⁵ Many analysts have explored this pun and these lines, but few summarize the contradictions and multiplications of meaning more succinctly than the *Riverside*’s footnote: “Richard says that he cannot answer either ‘ay’ or ‘no,’ for with his kingship stripped from him there is no ‘I,’ but without an ‘I’ a ‘no’ has no force” (note to lines 201-2 on page 871).

Northumberland thus puts this issue to the test immediately by ordering Richard to read aloud a list of his crimes, an act meant to solidify Bullingbrook's narrative of events. Richard answers this demand, however, with unstableness, blankness, and deferral. He resists Bullingbrook by labeling the deposition a sin (232-6) and again comparing himself to the patient Christ (239-42). Then he seems to acknowledge his yielding by calling himself a "traitor" and "slave" because "I have given here my soul's consent" to the deposition (248-51). He laments the emptiness that has replaced his own sense of identity, observing, "I . . . know not now what name to call myself" (255-59). Additionally, he defers the reading aloud of his crimes with questions ("Must I do so?" [228]), stall tactics ("Mine eyes are full of tears, I cannot see" [244]), and deflections and insults (254, 269), never quite refusing but certainly never agreeing, until Bullingbrook backs down, agreeing that the list need not be read (271). Richard then substitutes a reading of his own choice for the reading of Northumberland's list. Having demanded a mirror, he offers to "read" from it, calling the image within it "the very book indeed / Where all my sins are writ, and that's myself" (273-75). He doesn't recognize or trust the image that he sees, however, and instead shatters the mirror (279-91). Symbolically, he has confirmed himself as unreadable—to himself and to the others.¹⁹⁶

After this third failure of the yield-or-die demand to elicit a clear answer, Richard's ongoing illegibility is confirmed. As Queen Isobel watches her husband brought to London, she struggles to interpret his appearance. At first, she isn't even sure if Richard can or should be the

¹⁹⁶ Continuing to run in syncopated concert with the yield-or-die discourse in these scenes is the discourse of the king's two bodies. As I have commented, Kantorowicz's analysis of *Richard II* explicates in detail the operation of that idea of sovereignty in Shakespeare's play. Of this climactic moment with the mirror, Kantorowicz comments: "When finally, at the 'brittle glory' of his face, Richard dashes the mirror to the ground, there shatters not only Richard's past and present, but every aspect of a super-world. His catoptromancy has ended. The features as reflected by the looking-glass betray that he is stripped of every possibility of a second or super-body—of the pompous body politic of king, of the God-likeness of the Lord's deputy elect, of the follies of the fool, and even of the most human griefs residing in inner man. The splintering mirror means, or is, the breaking apart of any possible duality. All those facets are reduced to one: to the banal face and insignificant *physis* of a miserable man, a *physis* now void of any metaphysis whatsoever. It is both less and more than Death. It is the *demise* of Richard, and the rise of a new body natural" (40).

object of her gaze at all, as she tells herself to “see, or rather do not see” him before resolving to “look up” and “behold” him (8-9). The Queen then figures her husband as an emptiness, but she cannot settle on a single kind of emptiness. She objectifies him as a “model” or “map” of the real man, an “inn” for “hard favor’d grief,” and, most chillingly, “King Richard’s tomb, / And not King Richard” (5.1.11-14). She asks, “Hath Bolingbroke deposed / Thine intellect? Hath he been in thy heart?” (27-28), suggesting that perhaps her husband has yielded. Richard doesn’t answer those questions directly. Instead, he suggests that she should consider him “dead” (38) and work to propagate his narrative: “Tell thou the lamentable tale of me, / And send the hearers weeping to their beds” (44-45), again a move that suggests ongoing resistance, his desire to be known as a protagonist of a sad tale.

