

**Reading Robert Thornton's Library: Romance and Nationalism in Lincoln, Cathedral  
Library MS 91 and London, British Library MS Additional 31042**

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## ABSTRACT

Robert Thornton of East Newton, Yorkshire (c.1367-c.1465) is the most important scribe of late-medieval England: the only amateur scribe we know to be responsible for the concurrent production of multiple manuscript anthologies. This project constitutes the first extended study devoted exclusively to Robert Thornton and his books that treats them both as independent and as in conversation with each other. By uniting the concerns of codicology and cultural history, we can gain new insights into the effect of each manuscript's textual sequences while also considering the effect of the distribution of texts among both manuscripts. Moreover, by examining Thornton's romances in their original material and social contexts, we can read them as they would have been encountered by Thornton and his intended readers, and gain insight into the social and cultural anxieties that may have led to their organization and distribution among his two books.

Chapter 1 compares Thornton's compilations to those of analogous manuscripts, and demonstrates that Thornton took a more active role than most contemporary compilers did in rearranging and editing his texts in order to emphasise shared themes and interests within his books. Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation examine the nature of each of Thornton's manuscripts in turn. Chapter 2 demonstrates that Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 is a book meant to be used in the maintenance of social, spiritual, and physical health, written to be a useful tool for as wide a range of people as possible. Chapter 3 demonstrates that British Library MS Additional 31042 is a history book that traces the development of Christian civilization from its beginnings in the Holy Land to its present form in Thornton's England.

This dissertation then assesses Thornton's whole library. Chapter 4 examines the literary contexts of Thornton's romances, demonstrating that they are divided into thematic

groups that emphasise conflict between the interests of individuals and the interests of the individual and communal identities with which they associate. Chapter 5 examines the social context of Thornton's romances, demonstrating that Thornton employs the discourse of English nationalism produced during the Council of Constance (1414-1418), and that he therefore distributed his romances in order to emphasise England's superiority to France.

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## Introduction

### Introduction

Robert Thornton (c.1397-c.1468), Lord of East Newton, Yorkshire, is now one of the best-known manuscript compilers of late medieval England. The two manuscripts Thornton wrote between 1430 and 1450, Lincoln, Cathedral Library MS 91 and London, British Library MS Additional 31042, preserve numerous texts extant in few or no other witnesses, among them the *Prose Alexander*, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *Sir Perceval of Galles*, *The Siege of Milan*, and *Wynnere and Wastoure*. Thornton also preserves the best witnesses of texts such as *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*.<sup>1</sup> Because Thornton stands out as one of the few Middle English amateur scribes responsible for the concurrent production and compilation of multiple manuscripts, provides us with a unique opportunity to examine the work of a medieval reader, editor and compiler.

Although each of Thornton's manuscripts is long and complex enough to warrant a monograph on its own, scholars have tended to read his books piecemeal, limiting their exposure only to his more attractive texts or to those that best fit the argument at hand. This approach is understandable: Thornton's books together amount to over five hundred pages of apparently disparate material, from romances to devotional aids to a medical manual in one book, and from Christian history, to crusading romance, to discourses on mercy, and debates in the other. They are but rarely discussed as mutually interactive.

Medieval miscellanies are often more internally coherent than an initial assessment might suggest (Mills and Rogers; Shailor). Because Thornton's paper stocks are distributed among both of his books, it is safe to treat the final organization of booklets as the final stage

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<sup>1</sup> I provide a complete list of the contents in the appendices.

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of his compilation process. Ralph Hanna has argued convincingly that Thornton's "distribution of booklets into groups put into different codices presumably was a decision made at the end of production" ("The Growth" 59). One place we get a sense of how Thornton may have tuned his collection is the placement of the *Prose Alexander* as the first item in the Lincoln manuscript. George Keiser has argued persuasively that the *Prose Alexander* was a late addition to the Lincoln manuscript because the first page of the second item in the book – the alliterative *Morte Arthure* – shows signs of dirt and grime that indicate it was not always buried in the collection ("Life and Milieu" 177-78). Moreover, Phillipa Hardman has brought to our attention evidence suggesting Thornton's *modus operandi* was to organize his texts in each manuscript to facilitate reading and narrative flow.

There is significant evidence that Thornton was personally responsible for the collation of his manuscripts, most notably in the linked sequence of texts at the opening of the London manuscript. Here, Thornton copies two extracts for *Cursor Mundi* – the historical narrative treating events from the birth of the Virgin Mary to the beginning of the Passion – followed by "The Discourse Between Christ and Man," a text which exhorts the reader to meditate on Christ's suffering. However, Thornton replaces the Passion sequence of *Cursor Mundi* with the livelier poem *The Northern Passion*, and then composes a transitional colophon claiming that he has made the substitution on account of his "ffantasiam scriptoris," or at the whim of the scribe (fol. 32r). It is evident that Thornton's efforts to arrange his materials generally left patterns of thematic or authorial grouping. In a few cases, such as the gathering on folios 98-124 of the London manuscript, it appears he may have been forced to move his material to protect sections that were damaged, thus breaking the order.

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Thornton regularly celebrates his control of his scribal practice. The identification of Thornton as the scribe of both manuscripts which now bear his name has been made largely on account of his characteristic signature, “*R. Thornton dictus qui scripsit sit benedictus*,” which occurs on folios 98v and 213r of the Lincoln manuscript, and on folio 66r of the London manuscript. Thornton’s name also appears in nine other scribal signatures throughout the collection, often enough to suggest he was proud of his work. Moreover, linguistic evidence suggests that Thornton not only “translated” his English texts into his own dialect (McIntosh), but also that he often re-worked them in order to facilitate oral delivery (Carlson). This indicates he compiled his collection to facilitate its regular use.

Thornton was no mere copyist. Rather, he was an active translator, editor, scribe, and compiler of the two books he has left us. When we turn our attentions to Thornton and his books, we would do well to follow Hans Robert Jauss’ suggestion in *Toward an Aesthetic Theory of Reception* that we match our own “horizon of expectations” with that of the author and the intended audience at the time of composition (22). It is apparent that Thornton wrote his books primarily for the benefit of himself and his family. My point is that he did not write textual sequences or miscellanies, but *books*: both of which can be read as self-contained and thematically-unified anthologies.

One danger with performing a thematic study of a medieval miscellany is that a critic might unjustly attribute order to chaos. As Derek Pearsall reminds us, critics often overlook the exigencies that make the work of understanding medieval compilation an uncertain proposition that can at best speak only in probabilities (“The Whole Book” 29). Although we cannot be certain of the form in which Thornton accessed the texts he copied, his signatures and scribal interventions – decorations, *incipits* and *explicits*, and rubrication – indicate he had many opportunities to intervene in the texts he copied. Chapter 1 of this dissertation

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therefore makes the case for considering Thornton's two books as anthologies rather than as loose miscellanies. There is significant physical, literary, and linguistic evidence suggesting that Thornton was responsible for the organization and contents of his books. In this chapter, I offer a brief biography and a description of the manuscripts, followed by the evidence suggesting Thornton was an active compiler. Keeping Pearsall's warning in mind, I also compare the textual sequences produced by Thornton with other known patterns of textual transmission in order to determine the extent to which Thornton may have reorganized the texts he copied. Because most of Thornton's textual sequences exist in no other known exemplar, and because Thornton evidently took an active role in the organization of his books, I argue that the organization of his manuscripts was probably his own, not just one he borrowed from his exemplars, suggesting that codicological analysis of Thornton's work has significant literary consequences.

The remainder of this dissertation is divided into two broader movements. In Chapters 2 and 3, I will read each of Thornton's "books," questioning whether they are unified in tone or purpose. Critics such as Derek Brewer, John J Thompson, George Keiser, Ralph Hanna, and John Finlayson broadly agree that the Lincoln manuscript has, as Brewer puts it in his introduction to the *Facsimile* edition, "a recognizable 'shape' as a set of writings" (ix). The Lincoln manuscript is broadly organized into romance, religious, and reference booklets. Because it is likely that the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, Thornton's medical manual, was among the first texts he copied, I argue that his romances and religious texts have a similar function of facilitating the maintenance of social and spiritual health. Although the London manuscript is less clearly organized, Suzanne Conklin Akbari, S.H.A. Shepherd, and most recently Michael Johnston all agree that the 97-folio opening sequence of the London manuscript produces a sense of historical Christendom unified by a stark

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binary worldview opposing Christians to Jews and Muslims. These assessments do not account for the whole manuscript on account of its confusing organization. I will build on these arguments to suggest that the whole manuscript (and not just its opening sequence) is largely organized along this Christian-historiographical schema, and to argue that historical narrative produced by these texts depicts the gradual fragmentation of Christian society.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I turn towards treating both of Thornton's book as a single collection to question the extent of their mutual interaction. The genre of writing the two manuscripts most conspicuously share is romance, which amounts to roughly 40% of the texts Thornton copied. Moreover, Thornton appears to have had a clear sense of the term "romance," which he uses to describe seven of his fourteen chivalric poems in their *incipits* and *explicits*. Chapter 4 therefore investigates the extent to which the romances in each of Thornton's books might complement each other. Although critics' understanding of the genre tends to raise more questions than it answers, it is evident that Thornton perceived important differences between his two sets of romances.

Chapter 4 builds on Derek Pearsall's observation that romance was "the principal secular literature of the middle ages" ("Middle English Romance and its Audiences" 37), James Simpson's argument that romance was a genre "fitted to address tensions internal to a social system" (*Reform and Cultural Revolution* 283-84), and John Finlayson's argument that the Lincoln manuscript comprises "an anthology of romance sub-types and thematic preoccupations" ("Reading Romances in their Manuscript" 640). My contention is that it is only by reading *all* of Thornton's romances that we can observe the full breadth of his anthology and the extent to which is thematically and morally coherent. The most notable difference between the romances of the Lincoln manuscript and those of the London manuscript is the preference for individual protagonists in the former and the preference for

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corporate protagonists in the latter. Moreover, while the Lincoln romances tend to treat ideal figures, the London romances tend to treat the basic human condition. I argue that Thornton likely divided his romances on generic grounds, such that the emotive, fictional, and solitary Lincoln romances complement the prosaic, historical, and corporate London romances. By distributing his romances as he does, Thornton effectively highlights a paradox inherent to all successful societies: both individual and communal interests must be balanced in order to maintain social order and to avoid stagnation.

Chapter 5 continues to read both of Thornton's books together, building on the biographical, codicological, textual, and thematic data already discussed. Thornton lived through turbulent times, a life bookended by a coup and a civil war. In the Lincoln manuscript, Thornton's romances reward thematic reading: his readers observe how the negotiation and application of social and chivalric virtues empower individuals and facilitate their ability to preserve or advance their status. The Lincoln romances show the permeability of social boundaries, but stress that individual achievements mean little in the absence of a greater society to acknowledge them. In the London manuscript, Thornton's romances reward sequential reading: his readers observe the historical fluctuations of Christian corporate identities. The London romances show the development of factionalism and the slow fragmentation of a once-unified Christian Europe. *Richard Coer de Lyon* best exemplifies how Thornton seems to have viewed identity boundaries as fluid, as by the end of the poem the audience is not meant to identify with Christendom, but instead with a strongly-asserted Englishness that is directly opposed to Frenchness.

Chapter 5 therefore argues that it is with nationalism that Thornton formulates the most meaningful juxtaposition between his two groups of romances. In his seminal study *England the Nation*, Thorlac Turville-Petre suggests that the Auchinleck manuscript, an

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analogous Middle English anthology compiled almost a century before Thornton's time, is "a handbook of the nation" (112). As Phillipa Hardman has suggested, the hundred years that separate the Auchinleck manuscript from Thornton's library invite us to examine the extent to which the experience of the Hundred Years War may have affected English national consciousness ("Compiling the Nation" 51). Hardman demonstrates convincingly that Thornton had an evident interest in representations of England, its language, and its people, and that he often expresses this interest by drawing comparisons with France. However, Hardman suggests that Thornton responds to an English nationalism that was inchoate, and not yet fully articulated (61). Although scholarly treatments of nationalism in the Middle Ages tend to assume the trajectory of nationalist thinking observed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, I suggest that it is more likely that Thornton responded to the definitions of nationhood that were produced during the Council of Constance (c. 1414-1418). The Council of Constance took place during Thornton's lifetime, and during its many debates the concept of a *natio* was defined as a heterogeneous plurality of languages, peoples, and territories distinct from a *regnum*, which was a comparatively homogeneous cultural unit similar to today's nation-state. Most of the Lincoln romances are associated in some way with England as a nation and most of the London romances are associated in some way with France as a nation, as if the division between the two manuscripts recreates the English Channel in miniature. In his romances, Thornton shows on the one hand that England and its affiliated territories are able successfully to produce unity out of diverse opinions and peoples, and he shows on the other hand that France is not. Thornton therefore uses the occasion of his manuscripts to project a fiction over his sense of both English and French identities in order to allay his own anxiety over the tensions current in his own nation's polity. Thornton's imagination is powerfully retrospective, but what is most remarkable is

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the degree to which the past that Thornton imagines and desires to return to is the past of Henry V's nationalistic propaganda rather than a discrete historical moment.

Robert Thornton wrote two anthologies whose texts are organized by content, genre, author, purpose, and tone. Although the contents of both of his manuscripts are varied, the levels at which these texts interact are intricate. This dissertation reads Thornton's manuscripts together as a single "text": a man's library. We must recognize Thornton's contributions both as scribe and as compiler. His scribal practice indicates that he was as meticulous as he was curious. His compilatory practice indicates that he was a sophisticated reader and judge of narrative.

As Jauss suggests, the reconstruction of an historical text's horizon of expectation enables us to "pose questions that the text gave an answer to" (28). The contents of Thornton's library answer questions that may have been produced by his anxieties. The contents of the manuscripts suggest that Thornton was a man troubled with concern about the state of his soul, yet motivated mainly by the preservation of family, property, community, and corporal health against a backdrop of increasing domestic unrest. Anxiety over the interaction between spiritual and temporal concerns lies at the root of the tense internal conflict which may have driven Thornton to become so fascinated with both the ideal of the mixed life and the history of Christianity. And his interest in the history of Christianity suggests that Thornton looked to the past in order to discern the roots of the conflicts which affected his sense of participation in a national community. These insights are available to us only if we read Thornton's entire library – both its contents and its composition – as an expression of the interests and anxieties of the man who wrote it.

## Chapter 1 – Robert Thornton and his Manuscripts

Three-fifths of the extant corpus of Middle English romances exists in only three manuscripts:<sup>1</sup> National Library of Scotland MS 19.2.1, known as the Auchinleck manuscript, contains seventeen romances; Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38 contains ten romances; and Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91, known as the (Lincoln) Thornton manuscript after its scribe, Robert Thornton, also contains ten romances.<sup>2</sup> The Auchinleck manuscript is a book produced for an elite patron, made by professional London scribes between 1340 and 1350 (L.H. Loomis).<sup>3</sup> CUL MS Ff.2.38 was produced by at least two scribes in the middle of the fifteenth century, and may also have been a professional production (Guddat-Figge 98). The last of these, the Lincoln Thornton manuscript, was produced by Robert Thornton, Lord of East Newton and amateur scribe, between 1430 and 1450.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is some debate as to whether or not the copy of *Guy of Warwick* in the Auchinleck MS is one romance or two (Wiggins). Murray Evans counts a romance of *Heraude* in the CUL MS that Guddat-Figge's *Catalogue* overlooks (Table A9). Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 can be said to contain ten romances only if one considers *Thomas of Erceldoune* to be a romance, as I do. The manuscripts are usually ranked in the order I mention them.

<sup>2</sup> Until the discovery of the London Thornton manuscript (BL MS Add. 31042), the Lincoln Cathedral MS was known as "The Thornton Manuscript."

<sup>3</sup> C. Paul Christianson locates the scribes who wrote the Auchinleck MS in London ("Evidence for the Study of London's Late Medieval Manuscript-Book Trade"). For more on production in scribal quarters (as opposed to under the roof of a single bookshop) in late medieval England, see Doyle and Parkes, and Andrew Taylor ("Authors, Scribes, Patrons, and Books"; "Manual to Miscellany"). The most recent discussion of the Auchinleck MS' *milieu* can be found on its website, <http://auchinleck.nls.uk>.

<sup>4</sup> The manuscripts could not have been produced earlier than 1422, the date assigned to "*Quedam Revelacio: A Revelacyone schewed to ane holy womane*." Guddat-Figge, A.E.B. Owen ("Collation and Handwriting" xvi), and A.I. Doyle ("A Survey" 276) agree broadly on the dating of the manuscripts. The dating has been confirmed through an analysis of the watermarks on the paper in both MSS by Horall ("The London Thornton Manuscript"; "The Watermarks") and Thompson (*Robert Thornton*). Michael Johnston offers the most liberal conjecture, suggesting that the books might have been written any time between 1422 and Thornton's death in 1465 ("Sociology" 123). Based on Thompson's catalogue of the watermarks, Thornton's period of greatest activity was probably between 1430 and 1444, when nearly all of his paper stocks were current (71-73).

Thornton stands out as one of the few Middle English amateur scribes responsible for the concurrent production and compilation of multiple manuscripts. Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 is the only one of the three most important romance manuscripts whose selection of texts can be fully attributed to a single man. Even more remarkable is the fact that Thornton also copied and compiled British Library MS Additional 31042, a miscellany which contains four more chivalric romances and a “romance” of the Childhood of Christ. Together, Robert Thornton’s manuscripts contain a total of fifteen romances. Thornton thus provides us with a library of romances and other texts second only to that of the Auchinleck manuscript, except these items have been distributed between two books.

Thornton’s manuscripts preserve unique witnesses of a very large number of texts, especially among his romances, as well as the earliest manuscript witnesses of a number of others.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Thornton preserves a tradition of romance not represented elsewhere. CUL MS Ff.2.38 shares six of its ten romances with the Auchinleck manuscript. Thornton’s manuscripts together share only three romances with Auchinleck (in different versions), and share only two romances with MS Ff.2.38. The two Thornton manuscripts preserve the sole copies of the *Prose Life of Alexander*, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *Sir Perceval of Galles*, *The Siege of Milan*, and *Roland and Otuel*. Thornton also preserves the oldest known copies of the northern *Octavian* and *Thomas of Erceldoune*, and the best copy of *Sir Eglamour of Artois*.<sup>6</sup> If we broaden our scope to include non-romance items such as the works of Richard Rolle, *Quedam Revelacio*, the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, *Winnere and Wastoure*, and the

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A and Appendix B for the collation and contents of the Lincoln and London Thornton MSS, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> McSparran 11, Murray lvi-lvii, Richardson xxvi.

metrical “The Three Kings of Cologne,” we get a sense of the extent to which Thornton’s work contributes to our understanding of late medieval English literature.

The identification of Robert Thornton as the scribe of both manuscripts is made possible by the characteristic phrase “*R. Thornton dictus qui scripsit sit benedictus. Amen,*” found throughout both of the manuscripts to which we ascribe his authorship.<sup>7</sup> Virginia Everett conclusively identified Robert Thornton as a member of the middling gentry living in the manor of East Newton, in the Wapentake of Ryedale in North Riding, Yorkshire between 1396 and 1465 (Ogden xi).<sup>8</sup> Marginal notes throughout the London manuscript refer to other members of the Thornton family – Robert, Edward, Ellinor, and Dorythy – consistent with the family’s pedigree.<sup>9</sup> This evidence suggests his primary audience was his family. Everett draws our attention to a rebus within a four-line initial on fol. 23 of the Lincoln manuscript showing a thorn and a barrel. As Michael Johnston has recently noted, this rebus matches the family coat-of-arms still visible on the family tomb in the parish church of Holy Trinity in Stonegrave (“Romance, Distrainment and the Gentry” 453-54).<sup>10</sup>

Thornton’s manuscripts are remarkable for the breadth of their contents, their preservation of texts which would otherwise have been lost, and their organization. Thornton

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<sup>7</sup> This phrase occurs on fols. 98v (along with its only translation into English: “written by Robert of Thornton”) and 213r of the Lincoln MS, and fol. 66r of the London MS. Thornton’s name occurs also on fols. 93v, 129v, 211v, and 278v of the Lincoln MS and fol. 50r of the London MS. While Thornton undoubtedly had a hand in adapting these texts, it is unlikely that he composed them, though he probably did compose the colophons, *incipits* and *explicits*. Kerby-Fulton, Hilmo, and Olson provide a useful table of Thornton’s signatures 126-127. I discuss Thornton’s signatures and apparatus in greater detail below.

<sup>8</sup> Although Halliwell correctly identifies Thornton in *The Thornton Romances*, both Brock and Perry believed instead that Thornton was the Archdeacon of Bedford. Ogden’s publication of Everett’s work in the introduction to the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* constitutes the most authoritative identification of the scribe of these two manuscripts, as it accounts for more of the marginalia containing names of other family members. Jackson appends a family pedigree to *The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thornton of East Newton*.

<sup>9</sup> In the Lincoln MS, Robert is mentioned in a record of his birth in 1453/54 on fol. 49v. His name also appears on fol. 144v. Edward’s name appears on fols. 75v, 137r and 194r. Ellinor is named on fol. 135v, and Dorythy is named on fols. 265r and 266r.

<sup>10</sup> Johnston was kind enough to provide me with an advance copy of his article. I cite the pages as they appear in the Word document he gave me. I discuss the present state of the Thornton memorials in my conclusion.

himself is remarkable for being the sole example of a single amateur compiler and scribe whose work spans more than one manuscript. It is not only the texts Thornton preserves, but also the interpretive possibilities opened up by our understanding of his scribal practice and biography that set him among the most important manuscript compilers of late medieval England.

### **1.1 – Life and Milieu**

Historical records show that Thornton gained ownership of East Newton upon his father's death in 1418, and may have been dead by 1465, when his wife Isabel remarried (Ogden xi-xii). Thornton must have reached his majority by the time his father died and he inherited the estate, which suggests that he was born in or before February of 1396 (Keiser, "More Light" 111). By 1428, Thornton owned, aside from the manor at East Newton, a half-share of a parcel of land in Huton shared with Thomas Paliser, a fifth-share of land in Ampleforth, Bilsdale, West Newton, and Harome, and a sixth-share of a Knight's Fee in Stonegrave and West Ness; in 1441, Richard Pickering of Oswaldkirk enfeoffed Thornton with lands in Oswaldkirk, Stonegrave, and Holderness. All of these land holdings are within twenty miles of East Newton (Johnston, "Romance, Distrainment and the Gentry" 452-53). He also had some connection to the manors of Northholm and Great Eddeston, as his name appears as witness to quitclaim deeds on these properties; indeed, Thornton's name appears on documents relating to property claims so often as to suggest he had "a special interest in [land] transactions," suggesting he was one of the many members of the Yorkshire gentry "intent on realizing their ambitions through the acquisition of land" (Keiser, "More Light" 112-13).

At some point between 1452 and 1454, a William Thornton, possibly a distant cousin, sued Robert in the Chancery Court over disputed property in Richmondshire (Johnston, “A New Document”). George Keiser has discovered that Thornton worked as a tax collector for North Riding between 12 June 1453 and 9 May 1454, when he was discharged from service by royal writ; Keiser suggests that Thornton may have been fired because he sided with the Percy family in some of the violent disturbances of the peace that occurred between them and the Nevilles during this time (“Life and Milieu” 163).<sup>11</sup> Johnston has recently discovered that Thornton was distrained for knighthood in 1458 (“Romance, Distrain, and the Gentry” 454). As Johnston explains, the practice of distraint compelled wealthy landowners to take up knighthoods, an office that “carried with it a number of unwelcome financial burdens” (437); the distraint roll from 1458 records Thornton among the North Riding landowners who chose to pay fines rather than become knights (454). As Johnston implies, Thornton likely made this decision to spare his family an additional financial burden.

Documentary evidence tells us much about Thornton’s family life, economic situation, and social status. There exists also a significant amount of indirect evidence that informs us of Thornton’s likely social milieu. Keiser suggests that he may have been educated at home by a visiting cleric rather than at one of the grammar schools nearby (“More Light” 111). Keiser’s suggestion seems likely, for as Guddat-Figge notes, the Lincoln manuscript is the only extant manuscript containing Middle English romances that also contains a significant number of items in Latin, some of which are quite extensive;

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<sup>11</sup> Keiser suggests that Thornton’s discharge from royal service may have been due to his participation in some “disturbances” in North Riding, Yorkshire, on the side of the Percy family and against the Nevilles (“Life and Milieu” 163). However, Michael Johnston rejects Keiser’s Percy hypothesis, suggesting that “there is no evidence that Thornton was at all involved in these disputes; however, the aristocratic violence that erupted in the North Riding must have affected Thornton deeply” (“Sociology” 136).

moreover, the breadth of knowledge Thornton collects suggests that “he proved himself an extraordinarily versatile compiler who had access to material usually beyond the reach of laymen” (45). Keiser tracks possible local acquaintances of Thornton’s from whom he might have borrowed the books he copied, suggesting that Thornton’s access to material was so ready that “he must have been able not only to find texts without special pains but also to exercise some degree of choice in compiling his book[s]” (“Life and Milieu” 177). We know that Thornton was on good terms with Richard Pickering of Oswaldkirk, since Thornton executed his will and received property from him. Sir Richard’s sister Joan, a nun at the priory of Nun Monkton, likely provided Thornton with many of the devotional tracts in the Lincoln manuscript, especially those which address female readers (“More Light” 115). One of the recipes in the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, which Thornton also probably borrowed from Richard Pickering, demands the use of “rare unguents which a physician to royalty would have been most likely to prescribe” (xiv). This recipe is attributed to “Ser Apilton,” whom Ogden identifies as William Appleton, a Minorite Friar employed as John of Gaunt’s physician from 1373 until his death in 1381. Although Thornton would not himself have known Appleton, he may have had a contact at Pickering Castle, which is only fifteen miles away from East Newton and which was owned by John of Gaunt (xiii-xiv). Thornton may also have had relationships with men such as John Kempe, archbishop of York, later archbishop of Canterbury and chancellor of England;<sup>12</sup> Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, who became Chancellor on 2 April 1454;<sup>13</sup> Ralph, Baron of Graystock; John Thryske, Mayor

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<sup>12</sup> As Johnston notes in “A New Document,” the suit against Thornton in the Court of Chancery was addressed directly to Kempe (307).

<sup>13</sup> Keiser mentions this possible connection in the same article he suggests Thornton may have allied himself with the Percys. It is unclear which connection Keiser thinks is most plausible, or, although it must have affected him in some way, whether or not Thornton participated in the Neville-Percy conflict at all.

of York; and also a number of chaplains and aldermen of York. Thornton may have also come into contact with Robert Stillington, bishop of Bath and Wells, who became chancellor of England in 1467 (“Life and Milieu”; “More Light”). For the most part, Thornton’s influence was limited to North Riding, Yorkshire, and its environs (Johnston, “Sociology” 119-20). Thornton was clearly upwardly mobile, and it seems he often interacted with his betters. But although Thornton was clearly sociable and respected, he does not appear to have been particularly influential.

Keiser’s research identifies many of the people from whom Thornton could have borrowed books from which to copy his religious and devotional texts, all of which would have circulated locally. However, the testamentary evidence does not give us any information about the local availability of the romances which predominate in the manuscripts. These texts may have been made available to Thornton in anthologies containing other moral or didactic works. As Keiser puts it,

[T]here is sufficient reason to believe that the writers of romances, particularly those represented in the Thornton MS., intended their creations to appeal in the same manner as chronicles did to the moral sensibilities of their readers and to suppose that they succeeded in fulfilling that intention. (“Life and Milieu” 174)

Although Thornton’s romances may have been made available to him in mixed-subject miscellanies, Keiser notes that “information concerning distribution of romance books is scantier than that concerning distribution of devotional books,” making it unlikely we can ever know how much effort he expended in obtaining them (176). Furthermore, it is possible, as Karen Stern suggests, that Thornton’s access to various texts may have been facilitated by engaging in scribal activity for the benefit of others (“The London ‘Thornton’ Miscellany (II)” 213-214). Keiser, on the other hand, argues convincingly that Thornton had a “strong

interest in the written word,” and that he probably did not copy his books in order to earn money or to curry favours (“More Light” 118).

It seems as though Thornton treated his scribal practice as a hobby, perhaps as a way to foster or to strengthen relationships with his neighbours, or perhaps as a way to signal his erudition. The ambitious (and incomplete) planned programme of the illustrations in his manuscripts strongly suggests that these are books that Thornton would have been proud to show to his peers. For the most part, however, in his daily life he seems to have been concerned with making money, with expanding his network of influence, with managing his estates, and with defending himself in court. Thornton does not seem to have been exceptionally interested in advancement through politics or through adventure, and aside from the hugely important literary significance of his manuscripts, seems to have been fairly unremarkable.

## **1.2 – Codicological Makeup and Scribal Practice**

Although he was only an amateur scribe, Thornton was a careful, devoted, and ambitious one, and we can discern much about his character from his scribal practice. Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 is a paper manuscript written and compiled by Robert Thornton between 1430 and 1450 in an Anglicana/Secretary hybrid of varying size, typical of Middle English book hands of the second half of the fifteenth century. The MS originally contained 340 folios measuring 291 by 210 millimetres, of which 314 folios are extant. The quire structure of the MS is irregular. The volume is modestly decorated, containing frequent large initials, mainly in red, and a variety of scrollwork, images of animals, and initials in

other colours extant throughout. A large number of gaps occurring throughout the *Prose Life of Alexander* (fols. 1r-49r) suggest the existence of a plan for illustration that never came to fruition. There is a large drawing of a knight in the margin of folio 52r, and a full-page drawing of two knights and a horse on folio 52v, both without artistic merit. The manuscript contains a large amount of marginalia written by Thornton and others, mostly unrelated to the text. Thornton names himself in several marginal notes. The manuscript was re-bound in 1832, and again in 1973 when Brewer and Owen examined it in preparation for the *Facsimile*. Overall, this manuscript is an unassuming codex compiled by a gentleman amateur scribe.<sup>14</sup>

London, British Library MS Additional 31,042 is the second paper manuscript Thornton wrote and compiled, also between 1430 and 1450, in his varying Anglicana hand. The current scholarly consensus is that Thornton worked on copying the contents of both MSS simultaneously.<sup>15</sup> The manuscript contains 181 extant folios, measuring 274 by 206

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<sup>14</sup> The best discussion of the collation of the MS is by A.E.B. Owen, and his discussion of editorial problems in discerning the collation in “The Collation and Descent of the Thornton Manuscript,” may be supplemented with his revised section of the introduction to the second, 1977, edition of the *Facsimile*. By far the best history of the descent of the MS is by Keiser (“Discovery”). See also Keiser (“A Note on the Descent of the Thornton Manuscript”) and Ralph Hanna III (“Growth”) for more on the descent, production, and collation of the MS. For an alternative description of the MS based mostly on Halliwell’s, see Wooley. The most recent study of the Lincoln manuscript providing new information about its contents is Keiser’s “Reconstructing Robert Thornton’s Herbal,” which identifies the text contained on the stubs of folios 316-21, and identifies the final item in the MS as a copy of an herbal entitled *Betoyne and Pympernelle*.

<sup>15</sup> As mentioned below, Keiser had suggested that the binding of the MSS was a late stage of the compilation process (“Life and Milieu” 177-79). In the first comparison of Thornton’s watermarks, Horall confirms Keiser’s supposition, concluding that Thornton accumulated “piles of unbound quires which were only later separated and bound into the two different manuscripts” (“Watermarks” 385). As mentioned below, Hanna agrees with Horall’s assessment (“Growth”). Thompson also confirms Horall’s findings, finding based on the watermark evidence and the state of decoration that “Thornton can ... be shown to have had a tendency to copy some of his material into ... self-contained units” and that the final compilation was later on in the process (*Robert Thornton* 64). However, Thompson also offers some opposition by suggesting that “[i]t seems likely too that Thornton’s second miscellany became a sort of ‘overflow’ volume once the Lincoln manuscript had taken on a definite tripartite ‘shape’” (*Robert Thornton* 68). In a later article, Thompson turns possibility into certainty when he asserts that “the London Thornton MS was, or became, an overflow volume, which Thornton had commenced before completing the tripartite Lincoln collection” (“Another Look” 170). Thompson thus

millimetres, as well as two vellum fly-leaves at each end taken from a fifteenth-century breviary.<sup>16</sup> This manuscript also has an irregular quire structure. The manuscript is defective at both the beginning and the end. In 1972, the British Library dismantled the manuscript in order to mount its leaves on paper strips, but did not record the original structure of the gatherings (Thompson, *Robert Thornton* 9). Although the book in its current form contains the same pages in the same order as when Herritage first examined it, it is no longer possible to discern with any certainty exactly how much of the manuscript was lost before the British Library bought it in 1879. The volume contains few decorations, but its first item, an extract from *Cursor Mundi*, contains a pattern of spaces left blank for illumination similar to those found in the Lincoln *Prose Life of Alexander*. Regular patterns of alternating red and green large initials facilitate reading, but the decoration is otherwise sparse. Many of the pages are soiled, which suggests that some of the booklets within the manuscript were probably left on their own for some time before binding.<sup>17</sup> As we shall see, it appears that Thornton rearranged some of the items between folios 98 and 124 to protect texts from damage by liquid. The original identification of Thornton as the scribe is based on his characteristic signature, which occurs twice in this manuscript.<sup>18</sup>

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suggests that Thornton's primary aim was the compilation of the Lincoln MS. Although the Lincoln MS was probably completed first, I demonstrate in Chapter 3 that the London MS is also coherently structured.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson notes that the recycling of parchment and vellum for use as flyleaves began in the late sixteenth century, so there was probably an additional earlier stage of binding that was repaired or replaced, perhaps "some time after the paper gatherings which make up Thornton's book had suffered substantial losses and some soiling at both ends" (*Robert Thornton* 8).

<sup>17</sup> There is significant staining and/or grime on fols. 3r-v, 9r-v, 32r-34v, 54r, 73r-75r, 98r, 125r, 144r-v, 169r, and 181v. According to Thompson's collation, each of these locations is at or near the beginning or end of a gathering (*Robert Thornton* 19). Robinson suggests that a booklet may be identified by the quantity of dirt on its outer leaves (48). However, Thornton's manuscripts are written on paper, which is a more permeable support than parchment. Because some of the staining patterns are visible across multiple leaves, it is likely that some of the damage the book suffered was from some kind of liquid.

<sup>18</sup> For a reading of the implications of the decorated initials, see Hardman, "Reading the Spaces." Discussions of the collation can be found in Stern, "The London 'Thornton' Miscellany," Horall, "The London Thornton Manuscript: A New Collation," Hanna, "The London Thornton Manuscript: A Corrected Collation," and most

Both of Thornton's manuscripts are commonly described as miscellanies (Halliwell; Stern).<sup>19</sup> However, the Lincoln manuscript is generally considered to be the better organized of the two, with, as Derek Brewer notes in his introduction to the *Facsimile* edition, "a recognisable 'shape' as a set of writings" (ix). George Keiser refines Brewer's somewhat vague observation further to argue that the manuscript consists of three major "books" of romances, religious texts, and medical recipes, each of which likely existed independently before the manuscripts were bound ("Nineteenth-Century Discovery" 104n4).<sup>20</sup> Although the London manuscript is generally considered to be more poorly organized, a number of its items are directly connected by scribal interpolations.<sup>21</sup>

The critical consensus is that Thornton was a well-organized compiler. As Gisela Guddat-Figge observes in her *Catalogue of the Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances*, exclusively secular miscellanies are quite rare (25); most Middle English romances are copied into manuscripts "which contain a colourful variety of different items, only a few being keyed to specific fields or literary genres" (22). Thornton produced two such manuscripts made up, largely, of coherent clusters of texts keyed by topic or genre.

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recently Thompson, *Robert Thornton*. Catalogues of MS contents can be found in Herritage, *The Sege of Melayne and The Romance of Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne*, Brunner, "HS. Brit. Mus. Additional 31042," and Guddat-Figge's *Catalogue*, 159-63. Scribal signatures appear on fols. 50r and 66r.

<sup>19</sup> On Middle English romances in miscellanies, see Guddat-Figge (22-29). For a discussion on how MS layout and decoration affects the reception of genre in MS miscellanies, see Evans (15-50).

<sup>20</sup> Thompson also discusses some of the implications of pre-binding independence in *Robert Thornton*, 35-6. Keiser has noted this previously, as well, remarking that "Thornton has divided the contents of the manuscript ... according to their general nature" ("Life and Milieu" 177). Guddat-Figge notes of the Lincoln MS that "in the arrangement of texts some kind of grouping is discernible" (140); She notes of the London MS that "although it is of modest appearance, it is certainly written more carefully; it is ... more homogenous in its contents: religious-didactic throughout" (161). The clear thematic divisions within the Lincoln MS have been a matter of discussion for some time now, as I discuss in Section 2.1. For more on the structure of the "books" of the Lincoln MS, see Keiser, "To Knewe God Almyghtyn" and "The Nineteenth-Century Discovery of the Thornton MS."

<sup>21</sup> I discuss the organizational features of the London MS further in Section 3.1.

Keiser draws our attention to the remarkable sophistication of the organizational principles of the Lincoln Thornton manuscript when he argues that:

Thornton had in his mind a clear distinction between the two general categories of writings he expected to collect and between the emotional and intellectual responses of a reader to each. Thus, we see in Thornton a man whose response to literature may be more sophisticated than that of the fourteenth-century compiler (or compilers) of the Auchinleck MS ... in which the indiscriminate arrangement of materials attests to a more wide-eyed view appropriate to an earlier time when reading may not have been such a common experience ... because Thornton envisioned such a division of materials in his book from the beginning of his work compiling it, he must have supposed that he would have regular access to a variety of materials for copying. (“Life and Milieu” 177)

Keiser’s distinction between the organizational qualities of the Lincoln manuscript and the comparatively poor organization of the corporately-produced and indiscriminately-organized Auchinleck manuscript rightfully draws attention to Thornton’s agency as a compiler.

The Lincoln manuscript is written on fifteen distinct paper stocks and the London manuscript is written on ten. Six of the paper stocks occur in *both* manuscripts.<sup>22</sup> Some of Thornton’s paper stocks begin near the end of gatherings, suggesting that he purchased new paper when his supplies ran low. The earliest paper stock belongs to the Lincoln manuscript quire **Q** (fols. 280-314), which contains the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*. This stock might have been produced as early as 1413. The remainder of the paper stocks date from 1427 to 1444, which we can infer was likely the period Thornton’s greatest copying activity. Angus

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<sup>22</sup> For more detailed discussions of the watermarks, see Horall, “The Watermarks”; Thompson *Robert Thornton* 71-73; Hanna “The Growth”; and Johnston, “Sociology” 399-407.

McIntosh suggests based on dialectical evidence that the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (Lincoln quire **D**, fols. 53r-98v) and *The Prevette of the Passioun* (Lincoln quire **L**, fols. 179r-189r), two of the earliest texts Thornton copied, probably came from the same lost Lincolnshire exemplar, and perhaps even the same original author. According to McIntosh, these texts form a linguistically distinct ‘group’ in the MS and “were probably the works of a single scribe” before Thornton copied them (233).<sup>23</sup> Both texts are written on the same paper stock, but because Thornton copied them both at the beginning of a gathering, he probably intended to wait until a later stage in the manuscripts’ production before deciding the order in which they were to be compiled. In “The Growth of Robert Thornton’s Books,” Hanna suggests Thornton copied texts in the following stages (59-61):

1. The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* (Lincoln).
2. The alliterative *Morte Arthure* (Lincoln), *The Prevette of the Passioun* (Lincoln), probably from the same exemplar.
3. Most of the non-alliterating Lincoln romances (*Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, *The Earl of Toulouse*, *Sir Degrevant*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*). Possibly contemporaneous with the London metrical romances (*Richard Coer de Lyon* and *Ipokrephum*), which likely came from different exemplars. Possibly also contemporaneous with *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* and *Wynnere and Wastoure* (both in London), and maybe also the London Charlemagne romances (*The Siege of Milan* and *Roland and Otuel*).

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<sup>23</sup> Horall notes in “The Watermarks of the Thornton Manuscripts” that the *Morte* and the *Prevette* are written on paper with shared watermarks (386). Building on Horall’s conclusion, Keiser observes that “Thornton had in mind a devotional book, separate from the book of romances, from the time that he set to work on what would eventually become the volume we know as Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91” (“To Knewe God Almyghtyn” 108).

4. *The Awntyrs off Arthure* (Lincoln).
5. *The Northern Passion and The Siege of Jerusalem* (London), although probably not from the same exemplar.
6. *Sir Perceval of Galles*, *Thomas of Erceldowne*, and the remainder of the Lincoln romance section.
7. *Cursor Mundi* (London) and the *Prose Alexander* (Lincoln).
8. Much of the religious material in Lincoln was probably accumulated and copied over the course of stages 3-7. The remainder of the texts in both Lincoln and London probably came at a relatively late stage in production, with Thornton, as Hanna puts it, “putting materials into fascicles on generic grounds” (61).

Hanna’s cursory sketch does not bring a sense of overarching order to Thornton’s work, nor is it meant to. It does, however, indicate that Thornton copied both manuscripts *concurrently*, as series of textual sequences or clusters that could be compiled as he saw fit later on. The distribution of texts into their respective codices was probably the final stage of the manuscripts’ production.

Thornton endeavoured to keep his scribal practice as flexible as possible. The grime and stains on the outside pages of some of his booklets indicates they were bound into their respective codices well after they were produced. Hanna observes that Thornton kept the eight booklets that comprise his manuscripts independent of each other for as long as possible (“Growth” 51-55). He consequently suggests that:

None of the larger booklets was absolutely completed until Thornton arrived at the end of all his copying: each was capable of extension and of melding with other units, so long as new texts could be acquired. The only rule ... which Thornton seems to

have followed was that each fascicle contained works that were relatively homogeneous. (60)<sup>24</sup>

Thornton's evident concern for juxtaposition flexibility suggests that the organization of his manuscripts was meant to facilitate his texts being read in largely homogenous sequences or clusters, rather than as individual items.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it is possible Thornton intended for each of his *books* to be read similarly. As Keiser suggests in a later work, it is reasonable to assert that "Thornton had specific and discernible purposes for selecting the works he did copy" ("To Knewe God Almyghtyn" 107). Although we will never be able to know exactly which selections Thornton made when he copied texts from his exemplars, it is highly likely he was responsible for the choice of texts, their order, and their final distribution.<sup>26</sup>

Thornton's scribal practice does not stop at his choice and organization of texts; he was also responsible for their presentation to the reader. Phillipa Hardman observes that in cases where Thornton's romances can be compared to other witnesses, Thornton employs fitting divisions (usually by means of large coloured capitals) to "punctuate the text at regular intervals," and also to offer opportunities for the reader to pause at significant narrative moments (74). In Thornton's copies of *Sir Degrevant* these markers occur irregularly, and yet Hardman notes that in each case they demonstrate "considerable narrative competence"

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<sup>24</sup> John Finlayson has suggested that treating Thornton as the "grand compiler" of the Lincoln MS constitutes "wishful thinking" on account of what he perceives to be the radical thematic departure of the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* ("Reading Romances in Their Manuscript" 640). However, Finlayson concedes that Thornton was nevertheless probably the "designer of the compilation" (640). While we will probably never find out the extent of Thornton's involvement with the binding process, I argue in Chapter 2 that the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* is integral to the MS.

<sup>25</sup> Keiser argues convincingly that the religious and devotional texts copied onto folios 176v-279v of the Lincoln manuscript constitute a "devotional book" ("To Knewe God Almyghtyn" 104). However, Keiser does not comment on whether we ought to treat the other two major sections of the Lincoln MS as similarly whole units. Phillipa Hardman makes a similar and equally convincing argument about the London manuscript, suggesting that it is organized in such a way as to enable "continuous reading" ("Reading the Spaces" 269).

<sup>26</sup> For more about the context of amateur manuscript production, see Edwards ("Journeyman Manuscript Production"), and Hanna ("Some North Yorkshire Scribes," "Miscellaneity and Vernacularity"). On the paper stock used, see Horall; Thompson, *Robert Thornton* (71-73).

by marking episodes of special interest or of suspense; in his copy of *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, although these markers do not always correspond to the beginning of a tail-rhyme stanza, “each of them makes good narrative sense” when compared to the Cotton and Cambridge version, where fitt divisions sometimes come mid-sentence (74). Thornton’s placement of narrative divisions paid special attention to textual content rather than focusing exclusively on textual form, in order to enable to reader to better follow the sense of the stories.

Furthermore, Thornton often emended the language of the texts he copied in order to facilitate spoken performance. John Ivor Carlson reassesses instances where Thornton has been accused of corrupting the romances he copied, and demonstrates that “he engaged in predictable interventions motivated by a desire to present these tales orally” (53). These interventions include identifying speakers, adding conjunctions and adverbs, doubling of negative modifiers, adding pronouns to clarify the identities of implied subjects, and these interventions are perceptible as consistent features of Thornton’s scribal practice.

Likewise, scribal deletions occur frequently enough in both manuscripts to suggest that Thornton felt a strong sense of responsibility towards his exemplars even though his work was unsupervised (Trigg xxx). The prevalence of these scribal signatures suggests that Thornton was proud of his work. Michael Johnston suggests that Thornton is “a manuscript compiler who foregrounds his own active role in bringing together texts into meaningful combinations” (“Sociology” 145). It is evident from the many instances in which Thornton draws attention to his role as a scribe and from the frequency with which he attributes composition to others that he was as aware of the significance of his own contributions as he

was respectful of the work of the authors he copied.<sup>27</sup> In the Lincoln manuscript, Thornton repeatedly names the authors of his religious and didactic texts. For example, the items by Richard Rolle in the Lincoln manuscript such as the exemplum and prayer on folio 193v contain phrases such as “þat Richerd hermet made,” suggesting a pattern of conscious attribution. Throughout the Lincoln manuscript, Thornton acknowledges the authors of texts such as Gatryng’s *Sermon*, *Sayne Ierome Spaltyre*, the “Tractatus Willim Nassyngton ... de Trinitate,” and the “Ympnus quem composuit sancti Ambrosyus.”<sup>28</sup> The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* contains twenty-five authorial attributions among its many recipes, to such men as his friend Sir Richard Pickering, the Rector of Oswaldkirk, “Ser Apilton,” and “Magistrum William de Excestre.”<sup>29</sup> The only authorial attribution in the London manuscript is that of John Lydgate, to the copy of “The Virtues of the Mass” (fol. 103r). Although it is unknown whether or not Thornton’s exemplars contained such attributions, the evidence in the Lincoln manuscript suggests that Thornton probably included them where he could. It is possible, as G.G. Perry suggests, that Thornton’s preservation and attribution of a significant corpus of the works of Richard Rolle might reflect the sensibilities of “one proud of his fellow-countryman” (*English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle* vi). The consistency with which Thornton attributes authorship suggests he saw the value of acknowledging others’ work, and suggests he may have wanted his own labour to be recognized in the same way.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Thornton draws attention to his contributions mainly through his signatures. However, he also sometimes draws attention to his editing and juxtaposition of his sources, as on folio 32r of the London MS.

<sup>28</sup> The authorial ascriptions in the Lincoln MS occur mainly in the titles. See Appendix A.

<sup>29</sup> Ogden provides a comprehensive catalogue of these attributions in the notes to the introduction to her edition (xvi). Present in less than half of one percent of the over five hundred recipes in the *Liber*, these attributions are conspicuous, but do not dominate the text.

<sup>30</sup> Modern readers have found Rolle’s writings to be somewhat heterodoxical (Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*; Baker). If Thornton was aware of this, his inclusion of texts by Rolle is probably indeed a matter of local pride.

Thornton also decorated his manuscripts. Throughout both, large initial letters tend to fall in patterns of alternating colours in order to help the reader remember his or her place on the page. Moreover, Hardman (“Reading the Spaces”) has shown unrealized programme of large illustrated initials in *Cursor Mundi* and the *Prose Alexander* would have facilitated the reader marking his or her place in the longer and more prestigious texts just as, as Thomas Howard Crofts suggests, the smaller illustrations do throughout the *Morte Arthure*. Both Hardman and Crofts show that Thornton, in his role as scribe, has sufficient foresight to plan out, and to partially realize, programmes of decoration.

What decorative evidence that does exist suggests that Thornton may have in some way preferred the Lincoln manuscript (or its texts), given its pride of place, or completed it first, or just began decorating it first. Comparing the two books, it is almost immediately evident from the patterns of rubrication and illustration that more decorative work has been done on the Lincoln manuscript than on the London manuscript. Some of the large initials in the Lincoln manuscript are in colours other than plain red and green, and there is a great deal of sketch-work in the larger initials that suggests a fairly elaborate decorative scheme, as in the *Morte*. By comparison, there are few illustrations at all in the London manuscript aside from those on fols. 33r and 50r, even though it is evident that many more were planned.<sup>31</sup> In both manuscripts, the regular rubrication of section headings and semi-regular rubrication of proper nouns, the coloured pilcrows, and the alternating colours in the large initials combine to suggest that Thornton’s primary intention was to facilitate the reading process. Because the decorative features most useful to facilitate reading are equally present in both books, the

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<sup>31</sup> See Hardman (“Reading the Spaces”) and Crofts (“The Occasion of the *Morte Arthure*”).

most likely explanation is that after Thornton completed the production of his manuscripts, he began with the Lincoln manuscript when he turned to the task of decoration.

Given all the roles Thornton played in the production of his books – scribe/copyist, translator, illustrator, and compiler – the question that springs to mind is that of whether he was the author of any of the texts he copied. Sad to say, considering the quantity of unique texts he preserves, there is little evidence to suggest he did. The exception lies in his incipits, explicits, and colophons, where he signed his name to texts he copied often enough to suggest a sense of either pride or ownership. In the Lincoln manuscript, folio 23v displays a rebus depicting a thorn and a barrel (or tun), forming the name “Thornton.” Thornton’s name also appears in a drawing on folio 93v (in the middle of the alliterative *Morte*). The *Morte* begins and ends with signatures: “Thornton en esperaunce may” appears on folio 53r in a red display script at the beginning of the poem, and on folio 98v its explicit reads “Here endes Morte Arthure writen by Robert of Thornton / R. Thornton dictus qui scripsit sit benedictus. Amen.” His signature is found again on folio 129v, at the end of the *Vita Sancti Christofori* (another of his unique texts), and on folio 176r, at the end of *Sir Perceval of Galles*, where he writes “Explicit quod Robert Thornton S<sup>r</sup> Percevell of Galles.” On folio 211v, following the “Hymn to Jesus,” Thornton writes “explicit tractatus explicit ~~Amen Thornton Amen~~.” The more typical “R. Thornton dictus qui scripsit” recurs on folio 213r, at the end of the Latin “A medytacioun of the crosse of Criste,” another text which may be unique to Thornton. More interestingly, Thornton appears to have written himself into two of the prayers in this manuscript: the protection prayer on folio 176v, and a copy of Psalm 50 entitled “Thornton miseratur mei dei” on folio 278v. Only two signatures occur in the London manuscript, an “R. Thorntone” on folio 50r, between *The Northern Passion* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and the final “R. Thornton dictus qui scripsit” on folio 66r, at the end of *The Siege of Jerusalem*.

Although the “R. Thornton dictus” signature often coincides with unique texts, its presence at the end of *The Siege of Jerusalem* precludes any attempt to treat it as evidence of authorship. Moreover, *scripsit* only has the sense of “written,” not “composed,” as the verb *to write* would today, which renders this signature a red herring. The English explicit following *Sir Perceval of Galles*, however, seems a more attractive signal of authorship, since we could translate “Explicit quod Robert Thornton S<sup>r</sup> Percevell of Galles” as “here ends *Sir Perceval of Galles*, by Robert Thornton.” Although Thornton having composed this poem offers an exciting possibility, there is insufficient evidence to suggest he did. Many of Thornton’s texts, including *Cursor Mundi*, *Sir Isumbras*, *The Northern Passion*, and *Richard Coer de Lyon*, contain interpolated passages present in no other witnesses.<sup>32</sup> Because we know he tended to intervene in the languages of his texts, it is both possible and likely that he composed some of them. Broadly speaking, it is safest to treat Thornton’s literary interventions as mainly an aspect of his practice as a *compiler*, rather than as a scribe. Thornton’s books are too often described as miscellanies, but as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3, they are not as miscellaneous as a scan of their contents would initially suggest. Instead, let us consider Thornton’s manuscripts to be *anthologies*, and in doing so keep in mind that the sequences of the texts within are largely the product of Thornton’s intelligence.

### 1.3 – Editorial Practice and Patterns of Textual Transmission

To read Thornton’s manuscripts without acknowledging that the selection and organization of texts within them were the result of conscious decisions rather than of rote

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<sup>32</sup> I discuss such passages throughout this dissertation.

copying is to obscure the work of the agent responsible for their production. But some would argue that the effort to reveal this imposition is an act of wishful overinterpretation. Derek Pearsall suggests that thematic readings of late medieval English miscellanies, which assert that “manuscripts of apparently miscellaneous content are somehow the product of unifying controlling intelligences working so subtly that their strategies have hitherto escaped notice” (“The Whole Book” 17), often overlook the fact that “[t]he necessities of production, the pressures of circumstance, the paucity of exemplars ... make the work of compilation more random and inconsistent than many modern interpreters are happy to allow” (29). Thornton’s participation in a culture of copying which preserves or respects exemplars’ textual sequences partially may in some cases account for the high degree of textual organization noted by Guddat-Figge in her *Catalogue* (23-25).<sup>33</sup> For this reason, Thompson asserts that it is “easy to overstress” the extent to which Thornton may have been responsible for the sequence of linked religious and historical texts which comprise the first five quires of the London manuscript (*Robert Thornton* 48).<sup>34</sup>

Pearsall challenges us with what statisticians call a null hypothesis: a default interpretive position that no relationship exists between observed phenomena. I reject Pearsall’s null hypothesis for two reasons. First, because Thornton copied the texts now found in both manuscripts *concurrently*, there is significant evidence that he exercised his

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<sup>33</sup> No definitive sources for any of Thornton’s texts or clusters of texts have yet been found. It is possible, as Ralph Hanna suggests, that Thornton copied most of his romances and many of his alliterative poems from the now-lost “Doncaster exemplar” hypothesized by McIntosh, on account of what Hanna sees as Thornton’s “slackness at converting materials written in other dialects into his own” (“Growth” 57; 61). Carlson demonstrates more convincingly that Thornton was not a slack translator, but an active one (“Scribal Intentions” 53).

<sup>34</sup> Although this current project takes a different direction, Michael Johnston’s assessment of Thompson’s point here as too skeptical is persuasive (“Robert Thornton and *The Siege of Jerusalem*” 135n24). See also Keiser’s review of *Robert Thornton and the Thornton Manuscript*, where Keiser laments Thompson’s “disappointing” underestimation of Thornton’s ability to exercise judgment (159).

judgment in distributing texts between them. And second, although the paucity of exemplars and the low survival rate of medieval texts in general leaves open the possibility of Thornton being a mere copyist, on the balance of probabilities the evidence (as described above) of the single scribal hand, the decorative and poetic interventions to facilitate reading, the care taken in identifying original authors, and the original incipits, explicits, and transitional colophons suggests that his books were produced by an intelligent amateur designer.

In his classic study *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, Alistair Minnis suggests that we should give medieval compilers as much literary credit as we give to medieval authors. Minnis demonstrates that medieval conceptions of *auctoritas* could extend to the role of *compiler*, or compiler (190-210). Among the major aspects of compilatory practice Minnis describes is *ordinatio partium*, the organization of a book into parts. *Ordinatio*, as an organizing feature of a text, draws attention to the work of human *auctores*, and when applied to literature it included the sense of “the disposition and arrangement of material to an end or objective” (147). For the twelfth- and thirteenth-century exegetes who developed this theory of authorship, such an end was usually, but not exclusively, the adaptation of a book for the purposes of teaching. However, by the end of the fourteenth century, Chaucer and Gower had both exploited their use of *compilatio* to shield their work as *auctores*.

In *Scribal Authorship*, Matthew Fisher refines Minnis’ argument and turns it towards the problem of assessing scribes and their work. Because so few holograph manuscripts exist, Fisher draws our attention to the central, if oft-maligned, role of scribes in various nontransparent forms of copying such as composition, emendation, and compilation, a role he defines as “scribal authorship” (7). Although authoritative texts were universally desirable, Fisher’s concept of scribal authorship emphasises that nearly any aspect of a book’s production from its *mise en page* to its dialect might well, in the absence of a holograph,

constitute an expression of *scribal* (rather than authorial) intentionality. As we have seen above, Thornton was responsible for enough of the apparatus surrounding his texts that we might well consider him to be authorial.

The strongest case to be made for Thornton's contribution to his manuscripts lies in the *compilatio* and the *ordinatio* of his books, and he was undoubtedly aware that he possessed a *compiler's* authority: in the London manuscript, a colophon between *Cursor Mundi* and *The Northern Passion* reads "[e]t sic procedendum ad passionem domini nostri Ihesu Christi que incipit in folio proximo sequente secundam *ffantiasiam scriptoris*" (fol. 32r, emphasis mine). This colophon draws the reader's attention to Thornton's role as *scriptor* in the construction of a meaningful textual sequence. Although Thornton only rarely intervenes in such a way as to draw attention to the extent he employs his *ffantiasiam scriptoris*, or editorial prerogative, he nevertheless regularly draws attention to himself through his scribal signatures. To give due deference to the intellectual milieu in which Thornton worked, we must treat Thornton's editorial contributions as a *compiler* with all the seriousness and respect due to the original authors of the texts he copies.

Critics have largely overlooked the extent to which the texts in Thornton's manuscripts mutually interact at a literary level. Given that Thornton had the most flexibility in compiling his texts, what remains is to assess the extent to which the patterns of textual transmission found in his manuscripts conform to known alternative textual clusters. Although, as Pearsall suggests, such a study will not bring us any closer to certainty, we know already, based on McIntosh's assessment of the linguistic similarities between the *Morte Arthure* and *The Prevette of the Passioun*, that Thornton's sometimes radically redistributed texts found in a single exemplar. To what end?

As Hardman suggests, the “collectors” who organized some Middle English miscellanies, like National Library of Scotland MS. Advocates’ 19.3.1, treated their work as the compilation of a “library *in parvo*”: an anthology of materials chosen, organized, juxtaposed, and most importantly *edited* by the scribe such that each section of the manuscript constitutes a miniature anthology of a certain kind of literature (“A Mediaeval Library ‘*In Parvo*’” 272). In contrast to the Advocates’ manuscript Hardman describes, which was produced by multiple scribes piecemeal and ordered by its “collector,” Thornton did both jobs himself. Moreover, Thornton’s books do not contain evidence suggesting that some of the texts were once part of a larger sequence, as we can sometimes see in the organizational features of MS 19.3.1 (Hardman 264-65). Hardman’s metaphor seems an especially apt way to describe Thornton’s books because in this case we can take it literally, and thus treat his collection like the library it is.<sup>35</sup>

Thornton copied his texts from numerous exemplars, many of which were likely themselves books containing multiple items, much like his own. As I mentioned above, Thornton’s manuscripts contain few texts in common with either CUL MS Ff.2.38 or the Auchinleck manuscript, the other two most significant manuscript anthologies of Middle English romance. As we shall see, the patterns of organization in Thornton’s library are largely independent of known textual clusters, indicating that he exercised his *ffantasiā scriptoris* for literary (or thematic) effects, in order to produce meaningful juxtapositions.

Most of the non-romance texts Thornton copies are in some way religious. In his books, Thornton preserves sermons and homilies written by Richard Rolle, an abbreviated

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<sup>35</sup> Boffey and Thompson provide us with a rare instance of the treatment of both of Thornton’s MSS as a “collection” (298). Although he tends to treat the two MSS separately, Michael Johnston has recently drawn many interesting conclusions from examining the MSS through historical research into Thornton’s life.

psalter in Latin (*Sayne Jerome Spaltyre*), numerous prayers and religious songs in both Latin and English, extracts from theological treatises such as Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* and William of Nassington's *The Prick of Conscience*, and texts of sacred history like *Cursor Mundi* and *The Northern Passion*, to name just a few. In this regard, Thornton's manuscripts belong to a broad late medieval trend. Vincent Gillespie observes that the production of the literature of religious instruction in the vernacular increased significantly following John Thoresby's 1357 translation of Archbishop Pecham's 1281 decrees for the instruction of the laity ("Vernacular Books of Religion"). As Gillespie puts it,

Thoresby's decision to publish in a vernacular translation his restatement and updating for the Northern province of Archbishop Pecham's earlier decrees reflects a growing awareness and exploitation of the vernacular in catechetic contexts. This facilitated lay access to such texts ... and stimulated the production of vernacular miscellanies. (318)

Gillespie notes further that over the course of the fourteenth century,

[T]he most striking development in pastoral aids is the emergence of manuscripts in which a number of distinct vernacular texts have been brought together to form a sequence providing instruction in the fundamental beliefs and disciplines of the Church. (318)

The Lincoln manuscript contains a version of Thoresby's translation of Pecham's decrees in its copy of "A Sermon that John Gatreng Made," as well as a number of other catechistic texts which together comprise a didactic sequence of linked texts similar to those noted by Gillespie (318-19). Gillespie demonstrates that copies of sequences of vernacular texts providing religious instruction often retain the sequences, and also the layout and apparatuses,

of their exemplars (328-32).<sup>36</sup> As Guddat-Figge notes, Thornton's manuscripts are highly organized into textual sequences (23-25), although as I note above no exemplar for these sequences has yet been found. In a later article, Gillespie notes that as the production of vernacular religious literature of affective devotion increased over the course of the fifteenth century, texts such as Rolle's prayers and Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Love of Jesus Christ* became "a basic component of the vernacular writing for lay audiences" ("Anonymous Devotional Writings" 129). Most non-affective religious texts in English diagnose sin, inform the devout, or encourage moral behaviour. Thornton's inclusion of both affective and didactic religious texts in his manuscripts suggests that his exemplars may have contained such didactic sequences as Gillespie describes.

Religious and secular literatures were not as conceptually separate in the fifteenth century as they are now. The prologue to *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*, a guide to reading and devotion written for the nuns at Sion Abbey, encourages its readers to read "holy bokes" because (65):

some bokes ar made to enforme the vnderstondynge. & to tel how spiritual  
 persones oughte to be gouerned in all theyr lyuyng that they may knowe what  
 they shall leue. & what they shall do. how they shulde laboure in clensyng of  
 theyr conscience. & in getting of vertewes how they shulde withstonde  
 temptacyons & suffer trybulacyons. & how they shall pray. & occypy them in  
 gostly exercise. (68)

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<sup>36</sup> Although Gillespie expresses surprise by the degree to which some such texts are "remarkably uniform" (332), his conclusion emphasises the amount of uncertainty about the large-scale copying of religious textual sequences when he notes that "[a]ttempts were made to organize the circulation of some texts or groups of texts, but the transmission of many, if not most, remains unclear" (335). I treat Thornton's relationship to patterns of transmission here in this section with the understanding that developing conclusions on broader patterns is outside the scope of this study.

For the nuns at Sion to whom *The Myroure of Oure Ladye* is addressed, books “made to enforme the vnderstondynge” do not, of course, include secular texts such as romances. The prologue characterizes such works as “wythout reason of gostly edyfycacyon” (66). Such an sense of secular literature seems appropriate when situated in the prologue of a devotional guide for nuns. In his classic study *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages*, Glending Olson observes that outside the cloister there existed a “hygienic justification” for non-devotional texts and texts produced for entertainment. As Olson puts it, the writings of many contemporary physicians establish that “there is a precise connection established between the reading of enjoyable material and one’s health. Writing that makes one cheerful has a role in the curing of melancholy and, for the same reasons, in hygiene as well” (57). The hygienic justification could easily be extended to secular literature, where it would include romances that could be read for both entertainment and moral instruction. Many of Thornton’s romances contain episodes depicting how people “shulde laboure in clensyng of theyr conscience. & in getting of vertewes how they shulde withstonde temptacyons & suffer trybulacyons. & how they shall pray.” As we shall see, Thornton’s secular literature is both entertaining and edifying.

