

## **Introduction**

### **Nation and Region**

England's sense of national identity has been under increasing pressure due to accelerating Europeanisation and globalisation, as well as the spread of power to neighbouring countries. The cohesive concept of Englishness is threatened within the boundaries of England itself; the rebirth of principal cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol, and Leeds has kindled feelings of regional identity but contributes little to a national sense of Englishness, except to create a new atmosphere of intolerance. This identity crisis is heightened by a sense of loss, since the English formerly possessed a distinct ethnic marker as descendants of the Anglo-Saxons. It seems, as Tom Shippey convincingly observes, that "the developing and potentially powerful image of Anglo-Saxon origins was sacrificed, during the nineteenth century, to the needs of an Imperial and a British, not an English ideology" ("The Undeveloped Image" 215). During and after the dominance of the British Empire, English identity has been repeatedly contested and transformed into a culturally mixed and overlapping identity, exemplified by the wave of non-white immigration from all over the globe. In addition, postwar awareness of English imperialism has created a negative image for the country, which is more comfortably swept into a wider sense of Britishness. In such a volatile cultural landscape, the real paucity of national homogeneity has created the imaginative space for literary scholars and historians to search for the origins of Englishness.

While these contemporary issues have significantly affected the arena of medieval English literature, medievalists have been aware that they must take the first step in overcoming the academic monopoly of modern critics on discussions of nationhood. Approaches to the medieval nation have been encumbered by the received wisdom that the nation was an essentially modern phenomenon. In particular, Benedict Anderson's

seminal work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) has often invited alarmed responses from medievalists due to his view on the emergence of “imagined communities” as a post-Enlightenment phenomenon; he states that “in Western Europe the eighteenth century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought” (11). The assumption that medieval or pre-modern societies were fully controlled by Christian universality precludes a certain sense of tribal community, biological kinship, and “nation.” The rise of mass production of print and the spread of universal literacy are the primary criteria that enabled citizens to hold “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7), and to develop a broader sense of national identity.

Medievalists, however, have an axe to grind for various reasons. First of all, the automatic dismissal of the “medieval nation” as a time enshrouded in “religious modes of thought” is an essentialist, totalising attitude moulded by a modern perspective. As Kathleen Davis points out, the application solely of modern historical forms conflicts with the theoretical approach of contemporary criticism, which seeks to expose and displace such “construction of modern hegemonic categories” (613). In addition, the concept of the nation as a product of modernity emerged from the traditional periodization inextricable from the histories and ideologies of colonialism and imperialism. It means that the Middle Ages were treated as a temporal as well as cultural “Other.” The West retains their exclusive prerogative of autonomy by homogenising and degrading the past as a convenient “Other” to superior modernity.<sup>1</sup> In a way, the anachronistic discussion of the medieval nation on the basis of modernist characterisations can no longer hold true and has oxymoronicly proven to be a double-edged sword in its own right. As a counterargument to the modernist methodology towards nationhood, the following statement by R. R. Davies hardly seems refutable:

On any *longue durée* view of ethnic and national identity, the modernist emphasis on the political and civic features of nations and nationalism – so natural to us today – surely needs to be balanced by the attention that needs to be given to the ethnic, the cultural and what may be called, by way of shorthand, the genealogical-mythical. National identity is fundamentally multi-dimensional; as historians we should not privilege one of those dimensions. (568)

The understanding of the nation as a historically and theoretically determined modern artefact has directly foreclosed other viable paths of inquiry into the variable expression of nationhood, although this conception of the nation has been increasingly contested. For this reasons, it is less fruitful to discuss whether or not nations existed in the Middle Ages.

Discussing medieval nations constitutes a slippage of the conventional definition of “nation,” and provides significant opportunities to explore disparaged forms of a sense of national belonging.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the concept of medieval English nation is now diverging into various other conversations, such as the idea of “British identity,” “cosmopolitanism” (medieval Europe as a series of cities rather than nations), and the concept of the “archipelago” (an analogy of medieval communities as island chains rather than components of a nation). *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290-1340* by Thorlac Turville-Petre is the first major and highly influential work in medieval studies, and is still a point of departure for the discussion of medieval national identity in that it touched off debate over nationhood. Turville-Petre sheds new light on various writings produced between 1290 and 1340 and uncovers a burgeoning sense of national consciousness emanating from investment in