The paradox and blankness of illegibility are obvious in this encounter. The Queen’s figuring of Richard as a series of inanimate structures (an inn, a tomb, and indirectly the ruins—the “model”—of “old Troy” [11]) joins with other references throughout the play to create a subtle interweaving of illegible captivity, bodies, and stone walls. I have already noted how Mowbray, speaking of an experience of illegibility, likens his body to a prison (1.3.166-9). Richard’s choice of “Flint castle” as the place where he will “pine away”—resulting in Flint Castle being the site of his initial capture (3.2.109)—derives from historical fact, not from a Shakespearean choice to emphasize the castle-prison’s stony construction. That said, the Queen, observing Richard enter London, refers to the “flint bosom” of the Tower of London that she expects will shortly confine him (5.1.2-4), and Richard himself, in the play’s penultimate scene, wishes he were able to “tear a passage thorough the flinty ribs / Of this hard world, my ragged prison walls” (5.5.21). He may be longing for a literal prison break, but to imagine that he speaks of death, the liberating destruction of his own body, is not difficult, either. The association of prison with stone is straightforward, but the stone also metaphorically becomes a stony *body*, with a bosom and ribs. Although a full metaphor never develops, the swirl of associations—Mowbray’s body as prison; Richard as a constructed building, an inn or tomb; Flint Castle;

prison as a stony body; Richard as his own stony prison—suits the unsettled yet stony blankness of illegibility.

Richard's desire that "the lamentable tale of me" will reduce audiences to "weeping" begins to come to pass in the following scene, in which a "weeping" York tells his wife the "story" of Richard's entry into London (5.2.2). York seems to prefer describing Bullingbrook rather than Richard (at least, he has earlier stopped his report at the moment of Richard's entrance, and now resumes it with a description of Bullingbrook instead), but his wife asks questions that put the focus on "poor Richard" (22). This exchange proves that Richard's chosen self-narrative continues to exert some power, but York's description also stresses the limits of that power. Bullingbrook is the "well-graced actor" whose self-narrative is clear and dominant, while Richard can only "prattle" meaninglessly in his wake (24-6). In York's judgment, Richard continues to possess a contradictory both/and quality, "[h]is face still combating with tears and smiles, / The badges of his grief and patience" (expressions of affective resistance that war with each other) (31-2). Finally, York observes that Richard's appearance *ought* to have provoked a stronger reaction of pity in his audience, but inexplicably did not, a result York attributes to incomprehensible divine intervention ("God, for some strong purpose, steel'd / The hearts of men") (34-6). In this scene, Richard may be a resistant captive, but his narrative of resistance (a narrative that depicts him as a virtuous, suffering hero and Bullingbrook as the malign cause of that suffering) is attenuated and ineffective; the commoners, at least, are unable or unwilling to read it. Richard's final soliloquy opens with an acknowledgment of a similar disconnection. When the now-imprisoned former king comments that constructing an analogy between his "prison" and "the world" is a difficult, maybe impossible, task, he suggests both his literal disassociation from life outside his cell and also the disassociation between his experience and consensus reality that York observed (5.5.1-5).

Ultimately, however, resistance need not be clearly communicated or accepted as consensus reality to be successful. What matters is not the reaction of the commoners or the

“world,” but Richard’s, to the narrative he is telling himself. The remainder of his prison soliloquy takes up the question of his inner experience, his current experience of his own selfhood: is he illegible to himself? To an extent, the answer is yes. Varying self-narratives, “thoughts” that Richard thinks of as “people” (9-10), compete for dominance within him, leading to a paradoxical multiplicity: “divine” thoughts (which themselves are divided against each other on the question of Richard’s access to redemption and heaven) (12-7), ambitious thoughts (18-22), and philosophical thoughts (23-30) all struggle within him. He oscillates between feeling like a “king” and a “beggar” (32-8). Richard’s well-known conclusion to this first part of his ruminations—“Thus play I in one person many people / And none contented” (31-2)—sums up the unstableness of illegibility.

The second half of his soliloquy introduces the second illegible quality, blankness. Richard returns to his word “nothing” from the deposition scene:

. . . whate’er I be,
Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleased till he be eased
With being nothing. (38-41)

He compares himself to another inanimate object, this time the automaton-like clock (50-60). He fears he is losing his mind (61-3). Richard’s agonized experience of time as becoming distorted and meaningless (which leads to his clock metaphor) not only suggests a loss of legible sequence and order but also, perhaps, the arbitrary deferrals inherent to a character in this confused, uncharacterized state (42-9).