One example of this overlap can be seen in Thornton’s romance of *Sir Isumbras* and three others: *The Earl of Toulouse*, *Octavian*, and *Sir Eglamour*. These four romances are part of a group of romances which Murray Evans has demonstrated tend to be transmitted in clusters (*Rereading Middle English Romance*). Evans finds nine medieval manuscripts which contain two or more romances from what he calls the “*Isumbras*-group” of romances: *Sir Isumbras*, *The Earl of Toulouse*, *Libeaus Desconus*, *Octavian*, *Sir Eglamour*, *Beves of Hampton* and *Sir Degaré*, which he reads as similar because they all resemble the story of Job and the legend of St. Eustace (51-82). Although no single manuscript contains all seven

romances, the Lincoln Thornton manuscript contains four. Evans argues convincingly that “these romances were associated together, perhaps intentionally, in the compiling of the manuscript collections, and that they were read together” (56). More significantly for our present discussion of Thornton, although Evans reveals a suggestive pattern of textual clustering in the transmission of the *Isumbras*-group romances, he draws careful attention to idiosyncrasies of transmission suggesting that this cluster of romances is often put in sequence according to a scribe’s or compiler’s prerogative (56). It is likely that the order of *Isumbras*-group romances in the Lincoln manuscript is Thornton’s own.

Scholars cataloguing Middle English romances thematically have noticed the similarities of the moral tone of texts such as *Sir Isumbras*, *Octavian*, *The Earl of Toulouse*, *Sir Degrevant*, and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, all of which Thornton copies. The conspicuous moral tone of what Laura Hibbard Loomis calls “romances of trial and faith,” what Christine Chism calls the “homiletic/pious” romances, what Lee Ramsey calls the “familial” romances, what John Finlayson calls the “religious” romances, and what Evans calls “homiletic romance” suggests that there existed significant overlap between the literature of entertainment and the literature of spiritual guidance. These moral romances exploit the hygienic justification for the literature of entertainment by providing lay audiences with secular literature depicting the sort of activities the *Myroure of Oure Ladye* suggests ought to inform the lives of “spiritual persones.”<sup>37</sup>

The work of Gillespie and Evans suggests that we should expect to find correspondences in the patterns of transmission of both religious literature and romances between one or another of Thornton’s manuscripts and other manuscript miscellanies.

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<sup>37</sup> See Loomis 4; Chism, “Romance” 67; Ramsey; Finlayson, “Definitions (2)” 174-75; Evans 51.

However, to examine Thornton's manuscripts individually for such correspondences is to overlook half the picture, for many of the collocations that Thornton preserves are perceptible only if we treat both manuscripts as a single collection.<sup>38</sup> As we shall see, although Thornton preserves textual clusters similar to those found in other extant miscellanies, these clusters are often rearranged or split up between his two books.

Only two known manuscripts display evidence of transmission patterns consistent with a single Thornton manuscript. The most substantial correspondences are found in Cambridge University Library MS Dd.5.64, which preserves a number of Richard Rolle's English texts in the same order as that found in the Lincoln manuscript. MS Dd.5.64 contains witnesses of *The Form of Living*, the "Four Poems of Thanksgiving," the "Hymn to Jesus," "Whan Adam Dalfe," *Of Angel's Song*, "Thi ioy be ilke a dele," *The Prick of Conscience*, and "Earth to Earth." Because the Lincoln manuscript and CUL MS Dd.5.64 preserve the same texts in the same sequence, it is a likely possibility they share a common source.<sup>39</sup> The other manuscript is National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1, which places *Sir Isumbras* alongside the minor Lincoln texts *Lamentio Peccatoris*, "Prognostications of Weather," and "Epistola Sancti Salvatoris." The correspondences between MS Advocates 19.3.1 and the Lincoln Thornton manuscript suggest that even minor texts may be indicative of the presence of a textual cluster.

It is more common to see that texts transmitted together in one manuscript are divided among both of Thornton's. One such example is Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38, which shares five items with Thornton's manuscripts: "The Proverbs of Solomon,"

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<sup>38</sup> I draw my data here from Guddat-Figge's *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* and from P.S. Jolliffe's *Check-List of Middle English Prose Writings of Spiritual Guidance*.

<sup>39</sup> See note 33, above.

“The Adulterous Falmouth Squire,”<sup>40</sup> *The Earl of Toulouse*, *Sir Eglamour*, and the Northern *Octavian*. This manuscript also contains a large number of catechetic and didactic items and saints’ lives. This manuscript is as well organized as the Lincoln Thornton manuscript with which it has so many texts in common. The first nineteen items in CUL MS Ff.2.38 are religious and didactic lyrics, the next fourteen are saints’ lives and *exempla*, and the final ten are romances. Although most of the common texts appear in the Lincoln manuscript, it is worth noting also the presence of “The Proverbs of Solomon,” which Thornton copies into the London manuscript as *A louely song of wysdome*.

A number of other Middle English miscellanies do not group their romances together, and instead distribute them among their devotional and historical contents. Cambridge University Library MS li.4.9 includes the romance of *Robert of Sicily*, possibly as an *exemplum*, amongst copies of the *Northern Passion*, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, and various meditations and religious texts reminiscent of the contents of the Lincoln manuscript.

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61 also mixes romances with didactic texts. In this manuscript, *Sir Isumbras*, *The Earl of Tolouse*, the *Northern Passion*, Lydgate’s “Dietary,” and “The Adulterous Falmouth Squire” are copied alongside didactic material for sons and daughters, prayers, and advice on purchasing land.

The manuscript most similar in makeup (but not in overall organization) to the Lincoln Thornton MS is the first part of British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.ii (formerly Cotton Vespasian D.viii). This manuscript contains romances, religious texts, recipes, and didactic material reminiscent of Thornton’s collection as a whole. Notably, *Sir Eglamour*,

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<sup>40</sup> Without the prologue, which Thornton preserves as *Lamentio Peccatoris*.

Lydgate's "Dietary," the southern *Octavian*,<sup>41</sup> *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and *Sir Isumbras* appear together with a number of religious lyrics similar to those found in the Lincoln manuscript. A number of this manuscript's romances, including *The Siege of Jerusalem* and *Sir Isumbras*, appear among its religious texts. Guddate-Figge suggests that the order of the items in Cotton Caligula A.ii was "probably planned" such that its organization "reveal[s] a certain consistency" of theme, comparable to that of Thornton's manuscripts except that it was "produced more carefully" on account of likely being the work of a single professional scribe (171). Here, we can see that other compilers deliberately placed romances such as *Sir Isumbras* among explicitly religious works, probably for thematic reasons. *The Siege of Jerusalem* is also transmitted with primarily religious material in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 656, where it fits in among a copy of the *Piers Plowman* C-text, a sermon, and a collection of bible verses on account of its religious narrative content.

As we can see from the way *The Siege of Jerusalem* is placed beside religious texts in Cotton Caligula A.ii and Laud Misc. 656, medieval readers sometimes read romances for their homiletic content. The manuscript context of a romance often produces a kind of suggestive juxtaposition. This is especially true for historical narratives whose subjects are both secular and religious, such as *The Siege of Jerusalem*. The manuscript witnesses of both the alliterative northern poem (*The Siege of Jerusalem*) and the metrical southern poem (*Titus and Vespasian*) suggest that this story was read most commonly as a historical record. This is the case in BL MS Cotton Caligula A.ii, above. *The Siege of Jerusalem* is also

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<sup>41</sup> I count the southern *Octavian* as a significant collocation here, as I will count the southern *Titus and Vespasian* and the prose "Three Kings of Cologne" below, as texts that indicate interests shared among compilers. Although Thornton sometimes preserves different versions of narratives than do other compilers, this additional data suggests that fewer of Thornton's juxtapositions are atypical that could be found by a stricter survey collocating only exact matches.

transmitted as part of an historical miscellany in Lambeth Palace MS 491, along with copies of “The Three Kings of Cologne,”<sup>42</sup> *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, and a chronicle of English history, and in BL MS Cotton Vespasian E.16, where it is transmitted alongside “The Three Kings of Cologne,” in what appears to be a manuscript containing histories of the foundation of the Greek and Roman churches. A copy of *Titus and Vespasian* follows Lydgate’s sieges of Thebes and Troy in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 230, showing that this story was also read as a siege romance and as a history. History is also the dominant theme of London, College of Arms MS Arundel 58, which contains *Richard Coer de Lyon* and Lydgate’s “Verses on the Kings of England” alongside a number of chronicles. Finally, a copy of *Titus and Vespasian* is preserved in British Library MS Additional 36983, along with fragments from *Cursor Mundi* and *The Prick of Conscience*, “The Three Kings of Cologne,” and *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*. British Library MS Additional 36983 has many items in common with Thornton’s collection, but *Titus and Vespasian* is its only romance. In this context, set among a number of devotional items, its immediate setting beside “The Three Kings of Cologne” suggests its place is to mediate between the devotional and historical texts in this collection.

Although Thornton preserves a number of texts that tend to have been copied alongside each other, the only case in which Thornton’s order of texts corresponds to that of another manuscript witness is Dd.5.64. Thornton nevertheless offers his readers clustered texts such as the *Isumbras*-group romances and minor religious works in a substantially different order than they are otherwise found. It is surprising how often relatively obscure texts such as *Lamentio Peccatoris*, Lydgate’s “Dietary,” and “The Three Kings of Cologne”

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<sup>42</sup> All known copies of this text, aside from Thornton’s, exist in the prose version edited by Carl Horstman.

find themselves in other manuscripts containing some other text that Thornton was aware of. Although none of these minor texts ever finds itself taking the central place in an anthology, they emphasise certain themes in the texts surrounding them: *Lamentio Peccatoris* signifies the presence of a moral programme in a manuscript, the “Dietary” signifies an interest in didactic materials, and “The Three Kings of Cologne” signifies an interest in history.

The codicological questions of textual transmission and sequencing lead us to the substantial literary questions of theme and effect. Meaningful textual juxtaposition, even if accidental, is a fairly common feature in miscellaneous manuscripts. As I discuss below, this is a hugely important question for studies of medieval books and their production. The common themes found in Thornton’s books were the result of his work as a *compiler*. Moreover, the majority of the correspondences found in this survey would not be perceptible in an assessment considering only one of Thornton’s books. Based on the early separation of the *Morte* from *The Prevette of the Passioun*, we know that Thornton had a tendency to split up texts found in a single exemplar, so there is no reason to doubt he may not have distributed two texts found in a single source between both of his books. We already know that Thornton’s manuscripts were bound together after all their texts were copied and that some booklets spent a considerable amount of time unbound.<sup>43</sup> The delay between copying and binding suggests that Thornton need not have organized his texts on patterns predetermined by his exemplars, and moreover that he was possessed of a substantial opportunity not to. As Thompson puts it, “the order in which ... texts are presented to Thornton’s readers is no good indication of the order in which he copied them” because his practice as a compiler required him to develop his literary and editorial instincts (ie: his

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<sup>43</sup> See Ogden, Hanna “Growth,” Keiser “To Knewe God Almyghtyn,” Thompson “Another Look,” “The Compiler in Action,” “Textual Instability,” and *Robert Thornton*.

*ffantasiā scriptoris*) in order to perform his work (“Textual Instability” 185). Textual clusters found in analogous miscellanies are often split up in Thornton’s collection. It is likely that Thornton reorganized the texts he copied in order to juxtapose them with other texts of similar topics, themes, or genres. We must therefore consider more seriously the extent to which both the order of texts within each of Thornton’s manuscripts and also the distribution of texts among them constitute meaningful literary and editorial contributions.

#### 1.4 – Thornton as *Compiler* and *Author*

As Daniel Wakelin observes in his study of early English humanism, the 1430s and 1440s saw the development of a taste among noblemen for narrative collections meant for didactic study, modeled after the conspicuous intellectual interests of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester (23-61). Around this same time, John Talbot had commissioned the Shrewsbury Book (BL MS Royal 15 E.vi), an anthology of *chansons de geste*, romances, chivalric treatises, and mirrors for princes purposed as an educational programme consisting of the most advanced theories of chivalry and warfare, which he presented to Margaret of Anjou, probably for the education of her future son (C. Taylor). At a lower social level, members of the gentry such as Thornton might have endeavoured to emulate such anthologies when compiling their own.<sup>44</sup> His collection, however, would not be confined to narrative.

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<sup>44</sup> One such figure was Thomas Mull (b.1400, d. 1460) who commissioned San Marino, Henry E. Huntington Library MS HM 28561, a manuscript composed between 1450 and 1475 containing a copy of Trevisa’s translation of Higden’s *Polychronicon* and the Middle English *Turpines Story*, among other items (Shepherd, *Turpines Story* xviii-xxvii). As Shepherd notes, Mull was a “staunch Lancastrian,” and his copy of the *Polychronicon* contains additional Lancastrian material in Latin, possibly intended to be read as “Lancastrian history in particular,” or possibly in tribute to Talbot, who was Mull’s employer (xxi, xxvi). This MS also

The contents of Thornton's manuscripts provide evidence by which we can gauge his interests and anxieties. Although Thornton's interests are broad, Boffey and Thompson note it is evident he "retained a limited degree of control over the order of ... his items" (300). As I have argued above, it is in Thornton's work as a *compiler* that we are most likely to find evidence of his literary decisions. These decisions indicate his interests straddle the clerical and the chivalric. As I will argue below, the romances tend to share common interests in individuals' relationships with their societies, with the maintenance of family units, with the defense of territory, and with negotiating the effects of the sacred on secular activity. Furthermore, Thornton's religious texts, especially the prayers and devotional guides of the Lincoln manuscript, tend to express an anxiety about the relationship between salvation and the active life. His other concerns include health, religious practice, and history. Thornton preferred to resolve conflicts through mediating structures wherever possible in order to avoid violence. Even if it is true, as Johnston suggests, that his manuscripts reflect the typical social anxieties of the minor gentry of fifteenth-century England ("A New Document" 311-12), Thornton provides us with an exciting opportunity to employ the tools of codicology (ie: the presence of textual clusters and sequences, or the distribution of his texts among his manuscripts) to open up new avenues of *literary* analysis with respect to his biography, his religious and literary concerns, his reading habits, and his historical situation. In essence, the texts Thornton copies allow us to examine how he imagines his own identity.

Thornton's literary contributions are worth reassessing because they have been largely underemphasised. Since Susanna Greer Fein's publication of "Haue Mercy of Me" in 1989, all of the contents of Thornton's manuscripts have been available in some form or

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contains a copy of the pictorial genealogy of Henry VI commissioned by John, duke of Bedford (xv; cf. Section 5.3).

another in print. Nevertheless, it is an arduous task to use these editions to re-assemble the original series of texts in the manuscripts, as not all of the editions preserve Thornton's versions of text independently, and some print them out of their original manuscript order. The first treatment of Thornton's texts to attempt to engage seriously with Thornton's role as copyist, Halliwell's 1844 edition of *The Thornton Romances*, does so only to dismiss, with alarming alacrity, the idea that a scribe could have made a literary contribution:

It must not ... be supposed that Robert Thornton was the *author* of this miscellany.

Although in more than one instance the tracts are said to be "written" by him, we must be content, excepting perhaps a very few lines, with giving him the bare honour of a scribe; and if it be thought that by the title of this work we are conferring an unmerited posthumous reputation, it must be recollected that the real authors have not recorded their names, and thus, while no injustice is committed to any memory, we obtain the advantage of a short distinctive title. (v-vi; italics in original)

Halliwell's position that any attempt to recognize that Thornton may have positively contributed to the manuscripts he copied would slander the reputations of the "real authors" whose work he merely copies is more than merely problematic. Halliwell is not the only critic to make this move. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Gollancz was equally dismissive of Thornton's agency in his editions of *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, *Wynnere and Wastoure*, and *The Quatrefoil of Love*, and we have already seen that Thompson resists attributing significant agency to him. These assessments of Thornton's literary agency are excessively conservative, but they have been influential enough, that critics have largely avoided treating Thornton's literary agency as significant. As Minnis and Fisher would suggest, however, *compilator* and *ordinatior* were both considered to be roles with significant literary consequences, and roles which were taken up often by scribes themselves.

Ironically, Halliwell's remarks draw attention to the very place where we might most fruitfully discuss Thornton's literary contributions, but his emphasis on the word *author* misses the point. Thornton might not have composed any of his texts, but he certainly designed his collection to take advantage of meaningful literary sequences. Thus, while it is true, as Halliwell states, that "Robert Thornton was the *author* of this miscellany," it is equally true that he was 'the author *of this miscellany*'.

It is unfortunate that single-text editions which do exist of texts in Thornton's manuscripts tend not to discuss the texts alongside which they are transmitted. These editions usually overlook other texts in the same manuscript, and almost all of them overlook the contents of the other manuscript. These editions thus obscure important contexts which may enable certain lines of literary analysis. Indeed, the manuscript context of medieval literature is often overlooked entirely.<sup>45</sup> Laura Hibbard Loomis remarked in 1942 that "literary criticism has but rarely concerned itself with medieval English books as wholes rather than parts" (596). As recently as 2005, Siobhain Bly Calkin suggests that Loomis' point "still characterizes most scholarly work on the Auchinleck manuscript" (*Saracens and the Making of English Identity* 5). As with Auchinleck, so too with Thornton. Of the two most recent extended studies of Thornton's manuscripts as whole entities, Emily Lavin Leverett's 2006 dissertation "Holy Bloodshed: Violence and Christian Piety in the London Thornton Manuscript" and Michael Johnston's 2007 dissertation "The Sociology of Medieval Romance," neither treats all his romances, let alone the other texts he copies.

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<sup>45</sup> In 1990, Stephen G. Nichols spearheaded a renewed move towards reconsidering medieval texts in light of their manuscript context or contexts, what Nichols calls the "manuscript matrix" ("Philology in a Manuscript Culture"). See also Nichols and Wenzel, and Caie.

Scholarly inquiry into manuscripts as whole books forces us to tackle issues of medieval textuality and intertextuality which are nearly impossible to reproduce given that medieval texts now circulate mainly in single-text editions which at best only hint at the significance of the books from which they are extracted.<sup>46</sup> As Hanna points out, rather than being a nuisance to be disposed of in order to produce an edition, medieval miscellanies enrich our understanding of medieval texts by means of “unique contextualizations” and appeal to “unique, historicizable audiences” (*Pursuing History* 8).<sup>47</sup> More general studies of the literary implications of manuscript transmission have done much to reveal the dynamics of medieval transmission practices. Sylvia Huot demonstrates how Old French manuscripts of both the miscellaneous and single-author variety developed to show signs of thematic organization (*From Song to Book*). Likewise, Keith Busby demonstrates convincingly that “it is ... illogical to suppose that texts appear in each other’s company as a result of hazard and happenstance” when we read series of texts in a medieval miscellany (*Codex and Context* 367). More recently, Andrew Taylor’s study *Textual Situations* has drawn attention to the need to read manuscripts as whole entities whose contexts provide evidence essential to understand how medieval texts were initially received.

The task of reading a manuscript anthology as a text in itself is complex. Often, evidence for a medieval book’s intended readership is scant or absent, or the scribe’s sources are lost to oblivion. The ease with which one may access contemporary networked databases

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<sup>46</sup> By facilitating the presentation of high-quality facsimiles alongside numerous other collections of information such as transcriptions, commentary, and translation, technological advances are now doing much to alleviate the divide between the manuscript and the edition. The *Virtual Vellum* software designed for Peter Ainsworth’s Online Froissart project allows for the easy manipulation of the digitized manuscript and facilitates the reading of texts in multiple witnesses (<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/onlinefroissart/>).

<sup>47</sup> The studies of whole manuscripts which include a literary component have proven to be quite successful. See Pearsall (*Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*), Lerer, Orchard, Fein (*Studies in the Harley Manuscript*), Taylor (*Textual Situations*), and Calkin.

makes it difficult to imagine a world where written information is scarce. We very rarely encounter anthologies covering such a diversity of topics as we find in medieval books.

The difficulty lies in how we read such books. Are their organizational features largely products of accident, as Pearsall suggests? Or can we attribute literary significance to questions of codicological organization? When it comes down to it, we must remember that people are still *people*, even when their historical and cultural situation seems foreign to us. Huot and Busby remind us of this when they suggest that our first instinct should be to look for order even when books appear to be chaotic: we ought to read anthologies as though they were organized by intelligent persons. For Taylor, *Textual Situations* provides him with an opportunity to assess how “a given collection of texts might have taken meaning in the mind of a particular reader, a real person, at a given moment” (9). To focus on the intentions of specific readers as Taylor does is a difficult task indeed. The scarcity of historical evidence for such personal responses to specific texts leads him to respond to manuscripts with intriguingly quixotic questions, as when in his discussion of *The Song of Lewes* in British Library MS Harley 978 he asks “[w]hat sort of conversation might William [of Winchester, the manuscript’s first owner] have had with the author of this poem, had he met him?” (126). Unfortunately, we will never know.

At its most radical, Taylor’s approach to medieval manuscripts and readers approaches historical fiction. Michael Camille, in his remarkable study *Master of Death: The Lifeless Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator*, takes this very approach in his treatment of the day-to-day life of the man he studies:

*A creak on the wooden staircase that led from the downstairs shop to the cramped living quarters announced her coming. The slow deliberate step was audible to the old man even above the creakings and wheezings of that ‘minor mundus’ of his*

*own body and the other clattering sounds that came through the open window from the bustling streets of the ‘major mundus’ outside. Both worlds had for long now been in decay and decline and, as the preachers never tired of screeching from their pulpits, ‘the end is nigh’. They had been saying that for as long as he could remember. But perhaps now at last, for Remiet it was.* (11, italics in original)<sup>48</sup>

Camille uses the self-conscious fictionality of such passages to draw attention to the extent to which to study historical actors is to overcome the unknowable.<sup>49</sup>

At the other end of the scale of intentionality, Stephen G. Nichols demonstrates in his discussion of an Occitan *chansonniere* that it is possible to read miscellanies as books consciously organized by absent compilers. On the basis of Cassiodorus’ sixth-century innovation of the *pandect* – or compendium – Nichols suggests that

*receuils* or *chansonniers*, at least many of them, should be regarded as having an aesthetic (or other motivation) for the manuscript as a whole and therefore principles of order that convey reading programs to correlate the *dissimilar* individual texts they contain. (“Principles of Order” 83, emphasis in original)

Thus, for Nichols, New York, Pierpoint Morgan Library MS M.819 is a manuscript whose order of texts constitutes an aesthetic “performance” which “dictates the ordering of wildly disparate materials” (120). Although Nichols’s account of the whole book as a single aesthetic unit is compelling, he does not ascribe the unity of the manuscript to any human beings. Instead, he treats the book itself as the agent of its own unity, as when he tells us that “the manuscript brings out this link by staging a fuller version of the dialectic of

<sup>48</sup> Camille distinguishes such fictional passages from his more sedate work by publishing them in an italic font.

<sup>49</sup> Simon Schama’s half historical, half conjectural, book *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)* integrates the two more completely. Schama remarks in his afterword that “historians are left forever chasing shadows, painfully aware of their inability ever to reconstruct a dead world in its completeness” (320).

exemplarity” (118). In light of the difficulty Taylor and Camille have in approaching the minds of the long-dead, Nichols’s attribution of agency to the book itself has much to recommend it.<sup>50</sup> On account of his position as the sole scribe and compiler of his own books, however, this approach is less desirable in Thornton’s case.

Perhaps we should turn our focus away from the scribe himself, following Hanna’s suggestion that the manuscript context provides us with unique contexts for texts, which were read by historicizable audiences. In “In Thrall,” his introduction *London Literature, 1300-1380*, Hanna recalls the smell of “cotton ginning” from his childhood in order to demonstrate that knowledge is sometimes local to a particular community, in its particular geography. Hanna resists postmodern studies that:

... produce master-narratives and an emphasis on the *longue duree* [sic]. Yet in so doing, they often fail to respond to, to render comprehensible and narratable, a history I would take as responsive to something like lived experience and practice.

This would actually occur somewhere, in a fragmented locality. (xiv)

Central to Hanna’s project is the idea of a “somewhere,” which by implication represents, like the alienated town of Thrall of his distant memory, a geographical situatedness distinct from other geographies. For Hanna, medieval London constitutes one such ‘fragmented locality’ with a “distinctive productive character” that exists in spite of its cosmopolitan status (xvii). Although Hanna’s approach is tempting, it requires treating literature as

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<sup>50</sup> As Andrew Taylor suggests in “The Time of an Anthology,” Nichols’ work draws our attention to an interpretive conflict between “two very different orders, that of the book as a human tool and that of the book as a work of art” (129). Taylor thus notes that Nichols’s approach invites us to question whether or not the owners of a book actually read it. This question is, I think, more pertinent to our understanding of presentation MSS. Thornton’s unique situation as sole scribe and compiler, coupled with the additional evidence of the records of family births and the regular scribal signatures throughout the collection, provide ample evidence to suggest that he did.

produced by places rather than by people. This approach would be much more appealing for Thornton's manuscripts had he not emphasised his idiosyncratic contributions.

My approach lies somewhere between Taylor's and Hanna's. Thornton reminds us of his presence so often throughout his manuscripts that it would do him a disservice to consciously overlook the man who wrote them, as Halliwell does, and as Nichols's approach suggests we might. Following Hanna, although we cannot treat Thornton as independent of influences of geography and time, there is little evidence to suggest an exclusively Yorkshire context behind his scribal practice. The manuscripts contain texts from all over England, including poems by Lydgate (from Bury St. Edmund's), the works of Richard Rolle (from Hampole), and work by Walter Hilton (from Ely), to name a few. Thornton seems to have responded largely to social anxieties common throughout England.

Thanks to the work of scholars such as Carlson, Hardman, Hanna, Keiser, Crofts, Thompson, Horall, and Johnston, we now know a great deal about Thornton's biography, milieu, and scribal practice. His immediate concern in his life was his property, and he wrote and compiled his books largely for his own benefit and that of his family. The texts he copies commonly express interest in topics such as familial unity, devotional practice, troth, law and order, and Christian history. As a landowner whose fortunes would have relied on the broad maintenance of law and order, he probably kept abreast of developments in both regional and national politics. This project asks how Thornton's manuscripts examine, articulate, and offer solutions to the cultural anxieties he might have felt as he worked on them.

## Chapter 2 – Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91: A Guide to Living

Compared to most of the contents of the Lincoln Thornton manuscript, the stylistic simplicity of the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* distinguishes it from the headier romances, devotional guides, prayers, and theological treatises that precede it. However, it may have been the first text Thornton copied (Hanna, “Growth” 59).<sup>1</sup> The recipes contained in the *Liber* are organized under clear headings in order to facilitate their use, and these uses range from the simple to the complex. One such example provides recipes “For to wiete if a wounded man sall lyfe or dye:”

*For to wiete if a wounded man sall lyfe or dye:* Tak betoyn, vetoyn, matefelon, madir & stampe þam wele & drynke þe jus with alde ale &, if he caste it owte at þe mouthe, he sal dy....

*An oper:* Tak pympernole & stampe it & drynke þe jus menged with water &, if it ga owte at þe wonde, he sal dy &, if he hald it, he sal lyf. (59)<sup>2</sup>

The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* is a remarkably economical text, and its purpose is to dispense advice. The primary ingredients of these recipes, which are separated in the manuscript by only three lines (fol. 304v), are “betoyme” and “pympernole,” which are significant because these two herbs form the title of the final, now fragmentary, item in the Lincoln manuscript, an Herbal entitled *Betoyme and Pympernelle*.<sup>3</sup> Evidently, these two herbs can tell us whether a wounded man will live or die. More significant yet, is that as we

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<sup>1</sup> Although Keiser has suggested that Thornton’s first text was the *Morte Arthure* (“Life and Milieu” 178), Hanna’s observation accounts for watermark evidence that Keiser did not have access to at the time. The paper bearing the watermark on which the *Liber* is copied was the in circulation between 1385 and 1442 (and the earliest paper Thornton could have owned), while the paper on which the *Morte* is copied circulated only between 1437 and 1445 (Thompson, *Robert Thornton* 71-73). While the *Morte* was undoubtedly copied early in Thornton’s career, a medical manual seems a more sensible first production.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations are from the edition prepared by M.S. Ogden for the EETS, by page and line number. I use italics here to denote the item headings, which occur in the margins in the manuscript.

<sup>3</sup> George Keiser, “Reconstructing Robert Thornton’s Herbal.”

read passages like this we get the sense that we could follow these same recipes today so long as we could identify their ingredients.

The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* tells us exactly what we must do and exactly how to do it. It collects over five hundred such recipes and cures, organized by the part of the body affected, and indexed by a series of running titles at the top margin of the page, with each recipe distinguished by a marginal note. Its organizational schema partitions the human body in descending order from the head to the feet before it addresses more general ailments such as lice, fevers, and cankers, and its final pages offer recipes for ointments, gums, and salves. The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* is a comprehensive guide to medicating the human body.

The two reference texts at the end of the manuscript provide clues indicating the whole book is largely coherent. On account of its utility, the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* might seem to stand apart from the other items in the Lincoln manuscript, but they too might be considered texts providing useful information. What if we do not suffer from a medical crisis? What if our problems are social or devotional? What if we have forgotten our psalms or the articles of our faith? What if we are confused as to whether our secular work will help our spiritual growth? Worse yet, what if we fear one of our relatives suffers in purgatory? What if we want to prepare ourselves to travel abroad? Or what if we merely want a refresher on how to address a letter? As we shall see, the answers to all these questions and more can be found in the Lincoln Thornton manuscript: a comprehensive guide to living.

## **2.1 – Organizational Features**

As already noted, the Lincoln manuscript is generally considered to be better organized than the London manuscript. There is an evident sense of purpose in the

organization of the three “books” of the Lincoln manuscript, yet it has but rarely been treated as a whole. Moreover, there is some critical disagreement on whether we ought to rely on thematic or codicological evidence in order to understand how the book is organized. In “The Compiler in Action,” Thompson suggests that the manuscript consists of three thematic “books” which correspond to the quire structure:

|                  |                                                       |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Fols. 1-176r:    | Romances <sup>4</sup>                                 |
| Fols. 176v-279v: | Religious/Devotional texts <sup>5</sup>               |
| Fols. 280r-321:  | <i>Liber de Diversis Medicinis</i> <sup>6</sup> (114) |

Keiser agrees with Thompson’s tripartite division of the manuscript, and argues further that its current shape is the result of a process of incremental composition where texts were copied separately, with Thornton’s ultimate goal being the production of a whole book rather than a series of fascicules or booklets (“To Knewe God Almyghtyn” 108). Studies of the manuscript’s gathering structure, watermarks, and program of illustrations have confirmed Keiser’s hypothesis.<sup>7</sup>

There has also been some debate on whether or not the romances ought to be subdivided further. Johnston offers a more detailed thematic grouping of the texts in his dissertation “The Sociology of Middle English Romance.” Johnston reads the “kingly romances” (the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure*) together as a single “thematic unit”

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<sup>4</sup> Thompson subdivides the romances further, into “Alexander” and “Arthurian” units (117). The idea of an “Arthurian” section is unhelpful since fewer than half of the romances are Arthurian, and traditionally Arthurian concerns do not extend throughout the remainder of the romances.

<sup>5</sup> Keiser notes in “To Knewe God Almyghtyn” that Thornton tends to alternate sections of prose and verse in this section of the MS. The only text here whose presence has caused some confusion (notably in Thompson’s “Collecting Middle English Romances”) is the hagiographical *Of Sayne Iohn Be Euangelist*. Kennedy provides a convincing explanation for its grouping amongst the religious texts.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson had by this point already argued convincingly in “Textual Lacunae and the Importance of Manuscript Evidence” that the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* constitutes a “book within a book,” due to its uncharacteristic absence of red ink in the text’s section headings (274). Thompson goes on to label the two other ‘books’ “romance” and “religious.”

<sup>7</sup> See Owen (“Collation and Descent”), Thompson (“The Compiler in Action” and *Robert Thornton*) and Horall (“Watermarks”) for more on MS collation, organization, decoration, and watermarks, respectively.

because they differ “in *kind*” from the “familial romances” on account of their shared programme of decorated initials (141-2; italics in original). He contrasts these texts to the “familial romances” of *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, *The Earl of Toulouse*, *Sir Degrevant*, and *Sir Eglamour*, which are “markedly different” because “their scope is much more localized, and ... overtly economic” (166). Although he expresses awareness of the manuscript’s general tripartite division (127), he treats the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* among Thornton’s devotional and moral texts, as “evidence for [Thornton’s] clerical milieu” (137). Johnson’s chapter on the Lincoln manuscript subdivides it as follows:

|                 |                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Fols. 1r-98v:   | Kingly Romances            |
| Fols. 98v-147r: | Familial Romances          |
| Fols. 147v-321: | Devotional and Moral Texts |

Johnston’s understanding of some of the romances as concerned with “familial” issues is insightful, and I will expand on it below. However, his classification of folios 147 to 321 as “devotional and moral” separates the romances of *Thomas of Erceldowne* (fol. 149v-153v), *The Awntyrs off Arthure* (154r-161r), and *Sir Perceval of Galles* (161r-176r) from the other romances. Moreover, since neither folio 98 nor folio 147 ends a quire,<sup>8</sup> Johnston’s model conflicts with Keiser’s and Thompson’s sense that the manuscript began as a collection of texts that was compiled and organized only at a late stage in their production.

John Finlayson suggests that the manuscript ought to be divided in stricter accordance with quire divisions (“Reading Romances”). Finlayson divides the manuscript as follows:

|                 |                                                              |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fols. 1r-52r:   | <i>Prose Alexander</i> (quires <b>A-C</b> )                  |
| Fols. 53r-178v: | Verse Romances and four short pieces by Rolle ( <b>D-K</b> ) |

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<sup>8</sup> Owen provides a breakdown of the gatherings in the introduction to the *Facsimile*, xii.

Fols. 179r-279v: Mainly religious texts by or attributed to Rolle (**L-P**)

Fols. 280r-321: *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* (**Q**) (641-43)

Finlayson argues based on the quire structure that before the manuscript was bound, it was composed of four separate units, each of which contains a “distinctive body of material” (643). However, he blurs the distinction between his first and second groupings when he notes that the collocation of the *Prose Alexander* with the *Morte Arthure* “indicates an element of literary awareness on the part of the compiler ... since both works are heroic histories, and relate to the Nine Worthies motif” (643). Finlayson maintains that it is improbable that Thornton intended the *Prose Alexander* to function as a preface to the *Morte Arthure*, since one is a “real history” and the other is a “historical romance” (666).<sup>9</sup> This division leaves open the question of the nature of the romances in the London MS, which are aligned more closely with issues of historicity.<sup>10</sup> According to Finlayson’s division of texts, it is unclear whether the short pieces by Rolle which follow *Sir Perceval of Galles* constitute merely filler or whether they are to be included as part of Thornton’s group of religious texts.

It is tempting to consider the manuscript, as Finlayson does, strictly according to its compilation. Because this study focuses on the unity of the manuscript, I will more closely follow Thompson’s model, refined slightly to conform more closely with its booklet structure and the new discoveries pertaining to the contents of the stubs on folios 316-21.<sup>11</sup> I see the manuscript’s contents to be organized as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> Finlayson’s distinction between the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure* is unconvincing. The state of decoration of the *Prose Alexander* matches that of Thornton’s *Cursor Mundi*, which opens the London MS, suggesting that it was a late addition to the compilation (Thompson, *Robert Thornton*, 59-60, 65).

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 3 for more on historicity in the London romances.

<sup>11</sup> In “Reconstructing Robert Thornton’s Herbal,” George Keiser identifies the contents on the stubs at the end of the manuscript (fols. 316-21) as a copy of the herbal *Betoyne and Pympernelle*. This evidence prevents me from considering the final booklet of the manuscript as though it contained only the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*. I thus categorize folios 280r-321, containing both the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* and *Betoyne and Pympernelle* as a “reference” book.

|                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Fols. 1-178r:    | Romances             |
| Fols. 179v-279v: | Religious/Devotional |
| Fols. 280r-321:  | Reference            |

The romances, even with the odd intrusions between them, form a coherent enough organizational unit that they ought to be treated together. I will, however, discuss the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure* separately, since their length demands considerable attention. I will likewise discuss all of Thornton's religious texts as a group, though the quantity of items in this booklet and restrictions of time prevent me from discussing more than a representative sample. I will then briefly discuss the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* and *Betoyne and Pympernelle*. These superficially aberrant texts do not provide as fertile a ground for literary analysis as do the romances or the religious texts, but their overt utility provides us with an inroad into understanding the manuscript is a guide to living; a tool compiled for the maintenance of social, psychological, and physical health.

## 2.2 – The Romances

Although the romances of the Lincoln Thornton MS have been the subject of scholarly interest for a long time, only five critics have undertaken to read them as a group. These studies are therefore worth considering at some length. Owen James Daly offers the first thematic reading of Thornton's romances in his dissertation "This World and the Next: Social and Religious Ideologies in the Romances of the Thornton Manuscript." Daly focuses primarily on Thornton's tail-rhyme romances and his copy of the *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, arguing that they negotiate between the values of secular and religious society in terms of the

discourse of “the mixed life” – combining secular activity with a prayer life of personal meditation – as presented by the texts in the ‘religious’ booklet of Thornton’s manuscript.<sup>12</sup>

Daly suggests that the romances function dialectically, and that they reflect concerns about maintaining the “nuclear family” (31), masculine and feminine sensibilities (61), hospitality (116), social mobility (150-53), and the relationship between private fulfilment and social stability (164). Daly ultimately argues that the romances articulate a pious lay ideology which imbues secular activity with spiritual significance (230-31). Reading Thornton’s romances in the context of his religious texts, Daly thus emphasises that the manuscript was compiled as a single book. He consequently encourages us to look more closely at the effects of its many intertexts when he suggests that:

both the romances and the spiritual literature present complementary aspects of an interest in self-improvement. The moral growth and upward social mobility of the heroes of romance and the disciplined cultivation of the self in a striving for spiritual perfection are simply two sides of the same process. (290-291)

Daly suggests, inaccurately, that the romances treat secular aspirations as if they were expressions of pious devotion. Although Thornton’s romance protagonists sometimes rise in rank, Sir Isumbras stands alone in expressing a desire for self-improvement. Moreover, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, a text Daly does not discuss, suggests that Arthurian society is corrupt at the highest level. On the contrary, most of Thornton’s protagonists are static characters unaware of their own faults who resolve conflicts through the forceful expression of their pre-existing characteristics.

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<sup>12</sup> Daly diverges from the order of texts as presented in the manuscript, discussing the romances of *Octavian*, *Sir Degrevant*, *Sir Eglamour*, *Sir Isumbras*, *The Earl of Toulouse*, and the *Vita Sancti Cristofori* in that order.

Jonathan Hughes expands slightly on Daly's treatment of the manuscript in two short sections on Thornton in his book *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire*, reading the manuscript's romances as a series of depictions of figures who exemplify the "mixed life" (282; 295-96). However, Hughes goes on to suggest that "Thornton may have provided his family with everything they needed in terms of moral and spiritual instruction and entertainment, *but he was aware of the possibility* that he and his family would isolate themselves by turning to their book as an anchorage and refuge" (296, emphasis mine). Hughes's reading seems conflicted, as he sees the manuscript both as promoting the social contact that is characteristic of the mixed life and as promoting isolation. Since the *Prose Alexander* offers a scathing critique of social isolation, all of the romances treat protagonists actively engaged with the world around them, and texts like Rolle's "Our Daily Work" and Hilton's *Of Mixed Life* strongly encourage their readers to participate in secular activities, it is more likely that Thornton preferred the mixed life.

Thompson discusses the structure of Lincoln manuscript in "The Compiler in Action: Robert Thornton and the Thornton Romances in Lincoln Cathedral MS 91," which investigates the significance of textual juxtaposition with regards to manuscript composition. Thompson argues that the blank pages between the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure* indicate the thematic juxtaposition of these two texts was "achieved indirectly, and even then only in the most rudimentary way" (116-17). Rejecting as "optimistic" Daly's reading of the *Vita Sancti Christofori* as a representation of the pious lay ideology of the mixed life present throughout the MS, Thompson regards the separation of this text from the life of *Sayne John þe Euangelist* as an "obvious inconsistency" (119). Thompson accounts for the "unorthodox" placement of items such as *Thomas of Erceldowne* and *De miraculo Beate Marie* by asserting that their placement is "marginally acceptable" because they are about knights, and

thus “there is no other context ... which would have been more appropriate” (120).<sup>13</sup>

Thompson rejects ascribing a clear plan to Thornton by stressing that “the haphazard way in which some items were added by Thornton to his collection” results from “the piecemeal way in which he received his various sources” (117).<sup>14</sup>

John Finlayson’s study of Thornton’s romances, “Reading Romances in their Manuscript: Lincoln Cathedral MS 91,” diverges from Thompson’s position on haphazard compilation, arguing that Thornton “arranged the romances as an anthology of romance sub-types and thematic preoccupations” (640). Finlayson reads the romances, persuasively, as “a graduated range of romance sub-types” progressing from heroic and historical texts through elements of *chansons de geste* and towards the “romance of adventure” (644-45). He notes that “some of these romances are acknowledged to have been influenced by works which precede them in the manuscript” and offers the unlikely scenario that “three of these romances [*Degrevant*, *Awntyrs*, and *Perceval*] may have been composed, or at least first copied, for this collection” (666). I treat the question of Thornton’s “anthology of romance” in Chapter 4. Finlayson invites us to consider Thornton as an authoritative compiler who purposefully juxtaposes texts in order to amplify their shared themes.

The most recent study of the Lincoln romances is found in Johnston’s dissertation “The Sociology of Middle English Romance.” Johnston agrees with Daly in arguing that the manuscript’s focus on its devotional texts serves to democratize religion and to encourage the “mixed life” (137-40). In doing so, he reads these texts as a “backdrop” to the romances, which he argues are kept “comfortably separate” from the devotional texts (141). Reading

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<sup>13</sup> Thompson discusses Daly’s approach on page 119n10, but argues instead that the *Vita Sancti Cristofori* was included as filler. Thompson argues that *Lyard*, an “obscene” satire about mendicant friars, fails to fit the context of this booklet on visual, thematic, and stylistic grounds (120-1).

<sup>14</sup> Thompson does, however, produce a convincing chronology of Thornton’s copying of texts (122-23).

the stories of Alexander and Arthur as “[engaging] in a common cultural project” focused on questions of monarchical power (144), Johnston argues that the extended meditations on the rhetoric of kingship expressed in these texts reflect the social tensions faced by those who lived in England between the death of Henry V in 1422 and Henry VI’s assumption of government in 1436, during which time the country suffered increased lawlessness, new taxes, loss of continental territories, and increasing factionalism (152-53).<sup>15</sup> Johnston sees Thornton’s second thematic unit in the romances as characterized by its comparatively local scope and its interest in playing out a “fantasy of the inviolability of the family unit” (166), and goes on to suggest that the familial romances address issues central to the class consciousness of the fifteenth-century English gentry (195).<sup>16</sup> Johnston’s approach to Thornton’s *milieu* is compelling. However, he is unique in conceiving of the manuscript as divided into two rather than three units, as when he suggests that after the romances, “[t]he latter half of the Lincoln MS is taken up with texts of a primarily devotional and moral nature” (137). I agree that Thornton must have copied romances that expressed his own social concerns. I see in the Lincoln Thornton manuscript a series of texts which can, as Daly and Johnston suggest, be read both in terms of their social and their didactic utility, and part of this social utility would be the expression of gentry ideology.

The values that lie at the heart of this manuscript are family integrity, humility, and community. Thornton’s concern with these values is manifested first and most strongly in the romances, and then intermittently throughout the religious texts. The consistency with which

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<sup>15</sup> Although Johnston here implies that the MSS might have been written between 1430 and 1436, he maintains that the latest possible date of composition would have been 1465, when Thornton died (“Sociology” 123). While liberal, Johnston’s conjecture agrees with the watermark evidence, since some of the paper is not known to have circulated until after this date (cf. Thompson, *Robert Thornton* 71-73). See also 9n4, above.

<sup>16</sup> On the whole, Johnston agrees with Daly’s position that family units are the essential topic of Thornton’s shorter romances, though where Daly is concerned with linking the ideology of the romances to the ideology of the religious texts Johnston focuses more on how the romances reflect the tensions of fifteenth-century gentry life.

these values emerge throughout the manuscript suggests that Thornton was preoccupied with them to a significant degree. Olson, as we have already seen, argues that for the Middle Ages recreational reading could play a role in maintaining health. For medieval readers, “literature, music, and conversation are grouped together as methods of properly disposing the emotions, in what may be the closest approach medieval medicine makes to recognizing the psychosomatic factors in illness ... [that] all those activities ... play a role in hygiene as well as in therapeutics” (63). Thornton might have considered his romances to be worth reading as much because they could be used to maintain an individual’s psychological health as for their moral or didactic qualities.

Thornton’s romances dramatize complex social interactions and regularly depict societies at the brink of chaos. James Simpson argues convincingly in *Reform and Cultural Revolution* that the end result of the kinds of intercultural interactions depicted in romance is the maintenance of order by means of social integration, so that “the civilized order survives only by entering into, and having commerce with, all that threatens it” (273). For Thornton’s protagonists, respect for existing social structures facilitates the maintenance of the civilized order. Simpson suggests further that the circular pattern of romance emphasises a “social ecology,” in which social dynamics and narrative trajectories both mandate that “individual fulfilment can only be premised on social reintegration” (274-75). The dynamic literary environment Thornton creates by juxtaposing romances concerned with issues of family, humility and community tests his protagonists’ ability to act individually while maintaining harmonious relationships with, or negotiating their re-entry into, their original communities.

### 2.2.1 – Exemplarity in the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure*

The two main items at the head of the Lincoln MS are the *Prose Life of Alexander* and the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. The *Prose Alexander* contains one large initial and nine spaces of similar size, along with 103 small initials; the *Morte Arthure* contains 82 small decorated initials (Fredell 78). Aside from the copy of *Cursor Mundi* in the London MS, this programme of illustration appears nowhere else in Thornton's collection. Because these decorations suggest that Thornton considered these texts to be particularly prestigious, we ought to consider them as a pair.<sup>17</sup> Thornton had a strong interest in fortune, a conspicuous theme in both texts, and in the Nine Worthies, one of whom, Charlemagne, features conspicuously in the romances of the London manuscript.<sup>18</sup> *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, also in the London manuscript, contains a long excursus on fortune and the Nine Worthies (292-637). It is, therefore, no surprise that Thornton places the *Prose Alexander* and the alliterative *Morte Arthure* at the beginning of the Lincoln manuscript. Although these are Thornton's two longest romances, they do not differ in kind from the shorter romances which follow. Rather, these longer romances anticipate the shorter romances by introducing the themes of family unity and social stability that occur throughout Thornton's romance booklet.

The *Prose Alexander* is for the most part a straightforward and clear, if unornamented, translation of the I<sup>3</sup> redaction of the Latin *Historia de Preliis Alexandri Magni*, a text that

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<sup>17</sup> For more on the decorations in the Lincoln MS, see Fredell, Hardman ("Reading the Spaces"), and Crofts. For more on the decorations in the London MS, see Thompson, *Robert Thornton*, 56-63.

<sup>18</sup> Much has already been made of Arthur's dream of the Nine Worthies upon fortune's wheel – too much to summarize easily. Benson, Heng (*Empire of Magic* 157-60), and Janssen provide readings of the place of the Nine Worthies in the *Morte Arthure*. For more instances of references to the Nine Worthies, see "Appendix II" of Israel Gollancz's edition of *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, 119-44 and Roger Sherman Loomis. Thompson observes (based on watermark evidence) that the *Prose Alexander* was copied independently and added to this manuscript after the *Morte* (*Robert Thornton* 59-60; 65); this suggests that Thornton put the *Alexander* where it is for some purpose, most likely thematic. For more on the planned program of illustrations, see Fredell.

goes back ultimately to the Hellenistic Alexander romance written by Pseudo-Callisthenes, probably composed between 1186 and 1235.<sup>19</sup> This translation interpolates aspects of numerous textual traditions into the exchange between Alexander and Dindimus, while avoiding claims that its hero is of divine birth (Bunt, “Art of a Medieval Translator” 149-50). Consequently, this rendition of the Alexander-story is able to devote more of its time to portraying his concern for preserving families. Indeed, one of the most notable characteristics of this romance is its exemplarity, especially in its use of epistolary exchanges. Alexander’s successes are the result of his good sense, his respect for families, and his curiosity, making him one of Thornton’s heroes most worth emulating.

The first section of the romance begins with the revelation of the identity of Alexander’s biological father, Anectantabus. Enraged, Alexander pushes him into a ditch, mortally wounding him. Even though Anectantabus tells Alexander “I gat the” with his dying breath, it takes some time before he internalizes this revelation (8.9). When Philip sees that Alexander can control the horse Bucephalus, he calls him “mi son Alexander” (9.12). Alexander likewise refers to Philip as “fader,” and requests an army to seek deeds of arms (9.15). As Alexander returns home from his first successful campaign, he finds that Philip intends to abandon Alexander’s mother Olympias and marry a woman named Cleopatra. Shocked, Alexander begs his father for a boon, asking “I pray 3ow, þat for a rewarde of my firste iournee þat I hafe now made, 3ee graunte me to take my Moder Olympias agayne vn-to 3ow, & do to hir as awe to be done to a qwenne,” on account of this new marriage being “vnlefull” and because he does not want them to become enemies (10.27-32). Alexander’s first experience after leaving home for the first time is to witness his father celebrating his

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<sup>19</sup> For more on the links between the *Prose Alexander* and its sources, see Blunt (“An Exemplary Hero: Alexander the Great,” “Art of a Medieval Translator”).

marriage to a new wife, and his first concern is that his father take his mother back in order to keep the family together, so he ejects Cleopatra from the hall and convinces Philip to reconcile with his wife (11).<sup>20</sup>

Alexander only achieves familial stability upon Philip's death. After subjugating Armenia, Alexander returns home to find that Philip has been mortally wounded by Pansamy, a local lord who desires Olympias. Now king of Macedon, Alexander prepares his people for war and begins a campaign of conquest around the Mediterranean. It is not until he reaches Egypt that Alexander acknowledges Anectantabus as his father:

And when Alexander come in-till Egipte, he fand ane ymage of a kyng made of  
blake stane curiously coruen, and he askede þe Egipcians whase ymage it was,  
and þay ansuerd & said, 'It es ymage,' quop þay, 'of Anectantabus that was kyng  
of Egipte noȝte lange sythen gane, þe wyseste & þe worthiest þat euer was þare-in.'  
For sothe quop Alexander, 'Anectantabus was my fader.' And þan he knelid down  
with grete reuerence & kyssed þe ymage. (15.23-30)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This episode diverges from more historical treatments of Alexander, who has been accused by historians of participating in a conspiracy to kill Philip, perhaps at his mother's behest. This episode was nevertheless a disastrous development for Alexander's relationship with his father (Hamilton; Frederickmeyer). Alternatively, Alexander overreacted to this incident or saw it as a serious threat to his succession (Carney). The *Prose Alexander* does not treat either of these possibilities explicitly.

<sup>21</sup> A copy of the *Roman d'Alexandre*, a French translation of the *Historia de Preliis*, is the first item in the Talbot Anthology (British Library MS Royal 15.E.VI). The first illumination in this MS treats Nectantabus (Anectantabus in the *Prose Alexander*) in his role as an inseminator of a foreign queen. This illustration simultaneously recalls the vulnerability of married couples and raises puzzling questions about the suitability of chivalric texts as ideal reading material for a young prince. It thus appears as though Nectantabus "inseminates" the mind with useful knowledge (Bossy 245-46). This moment in the *Prose Alexander* is striking for its placement at Alexander's transition from a dependent figure to one of authority. This kind of frontispiece is common amongst medieval recensions of Alexander romances, all of which stress Nectantabus' paternity of the hero (Ross).

Alexander is finally willing to acknowledge the truth of his parentage, and from this moment onwards, the *Prose Alexander* depicts its protagonist as a man widely known to be as obsessed with family as he is ambitious in conquest.<sup>22</sup>

On Alexander's first campaign against Darius of Persia, his opponent writes to him as though he were a child, suggesting that he give up on the campaign and go home to his mother's lap. Darius encloses a ball for him to play with, telling Alexander that "pou ert bot a childe" and that "it es mare semely þat þou vse childeʒ gammeʒ þan dedeʒ of armes" (21.31-36). Darius responds to Alexander's attempt to treat him as a peer by calling him a child, sending him children's toys, and telling him to go home to his mother, which is exactly what Alexander does when he finds out she has become ill, suspending his military campaign to do so (26.36-27.3). For Alexander, the preservation of his relationship with his mother is more important than global conquest. When he returns home, his mother has recovered, yet he is so unconcerned with the military ability of his enemy that he "suggournede þare wit her a while" before going back to war (28.28). Alexander's concern for family unity gets him into as much trouble as it gets him out of.<sup>23</sup>

For his own part, Alexander sees his awareness of his own parentage as a boon to his campaign. In his subsequent letter to Darius, which Thornton must have considered to be the

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<sup>22</sup> Alexander's relationship with his own parents fluctuates throughout the text. Alexander often writes home to his mother and to Aristotle to give them news of his doings (58.5-22, 59.36-60.4, 108.6-10, 108. 111.35-112.20). While Alexander considers himself the son of Philip of Macedon in his epistolary exchanges with Darius, following his conquest of Persia his first letter to his mother announces his identity as "Alexander the son of the godd Amon" (58.5). Alexander continues writing of himself in this vein until his return to Babylon (108). Historically, Alexander only referred to Philip as his father when it was politically expedient for him to do so, preferring to construct himself as the son of Zeus Ammon (Frederickmeyer 310-12).

<sup>23</sup> In the extended episode involving Candace and her sons (96.21-103.24), Alexander becomes enamoured with her and she manages to capture him because "This quene was a wondere faire lady & a semely; And when Alexander saw hir, hym thoghte als he hade sene his moder Olympias" (99.23-5). Alexander goes on this quest alone, leaving his army to wait for him, and barely escapes with his life. Alexander's earlier work reuniting Candace's son with his wife leads Candace to help him defeat a mutual enemy. Historically, Alexander's relationship with Olympias suggests that he may have suffered from an Oedipus complex (Thomas). Scholars agree that she was his "formative parent" (Frederickmeyer 301), who "always retained his affection" (Hamilton 117). For links between the historical Alexander and the character in the romance, see Samuel.

most important as it is the only epistle in the romance marked out in red ink (fol. 8r), Alexander chastises Darius for his claims to divinity. Because Alexander acknowledges that “I come as a dedely man, for to feghte wit the” (24.6), he is able to lecture Darius on the workings of the Wheel of Fortune:

þare es na thyng þat we here hafe þat we may bi righte calle ours, bot all it es lent vs  
for a tyme. For alle we þat ere whirlede aboute wit þe whele of fortune, now ere we  
broghte fra reches in-to pouerte: now fra myrthe & ioy in-to Sorowe & heynesse;  
and agaynwarde3: and now fra heghte, we are plunged in-to lawnesse. (23.21-26)

Acknowledging his own mortality, Alexander explains to Darius that the nature of Fortune demands that the lowly will rise just as the high are brought low. By juxtaposing Alexander’s desire for conquest with his explicit acknowledgement of his own mortality, the *Prose Alexander* ensures that its protagonist provides the reader with a model of strength tempered by humility. Later, while campaigning in Persia, Alexander shows mercy to Darius’s mother, wife, and children, and writes Darius to tell him that he believes that benevolence towards families comes from “a gentilnes of oure awenn hert, founded in vertu” (43.22). Alexander’s “gentilnes,” his ability to manage a military campaign and to engage in diplomacy, and his “vertu,” his concern for the maintenance of both justice and families, are worthy of emulation because they are couched in his acknowledgement that he is subject to fortune.

Alexander comes into contact with a variety of foreign cultures over the course of his campaign for global conquest. When he finally conquers Persia, his first decrees as a new ruler are meant to stress continuity. The Persians are instructed to be “obeyande as 3e before-tymes hafe bene,” to enjoy their lands and possessions as they did before, and to enjoy peace

and safety on the roads (58.12-22).<sup>24</sup> Over the course of his campaigns, Alexander shows himself to be not only tolerant of alien cultures, but also willing to discuss their values.

Two of the episodes in India that stand out the most are Alexander's encounters with the Gymnosophists and the Brahmins. The Gymnosophists – townless, naked cave-dwellers – are “symple men” (73.9), and they write to Alexander as soon as they hear of his arrival to tell him that they have no possessions to give him. Visiting their country peaceably, Alexander wonders at their ability to survive in a state of nature and offers them a boon. The Gymnosophists ask for deathlessness, but Alexander, echoing his letter to Darius, reminds them that he is a mortal man and cannot provide them with something he does not himself have. The exchange turns from a matter of curiosity to a point of serious philosophy when the Gymnosophists chastise Alexander for his ambition. Alexander's response is to assert that he conquers only through God's providence (73.7-74.10). This exchange with the Gymnosophists provides Alexander with another opportunity to act with pride, but once again we see him remind himself of his own mortality.

The exchange of letters between Alexander and Dindimus, king of the Brahmins, constitutes the most extensive discourse in the *Prose Alexander* (77.7-89.5). Encompassing six folios worth of material (fols. 31v-37v), this exchange directly interrogates the value systems of Alexander's world.<sup>25</sup> Because the Brahmins live too far away to easily conquer, Alexander writes first with curiosity, demanding that Dindimus:

certyfye vs bi 3our lettres of 3our lyffe and 3our maners and 3our doctrine. For  
peraventure we may take þare of sum gud Ensamble, and 3our wysdome & 3our

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<sup>24</sup> For more on the importance of peace on the roads for the maintenance of a civil society, see my discussion of *Sir Perceval of Galles* in Section 2.2.2.2.

<sup>25</sup> For a chart summarizing the differences between various versions of this exchange, see Bunt, “The Art of a Medieval Translator,” 149.

gudnesse neuer be þe lesse. For it es na harme till a man thurgh his gudnes to  
make anoþer man as gude as he es. (77.36-78.3)

Alexander is worth emulating exactly because he desires to “take ... sum gud Ensamle” from the Brahmins’ wisdom. Unfortunately, he soon finds out that there is little to be gained from discoursing with these prideful men.<sup>26</sup> Dindimus explains the nature of the Brahmins’ civilization, but he does so condescendingly, asserting first that what Alexander truly desires to know when he asks of the Brahmins’s way of life is “to hafe verray connyng and perfitt wisdom” (78.15-16). Moreover, Dindimus appears to be already familiar with Greek civilization, and asserts his people’s “maner of lyffinge es full ferre dyuerse fra 3ours” (78.23-24), with respect to their gods and their approach to deeds of arms. The remainder of Dindimus’s letter – 240 lines of prose – compares every aspect of the Brahmins’ way of life to that of the Greeks and finds the Greeks wanting. These differences include their stances on polytheism, diet, disease, war, class, law, and vice, among others. Because the Brahmins believe themselves to be superior to the Greeks because they have none of these things, Dindimus claims that “[b]e wisdom allanly of þe Bragmayns passe3 all 3our witt & 3our wysdom” (82.16-17). The remainder of the letter is a critique of the society of the Greeks on those same issues. Alexander rebuts the critique by pointing out the flaws in the Brahmins’s own culture. He contends that the Brahmins dress folly up as wisdom, because they imagine themselves as virtuous to distract themselves from poverty, they do not believe in free will, they refuse to take joy from all aspects of Creation, and are accountable to others.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In most of the earlier Alexander romances, Alexander’s tone towards the Brahmins is closer to that of a bully, but the discourse itself is also closer to a riddle-exchange in which only commonplaces are exchanged between the two groups (Stoneman 112-13).

<sup>27</sup> This argument is not unique to the *Prose Alexander*. In the other Middle English version of this exchange, in the alliterative *Alexander and Dindimus* (a.k.a. *Alexander B*), Alexander argues that the Brahmins avoid taking part in the joys of life, saying “Manie mirþus on molde, þat oþer men vsen,/ 3e leuen þorou 3our luþer wit, þat

Alexander's most biting observation is that the Brahmins live as they do only because they live withdrawn from worldly affairs, which enables him to realize that virtue is meaningless if sin is impossible. The *Prose Alexander* thus asserts that the Greeks' global engagement is preferable to isolated asceticism, and more fulfilling.<sup>28</sup>

The alliterative *Morte Arthure* brings tragic immediacy to the values the *Prose Alexander* celebrates in the figure of Alexander: humility, curiosity, and the concern for family. In the *Morte*, Arthur idolizes Alexander. Like his hero, Arthur is a consummate diplomat, and at the outset of the poem, he is more concerned with defending his realm than he is with conquest. However, he increasingly fails to balance his interests as a ruler with concern for the state of his family or his homeland. Furthermore, he fails to acknowledge that because he is mortal he is subject to the vicissitudes of Fortune. Because he takes his example from Alexander's achievements but not his character, we can see that Arthur's pride and lack of concern for his family foreshadows the lack of concern for domestic affairs that brings his empire to ruin.

At the beginning of the *Morte*, Arthur's accomplishments approach Alexander's, and in the poem's first episode the audience bears witness to his diplomatic savvy.<sup>29</sup> The story opens with a Christmas feast and New Year's celebration which is interrupted by the arrival of a Roman ambassador who brings a request from Emperor Lucius of Rome. Lucius demands that Arthur relinquish sovereignty over his realm, and then bring himself and his knights to Rome, on pain of death, to account for their unlawful "occupation" of Roman

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longen to peple" (945-46). The text of the *Historia de Preliis* (provided by Skeat) reads "Multa delictabilia visui nostro occurrunt que uobis penitus denegantur."

<sup>28</sup> Skeat draws attention to this passage as a discourse between the "contemplative life" and the "active life" in his introduction to *Alexander and Dindimus*, though he argues instead of this passage that "there is nothing to be learnt from the story of it" (xviii). For more on Thornton's and the active and contemplative lives, see section 2.3, below. See also Daly 261-75.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the poem's episodic structure as a series of of moralized *exempla*, see James L. Boren, "Narrative Design."

lands (93-99).<sup>30</sup> Lucius claims Arthur's realms for himself and demands tribute – this is no small claim, for the poet has told us already that Arthur has extended his rule over the British Isles and most of Western Europe by right of conquest (26-51).<sup>31</sup> Arthur's immediate response terrifies the Romans: he “luked as a lyone, and on hys lyppe bytes” so fiercely that “the Romaynes for radnesse ruschte to the erthe” (118-19). However, Arthur also has the good sense to take counsel from his peers on the matter rather than to respond in anger.

Although his realm and rule are threatened by Rome and Arthur desires his peers' opinions on how to act, the parliament offers no opposition to Arthur's desire to go to war. Sir Cador argues that war would be beneficial because the children of the realm lack the opportunity to prove themselves in battle (255-56). Arthur wants to respond aggressively to Lucius's demands, but his position is based on reason as much as it is on fury:

He askyde me tyrauntly tribute of Rome,  
 That tunefully tynt was in tyme of myne elders;  
 There alyenes, in absence of alle mene of armes,  
 Couerde it of commons, as cronicles telles;  
 I haue title to take tribute of Rome. (271-75)

Arthur portrays Lucius's demands as tyrannical, before he claims his own ancestral right to Roman territory. Now that Arthur's council is discussing the justifications for war, King Aungers compounds a list of grievances against Rome:

Whene the Romaynes regnede, thay raunsounde oure eldyrs,

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<sup>30</sup> This episode is a departure from its treatment in Geoffrey of Monmouth, where Lucius's demand for tribute is couched in a claim that Arthur is a tyrant (177). Monmouth does not treat Arthur's reaction, and moves immediately to the council scene.

<sup>31</sup> Aside from the British Isles, the poem mentions Flanders, France, Holland, Hainault, Burgundy, Brabant, Brittany, Guinne, Gothland, Greece, Bayonne, Bordeaux, Touraine, Toulouse, Poitiers, Valencia, Vienne, Erugia, Aniane, Navarre, Normandy, Norway, Germany, Austria and Denmark. I will discuss the implications of these far-reaching territorial claims in greater detail in Chapter 5; but for now it is sufficient that most of Europe is part of Arthur's realm.