“its territory, its people, and its language” (14). The miscellaneous nature of his sources seems to have been unsatisfactory to Derek Pearsall, who, while acknowledging the gradual rise of nationalistic feelings during the era, nevertheless remarks that they are “evidence of fragmentary, sporadic, regional responses to particular circumstances, not of a wave of English nationalism sweeping the country” (“The Idea of Englishness” 17).<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Pearsall is right to deny a rise in jingoistic nationalism, in which the Hundred Years War is often thought to promote nationalistic English sentiments. J. A. Burrow also acknowledges the ascent of patriotism out of antagonism towards the French, but continues, “England as a place, with its own traditions linked to its own towns and rivers and seas, played little part in Middle English literature” (*Medieval Writers* 128). These criticisms tend to dismiss the “local/regional” as a lack of national sentiment, which serves as a caveat suggestive of the medieval nation’s theoretical inadequacy as a similar manifestation of modern senses of nationhood.

However, subsequent critics have become more attentive to the unstable, fractured nature of national desires, not restricted to one specific mode or condition akin to the modern. For example, Patricia Clare Ingham locates in late Middle English Arthurian texts “a fantasy of insular union” (2), driven not by a celebration of homogeneity but by a constant reiteration and negotiation of difference. She suggests that “narratives of fragmentation, of sovereign mutability and loss, might be just as culturally useful as stories that emphasize cultural unity, wholeness, or recovery” (3). Robert Allen Rouse discusses a broader range of medieval literary works that remember and appropriate pre-conquest English history. Observing that “the Anglo-Saxon past is constructed using memories, places, events and names that are part of a wider imaginative remembrance of the pre-conquest past” (160), he approves of the idea of England as a nation founded upon a sense of continuous history. From a geographically broader, or “global” point of view, Kathy Lavezzo demonstrates how medieval writers

define their national image by foregrounding the insular “marginality” of the rest of the world as evinced by medieval world maps or *mappae mundi*. Lavezzo illuminates the way authors such as Alfric, Higden, and Chaucer utilise “the concept of their far-off homeland to think of themselves as not only inferior but also superior to other men . . . [and] engage imaginatively with the problems and potentials of English identity” (*Angels on the Edge* 21).

The words critics often prefer (“fantasy/imaginative/imaginatively”) imply a significant shift of focus in the discussion of the medieval nation. While challenging the novelty of nationhood, medievalists are engaged with and irrevocably influenced by the idea of the “imagined communities” prescribed by Anderson for use in a flexible framework.<sup>4</sup> As Ardis Butterfield comments, “the act of defining nationhood is . . . made to seem not a category of analysis so much as something creative” (29). Beyond the limitations of time and historical period, “creative” or “imaginative” investment in national discourse become a powerful theoretical ground for medievalists attempting to locate a nascent sense of Englishness in medieval texts. A constellation of recent studies places emphasis on a situation-specific and momentary, if not constant, articulation of the nation in medieval England. More attention has unavoidably been paid to the multiform character of national yearnings, gesturing towards an acknowledgement of their varied natures and moments of manifestation.

Rather than being nailed down to an established concept, the term “nation” has become a more flexible, as well as fascinating, idea that embraces the changing aspects of the nation according to the varying circumstances of different communities. Turning back to our analysis, it is now time to provide deeper insight into what Pearsall somewhat negatively dubbed “fragmentary, sporadic, regional responses” in the discourse of the medieval nation. These characteristics cannot lie in the periphery but at the heart of the question of the nation in Middle English texts. In this thesis, I wish to

contribute to these ongoing debates of national identity by reappraising the value of “regional responses” in Middle English texts. I examine the power and dynamism of regions or regional identities articulated through negotiation within a wider national framework. Admittedly, this involves a layer of fundamental obstacles when approaching Middle English texts. It is often noted that the profoundly regional nature and diversities of textual production impede the poetics of English identity. The Middle English period is often described as having “dialectal variation,” and its literary texts are deeply concerned with their own regional locale, and thus work against the development of ideas of national identity. However, even if it appears rooted in the provincial locale, regional voices can find their fullest articulation in relation to a national community. I posit that the regional character of texts is not necessarily or inherently at odds with the exploration of a larger community. Overall, I discuss the importance of cultural interaction between the region and the nation, attending particularly to the exercise of local, regional, and provincial vitality, which, by resorting to, or working against the dominant historiography, is in tension with this tradition and becomes engaged with rewriting the vision of national community, and with an idea of regions distinct from and even poised against the nation.