A clear narrative for Richard’s character—whether his own self-narrative or one imposed by his captor, Bullingbrook—seems out of reach by this point, but the play suggests that, in his final moments, Richard claws his way back toward legible resistance. The arrival of the sympathetic Groom, who has gone to considerable effort “[t]o look upon my sometimes royal master’s face” (74-5), suggests that Richard’s suffering continues to find an audience (plaint, as I

noted in chapter 3, tends to reach sympathetic ears). The Groom, like the Duchess of York in 5.2, looks past Bullingbrook's showier self-narrative to see Richard's. Richard displays a range of reactions to the Groom's description of Bullingbrook astride his own former horse (84-94), but his attitude toward his captor is consistently resistant (even his reference to being driven "like an ass" by Bullingbrook reads as plaint rather than propagation of Bullingbrook's narrative). The Groom's final words in the scene, within hearing of the prison's Keeper and in response to Richard's "If thou love me, 'tis time thou wert away," are guarded and ambiguous: "What my tongue dares not, that my heart shall say" (96-7). The comment implies that a narrative centering on Richard still exists, though it will not be spoken out loud and may never have practical impact upon the world beyond Richard's prison.

Perhaps inspired by that moment of connection—in which his self-narrative is ratified by an audience of one who can "read" it—Richard ends his life in straightforward resistance. Rejecting (in one final oscillation) the quietly resistant narrative he projected to York (33), Richard announces, "Patience is stale, and I am weary of it" (103). He dies in violent combat with his Keeper and the arriving murderers, denouncing Bullingbrook clearly (102) and declaring his confidence that his murderers are sinners and his own destiny is in heaven (108-11). In these last moments, Richard himself seems confident of his own identity as a morally righteous hero resisting—to the death—his morally corrupt enemies.

Bullingbrook's final scenes explore his attempts to restore order in what is now his kingdom—but those attempts are scrambled by the usual residual confusion that leaks out from illegible characters (especially, as *Edward II* also showed, from illegible kings, whose public selves are conceived to be connected so profoundly to those around them). The arguably comic scene in which Bullingbrook pardons Aumerle comes close to being a successful exertion of Bullingbrook's narrative power in this sense. Aumerle has been suffering from his association with Richard, not only politically but also in the matter of his own sense of identity. Some residual illegibility has clung to him, making him now "Aumerle that was, / But that is lost for

being Richard's friend" (5.2.41-2). Upon his father's discovery of his treason, Aumerle appears "amaz'd" (85) and stays that way, without dialogue, until he makes his way to Bullingbrook to throw himself on the new king's mercy (the stage direction at 5.3.22 is "Enter AUMERLE amazed"). Richard was also "amazed" by Bullingbrook's first ultimatum (3.3.72)—plunged into the shock in which an old narrative has fallen apart and a new one has not yet appeared. The crisis Aumerle now faces is much like the yield-or-die crisis, because if he wishes to live, he must persuade Bullingbrook of his absolute (yielding) loyalty.

The debate that ensues is mostly comic and Bullingbrook's mercy is not particularly in doubt, but at issue is the legibility of Aumerle's "heart" (53). Just as he wanted to assess Richard's willingness to be deposed, Bullingbrook now wants to know if Aumerle's repentance is sincere and permanent. By pardoning Aumerle and warning him to "prove you true" (145), Bullingbrook attempts to restore Aumerle to the legible status of yielded subject. His warning arguably betrays a little uncertainty that the narrative he is imposing on Aumerle may be unreliable, but more straightforwardly that warning simply asserts his narrative power. Aumerle will prove true because Bullingbrook says he will. The play invites us to contrast this concluding scene of judgment with the scene of Richard judging Mowbray and Bullingbrook in Act 1, and in the context of my argument the difference is striking.¹⁹⁷ The non-judgment Richard imposes leaves both men illegible, their identities protean; the judgment Bullingbrook imposes leaves Aumerle decisively defined and circumscribed, subject to Bullingbrook's narrative control.