And rade in theire ryotte, and rauyschett oure wyfes,

With-owttyne resone or ryghte refte vs oure gudes. (293-95)

These arguments combine to justify war against Rome. Arthur has a personal claim to Rome, and it has already been established that he has valid claims to the territories over which he currently rules. Moreover, acknowledging the Roman claim to Arthur's realm would impoverish the people and destabilize the realm. The requirements of a just war having been established, Arthur's knights offer troops in support of the cause, and Arthur himself promises to lead the vanguard. At the end of the week, Arthur responds to the "alien" Roman embassy by challenging Lucius directly and exiling his emissaries (418).<sup>32</sup>

In the introduction to his edition of the poem, Finlayson observes that "Arthur's controlled anger, courteous treatment of the ambassadors and subsequent consultation of his knights quickly establish the moderation, courtesy, and readiness to take counsel which are the marks of the medieval 'wyse prince'" (16). It nevertheless seems odd that Arthur needs to justify war by legal means. The protection of Arthur's realm against Lucius's claim would justify an equally bellicose response. That Arthur takes care, even in a moment of rage, to seek out an excuse for violent retaliation against this insult points towards a significant shift in Thornton's compilation. Though both Arthur and Alexander are clearly meant to be read as exemplary figures, Arthur is Christian, while Alexander is not. It is acceptable for Alexander to start a war to avenge a personal insult, but Arthur must go to war according to the dictates of Christian protocol.

For a Christian, there are clear protocols which must be followed to declare war. In the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas suggests that there are three necessary conditions

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<sup>32</sup> The poet departs from Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose Arthur does not respond to the Roman embassy until after he has launched his campaign (180-81).

for a just war: *auctoritas principia* [the authority of the prince], *causa iusti* [just cause], and *intentio bellatum recta* [right intention for war].<sup>33</sup> *Auctoritas principia* states that only a recognized ruling body is empowered to make the decision to go to war.<sup>34</sup> This first obligation is established by the poet before Lucan's envoys come to Arthur's court, when we are told that he is the rightful lord of his own land. Likewise he claims similar rights over Rome, which transforms Lucius's claim to sovereignty into an internal dispute, and Lucius becomes a rebel, one of Aquinas's "*interiores perturbatores*." Arthur has thus established his authority. *Causa iusti* requires that the cause for war be just. One can only attack an opponent on account of some fault, to avenge wrongs, or to restore the opposing kingdom from an unjust seizure.<sup>35</sup> Arthur fulfils this requirement when he claims that Lucius acts "tyrauntly" and that he refuses to acknowledge his claim to Rome (271). *Intentio bellatum recta* requires that war be pursued with the intention of creating peace.<sup>36</sup> Aungers's

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<sup>33</sup> In the analogous episode in Geoffrey of Monmouth, Arthur only establishes *auctoritas principia* before agreeing to go to war (178-79).

<sup>34</sup> Aquinas writes: "*Primo quidem auctoritas Principis, cujus mandato bellum est gerendum: non enim pertinet ad personam privatam bellum movere; quia potest jus suum in iudicio superioris prosecui: similiter etiam convocare multitudinem, quod in bellis oportet fieri, non pertinet ad privatam personam: cum autem cura rei publicae commissa sit Principibus, ad eos pertinet rem publicam civitatis, vel regni, seu provinciae sibi subditae tueri: et sicut licite defendant eam materiali gladio contra interiores perturbatores, dum malefactores puniunt*" [First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged: for it is not the business of a private person to wage a war because he can seek redress of his rights from the tribunal of his superior. Likewise it is not the business of a private person to summon the people together, which must be done in wartime. Since, moreover, the care of the commonwealth has been entrusted to princes, whose business it is to watch over the city, or kingdom, or province, subject to them. And it is just as lawful for them to have recourse to the matter of the sword in defending against internal agitators, when they punish evildoers.] (*Summa Theologica* 2.2. question 40, translation mine).

<sup>35</sup> Aquinas writes: "Secundo requiritur causa justa; ut scilicet illi, qui impugnantur, propter aliquam culpam impugnationem mereantur; unde August. Dicit ... 'Justa bella solent definiri, quae ulciscuntur injurias, si gens, vel civitas plectenda est, quae vel vindicare neglexerit quod a suis improbe factum est, vel reddere quod per injuriam ablatum est'" [Secondly, a just cause is required. Namely, that those who are attacked deserve it on account of some fault that merits the attack. As Augustine says ... 'A just war is usually defined as one that avenges wrongs, when a people or city must be punished for neglecting to make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its own people, or to restore what has been seized unjustly.] (*Summa Theologica* 2.2. question 40, translation mine).

<sup>36</sup> Aquinas writes: "*Tertio requiritur, ut sit intentio bellantium recta; qua scilicet intenditur, vel ut bonum promoveatur, vel ut malum vitetur: unde August ... 'Apud veros Dei cultores etiam illa bella pacata sunt, quae non cupiditae, aut crudelitate, sed pacis studio geruntur, ut mali coercantur, et boni sublevantur'*" [The third condition is the correct intention for war: which we may know by either the promotion of good or the avoidance

recollection of history and his argument that the Roman subjugation of pre-Arthurian Britain was one of wanton destruction and disorder reaffirms that subjecting Britain to Rome would create chaos.

It is only once Arthur and his counsellors have established their right to war that they begin preparations. As soon as these criteria have been established, Arthur's knights waste no time committing themselves and their troops to the effort. George Keiser draws our attention to this council scene, expanded significantly from what we find in Geoffrey of Monmouth and made more dynamic by the *Morte*-poet, as indicative of Arthur's position as a model of kingship, for "a king who goes to war of his own accord to avenge a personal insult would be a whimsical and vindictive tyrant" ("Narrative Structure" 136).<sup>37</sup> Arthur is as likely as Alexander to go to war to avenge insults, but he is careful to ensure that he follows protocol in doing so. The Arthur of the beginning of the poem is conscious of the need to avoid ruling as a tyrant.

Soon, however, the presentation of Arthur begins to darken. While Alexander does as much as he can to keep in contact with his mother and to keep abreast of developments in Macedonia, Arthur does not care at all about what happens at home while he is on campaign. This represents a troubling shift in tone, as our immediate expectations of Arthur are that he will in some way surpass Alexander. He does not. If Alexander cares too much about his family and his homeland, Arthur cares too little. The poem first suggests this at the parliament at York, when Arthur names Mordred as his viceroy, commands him to care for

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of evil. Hence Augustine states ... 'Among true worshippers of God those wars are peaceful which are neither greedy nor cruel, but those which are eager to produce peace, or coerce the wicked and support the good.] (2.2. question 40, translation mine).

<sup>37</sup> I agree further with Keiser's argument in "Edward III and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* that the poem "contains moral and philosophical implications for all men" (51). For a contrasting view of the poem's relationship with Ricardian court politics, see DeMarco and Chism ("Friendly Fire"). My reading of the centrality of Just War theory in the council scene disagrees with DeMarco's assessment that political unity is only established through the king's dependence on his knights (480).

his realm and his wife, and promises him that he will become king next (625-78). Mordred begs for a chance to join the fight, saying:

I be-seke 3ow, sir, as my sybbe lorde,  
 That 3e wille for charyté cheese 3ow a-nother;  
 ffor if 3e putte me in this plytte, 3owre popless dyssaubyde;  
 To present a prynce astate my powere es simple.  
 When other of werre wysse are wyrchipide here-aftyre,  
 Than may I for-sothe be sette bott at lyttile.  
 To passe in 3our presence my purpos es takyne,  
 And alle my purueaunce apperte fore my pris knyghtez. (681-88)

Mordred believes that being left to maintain the homeland is a slight on his honour, which will decrease his standing when Arthur and his men return from the campaign. Mordred believes himself to be incapable of ruling well on his own, which is shown when he states that Arthur puts him in a “plytte.” Arthur’s response to Mordred is to pointedly reiterate that he has made a choice and to tell him that “that thow ne wyrk my wille, thow watte whatte it menes” (692), at which point he departs on his campaign. This exchange presents a clear warning sign that not all is well within the borders of Arthur’s kingdom. Mordred not only feels insulted by having been chosen to act as Arthur’s regent, he also believes he was chosen for this duty because he is thought incompetent in battle. For his part, Arthur seems to have put more thought into the provisions to be made for hunting in his absence, when he commands that “nane werreye my wylde, botte Waynour hir seluene” (657). And although Mordred draws attention to this insult, Arthur refuses to be gainsaid. By having Arthur dismiss Mordred’s opposition in this way, the poem signals that despite his ability to gain the support of his parliament, Arthur’s reign contains a hint of tyranny. The reader’s suspicion

that Arthur is inattentive to domestic affairs is confirmed when he is surprised by the news that Mordred has staged a coup, divided the kingdom, and married Guinevere (3522-56).

The *Morte Arthure* is, as its name suggests, a tragic poem. At the beginning of the poem Arthur seems to be an example worth following, but by the end of the poem his inability to impose his will on Mordred, his lack of concern for domestic matters, his pride, and his lust for territory together transform him into an example worth avoiding. Arthur has become a tyrant.<sup>38</sup> In the *Morte Arthure*, we are asked to come to terms with an Arthur who seems to rule by emotion alone. Rudnytzky Schray argues that Arthur's turn to tyranny is a consequence of his absorption of sin following his combat against the giant of St. Michael's Mount. However, if we are meant to read Arthur's response to the dream of Fortune's Wheel as a signal of his character, we realize that his insistence on modeling his life after that of Alexander is not an abrupt change at all, but a consistent aspect of his character and motivation. Even at the beginning of the poem, Arthur's reaction to the words of Lucius's ambassadors is one of anger (116-39). As made evident by the lack of opposition to Arthur's clear desire to go to war, the council scene is mere theatre. Arthur's war on Lucius provides him with the opportunity to emulate Alexander and expand his empire through conquest.

Although the poem treats Arthur's violent emotional response and campaign in defence of his realm in a positive light, he later develops a desire for conquest which is rooted in the major flaw in his character – the sin of pride, or *cirquytrie* (3399).<sup>39</sup> Following his conquest of Rome and successful defence of his rightful claims, Arthur summons his

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<sup>38</sup> For more on the *Morte*, medieval tragedy, and the cruel inevitability of fortune, see Benson ("The Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and Medieval Tragedy"), Keiser ("The Theme of Justice in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*"), Peck, Rudnytzky Schray, Sutton, and Ziolkowski. These scholars agree that Arthur's downfall is a result of his blind faith in his "destiny" following his dream of Fortune's wheel.

<sup>39</sup> George Keiser draws attention to Arthur's *cirquytrie* in "The Theme of Justice," 99-102.

knights to a council, where he expresses his desire to engage in a war of aggression. Arthur states that:

Here es a knyghte in theis kleuys, enclesside with hilles,  
 That I haue cownyte to knawe, be-cause of his wordez,  
 That es Lorayne the lele, I kepe noght to layne;  
 The lordschipe es louely, as ledes me telles.  
 I wille that ducherye devyse, and dele as me likes

.....

Thane wille I by Lumbardye lykande to schawe,  
 Sett lawe in the lande, that laste sale euer. (2396-407)

Even though Arthur has defeated Lucius and conquered Rome, he is not content to rest in the knowledge that his realm is now secure. Instead, he decides that he will oust the Duke of Lorraine and take his lands in order to rule them as he pleases, and refers to this whim as “cownyte,” or greed. Arthur no longer acts as though he needs to justify himself by taking counsel. Instead, he launches a war of conquest which culminates in the siege of Metz (3032-83), in which Arthur’s engines attack so violently that “the pyne of the pople was pete for to here” (3043). Larry D. Benson suggests that this episode exemplifies the poem’s treatment of all wars as wasteful. Göller concurs, and argues convincingly that this episode – in which Arthur attacks fellow-Christians rather than the pagan-aligned Romans – signals a turning-point in the tone of the poem as the narrator becomes progressively less willing to identify with Arthur or his army afterwards (27). Although this is the moment when Arthur goes off the rails, this episode does not constitute an abrupt transition in his character. On the contrary, he has been greedy all along. Our suspicions are confirmed when Arthur conquers Lombardy merely because he likes the look of it (3094-175). All we are told is that he:

Lukande one Lumbardye, and one lowde melys,\* *speaks*

“In ȝone lykande londe, lorde be I thynke.” (3108-9)

Arthur’s whimsical conquests continue until the arrival of an emissary from the Pope who declares him Lord of Rome (3182-83).

Soon afterwards, Arthur dreams of Fortune’s Wheel, and even though Fortune herself tells him that he “has lyffede in delyte and lordschippes inowe” (3387), he doesn’t seem to be aware of his own overreaching. The philosopher who interprets the dream tells him that:

Thow arte at the hegheste, I hette the for-sothe!

Chalange nowe when thow wille, thow cheuys no more!

Thow has schedde myche blode, and schalkes distroyede,

Sakeles, in cirquytrie, in sere kynges landis. (3396-99)

The philosopher uses Arthur’s dream of Fortune’s wheel to offer a moral critique of his campaign. Although Arthur has been told twice that he will be punished for his prideful acts, he does little to buttress himself against the future or to acknowledge his mortality. At the poem’s first mention of Alexander, Gawain tells Sir Priamus that Arthur wants to “be Alexander ayre, that alle the erthe lowttede” (2634). Arthur desires to gain a reputation for conquest similar to Alexander’s, but unlike Alexander he never acknowledges his own mortality, as we can see when he ignores the philosopher’s advice to repent and prepare for his end. Where Arthur was once exemplary, he has now become an *exemplum*, and it is at this moment that Sir Craddock arrives to tell him of Mordred’s rebellion.<sup>40</sup> Arthur acts as single-mindedly in his campaign against his nephew as he does in his campaign against

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<sup>40</sup> R. A. Shoaf argues persuasively that the poet places Mordred’s rebellion here to imply that it is a direct punishment for Arthur’s war of aggression and that the most direct comparison to him amongst the Nine Worthies can be made with King David, whose career is equally fraught with concern over punishment for pride. This is a compelling argument, made all the more ironic in light of Arthur’s narrow-minded intention to mimic Alexander.

Rome. However, unlike the carefully prepared campaign to the continent, Arthur and his knights are so bloodthirsty that they endanger themselves and each other by their lack of unified action (Ziolkowski 239-42). This final battle ends in disaster: the Knights of the Round Table die along with the virtues they represent.

Both the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure* treat the actions of legendary kings, and both romances offer the reader strong practical and moral lessons. Practically, both protagonists are consummate diplomats and strong generals. Morally, the juxtaposition of these two texts stresses the differences between the two kings. Alexander's concern for administrative and family stability, his humility, and his awareness of the movement of fortune's wheel are positive examples. The irony of Arthur's attempt to model himself on Alexander's example is that he mistakes accomplishments for character. Arthur's *cirquytrie* and his failure to acknowledge his own mortality until his moment of death are clearly negative examples. In both romances, the family functions as a metonym for the society to which one belongs, such that familial stability seems to indicate political stability. Because the *Morte* connects Arthur's selfishness to his descent into tyranny, the moral lessons of *Morte* are the most explicit: political stability exists only when concern for the community supercedes concern for the self.<sup>41</sup>

### 2.2.2 – Exemplarity in Thornton's Shorter Romances

The *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure* both contain strong moral lessons and useful models for social interaction. The remainder of Thornton's romances emphasise the

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<sup>41</sup> Remarkably, the *Morte* is still able to assert that the Round Table is a concept more socially significant than the king who founded it. I discuss this matter in more detail in Chapter 4.

values of humility and of family and community loyalty, but on a scale closer to that a reader might plausibly experience. Similar concerns are at work in the moral exemplarity of *Lamentio Peccatoris*, one of the two texts that fall between the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure*. The consistency of tone between the romances and *Lamentio Peccatoris* suggests that it is not merely filler. Rather, it was carefully chosen to illuminate the romances by reminding the reader that the future inevitably rewards or punishes us for our present actions.

*Lamentio Peccatoris* is a short poetic monologue which describes a variety of unrepented sins which have prevented its aristocratic speaker from attaining a place in heaven after his death. The speaker begs the reader to learn from his bad example:

Tayk heyd of me both kyng & kneyt  
 & mend yow heyr qwylle 3e haue space  
 For qwen 3e haue lost on lasting leght  
 Fro mercy be gone 3e gayt no grace (5-8)<sup>42</sup>

The unnamed speaker expresses regret for his vanity, lechery, and sloth, though the poem focuses mainly on his lechery. Near the end of the poem, the speaker informs us that his suffering is indeed a punishment when he tells us that:

The cage yt be an byrnyng fyer  
 þat I am ordand in to duell  
 Hyt haue þa gyuyn me to my hyer

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<sup>42</sup> Although I transcribe the manuscript directly, I have provided the line references from Perry's edition in *Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse*. An alternate version of this poem (as the prologue to *Adulterous Falmouth Squire*), can be found in *Political, Religious, and Love Poems*, ed. F.J. Furnivall, printed from the version in the fifteenth-century Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61. Thornton's version omits lines 5-7, "Some tyme in England duelling/ Thys was trew with-uten lesyng/ Y was callyd sir Wylliam Basterfield, knyght." These lines not only locate the text in England, but with a specific name, which would have added to the poem's sense of immediacy.

Euer to last in the pauer of hell (68-71)

As we can see, *Lamentio Peccatoris* warns the reader that hell awaits those who do not gain absolution from their sins before it is too late, a moral emphasised by its final line, which urges that “[a]ll crystyn men be war by me” (99). *Lamentio Peccatoris* repeatedly stresses that present sin leads to future punishment. Even the short and fragmentary “Prognostications of Weather,” which precedes it, shares this concern with predicting the future based on present circumstances in its repeated use of the formula “thonour in [month] sygnyfyet þt same ȝere [something will happen]” (fols. 50r-50v). Both *Lamentio Peccatoris* and the “Prognostications” describe a direct causal relationship between present and future. More significantly, the speaker’s concern the reader “tayk heyd of me” echoes Alexander’s desire to “take ... Ensample” from the Brahmins. Good and bad examples alike are useful tools to teach sociable behaviour.

In Thornton’s eight shorter romances, protagonists’ ultimate success is predicated on their ability to internalize the lesson of *Lamentio Peccatoris*, in which the future is goverened by present action in a moral economy. Each romance rewards humility and communitarian values.<sup>43</sup> Thornton’s shorter romances present readers with a variety of protagonists – fathers, mothers, children, men, women, and lovers – in various social contexts, and yet they all offer the reader models of behaviour because they all succeed through similar virtues.<sup>44</sup> Though there is significant thematic overlap among these romances, they can be divided broadly into two groups: four of these romances – *Northern Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Eglamour of*

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<sup>43</sup> Critics have until very recently generally expressed disdain for the shorter, less courtly Middle English romances, referring to them somewhat dismissively as ‘popular’. All of Thornton’s romances copied between fols. 98v and 147r have been referred to as such. I will discuss this matter in greater detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>44</sup> This is also true somewhat of the *Vita Sancti Cristofori*, discussion of which I have omitted from this chapter for reasons of space. The ease with which St. Christopher becomes integrated into societies in the *Vita*, coupled with the respect with which he treats them while doing so, strongly suggests that even a saint must align himself with others. See Daly for a reading of the *Vita* as an example of “mixed life” morality.

*Artois*, and *Sir Perceval of Galles* – are *familial*: their main concern is that of the maintenance of family units in times of strife; the other four – *Sir Degrevant*, *The Earl of Toulouse*, *Thomas of Erceldowne*, and *The Awntyrs off Arthure* – are *feudal*: their main concern is that of the maintenance of law and order in times of strife. Both groups emphasise the teaching of the major values of the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure* – humility and family stability in the former; community stability in the latter – while making these lessons more accessible in terms of their length, complexity, and choice of protagonists.

### 2.2.2.1 – Familial Romances

In the *Prose Alexander*, the maintenance of a family unit provides the moral foundation for other virtues. The protagonists of the Northern *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, and *Sir Perceval of Galles* are each haunted by the loss of family members and their desire to reunite with them. In this sense, they follow the cues laid out by the *Prose Alexander* including the rejection of asceticism, as shown in his response to the Brahmins, in favour of worldly engagement. The motif of loss and recovery, especially in *Octavian*, *Isumbras* and *Eglamour*, constitutes a variation on the motif of the calumniated wife reminiscent of Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*. Although Chaucer does not press the motif after providing us with the tale of a woman separated from her child, Thornton's concern for family integrity becomes evident when he follows a tale similar to Chaucer's with one featuring a grieving father, one featuring a grieving father *and* mother, and one featuring a grieving son. These romances are not consistently serious – *Octavian*, *Eglamour*,

and *Perceval* each have their comedic moments – but each is deeply preoccupied with keeping families together.

*Octavian*'s protagonist is actually the anonymous wife of Emperor Octavian of Rome. When she gives birth to twins, the emperor's mother accuses her of adultery, and both she and her two sons are exiled. The empress's sons are kidnapped by wild beasts: one son, also named Octavian, ends up being fostered by the king of Jerusalem; the other, Florent, is fostered by a burgher of Paris. The empress's humility provides her with a strategy for coping with loss. As she enters the forest with her children, the empress, in prayer, admits her belief that "this sorwe, Lorde, that I am in,/ full wele I wote, es for my syn;/ welcome by alle Thi sande" (400-02).<sup>45</sup> The empress's penitent acceptance of her state ultimately leads her to the Holy Land, where she is reunited with her son Octavian. The story then focuses on Florent's upbringing, as his noble nature interferes comically with his foster father's attempts to teach him the family business. Florent inherently prefers the trappings of nobility to his foster father's mercantile activity. When Paris is besieged by Saracens, Florent saves the city. In the ensuing celebrations he is knighted, then reunited with his biological father, who has come from Rome to aid in the defense of Paris. Upon meeting his son, the emperor Octavian weeps at the memory of his wife:

.....Allas my faire wife,  
 The best lady þat was one lyfe,  
 Salle I hir see no mare?  
 Me ware leuir þan alle þe golde  
 Þat euir was appon Cristyn molde,

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<sup>45</sup> Quotations taken from the transcription of Thornton's text in Frances McSparran's edition, except where otherwise noted.

Wiste I one lyue scho ware. (1152-57)

The emperor's love for his wife has not diminished over all this time. Now, encouraged by his reunion with Florent, Octavian and his son fight together against the remainder of the Saracen army, but are captured. When news of this defeat reaches the younger Octavian and his mother in the Holy Land, they go to rescue Octavian and Florent so that Octavian's wife can "make hir pese" with her estranged husband (1559).

Much has been made of *Octavian's* episodes of social satire and its keen class consciousness, but this is ultimately a poem about family.<sup>46</sup> At the beginning of the poem, Octavian's family dissolves. Throughout the poem, we witness this family being replaced by a progression of incomplete or inappropriate temporary pseudo-familial units which approximate, but never equal, the social fulfilment which comes from being part of a complete family. The empress and the younger Octavian live in Jerusalem as royal guests until they get news of Octavian's capture. Florent lives with Parisian burghers until he learns that his biological father is really the emperor of Rome, but on departing from them ensures they are rewarded for their trouble (1461-72). Once it becomes an option, all the members of Octavian's family work towards familial reunion. In doing so, they return order to the state.

Because it does not contain comic interludes, *Sir Isumbras* treats its dispersed family with a more consistently doleful tone than *Octavian* does.<sup>47</sup> One day while hunting in the woods, Sir Isumbras encounters a divine messenger who tells him that God requires that he

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<sup>46</sup> I depart from these readings of *Octavian* which consider it as an expression of middle-class anxieties on account of my consideration of only Thornton and his family as a relevant reading audience. The arguments made by Knight, Simons, Weiss, Wright, and Farenbach are nevertheless engaging and compelling. For more on familial romances more generally, see Daly, Laura Hibbard (Loomis) (*Medieval Romance in England*), Ramsey (Chapter 7), Heng (*Empire of Magic*), and Riddy.

<sup>47</sup> It was also one of the most popular romances of late-medieval England. As mentioned on 31-32, above, Thornton preserves what Evans would call an instance of the "*Isumbras*-group" cluster of romances, which tended to be transmitted together and which all share a resemblance to the story of Job and the legend of St. Eustace (55-61). For more on the Eustace connection, see Braswell.

suffer for his pride. Given the choice to suffer in his youth or his old age, he chooses youth, and returns to find his possessions gone, his home burnt down, and his wife and children naked. As Isumbras travels with his family through the wilderness, all three of his children are kidnapped by wild beasts and his wife is kidnapped by Saracens. Isumbras works as a smith for a number of years, eventually earning enough to forge himself a suit of armour. When the Saracens who took his wife attack the country where he now lives, Isumbras joins the fight, singlehandedly turning the tide of battle and killing the Sultan who took his wife. After recovering from his wounds, Isumbras travels as a pilgrim to Bethlehem, where an angel tells him his sins have been forgiven. The next day he is reunited with his wife, who joins him in waging war against the neighbouring Saracens. As they fight together against overwhelming odds, they are saved by three knights who turn out to be their three sons. The united family proceeds to spread Christianity throughout the Holy Land.

Like *Octavian's* empress, Isumbras is humble enough to acknowledge that his tribulations are the result of his own sin, but this time God's messenger makes this fact explicit. As he learns of his loss of property, Isumbras expresses concern only for his family, saying

With thi that I may one hir see,

My wyfe and my childre thre,

3itt was never mane so fayne\*. (84-86)<sup>48</sup> *happy*

Even as he begins to accept living in penance, Isumbras reminds us once again that his primary concern is for his family's safety. He therefore decides to take them into exile:

Of lande I rede we fare;

Of my-selvene haue no thoghte

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<sup>48</sup> All quotations from *Sir Isumbras* are from Halliwell's edition in *The Thornton Romances*.

Bot I may helpe my childir noghte

For tham es alle my kare. (119-22)

*Sir Isumbras* draws on its protagonist's concern for the security of his family to produce pathos. Both Isumbras and his wife are paralyzed with sorrow after they lose their second child. In this touching stanza, Isumbras and his wife nearly commit suicide together:

The knyghte mase dole and sorowe y-noghe,

Nerehand he hym-selvene sloghe

Are he come to the banke.

And the lady grett\* and gafe hir ille\*, *laments; went to injure herself*

Nowther of tham myghte other stille,

Thaire sorowe it was fulle ranke!

Thay sayd, allas that thay were borne,

“Felle werdes es layde us by-forne,

That are were wele\* and wanke\*!” *very unstable; inconsistent*

The knyghte bad scho sulde be stille,

And gladly suffir Goddes wille,

“Us awe hym alle to thanke!” (195-206)

Just as we are told of Isumbras that he “nerehand he hym-selvene sloghe,” his wife expresses an equal amount of grief when she attempts to injure herself (“gafe hir ille”). We see in *Sir Isumbras* that parents suffer equally when their children are taken from them. As Maldwyn Mills observes, this is one of the many stanzas interpolated into Thornton's copy of *Sir Isumbras* which accentuates the pathos inherent in the story and humanizes the protagonist (“*Sir Isumbras*” 12). Isumbras's sadness at the loss of his family even supercedes the

penitential tone of the beginning of the story. When the angel tells Isumbras that God has forgiven his sins, all he can think to do is “walke in payne” (545).

*Sir Isumbras* prefers to dwell on its moments of sadness. While both this poem and *Octavian* dramatize the trauma of familial separation on a given individual, Isumbras's is the more redemptive story because he endeavours to persevere in spite of his losses. Near the end of the poem, after Isumbras has reunited with his wife, he decides to continue his fight against the Saracens. Believing himself destined to die in battle, the tearful Isumbras offers a final farewell to his lady. His wife, no longer willing to suffer the pain of familial separation, insists on donning armour and fighting alongside him:

‘A! lorde,’ scho sayd, ‘helpe that I were dyghte

In armours, als I were a knyghte,

And with the wille I fare;

And God that made bothe see and lande,

My saule I wyte into thy hande,

For I kepe to lyffe no mare!’

Sone was the lady dyghte

In armours, als thofe scho were a knyghte,

And had bothe spere and schelde;

Agaynes thrytty thowsandez and maa

Come there nane bot thay twa (729-39)

That Isumbras's wife prefers going to war to leaving her husband's side indicates the extent to which this poem links fortitude with unified families. Isumbras and his wife fight a Saracen army alone. The poem rewards their faith in each other by reuniting them with their

children at the very moment the battle appears to be lost; the five members of Isumbras's family, together again, manage not only to kill thousands of Saracens, but also to establish five Christian kingdoms in the Holy Land. Such is the power of a family.

The two other familial romances, *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and *Sir Perceval of Galles*, address the familial concerns of unattached adults. Sir Eglamour is a knight of small means in service to the Earl of Artois. Eglamour loves the Earl's daughter, Christabelle, but even though he is the "nobileste knyghte" (92), he is of too low a station to have a chance of successfully courting her, as "hir woves emperour and kynge/ and dukes þat are bolde" (74-75).<sup>49</sup> Eglamour mentions his desire for Christabelle to the disapproving Earl, who agrees to the proposal under the condition that he completes three tasks. Each quest takes Eglamour further away from Artois and into greater danger. After he kills a giant boar on his first quest, and then its giant master on his second quest, Christabelle is so taken by his prowess that she marries him in secret and sleeps with him. His third quest is to kill a dragon, and he is so grievously wounded after completing this task that it takes him a full year to recover and return to Artois. From this point forward, the poem's plot returns to the motif of the calumniated parent reminiscent of that of *Octavian* and *Isumbras*: Christabelle has given birth to their son and her father has exiled both of them. While adrift at sea, a griffin kidnaps the child and deposits him in Israel, while Christabelle eventually lands in Egypt. Upon his return to Artois, Eglamour learns of what occurred and deposes the tyrannous Earl. Later, a tournament is held in Egypt for which the prize is Christabelle's hand in marriage. Eglamour defeats his own son in the final match, and the family reunites.

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<sup>49</sup> All quotations from this poem taken from the MS transcription in Richardson's edition. Where the Lincoln text is defective, I cite Richardson's transcription of the Cotton text, in the same volume.

Like Octavian's wife and Sir Isumbras, Eglamour is very humble. Worried that his desire for Christabelle might be seen as overreaching his station, he begins his courtship with a prayer:

‘Lorde, 3e grant me my bone,

On þe rode als þou be boghte.

The erlis doghetir, faire and free,

þat scho might myn bee –

þat maste es in my thoghte.’ (101-05)

It is only after this that Eglamour petitions the Earl for his daughter's hand in marriage, and it is only after the Earl suggests he perform the three trials that he brings the subject up with Christabelle. Even then, he initially tells her only that:

‘For þi lufe hafe I vndirtane

Dedis of armes thre.’ (251-52)

*Sir Eglamour* takes an odd turn when the protagonist returns from his second quest, where we learn that the Earl was hoping the whole time that he would just die and stop bothering him. Eglamour acknowledges that his low station requires that he prove his worth, but Christabelle's father perceives his suit as an opportunity to rid himself of an annoyance. When Eglamour returns from his second quest with the head of the giant, the Earl expresses shock at his success:

What, deuell!’ he said. ‘May na thing þe sla?

By Sayne Iame, so I wene! (656-57)

This is the moment on which the poem turns. The Earl's pride is revealed to be excessive rather than merely cautious. Now he opposes Eglamour's courtship and his desire to create a family. The poem reveals its commitment to family unity only after Eglamour has proven

himself twice, the Earl has revealed his treacherous intent, *and* Christabelle has married him. The poem replaces Christabelle's now-suspect relationship with her father with the more reciprocal relationship she has with her husband.

In *Sir Perceval of Galles*, we see the effects on family life which result from the chaos of an unresolved feud. The poem, unique to this manuscript, differs from Chrétien de Troyes's romance of *Perceval* in a number of ways, most obviously in its omission of reference to the Grail and Gawain's parallel adventures.<sup>50</sup> It is possible that it may be more closely related to an earlier version of the legend of Perceval than it is to Chrétien's version.<sup>51</sup> The plot's chronological organization and omission of long descriptive passages make this story comparatively economical, which may have made it more attractive to a young audience.<sup>52</sup> Although the two stories differ in many of the details, *Sir Perceval* strengthens the already strong relationship between its hero and his mother so notable in Chrétien's romance, and in doing so it emphasises that broader society benefits from the maintenance of familial bonds. The poem's *explicit*, which reads "*Explicit Sir Perceval de Gales; Here endys þe romance of Sir Percevell of Gales Cosyn to kyng Arthoure*" (fol. 176r), further emphasises the poem's familial interests. *Sir Perceval of Galles* combines its concern for family integrity with a biting criticism of those who withdraw from society. At the same time, the poem links disrespect for families to broader social chaos. Unlike the protagonists of Thornton's other familial romances, humility is not among Perceval's virtues; Perceval instead retains his more memorable character traits from Chrétien's version: his social awkwardness, his childish petulance, his ignorance, and his impulsive strength.

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<sup>50</sup> See Keith Busby, "Chrétien de Troyes English'd," for a detailed comparison of the two romances.

<sup>51</sup> See Brown, Griffith, and Woods. For an alternate view on the poem's relationship to Chrétien, see David Fowler.

<sup>52</sup> See Eckhardt, Putter ("Story Line and Story Shape") and Hardman ("Popular Romances and Young Readers").

The first thing we learn about Perceval is that his father was “in kyng Arthures haulte/ beste by-lyffede of alle” (13-14),<sup>53</sup> and was such a strong knight that Arthur married him to his sister, Acheflour (23-24). A tournament is held at their marriage, in which Perceval defeats all of his opponents, including a Red Knight. Perceval continues to enter tournaments after the birth of his son (also named Perceval), and it is at one such tournament that the Red Knight finally gets his revenge by killing him. Acheflour responds to this trauma by fleeing with her son into the forest in order to raise him away from civilization (165-76). Acheflour even refuses to teach Perceval how to act as a knight or participate in “dedez of armez” (167). In a poem which handles interfamilial relationships with great sensitivity (Baron), Arthur’s conspicuous absence from this episode provides the reader with the first indication of his weakness, as he leaves his sister and her son to fend for themselves.

As it turns out, Perceval eventually chooses to rejoin society; by doing so he resolves the conflict which initially led to his exile. He restores peace to the roads, finds a wife, and restores his mother to sanity and prosperity, all despite Arthur’s self-admitted inability to maintain order in his own land. When the Red Knight rides into his hall to steal his cup, Arthur laments:

‘A! dere God,’ said the kyng thanne  
 ‘That alle this wyde werlde wane,  
 Whethir I sale ever hafe that manne  
 May make 3one fende duelle;  
 Fyve 3eres hase he thus gane,  
 And my coupes fro me tane  
 And my gude knyghte slayne,

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<sup>53</sup> All quotations from *Sir Perceval of Galles* are taken from Halliwell’s edition in *The Thornton Romances*.

## Mene calde syr Percyvelle' (629-36)

Arthur is an impotent ruler. When Ache flour fears the depredations of the Red Knight, Arthur is absent, and when the Red Knight steals from him, he does nothing. It is Perceval who restores peace to the court and safety to the roads when he kills first the Red Knight and then his mother. Once Perceval dons the Red Knight's armour, the effects of Arthur's ineffective regime become explicit when travellers flee from him:

Whenne those tene [men] saw hym thare,  
 Thay wende the rede knyghte it ware,  
 That wolde thame alle for-fare,

## And faste gane thay flee (873-76)

In medieval romance, providing safety to travellers is usually a sign of good kingship (Rouse), and Arthur's failure to dispose of the Red Knight is a further indication of his weakness. Perceval chases the riders down and reveals his face, asking "wherefore fledde ȝee/ lange are whenne ȝe sawe mee/ come rydande ȝow by?" (902-04). At this point, the riders inform him that the Red Knight would have slain them all because they are related to his father. The Red Knight is the only character whose actions suggest his awareness of the strength of unified families. Just as he is the only character in this poem whose power is buttressed by familial support, he is also the only character who fears his enemies' families. The Red Knight is anxious that Perceval's uncle and cousins would "take hym for thaire foo" once they became old enough to bear arms (927). Ultimately, his anxiety over family proves itself warranted when the young Perceval accidentally avenges his father. The irony of the Red Knight's anxiety is that Perceval takes his armour when he dies. So long as Perceval wears the red armour, he repairs the disorder caused by his father's killer while transforming his arms from a symbol of fear to a symbol of liberty.

The reader of *Sir Perceval of Galles* is placed in the odd position (for a romance) of knowing more about the importance of the poem's action than its protagonist. This vantage point serves to emphasise the poem's understanding of social order as meaningless unless it is defended. In *Sir Perceval of Galles*, those who can effectively defend their families are shown to be equally effective when they defend society. The main antagonists in this poem are Saracens, a common symbol of social disorder in Middle English romance (Gorny). First, Perceval single-handedly defends Lufamour, whose castle is attacked by a Sultan whose pursuit of her hand in marriage has brought him to kill the rest of her family (981-1004). Perceval learns of the Saracen threat when his uncle intercepts a messenger who reveals that:

..... "I come fro the lady Lufamour,

That sendes me to kyng Arthoure,

And prayes him, for his honoure,

Hir sorowes for to seese. (973-76)

Because Perceval responds immediately to Lufamour's distress and thus arrives well before Arthur is able to, he ends up superceding Arthur in his role as guardian of justice. Perceval fights so well against the Saracens that they are dead to a man by noon (1377-80). By the time Arthur finally arrives, four lines later, Perceval has already done his job for him.

Lufamour rewards Perceval by marrying him, and it is only during the wedding feast, nearly 1600 lines into the poem, that anybody tells Perceval his father's story (1546-1600). Even at this point, the information only comes out because Lufamour was curious about the man she is to marry. Perceval must piece together on his own the story's connection to himself; Arthur never explicitly reveals their familial bond.

After marrying Lufamour, Perceval's thoughts turn towards his estranged mother once again. Remembering that he left his mother to survive alone in the wilderness, Perceval

becomes preoccupied with her: we are told that “he thoghte on no thyng” else (1772). Perceval expresses his concern that “Blythe salle I never be,/ Or I may my modir see,/ And wete how scho fare” (1790-93), and leaves his new wife immediately to find her. Perceval reclaims the ring his mother gave him when he first left her, and in doing so defeats a Saracen giant who has conquered the region. When he goes to reclaim his mother’s ring, the pawnbroker informs him that his mother has gone mad from grief, as she believes him to be dead (1953-2169). Perceval finds his mother, cures her madness by proving his identity to her, and brings her back to live with him in his new castle. As the poem ends, Perceval’s mother has been restored to her rightful position in Arthur’s court. *Sir Perceval of Galles* turns again and again to its theme of family unity: the social order is disrupted when families are disrupted; the social order is restored when families are restored. A divided Arthurian family facilitates the Red Knight’s depredations for many years, which are stopped only by Perceval’s quest to re-enter the society from which his mother’s exile estranged him.

Thornton’s familial romances consistently remind us how much their protagonists think about their families. Taken together, Octavian’s concern that he shall see his wife “no mare,” Isumbras’s repetition that his children are “alle my kare,” *Eglamour*’s constant reminders to the reader that “Crystabell was in hys thowȝt” (961), Perceval’s concern that he shall never be happy “or I may my modir see” all show Thornton’s preoccupation with family integrity. As a group, these romances follow the lead of the *Prose Alexander* by making their protagonists preoccupied with concern for their families, by expressing the importance of humility in the face of trauma or stress, and by stressing the need to engage actively with the rest of society. In this sense, all of the familial romances offer meaningful examples of how one might productively respond to stress in one’s life. Moreover, the family functions as a metonym for the state. Alexander criticises the Brahmins for their temerity in

judging a world that they live outside of. In Thornton's familial romances, active participation in society facilitates family reunions, and these reunions occur soon after chaotic elements are expelled from society, usually signalled by the defeat of Saracens. These romances distinguish themselves by asserting that a direct correlation exists between the health of a society can be judged by the integrity of its constituent families.

### 2.2.2.2 – Feudal Romances

The second group of Thornton's romances draws from the motifs of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Although the motif of family stability first noticeable in the *Prose Alexander* governs Thornton's four familial romances, the social order cannot be maintained by families alone. For Thornton, society must also govern itself. In the *Morte Arthure*, political stability and social order are maintained only when characters put aside their emotions and act according to the law. Thornton's four feudal romances dramatize the chaos that results when law no longer effectively preserves society. Taking cues from Arthur's strong defense of his realm at the outset of the *Morte Arthure*, *Sir Degrevant*, *The Earl of Toulouse*, *Thomas of Erceldowne*, and *The Awntyrs off Arthure* all teach how to appropriately defend one's holdings with a preference for diplomacy rather than war. When the protagonists of the familial romances resolve societal conflicts, they do so accidentally, in pursuit of their own goals. By contrast, conflicts in the feudal romances are resolved when their protagonists work within the extant structures that surround them. Like the *Morte Arthure*, the violent action that provokes the reaction is the seizure, or the threat of seizure, of property, usually land. These romances consequently find themselves dominated by concern with the assertion

of property rights and fidelity to compacts. Such fidelity has long been considered a mark of ethical behaviour in general, or what was sometimes called ‘troth’. As Richard Firth Green suggests in *A Crisis of Truth*, by the end of the fourteenth century “troth” was a complex concept that had legal, ethical, theological, and intellectual connotations (9). For Green, the legal sense of the term includes respect for promises, pledges, and covenants; the ethical sense includes concepts such as loyalty, honour, fidelity, and rectitude of character, while its intellectual sense is closer to “truth” and includes conformity to reality and factual statements. Troth also has a strong religious connotation, which includes aspects of both formal religion and general faith. Thornton’s feudal romances show that legal and ethical principles are interconnected, and advocate their practice as a means of maintaining social stability.

The eponymous hero of *Sir Degrevant* is an Arthurian knight who is recalled from a crusade by news that a neighbouring Earl has violated his forests without reason. The narrator tells us that:

There wonnede ane Erle hym by-syde,  
 A grete lorde of mekill pryde,  
 Of brade londis and wyde,  
 And borowes full brade;  
 Hym thoghte desdeyne of þe knyghte  
 (For he was hardy and wyghte),  
 And thoghte þe beste how he myghte  
 þat doghety degrade. (97-104)<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> All quotations from this poem are taken from Casson’s edition. Where the Lincoln text is defective, I cite the version in the Cambridge MS, published in the same edition.

Degrevant returns home to Britain to protect his lands from his jealous neighbour. After repairing the damage to his land and his tenants' property, he sends a messenger to the Earl with a gift of ten pounds in the hopes of putting a stop to his hostilities. The poem makes it clear at this moment that he decides to act ethically: he "thoghte to wyrke by þe lawe/ and by no noþer schore" (151-52). Degrevant justifies his claim against his neighbour's raids in legal terms, just as Arthur justifies his war on Rome legally in the *Morte*. In *Sir Degrevant*, the law is integral to the protagonist's conception of a just society, which is why he chooses to work within its boundaries. The Earl does not, and decides instead to refuse the money and kill the messenger, then raids his neighbour's lands once more. This time, Degrevant's presence enables his men to stage a successful defense.

The next day, Degrevant travels to the Earl's castle and attempts to resolve the feud with a duel, but the Earl is too afraid of his strength. The Earl's wife feigns ignorance and begs him to leave her family alone, at which point he realizes that he must restate his case. Exasperated, he does so:

The knyghte spake to þat fre:  
 'Ma-dame, wite noghte me;  
 Mekill maugre hafe he  
 þat chalanges vn-righte!'

'Luk, my perrkes are stroyed,  
 And my reuers are drawed,  
 And I gretly am anoyde,  
 For sothe als I say.  
 When I werreyde in Spayne,

He mad my landis barrayne,

My woddis and my warrayne;

My wylde are awaye.’ (429-40)

Degrevant’s desire to peaceably resolve this unjust and unnecessary conflict with his neighbour reflects the very real desire of fifteenth-century English landowners to resolve their disputes peacefully.<sup>55</sup> He may be “gretly anoyde,” but he sets aside his immediate emotional response in order to procure the best possible result for himself and his land. Moreover, he does this in spite of his clear military superiority, procuring peace by marrying the Earl’s daughter.<sup>56</sup> *Sir Degrevant* thus prefers order to vengeance.

*The Earl of Toulouse* also depicts the resolution of a feud by means of ethical action. In this romance, the German emperor Diocletian has a penchant for seizing his neighbours’ lands. One of the few men willing to defend his territory is Barnard, the Earl of Toulouse. The bloodthirsty Diocletian refuses to take ransoms, but Barnard successfully defends his land and people. Recovering from his loss, Diocletian swears revenge, but his wife Beulybon chastises him by saying that “hyt ys better ye be acorde” and begs him fruitlessly to cease his warmongering (140).<sup>57</sup> Barnard falls in love with Beulybon when one of his prisoners tells him about her beauty, and goes to see her and proclaim his love. Beulybon accepts him, but will not consummate their relationship because she is married. A traitor fabricates a charge of adultery against her, but Barnard returns to the city to exonerate her as soon as he hears of

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<sup>55</sup> Davenport (“114), Edwards, (“Gender, Order, and Reconciliation” 54-5).

<sup>56</sup> For discussions of the marriage plot, see Davenport, Edwards (“Gender, Order, and Reconciliation”), and Diamond (“*Sir Degrevant*: What Lovers Want”) for this theme in *Degrevant*. On *The Earl of Toulouse*, see Diamond (“*The Erle of Tolous*: the Piece of Virtue”).

<sup>57</sup> All quotations are taken from the edition of this poem in French and Hale’s *Middle English Metrical Romances* (383-419).

the trial. This persuades Diocletian to reconcile with Barnard. When Diocletian dies, Barnard succeeds him in ruling the kingdom and marries Beulybon.

Of all Thornton's feudal romances, *The Earl of Toulouse* most strongly links the concepts of troth and law. Desire is never allowed to supercede the social conventions which constitute and maintain the public good. Beulybon's chastisement of her husband in her first appearance in the poem is merely one such example. Another is the case of Trylabas of Turkey, the captive who first tells Barnard about Beulybon. Although he pledges his troth to Barnard he continues to secretly support Diocletian and seeks to betray him to Beulybon because he is her husband's enemy. As the voice of reason, Beulybon castigates Trylabas for his attempt to break his troth:

The lady seyde, 'So mut y goo,  
 Thy soule ys lost yf thou do so;  
 Thy trowthe þou schalt fulfyllen.  
 Sythe he forgaf the thy raunsom  
 And lowsydd the owt of preson,  
 Do away thy wyckyd wylle!' (280-85)

Beulybon maintains that troth is more important than political expediency. Barnard holds the same values. When Barnard first gazes upon her, his desire for her is tempered by his awareness of her marital status,

He seyde, 'Lord God, full of might,  
 Leue y were so worthy a knyght,  
 That y might be hur fere,  
 And that sche no husbonde hadde,  
 Alle the golde that euyr God made

To me were not so dere!’ (367-72)

Barnard knows that it is acceptable for him to desire Beulybon, but he recognizes that it is not acceptable for him to act on that desire. By having Barnard qualify his emotional response with his wish that Beulybon were unmarried, *The Earl of Toulouse* ensures that its feuds – Barnard’s lands, Trylabas’s duplicity, and Beulybon’s adultery trial – resolve themselves within the framework of extant social structures. Furthermore, the romance rewards those who act with respect for social structures while punishing those who act out of brash self-interest and without concern for the consequences of their actions.

The narrative portion of *Thomas of Erceclown* similarly puts private desire at odds with the maintenance of compacts. One spring day, Thomas is sleeping beneath a tree, when he is awakened by the approach of a beautiful lady. Although the lady tells Thomas that loving her would be foolish, he pledges his troth to her:

“Now, luffly ladye, rewe one mee,  
And I will euer more with thee duelle;  
Here my trouthe I will the plyghte,  
Whethir þou will in heuene or helle.” (105-08)<sup>58</sup>

The lady accepts Thomas, reveals to him that she is actually a fairy and invites him to stay at her castle at the crossroads between earth, heaven, hell, and purgatory. After experiencing a variety of wonders over the course of three days in the fairy kingdom, the lady returns him to earth and tells him that three years have passed. When Thomas asks why the lady is abandoning him, she tells him that she does so out of concern for his safety, as her country has an arrangement by which the devil comes and takes his pick of its inhabitants’ souls. He

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<sup>58</sup> All quotations taken from the transcription of Thornton’s text in Murray’s edition.

then demands the gift of prophecy in exchange for his disappointment, and the poem concludes with a series of prophecies, mainly concerning war between England and Scotland.

At the heart of *Thomas of Erceldown* lies the tension between private desire and the public good. The lady initially reveals only that she is from “ane oþer countree” while trying to refuse Thomas’s advances (93). After three days of wonder, the lady tells Thomas that he must go:

Do buske the, Thomas, þe buse agayne;  
ffor þou may here no lengare be;  
Hye the faste with myghte & mayne,  
I sall the brynge till Eldone tree. (277-80)

Thomas, concerned only with his own desire for the lady, resists, so she reveals to him the true reason why she is to abandon him on earth:

To Morne, of helle þe foulle fende.  
Amange this folke will feche his fee;  
And þou arte mekill mane and hende,  
I trowe full well he wolde chese the.  
ffor alle þe golde þat euer may bee,  
ffro hethyne vn-to þis worldes ende,  
þou bese neuer be-trayede for mee;  
þere-fore with me I rede thou wende. (289-96)

The lady values Thomas so much that she does not want to let the devil take him away.

Critically, breaking the arrangement with the devil is completely out of the question. We are here made to see his interaction with the fairy kingdom in a new light: as a kingdom like any other, with the same requirement to honour its obligations. The lady clearly cares very much

for him; the narrator tells us that “seuene sythes by hir he lay” at their first meeting (124), and she keeps him in her castle three times longer than she had originally intended to, but she must part from him to ensure his safety. The lady’s actions are honourable because she never lets her emotions supersede her feudal obligations or her concern for Thomas.

*The Awntyrs off Arthure* is a more overtly moralistic poem, and its diptych structure has led some critics to suggest that it is hardly a romance at all (Spearing). Like *The Earl of Toulouse*, the *Awntyrs* links its treatment of morality with its treatment of justice and law. In the poem’s first episode, the ghost of Guinevere’s mother criticises Arthur’s court for its selfishness in a scathing *memento mori*. Like the speaker in *Lamentio Peccatoris*, Guinevere’s mother is dead. Her distanced perspective enables her to assess objectively the moral state of Arthur’s court. As we shall see below in *Quedam Revelacio*, this kind of text presupposes a direct relationship between the worlds of the living and the dead. The poem’s second episode invites the members of Arthur’s court to amend their habits and extend justice to outsiders.

In the poem’s first episode, Arthur and members of his court are hunting in a forest. Guinevere and Sir Gawain travel together, but are accosted by the tormented spirit of Guinevere’s mother. Guinevere’s mother suffers in Purgatory for the sins she committed while alive, and returns to warn her daughter about the moral danger in which her society sits. The ghost provides moral advice couched in a reminder of the inevitability of death:

Thus dethe wil you dight, thare you not doute;  
 Thereon hertily take hede while thou art here.  
 Whan thou art richest arraied and ridest in thi route,  
 Have pité on the poer – thou art of power.  
 Burnes and burdes that ben the aboute,

While thi body is bamed and broghte on a ber,  
 Then lite wyn the light that now wil the loute  
 For then the helped no thing but holy praier.  
 The praier of poer may purchas the pes –  
 Of that thou yeves at the yete,  
 Whan thou art set in thi sete,  
 With al merthes at mete  
 And dayntés on des. (170-82)<sup>59</sup>

*Lamentio Peccatoris* constructs moral action as means by which a man may escape punishment after death. For Guinevere's mother, the Arthurian court is so steeped in sin that they must go one step further and "purchas" peace after death with the prayers of the poor. This is a common trope in literary representations of Purgatory, and one that stresses a causal relationship between devotion and salvation.<sup>60</sup> Hughes notes that late-medieval English noblemen employed "the currency of prayer" to speed their way to heaven (43). Guinevere's mother follows this pattern, suggesting that her daughter join her in treating salvation as something that can be bought, rather than earned.

According to Guinevere's mother, Arthurian society fails because it fails to "have pité on the poer." This is a failure not of the system, but of its rulers. The ghost, offering herself as an example, warns Guinevere and Gawain away from temporal desires:

That is luf paramour, listes and delites  
 That has me light and laft logh in a lake.

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<sup>59</sup> Quotations taken from the edition prepared for TEAMS by Thomas Hahn in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, 169-226

<sup>60</sup> For a detailed history of representations of Purgatory, see Le Goff. Hughes notes that concern over the length of time the soul spent in Purgatory was particularly fervent among Yorkshire nobility in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (*Pastors and Visionaries*, Chapter 1).

Al the welth of the world, that away witis

With the wilde wormes, that worche me wrake. (213-16)

The ghost continues, warning them that following the example of their king endangers their souls because he acts without concern for the future:

Your King is to covetous.....

May no man stry him with strenght while his whele stondes.

Whan he is in his magesté, moost in his might,

He shal light full lowe on the sesondes. (265-68)

This passage draws a direct connection between the *Awntyrs* and the *Morte Arthure*, warning Guinevere and Gawain that their king is ignorant of the fact that he, like all men, is beholden to the movement of Fortune's Wheel. The ghost predicts, as the *Morte* bears out, that Arthur will fall at the apex of his career. The remedy is to respect the unfortunate. The ghost thus sets the values of social continuity, mercy, and justice against the values of chivalry, which can lead to covetousness, as we have seen in the *Morte*.

Unlike the *Morte*, however, *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is not a tragic story about the end of an era of glory. The ghost's criticism is biting, but Arthurian society can still be salvaged. The second episode of the poem sees society put to the test. Sir Galaron of Galloway enters Arthur's court to sue for the return of his lands, which he claims were seized unjustly by Arthur to be given to Gawain:

My name is Sir Galaron, withouten eny gile,

The grettest of Galwey of greves and gyllis,

Of Connok, of Conyngham, and also Kyle,

Of Lomond, of Losex, of Loyan hilles.

Thou hast wonen hem in werre with a wrange wille

And geven hem to Sir Gawayn – that my hert grylles.

\* \* \*

I wol fighte on a felde – thereto I make feith –

With eny freke upon folde that frely is borne.

To lese such a lordshipp me wolde thence laith,

And iche lede opon lyve wold lagh me to scorne (417-22; 430-03)

Galeron's complaint is that his lands were seized with a "wrange wille," which has resulted in his need to sue for his property in order to maintain his public identity – otherwise "iche lede opon lyve wold lagh me." Notably, Galerón does not ask for his lands to be restored, but instead offers to fight for them. For his part, Gawain is perfectly willing to fight "in defence of my right" (467). Arthur asks him not to, however, saying that "I nolde for no lordeshipp se thi life lorne" (470). Arthur clearly cares more for his nephew's life than for his reputation as a just ruler; his attempt to dissuade Gawain from accepting the challenge reveals that his inclination to maintain the status quo supercedes his responsibility to pursue justice. He asks Gawain not to fight because he "nolde for no lordeshipp see thi life lorne" (470). Gawain, aware that more than merely property is at stake in this conflict, demands that Arthur "let go" of his concern, because "God stond with the right" (471). Gawain and Galerón fight, but Galerón relents at the moment he has Gawain at his mercy, not wanting to kill such a worthy opponent.<sup>61</sup> Galerón concedes his quit-claim, and the two knights exchange territories until both are satisfied. The precise legal resolution to the poem's violent conflict restores the court's authority.

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<sup>61</sup> The poem is not very clear about why Galerón concedes the duel. It is possible that he may have heard Guinevere's cries and pleas to Arthur to command the duel to stop, as we see in the previous stanza (625-37). Arthur's intervention occurs only after Galerón's concession (647-50).

Tellingly, Arthur himself does little more than witness the exchange. The only character who seems to have taken the ghost's advice is Gawain, who reciprocates Galeron's concession of land with a concession of his own (664-85). Guinevere begs Arthur to stop the duel when she sees that Gawain has been outmatched, but even here she acts only because Gawain's lover "gretes on Gaynour with gronyng grille" (620). Galeron is the most generous character of the lot. He believes that justice can be procured without killing, interrupts the duel, and is the first to release his lands. Arthurian society is clearly in trouble if this is the closest it comes to having "pité on the poer." However, the creation of a just Arthurian society is not impossible. Guinevere commissions "a mylion of Masses" for her mother's soul (706). Galeron's respect for the law in demanding a formal challenge and the subsequent restoration of his property together reinforce the connection between social order and avoiding rash actions.

Thornton's feudal romances consistently depict protagonists forced to defend their possessions. In order to do so, each of Thornton's protagonists – Sir Degrevant, Barnard, the fairy lady, and Galeron – effectively defend their property because they refuse to succumb to their emotions and choose instead to work within the framework of existing social systems. By acting in this way, Thornton's protagonists are able to defend themselves without destroying or diminishing the stability of their society. These three romances all turn on troth. An individual who acts ethically, as all these protagonists do, would also respect legal covenants. Taken as a group, these romances emphasise their exemplarity by demonstrating that social structures exist in order to protect those who act ethically from those who do not. Thornton's feudal romances therefore echo the example of Arthur's successes and failures in the *Morte Arthure*; each of these romances stresses the importance of diplomacy and law as a means of resolving conflict while tacitly acknowledging that situations change with the turn

of Fortune's wheel. Thornton himself was sued in the Court of Chancery over the possession of property in the early 1450s; it is no surprise that he copied so many romances which enact a fantasy that property can be defended against power by trusting in the legal system (Johnston, "A New Document"). By asserting that moral action is action in pursuit of justice, Thornton thus effectively connects social order with respect for both the law and the vicissitudes of fortune.

As we have seen, the Lincoln Thornton romances can be read as a single, broadly didactic, unit. The shorter romances which dominate this booklet all draw on the themes of one of the two long romances at the beginning of the manuscript. The shorter romances iterate the themes of the *Prose Alexander* and the alliterative *Morte Arthure* in order to make their lessons more explicit and to stress their moral, didactic, or pragmatic content. Even the intervening non-romance texts like *Lamentio Peccatoris* share their theme and tone with the more substantial texts in this booklet, only more explicitly. As we shall see, Thornton's religious texts describe the abstract values necessary to spiritual health just as his reference texts prescribe solutions for physical health. Thornton's romances provide a means by which to dramatize and express concretely the social values most important to him, teaching that valuing family and order is integral to societal health. Thornton's values are demonstrated by the actions of his romance protagonists, who on the whole provide his readers with models worth emulating to facilitate the maintenance of social order.

### **2.3 – Secularity and Spirituality in Thornton's Religious Texts**

In the 119 folios which follow his romances, Thornton provides his readers with a great diversity of religious texts, offering basic instruction, guides to affective meditation,

prayers, edifying stories, and an abbreviated psalter. Thornton was clearly greatly concerned with spiritual health and its concrete benefits. These texts are for the most part expository and didactic. *Exempla* such as “*De Miraculo Beate Marie*,” Richard Rolle’s “*Moralia ... De Nature Apis*” and his “*De imperfecta contricione*” discuss the relationship between social life and asceticism, encouraging the reader to maintain a Christian outlook while engaging with society. Explicitly didactic texts such as “Dan Iohn Gatrynge’s Sermon” teach the articles of Christian faith. Devotional texts such as *The Prevette of the Passioun* guide the reader through affective meditation on Christ’s passion. And the dream-vision *Quedam Revelacio* warns readers to consider the matter of their salvation more seriously. Because this second booklet contains over fifty items, I can only discuss a representative sample. And because I am concerned with conceptual links between these texts, I must discuss them outside their manuscript order. Many of these texts suggest a correlation between devotion and its outcomes so that the dominant mood of this booklet is seen to be pragmatic. A reader familiar with these texts will have been instructed in the principles of Christianity and their logic, know how to pray in both English and Latin, and be aware of his or her need to lead a “mixed life.”

The text most central to the transmission of Christian belief in this manuscript is entitled “A Sermon that John Gatrynge made” (fols. 213v-218v), a prose rendition of *The Lay Folk’s Catechism*.<sup>62</sup> Gatrynge’s “Sermon” is the official English translation of an instructional manual commissioned in 1357 by John Thoresby, Archbishop of York, and modeled on the instruction promulgated by Archbishop Peckman of Canterbury for the

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<sup>62</sup> Thornton appears to be the only scribe who has a copy of this text rendered in prose.

southern diocese in 1281 (Lawton 330-31).<sup>63</sup> Gatrynge's "Sermon" draws heavily on the educational programme formalized in canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215: the declaration that every Christian man or woman (*omnis utriusque sexus*) must confess his or her sins at least once a year. In England, one result of this Canon was that Episcopal legislation, notably the Salisbury statutes of Bishop Richard Poore, began to call for broad religious instruction of both adults and children in the tenets of the faith (Curry and Copeland 390). Keiser notes that "the *Sermon* is the work of an author with a firm, intuitive grasp of his audience and their practical interests" ("To Knaue God Almyghten" 113). The intended audience of the "Sermon" would have undoubtedly included men such as Thornton who might have been anxious about whether or not the time they devoted to secular work would endanger their souls. The introduction to Gatrynge's "Sermon" reveals that it was written for the purpose of allaying anxieties such as Thornton's among the laity by instructing them in the tenets of their faith:

For-thi þat mekill folke now in þis werlde ne ere noghte wele ynoghe lerede to knawe God Almyghty, ne lufe Hym ne serue Hym als þay sulde do, and als þaire dedys oftsythes opynly schewes, in gret peril to þam, to lyfe and to saule ... þe counsell of his clergy hase Ordeyned, þat ilkane þat vndir hym hase cure of saule, Opynly, one ynglische, apon sonondayes, preche and teche þaym þat þay hase cure off, þe lawe and þe lare to knawe God Almyghty, þat principally may be scewede in theis sexe thynges – [1] In þe fourteen poyntes þat falles to þe trowthe, [2] In þe ten commandementes þat God hase gyfen vs, [3] In þe Seuen Sacramentes þat er in Haly Kyrke, [4] In þe Seuen werkes of mercy vntill oure euen crystyn, [5] In

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<sup>63</sup> For more on textual transmission and circulation, see A. Hudson and Powell. Swanson notes that the English text was a deliberate creation, more explicit and didactic than the Latin text on which it was based.

the seuen vertys þat ilke a man sall vse, [6] And in the Seuen dedly Synnes þat ilke man sall refuse. And he byddes and commandes in all þat he may, þat all þat hase cure or kepyng vnder hym Enioyne þair parischennes and þair sugettes þat þay here and lere þise ilke sex thynges, and oftesythes reherse þam till þat þay cun þam, and sythen teche þam þair childir ... And for-thi þat nane sall excuse thaym thurgh vnknowlechyng for to cun þam, our haly Fadir + þe beschope, of his gudnes, hase ordaynede and bedyn þat þay be scewede opynly one ynglische amanges þe folke. (2-3)<sup>64</sup>

The remainder of the text provides a comprehensive account of each of these items along with some statements of their present importance to everyday life, with items clearly marked out and separated by red pilcrows and large section headings. The “sermon” is simultaneously a reference work and a teaching tool. Moreover, the “sermon” signals its universality by stressing the importance for both “folke” and “þair childir” to memorize its contents, as “nane sall excuse thaym thurgh vnknowlechyng.” The “sermon” reminds the reader numerous times that this content is “nedfull to trowe” (4), and thereby justifies itself as a tool for the dissemination of informed belief.

Thornton’s religious texts do not merely teach what to believe, they also teach how to pray. *The Prevette of the Passioun* (fols. 179r-189r), a guided meditation on the Passion, provides direction for affective meditation on the death of Christ similar to that in Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Love of Jesus Christ*. The *Prevette* guides the reader’s meditation step-by-step through the story of Christ’s Passion. As with Gatrynge’s “Sermon,” the *Prevette* is prefaced with an introduction expressing its utility:

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<sup>64</sup> I quote from the edition published by G. G. Perry in *Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse*. The numeration of the six points rehearsed by Gatrymge is Perry’s, and does not occur in the MS.