### **Chronicle, Romance, and Fabliau**

Since this study includes an inspection of the historical dimension within literary works, it is vital to take a look at a picture of medieval historiography and how it relates to Middle English literary works. One dominant version of medieval English history was written in the form of the so-called *Brut* chronicle. The *Brut* chronicles survive in over 240 manuscripts, in the form of both prose and verse, and features widespread, multilingual authorship (Latin, Anglo-Norman and Middle English), which attests to its robust popularity, to the extent that it has been referred to as a medieval best seller. As

Lister M. Matheson maintains, “it is no exaggeration to say that in the late Middle Ages in England the *Brut* was the standard historical account of British and English history” (9). The *Brut*, though each varies in character and in content, derived from *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*, hereafter *Historia*) by Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1100-c.1155), which enjoyed immense success after the Norman Conquest from the twelfth century onward. Geoffrey’s *Historia*, the source of the *Brut* chronicles, shed detailed light on the history of the Britons, from long before the arrival of the Saxons to the death of Cadwallader, the last British king, in A. D. 689. Tracing back to and identifying their ancestry with the heroes of legendary Troy, the name “Britain” has its origin in the exiled Brutus, a descendant of Aeneas, who first came to the island with a band of Trojans (several of the manuscripts are hence labelled with the name *Brut*, derived from the first conqueror of the island). Following the arrival of the Trojans (probably c.1100 B. C.), most of the history is devoted to an unbroken line of British rulers over centuries of insular rule and martial combat. Among these rulers, King Arthur captures special attention, as it addresses, in detail, his birth, rise to power, continental conquests, and military campaign against Rome, marking the climax of British supremacy. As emblemised in the great deeds of Arthur, Geoffrey is particularly concerned with an account of the Britons as an offshoot of Troy, inventing a “British” history, as opposed to his predecessors aligned with an Anglo-Saxon past. Despite contemporary scepticism and serious opposition to his upstart account, Geoffrey’s *Historia* was so powerful and influential that it immediately spread over all of Europe and was used as a historical as well as cultural source by a number of later authors through translations and adaptations.

Meanwhile, Geoffrey’s monumental artefact gave birth to another form, or appropriation of, historical account: the development of the so-called “romancing” of the Arthurian story (Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance* 20). A remarkable body of literature

which addresses the lives and deeds of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, flourished in continental Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The work of the French poet Chrétien de Troyes (c.1135-c.1183), in particular, catalysed for the growth of the more fictitious, less historical form. These stories tend to include the marvellous adventures of a chivalrous, heroic knight errant who frequently goes off on a quest and then reports back Arthur's court. These works seldom feature the same world or heroic types of Geoffrey's Arthuriana, but instead the chivalric, courtly love and supernatural adventures of the Arthurian knights. The continental outpouring of Arthurian narratives, therefore, shifted its focus from the military and martial world of Geoffrey's to that of a more romantic and fairy-tale milieu.

However, this is admittedly a simplified account of the relationship between two modes of medieval writings, chronicle and romance. Geoffrey's *Historia* was, from the beginning largely ahistorical and skipped the era of Viking invasions, as well as the conventional dynastic succession of the Saxon rulers, and thereby disregarded the whole sequence of events which occurred from the seventh through the tenth century (Leckie 71). In essence, it was pseudo-historical and a "virtuoso work of the imagination" (Davies, *The Matter of Britain* 7). Antonia Gransden also claims that "Geoffrey was a romance writer masquerading as a historian" (202). Perhaps Geoffrey's innate fictionality lays, directly or indirectly, in a rich ground that ensues the development of the "romantic" literatures. Yet, the definition of "romance" is notoriously tricky to pin down in Middle English works, especially for those who are accustomed to the sense of "a story of romantic love, *esp.* one which deals with love in a sentimental or idealized way" (*OED*, s. v. "romance" 7). Contrary to general expectations, the nature of medieval romance was so diverse and complicated as to be labelled "the carnival magician of genres" (Chism 57). Originally derived from Old French *romanz* or *roman*, the term "romance" reflects the influence of medieval French vernacular, as contrasted