Almost the very moment Bullingbrook renders this judgment and asserts this control, however, the play questions his narrative power as Exton offers his interpretation of an ambiguous statement by the new king—the interpretation or misinterpretation that leads to Richard's murder (5.4). Mortimer's analogous order in *Edward II* is ambiguous, too, but

¹⁹⁷ For example, in "Aumerle's Conspiracy," while arguing that the Aumerle scenes are "fully intended farce" (175), Sheldon P. Zitner compares Bullingbrook's "precise grasp of practical politics" in this scene of judgment with the way Richard II "plays with the idea and language of pardon" in the opening scenes (182). Zitner thus, of course, participates in a long critical tradition of judging Bullingbrook to be the pragmatist in opposition to Richard's poet.

deliberately so: the audience is made privy to his intention. By contrast, Shakespeare denies us a primary hearing of Bullingbrook's ambiguous statement; we hear it only as repeated by Exton, leaving Bullingbrook's true meaning off-stage and unattainable. Bullingbrook's dismay upon hearing of Richard's death is unquestionably tempered by relief, and may be entirely feigned, but we cannot be sure (5.6.38-40). Bullingbrook thus ends the play caught in a moment of paradox that is reminiscent of his rival's illegibility—"I hate the murderer, love him murder'd" (40)—while Richard finds a last-minute legibility in clear resistance.

Shakespeare's Barnardine

As a character discussed extensively before his entrance onstage, *Measure for Measure's* criminal Barnardine is notable first as an absence, described but not seen. (He is also notable among this chapter's collection of illegible characters for being hilarious. Negating the power of the yield-or-die question does not belong solely to solemn Griseldas and Richards.) According to his fellow characters, who don't know what to make of him, Barnardine is marked by now-familiar qualities: deferral, paradoxical unstableness, blankness. The deferral of his entrance echoes the deferral of his case's resolution. He has been accused of murder (4.2.62) and imprisoned for nine years (131). The disguised Duke wonders, "How came it that the absent Duke had not either deliver'd him to his liberty or executed him?," asking why Barnardine has not been decisively labeled as innocent or guilty and, in my terms, asking how he has evaded the Duke's characterizing narrative power for all this time (in this sense, the Duke has been "absent" to Barnardine far longer than he has been literally absent from Vienna) (132-2). The Provost explains that Barnardine has had "friends" intervening on his behalf, and no one ever decided there was sufficient evidence to execute him. Only recently, under Angelo, has the crime been proven (135-9). Implicated but unspoken in this conversation is the Duke's own policy of lax law

enforcement that he now, through Angelo, seeks to correct (1.3.19-43); Barnardine has been in limbo under this policy for years.

Both Claudio and the Provost offer descriptions of the as-yet unseen Barnardine that highlight his paradoxically unstable and blank qualities. Claudio explains that his fellow prisoner is “[a]s fast lock’d up in sleep as guiltless labor / When it lies starkly in the traveller’s bones. / He will not wake” (4.2.66-8). The statement is significant in several ways: “locked up,” of course, suggesting imprisonment; “sleep” making that particular imprisonment seem both pleasant and mindless; “guiltless” contradicting Barnardine’s now-proven criminality; “traveller” standing in paradoxical opposition to “locked up”; and the final comment, “He will not wake,” suggesting that Barnardine’s imprisoning sleep is also self-willed. The unstable paradoxes pile up quickly (innocent/guilty, imprisoned/travelling, locked-up/willful), while at the same time we receive an overall impression of unconsciousness. The Provost, describing Barnardine to the Duke, enriches Claudio’s picture of paradoxical blankness: Barnardine is “[a] man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep, careless, reckless, and fearless of what’s past, present, or to come; insensible of mortality and desperately mortal” (142-5). His insensibility is further proven by his refusal to “hear” any wise or religious “advice” (146-7), his drunkenness (149-50), and especially his lack of response to either the hope of freedom (he enjoys “the liberty of the prison,” says the Provost, but “give him leave to escape hence, he would not” [147-9]) or the fear of execution (in a torturous manipulation, his jailers have “very oft” pretended “to carry him to execution”—which “hath not mov’d him at all” [150-2]). The Provost says that Barnardine has “not denied” the charges against him, a negative phrase that does not carry nearly the same narrative power as would a confession to those charges; possibly, Barnardine has said nothing (139).