Who so desires to ffynd comforthe and gostely gladness in þe Passione and in þe crosse of owre lorde Ihesu, hym nedis with a besy thoghte ffor to duell in it and all oþer besynes fogette and sett at noghte ... To gete þis state þat I speke of, I trowe þat a mane behouved to rayse vp all þe scharpenes of þis blesside passione, and forgett & caste be-hynd hym for þe tyme all oþer Occupacyouns & besynes; and that he make hym-selfe present in his thoghte as if he sawe fully with his bodily eghe all the thyngys þat be-fell abowte þe crosse and þe glorious passione of oure lorde Ihesu. (198)<sup>65</sup>

Just as Gatrynge emphasises that Christians ought to learn the tenets of their faith lest they be threatened with “payne of penance,” the *Prevette* emphasises the practical side of affective devotion: the the reader “nedis” to meditate “to gete þis state” of comfort. However, this devotional practice is not meant to be spontaneous; on this matter, the *Prevette* takes a suggestively imperative tone:

*Begynne now* thy meditacyone at the be-gynnyng of Cristes passyone and pursue it feruently to þe laste Ende: of the whilke I sall towche to þe a littill: bot thow may vse theme more largeleye, after god gyffes þe grace. *Be-holde now* besyllye to euery poynte as if þou were there bodyly: and *be-holde hym* graythely as he rase vpe fro his super, whene he had Endide his Sermone, with his disciples, and ȝede with theme in to a ȝerde where he was ofte wounte to goo wit htheme. *Goo now* amange theme, & *be-holde how* lufandly, how felandly he gose with theme and spekes ... And *here sall þou haue pete and compassione*. (198-89; emphasis added)

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<sup>65</sup> Quotations here and for the remainder of Thornton’s religious texts are from the first volume of Horstmann’s *Early Yorkshire Writers*.

As the words I emphasise suggest, the *Prevette* does not trust its reader to avoid distraction. The *Prevette* instead attempts as much as possible to control the reader's meditations and direct them to the figure of Jesus, whose name is consistently emphasised throughout the text with nominal rubrication. This is a prayer guide whose very purpose is to simultaneously encourage and limit the reader's devotional practice.

Thornton was very much concerned with the integration of secular and spiritual life. The longest treatise Thornton copies on this topic, Richard Rolle's "Our Daily Work" (fols. 243v-250v),<sup>66</sup> offers a compelling justification for spiritually inclined laypeople to approach their labours with good cheer:

Thre thynges are nedefull till ilk a mane of what state he be, to mekill his mede, thurgh goddess grace helpande, als abouene es sayde, þat hym sall lede. The ffirste es þat mane be in honeste werke with-owtenne lettyng of his tyme. The secunde, þat he his werke do with a fredome of spyrite, in stede and in tyme als till ilke werke falles. The thirde, þat his vtire berynge, whare-so he cummes, so honeste be & faire, þat louynge be to go, and stirring of gude till all þat hyme sesse; þat þe appostull byddyng þay ful-fill in dede, þat sayse: *Omnia in vobis honeste & secundum ordinam fiant*, þat es at saye: "all þat 3e do, honestly be it done, & in ordire." (310)

"Our Daily Work" is yet another text that asserts its universal value, since Rolle considers his work important to anyone, "of what state he be," who concerns himself to think upon such matters. Although "Our Daily Work" cites a number of authorities such as St. Paul, St.

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<sup>66</sup> The other substantive text on this topic is Walter Hilton's *Of Mixed Life*. Watson explains that the "mixed life" was a topic of great concern to Rolle, who wrote about it quite often (*Richard Rolle*). Hughes argues convincingly that the Yorkshire gentry can be said to have integrated Rolle's position and preoccupation with the mixed life into their own social practices over the course of the period between 1370 and 1450 (*Pastors and Visionaries* ch.5). By the end of the fifteenth century, affective devotion and concern for the mixed life became the predominant form of English lay piety (Carey).

Gregory, Seneca, and Solomon, its dominant tone is more practical than abstract. Rolle's authority is more subtle than Gattrynge's, which threatens "payne of penance" for those who do not know the articles of faith (2), or the imperiousness of the *Prevette*. Rolle nevertheless provides a very useful text which would have offered a reader such as Thornton assurance that his anxiety about the relationship between his secular work and his spiritual state is normal. Rolle's position on this matter is that work itself can have a spiritual component. Rolle's treatise emphasises the theme in the *Prose Alexander* and in the familial romances that it is preferable to engage with society than to withdraw from it.

Thornton recognized the difficulty of balancing secular living with his spirituality. This concern must have led to his inclusion of *Sayne Jerome Spal tyre* (258v-269r) in the manuscript. This text's preface explicitly states that it is an abbreviated psalter specifically written for use by those too weak, too busy, or otherwise unable to employ the unabridged text in their prayers:

Beatus vero Ieronimus in hoc modo disposuit hoc spalterium, sicut angelus domini docuit per spiritum sanctum. Porro propter hoc abbreviatum est quod hii qui solitudinem habent seculi, vel qui in infirmitatibus iacent, aut operibus seu itineribus occupantur, qui nauigam agunt, qui bellum commissuri sunt, vel quos inuidia diaboli exagiat, uel aliud aliquid tribulacionis molestat, siue quociens uovere cotitie spalterium et implere minime possunt, vel qui ieiunant et debilitantur, et qui dies festos custodiunt, et qui uult animam suam saluam facere et vitam eternam habere: hoc spalterium dicat assidue. (392-93)<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> [The blessed Saint Jerome arranged the Psalter in this way, as an angel of the lord taught him by the Holy Ghost. This abbreviation which follows hereafter is on account of those who have secular concerns, or those who lie in infirmity, or whose works occupy them in travel, those who sail, those who are engaged in battles, or those who are harassed by the envy of the devil, or if are molested by any other kind of tribulations; as long as

*Sayne Jerome Spaltyre* explicitly lists the classes of people for which it was written to be used. The text is devotional, but it understands that not everybody can live a life devoted exclusively to his or her spiritual health. The *Spaltyre* provides a practical solution to the complex spiritual problem of those who desire to act devoutly but whose engagement with the world prevents them from doing so.

The general tone of Thornton's religious texts is one of practical universalism. Consequently, it should not surprise us that Thornton sometimes treats prayer as a medium of exchange. We have already seen a hint of this in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* when the spirit of Guinevere's mother mentions that prayers can "purchas" a speedy journey through Purgatory. This spiritual economy returns in *Quedam Revelacio* (250v-258r), the description of a holy woman's vision of Purgatory. The dreamer has a vision of the suffering of souls in Purgatory, in which she encounters the spirit of her friend Margaret, who begs her to procure the prayers of the living in order to speed her journey to heaven. The departed spirit's requests to the dreamer are remarkably specific, and worth quoting at length:

Pou sall make to be saide for me thirttene messis, in the manere als I sall telle the." And þane scho namede a gude manned name the whilke es my confessoure: "and byd hym saye a messe of requiem for me. And he sall saye fyve dayes alle þe psalme *Miserere mei deus*. And whene he bygynnes to say *Miserere mei*, saye he þis verse fyve tymes *Miserere mei deus* alle-owt to þe Ende, with castynge vp herte & eghne to godwarde." – for þe more deuotely he says it, þe more relesede suld hir paynes be, & the gretter sold be his mede. "And whene he hase sayde this verse fyve tymes, late hym say out þe psalme: and byd hym saye þis ympne *Veni creator*

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they consecrate the Psalter daily and beg for as little as they can, even those who fast or are weakened, and who observe feast days, and who desire to make their soul safe and to have eternal life: this Psalter is to be declared regularly.] My translation.

*spiritus* to þe ende fyve dayes. Also go to thi gastely fadir, sir Iohn, & byd hym say for me three messis of þe thynyte, and Miserere mei fyve dayes, with þis ympne Veni creator spiritus and so for the ... And also sende to this fadir þe recluse of Westemynster, & byd hym synge ten messis of saynt Petir for me, & saye fyve dayes for me this psalme Miserere mei deus & þis ympne Veni creator spiritus and so for the ... And bydde hym warne dane Perse Cowme þat he saye two messis of þe haly gaste for me ... Also byd sir Richerde Bowne saye for me three messis of oure lady ... Also byde Dane Iohn Percy say for me two Messis of Alle sayntes with þis office *Gaudiamus omnes in domino &c*” (384-5)<sup>68</sup>

These instructions are so explicit that they lead us to question how *Quedam Revelacio* constructs the meaning of prayer. In *The Prevette of the Passion* and in Rolle’s affective meditations like “Of the Vertus of the haly name of Jhesu,” “Item [Richardus] de septem donis *spiritus sancti*,” and “Item [Richardus] de dilecacione in deo,” prayer and meditation are constructed as spontaneous outbursts of devotional feelings. In *Quedam Revelacio*, on the other hand, prayers are treated like a kind of spritual currency. The text posits a direct correlation between specific prayers uttered by specific people and the length of Margaret’s suffering in Purgatory: Margaret “spends” the prayers of the living to “purchase” entry to heaven. The text makes this correlation explicit near the end when Margaret says:

[I]f þou had noghte gone to Sowthwyke one pilgrimage for me in þe wyrchipe of god and of oure lady – ffor I had vowede it an might noghte do it, and þou hase done it for me, & ells I sulde full foule hafe bene lettide of my passage whene I wolde hafe bene weyhede oute of pise paynes. (391)

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<sup>68</sup> I have not been able to uncover any biographical details on the identity of Margaret’s confessors and friends.

*Quedam Revelacio* thus teaches that prayer is a kind of spiritual currency, indistinguishable from something that can be “purchased” (391), and that the living can use this currency to help speed the dead towards heaven.

Thornton’s religious texts tend to have some kind of pragmatic function. Gatrynge’s “Sermon” teaches the fundamentals of Christianity to readers who want to escape penance. *The Prevette of the Passioun* guides affective meditation in every detail. “Our Daily Work” imbues the daily activity of secular life with spiritual significance. *Sayne Ierome Spaltyre* enables worship for devout laypeople unable to take time off from their daily lives. And *Quedam Revelacio* provides a meditation on sin and the afterlife at the same time that it teaches that prayer exists within an economy of salvation. These texts are all meant to appeal to a universal audience of men, women, and children, and thus offer universally applicable catechistic, devotional, and spiritual guidance. Taken together, however, the overall mood of Thornton’s religious texts is surprisingly subjunctive. It is almost as though Thornton perceived of devotion algorithmically: as a series of “if-then” processes consisting of well-defined instructions which, when provided with the correct input, would produce a given, and desired, end state. Thornton’s romances guide the reader by providing him with models for social interaction. His religious texts mandate the knowledge to memorize, the method by which to meditate, the emotions to express, and the prayers to utter, in order to produce salvation. Because most of these texts are written in English, they would have proven to be useful as both instructional material and as reference material for not only Thornton himself, but all the members of his family interested in their spiritual health.

#### **2.4 – Thornton’s Reference Texts: Practicality and Utility**

The final booklet of the Lincoln MS contains only the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, a collection of medical recipes, and stubs that probably once held a copy of the Herbal *Betoyne and Pympernelle*.<sup>69</sup> It is not particularly surprising that neither text has been the subject of much scholarship. The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* is not a narrative, and the final text in the manuscript was identified by Keiser as *Betoyne and Pympernelle* only fairly recently, in 1996 (“Reconstructing Robert Thornton’s Herbal”). As we have seen, the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* is organized in such a way as to facilitate speedy reference. A small number of these recipes are in Latin, but the vast majority are in English. This is a text clearly designed to function as reference material for practical use.

A number of Thornton’s medical recipes contain marginal notes attesting to their efficacy. One recipe for a plaster for blurred sight or blood in the eye is tagged with the marginal note “optime” (9). One marginal note emphasises “versus notabilis,” a short Latin mnemonic on the efficacy of certain herbs in restoring vision (11.33-35). There are a number of other signs that this text was included for its practical utility. One recipe for the melting and application of iron filings for tooth-work emphasised with “nota” warns the reader that the treatment “is harde for to thole” (17.33-34). Recipes throughout this text are tagged in such a way that those which apparently had the greatest efficacy are explicitly noted as such in the margins. Likewise, a number of recipes refer to ingredients by both technical and common names, such that the reader is instructed that “playntayn” means “waybred” (17.22). The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* was meant to be extremely accessible: effective cures bear greater emphasis, ingredients are named as clearly as possible, and the remedies are organized sensibly and grouped together for ease of reference.

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<sup>69</sup> For more on *Betoyne and Pympernelle*, see Keiser, “Reconstructing Robert Thornton’s Herbal.” Reflecting on the nature of this text, Keiser reads its inclusion in Thornton’s manuscript as indicative of the broad intellectual curiosity of the middle and upper classes in fifteenth-century England (50).

Neither the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* nor what remains of *Betoyne and Pympernelle* is visually attractive. Neither contains rubricated headings, nor any other decoration. These texts are straightforward and plain – functional and utilitarian. It would therefore seem as though they are merely an appendix to Thornton’s manuscript, present only because they are practical. As counterintuitive as it may seem, however, one might even argue that the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* is the key to understanding the nature of the manuscript. The examples of the romances and instructions of the religious texts culminate in the prescriptions of these reference texts. The manuscript is thus organized into a graduated sequence of texts increasing in concreteness and specificity: the explicit prescriptive tone of the reference texts constitutes the culmination of this series in their straightforward articulation of cause-and-effect relationships. The *Liber* articulates a series of causal relationships as explicitly as possible. In doing so, it also asks the reader to meditate retrospectively upon the more subtle and profound causal relationships articulated throughout the whole manuscript.

Working through the manuscript backwards from the reference texts, we find that Thornton’s religious texts are also predominantly prescriptive, though their concerns are naturally more abstract than those of the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*. Just as the *Liber* and *Betoyne and Pympernelle* express concern with maintaining the health in the body, Thornton’s religious texts express concern with maintaining the health of the soul. Alongside the articles of faith and a series of prayers, Thornton reproduces meditative guides and treatises concerning the natures of sacred things. We can see this rhetorical expansion at work if we compare Gattrynge’s translation of the Ten Commandments in his “Sermon” to Rolle’s “A notabill tretyse off the ten commandementtys,” which itemizes and expands on the social restrictions suggested by the Decalogue. Both texts are comparatively superficial

when read alongside the nuanced and greatly expanded commentary on the nature of Decalogue restrictions presented by the *Speculum Sancti Edmundi*. The *Liber* treats corporal health transactionally; the religious texts do the same for spiritual health. The *Liber* presupposes that strict adherence to a curative will effect change in the body by means of the transference of its medical virtues just as the religious texts presuppose that prayer is a kind of currency in an economy of salvation where devotions can be exchanged for the amelioration of the state of one's soul. Even more abstract are the romances and their concern with the representation of exemplary social behaviour. These texts suggest that certain virtues facilitate the peaceful resolution of interpersonal conflict. The romances uphold the ideals of family, humility, law and justice as vitally important social values. In this sense, the romances tend to guide the reader by modelling the roots of social health.

The religious texts and the romances are tools as much as is the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*. Thornton's organization of booklets in this manuscript progresses from the abstract lessons of the romances to the concrete instructions of the *Liber*. Thornton's romances are tools for the articulation of social values, the representation of ideal social behaviour, and the maintenance of a reader's psychological health. The catechistic and religious guides and occasional prayers of the religious booklet are equally tools: designed to teach the fundamentals of the Christian faith and its practice, and thus maintain the reader's spiritual health. Broadly conceived, the manuscript is comprised of texts intended for employment in the maintenance of social, spiritual, and physical health, underlying which is a sensibility that values universal appeal and relevance. In this book, Thornton provides his readers with a clearly articulated and well-organized guide to living, telling us exactly what actions might be warranted in any situation one might encounter. But Thornton does not tell us *why* things are as they are; he saves this topic for his other book.

### Chapter 3 – British Library MS Additional 31042: Cultural Fragmentation

*Wynnere and Wastoure*, the debate poem that brings to a close the London Thornton manuscript, is incomplete. Set during the reign of Edward III, this poem's geographical setting and temporal situation are the closest in the manuscript to Thornton's own historical moment, although they are still separated by a century. Like the other debate poems in this manuscript, *Wynnere and Wastoure* is an allegorical dream poem, and it opens with the disturbing image of an imminent war:

Me thoghte I was in the werlde, I ne wuste in whate ende,

One a loueliche lande þat was ylike grene

þat laye loken by a lawe the lengthe of a myle.

In aythere holte was ane here\* in hawberkes full brighte *army*

Harde hattes appon hedes and helmys with crestys;

Brayden owte thaire baners bown for to mete;

Schowen owte of the schawes in schiltrons\* þay felle *phalanxes*

And bot the lengthe of a launde this lordes bytwene.

And alle prayed for the pese till the prynce come[.] (47-55)<sup>1</sup>

The poet soon raises the stakes when he tells us that the war we are about to witness is actually a *civil* war which we can infer from the suggestion in line 55 that both armies are waiting for the same prince. Even worse, we are told that it is a civil war among Englishmen, since the prince's cabin above the battlefield is decorated with "Ynglysse besantes" (61), and painted with garters ringed with the "sawe appon Ynglysse tonge,/ 'Hethyng haue the hathell þat any harme thynkes," an English translation of the Middle French phrase *honi soit qui mal*

<sup>1</sup> All quotations taken from the edition prepared by Stephanie Trigg.

*y pense*, the motto of the Order of the Garter (67-68). To clear any doubts in the reader's mind, the poet continues by describing the king's shield:

.....casten full clenly in quarters foure;

Two with flowres of Fraunse before and behynde

And two out of Ynglonde with ofraised bestes

Thre leberdes one lofte and thre on lowe vndir. (77-80)

For the third time in twenty lines, the poet tells us we are reading a poem about England. The basis of this civil war is ideological. One side, represented by *Wynnere*, believes that the best course of action for the English economy is to amass wealth. The opposing side, represented by *Wastoure*, believes that the economy is best served by lavish spending. The king wisely prevents the conflict from escalating when he channels the interests of both parties towards facilitating his imminent war with France.

The London manuscript tells us why things happen as they do. In cases of cultural fragmentation such as *Wynnere and Wastoure*'s imminent civil war, we see that diversity is potentially pernicious. However, we also see in the king's employment of both parties that a diverse society is more flexible than one that is not. The lesson here is that diversity produces chaos only when those who follow competing, mutually exclusive ideologies cannot agree. It is surprising that order cannot solve the problem of diversity: in *Wynnere and Wastoure*, both parties' attempts to impose order produce chaos instead because their ideological stances are incompatible. In the king's decision to channel the disputants' antagonism towards a shared goal, we can see that diversity is mediated by harmony, that harmony is produced by common goals, and that strife is the inevitable product of unmediated ideological competition. As we shall see, these will be the dominant themes of the London manuscript.

### 3.1 – Organizational Features

The London manuscript has not traditionally been seen to be as well organized as the Lincoln manuscript. Unlike the Lincoln manuscript, the London manuscript does not subdivide easily into booklets containing texts of a relatively homogenous genre and tone. Watermark evidence shows that texts in both manuscripts were copied onto shared paper stocks, suggesting that Thornton was busy accumulating texts that he distributed among his books only at a later stage in their production, and the poor condition of folios at the beginning of some of the gatherings suggests that this process was in some cases quite protracted.<sup>2</sup> This corresponds with Ralph Hanna's suggestion that Thornton's access to copy-texts was inconsistent and that his copying process was piecemeal ("Growth"). Thompson, while agreeing that the manuscript was built up gradually, offers a somewhat different explanation, suggesting that "Thornton's second miscellany became some kind of 'overflow' volume once the Lincoln manuscript had taken on a definite tripartite 'shape'" (*Robert Thornton* 68-69).<sup>3</sup> Thompson finds the manuscript's most coherent textual sequence in its first 73 folios (quires **A-D**), which contain the linked narrative sequence of *Cursor Mundi*, *The Northern Passion*, and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, followed by *The Siege of Milan* (48). Even within the limited context of the opening sequence, Thompson doubts the significance of Thornton's contribution to its coherence, arguing that it is "easy to overstress ... Thornton's personal responsibility for the creation of this sequence" (48). Johnston, on the

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<sup>2</sup> See Stern, Horrall "A New Collation" and "The Watermarks," Hanna "A Corrected Collation," and Thompson, *Robert Thornton*.

<sup>3</sup> As I have mentioned above, the scholarly consensus on Thornton's compilation process is that he worked on texts now in both manuscripts simultaneously, cf. 15n17.

other hand, has recently suggested, and rightly so, that the opening sequence of the manuscript is intentional, writing:

Thornton has crafted a Christian historiographical schema for the opening of this volume ... at times – *as in the opening sequence of his London manuscript* – one can glimpse Thornton’s intentions and one can be relatively certain that he meant for a series of texts to be read in a particular order towards a particular thematic/literary end. (“Robert Thornton and *The Siege of Jerusalem*” 136).

Based on the organization of the Lincoln manuscript, we know that Thornton tended to organize his texts into particular thematic or literary clusters. And because Thornton worked on both of his books simultaneously, the textual sequence at the opening of the London manuscript was probably intentional.

Suzanne Conklin Akbari, S.H.A. Shepherd, Dorothee Metlitzki, and most recently Michael Johnston all agree that the opening sequence (by which they mean the first 97 folios, with *Roland and Otuel* added to Thompson’s coherent opening sequence) of the London manuscript defines Christendom as a culture unified against Jews and Muslims, in a stark binary worldview.<sup>4</sup> However, the relationship between the opening sequence and the remainder of the manuscript has been largely overlooked. Because Thornton copied the texts found in both manuscripts simultaneously, it is unlikely that the London manuscript is the “overflow volume” Thompson suggests it is. Thompson, while agreeing that the manuscripts were copied simultaneously, states that the London manuscript was a secondary concern – a book that “seems to have evolved in an ad hoc fashion as Thornton obtained the written materials that enabled him to continue his copying activities” (“Another Look” 170).

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<sup>4</sup> Mills also sees a “meaningful grouping” in this textual arrangement, also broadly historical and thematic, but does not see stark binarism (*Six Middle English Romances* 196-97).

Thompson's suggestion is unlikely. We have seen that the Lincoln manuscript was organized by a competent compiler, and it is unlikely that Thornton suddenly became incompetent during the compilation process or that he cared less about this volume than about the Lincoln manuscript. It is more likely that the London manuscript is, or was, as well-organized and thematically unified as its counterpart.<sup>5</sup> As we shall see, the Christian-historiographical schema that observed in the opening sequence continues, broadly, throughout the whole manuscript, and this history can be characterized by the progressive fragmentation of Christian society.

In *Robert Thornton and the London Thornton Manuscript*, Thompson's rigorous analysis and reconstruction of the collation of the London manuscript builds on the earlier work of Stern, Horall, and Hanna by accounting for all available qualities that might indicate the original form of the book, including literary evidence, fragments of catchwords that survived cropping, watermarks, and patterns of chain indentations in the paper. Based on these features, Thompson divides the manuscript into the following sections:

|              |                                                                                |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fols. 3-32   | Extracts from <i>Cursor Mundi</i>                                              |
| Fols. 33-97  | "An amorphous cluster of material, some of which is fragmentary"               |
| Fols. 98-124 | "An extraordinarily large and fragmentary gathering"                           |
| Fols. 125-68 | The Romances of <i>Richard Coer de Lyon</i> and <i>Ipokrephum</i> <sup>6</sup> |

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<sup>5</sup> Thompson provides us with the only assertion to the contrary in his supposition that "the unfinished copy of *Richard* [Coer de Lyon] was available, but simply not selected, when Thornton finally began to assemble his 'romance' material for the Lincoln manuscript" (*Robert Thornton* 68). This assertion is unlikely for two reasons. First, the quire on which *Richard* was written shares paper stock only with the quire following it (containing *Wynnere and Wastoure*), and shares no paper with stock found in the Lincoln MS. And second, *Richard* is such a long and lively poem that Thornton would surely have found a way to put it in the Lincoln MS if he found it appropriate to do so, as he evidently did with the *Prose Alexander*.

<sup>6</sup> For some reason, *The Romance of the childhode of Jhesu Christe þat clerkes callys Ipokrephum* is often referred to by critics as "*Ypokrephum*."

Fols. 169-81      *The Parlement of the Thre Ages and Wynnere and  
Wastoure* (35)

It is evident from his language that Thompson finds little discernible order in the London manuscript. Thompson's sense that the manuscript is haphazard in part stems from his frustration with the British Library staff who did not keep records when they mounted the book's pages on paper strips and re-bound it in 1972 (9). One of Thompson's evident concerns is that the absence of records of the original gathering structure. Although much of this data can be recovered from analysis of the paper stocks, this absence makes it difficult to determine how much of *Cursor Mundi* Thornton initially copied and what the motivation might have been for the "amorphous" gatherings between folios 33 and 124.

It is clear that folio 3 was not intended to be the first page of *Cursor Mundi*. There is neither a title nor a heading on this page. The first large initial does not appear until the second column; the first line of text, "it was wele kid þar-bi and sene" (*Cursor Mundi* 10630), is clearly a fragment of a phrase whose rhyme matches a previous line, now lost in this witness. Thompson suggests that because Thornton tended to construct large gatherings, "it is possible to argue for the almost total loss here of three large, probably unevenly sized gatherings" which would make up 70 to 75 leaves of lost text, a number sufficient to conclude that Thornton might have copied the whole of *Cursor Mundi* (22). Thompson acknowledges in a note that:

A less attractive possibility is that the loss here might be restricted to the portion of *Cursor Mundi* that deals with the beginning of the fifth age of the world (i.e. the birth and early life of the Virgin described in ll.9229-10629). By this reckoning, only about one thousand four hundred lines may be missing from the Thornton copy ... this much

smaller number of missing lines could probably have been accommodated comfortably on nine or ten more leaves. (22n2)<sup>7</sup>

Hardman argues convincingly that Thompson's "less attractive possibility" is the more likely because a full copy of the poem would have been twice as long as any other text attempted by Thornton, a copy beginning at line 9229 would have run to around fifty pages, about the same length as *Richard*, the *Prose Alexander*, or the *Morte Arthure* ("Reading the Spaces" 257). Furthermore, since the *Prose Alexander* is the only text Thornton copies which treats an era before the birth of Christ, it seems unlikely that Thornton copied the whole poem. *Cursor Mundi* is comprehensive and long, comprising in its entirety nearly 30,000 lines of verse. Thornton replaces the Passion sequence of *Cursor Mundi* with his copy of *The Northern Passion*, which suggests he preferred this more engaging account of the story to version in *Cursor Mundi*.

Although we cannot know how much of *Cursor Mundi* Thornton originally copied, his exemplar probably contained the entire text.<sup>8</sup> Thornton therefore probably had the opportunity to read it in its entirety. If he did, he would have been familiar with its opening sequence, which recounts the various kinds of popular romance, categorized by protagonist. The author of *Cursor Mundi* recognizes that he is working against popular taste, and offers this text as a moral corrective – an alternative reading programme:

Man yhermes rimes for to here,

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<sup>7</sup> *Cursor Mundi* brings together the many events of history under St. Augustine's conception of the "seven ages" of history. The first age is from Creation to the time of Noah; the second age is from the Flood to the confusion of tongues; the third age is from the time of Abraham until the death of Saul; the fourth, from the reign of David to the Captivity of Judah; the fifth is from the birth of the Virgin to the time of John the Baptist; the sixth is from the baptism of Jesus to the present day, and the seventh is the Final Judgment. By following this model, *Cursor Mundi*, taken as a whole, can be considered to be a complete synopsis of sacred history.

<sup>8</sup> The four MSS collated by Morris all contain the prologue. Horall's edition expands on Morris's work by describing all known MS copies of the poem; only Thornton's MS and the Edinburgh, Royal College of Physicians MS do not contain the prologue (13-23). The Edinburgh fragment is incorrectly bound, but because its text begins on line 18989, during the passion sequence Thornton replaces, it is not analogous.

And romans red on maneres sere, (1-2)<sup>9</sup>

\* \* \*

Storis als o ferekin thinges

O princes, prelates and o kynges;

Sanges sere of selcuth rime,

Inglis, frankys, and latine,

To rede and here Ilkon is prest,

Be thinges þat þam likes best.

Be wisman wil o wisdom here,

Be foul hym draghus to foly nere,

Be wrang to here o right is lath,

And pride wyt buxsumnes is wrath;

O chastite has lichur leth

On charite ai werrais wreth;

Bot be the fruit may scilwis se,

O quat vertu is ilka tre

Of alkyn fruit þat man schal fynd

He fettes fro þe rote his kind.

O gode pertre coms god peres,

Wers tre, vers fruit it beres (21-38)

\* \* \*

And to þoo speke I alþer-mast

Þat won in vnuark\* es to wast

*idle work*

---

<sup>9</sup> Quotation taken from Morris' edition, from the text of London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A.III.

Pair liif in trofel and truandis,  
 To be ware wit þat self and wis,  
 Sumquat vnto þat thing to tent,  
 Þat al þar mode might wit amend.  
 Ful il hayl þai þat spending spend  
 Þat findes na frote þar-of at end. (251-58)

The *Cursor*-poet compares his work to romance as a literary genre and, while he concedes that each of us is most likely to read “Þe thinges þat þam likes best,” argues that one’s choice of reading material reflects on one’s state of wisdom or moral rectitude. In particular, the poet addresses the *Cursor* to those prone to wasting their time in “vnuark” in order to encourage them to read something that will amend their state. Although *Cursor Mundi* is a history, its prologue suggests it was written as an intermediate text meant to direct readers of romance towards religious literature. If Thornton agreed with the *Cursor*-poet’s assessment of romance, the romances in this manuscript may have been meant for some purpose other than strictly entertainment.<sup>10</sup>

Because *Cursor Mundi*’s history is biblical, its historical scope is limited by what accounts can be found in the Bible itself. This leaves a large gap in the Sixth Age (from the time of Jesus to the present day), a period of history whose duration is by definition unknowable because it is not biblically determined. By Thornton’s time, this period would have been over fourteen centuries long. The chronological organization of the texts which follow *Cursor Mundi* suggests that he may have organized the London manuscript so that its other narrative poems fill in this gap.

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<sup>10</sup> I will discuss the distribution of the romances in more detail in Chapter 4.

Turning to folios 33-97, the textual cluster Thompson describes as “amorphous,” a closer examination of the links between the texts suggests it is not amorphous at all. The first two items in this cluster, *The Northern Passion* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, form an uninterrupted narrative sequence ending on folio 66r. It is clear that *The Northern Passion* is meant to follow *Cursor Mundi* because on folio 32r Thornton composes and inserts a colophon connecting the two texts:

ffor faste now neghes to þe need

ffor to suffre his passyoun

Another boke spekes of þat rawnsoune

ffor now I thynke of this make ende

And to þe passyoun will I wende

Anothir boke to bygynn

And I may to my purpose wynn<sup>11</sup>

.....

Et sic procedendum ad passionem

domini nostri Ihesu Christi que incipit in folio

proximo sequente secundam ffantiam scriptoris.<sup>12</sup>

Thompson observes that the Passion-sequence in *Cursor Mundi* changes metre from octosyllabic lines to a septenary metre characteristic of thirteenth-century didactic clerical verse intended for religious instruction, noting that “one of the great disadvantages of using

<sup>11</sup> Thompson provides a comparison of this passage with that of another, uninterrupted, version of *Cursor Mundi*, making it evident that Thornton inserts the line referring to “another boke” (*Robert Thornton* 50). Thompson also agrees that Thornton is most likely responsible for the colophons in the opening section of the MS (51-52).

<sup>12</sup> [And so proceeds the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ which begins on the following page, according to the mental image of the scribe.] NB: Thomson translates *fantiam* as “purpose” based on the vernacular use of the word in fifteenth century England (*Robert Thornton* 52).

regular septenaries is the deadening effect that they can have on a narrative” (*Robert Thornton* 49-50). Thornton may have substituted in *The Northern Passion* for *Cursor Mundi*’s Passion-sequence because it is a more exciting rendition of the story. Because the metrical romances also tend to be octosyllabic, it is also possible that Thornton preferred *The Northern Passion* because its metre is more consistent with that used in *Cursor Mundi* and in the romances. As Thompson suggests, Thornton’s *ffantasia scriptoris*, or editorial prerogative, manifests in the substitution of *Cursor Mundi*’s Passion sequence with the more direct, less homiletic, and more metrically homogenous *Northern Passion* to present a more directly engaging narrative to his readers (50-52).<sup>13</sup> In the transition from *Cursor Mundi* to *The Northern Passion*, Thornton primes us to read his book as an historical sequence.

Thornton extends his historical sequence further by connecting *The Northern Passion* to *The Siege of Jerusalem*. The incipit to *The Siege of Jerusalem*, which reads “Hic incipit Destruccio Jerusalem quomodo Titus & Vaspasianus obsederunt & distruxerunt Jerusalem et vindicarunt mortem domini Ihesu Christi” (fol. 50r),<sup>14</sup> reminds us that Titus and Vespasian engage in a war of revenge over the death of Christ, whose suffering the reader would have read immediately beforehand, in the *Northern Passion*.<sup>15</sup> There is also a more explicit connection between the two narratives. Thornton’s copy of the text contains a 54-line-long episode extant only in this witness describing Jesus’s encounter with a woman who takes an impression of his bloody face, in order that it bear a true witness to his mortal visage for posterity as the relic called the Vernicle:

And als the Iewes led Ihesu thurgh þe strete

<sup>13</sup> See also Frances Foster’s notes to his edition of the poem, II.1-3 [Volume I contains only the four parallel texts; Volume II contains the introduction and notes].

<sup>14</sup> [Here begins the Destruction of Jerusalem; how Titus and Vespasian besieged and destroyed Jerusalem and avenged the death of Lord Jesus Christ.]

<sup>15</sup> Johnston draws our attention to the incipit in “The Sociology of Middle English Romance” 223.

A mayden of þe countre gan þay mete  
Scho was callede Maydene Sydonye  
And borne scho was in Bethanye  
And to the Cete haued scho thoghte  
To selle a clathe þat scho hafed wroghte.  
Scho mett Ihesu at þat tyme  
Als he was ledde to his pyne

.....

He saide laye thi clathe vnto my face  
And I sall sett þer one my merke  
In alle þis werlde ne es swilk a werke  
ffor this merke þou maye hafe  
Thi warysoun and þou will it craue.  
Whene Ihesu hauede this worde sayde  
That clothe till his face scho layde  
Than scho layde it to Ihesus face  
And in þat clathe was goddess grace  
Ihesus face als verraye  
Als he was leuyand mane þat daye.

.....

And sythyne the pape of rome it aughte  
And thedir was it with processyoun broghte  
The pape hir gaffe hir warysoun  
Whene it was broghte to Rome towne.

3itt es the face at Rome I wysse  
 And the vernycle haldyne es.  
 Wha so will to Rome pilgrim be  
 Thare thay may þe sothe see. (fol. 46v)<sup>16</sup>

This episode provides a direct link between *The Northern Passion* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*. In the prologue to the *Siege*, Nathan of Greece, a merchant recently come to Rome from the Holy Land, is asked to recount the story of the Gospel to Titus, and when he does so he includes an account of the creation of the Vernicle:

That ilke worthily woman that I firste nemynded  
 Hase his vesage in a vayle and veronyke scho highte  
 Enpryntede preualy and playne þat no poynte ne wantes  
 ffor luffe he lefte it hir with un till hir lyfes ende  
 Thare es no grefe on this grownde ne gome so grym woundide  
 Meselrye ne meschefe that mane hafe one erthe  
 That knelis downe to that clothe and in criste byleues  
 Bot alle happyns thaym the hele with in ane hand while (165-72)<sup>17</sup>

Nathan's account of the Vernicle is the final part of his retelling of the story of Christ; Vespasian converts and is healed as soon as he hears of it. This episode is important enough that Thornton or one of his readers marked it out with a marginal note on folio 52r reading "veronyke."<sup>18</sup> Thornton, through his *ffantasiā scriptoris*, connects *Cursor Mundi* to *The*

<sup>16</sup> The entire episode can be found in volume 1 of Frances Foster's edition, pp.180-81.

<sup>17</sup> I quote directly from the manuscript, and silently emend scribal abbreviations. Line references are to the edition edited by Hanna and Lawton.

<sup>18</sup> This is the only marginal note in the whole poem, which suggests it was particularly significant. Aside from offering a narrative connection between *The Northern Passion* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, the Vernicle is also mentioned numerous times in the *Morte Arthure* (297, 309, 348, 386).

*Northern Passion* and *The Siege of Jerusalem* in order to present the time from the Birth of the Virgin to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD as a continuous narrative.

The texts which follow *The Siege of Jerusalem* are not so tightly linked. The Charlemagne romances of *The Siege of Milan* (66v-79v) and *Roland and Otuel* (82r-94r) which follow *The Siege of Jerusalem* are clearly meant to stand together as a narrative unit. A number of shorter items fill out the gathering. Thompson explains the insertion of *O florum flos* on folios 80 and 81 (between the two Charlemagne romances) as the result of the insertion of the two leaves on which the poem was already written into the gathering some time between the copying of the two romances (46). Three of the remaining texts in this gathering, “*Passionis Christi Cantus*” (fols. 94r-96r), “Verses on the Kings of England” (96r-96v) and “The Dietary” (97r-97v) were composed by John Lydgate, which suggests the beginning of another unit: a “Lydgate Section” of the manuscript. Such a section is consistent with Thornton’s tendency to compile his texts in clusters. By summarizing the history of English kings from William the Conqueror to Edward I, Thornton’s copy of “Verses on the Kings of England” continues the historical sequence that *Cursor Mundi* begins. Moreover, the placement of “Verses on the Kings of England” between *Roland and Otuel* and *Richard Coer de Lyon* directs the historical narrative towards England when William is “made kyng by conquest of Brutes Albion” (4).

Now that we have accounted for Thompson’s first “amorphous cluster of material,” we can see that it is far from it. To the contrary, even Thornton’s “Lydgate Section” participates, if only somewhat, within the historical schema that characterizes the opening of the manuscript. It remains now to turn our attention towards folios 98-124, Thompson’s “large and fragmentary gathering.” In this gathering we find two more Lydgate items, “Virtues of the Mass” (103r-110v) and “The Three Kings of Cologne” (111r-119v), as well

as a number of “songs” on various topics and a number of religious lyrics. Thompson suggests that it is likely that Thornton copied all five of the Lydgate items together as a distinct literary sequence because they are all on “devotional, moral, historical and didactic themes” (42-43). This assessment is vague. Only “Passionis Christi Cantus” can be meaningfully described as a devotional text, and the rest are mainly historical and didactic. The four “songs” on folios 120r-124v also form discrete stylistic units; the first two songs are in eight-line rhyming stanzas, the next two are in twelve-line stanzas. Stylistically, there is no good reason why Thornton would place the “Prayer to the Guardian Angel” (101v), written in rhyming couplets, between the complex thirteen-line-stanza alliterative poems *The Quatrefoil of Love* (98r-101v) and “Haue Mercy of Me” (102r-102v).<sup>19</sup> Although all of the texts in this quire follow the didactic tone of the “Lydgate section” on folios 94-97, the order of the texts appears to be uncharacteristically disorganized, but it was not always so.

The problem lies with Thompson’s present quire **F**, which seems uncharacteristic of Thornton. Noting the effects of damage to the paper, Thompson suggests that the current state of the manuscript is consistent with Thornton having rearranged his texts at the last minute in order to envelop damaged paper with undamaged paper, thus protecting his copies of “The Three Kings of Cologne” and “Virtues of the Mass,” which were deteriorating from dirt and dampness (36-46). Thompson posits the existence of an earlier stage of production by developing a hypothetical quire **E** and an original quire **F**, as below:

Quire **E**:

|                                    |                         |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 103 <sup>r</sup> -110 <sup>v</sup> | “Virtues of the Mass”   |
| 110 <sup>v</sup>                   | <i>The Rose of Ryse</i> |

<sup>19</sup> Gollancz and Weale, in their edition of *The Quatrefoil of Love*, and Fein, in her edition of “Haue Mercy of Me,” both advance this point.

111<sup>r</sup>-119<sup>v</sup> “The Three Kings of Cologne”

Quire F:

120<sup>r</sup>-122<sup>r</sup> *A louely song of wysdome* (a.k.a. “Proverbs of Solomon”)

112<sup>v</sup>-123<sup>r</sup> *A song how þat Mercy passeth Rightwisnes*

123<sup>r</sup>-123<sup>v</sup> *A songe how mercy commes bifore þe jugement*

123<sup>v</sup>-124<sup>v</sup> *A songe how that mercy passeth alle thynges*

98<sup>r</sup>-101<sup>v</sup> *The Quatrefoil of Love*

101<sup>v</sup> Prayer to the Guardian Angel

102<sup>r</sup>-102<sup>v</sup> Paraphrase of 51<sup>st</sup> psalm [i.e.: “Haue Mercy of Me”] (41 fig.11)<sup>20</sup>

The implications of this reconstruction are significant. Among the texts on folios 94-97 (which precedes the gathering under discussion) are three other Lydgate items: “*Passionis Christi Cantus*,” “Verses on the Kings of England,” and “The Dietary.” Combined with “Virtues of the Mass” and “The Three Kings of Cologne,” Thornton evidently intended for his manuscript to include a twenty-five-page-long Lydgate sequence. The four “songs” (fols. 120-124) and the two alliterative poems (fols. 98-102) also clearly constitute recognizable textual sequences. All of these items are grouped like with like, which is consistent not only with Thornton’s treatment of texts in the Lincoln manuscript but also with the linked textual sequence with which the London manuscript begins.

The last two gatherings also contain meaningful textual clusters. If the London manuscript was organized only by genre, *Richard Coer de Lyon* (125r-163v) would have fitted quite well immediately after the two Charlemagne romances, but its current placement fits better when we consider its role in Thornton’s Christian historiographical schema. Based

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<sup>20</sup> I keep the present foliation in this table for clarity.

on Thompson's reconstruction above, we can see that that this portion of the manuscript is also organized formally and thematically. *Richard* and *The Romance of the childehode of Jhesu Christe þat clerkes callys Ipokrephum* (163v-168v) are both written in couplets. Admittedly, *Ipokrephum* seems to fit better within the context of the extended religious-historical opening sequence of this manuscript than it does here. Thornton may originally have intended for this text to replace the Childhood of Christ sequence of *Cursor Mundi*, just as *The Northern Passion* replaced its Passion sequence. Or perhaps he saw a connection between both poems on account of their treatment of significant protagonists as integrated into broader communities (as I will suggest in Chapter 4).

The final items in the London manuscript are the two alliterative debate poems *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* (169r-176v) and *Wynnere and Wastoure* (176v-181v). These poems are quite similar in their language and tone. Both poems present inconclusive debates between personified abstract concepts. Moreover, because *Wynnere and Wastoure*, the final poem in the manuscript, is set in Edward III's England, it participates in the manuscript's historical sequence by approaching Thornton's own country in his own time. The manuscript's contents can thus be organized as follows:

|                  |                                                           |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Fols. 3r-66r:    | An extended religious-historical sequence                 |
| Fols. 66v-97r:   | Two Charlemagne romances, religious and historical filler |
| Fols. 97r-124v:  | Didactic poems and songs (including most Lydgate items)   |
| Fols. 125r-168v: | <i>Richard Coer de Lyon</i> and <i>Ipokrephum</i>         |
| Fols. 169r-181v: | Alliterative debate poems                                 |

We can see that the London manuscript contains a series of textual clusters, from its religious-historical opening sequence, to its tail-rhyme Charlemagne romances, its histories and didactic texts, its two metrical romances, and the alliterative debate poems.

*Cursor Mundi* institutes a survey of Christian history that provides a sense of order to the manuscript, and the rest of its contents largely follow the chronological arrangement of the opening sequence.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the sequence from *The Siege of Jerusalem* to the Charlemagne romances marks a geographical transition northwards and westwards from the setting of *Cursor Mundi* and *The Northern Passion*, suggesting the manuscript is arranged geographically. I will return to both possibilities in Section 3.2, below. The organization of the London manuscript suggests Thornton resisted the opposition between religious literature and romance set up by the *Cursor*-poet, and that he preferred instead to present his readers with a book integrating the interests of sacred history, didactic literature, and romance.

Recent critical appraisals of the London manuscript have focused mainly on the more obviously organized portion of the manuscript and its romances. Emily Lynn Leverett's 2006 dissertation, "Holy Bloodshed: Violence and Christian Piety in the London Thornton Manuscript," examines the first three romances in the manuscript, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, *The Siege of Milan*, and *Roland and Otuel*, arguing that they employ violence performed on behalf of Christianity as an expression of the meditative and devotional aspects of *Cursor Mundi*, *The Northern Passion*, *O florum flos*, and Lydgate's *Passionis Christi Cantus*. Leverett argues that the juxtaposition of these meditative texts with the crusading romances reflects a twofold movement, from the far-away past towards contemporary chivalric values, and from the "unattainable divinity of Christ himself to the more manageable expression of faith of real characters" (179). She therefore reads these romances as texts which draw upon the image of the body of Christ to look towards a "fantasy of belonging" to a universal

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<sup>21</sup> As I have mentioned above, most students of this MS agree on this point, at least with respect to the opening sequence (Stern, Leverett, Johnston). Phillipa Hardman's studies comparing Thornton's scribal practice to that of his contemporaries demonstrate convincingly that Thornton had a remarkably sophisticated grasp of narrative structure ("*The Sege of Melayne*: A Fifteenth-Century Reading," "Fitt Divisions"). Pace Thompson, it is more likely that the danger with Thornton is to understress his contributions rather than to overstress them.

Christian community linked through meditation on the Passion (215). Leverett argues that religious warfare can be read as a manifestation of devotional practice. Reading the violence of these romances as expressions of sympathetic meditation on Christ's Passion enables her to explore the conflicts between Christians and Jews or Muslims, and to argue that orthodox Christianity in England sometimes required violence to dominate symbolically threatening groups or ideologies (ii). In the London manuscript, this thread of religious devotion runs through *Cursor Mundi*, *The Northern Passion*, *O florum flos* and *Passionis Christi Cantus* in such a way that "Thornton blends affective piety and chivalric violence, creating a fantasy of orthodox devotion that allows for the contemplative meditation on Christ's Passion and an active display of violence through prowess" (Leverett 18). Leverett thus concludes that the manuscript offers a vision of a monolithic Christian culture.

Leverett makes a powerful case for the theological implications of *The Siege of Jerusalem*, *The Siege of Milan*, and *Roland and Otuel*, but there are many other texts in the manuscript she does not read. By limiting her study to "the three romances in the opening section of Robert Thornton's fifteenth century manuscript" (1), Leverett overlooks the many texts in the manuscript which do not link affective piety with chivalric violence. "The Three Kings of Cologne" provides an account of the establishment of the Greek Orthodox Church, yet does not assert the superiority of Roman Christianity. Moreover, the most intense conflict in *Richard Coer de Lyon* is not between Christians and Saracens, but between the English and the French. Finally, *Wynnere and Wastoure* suggests that even within a relatively circumscribed cultural community such as the court of an English king, ideological conflicts produce irreparable social divisions. Thus, in the London manuscript the fantasy of a monolithic Christian culture is realized only briefly and quickly undermined.

The Lincoln manuscript provides us with sufficient evidence that Thornton was sympathetic towards affective piety, as we can find in its collection of texts by Rolle, prayers of affective meditation, and Pseudo-Bonaventurian tracts such as *The Prevette of the Passioun*. Such texts, however, are far from dominant in the London manuscript. For the most part, the London manuscript's "religious" items are meant to be didactic rather than devotional. Lydgate's "Dietary," "Virtues of the Mass," and "The Three Kings of Cologne" explain the reason and meaning behind various religious practices, but do not directly guide devotion. Moreover, the various "songs" on the primacy of mercy and *The Quatrefoil of Love* do not teach us how to pray. Instead, they tell us why we might want to. And although there is indeed a religious component to some of the positions taken by the debaters in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, and *Wynnere and Wastoure*, neither poem explicitly supports any specific view of devotion. If, as Leverett suggests, the romances at the beginning of the London manuscript respond to orthodox fifteenth-century practices of religious devotion as outlined in works such as Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (177-79), then we are left to wonder why Thornton does not include a guide to such devotional practices in the London manuscript as he does in the Lincoln manuscript. We are also left to wonder why Thornton would subvert this theme by having the second half of his manuscript depict the development of heterodoxy and schism in both religious and secular thought.

In his 2007 dissertation "The Sociology of Middle English Romance," Johnston contends that the link between religion and violence in this manuscript is based primarily on an "aggressive religiosity" characterized by a punitive desire to witness the suffering of Jewish and Christian bodies (211). Like Leverett, Johnston sees the London manuscript sharing Lincoln's emphasis on affective piety, except that the London manuscript turns its focus away from private ethics and towards the celebration of "the muscular exertion of the

Christian faith, with a particular focus on erasing competing religious systems” (214).

Johnston draws attention to the stark morality of inter-religious warfare displayed by the London romances as a way in which readers may have been encouraged to imagine that Christian victory would be inevitable (214). Where Leverett sees the romances in the London manuscript as animated mainly by a desire to produce devotional hegemony, Johnston sees a “genocidal ... logic” (216), and reads the London romances as a series of texts which paradoxically desire to erase from existence the Jews and Muslims whose presence provide Christians the impetus to express their devotion with righteous violence (211-16). Johnston suggests that the London romances resolve this problem of affect in a fundamentally different way than do most fifteenth-century English texts of affective piety, functioning as it does “in quite a different ideological register” than more orthodox texts “which come to fruition in the private, intimate relationship between the reader and Christ” (216).

Johnston’s reading, however, does not fully account for the entire manuscript, and indeed is largely based on the first five quires, limiting his scope to the sequence of texts from *Cursor Mundi* to *Roland and Otuel*, the first 97 folios of the manuscript (218-19). Johnston discusses the first half of this manuscript in terms of its chronological organization as tracing “the history of Christian salvation from its originary moment” (219). However, his reading overlooks Thornton’s evident comfort with representations of cultural heterogeneity, as seen in “The Three Kings of Cologne,” *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, and *Wynnere and Wastoure*. Moreover, Johnston dismisses *Ipokrephum* as redundant because it repeats the story of a similar episode in Thornton’s copy of *Cursor Mundi* (264-65). In doing so, he overlooks the different narrative focus taken by *Ipokrephum*. Unlike the Childhood of Christ sequence in *Cursor Mundi*, *Ipokrephum* spends much of its time depicting Mary’s merciful intercessions which will ultimately teach her son the values of pity and grace; this is a poem

that resists stark categorical judgments. Thornton returns to the values of pity and grace elsewhere in the manuscript, most notably in *The Quatrefoil of Love* and in the three “songs” on the primacy of mercy on folios 112v-124v. Although he often depicts aggressive religiosity, there is considerable evidence that he does not support it unquestioningly.

Leverett and Johnston provide us with the two most recent assessments of the London Thornton manuscript, but neither discusses the whole book. The London Thornton manuscript presents the reader with a largely coherent historical sequence that rewards sequential reading. Thornton compiles a history that approaches his own time and place, moving from the roots of Christianity to the present day as it travels from the Middle East, to Europe, and then to England. Moreover, the manuscript is progressive: the societies depicted are neither ahistorical nor static. Because both books were produced concurrently, Thornton would have no good reason to duplicate his work by producing another book that imagines the world as it ought to be. Instead, he produces a book that not only treats the world as it is, but also tells us why things are as they are. Although he initially depicts a unified Christian community, unity is always only temporary. Rather, Thornton’s histories bear witness to the power of ideological conflict to fracture a culture irreparably.

### **3.2 – Christian History, Narrative and Romance (3r-50r and *Ipokrephum*)**

The opening section of the London manuscript presents its reader with a coherent and chronologically organized historical narrative from the Birth of the Virgin to the destruction of the Second Temple. Thornton organizes his texts chronologically and draws attention to the serial history he compiles with the colophon linking *Cursor Mundi* to *The Northern*

*Passion*. Although many of the items in the manuscript do not treat a particular chronological moment, all those that do, besides *Ipokrephum*, occur in chronological order.

The narratives in the London manuscript tend to be situated historically. For medieval readers, romances and hagiographies were often also read as histories, since both genres situate their contemporary audiences in relation to a distant past (Hiatt 175-76). It is thus worth considering how all of Thornton's texts participate in the writing of history. The sequence from *Cursor Mundi* to *The Northern Passion* to *The Siege of Jerusalem* treats events from the birth of the Virgin in the last quarter of the first century BC to the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Sidney J. Herritage notes in the introduction to his edition of the two Charlemagne romances that a historical reading of these poems would place them around the years 776 or 777 (xiii). Thornton's copy of Lydgate's "Verses on the Kings of England" provides short histories of English kings from William the Conqueror through Edward I, who ruled until his death in 1307.<sup>22</sup> "The Three Kings of Cologne," beginning with the Journey of the Magi, recounts time to the events leading up to the East-West Schism of 1054 that led to the establishment of the Orthodox Church and continues through to the translation of the relics of the Magi to Cologne in 1164, anticipating Richard's introduction to Greek Christian culture in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, which would have taken place between 1189 and 1192. The manuscript ends with a copy of *Wynnere and Wastoure*, which contains topical references to the court of Edward III in the 1340s. Except for *Ipokrephum*, the manuscript's narratives render history sequentially, from the time of Christ towards the time of its inscription.

If Thornton indeed intended to organize this manuscript historically, we must account for the anomalous placement of *The Romance of the childhode of Ihesu Christe þat clerkes*

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<sup>22</sup> The poem is fragmentary. Assuming that only one leaf is wanting, because Thornton's copy has 37 lines per page, 74 lines are missing. Thornton therefore probably copied the poem through the reign of Henry V, or even Henry VI if he cramped his writing.

*callys Ipokrephum*. As Johnston notes, the copy of *Ipokrephum* in the manuscript renders the childhood section of *Cursor Mundi* redundant (“Sociology” 264-65). While these two texts are similar, *Ipokrephum* is more concerned with demonstrating the importance of the relationship between Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in Jesus’s moral upbringing. By contrast, this section of the *Cursor* focuses more on demonstrating Jesus’s ability to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. *Ipokrephum*’s narrative is less episodic than that of the *Cursor*. Moreover, it humanizes the story by naming minor characters where the *Cursor* does not. Many of these characters appear elsewhere in the New Testament, and all of them recur in *The Northern Passion*. *Ipokrephum* includes scenes such as Barabbas’s attempt to rape Mary (43-64), Jesus’s killing and resurrection of Judas (149-92), and Jesus’s theological dispute with Caiaphas (193-253).<sup>23</sup> Because these characters all have significant roles throughout Jesus’s life, *Ipokrephum*’s Holy Land becomes a living world, and not just a backdrop against which Jesus performs miracles (as it is in *Cursor Mundi*). In the Lincoln manuscript, Thornton copies many texts concerned with representing the dynamics of family life. Because *Ipokrephum* concerns itself with the representation of family life far more than with the ways Jesus fulfills Jewish prophecy, he may have intended to have it replace the Childhood section of the *Cursor* just as *The Northern Passion* replaces its Passion section. In addition, both *Ipokrephum* and *The Northern Passion* provide better stories.<sup>24</sup> We have no way of knowing what circumstances led to the preservation of two versions of the story of Christ’s childhood and only the one version of the Passion. We can say with certainty, however, that Thornton intended for the first 66 folios of this manuscript, containing *Cursor Mundi*, *The Northern*

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<sup>23</sup> Line references are to Horstmann’s edition.

<sup>24</sup> As Hardman (“Reading the Spaces,” “Fitt Divisions,” “Windows into the Text”) continues to observe, one of the most notable aspects of Thornton’s scribal practice is his organization of texts in such a way as to facilitate narrative flow.

*Passion*, and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, to be read sequentially as a history of Christianity from its beginnings to the establishment of Christian government in Rome.

As Finlayson observes, the order of the romances in this manuscript appears to be “less than random,” since they all contain a “pseudo-historical base” (“*Richard, Coer de Lyon*” 164). It is likely that Thornton viewed the romance of *Richard Coer de Lyon* as a “fundamentally historical-heroic work” (164). Thornton provides us with the version of the romance with the larger accretion of ‘fictional’ elements (the A version),<sup>25</sup> and one of the effects of this version is to blur the boundary between fiction and history. Thus, while the facts of the campaign are fairly accurate, the fictitious accretions constitute a “partisan interpretation of historical events” consistent with the treatment of Christian-Saracen conflicts in *chansons de gestes* (169, 175). Finlayson’s point is that texts such as *Richard* “are, to varying degrees in each, not conceived of as fictitious history, but as historical matter presented through those rhetorical arts which were also used for purely fictitious narratives, in order to entertain as well as instruct” (157).<sup>26</sup> This mixed quality of the manuscript’s narratives exploits the resonances of romance as they produce a chronological sequence.

As noted above, Thornton was probably familiar with the introduction to *Cursor Mundi*, which suggests that sacred history offers the reader more moral content than does chivalric romance. Although the *Cursor*-poet imagines sacred history as a source of moral instruction, the romances of the Lincoln manuscript (some of which are specifically mentioned by the *Cursor*-poet) could also serve this role. The romances of the London

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<sup>25</sup> There are two main versions of this romance. The A version, of which Thornton’s copy is a witness, is 1200 lines longer than the B version, mainly amplifying the episode describing Richard’s birth to a demon mother and adding the episode where Richard makes friends by participating in tournaments in England, well before his preparation for the Third Crusade (Finlayson 160). As the poem’s most recent editor, Karl Br  nner, notes in his introduction to his composite edition of the poem, neither version appears to be a direct source for the other, though the A version clearly came later and its expansions are clearly fictitious (14-17).

<sup>26</sup> I will treat the problem of genre in the Thornton romances in Chapter 4, and the issue of “partisan interpretation” in Chapter 5.

manuscript are organized chronologically and contextualized by the historical texts which surround them, and although the placement of *Ipokrephum* does not fit into this historical sequence it nevertheless adds texture and narrative urgency to the historical information it duplicates. Regardless of whether the romances of *The Siege of Jerusalem*, *The Siege of Milan*, *Roland and Otuel*, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, and *Ipokrephum* provide us with accurate historical accounts, they all participate in depicting a single history.

In the London manuscript, Christian history is told using the narrative techniques of romance, in such a way as to blur distinctions between the two genres. This is scarcely surprising. In his classic study *The Discarded Image*, C.S. Lewis reminds us that the “distinction between history and fiction cannot, in its modern clarity, be applied to medieval books or to the spirit in which they were read” (179). Lewis further reminds us that:

[T]he texts we should now call historical differed in outlook and narrative texture from those we should call fictions far less than a modern ‘history’ differs from a modern novel ... Hence a modern finds those [histories] of the Dark Ages suspiciously epic and those of the High Middle Ages suspiciously romantic. Perhaps the suspicion is not always justified ... [H]istorians, even in dealing with contemporary events, will pick out those elements which the habitual bent of their imagination has conditioned them to notice. (182)

As Lewis suggests, historical narratives such as we find in Thornton’s manuscript are not strictly ‘histories’ in the sense that we use the term today, nor does the medieval conception of history, especially in the vernacular – the language of medieval epic and romance – require that its audience read it with a horizon of expectation significantly divergent from

that it would have brought to the dominant discursive modes of fiction.<sup>27</sup> Thornton's choice and order of texts leads to the conflation of history and romance. All of the narrative texts in the London manuscript, from *Cursor Mundi* to *Wynnere and Wastoure*, are written in verse, further blurring any distinction between history and fiction in this manuscript. It should not surprise us, then, that Thornton does not differentiate between history and pseudo-history.

Other scholars have questioned the historicity of other texts in this manuscript; Arlyn Diamond has argued that *The Siege of Jerusalem* is a "pseudo-history" ("The Poetics of Destruction" 105), and Finlayson has noted that *Richard Coer de Lyon*, like most of the texts in this manuscript, falls somewhere in between history and fiction ("*Richard Coer de Lyon*"). *Wynnere and Wastoure* contains topical references to political concerns current in the court of Edward III, yet these references are sufficiently inaccurate that they cannot be relied upon to date it (Trigg xxv-xxvi).<sup>28</sup> Thornton juxtaposes sacred history, secular romance, and topical poems to construct an extended historical narrative.

Hardman, Akbari, Leverett, and Johnston have suggested this manuscript encourages its readers to respond affectively to the plight of its Christian protagonists to engender sympathy for aggressive religiosity. This reading is drawn from an assumption that *The Northern Passion* is a text of affective devotion because it is a Passion narrative. However, the vast majority of Thornton's religious texts of affective devotion are found in the religious

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<sup>27</sup> More recently and more influentially, Hayden White has questioned the extent to which the blurring of the distinction between history and fiction is a purely medieval phenomenon ("The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Tropics of Discourse*). White argues that history is only meaningful when it employs the same discursive strategies of narrative, and that these narrative strategies cannot be distinguished from each other. In a more directly medieval context, Robert Stein argues in *Reality Fictions* that medieval manuscript compilers often interpolated sacred texts and romances in order to "form a continuous cycle of secular history" (166).

<sup>28</sup> In his edition of the poem, Israel Gollancz dates the poem strictly to the winter 1352-53 and calls it a "pamphlet of the day" (ii-ix). However, Gollancz bases his assertion on his own emended text rather than on the manuscript witness. Trigg provides a summary of the opposition to this assertion in her introduction (xxii-xxvii). Gollancz's specific dating of the poem is based on its reference to Edward III's planned march on Paris, although at that time he was already there. Trigg bases her dating on the clear reference to Edward III, a reference to the Statute of Treasons of 1352, and the poem's reference to Sir William Shareshull (xxv-xxvi).

section of the Lincoln manuscript.<sup>29</sup> To begin the London manuscript with a devotional sequence that echoes the devotional guides of the Lincoln manuscript would be redundant. While *Cursor Mundi* sometimes demands an affective response, it is a poem more deeply invested in naked didacticism. Very few texts in this manuscript demand an affective response to Jesus's suffering. And as Thornton's reader goes on to read *The Siege of Jerusalem* and beyond, affective responses become decreasingly justifiable.

*The Siege of Jerusalem* resists affective readings by shifting the focus of suffering from Christ to the Jews who suffer and die *en masse* in a cruel retribution for their role in Jesus's death. As we shall see below, *The Siege of Jerusalem* is remarkably ambivalent about its depiction of Jewish suffering even as it asserts that Titus and Vespasian's retributive siege of Jerusalem provides catharsis. Other texts share this ambivalence. Thornton's histories stress the failure of cultures which exclusively rely on a binary understanding of aliens. *The Siege of Milan* is a poem deeply invested in justifying itself with the binary logic of crusade, but this logic also justifies Turpin's civil war and episcopal *coup d'état*. In *Roland and Otuel*, we witness a French war against Saracens that succeeds only because its protagonists integrate an experienced and canny Saracen convert into their own society. "The Three Kings of Cologne" depicts a religious schism that draws our attention to the continuing irreparability of the cultural rifts produced by ideological conflict. In *Richard Coer de Lyon*, a secular schism in the form of conflict over national pride constitutes a greater danger to the cause of Christendom than do the Saracens. *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* brings the exploration of factionalism home to England by drawing attention to the irreconcilability of the different priorities of youth, middle age and old age. And in *Wynnere and Wastoure* the

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<sup>29</sup> In this I disagree with both Leverett's and Johnston's arguments in their dissertations that the manuscript is strongly influenced by the practice of affective piety.

reader witnesses an unresolvable debate between two opposing positions on economic management in the court of Edward III. As we shall see, the histories of the London manuscript become increasingly nuanced as they approach the present day.

### 3.3.1 – *The Siege of Jerusalem*: Establishing Roman Christianity

In the transition from *The Northern Passion* to *The Siege of Jerusalem* on folio 50r, Thornton's reader is confronted with a poem that expresses its violence with such a sense of glee that it seems antipodal to the personal meditation encouraged by the texts that precede it. As the first of Thornton's crusading romances, the *Siege of Jerusalem*, rather than provoking a personal response, establishes a recurrent theme in the manuscript that produces what Johnston describes as "an aggressive religiosity that finds its *raison d'être* in ... the suffering of Jewish and Saracen bodies" to provide a cathartic response to Christ's death ("Robert Thornton" 128, 144). Hardman observes that Thornton's textual sequence at the beginning of the manuscript seems to be organized with a meditative purpose that turns the reader's response to the Passion into a justification for revenge against the enemies of Christ and, later, against the enemies of Christianity ("Windows into the Text"). While *The Siege of Jerusalem* indeed draws much of its strength by connecting to Christian experience unified by affective meditation on the Passion, the progression of Christian history treated by the Charlemagne romances and *Richard Coeur de Lion* depicts the gradual destabilization of a unified Christendom.