with that of Latin works. From the end of the twelfth century onwards, there appeared a sequence of works concerned primarily with the events of Latin antiquity. It is through this association of linguistic form that the term “romance” was imported into English vocabulary. While this linguistic association is one definite way to represent “romance,”<sup>5</sup> things become tangled further as the term refers not only to French vernacular narratives but also to the content of romance. By the thirteenth century, the term had come to encompass a more generic sense, associated with works containing a certain romantic subject matter (Strohm 7). Due to the fact that French vernacular texts are frequently concerned with the adventures of chivalric heroes, the term “romance” came to denote, in particular, narratives of the martial and amatory deeds of a single hero. For this reason, John Finlayson, for instance, suggests that the essential difference between “chanson de geste” (a type of heroic poem which attaches importance to valour of warriors) and the “romance” resides in the concept of the hero. He maintains that “both chanson de geste and romance heroes are known through their prowess, but while the former employs his skill in a public context, the latter does so solely or usually in pursuit of a private ideal” (“Definition of Middle English Romance” 54). This is one way to look at the “romance” genre generally, but this clarification of “romance” always has exceptions, possibly related to romance’s maintenance of its enduring appeal in medieval England. In a more positive light, the very slipperiness of the definition underlies the strength of a genre “particularly resistant to becoming out-of-date” due to its extreme flexibility (Field, “Romance in England” 175). For example, when the *Gawain*-poet concludes his poem with the following passage, it demonstrates more complex interplay between “romance” and “chronicle”:

For þat watz acorded þe renoun of þe Rounde Table,

And he honoured þat hit hade euermore after,

As hit is breued in þe best boke of romaunce.

Pus in Arthurus day þis aunter bitidde,

Þe Brutus bokez þerof beres wyttensesse; (2519-23)

Gawain's adventure is enclosed by the poet's invocation of two different sources as authorities; "þe best boke of romaunce" and "Þe Brutus bokez."<sup>6</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon note that "the Brutus bokez" may be understood as "any chronicles or romances of British times, as can be found in the usage of the Middle English poem *Arthour and Merlin*, where 'the Brut' refers to the French source" (131). This conflation of "romance" and "chronicle" implies that there is no clear-cut distinction between the two as we understand there to be in our era. While this is a likely explanation, it does not clarify why the *Gawain*-poet makes separate allusions to both "romance" and "the Brut." Finlayson regards this curious intersection of the two styles as "a final reminder of our engagement in a literary artifact . . . [and] a deliberate move on the poet's part to separate our perspective from Gawain's" ("The Expectation of Romance" 23).<sup>7</sup>

I would insist that these readings overlook more nuanced interaction in Middle English literature. The closing stanza of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* crystallises a feature of "romance" that is of the utmost importance in Middle English texts: the text's intimate relationship with history. The significance of Gawain's quest to the Green Chapel does not reside in his personal virtue and experience, but extends further into the establishment of dynastic, ancestral, or national community and identity, as addressed by the *Brut* or Trojan framework.<sup>8</sup> While Middle English romance has its immediate Anglo-Norman predecessors, it departs from them in terms of the "conscious historicity" (Field, "Romance as History" 173) embedded in the soil of England. Therefore, it is no longer sensible to marginalise "romance" as "a tale of fictional or nugatory content as opposed to a factual account" (*MED*, s. v. "romaunce" 1) nor a

“private realm,” rather, the genre serves as a manifold medium that is not only engaged with but also revises history. In particular, medieval romance, much like the modern novel, has the potential to reveal the ideological process of national identity construction.

One of the aims of this thesis is to free us from the rigid, conventional categorisation of Middle English genres. Middle English texts are prone to adhere to preconceived notions of literary grouping, but as attested to by the chameleon qualities of the “romance,” they are more open to various interpretive possibilities. In a similar vein, another thematically diverse and flexible form is the *fabliaux*, short tales that, flourishing in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century France, constitute an essential part of the medieval literary landscape. They are typically comic, obscene, and often cynical, characterised by vivid detail and a lively realism of everyday life with lusty clerks, randy wives, and their cuckolded husbands. Due to these apparently crude tastes, *fabliaux* were once considered to be the poetry of the newly emergent bourgeoisie, against the literature of courtly elegance. Yet, a dominant view now is that appreciation of *fabliaux* were not limited to a certain group or social stratum but coexisted with the epic and chivalric romance.<sup>9</sup> It is obvious that Chaucer had a profound interest in this genre in his maturity. He improves on his sources with his detailed characterisation of the two clerks who speak with the northern accent. In Chaucer’s tale, the linguistic technique unique to continental *fabliau* does not stay in the realm of comic, but transformed into the matter of local and national language.