Especially contrasted with the straightforward Provost describing him, whose “honesty and constancy” appear “written” on his face for the Duke to “read” (153-2), Barnardine is illegible. That said, illegibility is a specific quality, defined primarily by a prisoner’s confusing or

absent answer to the yield-or-die demand, and in this sense Barnardine is different than many imprisoned characters I have examined because the moment of his arrest is never discussed, let alone staged (we will never know if some Viennese constable such as Elbow ordered him to “yield or die”). How Barnardine might have been characterized before his imprisonment, or how he behaved at the moment of capture, is irrelevant in this playworld. Following on that absent beginning, authority figures are unable to extract clear, characterizing responses from him: is he guilty? He doesn't *deny* it. Does he wish to escape? Does he fear death? Unclear. Barnardine is a negative space instead of a character, not only physically absent while introduced but also defined by his refusals either to narrate himself or accept the narratives of others. He is defined by “not”: “He will not wake,” he does “not” deny his guilt, “[h]e will hear” no advice, “he would not” escape, he is “not mov'd” by the threat of execution. Although we never see him face a yield-or-die moment, his subsequent interactions with his captors are all marked by illegibility. His captors have failed to impose a clear narrative upon him, and Barnardine has not asserted a clear self-narrative, either.

The Duke's arrival and desire to use Barnardine in service of his own schemes means that he steps personally into the role of Barnardine's captor. Having been “absent” in Barnardine's experience before, the Duke now becomes the face of the state's unresolved and muddled battle for narrative power with the Bohemian murderer. The Duke expects an easy victory, assuming that Barnardine must support his goals without complication: the murderer can be executed and “his head borne to Angelo” as if it is Claudio's. To the Provost's objection that the two prisoners look nothing alike, the Duke gives his breezily confident response, “O, death's a great disguiser” (4.2.170-4). He means literal death, of course, but he might as well assert that loss of narrative power is a great disguiser. If Barnardine (and, for that matter, Claudio and Angelo) have yielded to the Duke's self-narrative as prisoners or vassals, then they will become who he needs them to become, act as he needs them to act.

The first hint that the Duke's expectations about Barnardine may not be so simply fulfilled comes through the Provost's ongoing concern about the Duke's substitution plan. The Duke goes to some lengths—indeed, “further than I meant” (190-1)—to reassure the Provost and gain his cooperation. In this scene, however, the Provost never straightforwardly agrees to support the Duke's plan. Instead, the Duke is left to issue him answerless orders. “Put not yourself into amazement how these things should be,” the Duke urges, but then accepts that, for now, the Provost is, in fact, “amaz'd” (204-8). Perhaps Barnardine's illegibility has spread out to infect the Provost and left the Duke struggling to win his immediate audience's unquestioning support. Certainly, despite the Duke's confident orders about the fate of Barnardine's head, the scene ends irresolutely.

Barnardine himself has yet to appear onstage, and deferral continues to be one of his defining qualities. Before his grand entrance in the next scene, Barnardine speaks his first few lines from off-stage while his executioners Abhorson and Pompey comment impatiently on his slow emergence from his cell (4.3.20-36). His objections to the pending execution—“I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me” (53-4); “I will not consent to die this day, that's certain” (55-6); “I swear I will not die to-day” (59-60)—are delightfully and bizarrely focused on delaying the execution indefinitely, not calling it off. By declaring himself too drunk to receive the Duke/Friar's religious counsel, Barnardine dares his captors to execute him while he is in a state of sin.

Barnardine's drunkenness recalls the madness associated with other illegible characters (for example Launcelot and Edward II); both are states of mind that characters feel bars access to a complete and clear sense of self. Barnardine's sleepiness is a comedic echo of Griselda's fainting, Palomydes's drifting reveries, and Edward II's drowsiness (4.3.28-9). His speech, like the earlier second-hand descriptions of him, is full of negative denials (44, 53, 55, 59), and he even manages to silence the Duke himself, interrupting him with, “Not a word. If you have any thing to say to me, come to my ward; for thence will not I to-day” (62-3). These latter points—

Barnardine's denials and his shutting-down of the Duke—might support an argument that Barnardine is resistant rather than illegible. Although Barnardine is forceful, however, he is forcefully illegible. He is not so much defying the Duke's narrative in favor of his own as he is ignoring that narrative and going back to sleep. His contradictory final line ("come to my ward; for thence will not I to-day") reminds us that, as the Provost said, this is a man who would not escape if he could (4.2.148-9). His return to his ward is both resistant and passively self-imprisoning—a paradox.