It is likely that the Lincoln manuscript's guides to affective meditation such as *The Prevette of the Passioun* might have primed Thornton's readers to respond affectively to a

text like the *Northern Passion*. Considering the poem's immediate context in the London manuscript, the reader is still encouraged to respond with pity to the Passion of Christ. Johnston observes that the manuscript's second item, "The Discourse between Christ and Man," *demand*s an affective response when Jesus addresses the reader ("Robert Thornton" 145-46):

þou, synfull man, þat gase by me  
 Dwelle a while and folde to stande  
 Bihalde my fete and my hande.  
 Mi body es with scourges swongen,  
 Handis and sides & fete thurgh stonngen.

.....

With thy syn þou pyne me (17129-33; 17157)<sup>30</sup>

We can see here that Christ implicates the reader in a manner similar to that found in the York play of the Crucifixion, and asks the reader to "thynke appon my pyne" affectively in order to continue to consider how human sin has brought the Savior to his current state (17164).<sup>31</sup> Johnston suggests that *The Northern Passion* asserts Jewish culpability for the Crucifixion as aggressively as it does in order to reduce the amount of blame placed on Pilate, and by implication Rome; this shift of focus prepares the reader to side with Titus and

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<sup>30</sup> Johnston cites the transcription of the Thornton text in Horall's edition.

<sup>31</sup> Meditation on the Passion and affective responses to it as an image were common forms of affective devotion through the fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries in England. Analogues other than the York plays can be found in English religious lyric poetry, including the poems of Richard Rolle, some of which Thornton preserves in the Lincoln MS. See Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* for a detailed examination of this theme and a great number of other fourteenth and fifteenth century analogues (19-66; 183-238). This extract has much more in common with the fourteenth century tradition; by the fifteenth century, this literature shifted its focus away from visual experiences towards direct didacticism.

Vespasian as they besiege Jerusalem and take revenge upon the Jews (147-52).<sup>32</sup> However, a reader primed by “The Discourse Between Christ and Man” and *The Northern Passion* to respond to suffering with pity would, in *The Siege of Jerusalem*, find his or her pity redirected towards the suffering of Jews, whose suffering the poem depicts in exacting detail.

Although it was the second-most copied text of the Alliterative Revival, *The Siege of Jerusalem* is a poem that suffers from a degree of critical neglect. Ralph Hanna, its most recent editor, calls it “the chocolate-covered tarantula of the alliterative movement” because its anti-Semitism is too offensive to critical taste (“Contextualizing *The Siege of Jerusalem*” 109). *The Siege of Jerusalem* depicts in bloody and exacting detail the violent siege and conquest of the Jewish capital by Roman Imperial forces led by the future Roman emperors Titus and Vespasian.

One strange result of the critical distaste Hanna mentions is that *The Siege of Jerusalem* has undergone a series of readings in which its Jews are meant to stand for something else. As Hanna notes, the poem’s anti-Semitic stance is peculiar and problematic mainly because its oldest exemplar was copied between 1370 and 1380, nearly a century after the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 (113). Hanna thus contextualizes the *Siege* as a Lancastrian poem, suggesting that its Jews are meant to represent Lollards (119-20). Mary Hamel argues instead that the poem is best read as a response to the renewed crusading fervor of the later fourteenth century and suggests that its Jews are meant to represent Saracens (“*The Siege of Jerusalem* as a Crusading Poem”). In a somewhat similar vein, Christine Chism suggests that the poem is best contextualized by the Hundred Years’

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<sup>32</sup> Miri Rubin explains in *Gentile Tales* that there existed a complex and persistent tradition throughout medieval Europe in which Christians’ affective responses to crimes instigated by Jews, whether real or imagined, tend to follow similar narrative trajectories. Thornton’s *Siege of Jerusalem* simultaneously draws from and complicates this tradition.

War and that its Jews are meant to represent money (“*The Siege of Jerusalem: Liquidating Assets*”). These substitutive readings obscure the poem’s depiction of cruelty to Jews.

Considering the horrors Jews have suffered at the hands of anti-Semites in the twentieth century, it is understandable why critics would want to substitute *The Siege of Jerusalem*’s treatment of Jewish bodies with *anything* else. However, comparative readings of the poem’s treatment of Jews have opened up a more compelling avenue of interpretation. Elisa Narin van Court was the first to note that the poem treats Jews more humanely than they are treated in the poem’s sources, and uses this evidence to argue convincingly that the poem’s excessive violence towards Jews goes so far beyond simple vengeance that they become objects of sympathy (“*The Siege of Jerusalem and Augustinian Historians*”).<sup>33</sup> For van Court, the poem’s central image is that of the starving woman eating her own child:

On Marie, a myld wyf, for meschef of foode,  
 Hire owen barn þat 30 bare + brad on þe gledis\*, *live coals*  
 Rostyþ rigge and rib with reweful words,  
 Sayþ, ‘sone, vpon eche side our sorow is alofte:  
 Batail aboute þe borwe our bodies to quelle;  
 Withyn hunger so hote þat neȝ our herte brestyþ.  
 Þerfor ȝeld þat I þe ȝaf and aȝen tourne,  
 + Entre þer þou out cam’, and etyþ a shouldere. (1081-88)

Van Court reads in this passage the poet’s treatment of the pitiful actions of a desperate woman rather than an excuse to dehumanize the Jews as cannibals (“*The Siege of Jerusalem and Recuperative Readings*” 158-62). The decision to name the suffering Jewish mother

<sup>33</sup> Van Court argues both on the basis of the poem’s immediate literary and historical sources, and on account of its likely composition by Yorkshire Augustinians (and not, as Hanna suggests, Cistercians), whose chronicle accounts of the massacre of the Jews in York in 1190 are unusually tolerant (176-81).

Mary surely informs this passage, perhaps as a cue to the reader that she is worthy of sympathy even though she is a Jew. *The Siege of Jerusalem* assumes its readers will identify most strongly with its Roman Christian heroes as they bring Christianity to the world stage and demonstrate its superiority to the religions it replaces. But as we can see from the episode above, within the *Siege of Jerusalem* is a paradox: as the poem aligns its audience's sympathies with the Romans it also criticizes Roman imperial brutality, resists blindly supporting violent imperial expansion, and destabilizes the binary Christian/non-Christian identities commonly found in crusading romance.<sup>34</sup>

Van Court's turn towards accepting that the Jews in *The Siege of Jerusalem* stand for Jews is both compelling and productive, since it brings to the forefront discussions of the poem's use of affect in its treatment of both Jews and Romans. As van Court suggests, the poem, independent of its manuscript context, treats suffering Jews with a surprising degree of sympathy. In the context of the London manuscript, *The Siege of Jerusalem* represents a shift of focus away from Christ himself, and towards the establishment of the Roman Christianity which will be defended in later poems by Charlemagne and Richard I.

At the beginning of *The Siege of Jerusalem*, Nathan of Greece evangelizes to Titus and Vespasian. Titus is so angered at Rome's treatment of Christ that he agrees to be baptized. We are told that "Forthe thay fechede a fownte and baptizede þat beryn/ And made cristenyde that kyng that efter criste served" (193-94). The poem informs the reader explicitly that Titus becomes a Christian king. Likewise, though we are not party to Vespasian's baptism, we are told shortly after he is healed by the Vernicle that "Crownede

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<sup>34</sup> For more on genre and audience sympathy, see Arlyn Diamond, "The Alliterative *Siege of Jerusalem*: The Poetics of Destruction." On critiques of Rome, see Alex Mueller, "Corporal Terror." On imperial expansion, see Randy Schiff, "The Instructive Other." On binary approaches to non-Christians, see Johnston, "Robert Thornton."

kynges ware thay bothe that criste mekill luffede” (277). The poet here maintains that the poem is not merely about a war between the Romans and the Jews, but between *Christian* Romans and the Jews.

*The Siege of Jerusalem* is careful to establish that the violence it depicts is undertaken on behalf of Christianity itself. This occurs first by introducing Saint Peter as the “pope” who “prechide in Rome” (205), and then again when the Vernicle is brought to Vespasian in the temple at Rome, when:

Bot a ferly by felle thare by fore þam alle

In thaire tempill be tyde full tenefull thynges

Thaire mahowne and thaire mawmetries mourlede in peces

And al to thrushede als the clothe thorowe the kirke passede (237-40)

When Saint Peter brings the Vernicle into the temple, all of the Roman idols burst into pieces as the cloth bearing Christ’s image is carried through the church. The poet notably uses “mahowne” and “mawmetries” to refer to false gods and idols, associating pagan Rome with the categorically-evil practices of Saracens. Finally, even though we are told that Nero’s difficulty with the Jews was political rather than religious – the Jews are withholding tribute (266) – the Senate decides to send Titus and Vespasian to war because their Christianity makes them eager to take revenge on those responsible for Christ’s death (269-80). The *Siege*-poet locates Christianity in Rome by ensuring that his protagonists are Christians, blessed by St. Peter, and given state license to go to war on behalf of their religion. This represents a tonal shift. The reader is no longer encouraged to think about the death of Christ in terms of its affective power, but is instead encouraged to support the military action of a newly Christianized Rome.

Thornton's copy of *The Siege of Jerusalem* follows a detailed and affecting account of Christ's Passion. However, the *Siege* contains its own scenes of intense and violent torture committed by the Christians in retribution. Mid-way through the poem, the reader witnesses another scene of gruesome torture and death when Caiaphas is executed, which is worth reproducing at length:

Waspasyann turnes to his tentis with Titus and other

Comandis concelle anone one kayphas to sitt

Whatekyns\* dede by dome that he dye scholde *what sort of*

With those letterde ledis that thay laughte hade

Then domesmen appon desse demyde full swythe

Whils ilka freke ware qwyke flayne the flesche clene

Fyrste to be on the bent with blonkes ydrawen

And sythen hangede appon heghte appons heghe galoues

The fette to the firmament all folke to be holde

With hony appon ilk a halfe þe hiddills enoyntede

And clauerande cattes with clawes full scharpe

Foure chachede with a corde till to cayphas these

Two apis to his armes to anger hym more

That ryhe scholde his rawe flesche appon rede peces

So was he pynd fro þe pryme with percede sydis

Till the sonne downe sett in the somire tyde (693-708)

Titus and Vespasian have captured Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, and together pass judgment upon them, but Caiaphas is to get the worst of it. First he is flayed, then he is bent and stretched, then hanged upside-down on a high gallows; he is covered in honey, quartered at the thighs and arms, and attacked by cats; his sides are pierced, and he is set upon by apes, all while suffering from exposure to the full heat of summer. The poet clearly considers this punishment to be just. The narrator concludes this episode by explaining the punishment was

In tokne of tresoun and trey þat þey wroȝt

Whan Crist þrow here conseil was cached to deþ. (725-28)

For the *Siege*-poet, public torture in an ironic mockery of the Crucifixion seems an adequate response for the Jewish priests' treacherous counsel and their putative responsibility for Christ's death – a kind of poetic vengeance emphasized by the poet's recollection of Christ and his twelve disciples in his emphasis on the shared culpability of the leaders of the Jews.

This gruesome scene recalls the action of *The Northern Passion*. Both scenes involve a man being bound, judged, disrobed, scourged, beaten, hanged, and pierced in the side. In its own way, this episode provides a fitting end to the same Jews who readily accept responsibility for the Crucifixion in *The Northern Passion*:

Alle his blode on vs be sene

God leue þat all his synne falle

One vs & one owre childrene alle. (1136-38)

It is easy to see the justice in this. Caiaphas and the rest of the Jewish priesthood are here punished for an action for which they claimed responsibility. However, the execution of Caiaphas, especially considering the reference to his "percede sides" (*Jerusalem* 707), is brutal to the point of excess. An audience already primed by *The Northern Passion* to express sympathy for the suffering of one man's brutal torture and execution at Roman hands

risks reacting sympathetically to the suffering of another's. Thornton chose to place the *Siege* after *The Northern Passion*, but the reader is encouraged to respond with pity to the torture and crucifixion of Jesus, but not to that of Caiaphas. The sympathetic treatment of Mary, the Jewish mother who has no recourse but to eat her own child, suggests that the suffering inflicted on Jewish bodies is just as deserving of pity as suffering inflicted on any other body. Thus the effect of the juxtaposed crucifixions is not to shift the focus of the reader's existing affective response towards the Jews – the poem's treatment of them is too ambivalent – but rather to realign the audience's sympathies towards Christian Rome.

The anticlimactic final episode of the *Siege* makes its alignment of reader sympathy with Christian Rome evident. In this episode, Titus, victorious, sets himself up to judge all who live in Jerusalem, and the first person he calls upon is Pilate, “that prouoste was thanne” (1300). Pilate is called to recount the events leading up to Christ's death as the Jews are led away to be sold into slavery. This episode comes down with staggering finality with the phrase “and so Titus commandis” (1324). Titus, a Christian, supersedes the jurisdiction of Pilate, a pagan. As the poem moves on to its epilogue, we learn of Pilate's fate:

And Pilate putt was to presone to pynen for euer

At V[ienn]e<sup>35</sup> thare vengeaunce and vile dede tuke (fol. 66r)<sup>36</sup>

Other versions of the *Siege* expand this episode to include a description of how Pilate kills himself while in prison. Why is Pilate disposed of in this way? Shortly before the Jews claim responsibility for Christ's torture, *The Northern Passion* makes it clear that Pilate does not want to put Jesus to death: when the Jews tell him that Jesus is from Galilee, he claims that Jesus is under Herod's jurisdiction (937-54); when Jesus is brought back, he refuses to

<sup>35</sup> MS *vittern*. Four of the six extant MSS read *Vienne*.

<sup>36</sup> This excerpt corresponds to lines 1327-28 of Hanna and Lawton's edition.

prosecute him, telling the Jews “I ne may in hym no thyng fynde/ Why þat mene solde hym bette or bynde” (1017-18); and when the Jews decide to set Barabbas free instead of Jesus, he counsels them to release Jesus instead (1055-56). Pilate dies in prison, and no explanation is given. In *The Northern Passion*, Pilate is treated with sympathy; in *The Siege of Jerusalem*, he is treated summarily as a subject of “vengeaunce.” Why?

This sudden change in Pilate’s treatment between *The Northern Passion* and *The Siege of Jerusalem* only makes sense if some significant change has occurred in the intervening time. The *Siege* does not give us any clues as to whether or not Titus and Vespasian set out with the intent to depose Pilate. Pilate’s dilemma, so well explored in *The Northern Passion*, becomes truncated in *The Siege of Jerusalem* to the point of irrelevance. Pilate becomes the subject of vengeance because he represents pagan Rome. The *Siege* does all it can to keep power in Christian hands: first in Rome itself when Titus and Vespasian convince the senate to commit the army to Jerusalem to support Christian vengeance, and then in Jerusalem when Titus and Vespasian replace Pilate as governors of the Jews in order to punish them. By the end of poem, Christians rule all: Vespasian governs Rome (1025-26), and Titus governs Jerusalem (1297-1300). Rome is now Christian, and it governs Jerusalem with an agenda of Christian vengeance. *The Siege of Jerusalem* thus conflates Rome with Christianity. In its place in the London manuscript, *The Siege of Jerusalem* effectively diverts the affective feelings engendered by *The Northern Passion* away from Jesus himself and towards the triumphant establishment of Roman Christianity. *The Siege of Jerusalem* institutes a unified Christendom, but it soon fragments under stress.

### 3.3.2 – The Crusading Romances and the Failure of Absolutism

Like *The Siege of Jerusalem*, Thornton's crusading romances – *The Siege of Milan*, *Roland and Otuel*, and *Richard Coer de Lyon* – present us with a much more nuanced and complicated world than their subject matter might immediately suggest. The nature of most crusading romances requires the audience to invest in the absolute mutual antagonism of Christians and Saracens, expressed most memorably in *The Song of Roland*, which asserts that “pagans are wrong and Christians are right” (1015). Although Thornton's romances depict conflicts between Christians and Saracens, in each of them, as in *Roland*, Christians prove to be a threat more substantive and more dangerous to Christianity than any Muslim. As we read through the progression of Thornton's crusading romances, we witness the fragmentation of the united Christendom with which *The Siege of Jerusalem* concludes.

Most crusading romances (including *Roland and Otuel* and *Richard Coer de Lyon*) are invested in reaffirming a medieval readership's faith in Christian cultural, religious, and military superiority. Robert Warm notes that in Middle English crusading romances, “[t]he audience is regarded as possessing a set of values identical to those held by the narrative actors themselves” (98). Early readings of *The Siege of Milan* emphasize its interest in engendering crusading feeling. S. H. A. Shepherd argues that the poem is so invested in military Christianity and crusading ideology that it is barely distinguishable from mainline crusading propaganda (118). Susanne Conklin Akbari observes that the plot of this poem requires the assumption of the existence of a unified Christendom uninterested in acquiring

new members (23). These themes of culture and crusade are brought together under the mantle of the poem's protagonist, Archbishop Turpin.<sup>37</sup>

Turpin's militancy in *The Siege of Milan* is no surprise for anybody who has read *The Song of Roland*. Yet Turpin's blood-thirst is not merely incidental to *The Siege of Milan*, but an integral feature of it. *Milan*'s focus on Turpin inextricably intertwines religion and violence to the point that the latter becomes an outgrowth of the former. At the same time, Turpin locates religious power in Paris rather than in Rome. Thornton's textual sequence thus undermines the sense of Christian political unity so central to *The Siege of Jerusalem*.

*The Siege of Milan* supports absolutism. Following the Saracen conquest of Milan and the nearly-complete destruction of the French army sent to reclaim it, Turpin demands that Charlemagne send more troops to avenge the defeated Christians. However, the traitor Ganelon advises Charles that he should be more concerned with protecting his people by maintaining his rule rather than dying in battle. At this moment Turpin turns against the king by asserting that the Church is perfectly capable of pursuing its own interests without secular support and by turning France's clergy into warriors:<sup>38</sup>

And alle þe Clergy vndir-take I

Off alle Fraunce full sekerly

þay sall wende to that were.

Of þe Pope I have pousté:

Att my byddynges sall þay bee,

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<sup>37</sup> As we shall see in Chapter 5, an alternative school of thought reads this poem as a fundamentally English text significantly invested in denigrating the French.

<sup>38</sup> This episode constitutes a major break with the both the older continental tradition of the *chansons de geste* and with the extant Middle English tradition of Charlemagne romances. In the light of the extant literature, Turpin's treatment here is exceedingly bizarre. Even in *The Song of Roland*, Turpin is a capable warrior, but he is clearly subservient to Charles and more interested in maintaining the Franks' will to fight than he is interested in leading them (264-73). Maldwyn Mills provides notes on a number of these narrative parallels in *Six Middle English Romances*, xii.

Bothe with schelde and spere.'  
 The Bischoppe sendis ferre and nere  
 To monke, chanoun, preste and frere  
 And badd þam graythe þaire gere  
 And keste þaire [care] clene þam froo,  
 Come helpe to feghte one Goddis foo,  
 All þat a swerde may bere. (613-24)<sup>39</sup>

Turpin's claim that he has "pousté" from the Pope to assemble an army of clergy suggests that the poem takes place in a time when the unity between religion and government expressed in *The Siege of Jerusalem* has ceased to exist. The moment Turpin turns his clerics into warriors it becomes clear that Western Christianity is no longer unified.

Next, Turpin attempts to reclaim political power from Charlemagne's secular government. In a move unprecedented in Charlemagne romance, he excommunicates Charlemagne, accusing him of being "were þan any Sarazene" for contemplating peaceful co-existence with the Saracens who have conquered Milan (694). Turpin brings internecine violence to the court in Paris when he calls Charlemagne a coward and attempts to duel with him, only to be prevented from doing so by a gang of barons (697-723). And finally, he commands his clerical army to encircle and besiege Paris before continuing on to free Milan:

"I sall stroye the,  
 byrne and breke down thi Cite  
 If þou be neuer so tende.  
 Then to 3one Sarazenes wende sal I,  
 Fight with þam whis I may dry,

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<sup>39</sup> All quotations taken from *The Siege of Milan* and *Roland and Otuel* are from Herritage's edition.

In goddess seruyce to ende.” (751-56)

.....

They Romede to-wards Paresche town,

And thoghte to bete the Cyte downe

With þe powere þat he hade.

“Slyke clerkes beris my Benysone,

For trewere men of Relygyoun

In erthe were neuer none made.” (763-68)

Turpin makes it clear that he considers the main quality of a strong anti-Saracen fighting force to be its zeal. Disaster to Paris is averted only when duke Naymes convinces Charles to yield and beg for forgiveness. At this point, the two armies band together, under Turpin’s command, to retake Milan. During the final extant episode of the story we become witness to Turpin, bearing five wounds and repeatedly drawing attention to his resulting *imitatio Christi*, taking sole responsibility for overseeing the final siege of the campaign.

*The Siege of Milan* shows that religion and government ought to be unified, but in reality they are not. Notably, the unification of religious and secular interests is much more ambiguous here than it is in *Jerusalem*, where the Senate is quite comfortable allowing Titus and Vespasian to go to war against the Jews for what are clearly religious reasons. *Milan* begins with a France whose Church is at odds with its government and ends with its Church dominating it. The power struggle we witness suggests that the unification of the Church and government we see in this poem is exceptional. Crusading ideology dominates *Milan* by requiring Christians to express absolute dedication to the eradication of Saracens.

*Roland and Otuel* demonstrates that absolute zeal is not the only determining factor of a successful crusade. The poem begins by asserting an equivalency between its Christian

and Muslim knights. Otuel is “moste ... prouede of myghtis” and is “þe beste knyghte” that Roland has ever fought (72, 595-97). Yet Otuel is a Saracen. When he fights Roland, a dove lands on his head and he decides to become Christian. As soon as Turpin baptizes Otuel, Charles gives him his daughter to marry and makes him lord of Lombardy, the land currently controlled by his uncle Garcy. In exchange, Otuel swears to “distruye þe heythyn blode” and capture his uncle (648). Once he takes the field with his Christian peers, we learn how much better a knight he is. Here we must follow the basic story fairly closely. As soon as the Franks land in Lombardy, Roland, along with Oliver and Ogier, ride out together to kill some Saracens. They encounter a force of ten thousand, who easily repel the three knights. It is Otuel who discovers their absence:

Otuell þat was so wighte  
 Duellles with Belesent þe brighte,  
     Was comely one to calle;  
 Oute of hir chambire he wendis righte  
 Als faste als euer þat he myghte  
     In to þe kynges haulle,  
 To seche Olyuer and Rowlande;  
 Bot neuer noþer he ther fand  
     Among þe lordes alle. (1009-17)

Otuel then amasses a small company of troops and rides out to search for his comrades, only to find them fleeing from the very Saracens they have gone out to attack:

He metys Rowlande and Olyuere  
 Faste rydande by a reuere,  
     And fresche folke aftir þam dyng.

He hailsede þam with steryn chere,  
 And sayde: “Sirres, whate make ȝe here,  
 Come ȝe from Fischeynge?”

He reproued þam there full velanslye\*, *rashness*  
 And ȝit their bodies were alle blodye  
 With woundes Many one.  
 “Wene ȝe for ȝoure cheualrye,  
 For ȝoure boste and ȝoure folye,  
 þat þe Sarazenes will late ȝow one?  
 Charlles with his stronge powere  
 Schall thynke this a grete gramaungere,  
 This dede to vnder-tone. (1039-53)

Otuel chastises Roland, Oliver, and Ogier for having have acted shamefully and with great greed (“gramaungere”) by caring more for their own personal honour than for the whole effort to reclaim Lombardy.<sup>40</sup>

In *The Siege of Milan*, Turpin punishes Charlemagne for agreeing to co-exist with Saracens. *Roland and Otuel* demonstrates the danger of such strict absolutism. Charlemagne’s knights act impulsively against Otuel when he is Garcy’s messenger, in direct defiance of Charles’ protection (121-26, 151-73). They likewise act impulsively upon their arrival in Lombardy. It is only with Otuel’s good sense and aid that Roland, Oliver, and Ogier survive this foolish assault. Moreover, in the final battle, Otuel is almost single-handedly responsible for the campaign’s success; he personally kills many of his own

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<sup>40</sup> Siobhain Bly Calkin makes a similar observation (“Saracens” 188).

cousins and captures his uncle. In every episode, Otuel is self-confident, capable, strong, and decisive, and the whole campaign would likely have ended disastrously for the French had he not converted and joined them. In *The Siege of Milan*, it is enough for Christians to fight zealously, but in *Roland and Otuel* Christian overreliance on zeal nearly brings them to defeat. Ironically, the failure of the French that almost leads to the death of their most potent knights is a failure of integration. Otuel does not become wholly integrated into the poem's community of French Christians until he first saves the lives of Roland, Oliver, and Ogier, and then helps defeat his uncle and his forces. By contrast, Roland and Oliver succeed in Lombardy only because Otuel saves them from themselves. Charlemagne's warriors cannot succeed on their own merits and must now incorporate an outsider to defeat their enemies.

Ideological difference lies at the heart of the most significant conflicts the manuscript depicts, and nowhere more clearly than in "The Three Kings of Cologne," a poem depicting the roots of the East-West Schism that precedes *Richard Coer-de-Lyon*. "The Three Kings of Cologne" serves the dual roles of introducing the reader to the Greek Christians encountered by Richard and of demonstrating that ideological conflicts tend to produce irreparable cultural fragmentation. Compared to the failures the reader witnesses within Charlemagne's court, "The Three Kings of Cologne" stands out because it demonstrates not only how quickly ideological conflicts can fragment a culture, but also how quickly ideological fragmentation becomes permanent. As we shall see, "The Three Kings of Cologne" also establishes the high stakes of the debates found in the last two poems in the manuscript, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* and *Wynnere and Wastoure*, as they bring the threat of ideological fragmentation home to England.

"The Three Kings of Cologne" lies between history and hagiography, following the lives of the three kings, or magi, who come from the East to pay homage to Jesus at the time

of his birth. After giving their gifts to Jesus, the three kings return to their homelands and institute Christmas celebrations throughout the land, but they do not convert “till aftire the type of Cristis passiouwenn/ þat Seynt Thomas come to þat regyowenn,/ and christened þaym” (443-45). Although the three kings are predisposed to Christianity, they do not become Christians until St Thomas of India converts them and their peoples, and establishes temples. The three kings each become “bischoppes” and begin to govern the spiritual lives of their peoples under the influence of “Patriarke Thomas” (454-60). It is at this moment, when Christianity is established in the East, that “The Three Kings of Cologne” signals its focus as a history of a divergent branch of Christianity. Far to the East, the three kings establish the kingdom of the legendary Prester John, whose spirituality they guide until they all die and are buried together.

The final 167 lines of this poem provide a concise historical account of the development of Eastern Christianity after its establishment. Since this poem has not been the object of critical attention, it is worth quoting at some length. After they die, the bodies of the three kings lie unmolested until Christianity fragments by sectarian conflict:

Till aftir this were passeded many a 3ere,  
Till in that lande was skateride heresy  
Devisyone, debate, and false envy.

That time to powdyre felle þaire flesche & alle

So longe before þat were so fresche of hewe;  
Dyuerse sects that were as bittire as galle

Thurghe alle the londe were raysede vppe of newe.

The Nestoryens kyng Iasper with theym drewe,

Be-cause that they were of his kyngdome borne;

Whatt for wirchippe, what for envy and skorne,

The which false cursede Nestorians

Hase vnto paym that duellede in Seuva,

Owte of the towmbe pay toke kyng Iasper banes (696-708)

The symbolic wholeness of the kings' corpses is destroyed by the development of heresy, division, and false envy, until one of the graves is robbed by the evil Nestorians and the community of Eastern Christians becomes irreparably fractured. This only ends with the coming of Constantine, who causes Jasper's bones to be brought to rest. Constantine then builds the church of "Saynte Sophia" and fills it with relics from Mary, as well as the True Cross, the nails, and Jesus's coat, all of which are ostensibly brought from Jerusalem by his mother Helena (741-46). Although the initial conflict is resolved here, the poem continues on to describing the East-West Schism and the foundation of the Orthodox Church:

Aftir the dethe of noble Constantyne

And Saynt Elyn, Iulyan Appostata

Was Emperoure, and falely turnede syne

Agayn the kirke, and Cristyn faythe alswa,

Full many sayntes garte he birne and slaa

With-in this tyme in dyuerse contres sere,

Als in their legende men may see and here.

Sone aftir this, þe moste party of Cristyndome

Was envenomede and blyndide in heresy;

The Grekes rebelled agaynes the kirke of Rome

In mony poyntes, and lefte the Pape hally;

Vnto this day þay hafe yshade forthy

A Patriarke made by eleccyone

Whilke þaire lawe hase in his subieccyone. (776-89)

“The Three Kings of Cologne” shows the lasting effects of the cultural damage caused by both the Nestorian Schism and the East-West Schism. At the same time, this poem goes on to establish that Christian history involves a number of encounters between Eastern and Western Christians, continuing on through Charlemagne’s translation of the relics of the Crucifixion from Greece to France (771-75), and the re-internment of the three kings in Cologne by Reynald, Bishop of Cologne (827-59).<sup>41</sup> Moreover, “The Three Kings of Cologne” draws attention to its historicity with its chronological markers “till,” “that time,” and “aftir this.” This poem’s emphasis on chronology serves to augment its depiction of the Great Schism: time passes, but the wounds never heal.<sup>42</sup>

While *The Siege of Jerusalem* establishes Rome as the centre of the Christian world, this establishment is undermined by Turpin’s grand assertions of his own episcopal authority in *The Siege of Milan*. If “The Three Kings of Cologne” teaches nothing else, it teaches that schisms cause irreparable rifts. By the end of the poem, despite the establishment of separate Eastern and Western branches of Christianity, the remains of the three kings have been brought to the West, far away from their original resting place in India. Simultaneously, we

<sup>41</sup> Thornton will later remind us of the cultural relevance of the Shrine of the Three Magi in Cologne when the king in *Wynnere and Wastoure* resolves to travel “To þe kirke of Colayne þer þe kynges ligges” after he has conquered Paris (503).

<sup>42</sup> It is tempting to read into this poem a poignant foreshadowing of the Western Schism that was resolved by the Council of Constance 1414-1418. However, we cannot know when Thornton read it, and according to Thompson the earliest known date of the paper stock is 1446 (*Robert Thornton* 72). By this point the Western Schism would have been over for nearly thirty years, and although Thornton would undoubtedly have remembered it and its effects, it would not have been as alive an issue as it was during his youth.

have learnt that there exists a deep-seated unresolved conflict around the establishment of Rome as the centre of Christianity. Ultimately, factionalism proves to bring far-reaching consequences to cultural conflict. This thread of history reminds us that cultures are never long unified, and that disunity and schism are inevitable.

With the next item, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Thornton returns to the question of crusade. The crusading romances of the London manuscript begin by demonstrating the strength of Western European Christian armies united in faith. As the romances progress, we see how strained this unity becomes. In *Milan*, the Church in France asserts its superiority to the Church in Rome, thus providing us with a version of the Western Schism. In *Roland and Otuel*, we see that French knights are incompetent strategists who rely on brute strength to win their wars. In *Richard Coer de Lyon*, the fragmentation of Christendom has become complete, as conflicts on the level of national identity come to dominate relationships between Christians.

Falling somewhere between history and romance, *Richard Coer de Lyon* follows Richard I on his crusade and tracks his campaigns against Saladin and his allies.<sup>43</sup> One of the most striking aspects of this poem is its intense concern with the practical aspects of military campaigns usually absent from romances, including supply lines, border defense, and payment of troops. Amidst this mixture of fact and legend, *Richard* provides us with a compelling story of how conflict between European powers undermines the progress of a crusade. *Richard* demands an affective response, but this time the reader is meant to sympathize with the interests of a nation – England – as its king overcomes the treachery of

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<sup>43</sup> See Finlayson, “*Richard Coer de Lyon*: Romance, History, or Something in Between?” Scholarship on this text has focused mainly on its most grisly scene, in which Richard expresses enjoyment at learning that he has eaten the flesh of a defeated Saracen (Heng, “The Romance of England”; McDonald, “Eating People”). I discuss this scene in Chapter 4.

his putative allies in order to advance a Christian cause. Contrary to our expectations, Richard's most dangerous antagonist is not his opponent Saladin, but the traitorous King Philip Augustus of France.<sup>44</sup> There are seventeen distinct episodes in this romance in which Philip or his men sabotage Richard's crusading effort or fight against the English. In none of these cases are these attacks incited in any way by the English, and Philip never bothers to provide an explanation for them. In spite of Richard's clear military acumen and personal fortitude, Philip betrays Richard (1677-748), defends his men when they kill English knights (1765-82), insults the English (1871-78), counsels Richard to co-exist with Saracens (3275-96), prefers gold to victory (3813-901), captures cities in a way guaranteed to cause trouble in the future (4655-705), and ultimately invades Normandy (6533-44). Philip's behavior is so irrational that Richard ultimately swears that he shall "neuere, by God aboue/ Trystene unto Frenssche-mannes loue!" (6707-08).<sup>45</sup> By this point, Richard and the audience are both undoubtedly equally frustrated with Philip's pusillanimity.

The dominant conflict in *Richard Coer de Lyon* is between Richard and Philip, and the implications of this aspect of the romance are far-reaching. In *Richard*, crusade is not an action taken by Christendom as a whole, but by independent European rulers and governments. The unified Christian forces of *The Siege of Jerusalem* become progressively more fragmented as we read through Thornton's crusading romances. In *The Siege of Milan*, fragmentation is mainly ideological: the conflict between Turpin and Charlemagne is about crusading fervor, but the military capability of Charlemagne's armies is never questioned. In

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<sup>44</sup> Mills is the only critic who has previously observed this, noting that while both this poem and *The Siege of Melayne* have their heroes express "energy of an almost diabolical kind" against their Saracen opponents, both poets never forget that Turpin and Philip are "in the last resort French, and therefore always a little unreliable" (*Six Middle English Romances* xiii). For an alternate view on Frenchness (and Englishness) in *Milan*, see Elizabeth Berlings, "The Siege of Melayne." I return to the issue of nationalism in Chapter 5.

<sup>45</sup> I cite the edition prepared by Karl Brunner. Sadly, no edition of this poem has yet been published that is not a composite text, nor one with an apparatus in English.

*Roland and Otuel*, even a sufficiently zealous army cannot manage to act on its own without courting disaster: the once-Saracen Otuel's superior tactical acumen saves the French from themselves. And in *Richard Coer-de-Lyon*, Christendom is no longer unified under one banner, but many: Philip of France's spiteful antagonism undermines Richard's superior strategy and endangers the entire crusade. Thornton orders these narratives to reward sequential reading: his readers observe the development of factionalism and the slow fragmentation of a once-unified Christian Europe. By the end of *Richard Coer de Lyon*, the reader is not meant to identify with Christendom, but instead with a strongly-asserted Englishness that explicitly rejects association with France.

### 3.4 – The Debate Poems and the Roots of Disunity

The texts in the London manuscript do not attempt to make history palatable. Instead, they acknowledge that the roots of conflict are often as distasteful as its consequences. Thornton's histories thus rightfully depict war as brutal and violent, sometimes disturbingly so. Over the course of the manuscript's histories, Thornton's reader is confronted with the history of Christendom as characterized by a brief moment of unity followed by a slow process of fragmentation. While *The Siege of Jerusalem* establishes Rome as the centre of the Christian world, this establishment is undermined by Turpin's grand assertions of his own episcopal authority in *The Siege of Milan*. By *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Christians constitute a greater threat to the unity of Christendom than any outsider could hope to be.

The last two poems in the London manuscript, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* and *Wynnere and Wastoure*, bring home to England a sense of imminent cultural fragmentation

similar to that made manifest in “The Three Kings of Cologne.” Both of these poems contain debates within a dream framework in order to express nascent ideological fragmentation in England.<sup>46</sup> In *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, the speaker is a poacher, illegally hunting deer in the king’s forest (1-99). The narrator then falls asleep, and dreams of three men representing three phases in the lives of all men: 3outhe, a thirty-year-old fighter and lover; Medill Elde, a sixty-year-old manager of estates; and Elde, a bitter hundred-year-old man who spends all his time in prayer (104-67). 3outhe and Medill Elde enter into an argument about whether chivalry or the collection of rents is the best thing for a man to do with his life (168-264). This debate is quickly interrupted by Elde, who has already valued both, who suggests the two disputants “[make] 3oure mirroures bi me” and fear death (290-92).<sup>47</sup> Elde suggests that 3outhe and Medill Elde take wisdom from the examples of the lives of each of the Nine Worthies, or the best lovers from romances (295-630). Elde finally suggests the other two disputants spend their time in penitence (631-54). The dreamer suddenly awakens to the sound of a hunting horn, and hides out in town.

The debate in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* is politically ambivalent. Not only does the debate between the Three Ages remain unresolved, the poem never connects the digression on the Nine Worthies with Elde’s argument that men ought to devote their lives to penitence. Oddly, though the poem gives Elde the final word, with his statement that both 3outhe and Middle-Elde should hasten to “schryue 3ou full schirle” (646), fully half its length is dedicated to the discourse on the Nine Worthies and other heroes of romances, thus justifying interest in the very same deeds of arms and love with which 3outhe is preoccupied. *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* sets the value system of chivalry against those of estate

<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Jacobs provides a short introduction to the typology of English debate poems in “The Typology of Debate and the Interpretation of *Wynnere and Wastoure*” 481-86.

<sup>47</sup> All quotations taken from the edition prepared by M. Y. Offord.

management and religion, then breaks off without determining which position “wins” the debate. All the while, Ȝouthe and his values are treated most generously.<sup>48</sup> As R.A. Waldron has observed, the conflict in this poem is between the social commitments of a courtier, a middle-class businessman, and a spiritual man, and each is arrayed in such a manner as to represent one of the Three Estates (“The Prologue” 788). Although the poem reminds us that these states of being are interrelated when Elde says that “Elde es sire of Midill Elde and Midill Elde of Ȝouthe” (652), *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* can only express this conflict vigorously; it cannot resolve it.

The final text in this manuscript, the unresolved debate between *Wynnere and Wastoure*, lends immediacy to the debate between Ȝouthe and Medill Elde between the values of austerity and prodigality by locating this nascent schism to just one century before Thornton’s own time. Set around the reign of Edward III, *Wynnere and Wastoure* frames its dream-debate with a strong sense of its historical moment:

Sythen that Bretayne was biggede and Bruyttus it aughte  
 Thurgh the takynge of Troye with tresone within  
 There hath selcouthes\* bene sene in seere kynges tymes                      *marvels*  
 Bot neuer so many as nowe by the nyne dele.  
 For nowe alle es witt and wyles that we with delyn,  
 Wyse wordes and slee and icheon wryeth othere.  
 Dare neuer no westren wy while this welde lasteth  
 Sen his sone southewards to see ne to here

<sup>48</sup> Offord suggests in the introduction to her edition of the poem that its treatment of Ȝouthe is mainly satirical and that the poem’s main focus is on mortality (xxxvi-xxxvii). Early critics of the poem (David Lampe, “Poetic Strategy;” R.A. Waldron, “The Prologue”) have focused on its moral, didactic, and mortuary aspects. More recently, Anne Kernan (“Theme and Structure”) and Thorlac Turville-Petre (“The Ages of Man”) have observed that so much of the poem focuses on the values attributed to Ȝouthe that we must consider him to the most appealing of the disputants on account of his vitality.

That he ne schall holden byhynde when he hore eldes.

.....

Thene dredfull domesdaye it draweth neghe aftir. (1-9; 16)

The introduction to *Wynnere and Wastoure* looks both backwards and forwards through time. The poem looks back to the nation's Trojan origins at the same time that it looks to the present as a time of imminent apocalypse. For the poet, English society is in a state of decline: there are many marvels ("selcouthes") that have been seen over time, but none so many as now, when men now only deal in words, which obscures discourse to the point that language obscures itself ("icheon wryeth othere"). Even worse, a man cannot send his son out to go earn a living, because he cannot expect to be taken care of when he grows old. For the poet, social turmoil such as this indicates that doomsday is imminent.<sup>49</sup> This prologue may have provided Thornton with a retrospective interpretation of the histories which precede it, since it draws attention to the increasing levels of dissention and fragmentation within Christendom, as we have seen in the histories and romances.

As in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, the narrator of *Wynnere and Wastoure* falls asleep in a field and witnesses a debate. This time, however, the debate is not merely a representation of conflicting moral ideals, but an attempt to prevent an imminent civil war. Two armies have come together to fight over whose ideology is to steer England's economy. One is an army of foreign merchants, represented by Wynnere; the other is an army of friars and lawyers, represented by Wastoure. The king sends a herald to convince them to resolve their conflict with a debate. Wynnere argues that it is in the country's best interests to stockpile wealth, while Wastoure argues that it is in the country's best interests to spend it.

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<sup>49</sup> Thorlac Turville-Petre draws attention to the immediacy of the prologue in "The Prologue of *Wynnere and Wastoure*."

Both Wynnere and Wastoure attack each other and their positions on moral grounds with no end in sight, but what is clear is that both disputants are deeply committed to controlling the nation's economy. It is left to the king to judge whose policy is best, but the king ultimately decides that a healthy state requires a mixture of both. Ultimately, the king enlists Wynnere to aid the financing of his campaigns in France, while Wastoure is to go to London to encourage domestic commerce.

Both sides in this debate defend their philosophical positions on economic management by attacking their opponent's positions. Because the end of the poem is lost, we cannot know which side, if any, ultimately prevails. As Nicholas Jacobs observes, neither side of the debate is clearly in the wrong in the poem as it stands, even if neither side is clearly in the right, since "some thrift and some expenditure are both necessary for a healthy economy" (486).<sup>50</sup> Whether the reader is swayed by the arguments of one side or the other depends entirely on his or her own perceptions of the moral health of England. Trigg suggests in her introduction to the poem that the key feature of the text is that "the king cannot resolve [Wynnere and Wastoure's] dispute in ethical terms that might guide his own practices" (xlviii). What is striking about the indeterminacy of *Wynnere and Wastoure* is the importance it places on both maintaining economic balance and avoiding internal conflict.

*Wynnere and Wastoure* is not merely a poem about ideas, but a poem about ideas in a specific time and place. If Wynnere represents mercantilism and Wastoure represents the aristocracy, we can see in *Wynnere and Wastoure* an extended, if heated, version of the debate between 3outhe and Middil Elde in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*. The difference is that in *Wynnere and Wastoure* it is not merely personal values which are at stake, but their

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<sup>50</sup> A number of critics have drawn our attention to the serious economic theorization in which this poem engages, and its broad implications for a political economy. See Stillwell, Roney, Nolan, and Johnson for various discussions of particular political and economic conflicts in which the poem can be said to engage.

implications for the greater economy of an entire country. What both poems have in common is their indeterminacy. David Harrington shows how unreasonable all the speakers are:

The purpose of the debates is to provoke alert and skeptical reactions. None of the debaters in either poem, not even Eld, should be trusted. They give us nothing but one-sided, self-serving defenses of extreme positions, making no concessions, offering no compromises, and recognizing no need for coexistence of conflicting values. (253)

As Harrington argues, because all the debaters in both poems assert absolute positions and never provide well-reasoned arguments, it is left to the reader to take from them what he or she can. Moreover, readers of both poems in the context of the London manuscript would have already been made aware of the failure of absolutism which creates ambiguity in the sieges of *Jerusalem* and *Milan*. The closing debate poems are best read within their manuscript context, where earlier texts have already begun to train the reader to skeptically consider competing systems of moral and political commitments.

The London manuscript's unresolved debate poems draw the reader's attention to the high stakes of ideological conflict. "The Three Kings of Cologne" demonstrates how religious divisions based on absolutist thinking quickly lead to schism. *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* demonstrates that even within a homogenous culture, differences in value systems inevitably lead to conflict. And *Wynnere and Wastoure* historicises one such conflict and locates it in an England whose people are divided by exactly the kind of debating tactics used by both of the debaters sent before the king. The schisms which are the results of such conflicts are absolute in "The Three Kings of Cologne," unresolved in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, and dangerously close to inciting a civil war in *Wynnere and Wastoure*. In each of these poems, we see that the fundamental causes of social fracture are differences in value

systems. Thornton does not shrink away from showing us that such divisions might arise in England. Yet, as *Wynnere and Wastoure* establishes at the moment of the king's decision to employ both Wynnere and Wastoure to work for the good of the realm, the greatest danger to a society is not debate itself, but absolutism.

### 3.5 – Historicity and Sympathy in the London Thornton MS

Thornton opens the London manuscript with an extended religious-historical sequence, from the birth of the Virgin Mary, through the Crucifixion, and then to the establishment of Christianity in Rome. He continues to focus on Christian history as he depicts Charlemagne's battles against Saracens in Europe, all the while refusing to maintain an illusion of European cultural unification in the face of distress. Thornton compiles the manuscript so that it keeps one eye on the Holy Land and the other on Europe, with its European focus moving progressively closer to England.

Because the narratives in the London manuscript are historical rather than exemplary, we see protagonists engaging in varying degrees of ugly and reprehensible behavior, the consequences of which are openly acknowledged. The historical sequence Thornton compiles assumes the reader will agree with the political commitments necessary for European Christians to maintain the impetus of the crusades. However, Thornton's textual sequence does not, in doing so, occluding or ignoring the divisive implications of schism, nationalism, and politics on the unity of Western Christendom. On the contrary, as the texts in this manuscript progress ever closer towards Thornton's own society temporally and geographically, the juxtaposition of texts in this manuscript encourages the reader to consider the implications of schism at home.

In order to resolve this movement in the manuscript, Thornton carefully manages his audience's sympathies. *Cursor Mundi* and *The Northern Passion* encourage the reader to identify with Jesus, both affectively and as Christians. However, *The Siege of Jerusalem* separates these two threads of sympathy with its ambivalent treatment of the Jews who suffer at the hands of the Christian Roman armies who besiege Jerusalem. In the Charlemagne romances, while the reader is clearly meant to identify with the crusading ideology of the poems' Christian protagonists, both *The Siege of Milan*'s focus on the dispute between Turpin and Charlemagne and the military incompetence which permeates *Roland and Otuel* serve to discourage identifying too strongly with French crusaders whose impulses are not managed by a canny foreigner. This problem resolves itself with the treatment of the French in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, where they are not merely incompetent crusaders, but untrustworthy traitors who actively sabotage the crusading efforts of the English and their king. At the end of the manuscript, when strife is finally brought home to England after the notion of a monolithic Christianity has been undermined by keen historical awareness of "The Three Kings of Cologne," the reader of *Wynnere and Wastoure* is left on his or her own to determine whose vision of economic management is best for the nation.

In the London manuscript, Thornton compiles a sequence of narrative texts that present his readers with a rough account of the historical development of Christian culture from its beginnings in the Holy Land, to its acceptance in the West, and to its subsequent fragmentation into groups of nations in opposition due to their different interests. The textual sequence in this manuscript shows that culture changes over time while acknowledging that social fragmentation is common, powerful, tenacious, and often irreparable. Thornton uses the narrative sequence of the London manuscript to remind us repeatedly that absolutism is the best way to exacerbate such breaches and that it is both possible and appropriate to

attempt to resolve ideological competition without resorting to violence. It is not without a sense of irony that I suggest the London manuscript is an anthology unified by its treatment of fragmentation. However, as we turn towards reading both of Thornton's manuscripts in conversation with each other, it is worth keeping in mind that he was a man interested in exploring the roots of his own culture. Thornton's books suggest with remarkable acuity the sources of the social chaos his own society was facing when he wrote them. In order to imagine a solution, he was willing to analyze the history of Western Christianity in order to keep in mind its historical failures and successes alike.

### Chapter 4 – Romance in Robert Thornton's Library

As we have seen, Thornton tends to organize the texts in his manuscripts by grouping like with like. We can see this organizational principle at work in the Lincoln manuscript, which can be divided neatly into a romance book, a religious book, and a reference book. We can also see this organizational principle at work in the London manuscript, which can be divided, albeit less neatly, into sections of religious history, Charlemagne romance, didactic poems and songs, romances of ideological conflict, and debate poems. We have already observed that each manuscript is organized for a particular purpose: the Lincoln manuscript is on the whole a tool for the maintenance of social, spiritual, and physical health, and the London manuscript is on the whole a book that informs its reader on matters of history and culture. It seems that Thornton chose the order and organization of texts with an uncommon degree of care. Thomas Crofts, Phillipa Hardman, Ralph Hanna, George Keiser, and John Thompson have all drawn our attention towards evidence suggesting that he copied his texts piecemeal and that he ordered them only after they had existed for some time as separate, unbound, booklets.<sup>1</sup> These textual clusters tend to produce meaningful juxtapositions. However, the genre most conspicuous in both of Thornton's books is romance, and it is the only genre that has been distributed among them. It is possible that this distribution is also significant, and that there was some reason why Thornton decided to split up his romances.

So, why does Thornton distribute his romances among his two manuscripts instead of keeping them all together? Did Thornton even consider all of these texts to be romances? Are the romances meant to be read only in terms of their relationships with the dominant themes

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<sup>1</sup> See Crofts "The Occasion of the *Morte Arthure*," Hardman "Reading the Spaces," Hanna "Growth," Keiser "Life and Milieu," and Thompson *Robert Thornton*; "The Compiler in Action."

of the books in which they reside, or are the full collection of romances across both books meant to complement each other in some way?

My first question is the most complex, and this chapter is devoted to answering it. As for my second question, the answer is yes. Romance is the genre of writing that both books share most conspicuously, constituting just over 40% of the material in Thornton's collection.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Thornton appears to have a clear sense of the term when he uses the word "romance" to describe seven of his fourteen chivalric poems in their *incipits* and *explicit*s.<sup>3</sup>

We thus ought to assess what Thornton's romances might have meant for Thornton himself. We have already seen that Thornton is a well-organized and competent scribe. This competence extends to what appears to be a clear understanding of the genre. As Paul Strohm has persistently and convincingly argued, we should not assume that medieval authors and scribes were lax about their terminology when they made distinctions between different kinds of texts ("Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives").<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, John Finlayson suggests in "Definitions of Middle English Romance" that:

[B]y the late fourteenth century in England there seems to have been at least an implicit understanding of what a *romance* was, if we accept the evidence of *The Tale of Sir Thopas*. To be effective, or even exist, parody must depend on the audience's recognition of the standard pattern[.] (I.46-47)

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<sup>2</sup> Romances account for roughly half of the Lincoln MS (14 items at 169/340 folios) and nearly a quarter of the London manuscript (5 items at 43/181 folios); considered in light of Thornton's whole collection, just over 40% of the pages Thornton copied were romances.

<sup>3</sup> Found on folios 98v, 109r, 114v, and 161r of the Lincoln MS, and folios 82r and 163v (for both *Richard* and *Ipokrephum*) of the London MS. Thus, *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, *The Earl of Toulouse*, *Sir Perceval of Galles*, *Roland and Otuel*, *Richard Coer de Lyon* and *Ipokrephum* are all, by Thornton's reckoning, romances.

<sup>4</sup> Strohm argues a similar point in "The Origin and Meaning of Middle English *Romaunce*." Strohm treats similar kinds of distinctions in hagiography in "Some Generic Terms in Middle English Hagiographical Narrative."

Considered independently of each other, there might be any number of ways to categorize Thornton's romances. Finlayson has observed that the *Prose Alexander* and the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, both of which appear at the beginning of the Lincoln manuscript, might be treated as "heroic histories" ("Reading Romances in their Manuscript" 643). Thus, these two romances might have easily found their place among the histories of the London manuscript. Likewise, Elizabeth Berlings has suggested that both *Sir Perceval of Galles*, which occurs in the Lincoln manuscript, and *The Siege of Milan*, which occurs in the London manuscript, might have been written by the same author because both contain a "deliberate mixture of the comic and the serious" and contain parodic versions of scenes found in more serious instances of the genre (57-60). A number of critics, including S. H. A. Shepherd, Suzanne Conklin Akbari, and Emily Lavin Leverett have suggested that the London romances be set apart based on their shared depiction of militant Christianity, but this division seems questionable since a number of the Lincoln romances also depict Saracen antagonists, sometimes so aggressively as to undermine clear definitions of Saracen identity (Gorny 29). It is evident that Thornton did not divide up his romances on the basis of their treatment of history or their crusading ethos, and that he considered all of his romances to be romances.

Turning now to my third question – whether Thornton's romances might have been divided to complement each other – we have already seen that Thornton's choices reflect the dominant themes of the books in which each set of romances resides. However, it remains possible that they were also meant to form some larger unity. Finlayson has observed that in the Lincoln manuscript, Thornton "arranged the romances as an anthology of romance subtypes and thematic preoccupations" ("Reading Romances in their Manuscript" 640). Although Finlayson reads only the Lincoln romances, by extending his observation to include the London romances we can see that Thornton provides us with not only an

anthology of the genre, but also an anthology of the genre divided thematically. Thornton provides us with a unique opportunity to observe the qualities a medieval compiler took into account when separating romances into subtypes. Pearsall has suggested that among the Middle English romances there exists “a fundamental division between ‘epic romance’ and ‘lyric romance’, the former more prosaic, realistic, historical and martial, the latter more emotive, more concerned with love, faith, constancy and the marvellous” (“The Development of Middle English Romance” 96). Pearsall’s terminology has since become outdated, as it is based on distinguishing between the French genres of the *chanson de geste* and the *roman d’aventure*.<sup>5</sup> Pearsall suggests the production of Middle English romances indicates a social shift in the audience of romance, as “a class of social aspirants who wish[ed] to be entertained with what they consider[ed] to be the same fare, but in English, as their social betters,” although this view, too, has since become outdated, as we shall see below (92). Nevertheless, Pearsall’s thematic categories aptly describe one possible reason why Thornton distributed his romances as he did. What he would call “epic romance” is a group of texts concerned with treatments of societies as corporate bodies in conflict with each other, while what he would call “lyric romance” is a group of texts concerned with treating the desires of solitary individuals. As we shall see, Thornton distributes his romances along these lines. The Lincoln manuscript romances depict solitary protagonists with personal concerns who often encounter marvels, while the London manuscript romances treat corporate protagonists in comparatively realistic historical and martial contexts.

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Kay refutes the long-held assumption that the *chanson de geste* and the *romance* were competing genres in *The Chanson de Geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* by arguing instead that they were contemporary and often interrelated.

### 4.1 – Why Romance?

Critics have never found it easy to define what a romance is. This confusion is all the more impressive in light of Pearsall's observation, now a critical commonplace, that romance is "the principal secular literature of the middle ages" (*Middle English Romance and its Audiences* 37). The tendency has been to view it as an intermediary genre situated between the epic and the novel. Thus, romance is read as a genre with roots in the Old French *chanson de geste* tradition, which finds its apogee in the work of Chrétien de Troyes, following which we find the continuations of Chrétien, including the expanded treatments of the Holy Grail and texts such as the prose *Lancelot*, which constitute the sources Malory harmonizes in his *Morte Darthur*.<sup>6</sup> Thus, W.P. Ker's early and influential study *Epic and Romance* suggests that Chrétien and the twelfth-century authors who modeled their work after his anticipate the development of the modern novel (349-51). Ker claims that "Chrestien of Troyes is at the head of the French Romantic School" because he is not interested in "the 'Celtic magic,' except for decorative and incidental purposes, but in psychology and analysis of the emotions," and thus reads medieval romance whiggishly, in terms of how it engendered the novel (345). Ker not only dismisses the supernatural, but also Chrétien's followers, who "did much to make romance into a mechanic art" (325). By accepting romance's incorporation of psychology while rejecting the supernatural, Ker

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph Norris testifies to the continuing influence of this view when he begins the first chapter of his recent study by laying out a literary genealogy beginning with Geoffrey of Monmouth, continuing with Chrétien, who was "the first important poet to use the Arthurian legend" and whose work "inspired many continuators and imitators," which led to "the use of Arthurian characters and themes by Middle English poets," to whose work Malory contributed when he "retold the old story in a way that incorporated elements from many strands of Arthurian legend and therefore brought a measure of hitherto unrealized harmony to this diverse body" (2, 3, 4).

implies that authors of romance who fail to meet the quality of Chrétien's work fail to write compelling narratives.

Subsequent accounts of romance, notably the influential discussions of Erich Auerbach and Northrop Frye, share Ker's sense of Chrétien de Troyes's centrality. This approach has been tenacious, but it distorts the evidence. Chrétien was hugely influential, but surely he was not so influential that no other author could compare to him.<sup>7</sup> The current view is that there was a distinctly English tradition of romance. Models that assume the universality of features such as those described by Ker, Auerbach, and Frye fail so spectacularly when they discuss Middle English romances because their formal features resemble those found in Chrétien's romances only superficially. To exemplify from some of Thornton's romances, we have already seen how the novelistic concern with motivation, what Ker describes as "psychology and the emotions," takes a central role in poems such as the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *The Siege of Milan*, *Sir Degrevant* and *The Earl of Toulouse*. Auerbach suggests that the supernatural, which Ker rejects, is what enables the romance to present the reader with "a self-portrayal of feudal knighthood with its mores and ideals" and their strong connection to courtly society (*Mimesis* 130-31). Frye concurs, suggesting that romance is "the nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfilment dream," which the ruling social or intellectual class uses to "project its ideals" in opposition to the villains which threaten their ascendancy (*Anatomy* 186). But Thornton's romances are not limited to "a self-portrayal of feudal knighthood with its mores and ideals" as seen in instances such as when Sir Isumbras works for seven years as a blacksmith's apprentice in order to sustain himself,

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<sup>7</sup> For more on how scholarly approaches to Chrétien as a generic exemplar fail to fully understand even their assumed subject, see Gaunt. On the impact of French-centred theorizations of the genre, see Crane, Liu, Furrow ("Radical Categories and the Central Romance" and *Expectations of Romance* 61-85), and Putter ("Historical Introduction" 2-3). The work of both Liu and Furrow is influenced by Wittgenstein's "family resemblance" theory, discussed below.

or when the ghost of Guinevere's mother castigates Guinevere and Gawain for the loose morality of Arthurian society in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*. And we have seen that romance antagonists do not universally threaten protagonists' ascendancy, in texts such as the *Prose Alexander*, where Alexander exists mostly in a race against time to accomplish all he can before he dies; in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, whose two antagonists, Philip of France and Saladin, both compete for the protagonist's attention; or in *Ipokrephum*, whose protagonist is actually Mary, who strives to mollify her intemperate son.

Few Middle English romances share a set of fixed characteristics. The problems we find in the examples with which Thornton provides us are representative of the larger problem of categorizing Middle English romances. In a recent survey, Thomas Hahn and Dana Symons remark that "one can only marvel at the capaciousness of a genre that as easily accommodates the adventures of the baby Jesus as military and crusading exploits" (353). As Yin Liu has demonstrated, when medieval writers offer lists of romances, they usually categorize them by the names of their protagonists, rather than by plots (344).<sup>8</sup> Romance criticism until the mid-1980s tended to define the genre by its contents. These efforts at taxonomy have proven to be sometimes incomplete, often vague, and uniformly unsatisfactory, and have often relied on dubious assumptions about the social status of the alleged audience.<sup>9</sup> One representative example is Lee Ramsey's study *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England*. Ramsey suggests that because we do not find as

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<sup>8</sup> The usual suspects in such lists are members of the Nine Worthies, Octavian, Isumbras, Guy, Bevis, and Horn. As we can see in many of the essays in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, new approaches to character typology in medieval romance are a promising avenue of study. See also Furrow's contemporaneous article "Radical Categories," which achieves a similar conclusion. Liu is exceptionally helpful in pointing us towards understanding medieval romance as though we were medieval readers.

<sup>9</sup> I refer here to studies such as L.H. Loomis (*Medieval Romance in England*), French and Hale (*Middle English Metrical Romances*), Mehl (*The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*), and Burke and Severs (*A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, Vol.1). These studies are all successful in some way, and informative in many others.

many “courtly romances” in Middle English as are found in French, Middle English romances represent a “popular” literature that emphasises plot and action, seeking to serve its readers rather than to change or correct them (5-6). Here, Ramsay uses the word “courtly” as a cypher for “like Chrétien,” against whose work he proceeds to dismiss the efforts of the “hack writers” and unenlightened audiences of the fecund literary tradition in which the “popular” Middle English romances participate (17). Some of the romances he describes include *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and *Richard Coer de Lyon*, all of which exist not only in Thornton's collection, but also in multiple other manuscript witnesses from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, suggesting that these romances maintained their popularity for an extended period of time. “Courtly” romances such as those described by Ker, Auerbach, Frye, Jauss, and Ramsay are few and far between in Middle English; to privilege them is to project contemporary literary values onto the literary traditions of medieval England.

In his “Historical Introduction” to *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, Ad Putter stresses that Middle English romances are such a fluid genre that it is impossible to meaningfully divide them into discrete categories. Putter proposes that we instead engage with the genre as a “family-resemblance” category, which allows us consider these texts as “forming a complex network of relationships and similarities, not as a set that can be defined on the basis of specific properties common to each of its members” (2).<sup>10</sup> Although Alistair Fowler, in his influential early study *Kinds of Literature*, first applied Wittgenstein to the

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<sup>10</sup> Putter cites Wittgenstein's discussion of the concept of “family resemblance” in *Philosophical Investigations* (31-32), a passage which is epitomized by Wittgenstein's advice that we “don't think, but look!” Wittgenstein suggests that we can meaningfully consider groups of things even when we cannot comprehensively enumerate a set of common features. Moreover, he suggests that the presence of examples where such features are absent does not require the redefinition of whole categories, which can instead be considered as broad groups on account of their overlapping mesh of shared features. The idea of the “family resemblance” also informs Helen Cooper's approach in *The English Romance in Time* (7). For an opposing view, see Whetter, 19-20.

question of literary genre (42), Putter is the first to apply him specifically to romance.

“Family-resemblance” theory helps him to liberate what he terms the “popular” romances – texts written to all but the aristocracy, who were reading their romances in French – from the historical weight of the antiquated aesthetic sensibilities such as Ramsey's which persistently demonstrate their failure to live up to the French tradition of “courtly” romances (2-3).

Furthermore, Putter draws our attention to how older approaches to Middle English romance often overlook their manuscript contexts, which, he argues, provide us with direct evidence to their reception in their own time (4-5).<sup>11</sup> For Putter, to understand popular romance is to understand medieval popular culture, because the genre's tendency towards narrative conservatism enables us to discern what social issues people were concerned about; the genre's apparent conservatism is actually “politically manipulative, endeavouring to persuade its audience to accept a particular political system, or to whip it up in support of a particular cause” (18). Most significantly, Putter suggests that romances are deeply invested in aristocratic ideology *despite* being marginal to aristocratic culture, as “the social groups whose specific concerns are addressed by many popular romances are often not in the most powerful or central positions of their society” (23).<sup>12</sup> He concludes by suggesting that we read “popular” romances generously, as “endeavouring to discover the programme and principles that lie behind a work requires us to assume that the work is at least reasonably

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<sup>11</sup> In *The English Romance in Time*, Helen Cooper follows Putter in her suggestion that not only genres themselves, but also the motifs they contain, are subject to change over time (3-7). Cooper draws her argument from Richard Dawkins' suggestion in *The Selfish Gene* that the *meme*, which he defines as the smallest unit of cultural content, has causal agency and is able to propagate itself, much like a gene. Cooper thus reads in retellings of romance the adaptation of memes in new social contexts.