These literary, as well as historical, texts have an affinity for national themes and wider historical implications; they manifest a variety of regional attitudes towards the concept of Englishness by questioning or posing an alternative. By reading Middle English texts from a historical perspective, this thesis attempts to explore how regional texts contribute to nation-formation.

In Chapter 1, “Wassail, Sax, England: the Founding of England in the *Brut* chronicles,” I will pursue the succession of the *Brut* Chronicles and examine the various responses made during redaction. Geoffrey’s *Historia* is essentially a genealogy of British rulers, and the exclusively British nature of the history is challenged by its own dynastic conflicts and discontinuity. It recounts how the island was repeatedly intruded on by different peoples, such as the Romans, Picts, English, and Danes, and features a narrative rampant with diverse linguistic, ethnic, and cultural convergences over the course of a supposedly insular history. Among these, the chapter draws particular attention to the shifting implications of the episode of Saxon treachery, which concerns the renaming of land. While the *Brut* chronicles have its root in the history of the Britons, the construction of England is an important theme by which each of the *Brut* chroniclers addresses the idea of English identity as having descended from the Saxons. Some chroniclers stress the continuity between the Saxons and the English, and make modifications to the description in relation to the naming and conquest of Britain, casting it in a positive light. Nonetheless, these verbal and structural mutations are minor and not drastically reformative. A mere glimpse at the vast range of the *Brut* chronicles shows that there is no crucial shift in the narrative gist that revolves around an unheroic figure of Hengist, a chieftain of the Saxons. Due to the medieval historiographical tradition that dictates that the writers abide by the original sources, the main narrative of the Saxons’ act of treachery undergoes little change from its overtly negative portrayal in the *Brut* chronicles. In my examination of the discrepancy between feeling and action in the chroniclers, these fragmentary narratives are rife with successive waves of invaders and the composite nature of nation founding nevertheless provide “romancers” of subsequent periods with the ingredients for multiple interpretations, as well as the opportunity to make their own contributions to a page of history.

In Chapter 2, “The Rewriting of Nationhood and Ethnic Harmony in *Havelok the Dane*,” I demonstrate how the poem departs from its Anglo-Norman analogues and engages in the creation of a harmonious synthesis of national community from a regional point of view. The story of the Danish prince Havelok was popular in medieval England and appeared in several different forms, ranging from chronicles to romances. The Middle English *Havelok the Dane* attracts special attention in that it demonstrates an increased focus on England, reflected in the shift of narrative stage from its earlier analogues. The *Havelok*-poet effectively evokes the historical memories of contact with Viking raiders and exploits the scene of Havelok’s landing in England, finally rewriting it in a positive light. Havelok’s eventual victory over Godrich, the insular villain, is dramatised as if to strengthen the association with the historical union of the two countries under Cnut, thereby justifying the Danish dominion over England. My argument also uses lexical analysis and examines the implications of “wassail,” salutatory phrase of Old and Middle English during drinking festivities, which the poem depicts unusually. By drawing attention to the shifting meaning and implications of this term that emerges exclusively in the chronicle tradition, I discuss the *Havelok*-poet’s remarkable rehabilitation of the term, reprising and revising it, to celebrate the coalescence of the Danes and the English. The poet imagines a new concept of the nation not from a definitive Anglo-Saxon but from an “English” or hybrid “Anglo-Dano-British” point of view.