The Duke's exclamation following Barnardine's exit acknowledges the prisoner's illegibility: "Unfit to live, or die; O gravel heart!" (4.3.64). Barnardine's "gravel heart" describes his spiritual hard-heartedness but also evokes the stony, inanimate quality of illegible characters such as Griselda or Richard II. Further, Barnardine's both/and lack of fitness for either life or death provokes the Duke himself into a moment of irresolute oscillation. Immediately on Barnardine's exit, the Duke sends Abhorson "[a]fter him [to] bring him to the block" for imminent execution (65), but seconds later the Duke questions his decision, commenting that Barnardine is "unmeet for death / And to transport him in the mind he is / Were damnable" (66-8). After the Provost reveals that the head of Ragozine the pirate is available to substitute for Claudio's, the Duke—his time-sensitive problem resolved—decides to return to Barnardine and "[p]ersuade this rude wretch willingly to die" (81). Moments later, however, he simply orders Barnardine, with Claudio, confined "in secret holds" for the time being (87). In the space of twenty-five lines the Duke vacillates between several contradictory responses to Barnardine and chooses none of them, instead deferring the decision and leaving the prisoner in the mysterious limbo of a "secret hold." The Duke's plans, confronted with Barnardine, briefly become contradictory and unfulfilled.

The abrupt introduction of Ragozine, who is "more like to Claudio" in appearance as well as being conveniently already dead (76), grants the Duke a renewed appearance of narrative power. Ragozine's appearance and death answer and support the needs of the Duke's plot

obediently, causing the Provost to set aside his former objections as well and tell the Duke, in the language of vassalage, “I am your free dependant” (91). The Duke narrates Ragozine’s convenient death as “an accident that heaven provides,” arguably suggesting that God supports his plan but, at the same time, hanging a lantern on the event as a plot oddity, not unlike a *deus ex machina*, that (as Shakespeare’s pirates so often do) appears out of nowhere without following the usual cause-and-effect logic of narrative storytelling. Barnardine’s illegibility cannot be resolved with logic; instead, an irrational moment of possibly divine intervention must get the story back on track. Ragozine’s head allows the Duke to resume generally successful exertions of his narrative power, but also leaves Barnardine explicitly unresolved and unincorporated into the narrative. He is a drunken hiccup in the Duke’s—and the play’s—plot.

Barnardine has one last appearance in *Measure for Measure* when he and Claudio, their faces initially hidden, are escorted onstage in the final scene. Neither has any dialogue; both are revealed and receive pardons from the Duke. Claudio’s pardon makes narrative sense. Barnardine’s, by contrast, seems driven only by the comedic genre’s demand for a happy (even redemptive, grace-filled) ending. The Duke has at no point previously implied that he might pardon the murderer, but he now hopes that the “stubborn” Barnardine will be inspired to live well thanks to the “mercy” he is receiving (5.1.479-86). The final scene of *Measure for Measure* has provoked much comment on its status both as a narrative triumph for the Duke (who scripts and stage-manages all its drama and verbosely proclaims each character’s fate) and, also, as a strangely unsettling take on the usual tropes of a comedy’s conclusion (with the Duke’s dictatorial behavior verging on cruelty that silences or humiliates his fellow characters).¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Lawrence J. Ross’s discussion of the play’s conclusion touches on all these issues (118-50) and argues that “[w]hen the Duke commandeers the characters for the performance at his return, the effect of their bringing the recalcitrance of their vividly incarnated beings to the conclusion he would impose is to heighten the audience’s sense of the difficulties of resolving the problems of their world, of happily fulfilling the condition of their being, in a play” (122). In other words, the Duke’s attempt to impose a rigorously happy ending may fail to completely satisfy his subjects or us, but this dissatisfaction is the artistic achievement of Shakespeare’s ending.

Barnardine's pardon is one of many moments in the final scene that ticks a box on a checklist for happy-ending tropes without actually seeming to arouse much happiness. Barnardine's silence throughout the scene offers no clue to his own response, happy or otherwise. He is, again, merely blank.