<sup>12</sup> See also Harriet Hudson, “Middle English Popular Romances.” Hudson demonstrates convincingly that popular romances “appealed directly (though, we should note, not exclusively) to a gentry audience and the owners of the manuscripts were mostly members of this class” (162). It is evident that Putter's distinction between elite and popular romances is somewhat misleading. Nevertheless, family-resemblance theory is evidently a useful way to approach a genre as fluid as romance, and it is critical to entertain the possibility that texts are often successful on their own terms.

successful in its own terms" (30). Putter's model of romance as the literature of social groups on the margins of the aristocracy and his suggestion that the genre is understandable in its own terms are particularly appropriate to Thornton's case.

Nicola McDonald's "Polemical Introduction" to *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England* states Putter's case even more strongly, pointing out that Middle English romance as a genre tends to be excluded "from serious and sustained academic consideration" and "judged low class, on account of its non-aristocratic audience, its reliance on stereotypes, formulae and conventional plot structures, and its particular brand of unadulterated good fun" (2).

McDonald suggests that we instead read these texts more closely *because* they were so energetically condemned by even the earliest critics of the genre for their disruptive nature (3). Thus, romance has the potential of being a socially disruptive genre because it is so imaginative, as it provides "a space ... in which cultural norms and divergences from those norms are negotiated and articulated" because the fundamental plot structure of the genre, despite its conventionality, is about conflicts between incompatible desires (12). McDonald suggests that romance appeals to a low-status audience, offering an escape from daily life by appropriating an elite aristocratic milieu "from whence neither author not [*sic*] audience is likely to issue" (15). Thornton, a man distained of knighthood, was clearly not "low status," but we can see him as someone on the margins of aristocratic society. Nevertheless, she draws our attention to the pleasures of popular romance – its plots characterized by desire, its fictionality, and its marvels – as a space which enables authors to imaginatively transgress, and therefore interrogate, social conventions (13; 15-16).

Romance in medieval England was a genre that pushed generic boundaries on all sides. It was also a genre particularly suited to pushing the boundaries of taste. As Raluca Radulescu and Cory Rushton suggest in their introduction to *A Companion to Popular*

*Romance*, we ought to seriously consider the imaginative potency of these putatively unsophisticated texts that provided their medieval readers with entertainment, even though they present modern readers with disturbing images of rape, incest, racial discrimination and religious intolerance (3). For Radulescu and Rushton, romance “attests to a widespread appetite for narratives likely to tackle some uncomfortable home truths, whether these are family issues or religious belief and practice” (5). Middle English romance is a genre characterized by its flexibility and variety. These characteristics, combined with the genre’s imaginative capacity, together suggest that romance is a genre ideally situated to engage directly with its audience’s social and political anxieties.

We have seen from the examples of Ker, Auerbach and Frye that we cannot meaningfully classify the Middle English romances in terms of their formal qualities. Likewise, we have seen the futility of classifying such a capacious genre in terms of its content. The recent turn in criticism focuses on the relationship between romance and its audience, and rightly so; Thornton was not only the scribe and compiler of his romances, he was also among their primary readers. If romance is indeed – as Putter, McDonald, and Radulescu and Rushton suggest – a disruptive and politically persuasive genre, an exploratory genre that facilitates the interrogation of cultural norms, and a genre capable of articulating discomfiting truths, then it is probable that Thornton organized his romances in such a way as to express some kind of disruptive purpose.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Frederic Jameson suggests that genres are best understood as “literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact” (106, emphasis in

original).<sup>13</sup> The meaning of a genre is thus determined by its audience. Taking the genre as “realized ... in the romances of Chrestien de Troyes” (136), Jameson's Marxist reading of romance leads him to follow Frye in suggesting that romance is, as it has always been, a genre invested in expressing the desires of the ruling classes. However, Jameson does not see in romance the affinity for “generic discontinuities” characteristic of the novel (144). Consequently, the genre does not satisfy his characteristically Marxist desire to find in a text “a transitional moment in which two distinct modes of production ... coexist,” or antagonism “articulated in terms of the struggle of the social classes” (148). We might consider in what ways this analysis might be applied to the romances in Thornton's collection containing scenes of class antagonism such as *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*.

Jameson draws our attention to a more profound problem with how we understand romance when he characterizes the genre by its use of the machinery of “magical forces,” which he also calls “the phantasmagoria of ‘imagination’” (148). Jameson regularly claims that he calls attention to the “historical situation into which the individual work must emerge” (141), a historical situation that inevitably, according to his approach to literary form, produces “the eclecticism of the novel” (143). In order to produce this reading, Jameson compares romance to “traditional generic systems” such as comedy (141):

Comedy is active and articulates the play of desire and of the obstacles to it, whereas romance develops, as we have seen, under the sign of destiny and providence, and takes as its outer horizon the transformation of the whole world, ultimately sealed by those revelations of which the enigmatic Grail is itself the

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<sup>13</sup> This chapter, entitled “Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism,” is an expansion of Jameson's earlier article, “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre.” The earlier article suggests that critics must reclaim the concept of genre as a unit of meaning within a literary text, which Jameson categorizes as texts which add magic to their depictions of the natural world – a definition which includes a large number of post-medieval texts.

emblem. Comedy is social in its ultimate perspective, whereas romance remains metaphysical; and the wish-fulfillments of comedy may be identified as those of the genital stage, whereas romance would seem to betray older, more archaic fantasy material ... In particular, the archaic fantasy material that psychoanalytic criticism feels able to detect in such forms can never be imagined as emerging in any pure state, but must always pass through a determinate social and historical situation, in which it is both universalized and reappropriated by "adult" ideology. (142)

It is evident from this passage that Jameson considers romance to be a passive, archaic, and childish genre, whose motifs will inevitably be reappropriated and made directly relevant to a given historical moment by "adult" ideology, since "archaic fantasy material ... can never be imagined as emerging in any pure state," nor applied directly to any particular historical or social context smaller than the whole world. The fantasy of unity that romances produce by implying that providence might transform the whole world often serves the purpose of obscuring the chaos of reality. It is clear that Ker's ghost still haunts us: the only "romances" Jameson cites are *The Winter's Tale* (in the epigraph) and Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, which he takes as a representative example of the genre (119). Perhaps Jameson has overlooked his own point that genre produces meaning through the interaction between author and audience, or perhaps he does not want to join a community that might be defined by its possible interactions with such an "archaic" genre, when he can instead read novels which instantiate its concerns with the language of "adult ideology." For Jameson, romance is a genre of literature too deeply invested in its audience to express the social changes he sees as characteristic of modernity.

Jameson's focus on the specific historical context of modernism obviously limits the extent to which his analysis can be applied to medieval romance. Given that romances are

pre-modern literary creations, it is obvious that the genre cannot express the social changes of modernity. What it can do, however, is express the social changes of the medieval. The literature of the fantastic, with all its magic, phantasms, reliance on providence, subtly representative metaphysics, and dreams of global transformation, is powerful *because* it is so flexible.<sup>14</sup> In *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, James Simpson suggests that:

Late medieval romance ... negotiates between different poles of power; the king may be the point of departure and return for many romances, but the genre is primarily designed to offer space to the satellite figure of the knight, on whom the king is revealed to be dependent; and the knight's own position is itself revealed to be dependent on his dealings with women and merchants in particular. While the genre ostensibly promotes the interests of knights, their success is always premised on a complex interaction with other social forces internal to a given society ... romance is fitted to address tensions internal to a social system [...] (283-84)

Simpson demonstrates that the very expectation of familiarity with which readers of romance approach their reading requires the genre to remain in flux in order to maintain its cultural relevance by its "recognition of ideological fluidity:" the practice of recognizing moments where different social systems find themselves in opposition and the depiction of the resolution of the conflicts between them (316).<sup>15</sup> Simpson situates Middle English romance within the historical context that produced it, and celebrates its fluidity as a means by which it is able to address social tensions.

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<sup>14</sup> Nicola McDonald has observed that magic rings, fairy mistresses, love potions, dragons, giants, and other such fantastic things are endemic to romance, signifying "the imaginary space [the genre] generates simply by insisting it is a fiction ("A Polemical Introduction" 15).

<sup>15</sup> Simpson's position agrees with the conclusion of Susan Wittig's earlier Structuralist reading of motifs in Middle English romance in *Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances*, which concludes by finding that the Middle English romances tend to link love stories with the restitution of patrimony in such a way as that the narrative drives consistently towards "the preservation of the community" (182).

In Thornton's collection, the machinery of magic and fantasy is most prevalent in the Lincoln manuscript. A solitary romance protagonist's encounter with the supernatural often externalizes some kind of psychological concern or trauma, as we can see in episodes such as Alexander's solitary descent into the cave of forgotten gods in the *Prose Alexander*, Arthur's encounter with the giant of St. Michael's Mount in the *Morte Arthure*, and the various wild beasts which kidnap children in *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*. In these and other episodes, encounters with the supernatural challenge protagonists' self-identification, and these are challenges which must be overcome by the protagonists alone.

By contrast, because the London manuscript romances predominantly feature corporate protagonists, the supernatural does not make manifest otherwise subtly-present complications or interfere with the reader's assessment of the protagonist. Instead, it interferes radically with the natural course of events and forcefully integrates protagonists into their communities. The London romances thus depict heroes acting in groups to fulfil the desires of the societies with which they identify. None of the romances in the London manuscript depicts magic or monsters to any significant degree. The London manuscript prefers divine intervention and miracles, which are normalized by its historicized treatment of Christ and Christianity.

Although distinguishing between romance sub-types by their contents is not generally an advisable tactic, it is evident that Thornton did exactly that as he distributed his romances among his two books. The Lincoln romances, which I call "solitary" (and which Pearsall calls "lyric") depict solitary protagonists whose adventures reflect personal concerns and who often encounter the supernatural. Likewise, the London romances, which I call "corporate" (and which Pearsall calls "epic") depict whole societies as protagonists whose adventures reflect social concerns depicted in discrete historical contexts.

Each manuscript's corpus of romances complements that of the other. Thornton's decision to distribute his romances in order to emphasise these tonal and thematic differences indicates his editorial awareness of their disparate interests. In the more prescriptive Lincoln manuscript, Thornton's romances imagine the successes of their protagonists as a product of their exemplary behaviour as individuals. In the more historical London manuscript, Thornton's romances acknowledge that their protagonists' successes are far from inevitable and cannot exclusively be attributed to the actions of individuals. Both kinds of romances are equally capable of being socially disruptive. The individual romances can do so when their protagonists desire to live, or are forced into living, in new social situations. Likewise, the corporate romances can do so when the individuals who form a social group must temper their own needs in order to produce a desirable conclusion, or when they refuse to do so and thus threaten the lives of their allies. As we shall see, a survey of all of Thornton's romances suggests he was interested mainly in reading stories depicting conflict between individual desires and communal identities.

#### **4.2 – The Lincoln Romances: Individuals in Crisis**

The Lincoln manuscript's romances predominantly feature solitary protagonists and magical milieus. Paradoxically, although the protagonists of both the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure* are often surrounded by allies and armies, the narrative focus remains closely tied to each protagonist and his identity. Both romances manage this in episodes where the hero separates himself from his company in order to effectively become, to borrow Auerbach's phrase, a knight who rides out. However, both romances maintain their narrative

focus on the protagonist throughout. This is most evident in the *Prose Alexander*, where most of Alexander's social interactions are epistolary, and we can see him constantly inventing and re-inventing himself in the claims he makes in the prefaces of his letters. Although the *Morte Arthure*'s focus on its protagonist is more subtle, the regularity with which the poem depicts and analyses Arthur's dreams places special emphasis on Arthur, his self-construction as a successor to Alexander, and his relationships with his subjects.<sup>16</sup> These two romances provide us with evidence for Thornton's interest in texts which examine the tension that can develop between individuals and the communities with which they identify.

The first half of the *Prose Alexander* is dominated by Alexander's upbringing, his conquest of the city-states of Greece, and his antagonistic relationship with Darius, King of Persia. As Alexander travels into the East, however, this romance turns towards cataloguing the marvels he encounters. In one episode, Alexander and his army camp beside a pond overnight, when they see wonderful beasts:

Alson þe mone be-gan to schynne þare come a grete multitude of scorpyons to-  
warde þe stanke for to take þam a drynke. And þan þare come oþer maner of  
nedders, and dragounes wonder grete of dyuerse colours ... Þir dragones come  
dounne fra þe hye mountaynes for to drynke of þe stanke, and þay hadd crestis  
one þaire heddeȝ & þair bresteȝ ware bryghte lyk golde, & þaire mowthes open.  
Þaire aande slewe any quikk thyng þat it smat upon, and oute of þaire eghne þare  
come flammes of fyre. (70)

We might concede that dragons are depicted often enough in medieval texts that their presence does not necessarily make the story 'fantastic', but these dragons have the

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<sup>16</sup> As we shall see, such focus is absent from the Charlemagne romances of the London MS, where Charles is just one voice among many peers, all of whom seem to have equal standing at his court.

exceptional ability to shoot flames from their eyes.<sup>17</sup> This episode continues for nearly seventy lines of prose, in which Alexander and his troops participate in a chaotic battle with not only the scorpions, adders, and dragons mentioned above, but also other equally rare beasts such as three-horned horses and gigantic crabs, swine, mice, and bats (69-71). Despite the prevalence of supernatural beasts that threaten Alexander and his army, Alexander himself dominates the narrative to a remarkable degree. This encounter is prefaced by the narrator's remark that "Alexander thoghte it was noȝt spedeful langare to stryff wit thase monstres," so he "remowed his Oste fra þeine" (69.22-24). Shortly before the army camps by the pond, it encounters some men in the river, so the narrator tells us that "Alexander gert spirre þam in þe langage of Inde" where fresh water could be found (69.30-31). Similarly, it is "Alexander & his Oste" who travel towards the fresh water (69.34), Alexander who "comanded" the camp (69.36), Alexander who "comanded" the number of cook-fires to be lit and that the army should eat (70.3-5), "Alexander & his Oste" who first see and fear the dragons (70.15), and "Alexander" who comforts his troops and mobilises the defense of the camp (70.17). When the army does act, the narrator tells us that they "didd als þay sawe Alexander doo" (70.23). This encounter is typical of the extent to which the narrator prefers to ascribe agency to Alexander himself. Although Alexander is accompanied by his army, the author often depicts him acting alone.

Alexander witnesses stranger things as he travels further east, towards the edge of the world, in search of the Trees of the Sun and Moon which will tell him of his own future. Among the many wonders he and his followers encounter in the East are the cockatrice, a creature who can turn men to stone with its gaze (91-92), and the phoenix, a bird which

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<sup>17</sup> To compare, the dragon in Arthur's dream breathes fire from his mouth, and the dragon in *Sir Eglamour* does not project fire at all.

immolates itself and is reborn from its own ashes (94). Alexander takes twelve princes with him in his pilgrimage to the trees (92.32-33), and these wonders are visible to all. However, when he finally encounters the trees, the focus returns again to the protagonist and his private desires. Alexander asks the trees “sall I conquere all þe werlde, and efterwarde3 wit þe victorye wende hame to Macedoyne till my moder Olympias, and my sisters?” (94.29-30). The trees's responses are equally personal, for they respond to him exclusively in the second-person singular, discussing him and his future using the nominative pronoun *tu* or the dative pronoun *tibi* (94.33-95.12).<sup>18</sup>

Alexander is completely separated from his army in the Candace episode which follows his encounter with the Trees of the Sun and Moon (96-103). As Alexander and his armies return to the West, they pass a country called Prasiac, ruled by the queen Candace and her three sons. In an exchange of letters and gifts, Candace acquires a portrait of Alexander. Alexander has exchanged places with his advisor Antiochus in order to hide his true identity from strangers, and during this time he is drawn into a dispute between one of Candace's sons and a foreigner who desires his wife. His help is rewarded with an invitation to meet Candace. When he goes to meet her, he travels on his own for the first time in the romance. Alexander has forgotten all about the portrait that was taken of him, and so when Candace brings him to her privy chamber and calls him by his true name, we see the conqueror of the world in his moment of greatest vulnerability:

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<sup>18</sup> The romance records the trees' speech in Latin verse, which is probably how it appeared in his source. It is impossible to tell whether this is typical in the Middle English Alexander tradition. In the analogous episode in the Middle English *Kyng Alisaunder*, the trees speak in English (6950-73). No analogy can be found in *The Wars of Alexander* (a.k.a. *Alexander A*), as the fragment that remains breaks off as Philip attacks Byzantium, well before Alexander goes to India. Likewise, no analogy can be found in the fragmentary *Alexander and Dindimus* (a.k.a. *Alexander B*), which treats only the exchange of letters between the two, or in *The Wars of Alexander* (a.k.a. *Alexander C*), which breaks off at Alexander's conquest of Babylon.

And also sone als Alexander herde hys name be neuenede, he was gretly trubblede,  
and his vesage bi-gan to waxe pale, and his chere to change. And than the quene said  
vn-to hym: "Alexander," quop she, "for to schewe þe mare verrayly þat þou ert  
Alexander, com with me." And þan scho tuk hym by þe hande & leedde in-tyl anoper  
chambir, and schewed hym þare his awenn Fygyre portrayed in a parchemyn skyne.

And when Alexander saw þat, he wex pale & wane & biganne to tremblee. (100)

Now Alexander is visibly afraid for his life and Candace taunts him for being captured by a woman, but she agrees to keep his identity secret because his reputation has spread far and wide and her people would have killed him in retribution for his killing of King Porrus of India. Candace allows him to live because he had just recently saved her son's life, and she requests his aid to prevent two of her sons from warring against each other. As he returns to his army, he finds he must travel through a wonderful cave, a "gret spelunc," in which "all godde3 ere wount for to ete and halde þaire consaill" (102). As he travels through the dark, he meets two gods forgotten deep beneath the earth, Sensonchosis and Serapis, both of whom remind him of his mortality by telling him that he will never return to his homeland and by revealing the place where he will be buried. Only after this ordeal is Alexander finally at liberty to rejoin his army.

The *Prose Alexander* is preoccupied with its hero. In its first half, the text presents the reader with a series of epistolary diplomatic exchanges that express the protagonist's character.<sup>19</sup> The second half of the romance uses a mixed narrative consisting of letters and narration to depict the protagonist responding to increasingly alien situations as his preoccupation with knowledge of the future drives him to the far edge of the world. The great variety of marvels and magic present in the *Prose Alexander* make it Thornton's

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<sup>19</sup> Some quotations of this kind from throughout the text may be found in Chapter 2.

strangest romance by a large margin. We also know that Thornton added the *Prose Alexander* to the Lincoln manuscript at a late stage in its production, after he had begun his work on the London manuscript (Keiser "Life and Milieu" 177-78). The placement of this romance is all the more significant as it highlights the Lincoln manuscript's focus on solitary adventurers and supernatural encounters. These encounters provide insight into the character of the protagonist, demonstrating that he is a brave leader and canny diplomat, but also a man obsessed with the question of his legacy and his relationship with his mother. Alexander's self-confidence, too, has limits, as we learn when we see it evaporate when he is separated from his army. Alexander cannot escape his identity as an individual.

Like the *Prose Alexander*, the alliterative *Morte Arthure* actively separates its protagonist from the community he ostensibly represents. Although this poem appears to depict a community at war, the members of the Round Table tend to represent their own interests more than the kingdom on whose behalf they fight. These depictions approach the motif of the solitary knight so often found in medieval romance. We can see the supernatural at work in the poem's most diverse community: the army of Emperor Lucius of Rome, who goes to war:

Arayede with his Romaines appone ryche stedys;

Sexty geauntes be-fore, engenderide with fendez,

With weches and warlaws to wacchene his tentys,

Ay-ware whare he wendes, wyntrez and 3eres.

Myghte no blonkes theme bere, thos bustous churles,

Bot couerede camellez of tourse, enclosyde in maylez (611-16)

Although the giants, witches, and warlocks which accompany Lucius are not mentioned again, giants feature throughout the poem, none more notably than the giant of St. Michael's

Mount (840-1221).<sup>20</sup> In this oft-discussed episode, Arthur is accosted by a Knight Templar shortly after his army lands in Normandy. The knight reports that a giant has been despoiling the surrounding countryside and eating its villagers. Even worse, the giant has recently kidnapped the Duchess of Brittany, who happens also to be Guinevere's cousin. Arthur commands Sir Kayous and Sir Bedevere to prepare to avenge him if he is not able to slay the giant on his own, but maintains that the quest is to be his when he says "I wille passe in pilgrimage preuely here-aftyre" (896). For all the fierceness of Arthur and his armies, the poem's first violent episode pits a solitary knight, "Sir Arthure hym selfene," against a supernatural foe (900). Like the *Prose Alexander*, the *Morte Arthure* contrives to separate its protagonist from his community.

As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests, because giants are human, only too large to ignore, their presence serves to exhibit the undesirable or transgressive traits which also feature in those who defeat them: here, the giant, as an inflated human body, represents Arthur's inflationary sin of pride (51). Cohen reads giant-killing as a symbolic appropriation of power which enables narratives of self-determination (29-32). Geraldine Heng complicates Cohen's reading by suggesting that the redistribution of the giant's wealth at the end of this episode indicates the presence of a crisis of social mobility in Arthur's England. The discourse of Arthurian chivalry tends to associate that masculinity equally with martial prowess and economic strength; for Heng, Arthur's assumption of control over the dead giant's wealth and its subsequent redistribution constitutes a symbolic rejection of social mobility (*Empire of Magic* 127-34). She further observes that the poem invokes the ideology of the crusades by conflating giants with Saracens, and that it consequently prefers to treat identity as a

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<sup>20</sup> Giants occur throughout the poem. In lines 2889-909, giants figure into a melee. The poem's treatment of the Nine Worthies treats Julius Caesar as a "geant" (3410) and emphasizes King David's killing of Goliath as his most memorable action (3416-21).

social category (146-78).<sup>21</sup> In light of Heng's observation, the *Morte* simultaneously anticipates the socially alienated knights of the Lincoln manuscript and the corporate identities of the London manuscript's crusading knights. Unlike the *Prose Alexander*, the *Morte Arthure* contains more than one hero, so the narrative cannot make him singlehandedly responsible for every victory. Because Arthur decides to challenge the giant "preuely," this episode signals his problem with pride while foreshadowing the growing tension between his personal desires and the needs of his community.

Although socially constructed identities are integral to the *Morte Arthure*, we rarely witness its characters acting in groups. On the contrary, the martial episodes in this poem are usually limited to treating either Arthur and his knights or a knight representing Arthur. While the poem depicts mass combat, it rarely does so with the scale and specificity of the Charlemagne romances, or even of the Lincoln manuscript's popular romances, which more often depict the vast difference in power between lone combatants and their innumerable unnamed opponents. Instead, the poem merely shifts focus to one or another of Arthur's knights, who is then seen taking the field against a series of single, named opponents. Even in the council scene at the beginning of the poem, Arthur's peers pledge to join him in his campaign for their own reasons (231-406). Mordred is the only knight who does not immediately submit to the king's every whim, as we see in his response to Arthur's decision to leave him in England, where his dissent foreshadows his treachery (679-92). Although many knights pledge to fight alongside Arthur, we never find out whether or not the Round

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<sup>21</sup> Heng compares the *Morte* directly to *Richard Coer de Lyon* at the end of this section of her chapter, arguing that because the *Morte* is an "elite" romance, it does not, unlike a "popular" romance such as *Richard*, "care to exploit differences between English and French to project an imagined collective unity binding together the English" (178). I disagree with this assessment. As the introductory material to this chapter demonstrates, we gain nothing by attempting to distinguish between "elite" and "popular" Middle English romances. Furthermore, I believe that *Morte* truly does attempt to project collective unity onto the English, and that this projection is worthy of very serious consideration, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

Table is capable of functioning as a coherent group. Mordred must come to terms with his evident anxiety over whether his identity relies on his individual achievements or his social participation after he kills Gawain. When asked by King Frederic of Frisia who Gawain was, he responds with a stirring twenty-line-long eulogy culminating in a eulogy of the *collective identity* of the Round Table:

3it that traytour alls tite teris lete he falle,  
 Turnes hym further tite, and talks no more,  
 Went wepand a-waye, and weries the stowndys,  
 That euer his werdes ware wroghte siche wandrethe to wyrke:  
 Whenne he thoghte on this thyng, it thirllde his herte;  
 For sake of his sybb blode sygheande he rydys;  
 When that renayde renke remembirde hym seluene,  
 Of reuerence and ryotes of the Rownde Table,  
 He remyd\* and repent hyme of alle his rewthe\* werkes,      *cried out; sorrowful*  
 Rode awaye with his rowte, ristys\* he no lengere,      *rests*  
 For rade\* of our riche kynge, ryve\* that he scholde.      *fear; pierce*  
 (3886-96)

We can see in Mordred's tears and despair the psychological potency of one's social identity. Although the poet reminds us twice that he is a "traytour" and "renayde," we cannot help but sympathise with him when he realises that he is personally responsible for alienating himself from the organization whose unity so strongly informs his sense of his own identity.

Both the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure* depict kings who die in their pursuit of global conquest, yet despite the contributions of their associates and followers are remembered first and foremost as individuals. Both romances conclude with an epitaph that

situates the protagonist historically by memorializing his achievement as an individual: the *Prose Alexander* concludes by telling us “here endys þe lyf of gret Alexander conquerour of all þe worlde” (fol. 49r); the *Morte* concludes with “Hic jacet Arthurus, rex quondam rex que futurus” (fol. 98v). Both Arthur and Alexander are ultimately memorialized as members of the Nine Worthies, and as the manuscript's most culturally significant romance protagonists they both share legacies of solitary achievements that anticipate the fantasy of individualism seen throughout the manuscript's shorter romances.

In these works, even the common machinery of romance serves to explore the question of identity. The supernatural encounters in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, *Sir Perceval of Galles*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Octavian*, and *Thomas of Erceldowne*, serve to externalize developments in protagonists' emotional or psychological states. The most common encounters with the supernatural in these romances involve the beasts who seem to be constantly in the business of kidnapping human children. In *Sir Isumbras*, the protagonist's children are taken by a series of beasts: first by a lion (171-82), next by a leopard (183-94), and then by a unicorn (370-79). In *Octavian*, one of the empress's sons is kidnapped by an ape (334), while the other is stolen first by a lioness, then a griffon (352-63). In *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, Eglamour's son is also stolen by a griffon (844-85). These beasts are clearly narrative devices, but they also encourage the audience to sympathise with the protagonists who bemoan their solitude in the midst of the uncaring and dangerous wilderness that exists outside the safe havens of civilization.

Giants in Thornton's romances appear as antagonists to characters on the verge of individuation. One such example is in *Octavian*, where the only notable supernatural encounter is the giant against which Florent fights in order to win the Sultan's daughter's hand in marriage (665-920). By defeating the giant and securing the Sultan's daughter,

Florent comes to learn of his true heritage, which he ultimately helps to reclaim. In *Sir Perceval of Galles*, the protagonist again fights a giant, this time one who prevents him from entering the town in which his mother's ring was pawned (1953-2096). Here, Perceval's defeat of the giant facilitates his mother's restoration to human society and completes his own social integration.

In some of the Lincoln romances, the supernatural also serves to draw attention to a story's moral. *Thomas of Erceldowne* revolves around the supernatural power of the protagonist's fairy lover mainly to justify Thomas's gift of prophecy. The lady is forced to choose between her desire to possess Thomas and her obligation to provide the devil with tribute, and her decision teaches us that private desires must sometimes be set aside when the integrity of a larger society is at stake. *The Awntyrs off Arthure* requires the ghost of Guinevere's mother to denounce Arthurian morality in order to emphasise that more than merely territory is at stake in the conflict between Galeron and Gawain. *Sir Isumbras* is bookended by its protagonist's encounters with divine messengers, the first of which warns Isumbras that he is to be punished for his sin of pride, and the second of which brings news of his forgiveness to draw him out of his despair. Near the end of *Sir Perceval of Galles*, the Black Knight's lady tells Perceval that the ring he took from her was actually a magical ring that prevents its wearer from coming to harm or being killed (1857-64). This revelation forces the audience to question whether Perceval is a kind of chivalric idiot savant or whether he has truly earned his own success. We learn quickly that the second possibility is the case when Perceval survives his fight against the giant unscathed. The most notable example of the moral treatment of the supernatural in Thornton's romances is *Sir Eglamour*. The Earl of Artois sends Eglamour away on three quests: first, he is sent to hunt a deer from a nearby forest patrolled by a giant (229-40); then to defeat a wild boar in the far-away land

of Sedoyne (346-57), a task complicated by involving trespassing on the lands of a second giant (532-600); and finally to kill the Dragon of Rome (697-708). Each successive journey sees him sent further afield and into greater danger. Each time Eglamour returns to Artois, the Earl gets more and more frustrated with him, until eventually he descends into tyranny and must be deposed. *Sir Eglamour of Artois* draws a direct correlation between the danger faced by its protagonist and the moral degeneration of the lord he serves. By the time he has slain his dragon, we know that the Earl of Artois will no longer be a meaningful antagonist.

All of the Lincoln romances depict the actions of solitary knights. At the same time, all of these romances depict characters whose identities are developed in opposition to the societies to which they ostensibly belong. Alexander is the conqueror of the world who will never again see his family or homeland. Arthur is the ruler of an empire whose destruction he accidentally orchestrates through his pride. In the Lincoln manuscript, we are often invited to compare the achievements of individuals against the achievements of groups. Thus, in *Octavian*, when the empress and both of her children are exiled from their homeland, their reunion and triumphant return are predicated on their independent achievements. Isumbras's choice to alienate himself from his own society and to seek forgiveness is as much his own decision as is his foundation of a new society in the Holy Land once he reunites with his family. Although Barnard defends his homeland with an army in *The Earl of Toulouse*, he travels alone to Germany when he goes to meet Beulybon, and returns alone to redeem her. The protagonist in *Sir Degrevant* is recalled from a crusade to defend his subjects from the ruin caused by his neighbour, yet for most of the story these subjects are noticeably absent. In *Sir Eglamour*, the protagonist's success on his solitary adventures eventually drives the Earl to send his own daughter into exile, which in turn incites the solitary adventures of his wife and son. In *Thomas of Erceldowne*, both Thomas and his fairy lover profit from their

encounter, yet both begin and end it by travelling alone. *The Awntyrs off Arthure* would not be able to demonstrate the effects of the ghost's warning to Guinevere if Galeron had not chosen to travel to Arthur's court to challenge Gawain. And in *Sir Perceval of Galles*, Perceval's decision to seek adventure leads directly to his mother's social restoration.

In the Lincoln romances, solitary knights participate in cycles of alienation and restoration. This movement almost always involves radical transformation in either the society to which the protagonist returns or the one in which he ultimately settles. Thornton's romances approach the social influence of individuals with a sense of equity of agency: the romances do not merely depict solitary knights and their transformative influence on societies, but also the influence of solitary children, women, and mothers. The supernatural machinery found throughout the Lincoln romances is narrative shorthand that serves the purpose of making this influence explicit. This is true even in the *Prose Alexander* and the *Morte Arthure*. The significance of this motif is that the protagonists of the Lincoln romances only transform societies when they act independently of them. Even when the group endeavours are depicted in the romances *Morte Arthure*, *Octavian* and *Sir Isumbras*, the reader is always shown how each participating member decides to join the endeavour for his or her own reasons. The paradigm of the Lincoln romances departs from Finlayson's formulation of knights seeking adventure, but only slightly. Here, characters find themselves in situations where lone individuals have socially transformative agency. However, human agency cannot be limited to those who act alone. The London romances reverse this perspective to examine the efficacy of socially integrated individuals.

### 4.3 – The London Romances: Communities at War

Unlike those in the Lincoln manuscript, the London manuscript's romances predominantly feature corporate protagonists, and very little fantastic activity. Characters are repeatedly defined as representations of social groups – Saracen, Jew, Roman, Christian, French, or English – whose integration into their social group is central to the plot. Because the London romances prefer miracles to magic, the supernatural does not provide incidental detail or make manifest otherwise subtly-present complications, as it does in the Lincoln romances. We can see here that Thornton creates a very sharp distinction between these two kinds of romances. In the London romances, the miracles we witness never interfere with our assessments of characters and their abilities. Instead, they radically interfere with the natural course of events, signify significant interventions essential to the plot, and forcefully integrate protagonists into the religious and national communities they represent.

We witness a variety of miracles throughout the London manuscript, not least of which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ at the end of *The Northern Passion*. Naturally, the story of *The Northern Passion* anticipates its miraculous conclusion. Contrary to our expectations, the final lines of this poem do not celebrate Jesus's resurrection, but mourn it. The final episode follows the four knights sent by Pilate to guard Jesus's corpse, observing them as they work through their confusion and embarrassment until they agree to do what they can to avoid having their reputations ruined:

Ffor this wordes þay weryne fayne

Ffor firste þay went to haf bene slayne

Thay swore by þaire god Mahowne

Pay ne sold it telle in felde ne in towne  
 Pat Ihesu was resyne thorow his myghte  
 Bot pat men come for hym to fyghte  
 Pat many armed mene come full stille  
 And tuke his body agaynes oure will. (2071-78)

The guards' shame prevents them from publicizing the news of Jesus' resurrection. By depicting Jesus' guards engaging in a conspiracy of silence, *The Northern Passion* anticipates the conflicts between belief systems that the London manuscript depicts again and again over the course of its representation of Christian history. Most notably, the guards' oaths "by þaire god Mahowne" suggest that the veracity of Christianity will be at stake over the course of these conflicts. At the same time, the guards' belief in "Mahowne" signals to the reader that they are Saracens: *The Northern Passion* thus provides us with antagonists to Christianity defined not by their individuality but by their participation in a corporate identity.<sup>22</sup>

Jesus' Saracen bodyguards assert their shared identity at the very moment they agree to deny the veracity of the miracle whose consequence they have witnessed in examining his empty tomb. Since the manuscript depicts, in broad strokes, the movement of Christian history, the reader might expect, if the *Cursor Mundi* and *The Northern Passion* are anything to go by, that miracles will play an equally significant role in the texts which follow them. If the London manuscript contained a table of contents, the only poem whose title might immediately suggest the presence of miracles would be *The Romance of the childhode of Jhesu Christe pat clerkes callys Ipokrephum*, yet miracles are a recurring motif throughout

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<sup>22</sup> Saracen identities in Middle English romance tend to function as a mirror to Christian identities. See Siobhain Bly Calkin (*Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, Chapter 1; "Saracens") and Gorny.

all the manuscript's narrative poems.<sup>23</sup> We ought not to be surprised that miracles are omnipresent throughout *Ipokrephum*. This poem is remarkably invested in its assertion that both Christ's identity and his morality are socially derived, as we see in the various sequences where Mary and Joseph must teach him to temper his emotions in order to integrate into the communities in which he lives.

The parallels between *Ipokrephum* and *The Northern Passion*, although the *Passion* is not a romance, indicate a connection between divine intervention and social identity. In both poems, Jesus represents the community of early Christians and intervenes on behalf of those who believe in him. In the London manuscript, God does not intervene on behalf of believing individuals, but on behalf of believing *societies*. The identities of these narratives' successful protagonists are consequently so wholly corporate and so wholly integrated into that of their chosen societies as to suggest that the community supersedes the individual.

Miracles incite or extend the plots of the London manuscript's less plainly religious narratives so conspicuously as to suggest that the history these narratives produce is providential. *The Siege of Jerusalem* draws much of its narrative power from the effects of a miracle on its protagonists. According to this poem, both Titus and his father Vespasian fall ill while conquering Gascony:

[Tytus] hadde a malady vn-meke; inmyddis þe face;

þe lyppe lyþ on a lumpe lyuered on þe cheke.

So a canker vnclene hit cloched togedres.

Also his fader of flesche a ferly bytide:

A bikere of waspen bees bredde in his nose,

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<sup>23</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 3, *Ipokrephum* provides a more sympathetic treatment of this portion of Christ's life than *Cursor Mundi* does because its background characters are not treated as mere vehicles for the demonstration of divine power.

Hyued vp in his hed – he hadde hem of zouþe –

And Waspasian was caled þe waspene bees after. (30-36)

Both Titus and Vespasian resign themselves to suffering until they meet Nathan of Greece, who teaches them about Christ and tells him about the Vernicle and its power to heal all wounds and illnesses (169-72). At this time, Titus converts and his canker is healed (177-80). Titus has the Vernicle brought to Rome to heal Vespasian:

Þe pope auailed þe vaile & his visage touched,

Þe body suþ al aboute, blessed hit þrye.

Þe waspys wented away, and alle þe wo after. (253-55)

The conversion of the two protagonists as a consequence of these miracles directly informs the plot of the poem. Nero, displeased with the lack of tribute coming from the Jews, calls the Senate together to decide on a course of action. The Senate decides to send Titus and Vespasian to fight against the Jews because they are Christians:

And alle demeden by dome, þo dukes to wende

Þat were cured þrow Crist þat þey on croys slowen.

Þat on Waspasian was of þe wyes twey

Þat þe trauail vndertoke, and Titus anoþer,

.....

Crouned kynges boþe and mychel Crist loued

Þat hadde hem ȝeuen of his grace and here grem\* stroyed. *trouble*

Moste þei hadde hit in hert her hestes\* to kepe *promises*

And here forwarde to fulfille þat þei byfor made. (269-80)

The Senate does not care about Titus's and Vespasian's religion; they care about getting the job done. Yet at the same time, the Senate acknowledges that Titus and Vespasian are the

two knights most likely to successfully punish the Jews for resisting Rome. Here we can see how shared goals are central to the effective functioning of corporate identities. Our Christian generals are able to manage a pagan army and work as representatives of a pagan state because the interests of the two are temporarily aligned, although their motives differ. By the end of the poem, however, the desires of the Roman Senate have been superseded by the desires of the two protagonists. As Titus penetrates the city, the Jews witness a variety of grim omens indicating that the destruction of the city was an act of divine revenge (1221-40). *The Siege of Jerusalem* violently asserts the ascendancy of the Christian faith by treating the suffering of the Jews as a consequence of its protagonists' miraculous cures.

Divine intervention also drives the action of both of the manuscript's Charlemagne romances. *The Siege of Milan* begins with a depiction of the despair of Sir Alantyne, who has just lost Milan to Saracens. Alantyne prays to God for aid, and in a dream an angel tells him to "hy þe faste to Charlemayne,/ þe Crownede kynge of Fraunce" (98-99). That very night an angel approaches Charlemagne in his own dream, gives him a sword on behalf of Christ, and tells him to go to the defense of Milan (109-32). Even more miraculously, Charlemagne awakens to find that the sword lying beside him in his bed, which he takes as a sign it is God's will that he go to war against heathens (133-44).<sup>24</sup> Soon afterwards, Roland leads a force sent to liberate Milan. Charlemagne sends Roland with forty thousand men, all of whom are killed in the fighting; Roland is one of only four knights to be captured by the defenders. The Sultan interrogates the captured Roland, and attempts to sway him away from his Christianity by casting a cross into a fire before him. Earlier in the poem, the Saracens who conquer Milan destroy many crosses and relics without consequence (25-30), leading

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen Shepherd argues that this episode indicates the poem was written as "crusading propaganda" (118). However, Elizabeth Berlings notes that the sword breaks the first time it is used (62; citing lines 1059-60). It is significant that the sword breaks when Charles strikes Turpin: I will take up this matter more in Chapter 5.

the sultan to conclude that the symbols of Christianity are no more potent than “anoþer rotyn tree” (419). This time the cross that is cast into the fire will not burn, and as the Saracens continue to heap pitch into the fire, a miracle occurs:

A fire þan fro þe crosse gan frusche,  
 And in þe Saraþene eghne it gaffe a dosche,  
 Ane Element als it were,  
 That þay stode still als any stone,  
 Haundis nore fete myght þay stirre none  
 Bot drery wexe in chere. (469-74)

This diversion allows Roland and the other captives to escape and return to Paris. What is most notable about this episode is not the miracle itself, but its context. Earlier in the poem, God does not interfere with the Saracens when they destroy Christian symbols, but in this moment he does. The miraculous preservation of the cross occurs when Roland is present to witness and report back on it.<sup>25</sup> The miracles witnessed throughout *The Siege of Milan* constitute God's direct intervention on behalf of his believers. The plural is significant: these believers are never truly individuals, but *communities*.

The manuscript's second Charlemagne romance, *Roland and Otuel*, does not seem to be as concerned as *The Siege of Milan* is with asserting that God interferes regularly in human affairs. Nevertheless, none of its events could have occurred as they do without Otuel's conversion and subsequent incorporation into Charlemagne's court. Otuel comes to

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<sup>25</sup> The differing treatments of the two scenes in which crosses are burned in *The Siege of Milan* constitutes an astute observation about the relationship between miracles and witnesses in Christianity worth further investigation. Although such questions fall outside the scope of this project, one question worth contemplating in this context is “If God performs a miracle and nobody witnesses it, does it convert the heathens?” The *Catholic Encyclopedia* suggests that miracles tend to be purposeful, and that they either confirm the truth of the Divine Mission, attest to the true sanctity of an individual, or provide temporal favours to the virtuous (Driscoll). Regardless of how they may be categorized, the problem with miracles is that we know about them only from observation or from testimony, which suggests that an unreported miracle is a paradox.

Paris at the beginning of the poem as a Saracen emissary to demand that Charlemagne and his court abandon their Christian faith. When Roland and Otuel are fighting their duel, there is a moment when it looks to Charlemagne as though Roland's life is in danger. As Charlemagne kneels in prayer, a dove sent by the Holy Ghost alights on Otuel's helmet, causing him to convert (574-85). Otuel then takes his place among Charlemagne's peers, and his prowess and wisdom are integral to the success of the ensuing campaign against the Saracens in Lombardy. Once again, we can see that divine intervention is central to the plot. Had Roland won his duel against Otuel, he would have died along with Oliver and Ogier during the ill-conceived raid, and the campaign in Lombardy would have ended in disaster.

*Richard Coer de Lyon* treats the supernatural differently than the other London romances. As Brunner notes in the introduction to his edition, the extant manuscript witnesses of this poem are of two kinds (11-14). The longer and more fabulous A version of the romance contains the Cassiodoren episode, the consumption of the lion's heart and subsequent marriage to Margery, and the cannibalism at Acre. The shorter and more historical B version correctly identifies his mother as Eleanor of Aquitaine and his wife as Berengaria of Navarre. Thornton preserves a copy of the A version of this poem.<sup>26</sup> In this version of the poem, he is born to Cassiodoren, who is probably a witch or a demon since, for some reason unexplained by the text, she resists a priest's attempt to force her to witness the mystery of the sacrament by jumping through the church roof with Richard's two siblings in her arms, dropping his younger brother John and flying away with his sister Topyas, never to be seen again (197-234). *Richard* is also the only romance in the London manuscript to contain magical items: at one point Richard is given a pair of magical rings, one that prevents

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<sup>26</sup> Brunner's synthetic edition, based on Cambridge, Gonville and Caius, MS 175/96 and the two editions published by Wynkyn de Worde, incorporates as much as possible of the A version into the text.

drowning, and one that prevents harm by fire (1639-46). The poem abandons its connection to magic soon afterwards, and neither Cassiodoren nor the rings are mentioned again.

*Richard Coer de Lyon* abandons magic, but not the supernatural. Instead, it chooses to work with miracles.

As with *The Siege of Milan*, the miracles witnessed within *Richard Coer de Lyon* link the protagonist to his corporate identity. Although the beginning of Richard's campaign proceeds without supernatural assistance, we begin to witness divine intervention on Richard's behalf as the challenges faced by him and his troops increase in difficulty. These miracles begin when Jesus sends St. George to save the king's life:

Kyng Richard was almost ateynt,  
 And in þe pouder\* nyȝ adreynt. *dust*  
 On hys knees he gan doun ffalle,  
 Help! to Jhesu he gan calle,  
 Ffor loue off hys modyr Mary;  
 And as j ffynde in his story,  
 He seyȝ come Seynt George þe knyȝt,  
 Vpon a stede good and lyȝt,  
 In armes whyte as þe flour  
 Wiȝ a croys off red colour.  
 Al þat he mette in þat stounde,  
 Hors and man he felde to grounde. (4883-94)

Richard is so exhausted from fighting that he nearly expires from the stress of the battle, but St. George saves his life. From this point forward, God regularly sends angels to intervene on his behalf. Shortly after the siege of Acre, an angel commands Richard to kill the twenty

hostages whose lives he spared for ransom (3745-54). When Saladin sends Richard a gift of a necromantically conjured horse as part of a scheme to kill him in battle, an angel teaches him how to ride the horse safely and how to employ its strength against the Saracens (5481-577). Later on, when Saladin attempts to retake Jaffa by night, an angel awakens Richard and commands him to defend the city, then to make peace with Saladin and return to England to put down his brother's incipient coup back home (6961-80). All of the miracles in *Richard Coer de Lyon* drastically affect the action of the poem. St. George and the first angelic messenger save Richard's life, while the second angel forces Richard to broker peace with his enemy. Jesus's decision to send to Richard's aid St. George, the patron saint of England, suggests that the integrity of the king's body is as valuable as the integrity of the corporate identity he represents.<sup>27</sup>

In the London manuscript's romances, God intervenes in worldly events which threaten the integrity of groups of believers, rather than individuals. Where the Lincoln romances depict solitary knights, the London romances prefer to depict groups of knights or heroes supported by the societies they represent. As we have seen, *Ipokrephum* transforms a narrative about the childhood of Christ in order to include Mary and Joseph, and to treat the landscape across which they travel as a living society. *The Siege of Jerusalem* stops to show us the Roman Senate licensing Titus and Vespasian's act of revenge against the Jews. *The Siege of Milan* criticises those who would treat their societies as complete and impermeable,

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<sup>27</sup> According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, St. George's cross was used as an ensign on English ships as early as 1284. Based on expenditure accounts from the King's Wardrobe, it was most certainly the ensign flown by the king's ships by 1345, when Edward III invaded Crecy. Edward III also named St. George as the Patron Saint of the Order of the Garter in 1347. During Richard II's 1385 invasion of Scotland, all English troops were ordered to wear St. George's cross as part of their uniform. And in 1415, Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, ordered that April 23<sup>rd</sup>, St. George's Day, was to be ranked among the greatest feasts and celebrated to the same degree as Christmas (Thurston). Although St. George was clearly a potent symbol of Englishness when *Richard Coer de Lyon* was first produced (c.1330-1340), he would have been even more significant by the time Thornton copied the poem, nearly a century later.

while in *Roland and Otuel* we watch the same society succeed *because* it incorporates new members. The most potent symbol of the importance of group identity is the moment in *Richard Coer de Lyon* when St. George fights on behalf of the English king and his soldiers. *Richard* takes the theme of incorporation to its logical conclusion when it compares the open society of the English to the closed society of the French.

Although God intervenes regularly in the action of the London romances, miracles are made all the more remarkable by their juxtaposition with the mundane. The Lincoln romances, however, provide us with little sense of what “normal” life might mean for our protagonists. For the most part, the protagonists of the Lincoln romances are swept up into adventure quickly and do not consider the long-term consequences of their actions. One exception, notable because of its rarity, occurs in *The Earl of Toulouse* in the scene where Beulybon tells her husband that his warmongering and his unjust seizure of his neighbours' lands will cause him trouble in the long run. By comparison, aside from the instances of divine intervention, very little of the action in the London romances burdens the reader's suspension of disbelief. Furthermore, these romances as a whole take an uncommon degree of care to show that actions have consequences. As van Court has shown us, *The Siege of Jerusalem* expends considerable energy portraying the Jews sympathetically as they suffer in defense of their city. Readings of *The Siege of Jerusalem* by Hanna, van Court, and others have shown how difficult it is not to feel sympathy for Mary when she eats her own child, or for the Jews who are so hungry that they fill their bellies with gold (1165-68). This kind of horror is natural to a siege, as is the scene where the Roman army poisons the city's water supply and waits for the defenders to starve. A sense of grim realism dominates *The Siege of Jerusalem*. The poem's credible action draws attention towards its consequences, directing the reader's sympathy towards those who suffer.

The “realistic” attention to mundane detail we see in *The Siege of Jerusalem* can be found in all of the London manuscript's romances. In the beginning of *The Siege of Milan*, we are told that the Sultan who conquers Milan burns the Christian symbols he finds there to no ill effect. The reader must then treat the miracle of the blinding light emitted from the burning cross at the beginning of the first fitt with as much surprise as the Saracens affected by it (469-80). *Milan* maintains its realistic tone when it refuses to attempt to mask the inadequacy of the French knights who fail to retake the city. Although the armies are evenly matched numerically, only four French knights out of forty thousand survive the battle. Even at the fragmentary end of the poem, a French defeat appears imminent in spite of Turpin's presence on the hill above the battlefield, bearing the *stigmata* as a living symbol of Christ. Similarly, *Roland and Otuel* is careful to depict an ill-conceived raid undertaken by Roland, Oliver, and Ogier, in which three of Charlemagne's strongest peers nearly get themselves killed on a lark. Otuel's strength is evident – the only thing that keeps him from killing Roland at the beginning of the poem is the intervention of the Holy Ghost – yet Roland and his two companions fail so spectacularly to prepare an escape plan on their raid that the excursion is tantamount to an attempt to wrestle defeat from the jaws of victory.

The London romance most concerned with mundane detail is *Richard Coer de Lyon*. For the most part, this poem depicts the day-to-day concerns of army life and the importance of trusting those to whom one delegates responsibility. Much of the poem's action involves procuring supplies. Early on, Richard browbeats the marshal of the town of Marburette into providing his army with a significant stock of provisions (1547-63). Shortly before Richard comes to Messina, we see him using his own personal funds to provide his army with so much meat that the poet states only that he “can nought account in ryght reason” the amount (1764). Once the English enter the town, the first major conflict between English and French

knights occurs when the French kill them while they are out “chepying” for provisions (1769-72). Shortly before the siege of Acre, the English intercept a Saracen dromon laden with supplies.<sup>28</sup> The narrator's description of the booty is worth reproducing in its entirety:

Be kyng ffond in þe drowmound, sauns fayle,  
 Mekyl stor, and gret vytayle,  
 Many barel off ffyr Gregys,  
 And many a þousand bow Turkeys,  
 Hokyd arewes, and quarelles.  
 Pey fond þere ful manye barelles,  
 And off whete gret plente,  
 Gold and syluer, and ylke deynte.  
 Off tresour he hadde nouȝt half þe mounde  
 þat in þe drowmound was iffounde:  
 Ffor it drownyd in þe flood  
 Ar half vnchargyd were þat good.  
 Avaunsyd was al Crystyante,  
 Ffor hadde þe drowmound jpassyd þe see,  
 And comen to Acres ffro Kyng Richard,  
 An hondryd wyntyrr afftyrward,  
 Ffor alle Crystene-men vnder sunne  
 Hadde nouȝt Acres ben jwunne! (2587-604)

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<sup>28</sup> A dromon is a Greek style of galley that was used throughout the Mediterranean between the fifth and twelfth centuries.

*Richard Coer de Lyon* is full of passages such as this, emphasizing the importance of supply trains to Richard's crusade. The capture of the dromon provides the Crusaders with much needed food and weaponry at the same time that it deprives the Saracen defenders of the same. The poet's assertion that "Crystyante" was "avaunsyd" by Richard's piracy serves to draw attention to the poem's recognition that materiel is the essence of a military campaign.

Heng and McDonald have drawn our attention to the grisly scene of Richard's cannibalism at the siege of Acre, arguing that this is a critical moment in the text because it is one of the few moments where the protagonist's life seems to be truly at risk. Richard falls ill during the siege, and no locally available medicines can save him. His physicians know that the king's life can be saved if only he can eat cooked pork, but because they are in the Holy Land, it is impossible to procure. One of Richard's knights tells the steward to cook instead a "Sarezen zonge and ffat" (3088), which cures him. After taking Acre, Richard asks what he ate, and, being told the truth, relishes it. During diplomatic negotiations after the siege, he offers Saladin's ambassadors the heads of their dead compatriots, complete with name-tags, to their shock and horror. The ambassadors warn Richard that his supply-trains will not enable him to feed his army for the entirety of his campaign across the Holy Land, at which point Richard promises that his army will never lack food so long as they can kill Saracens and eat them along the way, and that "[i]nto Yngelond wol we nouȝt gon,/ tyl þay [Saraȝens] be eeten euerylkone" (3561-62).<sup>29</sup>

The grisly banquet scene that follows this episode, in which Richard serves cooked Saracen to Saladin's ambassadors, is noteworthy not only due to its imagery, as Heng and

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<sup>29</sup> Heng's argument is predicated on Richard's specific reference to the English in this speech (3529-62), suggesting that this moment conflates the concepts of 'good', 'English', and 'Christian' into "a community called 'England' ... defined by [its] appetite for Muslims" (75). McDonald expands on Heng in "Eating People and the Alimentary Logic of *Richard Coer de Lyon*," arguing that this episode is the crux of the poem because it demonstrates how "resolutely pragmatic" it is on matters of hunger and food (133).

McDonald suggest, but also due to his epiphany that the meat from one dead Saracen could feed nine or ten of his men (3544-45). At this moment, Richard realizes that his supplies no longer require the careful management they have required for the last two thousand lines of the poem.<sup>30</sup> And the reader sees that, freed from the concerns of campaign logistics, Richard can channel all of his faith and all of his self-confidence into exterminating the Saracens.

The ease with which the London manuscript's romances treat the basic human condition serves to make its penchant for divine intervention all the more remarkable. In the London romances, the reader is not necessarily encouraged to treat the protagonists' behaviour as exemplary. To the contrary, Charlemagne's eagerness to coexist with Saracens in *The Siege of Milan*, Roland's foolish and self-destructive eagerness for violence in *Roland and Otuel*, and Richard's cannibalism in *Richard Coer de Lyon* are all undesirable. In these romances, the greatest danger that exists is one that threatens the cohesion of a social group.<sup>31</sup> The threat of ideological schism, political turmoil, selfishness individualism, and narrow-minded factionalism underlies the action of the London romances to the point that no identity is more worthy of protection than that of the group to which a character belongs. The mundane details and the realistic reactions to stress which these romances depict further emphasise the importance of thinking about the needs of others as equal to, or more valuable than, one's own. These romances show, paradoxically, that communities are simultaneously potent and fragile. Throughout the manuscript, miracles indicate the kinds of group identities

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<sup>30</sup> It is from this moment forward that Richard, drunk with power, begins to hear angels. A strong case could be made that the poem is critically aware of a connection between cannibalism and insanity. However, such an argument would fall outside the scope of this study.

<sup>31</sup> Susanne Conklin Akbari demonstrates convincingly in "Incorporation in *The Siege of Melayne*" that all of the romances in the London manuscript draw upon the theological concept of the Eucharist in order to define communities (37). Akbari includes *Ipokrephum* in her assessment, explaining its apparently poor thematic fit by suggesting that "the model of community formation based on the presence of Christ's body in the sacrifice of the Mass serves as the model for community formation in ... romances such as *Richard Coer de Lyon* and *The Siege of Melayne*" (38). We can thus see that religious and community identities are tightly linked throughout the London romances.

most worthy of preservation, which are always Christian and sometimes also familial or national. The most successful characters throughout the manuscript are those who prefer to construct their identities as corporate, and subsume their own desires towards preserving the health of the groups to which they belong.

#### **4.4 – Self and Society in Thornton's Library**

Robert Thornton distributed his romances among his manuscripts in such a way as to ensure that each group of texts was able to stand on its own as a largely coherent sequence. Because both manuscripts contain romances both long and short, and in stanzas, couplets and alliterative lines, it is obvious that Thornton did not consider verse form or length when he made these decisions. Instead, he divided his romances into two basic categories. The emotive, marvelous, and solitary Lincoln romances complement the prosaic, historical and corporate London romances.

Why did Thornton decide to divide his romances into these two groups? Keeping in mind that Thornton copied his manuscripts between 1430 and 1440, a time of great social upheaval within England, it is worth considering the extent to which the division may be polemical. The settings and protagonists of the Lincoln manuscript are predominantly English while those of the London manuscript are predominantly French, which suggests that the division of the romances might be strongly nationalistic.<sup>32</sup> It is also evident that Thornton perceived some difference between his two sets of romances that justified their distribution.

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 5.

Finlayson suggests that Thornton compiled an anthology of romance sub-types and thematic preoccupations. Indeed, to read the Lincoln manuscript is to read a prose romance, a long alliterative romance, a number of familial and homiletic romances in a variety of verse forms, and a number of feudal romances in a variety of verse forms. The reader of these romances is asked to sympathize with conquerors, kings, knights, burghers, labourers, exiles, the dispossessed, mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, and children: the broadest possible spectrum of humanity. These romances demonstrate an equally impressive breadth of themes, including moral warnings, current prophecy, social order, impetus to war, and family integrity. In the London romances, on the other hand, we find subjects and themes that scarcely appear in the Lincoln romances, including siegecraft, crusading, schism, internal strife, statecraft, and the nature of God's engagement with his believers. It is only by reading all of Thornton's romances that we can observe the breadth of his anthology.

Thornton appears to have compiled two complementary groups of romances, each emphasising either individual or group identities. Thornton thus stresses the positive social effects of ideological plurality for social health in non-romance texts throughout both manuscripts: the Lincoln manuscript contains a number of texts stressing the importance of the "mixed life" of spiritually-governed participation in the secular world and the London manuscript ends with *Winnere and Wastoure*, a poem which refuses to categorically dismiss the political necessity of either austerity or consumption. In Thornton's romances, individual achievement is all but meaningless without a stable society to return to at the completion of one's adventure. Likewise, communal achievements are far less memorable without the efforts of those individuals. Societies, insofar as Thornton's romances describe them, require the co-operation of numerous individuals to function harmoniously. We can see the disparate needs of selves and societies at work throughout all of his romances, including the least

likely examples. In *Ipokrephum*, Jesus is depicted as a selfish and self-indulgent brat who kills other children at the slightest provocation, and it is only through his mother's intercession for the sake of the common good that his adventures in exile are not characterized by the trail of bodies he might otherwise have left behind. In the case of a more traditional romance hero like Richard, success is a matter of his capability to effectively align his self-interest with the needs of the community he represents.

Thornton indeed compiles, between his two manuscripts, an anthology of romance, encompassing as many subjects, topics, themes, and forms as possible. We can see how he understood the genre by how the romances are distributed between his books. In one book, Thornton provides his readers with the traditional motifs of romance: heroic individualism, societal alienation, and supernatural encounters. In the other book, he challenges his readers by providing them with the communitarian motifs of his crusading romances – heroic co-operation, social integration, and awareness of the mundane. In his juxtaposition of these two kinds of romance, Thornton effectively highlights a paradox inherent to all successful societies: both individual and communal interests must be balanced in order to maintain social order and to avoid stagnation. He thus employs his knowledge of romance in order to most effectively articulate, to use Simpson's phrasing, the tensions internal to social systems. What is most remarkable about his acuity on this point is that he exposes the tensions inherent to *all* social systems, and not just his own.<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately, however, Thornton's interest lies with England. As an upwardly-mobile member of the middle gentry, he would have been as well poised as any to observe which aspects of his own society might have been, or appeared to be, most susceptible to fracturing

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<sup>33</sup> As Putter suggests, Middle English romance often addresses the concerns of those whose interests are not central to their own societies.

under pressure. The distribution of romances between the two manuscripts suggests he understood that neither heroic individualism nor selfless communitarianism alone might provide a permanent solution to the social degradation he witnessed over the course of his life. Rather, it is the synthesis of these two ideals that lies at the root of his distribution of romances between his two books.

### Chapter 5 – Nationalism in Robert Thornton's Library

There is a curious omission in the textual decorations on Folio 109v of the London manuscript. In the midst of a passage of John Lydgate's poem "The Virtues of the Mass," where Lydgate explains the domains of various saints, we find the following stanza:

Albon for Inglonde. Seynt Denyse for Fraunce  
 Blissed kynge Edmounde for Royalle gouerenayle  
 Seyn Thomas of Cantirbery for his meke sufferaunce  
 At Westmynster Seyn Edwarde schalle noghte fayle  
 That none enemy schalle hurte nor prevayle  
 Bot þat seyn George schalle 3ow freely passe  
 Holde upe 3oure benere in pese + in bataylle  
 Iche daye whenne 3e devoutly here 3oure messe (fol. 109v)<sup>1</sup>

What is curious about this stanza is not the text itself, which is similar to copies found elsewhere, but rather the pattern of rubrication. Thornton rubricates most of the proper nouns in this passage, although this section of the manuscript is relatively unadorned.<sup>2</sup> The first letters of the names "Albon" and "Inglonde" are highlighted in red ink, as are "Blissed," "Edmounde," and "Royalle" in the second line, then "Thomas," "Seyn Edwarde," and "George." Thornton rubricates the names of all of the words which treat England and its saints, but does not rubricate "Seynt Denyse" or "Fraunce." Since he does not tend to rubricate the initial letters of proper nouns in the non-romance poems he copies, why would

<sup>1</sup> This passage conforms to lines 577-84 of MacCracken's edition.

<sup>2</sup> Between folios 94r and 118v, this is the only page containing adornments on any letters other than large initial capitals. The red ink used on folio 109v matches that of the initial capitals found throughout this section of the manuscript.

he choose this moment to insert rubrication, as if to facilitate such a nationalistic jab at France and its patron saint?<sup>3</sup>

In "The Virtues of the Mass," Lydgate distinguishes between the devotional practices of "Inglonde" and "France" as *nations*: delineated corporate identities reflecting some mix of shared geography, ethnicity, culture, language, and history. By using only a single line of verse to distinguish between England and France, Lydgate depicts these two identities as mutually exclusive. The rest of the stanza treats only saints and devotional practices of interest to an English audience. Is this passage nationalistic, or is it patriotic? It is important to differentiate between the two. Nationalism is the belief that the grouping of people by nations constitutes a meaningful category; patriotism is a subordinate concept which demands love for the homeland and encourages either psychological investment in its honour or action on its behalf. Although nationalism and patriotism usually go hand-in-hand, they do not require each other in order to exist. One can feel patriotism for one's home city or province just as easily as one can feel it for the more abstract concept of the nation; the nation is not homologous with the state. Although we tend to think of it in terms of its modern expressions, medieval nationalism was more complex and more inclusive than modern nationalism, which tends to view the state and the nation as the same. Thornton is not often patriotic, and yet the evidence of the division of texts between his manuscripts indicates that he considered the concept of the nation to be a meaningful way to imagine England's superiority to France. As we shall see, nationalism in Europe became a fully articulated concept near the beginning of the fifteenth century, during Thornton's youth. It is

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<sup>3</sup> Notably, this kind of rubrication programme (usually in order to highlight proper nouns) is surprisingly common in later Middle English manuscripts. One such example is the Winchester MS of Malory's *Morte Darthur*. However, such textual features are only rarely preserved in modern print editions. For an example of an edition that takes nominal rubrication into account, see Shepherd's edition of the *Morte Darthur* ("Preface" xii), whose main text represents medieval rubrication with a Textura font.

with nationalism that Thornton formulates the most meaningful juxtaposition between his two groups of romances.