Seen through the lens of the yield-or-die discourse, *Measure's* conclusion is disrupted by illegibility. The Duke attempts to enforce his own narrative power on everyone around him, transforming them into characters who will support his own identity rather than exert theirs—but Shakespeare's text never quite confirms that the Duke is successful in these attempts. Isabella has already yielded to the Duke in political terms (like Griselda to Walter, she is his "vassal" [386]), but when the Duke asks her to yield in marital terms as well (twice, the first time using the kind of language that stresses the similarities between conceptualizations of marriage and vassalage: "Give me your hand, and say you will be mine" [492]), she famously remains ambiguously silent.¹⁹⁹ In response to the marriage proposal, at least, Isabella is illegible. Angelo, though providing reactions that track his self-narrative throughout the scene, in the end falls silent as well after the Duke pardons him. Claudio and Julietta, similarly, have no scripted response to their pardon. All these silences suggest illegibility (even if they do not quite rise to the precise definition); they echo the illegibility of Barnardine and Isabella in the interpretive space they open up. Exactly how any one of these characters responds to the Duke's ultimate declarations is unclear.

Lucio, alone, has a verbal response to the Duke. When the Duke sentences him to marriage and death—then commutes the death sentence—Lucio consistently resists. He objects to this fate and he lets the Duke know it. Even Lucio, however, metaphorically invokes "pressing to death" (522-3): mostly a bawdy metaphor for unwelcome marriage, but coincidentally also the legal punishment for prisoners who refuse to plead and thereby refuse to participate in the

¹⁹⁹ T. F. Wharton offers a helpful summary of critical and theatrical responses to the silence that dominates Isabella and her fellow characters at the play's conclusion (49-51).

binary demand to identify themselves as guilty or innocent, yielding or resistant. The silent characters around Lucio on the stage are, in a metaphorical sense, refusing to plead, not revealing where they stand in response to the Duke's narrative demands upon them. The reference has powerful resonance with the illegibility that, like the silent Barnardine, haunts the last scene of *Measure for Measure*.

Conclusion

The yield-or-die discourse may seem archaic, the product of ancient honor cultures, taken seriously by the early modern period mostly in texts that look backward to the Middle Ages but also subverted by Spenser and Marlowe, made a punchline by Shakespeare. To some extent, this appearance is true. Times change. Discourses die. The famous shaping forces of modernity—from capitalism to poststructuralism—have all in various ways complicated any belief that yielding under duress makes one a slave.

Having immersed myself in this discourse, however, I have become aware of how frequently I notice its residue in later texts, whether those texts are novels or news broadcasts, nineteenth-century narratives by enslaved people or twenty-first century podcasts about prisoners of war. Further, while the early modern writers I examine certainly test and tease the discourse, so do Chaucer and Malory, because it was ancient by the time they came to it. I embarked on this project expecting to track late-medieval attitudes that changed with the Reformation and faded well before the Restoration. I expected that I could responsibly avoid universalizing and ahistorical conclusions. Instead, I have been left with a lingering suspicion that the yield-or-die discourse is deeply stable, a rhythm so persistent over centuries and despite syncopations that it may still structure our thinking more than we realize.

A counter-balancing suspicion that no one can finish a book-length study without seeing the topic of their study everywhere causes me to refrain from quoting present-day examples and

arguing this point in detail, but I propose the possibility nonetheless: the logic of the yield-or-die discourse haunts us still. It casts the pall of cowardice and shame over people who choose constrained or repressed safety over death and defiant escapes. It insinuates that rape victims must somehow have yielded. While I have generally presented illegibility as a deconstructive third term with the power to upend archaic honor-based binaries, it too is a product of the discourse and can be damaging. If my association of illegibility with modern trauma is valid, for example, then today we may see extremes of unstable insanity or uncharacterized bare life in people who are actually simply struggling to align a complex experience of captivity with the limitations of one particularly rigid discourse.

That said, the yield-or-die discourse can be deeply subversive itself, for example when it broadens our understanding of resistance beyond violent escapes or public defiance. Chosen (not imposed) patience, a secret internal story of virtue and personal commitment outlasting mistreatment, generates narrative power that can undermine physical or even verbal restraint. Illegibility can deal a mysterious but overwhelming defeat to the best-laid narratives of the strong. Even the particular dignity of honorable yielding—giving genuine and wholehearted consent to serving something or someone higher than oneself—may in the right circumstances become a countermeasure against a belief that individual success is the only marker of virtue and honor. In the end, if the yield-or-die discourse still haunts us, then that haunting is, itself, contradictory in its results.

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