### 5.1 – Nationalism, Identity Formation, and Romance

In his seminal study *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson sets out to explain how nation-states are supported by shared identities which bind their members together. Anderson argues that people in communities too large to enable significant interpersonal connections establish their sense of belonging through less-tangible characteristics such as shared language, geography, values, and experiences. He thus suggests that to be a member of a nation is to be a member of “an imagined political community” (6). In this formulation, such a community could not have existed in the Middle Ages, when communities such as Christendom were only “imaginable” by literary *fiat*, dominated by universal respect for sacred languages, thus:

The fundamental conceptions about ‘social groups’ were centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary-oriented and horizontal. The astonishing power of the papacy in its noonday is only comprehensible in terms of a trans-European Latin-writing clerisy, *and* a conception of the world, shared by virtually everyone, that the bilingual intelligentsia, by mediating between vernacular and Latin, mediated between earth and heaven. (The awesomeness of excommunication reflects this cosmology.) (15-16, italics and parentheses in original)

Anderson believes that medieval Europe was so dominated by its Church that there was no significant way to differentiate between members of peer communities. He continues by

asserting that nationalism became possible only after European civilization had moved beyond the medieval:

Yet for all the grandeur and power of the great religiously imagined communities, their *unselfconscious coherence* waned steadily after the late Middle Ages. (16, italics in original)

Anderson mischaracterizes the concept of “Christendom” as limited only to those realms pledging allegiance to the Roman Church, ignoring Byzantium. Moreover, he overestimates the political power of the Church, underestimates the extent to which secular political relationships depended on discrete boundaries between demesnes, and overlooks the Western Schism. Anderson’s sense of the historicity of the “late Middle Ages” vacillates between the “end of the thirteenth century” and 1640, when “publishing was ceasing to be an international enterprise” (16, 18-19). Although Anderson misrepresents nationalism as a symptom of modernity, and although his sense of pre-Enlightenment European history makes him an easy target (and many medievalists have made him one, as I note below), his most potent suggestion has been that the nation constitutes an “imagined political community,” which can be distinguished from other communities “by the style in which [it is] imagined” (6). The nation can thus be seen as a discursive concept, and medievalists have fruitfully applied it to the nationalistic discourses of medieval Europe.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Even among scholars invested in linking nationalism with modernity, there has been significant debate as to how modern the notion is. Lavezzo provides an account of this debate in the introduction to *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*, vii-xix. A more recent assessment of the debate from an historian’s perspective can be found in the first two chapters of Hirschi. Early twentieth-century scholars such as Coulton and Galbraith began to examine the extent to which nationalism was incorporated into medieval identities. However, interrogations of Anderson provided the impetus for a broader discussion of medieval nationalism, as we can see in the essays in Forde, Johnson, and Murray, eds. *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*. There exists a significant body of post-Andersonian scholarship examining the nature of medieval English nationalism, such as by scholars such as Hugh Seton-Watson, Lee Patterson, R.R. Davies (“Presidential Address” I and II), and more recently in the work of Pearsall (“The Idea of Englishness in the Fifteenth Century”), Lavezzo (*Angels on the Edge of the World*), and Staley (Chapter 4: “The English Nation”).

By and large, medievalists have accepted Anderson's account of how national identity comes to be formed, and simply argued that the process began earlier than he allows. But while both medieval and modern acts of imagination such as the articulation of national communities may be basically similar, the nature and composition of the communities imaginatively unified as a "nation" is not. In the scramble to adopt Anderson's presentist formulation of nationalism, we have overlooked that medieval formulations of nationhood do not require, as Anderson suggests, unity of geography, language or culture, or even a "political community" forged in the resistance of colonial oppression. On the contrary, medieval national identities not only celebrated diversity of geography, language and culture, they also were "imagined" as corporate, rather than political, communities.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars have employed Anderson's formulation of the nation as an "imagined political community" to great effect in examining the treatment of national identities in English romances. The one significant pre-Andersonian study of nationalism in medieval English romance is Susan Crane's *Insular Romance*. Crane demonstrates that Anglo-French romances tend to express nationalistic tendencies more commonly than continental French romances did.<sup>6</sup> Crane argues that English romances written in the twelfth century express particularly English concerns. For example, she observes that *Beues of Hamtoun* employs imagery associated with St. George for patriotic ends, while minimizing the (traditionally continental) narrative focus on baronial interests in favour of asserting national unity, which suggests that the protagonists of insular romances are more socially independent than those

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<sup>5</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 4, communitarianism is a common feature of social identity within many of Thornton's romances: corporate identities such as these inevitably fail when they impose restrictions on characters unwilling to participate in them.

<sup>6</sup> Here I take up Ardis Butterfield's argument for the use of the term "Anglo-French" (as opposed to Anglo-Norman), as she uses it in *The Familiar Enemy* (12-17, 50-65). It seems appropriate to apply this term also to Crane, whose work stresses both the linguistic plurality of English culture throughout the Middle Ages and the English genesis of the romances she reads.

of continental romances (59-60). Crane reads this changed focus as a radical transformation of the genre, such that insular romances “[associate] their [heroes’] excellence in adventure [with] the merit of the English as a whole” (67). Consequently, she argues that “The romances of English heroes acknowledge the dominance of national ideology by recognizing the right and power of kings, placing high value on communal stability, and representing the legal system as a legitimate source of redress for the barony.” (218). For Crane, early English nationalism acknowledges the superiority of broader communities over divisive personal interests. However, nationalism in early English romances finds its expression more in the defense of insular values than in explicit articulations of national identities: nationalism is the product of the translation of romance into new social contexts.

In his influential study *England the Nation*, Thorlac Turville-Petre expressly revises Anderson's argument by suggesting that English nationalism began at the end of the thirteenth century. Moreover, Turville-Petre suggests that concepts of the nation begin at the moment of their articulation and argues that medieval and modern people are not as alien to each other as scholars of modernity tend to suggest (v). Focusing foremost on moments of medieval national articulation, Turville-Petre argues that “defining a nation necessarily involves exclusion” such that “[w]hat does not belong needs to be identified in order to safeguard the unity of what is part of the nation” (1).<sup>7</sup> Looking to medieval definitions of nationality, he suggests that moments of crisis are the crucible of nationalism:

Concepts of nationhood become dominant when the nation is perceived to be under threat from outside attack or influence, for it is national identity that

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<sup>7</sup> Turville-Petre agrees broadly with Diane Speed's contemporaneous article “The Construction of the Nation in Medieval English Romance,” where she argues that the concept of the nation is how communities define themselves in order to resist the forces of disorder and the unknown (146).

distinguishes the English from the feared French or despised Scots, and it is national unity that will save the people. (4)

For Turville-Petre, evidence of the unification of identity which occurs under such cultural stress can be found in assertions of shared mythologies such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* (6), and in the shared language of English, as shown by passages such as the following from the introduction of *Cursor Mundi* from which he takes his book's title:

Dis ilk bok es translate  
 In to Inglis tong to rede  
 For the loue of Inglis lede,  
 Inglis lede of Inland,  
 For the commun at understand.  
 Frankis rimes here I redd,  
 Comunlik in ilk a sted,  
 Mast es it wroght for frankis man:  
 Quat is for him na frankis can?  
 Of Inland the nacion,  
 Es Inglis man þar in commun;  
 Þe speche þat man wit mast may spede,  
 Mast þar-wit to speke war need;  
 Selden was for ani chance  
 Praised Inglis tong in France; (232-246)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Turville-Petre discusses the entirety of this passage, but piecemeal (16, 37-40).

We can find a similar passage in John Gower's prologue to *Confessio Amantis*, when he writes "In oure englissh, I thence make/ A bok for Engelondes sake" (23-24).<sup>9</sup> In both *Cursor Mundi* and *Confessio Amantis* it is noteworthy that Englishness is defined simultaneously as a linguistic and as a communal category. Although such passages are often taken, whiggishly, as signs of the inevitable rise of the English language following the linguistic disruption of Norman Conquest, Turville-Petre finds in them assertions of a shared cultural identity based on a shared language (37-40).<sup>10</sup> For Turville-Petre, medieval nationalism is an expression of linguistic anxiety articulated in the rejection of alien people and languages.

I have quoted the passage from *Cursor Mundi* above for two reasons. First, since the London manuscript contains a large portion of the poem, it is very likely that Thornton had read it the passage above; second, this passage does more than merely assert an English identity.<sup>11</sup> Thompson suggests that the poem's address to "Ingland the nacion" constitutes an expression of linguistic anxiety about a "'foreign' French influence shaping [the poet's] English writing" ("The *Cursor Mundi*, the 'Inglis tong', and 'Romance'" 107). At the same time, as Thompson writes in a later article, *Cursor Mundi*'s references to both the English and the French languages in this passage suggests the poem might well also be considered as an English rendition of French sources "that had themselves been designed to compete on a supposedly 'popular' level with *chansons de geste* and other romance-style narratives" ("The Governance of the English Tongue").<sup>12</sup> *Cursor Mundi* is a poem that asserts the presence of a

<sup>9</sup> Turville-Petre does not mention *Confessio Amantis*.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Hahn, for example, draws attention to the "linkage of language and national identity that defines [the] emergent audience" the poem addresses ("Early Middle English" 88-89). A poem that runs to nearly thirty thousand lines seems rather ambitious if its audience was merely "emergent."

<sup>11</sup> As mentioned on 122n7, the prologue is transmitted in most extant copies of the poem.

<sup>12</sup> By his use of the word "design," Thompson suggests, and I think rightly so, that *Cursor Mundi* was conceived as a text meant to compete with secular vernacular literature. As Lesley Johnson reminds us, to

community of English speakers in order to divert them away from reading or hearing popular literature. The *Cursor*-poet depends heavily on his introduction to create a sense of community: he uses the word *commun* and *communlik* three times, as he discusses both the “Inglis lede of Ingland” and the “Frankis rimes” which are “wroght for frankis man.” By linking the concepts of language with community in this way, this passage suggests that the community of “Ingland the nacion” celebrates diversity within its dual linguistic heritage in a way that France does not. While Crane suggests that nationalism is produced by positive discourses asserting communal values and Turville-Petre suggests that nationalism is produced by negative discourses expressing the anxiety of an insecure people in response to perceived foreign threats, both locate the formulation of English nationalism before the beginning of the Hundred Years War (Crane 88-90; Turville-Petre 124). Because only a small number of texts produced before 1400 engage actively with the concept of England as a “nation,” however, it seems the discourse of nationalism had not yet become as potent or as widespread as it was to become in the fifteenth century.

Medievalists have responded to Turville-Petre's seminal study by refining the understanding of the nature of medieval formulations of nationhood. The influential collection of essays *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*, edited by Kathy Lavezzo, explores “the multiple representations of ‘England’ produced during the Middle Ages,” which Lavezzo characterizes as a time which “witnessed the construction of multiple, contingent, and conflicting ‘Englands,’ each geared towards the respective needs of different social groups” (“Introduction” xix). Lavezzo's collection complicates Anderson's concept of

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imagine a community is to perform labour, “because this notion of community [ie: the nation] must be larger than any individual could experience directly” (“Imagining Communities: Medieval and Modern” 6). The paradox of *Cursor Mundi* is that it relies on this sense of community in order to justify its own existence even as it attempts to produce it.

the “imagined community,” while rejecting its pre-modern/modern binary approach to nationalism. More recently, her monograph *Angels on the Edge of the World* demonstrates that England's geographic alterity, relative to continental Europe, made the English susceptible to national fantasies of communal wholeness and territorial coherence (8-9).

Siobhain Bly Calkin's study *Saracens and the Making of English Identity* reads encounters between Christians and Saracens in the romances of the fourteenth-century Auchinleck manuscript as opportunities for the articulation of English identity. Reading Saracens as the “stereotypical Other” (13), Calkin observes that the Saracen knights encountered in Middle English romances are nearly indistinguishable from their Christian counterparts (24). This similarity “raises the question of what it means to assert difference in situations where the samenesses between groups are many and the differences few and malleable” (14). She therefore reads encounters with Saracens as “reflexive comments on England's efforts in the early fourteenth century to rewrite the longstanding cultural and political ties between England and France,” focusing closely on the paradoxical difficulty of articulating difference between two communities that are fundamentally similar (14). Calkin agrees with Turville-Petre in suggesting that romance protagonists assert national identity as they reject the identities of their enemies. However, she stresses that identities need to be violently asserted in this way only when they are confronted by substantial sameness. By focusing on the rhetorical function of the Saracen in romance, Calkin demonstrates that nationalism can be articulated just as strongly in the rejection of the discrete other as in the rejection of the abstract other.

As we can see, medievalists have done significant work to demonstrate the similarities between medieval and modern nationalisms, in opposition to critics such as Anderson who treat it as a characteristically modern phenomenon. However, the nature of

the English identities asserted in medieval texts remains complicated by the variety of ways in which it is articulated (Crofts and Rouse). Ardis Butterfield's study *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* complicates our perception of English nationhood even further. Butterfield stresses the interconnectedness of England and France as socio-linguistic units at the end of the fourteenth century, arguing that "French was both internal and external to English, just as it was both internal and external to France and the French" (353). Butterfield asserts the existence of "cross-channel poetic communities" (234), consisting not merely of English authors writing in French, such as Gower (238-65), but also of later French authors writing in English, such as Charles d'Orléans (305). We cannot understand medieval nationhood as simply a matter of linguistic difference. Butterfield demonstrates that French literature influenced English literature at the same time that English political and military pressure influenced France. However, she does not demonstrate that French culture responded to English culture in the same way that English culture adopted French culture. On the contrary, the *Cursor*-poet's observation that "Selden was for ani chance/ Praised Inglis tong in France" suggests that French literary communities did not on the whole pay much attention to English literary productions. It is important to distinguish between these literary and political pressures because the evident influence of French literature on English literature does not prevent English authors like the *Cursor*-poet from articulating an identity for their own national community.

The trajectory of the scholarly debates on medieval nationalism and nationalism in English romance has for the most part been aimed towards asserting medieval origins for the concept of the imagined "community." Some scholars have asserted that medieval nationalism can be found in English romances produced any time from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries. At the same time, others such as Derek Pearsall, Paul Strohm, Lee

Patterson, and Christopher Allmand, maintain that the discourse of nationalism did not become widely influential in England until the fifteenth century, when the Lancastrian dynasty disseminated it broadly in order to establish and to maintain its power.<sup>13</sup> These scholars also agree that nationalism is articulated by the rejection of otherness combined with the ideological defense of the newly imagined community. However, England is a country whose predominantly insular geography may have predisposed its people to imagining themselves as culturally separate from the rest of Europe. As we shall see, it was not just England, but all of Europe that began to re-imagine local identities as national. The watershed moment for this change in European identities was the Council of Constance (1414-1418), which transformed Europe into a community of nations.

## 5.2 – The Council of Constance and the Formulation of Medieval English Identity

The Council of Constance produced a wide range of cultural changes in fifteenth-century Europe. This council finally resolved the embarrassing and extended ecumenical crisis of the Western Schism, which had exacerbated political divisions in Europe for the previous forty years, and in order to do so it brought nationalism to the foreground of political discourse. Despite its cultural significance, the effects of the Council of Constance are rarely discussed by literary critics; Vincent Gillespie notes that “it is surprising how little attention has been paid in scholarly work on English texts to the decrees of the Council of

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<sup>13</sup> See Pearsall (“The Idea of Englishness in the Fifteenth Century”), Strohm (*Hochon's Arrow*, esp. Chapter 4), Patterson (“Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England”), Allmand (*Henry V*), Staley (Chapter 4: “The English Nation”), Fisher (“A National Language Policy for Lancastrian England”), and Simpson (Chapter 2: “The Energies of John Lydgate”).

Constance ... and the far reaching impact they had on pan-European attitudes" ("The Haunted Text" 133). What happened at Constance that made it so influential?

The Council of Constance was the product of failure. The previous ecumenical council assembled to resolve the Western Schism had been the Council of Pisa in 1409. Neither Benedict XIII of Avignon nor Gregory XII of Rome sent representatives to Pisa or recognized the legitimacy of this council, which was characterized by a factionalism that was exacerbated by allowing each delegate a vote. The Council of Pisa resulted in the election of a *third* pope, Alexander V, based in Pisa, but it failed to successfully depose Benedict or Gregory. The presence of two active popes in Europe facilitated regional factionalism. Now that the Council of Pisa had added a third pope to the mix, and with all three backed by different secular powers, the situation had become untenable.<sup>14</sup>

Five years later, the Council of Constance was to succeed where the Council of Pisa had failed. Because the Council of Constance was convened to reform the whole makeup of the Catholic Church, its business was of concern to all Christians. The kings and princes of Europe delegated their best counsellors to Constance, and some even made personal appearances during the debates. The normal procedure in ecumenical councils before Constance was to provide each delegate with a vote. At Constance, however, it was decided that votes were to be cast by *nationes* rather than by individuals, in order to minimize the influence of the Italian delegation's numerical majority.<sup>15</sup> In *The Origins of Nationalism*, Caspar Hirchi reminds us that the division of Europe into *nationes* was not a new development, since previous ecumenical councils divided their voting members into four

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<sup>14</sup> See Allmand, *Henry V* 235-37; Hirshi 82, L.R. Loomis 511-12, Black 65-67.

<sup>15</sup> A good synopsis of the events at the Council of Constance can be found in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Shahan). As Genet demonstrates, there was a significant debate as to how these groups were divided. See also L.R. Loomis (512) and Black (67).

*nationes: Gallicana, Italica, Anglicana, and Germanica*. These four *nationes* were introduced at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274, and were modeled on the example of the French universities. These four *nationes* were introduced in every subsequent ecumenical council, but until 1414 they were of only minor importance and lacked an official function (82). The dramatic change in the organization of the Council of Constance was the importance placed on the various *nationes*, which were re-imagined into a system of voting blocs by most of the European clergy in order to circumvent voting by head-count.

At Constance, each *natio* was allowed only a single vote. Even the extant nationalism of the English had to compete with the newly articulated nationalisms that began to dominate European attitudes during the Council of Constance. Hirschi argues persuasively that the medieval language of nationalism, and especially the use of the word *natio*, was for most of its history used mainly to describe student bodies in the universities, and that these affiliations were on the whole temporary, corporate identities formulated to grant legal protection to foreign scholars (80). The Council of Constance is the moment in European history when *nationes* were reconceived as abstract, rather than corporate, communities (81-88). The debate over nations at the Council of Constance was part of a hugely influential political power struggle – one that drew in intellectuals and magnates from all over Western Europe: as Hirschi puts it, Constance “became a focal point for both political conflict and intellectual exchange unprecedented in Western Europe ... everybody who was anybody had to be present” (82). The Council of Constance provided a forum in which medieval people began to construct their own national identities. But what is most striking about these debates is the radical inclusivity inherent to medieval concepts of the nation.

The radical re-imagining of Europe as a collection of *nationes* was not a smooth process. Hirschi tells us that after convening the council, Emperor Sigismund proclaimed that

he would stand above the *nationes* and act as patron of the whole assembly. Sigismund maintained this position until he realized that he had deprived himself of influence, and soon afterwards caused a scandal when he declared that he would instead play a leading part in the deliberations of the *Germanica*, *Gallicana*, and the *Italica* because his dominion stretched over all three (Hirschi 83). Worse yet, when the envoys from the Iberian Peninsula arrived in 1416, two years after deliberations began, they demanded to form a fifth nation, the *natio Hispanica*, which the *Gallicana* delegation supported in order to challenge the status of the *natio Anglicana*. Hirschi argues that the division of Europe into its constituent *nationes* made secular politics even more complex:

[P]roviding the *nationes* with such unprecedented power proved only a prelude to a new power struggle, staged in the backrooms of the urban convents and fought with talks and treatises. This time it was a multipolar conflict over the control of each *natio*. The greatest stir was caused by the big secular players: the kingdoms of France, England, Castile, Aragon and the Holy Roman Empire. In the process, the meaning of *natio* was fundamentally transformed. (83)

The transformation to which Hirschi alludes was instigated by the *natio Gallicana*.

Following the approval of *natio* status for the *Hispanica* delegates, members of the *natio Gallicana* challenged the status of the *natio Anglicana* by arguing that it should be incorporated into the *Germanica*.

The complex struggles that resulted from the organization of the delegates to the Council of Constance into “national” voting blocs indicate the extent to which the concept of dividing Europe into nations was perceived as novel. The scheme of “nationalizing” the delegates in Constance proved to be both effective and formative: on 3 March, 1417, Jean Campan, one of the French delegates, filed a formal protest against the English and their

status as a nation, demanding they be forcibly integrated with the German nation. As Jean-Phillipe Genet demonstrates, the debate Campan instigated produced a clearly articulated, and uniquely medieval, concept of the nation. Although he was “markedly unenthusiastic about the whole nation system,” he nevertheless must have relished the opportunity to attack England and its status, and his complaint constitutes the first attempt to explicitly define the nature and the composition of a nation (65-66). First, he needed to distinguish between the concepts of *natio* and *regna*: distinguishing between what he called the *nationes principales* – the *nationes* into which the delegates to Constance were divided – and the *nationes particulares*, which were equivalent to *regna*, or kingdoms, which had no voting power.<sup>16</sup> Campan supported his complaint by asserting the inferiority of England to France according to canon law, citing *Vas Electionis*, a tract by Benedict XII (of Avignon) which included England in the German “nation,” then citing *Statuimus*, which divided Christendom into 36 provinces, of which England possessed only one, while France possessed six. He then asserted the superiority of French geography by comparing France’s 101 bishoprics to England’s 25. Next, he asserted the superiority of the Italian, French, and German *amplissimae nationes*, each of which contains numerous regions and provinces, to the mere *regnum* of England, because its provinces of Scotland and Wales rejected the authority of the English king. Finally, he suggested that France was superior to England because its church was both older and more consistently orthodox. Campan’s anxious overreliance on technical and numerical arguments was to prove to work to the benefit of his English respondent.

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<sup>16</sup> Because Campan denied England the status of *natio principalis*, he asserted that the four traditional nations were *Italia*, *Germania*, *Gallia*, and *Hispania*, obscuring the novelty of the recently-acknowledged *natio Hispanica* (Genet, L.R. Loomis). Campan’s concession that the *regna* is a subcategory of the *natio* suggests that he was concerned about the fluid identity constructions of nationalism even at this early stage in its development.

It was Thomas Polton, an English protonotary, who responded to Campan's attack on English nationhood.<sup>17</sup> With England's international status at stake, Polton needed not only to defend England's position as one of the five *nationes*, but also to assert its superiority to France. As Genet observes, Polton not only responded directly to Campan's technical arguments, he also integrated England's national history into his counterattack (66-68). First, he suggested that Campan attributed conciliar significance to *Vas Electionis*, which was really about fiscal circumscriptions, and moreover did not really include England in the German nation, since it also included *Anglia* in a non-hierarchical list of nations. Next, he refuted Campan's citation of *Statuimus*, an encyclical which deals primarily with organizing the chapters of the Black Monks, by pointing out that it refers to England as a major nation distinct from the German provinces. On the matter of ecclesiastical geography, he countered Campan with his own account, based on *Statuimus*, whereby he claimed that England was technically superior in its number of provinces, dioceses, kingdoms, parish churches, and even pontifical legates. Finally, he took advantage of his discussion of geography to claim France was comprised of not ten ecclesiastical provinces, but two: Rheims and Sens (67).

Polton's defense of England is remarkable for his imaginative refutation of Campan's claim for the greater prestige and antiquity of French Christianity. As Genet tells it,

Only at the very end of his tract, had Campan been unable to avoid an allusion to the greater antiquity of faith in France and to the perfect orthodoxy of the French Church, a traditional claim, but also one which the condemnation of Wyclif's errors by the council itself made especially painful to English ears. In fact, more than half of

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<sup>17</sup> In this case, one of "the seven [Roman Catholic] prelates who form the college of notaries for the Roman Curia, signing papal documents, registering papal acts, etc" (*OED* def. 2a). For biographical information, see Harvey.

Polton's speech seems to be devoted to answering this one French sentence alone.

(66)

Polton's rebuttal to Campan was devoted mainly to asserting English superiority over France on account of its greater antiquity of faith and the greater dignity of its church. Drawing upon the authority of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Polton asserted the antiquity of English Christianity by referring to the legend of Joseph of Arimathea. He then asserted the greater prestige of English Christianity by recalling the legend of Saint Helena, daughter of King Coel and the mother of Emperor Constantine, who was born in York, thus crediting England with the conversion of the Roman Empire (67). As we can see, technical arguments may have won Campan his request to incorporate the *nationes* of England and Germany, but Polton was able to resist his request by having the more flexible imagination.

The arguments of both Campan and Polton reflect the high stakes of their debate. Being a *natio* meant both prestige and power, the power of being one of the only five voting bodies at the Council of Constance. Campan's reliance on technical arguments betrays his anxiety, as does his petition's third proposal that, failing England's integration into the German nation or quotas being given to each nation on the basis of their size, the Council should "abolish the nations system and return to the traditional procedure" (Genet 66n32). We witness Polton's anxiety at the end of his rebuttal, where he resists concluding that England be treated as superior to France, insisting instead they be treated equally. Genet suggests that "Polton knew he was going a bit too far," because "he took care to underline the fact that making comparisons between kingdoms is odious, since comparisons were "*principe tenebrarum primitus adinventae*" [originally devised by the prince of darkness] (68). Polton thus limits his argument to maintaining the system of nations at Constance as it was originally created.

What is most striking about this debate is that Polton defended the status of the England as a *natio principalis* by asserting the radical diversity of *nationes particulares* within it. Polton argued that England was a nation by *any* definition, whether the understanding of the term meant “*gens secundum cognationem et collectionem ab alia distincta*” or “*sive secundum diversitatem linguarum*.”<sup>18</sup> He went even further to stress the linguistic diversity of the English nation, when he argued that it “*quinque linguas habet, videlicet nationes quarum una aliam non intelligit*” (75).<sup>19</sup> These nations whose languages comprise Polton's English nation include Wales, Ireland, England (including Scotland), Gascony, and Cornwall. Although these groups did not for the most part self-identify as English, Polton's assertion of shared identity facilitated his successful defense of England's status as a *natio*. This insistence that nationhood required the incorporation of a diversity of peoples best represents the difference between medieval and modern senses of nationhood: only modern nations are defined by homogeneity.

The conflict at Constance which developed over the status of nationhood was compounded by the increasing tension between England and France resulting from Henry V's military success on the continent. Hirschi suggests that the debate between Campan and Polton was tantamount to “a proxy battle of the Hundred Years' War” (83). Genet suggests that this moment was that in which European states first came to terms with the concept of nationhood:

The debate at Constance proved that in a Europe of nations it was becoming increasingly difficult to avoid the identification of state with nation. The English did

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<sup>18</sup> Genet 65. L.R. Loomis reproduces the entire passage, translating it as “a people marked off from others by blood relationship and habit of unity or by peculiarities of language” (525n55).

<sup>19</sup> [... has five languages, undoubtedly peoples who cannot comprehend one another]

not face this reality until 1417, but they did have to face it, hampered though they were by a programme of continental expansion which was clearly antagonistic to the national concept. (77)

Genet does not note the extent to which Polton's defense of England's nationhood differs both from modern nationalism and from the general use of the word *natio* in earlier ecumenical councils. L.R. Loomis argues that the French understood their nation as characterized by unity:

[I]t was understood that, ideally at least, each nation was distinguished from the rest by some degree of homogeneity in its membership, particularly as regarded language. The French nation embraced the delegates from Savoy, Provence, and much of Lorraine, provinces of the Empire, because they spoke the French tongue and were therefore of that nation. At the same time the word "nation" was frequently used to denote the people at home represented by the nation at Constance. They were also a unity of some sort, linguistic, geographic, or racial. (513)

In the process of defending England's nationhood, Polton imagines an English nation characterized not by unity of language, geography and race, but by its diversity. At the same time, his formulation of nationhood implies that a nation is capable of overcoming internal conflicts when necessary.<sup>20</sup> Polton's defense of England's status stresses harmony over unity.

Polton's defense of England's status as a *natio* on account of its diversity required him to assert the presence of a shared identity between its constituent *regna* that did not exist. Likewise, Polton's attack on France's *natio* status required him to stress the presence of a

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<sup>20</sup> Notably, when Shakespeare looks back to this period of English history in *Henry V*, he also celebrates the internal diversity of the English nation when he depicts the camaraderie between Captains Gower, Fluellen, MacMorris, and Jamy. Shakespeare uses these characters to suggest that one of England's strengths is indeed its internal diversity.

French geographic and linguistic unity that did not exist. We can see in the elated domestic response to Polton's success that the English were deeply concerned about the results of Campan's threat to England's international prestige. Loomis draws our attention to a letter written April 23 from Henry Chichele, archbishop of Canterbury to Robert Hallam, bishop of Salisbury,

congratulating him and his colleagues on their victorious defense of the rights and honour of the realm and clergy of England "against the malice of the French, who have always been our enemies" and urging an unremitting vigilance "lest by their wiles they regain control over the church which they had in times past and cunningly rob others of their rights." (523)

For Englishmen in England, the Council of Constance was not just a meeting convened to decide the fate of the Church; it was also an opportunity to demonstrate England's influence and prestige before all of Europe.<sup>21</sup>

Chichele provides one clear example of how an Englishman was all too ready to imagine France as a community characterized by malice, cunning, and belligerence.<sup>22</sup> It does not stretch the imagination to consider that Chichele would have characterized the English as possessing the opposing traits such as benevolence, forthrightness, and honour. Chichele was far from the only significant Englishman to take advantage of the council to advance the war effort against France. Allmand suggests that Henry V's greatest interest in the Council of Constance was to win military support: by distributing copies of the treaty of 1412, in which

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<sup>21</sup> Hirschi argues that the most significant result of the national debates at Constance were that by the time they ended it came to be believed that nations, like people, possessed a degree of honour which became worthy of defense (88-103). Here, Hirschi suggests a unification of the concepts of nationalism and patriotism which is far from universal.

<sup>22</sup> Another example of this position, albeit a relatively early one, can be found in *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, as we have seen in Section 3.3.2, cf. Heng, *Empire of Magic* 98-106. A short summary of European nationalistic prejudices can be found in Butterfield 131-3. I discuss Patterson on this matter below.

his claim to sovereignty over a number of French lands was recognized by a number of French princes, Henry worked to “demonstrate to the world the unreliability and lack of good faith of the French” (*Henry V* 239). As the debates at Constance continued, Henry V was able to procure an alliance between himself and Sigismund, which was formalized in 1416 in the Treaty of Canterbury, an arrangement of mutual military aid against France (240-44). Thornton would have been around twenty years old at this time. Both the King of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury were publically claiming that France was their national enemy, and it stands to reason that such rhetoric would have strongly influenced Thornton.

### 5.3 - Thornton's Nostalgia and Fifteenth-Century English Identity

Thornton imagines England nostalgically. Although his life was bookended by a coup and a civil war, his formative years were dominated by the stability of the reign of Henry V, whose administration witnessed reparations made for the deposition of Richard II, the development of a stable and effective internal bureaucracy, the suppression of dissidents, and triumph over France.<sup>23</sup> Allmand observes that “the reign was characterized by a marked sense of harmony among the English people, which was deliberately fostered by the king” (*Henry V* 436). Integral to the sense of harmony which pervaded England during Henry V's reign is the proliferation of what Lee Patterson calls “royal propaganda”: texts defending Henry's dynastic rights to continental territories (79). This literature expressed fear of internal division and disunity and acknowledged that internal divisions within the French polity were what made it vulnerable to English attacks (78, 80). Patterson suggests that this

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<sup>23</sup> Allmand, *Henry V* 404-08; 436-42

programme, which began with Henry's 1415 invasion, "fully ... structured contemporary thinking" by emphasising arguments which distinguished between frank and wholehearted Englishness and French duplicity (81). Although the campaign of royal propaganda to which Patterson draws our attention may not have come to dominate the English imagination until Henry V invaded France, literature of royal advice from the time of his coronation suggests that the greatest domestic concern throughout his reign was the establishment of internal unity in England in order to better pursue war with France.

Allmand suggests that one of the major social effects of the Hundred Years' War was the development of strong nationalist sentiments among both the English and the French, mainly in response to having their identities defined by their opponents (140). The political poems of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 102 offer the king significant political advice on both foreign and domestic matters.<sup>24</sup> Digby 102 is a political miscellany of 135 folios, written on parchment in the South Midlands in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, which contains a copy of the C-text of *Piers Plowman*, twenty-four political poems, a copy of Richard of Maydestone's metrical paraphrase of the seven penitential psalms, and *The Debate of the Body and the Soul* (Kail vii). Kail notes that the political poems in Digby 102, most of which are occasional, "are most probably by the same author" on account of their shared religious attitude towards social concerns, their "democratic tendency" to stress the importance of the commons to the health of a kingdom, and their shared interest in protecting the commons from encroachment and injustice (vii-ix). One of the Digby 102 poems, dated Easter 1413 and entitled *God Saue the Kyng, and Kepe the Crounn*, suggests that the worst thing that could happen to English military strength would be internal strife:

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<sup>24</sup> All of these poems are edited by Kail, and published in *Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems*. I take quotations only from this edition.

Ȝif we among oure self debate,  
 Þan endeþ floure of chyualrie.  
 All opere londis þat doþ vs hate,  
 Oure febelnes wole aspye; (33-6)

The poet's fear of foreign incursion is obvious, but it is also suggestive. The poet expresses his concern because he desires that England maintain its newly-earned international standing:

Englische men dede maystryȝes make;  
 Þurgh all þe world, here word it sprong.  
 Cristen and heþen þey made to quake,  
 Tok and slowen kynges strong.  
 God let neuere were be vs among,  
 To lese þat blo of gret renowne,  
 Ne neuere oure riȝt be turned to wrong.  
 God saue þe kynge, and kepe þe crowne!

Among oure self, ȝif fiȝt be raysed,  
 Þan stroye we oure awen nest.  
 Þat haþ victor, wole be euel payed,  
 So many good men ben lest. (121-32)

It is because England has recently been so victorious that internal conflict ought to be avoided, lest Englishmen "stroye ... oure awen nest."

Another poem in Digby 102, *Deed is Working*, dated 1414, reiterates the importance of quelling domestic strife, but this time re-casts its necessity as a predicate for Henry V's pursuit of his hereditary claims to France:

Whanne 3e han made pes wiþ-ynne,  
 All 3oure reme in vnyte,  
 Vttere-more 3e mot bygynne;  
 Strengþe 3oure marche, and kepe þe see.  
 Ofte haue 3e made 3oure fomen fle,  
 Here hatest blod o brod to sprede.  
 God doþ batayle, and not 3e;  
 Þou3 3e fau3t, god doþ þe dede.

To Fraunce, kyng Edward had queryle,  
 Hit was his kynde heritage;  
 And 3e han þe same style,  
 Wiþ armes of þe selue parage (105-16)

Other poems in the manuscript, written during the reign of Henry IV, explicitly advise the king on why he ought to work towards producing domestic harmony. *Love and Dread God* expresses its concern about rebellion when it promises the king that that “[a]nd lawe be kept, no folk nyl rise” (63), a claim echoed more strongly in the 1401 poem *Truth, Reste, and Pes*:

And lawe be kept, folk nyl not ryse  
 .....  
 For fawte of lawe 3if comouns rise,  
 Þan is a kingdom most in drede.  
 For whanne vengeaunce a comouns lede,  
 Þei do gret harm er þey asses. (15, 27-30)

These poems suggest that English writers were aware of both the potential for internal division within England and its potential for disruption within the English polity. Harmony was a desirable goal, but it could only be produced if the king desired it. In the English imagination, the primary concerns surrounding the reign of Henry IV were the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of uprisings. As the English crown passed to Henry V, and especially by the time the Council of Constance began, domestic anxieties over the maintenance of domestic order were superseded by assertions of English military strength and exhortations encouraging war in France.

Henry V drew upon the discourse at work in the poems of Digby 102 in order to encourage English nationalism. Allmand suggests that one of Henry's legacies was the sense of national unity he encouraged among his subjects:

Henry caught something of the mood of the day in the encouragement he gave to developments which would have an important bearing on the future. He used the conflict against France, inherited from his predecessors, as a means of giving his people the character of a nation blessed by God, favoured because their king was a man who did right. Englishmen should feel proud of being English. (*Henry V* 425)

As the Digby 102 poems suggest, the "mood of the day" upon which Henry V drew was that England could prosper so long as its people and its government worked in harmony.

Patterson observes that Henry V was a more active propagandist than Allmand concedes, noting that "Henry took care to compile and circulate dossiers of historical documents that supported his case" for dynastic rights over France (80). However, his domestic policy suggests that he may actually have taken the Digby 102 political advice to heart. As Gerald Harriss suggests in *Shaping the Nation*, from the moment he took the throne, Henry V seized the opportunity afforded him by this atmosphere to create stability throughout England:

The four years from March 1413 to July 1417 during which Henry ruled England saw the restoration of effective kingship and government. Henry cultivated the traditional image of kingship to make it the focus of unity. He met the need of the nobility for loyal service and stability, of the Church for support against its critics, of the gentry for order and solvency, and of traders for secure markets. (593)

Henry V harmonized England. This was not merely the result of Henry's propaganda suggesting that "Englishmen should feel proud of being English," it was also the result of his domestic policy, which was focused on creating a sense of order, stability, and justice throughout the realm. Henry created a sense of harmony by aligning the disparate interests of all his subjects.

As I have mentioned above, the broad dissemination of nationalism was important to the establishment of Lancastrian power at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Henry V used nationalism to encourage the war with France. This may explain why very few nationalistic texts were produced after 1420, when the Treaty of Troyes established the dual monarchy of France and England that Henry VI was soon to inherit. Pearsall suggests that Henry V's policy no longer prevailed after 1421:

Henry V's legacy was also ambiguous. The manner in which he had used the idea of the Englishness of the English language – what might be called his race-card – was no longer relevant, after 1421, to the dual monarchy, in which both languages were equally official ... There was in fact little expression of any consciousness of Englishness, any sense of English nationhood, in the years after the Treaty of Troyes in 1420. Englishness had always been constructed principally out of opposition to Frenchness, it being a structural principle of community formation that the strongest elements in it are oppositional and exclusory ... Opposition to France had been the

whetstone of English national sentiment since Norman times and it was always capable of being reinvoked. ("The Idea of Englishness in the Fifteenth Century" 20) Pearsall argues not only that the period of medieval English history which witnessed the most violent outbreak of nationalist rhetoric was the reign of Henry V, but also that there was no resurgence in it after the coronation of Charles VII of France in 1429 (21-22). English nationalism at its medieval peak was mainly limited to texts produced during the reign of Henry V that supported his claim to France.

What had changed between Henry V's conquest of France and the time when Thornton began to write his manuscripts was that, as Pearsall suggests, Henry V's campaign of nationalist propaganda had served its purpose. It is difficult enough to imagine a unified national community and to encourage others to do so, and it is even more difficult to actually produce one. By 1420 the institution of the dual monarchy by the Treaty of Troyes had made the production of royal propaganda unnecessary, at least temporarily.<sup>25</sup> The reign of Henry VI, however, witnessed a steady decline in England's power and prestige on the continent at the same time that it witnessed a surge in factionalism and internal strife among the English polity. Between Henry VI's succession in 1422 and his ascension to the age of majority in 1437, the bureaucracy instituted by his father was able to effectively manage domestic affairs. Harriss observes that despite the intensifying conflicts between members of the ruling council, they nevertheless "used their ability to keep the state functioning in the absence of

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<sup>25</sup> As B.J.H. Rowe demonstrates, royal propaganda remained a tool used by John, duke of Bedford, during his regency. As early as 1423, Bedford commissioned Lydgate to produce a poem in French entitled "On the English Title to the Crown of France," which explains that Henry VI's genealogical tree demonstrates his rightful claim to rule France (77-79). A copy of this genealogical tree can be found on folio 3v of Talbot's Shrewsbury book, mentioned above (80). As Rowe tells us, Bedford had the picture and the poem hung side-by-side in Notre Dame Cathedral in 1425 (82). It is evident that royal propaganda remained potent tool, and that the Lancastrians continued to use it after Henry V died. Although Bedford was regent, he was also based in Paris. It is no surprise that Bedford's propaganda was directed at the French rather than at the English, as it was under Henry V.

active royal rule. That was striking testimony to the stability and maturity of English political society” (604). John Watts concurs, suggesting that Henry VI's minority was “a broadly successful period of rule” (xv). In France, the successful defense of Orléans from its English besiegers in 1429 led to a newly invigorated French offensive against the country's English occupants and the progressive loss of English control over continental territory. In 1435, the Treaty of Arras saw Paris returned to French control, the end of the English-Burgundian alliance, and Charles VII's consolidation of power as a rival claimant to the throne of France (Wolffe 158-59).

Meanwhile, Henry's regents had begun to hand him more power in England in expectation of his majority. This plan did not go as expected. Bertram Wolffe explains the problems of the war effort:

By 1433, the ruling council was] faced with insoluble problems which were to dog the footsteps of the young king and his advisers for the next twenty years.

They could not conceive of any means of defending and consolidating the French inheritance which did not involve further aggressive conquest, yet it was impossible to raise finance from either kingdom adequate for this. (*Henry VI* 69).

The difficulty of marshalling broad support for further conquest was exacerbated by Henry's actions at the beginning of his personal rule when he chose to divert revenues which could have been used for the war in order to fund the foundation of Eton College, beginning a building project which was to last well into the 1470s (77). As Wolffe tells us, the management of the foundation of Eton College indicates Henry VI's purposeless and inconstant rule, characterized by weak planning, the pursuit of excessively lavish desires, and lack of fiscal restraint (135-45).

Henry VI suffered from these same flaws when he finally got around to dealing with France, where his misgovernance did much to destabilize English continental power. As Wolffe puts it:

Sad to say, the lack of consistent purpose, random changes of plan and undue susceptibility to influence by persons with wills stronger than his own, already revealed in [Henry's] kingly acts at home and in the history of the royal foundations, were equally apparent in the affairs of the second kingdom. An account of these years [1437-1443] shows that contradictory policies were pursued at the same time. (146)

Whether or not we can confidently blame Henry VI for the disasters that occurred during his reign, it is clear that the period of his personal rule was indeed disastrous.<sup>26</sup> The only military victories that occurred during his reign were in 1436 when the Burgundians were repulsed from Calais and the Scots from Berwick, neither of which can truly be attributed to the young king, who at the time was still in his minority (Wolffe 14). Henry VI's French subjects felt neglected by him because in reality they were (Wolffe 150-52). Moreover, the only French campaign in which Henry VI personally participated, the 1443 campaign to relieve Gascony and defend Normandy from French attack, ended so disastrously that it ultimately brought England to civil war (Wolffe 168).

I suggest at the beginning of this section that Thornton's imagined England is characterized by his nostalgia. Thornton was born around 1396 and died around 1465. Henry V may not have been Thornton's only king, but he was the king of his childhood. Thornton

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<sup>26</sup> Watts provides a strong retrospective of how Wolffe has been received in his introduction to the 2001 edition of *Henry VI*. Critics agree on the general efficacy of the ruling council before Henry's personal rule, but there has been significant opposition to Wolffe's claim that Henry was personally responsible for all its disasters. Watts observes that much of the resistance has been made by means of asserting the growing power of the landed gentry during this period, and there is still significant disagreement on the nature of Henry VI's personality.

would have been around 18 when Henry V won at Agincourt in 1415. By the time his father died and he inherited the manor in East Newton at the age of 21, the powerful discourse around the new nationalism incited by the Council of Constance, including tales of England's successful defense of its status among the *natio*, might have instilled in him a sense of pride in being a member of such an influential international agent. The *terminus post quem* of the Lincoln manuscript is 1422 (the date assigned to *Quedam Revelacio*); that of the London manuscript is 1415, the date of the Battle of Agincourt, which is alluded to in "The Rose of Ryse." Both were probably written sometime between 1430 and 1444, meaning that Thornton copied his manuscripts sometime between his 23<sup>rd</sup> and his 47<sup>th</sup> year.<sup>27</sup> Thornton's piecemeal copying process would have facilitated his copying of texts through the lens of nostalgia, responding to the administrative failures of Henry VI by imaginatively re-creating the strong England of his youth.

By the end of the period in which Thornton copied his manuscripts, Henry VI's patronage appointments had annihilated the sense of law and order which characterized the reign of Henry V. Wolffe tells us that the king's own policies had "exacerbated rather than checked, controlled or solved the differences of his unruly subjects" (107). By the 1440s, it was clear to many that "the royal powers of justice in the localities could be manipulated with impunity by those who enjoyed Henry's access and favour" (Wolffe 123). When Henry's regents began to give him power in 1435, nobody suspected that he would not have turned out to be as able a king as his father was (Wolffe 13). However, between 1444 and 1453, "Henry presided over the liquidation of [England's] first overseas empire and by his policies provoked the first significant revolt among his English subjects for three-quarters of a century" (Wolffe 15). By the early 1450s his reputation was a shambles:

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<sup>27</sup> I discuss the dating 9n4.

[S]ome of Henry's more articulate, obscure, but careless subjects had such low opinions of their king in his prime as to claim he was simpleminded or dim-witted on the evidence of the failure of his policies. Conspicuously to these ordinary subjects he was not the kind of king his father had been. That was what they wanted and expected. (Wolffe 18)

These feelings of disappointment and betrayal circulated near the end of the time when Thornton would have been writing his manuscripts. By the time Henry VI's diversion of funds away from the maintenance of England's continental holdings accelerated England's continental losses and led to the failed siege of Orléans, it must have been clear to Thornton that England had lost much of its international prestige.<sup>28</sup> Johnston argues persuasively that Henry VI's disastrous reign engendered in Thornton a set of social anxieties which led him to embrace romances that vilify those who threaten order and harmony:

By 1436, when Henry VI began taking a hand in governing the realm, this fictional exchange of power was rendered moot, but from 1422-36, when the king's body was absent, so to speak, the governance by council was anything but smooth: Gloucester, the Protector of the King, and Beaufort, the Chancellor, openly disputed in council; lawlessness increased dramatically throughout the provinces; new taxes were introduced; and the English lost the Battle of Orléans, lost control of Paris, and lost their alliance with Burgundy. ("Sociology" 152)

As we shall see, Thornton uses his romances to recall the rhetoric used by Chichele and Henry V in praise of Polton's defense of England's status at the Council of Constance, emphasising English unity and goodwill on one hand and French disunity and antagonism on the other.

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<sup>28</sup> See also Vale 395-98; Edward Powell 466-69.

Phillipa Hardman suggests that Thornton had absorbed enough of the nationalism which pervaded the reign of Henry V that one of his contributions to his romances (especially in the Lincoln MS) is to emphasize the potential for reading them as “a history of conquest and the establishment of empire” (“Reading the Spaces” 255). She suggests that Thornton's mindset throughout the copying of the romances might have been nostalgic:

As English power in France dwindled in the mid-fifteenth century, Robert Thornton was perhaps looking back to the conquests of Henry V, celebrated in popular literature as a great hero, comparable to the Nine Worthies ... His decision to include “The Rose of Ryse,” a carol celebrating Henry's famous victory at Agincourt, some twenty-five years after the event, certainly shows an interest in past glories that would support such a reading of the romances. (256)

Hardman's observation rings true. Why else would Thornton rubricate “The Virtues of the Mass” in such a way as to minimize the importance of France and its patron saint?

This expression of nationalism occurs in the same manuscript as the nostalgic poem “The Rose of Ryse” to which Hardman draws our attention. The title of this poem clearly refers to the red rose shared by the heraldry of the houses of Lancaster and Tudor (Rickert 156), and asserts the rose's domination of the fleur-de-lys:

þer-fore me thynke þe Flour delyse<sup>29</sup>

Scholde wirchipe þe Rose of Ryse,

And bene his thralle.

.....

Whan the Rose by tide a chaunce,

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<sup>29</sup> This is not the only references to France and the Fleur-de-Lys in the London MS. In *The Siege of Milan*, it is directly associated with Charlemagne (94), as well with the Lords of France in general (281). For French uses of Charlemagne for propaganda purposes, see Morissey 71-123.

Pan ferande alle þe floures of Fraunce,

And chaungyde hewe. (fol. 110v)

This poem clearly asserts the military dominance of England over France, as the fleur-de-lys “changes hue,” presumably to red, on account of the bloodshed to which the poem alludes.

Thornton's nostalgia is connected to his nationalism. “The Rose of Ryse” looks to the past in order to celebrate the superiority of England to France. Independently “The Rose of Ryse” is a poem that celebrates Henry V's military success. In its manuscript, it anticipates the French internal divisions shown in the Charlemagne romances, and their inferiority to the English as shown in *Richard*. Thornton responded to the crises of the reign of Henry VI by imagining England as harmonious and successful as it was during the reign of Henry V.

To date, Hardman is the only critic who has published a treatment of the nationalism of the Thornton manuscripts. In “Compiling the Nation: Fifteenth-Century Miscellany Manuscripts,” she draws our attention to the possibility that Thornton was familiar with the introduction to *Cursor Mundi* (quoted above) and its assertion of communal English identity based on shared language. She also draws attention to Thornton's copy of *Richard Coer de Lyon* as a poem that addresses itself explicitly to English readers when, on folio 125, it asserts that “In Fraunce Bokes these rymes men wrote/ Bot in ynglys lewede men knewe it note/ lewede men kan Fraunce righte none/ Amanges ane hundrethe vnnethes one” (54). Hardman reads Thornton's manuscripts as nationalistic not only on account of the English focus of some of the London manuscript's historical texts, but also on account of the unique prologue to Thornton's copy of *Thomas of Erceldoune*, which is remarkably concerned with England for a text that gives us prophecies about Scotland (54-55). Hardman reads *Thomas of Erceldoune*'s prologue and its “unlocalized prayers for Englishmen” as a text that would have maintained its appeal through the reign of Henry V, during which the Scots supported

the Percy revolt of 1403 and the Southampton plot of 1415, and also during the reign of Henry VI, when they fought with France against England in 1423 and when James I of Scotland attacked England directly in 1436 (56-57). In the London manuscript's Charlemagne romances, Hardman notes that *Milan* "treats as the crucial conflict one not between Christian and infidel but between Church and king, Christendom and nation," while *Roland and Otuel* "unusually represents the Saracens as almost indistinguishable from Christians and capable of conversion" (60-61). For Hardman, the London manuscript is "concerned with Christian identity," while the Lincoln manuscript "seems to address more particularly English interests," concerned as it is primarily with the extirpation of the numerous Saracens who constantly threaten English identities (61-62). Hardman reads Thornton as a man deeply invested in imagining England as his home.<sup>30</sup>

Although many of the romances Thornton copies can be traced back as far as the early part of the fourteenth century, he would have not have copied them unless they were somehow relevant to him in his own time. Witnessing the radical changes both within English society and in its international prestige, his romances control chaos by recalling English society as it was imagined during the reign of Henry V. As we have seen, romance is a very flexible literary genre, and this flexibility makes it well suited to address social tensions. Thornton's romances provided him with an outlet to express his own imagined England – the England of his youth. Thornton's nostalgia facilitates his wish to locate social harmony in England in the face of his first-hand experience of the increasing factionalism that developed in the years before the Wars of the Roses. Consequently, Thornton's

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<sup>30</sup> Thornton's national identity is more subtle than a summary treatment could provide. Aside from the prologue to *Thomas of Erceeldowne*, I treat the same texts as Hardman does throughout this dissertation to mainly the same conclusions. I disagree slightly with her assessment of the London MS as being concerned with Christian identity, as it is equally concerned with French and English national identities. Likewise, I disagree with Hardman's assessment of the nature of alien threats to Englishness in the Lincoln MS: they offer opportunities for disharmony more than direct threats to Englishness.

projection of internal divisions and factionalism onto France characterizes England's national enemy just as it existed in Henry V's rhetoric. Thornton's imagination is powerfully retrospective, but what is most remarkable is the degree to which the past that he imagines and desires to return to is the past of Henry V's nationalistic propaganda rather than a discrete historical moment. Like any other heterogeneous group, Thornton's imagined England has its own internal conflicts, but what differentiates it from his imagined France is that in his England it is always possible to resolve strife in such a way as to avoid putting the nation at risk of fragmentation. Just as Polton imagines an English nation comprised of diverse languages and peoples, yet still able to function as a coherent unit, Thornton imagines an England characterized not by unity, but by harmony. Thornton does not merely write one book, but two, and thus both of his manuscripts comprise a single collection. As we shall see, he divides his romances between his manuscripts in order to better represent the England and the France of his imagination: the Lincoln manuscript depicts English heroes and locates order and strength within England and the English just as the London manuscript depicts French heroes and locates chaos and weakness within France and the French.

#### 5.4 – The Representation of England in the Lincoln MS

The Lincoln manuscript provides us with ten romances. Four of these are explicitly Arthurian: the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *Sir Degrevant*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, and *Sir Perceval of Galles*. Two more Lincoln romances – *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and *The Earl of Toulouse* – treat territory that is associated with England. Six of the ten Lincoln manuscript romances thus treat politics internal to England as a nation. As I have suggested in Chapter 2,

these romances imagine England as a place where social disunity can be repaired and where it is both possible and desirable to resolve feudal conflicts with only a minimum of violence.

We can associate both *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and *The Earl of Toulouse* with Thornton's imagined English nation. In the case of *The Earl of Toulouse*, the *Morte Arthure* associates Toulouse with England when Arthur gives it to Sir Ewayne fitz Henry for his valour on the campaign against Lucius:

Sir knyghte, sais the conquerour, so me Criste helpe!

I ȝif the for thy thyȝandez Tolouse the riche,

The tolle and the tachmentez, tauernez and other,

The towne and the tenementez with towrez so hye,

That towchez to the temporaltee, whilles my tyme lastez. (1566-70)

If Toulouse "the riche" is simply an imperial prize, the associations of Artois are complicated and deep-seated. Located between Picardy in the south and Flanders in the east and north-east, Artois was of great importance to English campaigns throughout the Hundred Years War. On its north coast, Calais, its largest city and port, had provided England with a fortified staging ground and trade depot on the continent since Edward III conquered it in 1347 (Neillands 106; Allmand, *The Hundred Years War* 13-16). Throughout the Hundred Years War, Artois was important to England both symbolically and militarily. Sometime between 1333 and 1336, Robert III of Artois failed to reclaim Artois, which he considered to be his rightful inheritance, by means of a forged will. Philip IV of France, half-brother to Robert's wife, confiscated his property, imprisoned his family, and hunted Robert across France until he escaped to England. In England, Robert joined the court of Edward III and made himself available as a source of information on the workings of the French court, in exchange for which Edward made him Earl of Richmond. Robert challenged Edward to fight

for his rights in France, and “it is from that moment that the Hundred Years War properly begins” (Neillands 75). After Robert's defection to England and Edward III's capture of Calais, the English associated Artois both with French treachery and with English strength, an association that continued until the end of the Hundred Years' War. Although he had been an English ally since 1419, Philip of Burgundy withdrew his support from England after the Congress of Arras in 1435, and began to support Charles VII. As Allmand notes, the English reaction to Philip's defection was “strongly emotional” (*The Hundred Years War* 34). As the staging ground most important to the English campaigns on the continent, the possession of Artois loomed large in the English imagination. It is no surprise, then, that the romance of *Sir Eglamour of Artois* draws on both the positive and the negative feelings associated with the real Artois, first when Sir Eglamour is betrayed by the duplicitous earl, and then when he replaces the earl's regime with a just government. Thornton's copy of the poem may have encouraged him to imagine Artois as a province characterized more by its association with “English” traits of justice and order than with “French” traits of treachery and disunity.

In the Lincoln manuscript, Thornton copies six romances associated with England. These romances express a shared set of values which we can link to Thornton's imagination of England by virtue of their settings and characters. All of these romances demonstrably prefer to resolve internal conflicts with laws and diplomacy rather than with violence. These attributes form the basis of Thornton's sense of English national identity. Thornton must have had a special interest in *Sir Perceval of Galles*, since he adds his own name to its *explicit*, which reads “quod Robert Thornton Explicit Sir Perceuell De Gales Here Endys þe Romance of Sir Perceuell of Gales Cosyn to king arthoure” (fol. 176r).<sup>31</sup> The Arthurian connection that Thornton emphasises links the poem to the conflated Arthurian and English

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<sup>31</sup> Thompson draws our attention to this explicit in “Authors and Audiences” 392.

identities we find in the *Morte Arthure*. The *Morte* spells out the breadth of Arthur's empire early on, enumerating in an extended passage the "castelles and kyngdoms, and contreez many" that "the kynge Arthur by conquest had wonnyne" (26-27). These territories include the outer islands, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Low Countries, France, Germany, Austria, Norway, Denmark and Sweden (28-53). As Hardman observes, the country at the centre of the *Morte* is England, whose presence here is a natural assumption in all of Thornton's Arthurian romances ("Compiling the Nation" 61-62). The *Morte Arthure* begins with a description of an English empire, an assertion of its unity under the Arthur's rule, and the establishment of a peace-time government for it in the Round Table.

The enumeration of distinct conquered territories is essential to the articulation of national identity, for it is in such moments, as it was at Constance, that the nation is imagined as the product of diverse communities. We can find a parallel moment in *The Song of Roland*. In *Medieval Boundaries*, Sharon Kinoshita draws our attention to the fragility of the "Frankish" nation, as the poem imagines it. Reading the poem in the context of its Norman French audience, Kinoshita suggests that *The Song of Roland* produces a unified French identity when "[a]t the turn of the twelfth century, this collective identity was still in formation" (29). Kinoshita draws our attention to the poem's final battle, which is preceded by a catalogue of all the "nations" (what both Campan and Polton would have classified as *regna*) which compose the Frankish army. *The Song of Roland* reveals the sutures in this imagined national composition during Roland's death-speech at Roncesvaux, where he remembers all of the lands he has conquered but recently (repeating the phrase "Jo l'en cunquis" in each instance), and which now compose Charlemagne's army. Kinoshita argues that:

[T]he catalogue of troops cited above does not so much *describe* Frankish unity as *perform* it, assimilating former enemy tribes like the Bavarians and the Saxons into the imagined community of *douce France*. From this perspective, Roland *must* die so that his re-collection of the historical layering underlying the nascent Frankish state – the memory of the violence that had gone into the formation of Charlemagne's empire – may die with him. Charlemagne's annihilation of the Saracens to avenge Roland's death is a ritual forging of the various people composing his army into a new *Frankish* nation [...] (30, italics in original)

Kinoshita suggests that to imagine a nation is to forget the complex relationships which compose it, and thus implies that medieval nationalism follows a process similar to that described by Anderson, in which imagining a nation requires asserting shared values, language, and geography. She stresses that the primary conflict within *The Song of Roland* is between Pagans and Christians, and thus argues that Marsile's promise to embrace Christian law "threatens to disrupt the precarious binary through which Charlemagne's empire has hitherto been defined" (31). Despite the poem's insistence on Pagan wrongness and Christian rightness, however, Kinoshita admits that the Saracens of *The Song of Roland* are "[e]qual to their Frankish counterparts in all but religion" (27). Although *The Song of Roland* primarily depicts violent conflict between Christians and Saracens, we must not forget that Ganelon is the true antagonist in this poem. Ganelon, out of spite and hate for his stepson Roland, convinces the war-weary Marsile to ambush Charlemagne's army rather than to convert and pay tribute. For Ganelon, the Saracens are nothing more than an instrument by which he can engineer Roland's death. The greatest threat to Frankish unity in *The Song of Roland* is not the Saracens, but internal conflict.

The *Morte Arthure* contains three scenes of recollection of national composition similar to Roland's death-speech. We have seen that at the beginning of the poem, the narrator enumerates Arthur's recent conquests and names all the territories under his dominion (26-53). The narrator casts Arthur's conquests as an act of creation similar to the account in Genesis when he concludes this passage by telling us that "[w]hen he [Arthur] thys rewmes hade redyne and rewlyde the popule,/ [t]hen rystede that ryalle and helde the Rounde Table," drawing a parallel between Arthur and God by showing the king at rest (51-52). Later, Sir Craddock enumerates the geographic origin of the lords who ally themselves with Mordred (3522-55). When Arthur fights Mordred's allies, the narrator once again reminds us of their diverse origins:

The kynge comly ouer-keste knyghtes and othire,  
 Erlles of Awfrike, and Estriche berynes  
 Of Orgaile and Orkenay, the Iresche kynges.  
 The nobileste of Norwaye, nowmbirs fulle hugge,  
 Dukes of Danamarke, and dubbut knyghtes (3932-36)

As the similarities between these two episodes suggests, neither *The Song of Roland* nor the *Morte Arthure* is able to cleanly forget that national identities are forged from diversity. Just as Charlemagne in *The Song of Roland* is unquestionably Frankish, Arthur in the *Morte* is unquestionably English, as we can see when Craddock asks specifically to speak with "Sir Arthure of Englande" (3500), and when the "archers of Englande" play a central role in the re-establishment of Arthur's regime (3685). Kinoshita would argue that Arthur's death, like Roland's, allows his people to forge a united identity.

Kinoshita suggests that Roland's death-speech asserts national identity by performing it. However, Roland's performance does not consign the components of the newly-forged

Frankish nation to oblivion so much as it reminds the audience of their continued existence. The catalogues of the peoples who compose Arthur's English "nation" in the *Morte* also constitute acts of performative remembering. These parallel episodes remind us that the formation of a national identity is a performative act, and also that the maintenance of a national identity requires that unity be intermittently re-asserted. To imagine a nation is to perform difficult work, and to imaginatively unite apparently diverse peoples at a moment of crisis is even more difficult, yet models were available. The medieval universities were able to function effectively as corporate bodies in spite of conflicts that were aroused by the different "nations" from which their student bodies were composed (Coulton). Polton's defense of England's national status at the Council of Constance suggests that diversity had become an essential to medieval nationhood. Medieval nationalism demands that diversity be celebrated rather than erased or forgotten. Mordred's mourning of the legacy of the Round Table at the moment of Gawain's death emphasises that points of national fragmentation are also potentially points of national unity.<sup>32</sup> The *Morte* imagines an English nation at the moment of Arthur's death when it depicts its diverse peoples united in mourning.

The *Morte Arthure* creates an idea of England as a nation, but it remains for Thornton's other romances to explain to us what it means to participate in an English identity. As I have argued in Chapter 2, the Lincoln romances tend to connect the coherence of families to the coherence of greater communities, and this connection is most often demonstrated through the representation of justice. Thornton often locates this connection in English settings. These connected associations are common to many Middle English romances. As Crane puts it, "[t]he desires of the [English] hero subsume the desires of his community, so that the hero's impulse towards personal achievement is in harmony with a

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<sup>32</sup> I treat this episode in more detail Chapter 4.

broader, impersonal impulse toward national stability" (*Insular Romance* 218). Moreover, Middle English romances often treat dynastic problems of provinces and countries synecdochically, such that territorial problems are resolved on a national scale and regional identities are encouraged to assimilate into national identities (Field). The Middle English Arthurian romances consequently tend to localize Arthurian geography:

It can be no coincidence that the appearance of English Arthurian literature accompanies the gathering strength of English as a literary language and the growing sense of national identity most sharply felt in relation to France. From the fourteenth century onwards French romance is re-interpreted for an English audience for whom Arthurian material is inescapably historic and iconic. The legendary locations of French romance – Camelot, Logres, Astolat – become recognizable English places – Carlisle, Winchester, London, Guildford ... the lone knights of preference are local heroes. (Batt and Field 69-70)

Because the *Morte* participates in the tradition of English Arthurian literature, its defense of English political autonomy must stress that Arthur rules over territory that actually exists. He must also wage war on territory that actually exists.<sup>33</sup> We can see this at work in the geographic specificity found throughout the poem, such as when Arthur tells the Roman ambassador to leave the country by "Watelyng-strette, and by no waye elles" on his way to Sandwich (450).<sup>34</sup> By treating England with such conspicuous specificity, the *Morte* is able to employ English history in its argument for national sovereignty. In the first council scene, King Aungers responds to Lucius's claim of dominion over England by remembering that

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<sup>33</sup> Simpson notes a similar tendency in Malory's *Morte Darthure* when he suggests that "Lancelot is ... the king of France" because "[h]is distribution of lands in defeat constitutes a remarkably detailed map of south-western France in the fifteenth century, including areas fought over by the English in 1453" (113).

<sup>34</sup> Watling Street is the Roman road that stretches from the southern coast to Cardigan in Wales, by way of London. Most of it is still in use today as the A2 and A5 motorways, and as Edgware Road in London.

the Romans once despoiled the country and jeopardized its people (293-303). Taking the historical Roman domination of England personally, Aungers declares “of this grett velany I salle be venged ones/ on 3one venemus mene” (298-99). Aungers's simultaneous rejection of Roman authority and desire for vengeance suggests that in his mind Lucius's claim for tribute constitutes an imminent threat to England, which is why he promises Arthur fifty thousand men to help the “defence” of the realm (300). Aungers's memory facilitates Arthur's imperial ambitions by locating sovereignty exclusively within England. The poem never remarks on England's domination of the continent, but its subordination to a foreign power constitutes a “grett velany.”

The very nature of Arthurian society is at stake in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *Sir Degrevant*, and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*. As I have argued in Chapter 2, the *Morte* takes advantage of the opportunity of Arthur's war to reflect on abstract issues of political sovereignty just before it questions the legitimacy of Arthur's continuing pursuit of his feudal dispute against Lucius after its success. *Sir Degrevant* depicts a feudal dispute preoccupied with maintaining its own legitimacy. And *The Awntyrs off Arthure* stresses first the moral culpability of rulers who do not care for their people, then the social dangers of internal conflict. The same holds in Thornton's non-Arthurian romances: *Sir Eglamour of Artois* punishes the Earl for falsely promising Eglamour his daughter's hand in marriage. Likewise, *The Earl of Toulouse* is so preoccupied with social propriety that it defers its protagonist's desired reward by three years after the conclusion of the plot in order to ensure that each character's word has been kept. Each of these romances is deeply concerned with the maintenance of order on a national scale, but none more so than *Sir Perceval of Galles*.

In two episodes in *Sir Perceval*, English knights actively demonstrate their concern for harmoniously resolving conflicts with their compatriots. In the first episode, Arthur and

some of his knights have finally arrived to reinforce Lufamour's castle against the Saracens Perceval has just defeated. Wawain rides out first, and Perceval, mistaking him for another Saracen, challenges him. Once Perceval comes close enough for Wawain to recognize him, Wawain begins to doubt whether he can fight his cousin:

"A! dere God," said Wawayne the fre,

"How gates may this be?

If I sle hym, or he me,

That never 3it was fade?

And we are sister sones two,

And aythir of us othir slo,

He that lifes wille be fulle wo

That ever was he made!" (1437-44)

Wawain does not want to fight with Perceval because they are related, and knows that any conflict with him is likely to end poorly for both. In the second episode, Perceval encounters the Black Knight, but he, too, hesitates to combat a fellow countryman. As Perceval searches for his mother, he encounters a woman from whom he stole a ring. The woman is being punished by her lover, the Black Knight, for losing the ring that Perceval stole. Perceval frees the woman, who warns him when she sees the Black Knight return:

Scho sayd, "Dede mon 3e be,

I say 3ow, syr, certainly,

3onder out comes he

That wille us bothe sle!" (1889-92)

The Black Knight attacks Perceval and nearly kills him before the lady stops them:

Than the lady he forbere,  
 And made the Blak Knyghte to swere  
 Of alle evylles that there were  
     Forgiffe the lady:  
 And Percevell made the same othe,  
 That he come never undir clothe  
 To do that lady no lothe,  
     That pendid to velany. (1929-36)

Now that their conflict is mediated by the lady, neither Perceval nor the Black Knight poses a threat to the other. Instead, the Black Knight provides Perceval with the information he needs to reclaim his mother. The poem prefers to set aside internal conflicts in order to expose and eliminate the external, Saracen threat to its polity.

Once Perceval has dispatched the Red Knight, all of the poem's violent episodes redirect potential internal violence towards Saracens, suggesting that *Sir Perceval* prefers to reserve its positive energies for its scenes of restoration and reparation, rather than for the catharsis of violence. Maldwyn Mills observes that at the end of the poem, "the hero meets again, in reverse order, the two ladies he had harmed at the beginning of it" ("*Sir Percyvell*" 137). As he restores the two women he harmed to their original states, Perceval re-establishes internal harmony. The poem's cyclical plot thus suggests that threats to domestic order are as interrelated as their remedies. Most remarkably, however, this is the only poem in Thornton's collection where compatriot knights demur from fighting each other as a matter of course. In *Sir Perceval*, knights produce order in England through their actions.

The Lincoln manuscript romances perform Thornton's imagined conception of the superiority of a harmonious England to a chaotic France. In the *Morte*, during the siege of

Metz, the knights of the Round Table lead the attack while “the freke mene of Fraunce folowede thare-aftyre” (2454). Meanwhile, as Arthur's knights are fighting in Lombardy, Sir Gawain kills a “Sir Dolphyne,” who is notable not only because the poem mentions him twice (2971, 3023), but also because the title *dauphin* is traditionally that of the heir apparent of France.<sup>35</sup> From the perspective of the Romans, contending for French geography against the English is a clearly a futile effort. Arthur sends emissaries to Lucius, who pass along his message:

He byddis 3ow neuere be so bolde, whills his blode regnes,

To brawle 3owe fore Bretayne ne his brode landes

.....

We haffe foughttene in France, and vs es foule happened,

And alle oure mych faire folke faye are by-leuede!

Eschappide there ne cheuallrye, ne cheftaynes nother,

Bott chopped downne in the chasse, syche chawnse es be-fallene! (2361-68)

Arthur's message to Lucius is to refrain from asserting sovereignty over “Bretayne,” here clearly a metonymy for England and its territories. The messenger himself reveals the bloody consequences of opposing English imperialism: the death of vast numbers of nobles. *The Awntyrs off Arthure* is equally aware of the ease with which the English conquer France, when Guinevere's mother foretells the same events, saying:

“Fraunce haf ye frely with your fight wonnen;

Freol and his folke, fey ar they leved.

Bretayne and Burgoyne al to you bowen,

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<sup>35</sup> This word is rare in Middle English, and its first known use recorded in the *Middle English Dictionary* occurs in a copy of the *Brut* cs. 1400 (“Dolfin,” def. 2c; cf “dauphin”).

And al the Dussiperes of Fraunce with your dyn deved.” (274-77)

These poems depict France as a country inferior in military strength to England. Guinevere's mother notably refers to the French nobility as “Dussiperes,” a term more commonly associated with Charlemagne's twelve most preeminent warriors, whom we see in action in the London manuscript, yet they are all but helpless in the face of English strength. Turville-Petre notes that during the time of Edward III, “feudal subordination came to be regarded as demeaning to the status of an English sovereign” (110). The *Awntyrs* thus subordinates France to England while demeaning its king and people.

For Thornton, Arthur's invincibility in his French campaigns in the *Morte* would have recalled Henry V's military victories in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. Thornton imagines an English nation characterized by military strength (especially in France), imperial ambition, concord, law, and justice. These positive associations of order and fortitude are integral to his celebration of the idea of England. England and order are inextricably connected, especially when it must be made demonstrably superior to France.

### 5.5 – The Representation of France in the London MS

Just as the romances of the Lincoln manuscript treat predominantly English subjects, the romances of the London manuscript treat predominantly French subjects. As I have argued in Chapter 3, two of the manuscript's romances, *The Siege of Milan* and *Roland and Otuel*, deal with matters surrounding Charlemagne and his court, while *Richard Coer de Lyon* spends a considerable portion of its length treating the nationally-charged antagonism of King Phillip Augustus of France. Thornton uses these romances to interrogate French identities. In doing so, he imagines France as abject: a country characterized by internal

division and political chaos, populated and ruled by incompetent braggarts. It soon becomes apparent to the reader of *Richard Coer de Lyon* that French resistance to collaboration with outsiders works to their detriment. This is the case most strikingly in *Richard*, but it is also true in *The Siege of Milan* and *Roland and Otuel*; French social and military failures are a consequence of the failure of the French to meaningfully integrate with their diverse constituents or their allies: French monoculture makes France vulnerable to factionalism.

Although it comes thirty folios after them, the immediate context for Thornton's Charlemagne romances is the longest romance in the London manuscript: *Richard Coer de Lyon*. *Richard* is the most brazenly nationalistic of all of Thornton's romances; its treatment of English and French identities is so explicit that we ought to discuss it first, before we move on to the earlier and more ambiguous Charlemagne romances. The poem's treatment of its protagonist suggests that the historical Richard I "was so esteemed by the populace of both England and France that he should be associated in legends with the heroic Arthur and Charlemagne" (Broughton 140-41).<sup>36</sup> Broughton's comment has special relevance for the romance's place in Thornton's collection, since not only is there an extended discussion of the Nine Worthies in both the *Morte Arthure* and *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, but also the main protagonists of Thornton's romances are members of this group: Alexander, Arthur, Charlemagne. In a way, *Richard*'s depiction of the conquest of the Holy Land puts him on a par with Godfrey de Bouillon, except, of course, that Richard is English.<sup>37</sup> Mills has noted that both *Richard* and *The Siege of Milan* depict their heroes as diabolically energetic, and also that both Turpin and Philip are in their own way "French, and therefore always a little

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<sup>36</sup> Broughton takes at face value the poem's suggestion that it was copied from a French original. Had such a poem ever existed, it is now lost (L.H. Loomis, *Medieval Romance in England* 148-49). It is safer to treat *Richard* only as an English poem.

<sup>37</sup> Historically speaking, Richard barely spent any time in England and was not particularly fond of the place. Nevertheless, the poem's treatment of Richard as a consummate English king necessitates that we treat him as such for our purposes here.

unreliable" (*Six Middle English Romances* xiii). As we have seen, while the manuscript's Charlemagne romances depict internal division within France and its polity, *Richard* treats Philip and his French crusaders as treacherous outsiders and Richard's most dangerous antagonists. *Richard Coer de Lyon* is most effective when it depicts the prowess and bravery of its English protagonists. Thornton's Charlemagne romances draw attention to the presence and effect of internal divisions with France; *Richard* instead offers the reader a direct comparison of French and English military and social efficacy, with only the neutral geography of the Holy Land at stake.

In *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*, Geraldine Heng argues that *Richard* is a nationalistic poem, and that its complex nationalistic tendencies also encompass medieval concepts of race.<sup>38</sup> Reading the poem in its context in the Auchinleck manuscript, Heng reads *Richard* as a poem which conflates the national and racial differentiation.<sup>39</sup>

In the medieval period, racial thinking ... assumes the form of a parcel of tendencies within the impulse to differentiate that produces 'races' at historical junctures when the national community-in-formation required self-definition; and the effects, uses, and targets of racial thinking, and racial discourses of power, are visible in the treatment of specific groups of person and bodies within the community. (71)

For Heng, *Richard* is thus a poem about English national self-definition. She refines Turville-Petre's transposition of Anderson's formulation of the nation as an "imagined community" by suggesting that medieval nationalism approaches a *communitas regni*, a

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<sup>38</sup> I refer here to Chapter 2 of *Empire of Magic*. The same essay, with mildly abridged notation, appears as "The Romance of England: *Richard Coer de Lyon*: Saracens, Jews, and the Politics of Race and Nation" in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, 135-71.

<sup>39</sup> NB: Auchinleck provides us with a B-version text, and Heng reads from Brünner's composite edition.

community defined by and organized around its king. She therefore argues that we must read Richard and England as one and the same throughout the poem (72). Although this holds true for the poem's treatment of the interests of Richard and England, the episode in which St George descends from heaven to save Richard's life shows instead that *Richard Coer de Lyon* stresses how deeply ingrained national identity can be.<sup>40</sup> Richard is the perfect English king because he embodies all the traits English nationalism ascribes to the English and opposes all the traits it ascribes to the French.

As we have seen, one of the most noteworthy episodes in *Richard Coer de Lyon* is the cannibalistic banquet scene, where Richard promises Saladin's ambassadors that "[i]nto Yngelond wol we nouȝt gon,/ tyl þay [Sarazens] be eeten euerylkone" (3561-62).<sup>41</sup> The poem treats this episode as comic, and Richard's grisly audacity is indeed compelling. Heng reads this episode as proof of the poem's imperial ambition. Just as Richard literally devours the flesh of Saracens, so too does he intend to devour the Saracens' lands: "English Christians will swallow up lineages and sweep away succession, consuming the future itself, in world domination" (75). Richard's crusade after this moment ceases to be a joint effort between him and Philip, and becomes instead an exclusively English venture. Thornton refers to only two of his romance heroes as "conqueror": Alexander the Great and Richard I.<sup>42</sup> What these two heroes have in common is that both care for the management and maintenance of the territories they incorporate. *Richard* anticipates Polton's definition of the English nation with its positive depiction of its protagonist's ingestion and incorporation of the radical other.

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<sup>40</sup> *RCL* 4883-94. I discuss this episode in Chapter 4.

<sup>41</sup> See Section 4.3.

<sup>42</sup> The explicit to the *Prose Alexander* reads "here endes þe lyf of gret Alexander conqueror of alle þe worlde" (Lincoln fol 49r). The explicit to *Richard* reads "Explicit the romance of kyng Richerd þe conqueroure" (London fol. 168v). Comparing Alexander and Richard in this way invites a comparison with Arthur, who also has imperial ambitions. As noted above, Arthur fails by ignoring the management of the realms he conquers. Although Arthur is personally responsible for the conquest of his realm, he fails to defend it against threats to its integrity.

*Richard Coer de Lyon* imagines national identity as most potent when it enables its diverse constituent elements to act in unison. Richard's cannibalistic performance signifies his eagerness to produce strength from diversity.

*Richard Coer de Lyon*'s imperialism is subordinate to its Englishness. Yet, curiously, the poem's Englishness is less assertive than we might expect. Heng observes that *Richard* tends to express English national identity mostly when the English are discussed as a group by others. Even if it is only an aptly symbolic historical coincidence, as a fourteenth-century poem, *Richard* pits its protagonist in opposition to a King Philip of France at the same time that Richard II of England was opposed by the hated French Philip IV (Heng 91-92). Heng draws our attention to a moment early in the poem when Philip of France emboldens his troops by calling the English "cowardes" and "tayled dogges," and notes that the English turn this insult into an assertion of shared identity as "taylarden" (94). She further observes that many of the incidental descriptions of English war-machines and military activity – Richard's axe "wrought in England," his mangonel Robynet (made in England), the English bees he fires over the walls of Acre (and the later description of the English as swarming bees), and the spectacular windmill – are all depicted in such a way as to remind the audience about their connection to England or the progress of the English campaign (94-95). Heng suggests that English identity in *Richard Coer de Lyon* establishes itself through a process of differentiation:

*RCL* establishes English identity on the detritus of French identity: for, Saracens aside, the principal enemies of the English crusaders in this romance of England are plainly the French. Differentiated in every way from the English nation, the French in *RCL* are cowardly, greedy, sly, incompetent, covetous, and treacherous. (109)

Given the persistence of French opposition to the English crusading effort throughout the poem, it is no surprise that Richard's final encounter ends with him promising to never again trust a Frenchman.

As Heng suggests, *Richard* mainly constructs English identity in opposition to French identity. Early in the poem, Richard fights in a tournament in England, and there befriends two Lincolnshire knights, Thomas Moulton and Fulk D'Oilly, who travel with him on his pilgrimage at the beginning of the romance, and act as his generals later on during his crusade.<sup>43</sup> In one extended episode of over eight-hundred lines, *Richard* provides the reader with a stunning demonstration of the military potency of a unified English polity when Richard and his two Lincolnshire companions work in concert (3813-4620).<sup>44</sup> Following the siege of Acre, Richard decides that the crusader forces ought to split up to conquer territory more quickly:

Kyng R[ichard] gan Phelyp to telle:

"I rede we here no longer dwelle:

Ryde we forþ þe countre to seche\*                      *search*

And, Phelyp, do as I þe teche.

Myn hoost I schal part on þree,

And Kyng Phelyp take þy meyne,

Depart hem in hostes tweye,

And look þou doo as I þe seye.

Toun, cytee, and castel 3iff þou wyne,

<sup>43</sup> McDonald notes that neither of these names are known as famous crusaders, and that these families may have patronized the poet (130). Although these knights are important to much of the action, the poem does not emphasize their Lincolnshire roots after they have joined Richard on his crusade. Finlayson suggests that these episodes are a later interpolation and mostly fictitious, whose inclusion "is the work of an early redactor to glorify his or a patron's family" ("*Richard Coer de Lyon*" 166).

<sup>44</sup> Although Thornton's copy of the *Richard* is imperfect, these passages are among those that survive.

Slee alle þe ffolk þat be þerinne!  
 In Goddes name I þe forbade  
 For gold, syluyr, ne for no mede  
 þat þey may profere and geuen,  
 Ryche ne pore lat non leuen,  
 Husbonde ne wyff, mayde ne grome,  
 Bot ȝiff he wole take Crystyndome!" (3813-28)

Richard's instructions are simple enough: go, conquer, and do not allow yourself to be bribed away from converting the population. He is clearly already suspicious of Philip by this point, since he feels he must tell him twice to "do as I teche," and he knows him well enough to know that he will be tempted by money. Philip's response to him appears honest enough:

..... "Broþir, I þe graunt,  
 To doo as þou sayst, sekyrly,  
 For þou art wysere man þan I,  
 And off werre canst wel more" (3836-39)

Naturally, Philip's response is a lie, which is only natural because "þe Frenssche men be couaytous" (3852). Not only does Philip not divide his army, during his siege of Taburette he demurs from using missile weapons, readily takes ransom money, and requires no conversions (3866-921). He then travels to Archane and does what "he dede at þe opir toun" (3924). French pride – the rejection of Richard's counsel – drives Philip to work against himself and to capitulate to Saracen demands.

Soon after it demonstrates French failure, *Richard Coer de Lyon* turns to show English success. Richard divides his army into thirds, one part led by himself, one by Thomas Moulton, and one by Fulk D'Oilly. Each immediately besieges a city. Richard's

enemies tremble in fear at the sight of his banner, but they nevertheless try to defend the city. Richard finally enters, kills every Saracen, and destroys their temple (3980-4068). Meanwhile, Moulton has chosen to attack a well-defended castle. The Saracens send out a spy, who attempts to trick Moulton, but fails. Moulton has him tortured until he reveals to him the nature of the city's defenses. The defenders cry for mercy and offer him riches, but because they do not offer to convert he kills them all and frees their Christian prisoners (4069-302). At the same time, D'Oilly has chosen to attack an even stronger city. When he finds that the defenders are attacking his men with poisoned arrows, he withdraws somewhat and builds for them a gigantic shield to keep as many of his men as possible from dying needlessly, which lets the English get close enough to set fire to the town. The council rejects his proposal that the citizens become Christian. The citizens instead gather their forces and come out to fight the English, and are all slain. D'Oilly then rewards his men with loot from the town (4304-620).

A summary of these three English sieges emphasises their procedural sameness, which is exactly the point: the English army is capable of dividing itself into smaller units, each of which is equal and unified in goals, strength, and capability. Although the details of each siege are different, Richard and his three friends are able to independently produce unified results. This is the strength that comes from accepting diversity. This long series of episodes approaches one-tenth the length of the poem; its stark comparison of the efficacy of both armies emphasises how the very constitution of the English army provides it with the fortitude to surpass the French in every meaningful way. The poem's French crusaders fail, at the most fundamental level, because of their Frenchness. The narrator addresses this issue directly as Philip embarks on his two sieges:

Frenssche men arn arwe and feynte,

And Sarezynys be war, and queynte,  
 And of here dedes engynous;  
 Þe Frenssche men be couaytous.  
 Whenne þey sitte at þe tauerne,  
 Þere þey be stoute and sterne  
 Bostfful wurdes for to crake,  
 And of here dedes ȝelpyng to make.  
 Lyttyl wurþ þey are and nyce prowde,  
 Fyȝte þey cunne wiþ wurdes lowde,  
 And telle no man is here pere;  
 But whene þey comen to þe mystere,  
 Anon þey gynne to turne here hele,  
 And see men begynne strokes dele,  
 And gynne to drawe in here homes  
 As a snayl amon þe þornes;  
 Slake a bore of their boost! (3849-65)

Although the French are weak, we also witness the success of English chivalry, confident, universally competent, and able to act simultaneously in a variety of disparate contexts to uniform efficacy. Thus, when the narrator turns from describing Philip's sieges to Richard's, all we need to be told is that:

Kyng R[ychard] wiþ hys hoost gan ryde,  
 And wente be anopir syde,  
 Wiþ many an erl and baroun  
 Iborn off Ynglyssche nacyoun,

Alle hardy men and strong of bones,  
 And weel armyd ffor þe nones. (3927-32)

The narrator's remarks here do not merely reflect the action which has occurred so far in the poem; they associate it with national character. In *Richard Coer de Lyon*, the essence of the French national character is boastfulness and cowardice, while the essence of the English national character is strength and competence. We can understand the collective character of both English and the French by examining how they behave. That Philip, as King of France, does not rise above this characterization of Frenchness is not even his own fault. According to the poem's logic of national identity, the king epitomizes the character of the nation. Thus, Philip must be, and is, a boastful coward like his people. Contrariwise, Richard must be as strong, terrifying, wise, and diplomatically effective as his people are demonstrated as being.

*Richard Coer de Lyon*, or, as Thornton more aptly names it, "The Romaunce of Kyng Richerd Be Conqueroure" (fol. 163v), is a romance deeply invested in celebrating national identity. For the poem's English heroes, this identity is often couched in terms of denigration: both the French and the Saracens refer to the English throughout the poem as "tailed dogs." At other times, English national identity can only be preserved symbolically: when the king's body is ill and near death, it can only be saved by cannibalism – Richard literally ingests otherness in order to preserve the health of the King and his nation. Richard's subsequent hunger for bodies and lands would have resonated with the English national character at the moment of the poem's creation in the fourteenth century at the beginning of the Hundred Years War. When Thornton copied *Richard Coer de Lyon*, the poem would have reminded him of the prevailing sense of England as an inclusive nation as articulated by Polton, and of Henry V's successful wars of conquest on the continent. By placing this romance in the London manuscript after two Charlemagne romances which

depict French knights as barely, if at all, equal in strength to their Saracen opponents, Thornton imagines French identities as opposite and inferior in every way to their English counterparts.

Because *Richard Coer de Lyon* explicitly depicts French antagonism directed against English heroes, it can depict the French in such a way as to attack their national character. However, the London manuscript also contains two Charlemagne romances, neither of which is invested in comparing the French to the English. These romances provide a more ambiguous case study. As we have seen in Chapter 3, both *The Siege of Milan* and *Roland and Otuel* characterize French knights as disorganized and weak to the point that the reader might imagine France itself as characterized by its barely contained chaos. *The Siege of Milan* begins with an episode clearly demonstrating French failure. Sir Alantyne, lord of Milan, flees his city when it is besieged by the Sultan Arabas, and begs Charlemagne to send reinforcements. Roland is dispatched to Milan to aid in its defense, "With fourty thowsande cheualry/ Of worthy men of were" (203-04). These "worthy" French knights challenge a Saracen army of "Forty thowsandes of cheualrye/ Be best in erthe myghte bene" (227-28). These descriptions, separated by a mere twenty lines, suggest the poet's position on French knights. Although both armies are of equal size, the Saracens are "be best in erthe," while the French are merely "worthy." Unsurprisingly, the French relief force is annihilated to a man, aside from four knights, including Roland himself, who are taken captive. The poet states this in a matter-of-fact tone:

Thus fourty thowsande hafe þay slayne

Safe foure þat were in handis tane,

Rowlande ande oþer three. (373-75)

This is a notable turn from the usual action of Charlemagne romances, in which Christian failures are usually a matter of some fault within the Christian community, usually caused by Ganelon's advice.<sup>45</sup> The failure of the French armies is a failure of skill, and one for which the poet does not apologize.

Because *The Siege of Milan* acknowledges French military weakness and demonstrates the failure of the French polity to accept the presence of diverse political opinions, we must question the strange inclusivity of its language. The poem regularly treats the Christian armies with the possessive "oure," as in "owre Cristyn knyghte" (244), "oure knyghtis" (259), "oure cheualrye" (266), to name a few. To what end would Thornton bother to copy a romance which casts the French as heroes during the Hundred Years War?

Marianne Ailes and Phillipa Hardman argue that most of the Middle English Charlemagne romances deal explicitly with questions of identity articulated in opposition to the "Other:"

In the French texts on which our texts are based there is a strong and clear division between the Self, 'us' and the 'Other': between the side with which the reader/listener is expected to identify, and the enemy. The 'Other' is the pagan, the Saracen; the 'us' is the Christian, French army. 'Our' side is identified as being both 'Christian' and 'French'. (50)

Ailes and Hardman suggest that Middle English treatments of Charlemagne material tend to reflect contemporary anxieties concerning national and ecclesiastical politics (55). This seems to also have been the case for earlier Charlemagne material such as *The Song of Roland*, which, as Kinoshita suggests, aggressively asserts that Franks ought to be opposed to their Muslim neighbours, when "Normans in whose dialect the song was sung began

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<sup>45</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 3, *The Siege of Milan* is in nearly every way uncharacteristic of Charlemagne romances in both the French and the English traditions.

streaming across the Pyrenees, along with other French and Occitanian adventurers” and began assimilating aspects of Muslim culture (21). Thornton's Charlemagne romances may have given voice to his anxiety about French otherness because they avoid connecting their heroes too closely to France. While *The Siege of Milan* is aware that some of its protagonists can be “of Fraunce,” its heroes are never “our” French knights, but instead “cristyn” (as above) or “oure menzee” (564); the word “French” does not appear at all in this context in *Roland and Otuel* (Ailes and Hardman 52-53). These poems describe their protagonists as either French Christians or “our” Christians, but never as “our French Christians.” Thus, Thornton's Charlemagne romances eagerly appropriate French victories at the same time that they stress national divisions when depicting French losses.

The connection between the geography and the themes of the Lincoln romances suggests Thornton was anxious about the relative strengths of England and France on the continent. As Hardman notes, Charlemagne is usually treated in romances as a champion of Christianity, a connection which the poem reinforces through the narrator's guiding of the reader using the first person possessive pronoun (“*The Sege of Melayne*” 74-75). However, the connection between French kings and Christianity this thematic affinity might suggest is not as strong as it first appears, since “Edward III implicitly declared himself the rightful heir of Charlemagne when in 1340 at Ghent he solemnly assumed the arms and title of King of France,” a tradition continued under Henry V, who styled himself the “Most Christian King,” a title which was first given to Philip IV of France in 1311 (75). As a poem with fifteenth-century relevance, *The Siege of Milan* appropriates the positive qualities of French chivalry and redefines them as “British.”

Based on the treatment of Charlemagne in Arthur's dream of the Wheel of Fortune in the *Morte Arthure*, we would assume initially that he would be treated as his status among

the Nine Worthies deserves: a man “crowell and kene, and conqueror holdene” who “ceure be conquest contres ynewe,” and whose legacy is to “conquere to Crystyne men hondes” (3424, 3425, 3429).<sup>46</sup> Although Charlemagne ostensibly represents a unified Christendom, Thornton's Charlemagne romances demonstrate that the French fail not just because they are disunified and weak, but because they resist the integration of otherness.

The narrator of *The Siege of Milan* draws attention to the French failure to integrate otherness in the use of possessive pronouns near the end of the poem. At this point, Turpin has taken control of Charlemagne's army, and is leading the siege of Milan. News arrives in the French camp that Sir Tretigone is coming to reinforce the city's defenders, bringing with him sixty thousand men (1355-62). At this point, at least one page is missing. The narrative resumes with Sir Bawdwynne refusing to “flee” the battle and act as a courier (1366-77). In the next stanza, Sir Ingelere refuses the same task. Eventually, the wounded Duke Berarde of Paris agrees to carry the message, and is slain in the attempt (1402-25). The French army is clearly in some kind of trouble, and probably needs reinforcements. Suddenly, Turpin sees a relief force of sixty-thousand of “oure Bretons” coming over a hill to aid the French (1493). From this moment on, every instance of the first-person possessive pronoun refers to “oure Bretons” and their actions in aid of Charlemagne's war. While the battles between the French and the Saracens in this poem depict French forces losing, or barely matching forces with, their skilled and mighty Saracen opponents, the “Bretons bolde and fresche” who reinforce them are the ones who turn the tide of the siege (1525):

Oure Bretonns dide so doghtyly

That lange or none sekerly

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<sup>46</sup> The entire description can be found in the *Morte*, 3422-30. Cf. *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* 520-83.

Be Sarazenes lykede full ill. (1534-36)<sup>47</sup>

The first moment of contact between Bretons and Saracens sees forty-thousand Saracens killed and the remainder in flight. Although the poem does not tell us enough about the Bretons to ascertain whether they are meant to be from England or from Brittany, the alliterative *Morte Arthure* conflates “British” and “Briton” identities enough to suggest the presence of an English connection. The narrator obviously sides with “oure Bretonns”; in doing so he invites us to compare the efficacy of the French against the “Bretonns” who save the day. By substituting a French victory with an English one, *The Siege of Milan* implies that the English rescue the French from an otherwise inevitable defeat.

Elizabeth Berlings draws our attention to the effects of the displacement of the French, arguing that despite the poem's seriousness on the matter of the crusades, its comic treatment of Charlemagne and his forces effectively parodies the French (57). She reads Turpin's siege of Paris as especially comic:

Usually it is the clerics in the epics who are accused of cowardice, even though many authors, it seems, were clerics; so perhaps the idea of 100,000 clergy laying siege to Paris at any time, but especially during the Hundred Years War, along with a weak Charles, might have amused an English audience. (65)

Berlings stresses the continuity between *Milan* and other Charlemagne romances, with the main difference between this poem and most of the literary tradition with which it interacts being its comedic tone. This would have made the poem especially appealing to Thornton, who was a canny enough reader to have noticed that “without significant plot-changes from the familiar Charlemagne legends, the author has made the Bretons the heroes and poked fun at the French, their epics, and the Charlemagne romances” (70). The French heroes of *The*

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<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Berlings first noticed this substitution (“*The Sege of Melayne – A Comic Romance*”).

*Siege of Milan* are ridiculous and ineffective. *Milan* goes further than simply undermining French military efficacy. It suggests instead that France suffers so much from its divided polity that its knights cannot succeed on their own. More radically, by imagining French weakness under the rule of its most famous king, *Milan* suggests that this weakness is intrinsic to the French even at their most powerful historical moment. Furthermore, by calling its most effective knights *Bretonn*, *The Siege of Milan* suggests that French military potency and its political unity alike are illusory.

*Roland and Otuel* is equally savage in its treatment of French military potency when it depicts Roland, Oliver, and Ogier as brash and selfish knights whose actions jeopardize an entire military campaign. As in *The Siege of Milan*, French inefficacy in *Roland and Otuel* is only overcome when it is replaced by the strategic canniness Otuel brings to Charlemagne's court. The similarities between these two linked poems constitute more than merely an accidental feature of their shared subject. As Thomas Crofts and Robert Rouse note:

The nationalist content of Middle English popular romance should show itself, if it shows itself anywhere, deployed against the Frenchness of the Charlemagne romances of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It might reasonably be expected that the Hundred Years' War ... conjured in popular romance ... some war-time expression of Englishness, oriented against the French. (81)

Crofts and Rouse conclude that piety, opposition to Saracens, and general chivalric attitudes common to Middle English Charlemagne romances create an "imagined community" only stable insofar as it constructs a shared European aristocratic "self-identity" (95). Crofts and Rouse's hypothesis is helpful to use to understand how Thornton might have approached his Charlemagne romances as an opportunity for a "war-time expression of Englishness."

The London manuscript romances juxtapose English and French identities. Thornton's treatment of the French stresses their duplicity and their internal strife. By treating the French as he does, Thornton stresses their inability to integrate otherness. Although Richard's desire to consume Saracen flesh appears distasteful, it expresses a crucial imperialist drive. As the episode with St. George suggests, *Richard Coer de Lyon* demands that we treat Richard and England as one and the same. Consequently, England, like Richard, is strengthened when it attempts to integrate the Other. Why else would Richard try again and again to include Philip and his Frenchmen in his crusading efforts if not to integrate the two peoples? By contrast, the Frenchmen of Thornton's Charlemagne romances fail because they are disunified. In *The Siege of Milan*, Turpin besieges Paris because he prefers to exacerbate internal conflict rather than to work in harmony with Charlemagne in opposing an imminent threat to Christendom. In *Roland and Otuel* it is Roland, Oliver, and Ogier who fail to act in harmony with the newly-converted Otuel and nearly get themselves killed. Here, the way the French refuse to align themselves with others in spite of shared goals and their own best interests is the source of their internal strife and their duplicity.

### 5.6 – Thornton and the Nation

*Wynnere and Wastoure*, the final item in the London manuscript, breaks off in the middle of a thought about the relative importance of both Wynnere and Wastoure in the preparations to be made for Edward III's imminent war with France. The king commands that Wynnere travel to Rome to beg for papal funds and support, while Wastoure is to please

the people by spreading his wealth around London. Conscious of the importance of managing Wynnere's jealous tendencies, the king promises him that:

.....at þe proud pales of Parys the riche  
 I thynk to do it in ded and dub þe to knyghte  
 And giff giftes full grete of golde and of siluer  
 To ledis of my legyance þat lufen me in hert. (498-501)

This royal speech does not emphasise the geography or the rewards to which it refers so much as it emphasises loyalty. Notably, it conflates allegiance with love of the king. This passage gives us one final clue into the possible reasons why Thornton takes the opportunity of rubricating his copy of "The Virtues of the Mass" in such a way as to deny France and its patron saint the emphasis due to the saints of England. In *Wynnere and Wastoure*, the nation's success is predicated on the willingness of the king's subjects to unify in pursuit of a common goal. By the time Thornton copied *Wynnere and Wastoure*, Edward III would have been a distant memory. If Thornton were to consider the poem's implications in his own time, he would have on one hand recalled the effective domestic governance of Henry V in the king's management of the dispute between Wynnere and Wastoure, just as he would have on the other hand seen the pursuit of war with France as an unquestionable good and bemoaned its mismanagement under Henry VI.

As a man who came to adulthood at the same time that England transitioned from the strong domestic and international presence of Henry V to the foolhardy administration of Henry VI, Thornton participates in the imagination of his national identity by recalling the discourse and the activity of the earlier period. Even his efforts to normalize the dialect of his works could be seen as an extension of this nationalist agency, since, as Fisher suggests, the growth of literary output in English in the beginning of the fifteenth century was the result of

“a deliberate decision by ... Henry V” and his implementation of English in his official correspondence (1174). The way Thornton chose to divide his romances between his two manuscripts constitutes a national argument which is only perceptible when we read the collection as a whole. Because Thornton's romances share thematic and geographical associations, and because they were written during a critical turn in English history as England's fortunes in the Hundred Years' War began to fail, we can read them in terms of their participation in the imagination of national identity. People are averse to imagining themselves as losers; Thornton exorcises his anxiety over the growing disorder in the English polity by associating England with order in the Lincoln manuscript, by associating France with chaos in the London manuscript, and by stressing the superiority of England to France over the course of both. In cases like the rubrication of “The Virtues of the Mass,” Thornton expresses this anxiety by taking pot-shots at France. In cases like *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Thornton expresses this anxiety by comparing the efficacy of English and French crusading tactics over a neutral geography and observing the results.

Overall, there is too much evidence between Thornton's manuscripts to dismiss his imagination of national identities as mere anti-French jingoism. Thornton copies only three texts which treat France or the French explicitly, as compared to the seven texts which discuss England or the character of the English. This evidence suggests that Thornton was keenly aware of the growing divisions within the English polity, and that he consequently chose to project divisiveness abroad rather than to treat it directly. Thornton's nostalgia drives him to appropriate the nationalistic rhetoric which circulated during his youth; in doing so, Thornton appropriates the past to ameliorate the present.

Although the division of texts between Thornton's manuscripts strongly suggests the work of a nationalistic scribe, we must remember that his nationalism is not a medieval

expression of the kind of modern nationalism that demands that nations be united in culture, language, and geography. Instead, it is *characteristically* medieval. At the Council of Constance, Polton asserts that England's claim to recognition as a nation, rather than merely as a kingdom, rests in its ethnic and linguistic diversity. Thornton, like Polton, treats diversity as a characteristic strength of his imagined English nation, imagining in his English geographies a culture consisting of diverse peoples and ideas that are able to act harmoniously despite their differences. By contrast, he imagines the French as a polity characterized by unity: a monoculture not capable of adapting to new conflicts and causes, unwilling in any way to incorporate outsiders even when doing so would prove advantageous. By dividing the subjects of his romances between his two manuscripts as he does, Thornton sets his imagined concepts of Englishness and Frenchness in opposition, constructing his own national identity in response to the French identities he opposes.

### Conclusion

When he finally finishes producing his copy of Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*, now Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional MS 80, the scribe, Florentius of Vaeránica concludes by writing a letter to his reader:

Whoever you may be, therefore, who profit by this work, do not forget the laboring one who made it, so that God, thus invoked, will overlook your sins. Amen. Because no one who does not know how to write thinks it no labor, I will describe it for you, if you want to know how great is the burden of writing: it mists the eyes, it curves the back, it breaks the belly and the ribs, it fills the kidneys with pain, and the body with all kinds of suffering. Therefore turn the pages slowly, reader, and keep your fingers well away from the pages, for just as a hailstorm ruins the fecundity of the soil, so the sloppy reader destroys both the book and the writing. For as the last port is sweet to the sailor, so the last line to the scribe. *Explicit*, thanks be to God. (Qtd. in Clemens and Graham 23)

Florentius must have been frustrated with his work. He was clearly irritated with those who thought it was an easy process to write a book, and he was probably tired of hiding his anger with those who did not treat the books scribes like him produced with the respect they were due. Although he describes his “burden” so clearly that it is easy to sympathise with him even now, Florentius's labour of copying was one of his duties as a monk.

For Robert Thornton, the labour of copying was clearly a labour of love. Thornton's library provided him with what Keiser rightly calls “a vision of human experience”

(“Nineteenth-Century Discovery” 190); it also preserved this vision as a legacy to his family, and now, to us. I have tried to show in this dissertation that we can meaningfully treat Thornton’s compilations as though he was both author and reader, suggesting that Thornton was a sophisticated compiler who devoted himself to shaping his books as more than a miscellaneous jumble of contents. Moreover, I have tried to show that not only is each of Thornton’s books thematically coherent, but also that they are mutually interactive.

Although Thornton’s locale is now obscure, it was not always so. Thornton’s interests brought him to circulate throughout the region in which he lived, either through his duties as a landlord or through his literary interests, which he could sustain only by maintaining good relationships with his neighbours in order to procure a regular supply of texts to copy. Between his duties as a landlord and his procurement of library materials, Thornton most likely kept abreast with developments in national and international affairs, perhaps expressing pride in England’s symbolic victory at the Council of Constance, Henry V’s victory at Agincourt, and the Treaty of Troyes. Later, during the time he was writing his books, Thornton likewise would have been anxious about both the decline in England’s international prestige and the domestic factionalism that developed during the rule of Henry VI. From his doorstep, Thornton could see the beginnings of the feud between the Nevilles and the Percys that helped provoke the Wars of the Roses. All the while, English territorial holdings on the continent were being reclaimed by the French. It is no surprise that Thornton attempted to allay his anxieties by imagining England as a unified nation while projecting its faults onto the territory over which it was losing control at an alarming rate.

In spite of his remarkable achievements, which include the preservation of texts that would otherwise have been lost, the production of two complementary manuscript

anthologies, and his participation in the then-nascent discourse of national identity, Thornton is an obscure figure outside of literary circles. As we are told on the website for Stonegrave minster, Thornton's parish church:

From 1300 to almost 1700 the north aisle was the burial place of the Thornton family of east Newton but only two of teit [*sic*] tombs remain ... These effigies are all that remain of many memorials, silent figures watching over the building that the Thornton's [*sic*] had helped to maintain ... [because] in the Nineteenth century, the church was drastically remodelled under the influence of new fashions of worship.

(Hazlehurst)

Thornton's parents are buried in Stonegrave minster, and his family coat-of-arms is preserved in stained glass (Page). There is also a memorial to his descendent William, who died in 1668. To local memory, our scribe has been consigned to oblivion, and even his tomb has been lost.

I have attempted to do justice to Thornton's memory by drawing attention to the complexity of his literary production and by reading, as much as possible, texts he preserves that have not been the subject of criticism. Although Thornton wrote his books outside of the more common contexts of late medieval manuscript production – clerical, commissioned, or cosmopolitan – it is evident that Thornton was just as responsible for the production and interpretation of texts as the taste-makers we normally read. In compiling his books for a family audience and by organizing them according to his own literary taste, Thornton provides us with a window into the anxieties and concerns of his day. Scholars have long been aware that Thornton contributed in some capacity to how we interpret his anthologies; now we can better understand how.

## Appendix A - Contents of Lincoln, Cathedral Library MS 91<sup>1</sup>

Yorkshire, mid fifteenth century. 314 ff. paper + 7 ff. paper stubs. Originally 340.<sup>2</sup>

### Collation:

**A**<sup>24</sup> (wants 1-4, 23; ff. 1-19), **B**<sup>24</sup> (wants 1; ff. 20-42), **C**<sup>18</sup> (11-18 cancelled; ff. 43-52), **D**<sup>16</sup> (ff. 53-68), **E**<sup>18</sup> (ff. 69-86), **F**<sup>16</sup> (ff. 87-102); **G**<sup>22</sup> (wants 1, 22; 7 and 21 fragments; ff. 103-122); **H**<sup>22</sup> (12 is a stub; ff. 123-143), **I**<sup>22</sup> (wants 5, 18; ff. 144-163), **K**<sup>16</sup> (16 lost or cancelled, ff. 164-178), **L**<sup>20</sup> (ff. 179-198), **M**<sup>24</sup> (ff. 199-222), **N**<sup>18</sup> (wants 1, 16-18; ff. 223-236), **O**<sup>18</sup> (wants 1; ff. 237-253), **P**<sup>30</sup> (wants 1; 10-12 cancelled; ff. 254-279), **Q**<sup>36</sup> (wants 36; ff. 280-314), **R**<sup>7</sup> (7-stub fragment, ff. 315-321).

Note on quire **C**: Owen suggests this gathering was originally of 18 leaves and that 10-18 were cancelled. Johnston argues persuasively that this gathering, at the end of the Prose Alexander, was a late production composed of singleton leaves ("Sociology" 389-90).

### Contents:

| <u>Folio</u> | <u>Title</u>                                                                                                              |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1r-49r       | <i>The Prose Life of Alexander</i><br>Ed. Westlake (1913), Chappell (1992) <sup>3</sup><br>Unique                         |
| 50r-50v      | "What Thunder Signifies" (Prognostications of Weather)<br>Ed. Perry (1867), 114.<br>Other Copies: At least 1 <sup>4</sup> |
| 51v-52r      | <i>Lamentio Peccatoris</i><br>Ed. Perry (1867), 115 <sup>5</sup><br>Other Copies: 5                                       |
| 53r-98v      | <i>Morte Arthure</i>                                                                                                      |

<sup>1</sup> A complete list of incipits and IMEV entry numbers for Thornton's texts can be found in Gisela Guddat-Figge 135-42 (Lincoln MS) and 159-63 (London MS). For information on older editions, I am indebted to Derek Brewer and A.E.B. Owen's *Facsimile of the Lincoln MS* and John J. Thompson's *Robert Thornton and the London Thornton Manuscript*. Both of these volumes discuss quire and booklet structure in great detail. Titles are reproduced as in the most recent edition.

<sup>2</sup> Owen, A.E.B. "Collation and Hadrwriting." *The Thornton Manuscript*. xiii-xvi. (xiii). Collation data taken from Owen, "Collation and Descent," which revises the collation published in the facsimile edition (219).

<sup>3</sup> Many of Thornton's texts have been published by a small number of scholars. Citations in this appendix refer to year of publication, publication volume, and first page of appearance. Refer to the Bibliography of Editions for full citations.

<sup>4</sup> This is not the sort of text that is usually edited. At least one other copy exists, in National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick James Furnivall prints this as the prologue (ll.1-99) to *Adulterous Falmouth Squire* in his 1866 EETS edition of *Political, Religious, and Love Poems*.

- Ed. Perry (1865), Brock (1871), Benson (1974)  
Unique
- 98v-109r *Northern Octavian*  
Anglo-French Original  
Ed. Sarrazin (1885), McSparran (1986), Hudson (1996)  
Other Copies: 2
- 109r-114v *Sir Isumbras*  
Ed. Ellis (1811), 3.158; Halliwell (1844), Hudson (1996)  
Other Copies: 10
- 114r-122v *The Earl of Toulouse*  
Ed. French and Hale (1930), Laskaya and Salisbury (2001)  
Other Copies: 3
- 122v-129v *Vita Sancti Christofori*  
Ed. Horstmann (1881), 454  
Unique<sup>6</sup>
- 130r-138r *Sir Degrevant*  
Ed. Casson (1949), Kooper (2006)  
Other Copies: 1
- 138v-147r *Sir Eglamour of Artois*  
Ed. Halliwell (1844), Richardson (1965), Hudson (1996)  
Other Copies: 3
- 147r-147v “De Miraculo Beate Marie”  
Ed. Horstmann (1881), 503.  
Unique
- 148r-149r “Lyarde”  
Ed. Wright and Halliwell (1840-3), 2.280  
Unique
- 149v-153v *Thomas of Erceldowne*  
Ed. Murray (1875); Child (1884), 2.317  
Other Copies: 3
- 154r-161r *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Watheleyne*  
Ed. Gates (1969), Hahn (1995)  
Other Copies: 4
- 161r-176r *Sir Perceval of Galles*

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<sup>6</sup> This particular version is. See *Manual* 2.576 for more details about other versions.

- Ed. Halliwell (1884), French and Hale (1930), Braswell (1995)  
Unique
- 176r-176v Three Charms for Toothache  
Ed. Perry (1867), 119; Horstmann (1895), 1.375  
Unique
- 176v “Epistola Sancti Salvatoris”<sup>7</sup>  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.376  
Other Copies: At least 3<sup>8</sup>
- 176v-177r “Robert’s Prayer”  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.376<sup>9</sup>  
Other Copies: At least 4<sup>10</sup>
- 177v-178r “A Preyere off the ffyve ioyes of oure lady”  
Author: Richard Rolle<sup>11</sup>  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.377-8  
Unique
- 178r “Psalmus Voce mea ad dominum clamaui”<sup>12</sup>  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.379  
Unique
- 178r “Fyve Prayers to the five wounds of Christ”  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.379  
Unique
- 178v “Oracio in ynglys”  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.380  
Unique

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<sup>7</sup> Guddat-Figge separates the letter and the ensuing Latin prayer (“Crux cristi...”) as separate items, even though they are clearly related.

<sup>8</sup> In *Marking the Hours*, Eamon Duffy asserts that this text, which he names the “Charlemagne Prayer”, was “an especially popular charm against enemies and danger” (76). Duffy provides only two contemporary references, however, in the *Talbot Hours* (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 40-1950) and *The Roberts Hours* (CUL MS li 6.2). This text must have been or have become fairly common, however, as it also circulates in printed books of hours such as RSTC 15973 (Duffy 140).

<sup>9</sup> Horstmann edits this text under the heading “A Prayer.” The catalogue of the MS in Brewer and Owen’s *Facsimile* edition omit this item. Guddat-Figge classifies it as an “English Indulgence and Latin prayer” (137).

<sup>10</sup> Eamon Duffy cites four other examples throughout *Marking the Hours* (New York, Pierpoint Morgan Library MSS M.700 and M.487; London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 474; and CUL MS Ee.1.14). Although Duffy states that this text is fairly common (32), he does not demonstrate this coherently. The only other version of this text I could find in print was that in the Lambeth Palace MS, which is transcribed in *The Hours of Richard III* 76, does not conform exactly to Thornton’s version.

<sup>11</sup> Horstmann’s attribution is tentative.

<sup>12</sup> Brewer and Owen list this and the following four items in their facsimile edition as “Five prayers.”

- 178v “A Colett to owre lady Saynt Marye”  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.380  
Unique
- 178v “Oracio in modo Collecte pro amico”  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.380  
Unique
- 178v “Antiphona Sancti Leonardi, cum Collecta”  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.380  
Unique
- 179r-189r *The Prevette of the Passioun*  
Author: Pseudo-Bonaventure<sup>13</sup>  
Translation of *Meditationes vitae Christi*, cap. 74-92  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.198  
Unique
- 189r-191v “Tractatus Willim Nassyngton ... de Trinitate”  
Author: William of Nassington  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 2.334; Perry (1867), 60  
Unique?
- 191v Four poems of thanksgiving  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.363-4  
Other Copies: 1<sup>14</sup>
- 192r-193r “Of the Vertus of the haly name of Jhesu”  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.186; Perry (1866), 1  
Other Copies 1
- 193v “A tale þat Richerde hermet [made]”  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.192  
Unique
- 193v “A prayere þat Richerd hermet made”  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.192n1  
Unique
- 193v-194r “Ympnus quem composuit sancti Ambrosyus”  
Author: St. Ambroise

<sup>13</sup> As identified by Keiser in “To Knawe God Almyghtyen,” 108.

<sup>14</sup> See Horstmann (*Early Yorkshire Writers* 363n1).

- Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.192n1  
Unique
- 194r “De imperfecta contricione”  
Author: Richard Rolle?<sup>15</sup>  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.192  
Unique
- 194r-194v “Moralia Richardi hermite de nature apis”  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.193; Perry (1866), 8; Allen (1931), 193  
Other Copies: 2
- 194v “De vita cuiusdam puelle”  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.194; Perry (1866), 9  
Unique
- 195r “Richardus heremyta” (Latin)  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann 1895, I.194n7  
Unique
- 195r “Item inferius idem Richardus” (Latin)  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.194n7  
Unique
- 195v-196r “A notabill trefyfe off the ten commandmenttys”  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.195; Perry (1866), 10  
Other Copies: 1
- 196r-196v “Item idem de septem donis *spiritus sancti*”  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 196; Perry (1866), 13  
Other Copies: 2
- 196v “Item idem de dilecacione in deo”  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.197; Allen (1927), 271; Perry (1921), 14  
Other Copies: 1
- 197r-209v *Mirroure of Seynte Edmonde ... of Canterberye*  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.219; Perry (1867), 15

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<sup>15</sup> Allen notes that Rolle’s authorship here is doubtful (324).

Translated into English by Richard Rolle?<sup>16</sup>

Trans. from Latin.

Other Copies: 1

- 209v-211r     *Tractatus de Dominica oratione*  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.261  
Unique
- 211r-211v     Hymn to Jesus  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.364; Perry (1867), 73  
Unique
- 211v           Hymn to the Trinity, the Virgin and Jesus  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.365; Perry (1867), 76  
Other Copies: 1
- 212r           A prayer  
Ed. Perry (1867), 87; Horstmann (1895), 1.367  
Unique
- 212r-212v     “A meditacioune of þe fyve woundes ...” (Latin)  
Author: Richard Rolle?  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.381  
Unique
- 212v-213r     “A medytacioun of the crosse of Criste” (Latin)  
Author: St. Bonaventure (?Pseudo-Bonaventure)  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.382  
Other Copies: Unknown
- 213r-213v     Poem: “Whan Adam dalfe”  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.367-8; Perry (1867), 80  
Other Copies: 1
- 213v-218v     “A Sermon that John Gatreng made,” aka. *The Lay Folks’ Catechism*<sup>17</sup>  
Author: John Gatreng  
Ed. Perry (1914), 1; Blake (1972), 73  
Other Copies: 21
- 219r-219v     Poem: “Ihesu thi sweetnes”  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.368; Perry (1867), 84  
Other Copies: 4

<sup>16</sup> Horstmann tentatively ascribes this translation to Rolle, on account of the importance of this text to many of Rolle’s ideas on the nature of divine love (219)

<sup>17</sup> *Manual* 7.2492. Item 19.

- 219v-221v    *Of Angel's Song*  
 Author: Walter Hilton  
 Ed. Perry (1866), 15; Horstmann (1895), 1.175  
 Other Copies: 5
- 222r-222v    Poem: "Thi ioy be ilke a dele"  
 Author: Richard Rolle  
 Ed. Perry (1867), 107; Horstmann (1895), 1.370; Allen (1931), 52  
 Other Copies: 1<sup>18</sup>
- 223r-229r    *Of Mixed Life* (often published as *The Scale of Perfection*)<sup>19</sup>  
 Author: Walter Hilton  
 Ed. Perry (1866), 27; Horstmann (1895), 1.264  
 Other Copies: 19<sup>20</sup>
- 229v-230v    An epistle on salvation  
 Author: Walter Hilton  
 Horstmann, citing Perry, misattributes this to Richard Rolle, but this is  
                  actually section 2.3 of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*.  
 Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.293; Perry (1866); 44  
 Unique
- 231r-233v    *Of Sayne Iohn þe Euangelist*  
 Ed. Horstmann (1881), 467; Perry (1867); 88  
 Unique
- 233v-237r    *On Prayer*  
 Author: Richard Rolle  
 Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.295  
 Unique
- 237r-240r    Six Things that are to wit in Prayere  
 Author: Richard Rolle  
 Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.300  
 Other Copies: 1
- 240r-243v    *De gracia dei*  
 Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.305  
 Other Copies: 1
- 243v-250v    Our Daily Work

<sup>18</sup> The Thornton copy contains three extra stanzas and is joined to another Rolle poem which circulated separately. See Horstmann (*Early Yorkshire Writers* 81n1).

<sup>19</sup> See *Manual* 9.3133-5. Item 30

<sup>20</sup> Six of these witnesses are of the 'long version'; this copy is from the 'short version'.

- Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.310  
Other Copies: 1
- 250v-258r     *Quedam Revelacio: A Revelacyone schewed to ane holy womane*  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.383  
Unique
- 258r-258v     *Misere Mei Deus*  
258v            *Veni Creator Spiritus*
- 258v-269r     *Sayne Jerome Spaltyre*  
Author: St. Jerome  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.392  
An abridged version of Jerome's *Psalterium Gallicum*, with Office.  
Other copies: at least two<sup>21</sup>
- 269v-270v     Five Latin Prayers  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.406  
Unique
- 271r-276r     *Religio Munda (The Abbaye of the Holy Ghost)*  
Author: Richard Rolle  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.321, Perry (1867); 49, Blake (1972), 88  
Other Copies: 9<sup>22</sup>
- 276v-277r     Extract from *Prick of Conscience* (ll. 436<sup>23</sup>-551)  
Author: William of Nassington?<sup>24</sup>  
Significant variations from original (Horstmann).  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.372; Morris (1863), rev. Gradon (1965)  
Other copies: 30+
- 277v            *Oracio de VII gaudia*  
Author: St Thomas of Canterbury  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.408  
Unique
- 277v            "Anoper salvacioun till oure lady of hir fiue joyes"  
Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.409  
Unique

<sup>21</sup> A pair of Anglo-Norman copies of this text exist, at least one of which contains the same preface as Thornton's, except in French (Dean and Boulton 247).

<sup>22</sup> Thornton's is the only known northern MS.

<sup>23</sup> Guddat-Figge misprints this as "438."

<sup>24</sup> Hope Emily Allen denies previous attributions of authorship to Rolle (395-7), and suggests Nassington as a more plausible alternate author.

- 278r-278v     Five Prayers and Anthems  
                   Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.409
- Incipits:
- 1) An antyme to þe ffadir of heuene wt a colett  
                   Unique
  - 2) Anoper antyme of þe passyoun of Criste ihesu  
                   Unique
  - 3) A colecte of grete perdone unto Crist Ihesu  
                   Author: Richard Rolle<sup>25</sup>  
                   Unique
  - 4) *Crucem coronam spiniam*  
                   Author: Richard Rolle  
                   Unique
  - 5) A preyre to þe wounde in Crystis syde  
                   Author: Richard Rolle  
                   Unique
- 279r-279v     “Earth to Earth”  
                   Author: Richard Rolle  
                   Ed. Horstmann (1895), 1.373; Perry (1867), 96  
                   Other Copies: 2
- 280r-314v     *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*  
                   Ed. Ogden (1939)  
                   Unique
- 317r-321v     *Betoyne and Pympernelle*  
                   Ed. Keiser 1996  
                   Fragmentary: the pages have been removed  
                   Other Copies: 4

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<sup>25</sup> Horstmann’s attributions for this and the following two poems are tentative. See Horstmann (*Early Yorkshire Writers* 381n2, 410n3).

**Appendix B - Contents of London, British Library MS Add. 31042**

Yorkshire, mid fifteenth century. ii + 181 + ii, 181 ff. paper covered by two vellum flyleaves on each side taken from a fifteenth-century breviary. Originally probably at least 203 ff, possibly as large as 257ff.<sup>1</sup>

Collation:<sup>2</sup>

ii vellum flyleaves (ff.1-2) **A**<sup>?</sup> (wants an indeterminate number of leaves; six leaf fragment; ff.3-8), **B**<sup>24</sup> (ff. 9-32), **C**<sup>22</sup> (wants 22; ff. 33-53), **D**<sup>20</sup> (ff. 54-73), **E**<sup>28</sup> (wants 5, 8, 26, 28; ff. 74-97), **F**<sup>36?</sup> (wants 6-10; 19-20 are stubs; 35-36 cancelled; ff. 98-124), **G**<sup>22</sup> (wants 20-22; ff. 125-143), **H**<sup>26</sup> (26 cancelled; ff.144-168), **I**<sup>?</sup> (13 leaf fragment; ff. 169-181), 11 vellum flyleaves.

Contents:

| <u>Folio</u>                     | <u>Title</u>                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 <sup>r</sup> -32 <sup>r</sup>  | Extracts from <i>Cursor Mundi</i> (ll. 10630-14933)<br>Ed. Morris (1874), Horall (1978)<br>Other copies: 8                                                               |
| 32 <sup>r</sup> -32 <sup>v</sup> | Extract from <i>Cursor Mundi</i> (ll. 17111-17188), a.k.a. “The Discourse between Christ and Man”<br>Ed: Morris (1876), Horall (1978)<br>Other Copies: 8 + 2 independent |
| 33 <sup>r</sup> -50 <sup>r</sup> | <i>The Northern Passion</i><br>Ed. Foster (1913)<br>Other Copies: 11                                                                                                     |
| 50 <sup>r</sup> -66 <sup>r</sup> | <i>The Siege of Jerusalem</i><br>Ed. Kolbing and Day (1932); Hanna and Lawton (2003); Livingston (2004)<br>Other Copies: 19 <sup>3</sup>                                 |
| 66 <sup>v</sup> -79 <sup>v</sup> | <i>The Siege of Milan</i><br>Ed Herritage (1880); Mills, (1973); Lupack (1990)<br>Unique                                                                                 |

<sup>1</sup> See Section 3.1. According to Thompson, the fragmentary quire **I** contains no bifolios, so it was probably originally at quire of at least 26 pages.

<sup>2</sup> My data on collation is taken from Thompson, *Robert Thornton* (22-34); cf. Brunner (“Hs. Brit. Mus. 316-27), Stern, Hanna (“The London Thornton Manuscript”; “The Growth of Robert Thornton’s Books” 54-55). Thompson’s collation is preferable because it is the most consistent with Thornton’s practises in the Lincoln MS and because he offers the most convincing explanation for the state of quire **F**, as discussed in Section 3.1.

<sup>3</sup> Seven of these versions are alliterative like this one. The other eleven are in metrical couplets.

## Appendix B – Contents of London, British Library MS Add. 31042

- 80<sup>r</sup>-81<sup>v</sup>      ‘Hymn to Our Lady’ (*O florum flos*)  
 Author: John Lydgate  
 Ed. MacCracken (1913)  
 Other Copies: 1
- 82<sup>r</sup>-94<sup>r</sup>      *The Romance of Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne*  
 (*Roland and Otuel*)  
 Ed. Herritage (1880)  
 Unique
- 94<sup>r</sup>-96<sup>r</sup>      “Cristes Passioun” (*Passionis Christi Cantus*)  
 Author: John Lydgate  
 Ed. MacCracken (1911), 216.  
 Other Copies: 5
- 94<sup>v</sup>      Two Short lyric fragments  
 Marginal  
 Post-Thornton hand  
 Ed. Hodder (1969)  
 Other copies; unique variants
- 96<sup>r</sup>-96<sup>v</sup>      Fragment of “Verses on the Kings of England” (ll.106-165)  
 Author: John Lydgate  
 Ed. MacCracken (1934), 710  
 Other Copies: 42<sup>4</sup>
- 97<sup>r</sup>-97<sup>v</sup>      “The Dietary”  
 Author: John Lydgate  
 Ed. MacCracken (1934), 702  
 Other Copies: 56
- 97<sup>v</sup>      Three Short Latin Aphorisms  
 Walther, II/3, 904 (72); II/2, 721 (95); II/1, 101 (64).  
 Unique?  
 [Citation as in Thompson, *Robert Thornton*]
- 97<sup>v</sup>      *A gud schorte songe of this dete: The werlde es tourned vp sodownne*  
 Ed. Brunner (1914)  
 Unique
- 98<sup>r</sup>-101<sup>v</sup>      *The Quatrefoil of Love*  
 Ed. Gollancz and Weale (1935)  
 Other Copies: 2

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<sup>4</sup> As the number of copies suggests, Lydgate’s “Verses” and “Dietary” were very popular texts.

## Appendix B – Contents of London, British Library MS Add. 31042

- 101<sup>v</sup> Prayer to the guardian angel  
Ed. Brunner (1914), Brown (1939)  
Other Copies: 1
- 102<sup>r</sup>-102<sup>v</sup> “Haue Mercy of Me” (Paraphrase of 51<sup>st</sup> psalm)  
Ed. Fein (1989)  
Unique
- 103<sup>r</sup>-110<sup>v</sup> “Virtues of the Mass”  
Author: John Lydgate  
Ed. MacCracken (1911), 87  
Other Copies: 10
- 110<sup>v</sup> *The Rose of Ryse*  
Ed. Rickert (1910), 142-43; Greene (1962), 157  
Unique
- 111<sup>r</sup>-119<sup>v</sup> “The Three Kings of Cologne”  
Author: John Lydgate  
Ed. MacCracken (1912)  
Unique<sup>5</sup>
- 120<sup>r</sup>-122<sup>r</sup> *A louely song of wysdome* (a.k.a. “Proverbs of Solomon”)  
Ed. Brunner (1933)  
Other Copies: 2
- 112<sup>v</sup>-123<sup>r</sup> *A song how þat Mercy passeth Rightwisnes*  
Ed. Brunner (1914); Bazire (1985)  
Other Copies: 3
- 123<sup>r</sup>-123<sup>v</sup> *A songe how mercy commes bifore þe jugement*  
Ed. Brunner (1914)  
Other Copies: 3
- 123<sup>v</sup>-124<sup>v</sup> *A songe how that mercy passeth alle thynges*  
Ed. Brunner (1914)  
Other Copies: 2
- 125<sup>r</sup>-163<sup>v</sup> *Richard Coer de Lyon*  
Ed. Brunner (1913)  
Other Copies: 6
- 163<sup>v</sup>-168<sup>v</sup> *The Romance of the childhode of Jhesu Christe þat clerkes callys  
Ipokrephum*

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<sup>5</sup> Carl Horstmann’s edition of *The Three Kings of Cologne* reproduces a prose version of the narrative, of which there are a number of copies, but does not represent the poetic version copied by Thornton.

## Appendix B – Contents of London, British Library MS Add. 31042

Ed. Horstmann (1885)<sup>6</sup>

Other Copies: 2

169<sup>r</sup>-176<sup>v</sup>*The Parlement of the Thre Ages*

Ed. Gollancz (1897), Offord (1959), Ginsberg (1992)

Other Copies: 1

176<sup>v</sup>-181<sup>v</sup>*Wynnere and Wastoure*

Ed. Gollancz (1920), Trigg (EETS, 1990), Ginsberg (TEAMS, 1992)

Unique

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<sup>6</sup> See *Manual* 2.639-40; item 311.

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Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS 40-1950  
 Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.2.38  
 Cambridge, University Library MS Dd.5.64  
 Cambridge, University Library MS Ee.1.14  
 Cambridge, University Library MS Ii.4.9  
 Cambridge, University Library MS Ii.6.2  
 Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS 19.2.1 (*Auchinleck*)  
 Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS 19.3.1  
 Lincoln, Cathedral Library MS 91 (*Lincoln Thornton*)  
 London, British Library MS Additional 31042 (*London Thornton*)  
 London, British Library MS Additional 36983  
 London, British Library MS Additional 59678 (Thomas Malory, *Winchester Manuscript*)  
 London, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.ii  
 London, British Library MS Cotton Vespasian E.16  
 London, British Library MS Royal 15.E.VI (*The Shrewsbury Book / The Talbot Anthology*)  
 London, College of Arms MS Arundel 58  
 London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 474  
 London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 491  
 Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional MS 80  
 New York City, Pierpoint Morgan Library MS M.487  
 New York City, Pierpoint Morgan Library MS M.700  
 New York City, Pierpoint Morgan Library MS M.819  
 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61  
 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 102  
 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 230  
 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 656  
 San Marino, Henry E. Huntington Library MS HM 28561

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