In Chapter 3, “Trojan Ancestry and Territory in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” I suggest that Gawain’s seemingly “romantic” adventure through a highly localised landscape addresses the important theme of regional and national identity. My discussion begins with an insight into the relatively unexplored relationship between the opening Trojan stanza and its implication for Gawain’s experience in the province. Unlike other Arthurian romances, this poem is not merely a romance of a single hero but,

with its evocative prologue recounting the Trojan founding myth, a chronicle romance of a community that is potentially related to the origin and formation of British identity. The heroic enterprises of Aeneas' pedigree overlap with, and form the underpinning basis for, the individual quest of a knight of the Round Table to the Green Chapel, which in turn reveals a unique feature of the region—a space conventionally marginalised in Arthurian narrative. While “treachery” works as a fundamental stimulus for Aeneas' heroic success and territorial expansion, it does not motivate Gawain to embark on an imperialistic undertaking, despite having such potential as progeny of Aeneas. Gawain's bedroom exchange with the Lady of Bertilak, one of his crucial ordeals in the province, progresses towards tragedy and becomes a miniaturised version of his Trojan legacy. The scene is couched in military terminology and replete with such connotations, so as to dramatise the lack of the knight's warrior ethos, which also represents his inability to gain influence over the province, as the Trojans had achieved. The provincial scene also takes on a significant, if not explicit, parallel with the royal politics of the time in regard to the growing expression of territorial and regional community. The opening Trojan stanza is not intended to legitimise or bolster an aristocratic, royal, or “central” authority on behalf of Gawain, but rather to enrich the understanding of Gawain's journey to the Green Chapel, and of the “regional/marginal” dimension and dynamics prevalent in Trojan Britain. Far from being conventional, therefore, I conclude that the nature of the opening lines serves as an essential device for the understated territorial and regional identity that emerges.

In Chapter 4, “*The Reeve's Tale* and Regional/Marginal Identity,” I turn attention back to an author from the central city of England. This chapter examines the way in which Geoffrey Chaucer, based on a “metropolitan” viewpoint, sees one of the internal provinces, the North of England. Throughout the history of medieval England, this provincial region is constantly presented as remote and uncivilised, an area of

geographic alterity. In addition to geographic, agricultural, commercial, and economic distance, as well as the absence of royalty, those in the south also observed linguistic peculiarity. From Ranulph Higden to John Trevisa, a persistent comment is that northern speech is “strange” and hardly understandable to a southern ear. Chaucer was aware of regional diversity and the inevitable shift in the history of the English language, but tries to overcome the problem by weaving dialectical variation into one of the tales in *The Canterbury Tale*, *The Reeve’s Tale*. One of his fabliaux, featuring an ostensibly bawdy and slapstick quality, is deeply tied to the issue of the North in the form of the northern dialect spoken by the two students. I pay special attention to the much neglected phenomenon in which the northernisms fade away towards the end of the tale. I discuss the significance of this subdued northernism in relation to the storyteller, Oswald the Reeve, and also explore the possibility that his representation of the North, in fact, places Chaucer as a writer of vernacular English. While *The Reeve’s Tale* offers the most sustained engagement with the idea of northern England, it also commits to a geographic concept of northernness projected onto Chaucer’s homeland, England, as a whole: Chaucer perceives his homeland as geographically marginalised from a “global” perspective centred on Rome. Chaucer, located at the perceived fringe of Europe, makes an implicit assertion of English tradition by cloaking himself and highlighting “elvish” otherness. Quite paradoxically, while living in an increasingly international milieu at the closing of the fourteenth century, Chaucer projects the inherent power of provincial-marginal dynamism onto a vision of national identity, an important feature that boosted him into international prominence.

## **Chapter One: “Wassail, Sax, England”: the founding of England in the *Brut* Chronicles**

### **1. A Signal of the Saxon Invasion**

Franklin in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* describes how Arveragus leaves his beloved wife Dorigen; he was determined to “goon and dwelle a yeer or tweyne / In Engelond, that cleped was eek Briteyne, / To seke in armes worshipe and honour / For al his lust he sette in swich labour” (V 809-12).<sup>10</sup> Underneath the surface of these hasty lines lies an important issue in the history of medieval England—the question of when Britain became England. The change in the island’s name and the concomitant transfer of insular power in fact result from seeking “in armes worshipe and honour” that Arveragus aspires to display in the land. While Chaucer is not concerned with amplifying his deeds beyond the sea, the phrase “swich labour” encapsulates the violent as well as volatile aspect of English history. The change in appellation of the island accordingly reflects the conflict inherent in the history of the native soil.

Names and self-identification are, regardless of time and place, the essential ingredients in the shaping of a people or a nation. It is often pointed out that it was in the late ninth century that the term “Angelcynn” (English) became widely used at least according to the contemporary *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The recurring threat of Viking raids in the eighth century was certainly an impetus to heighten a vision of “English” unity: King Alfred and his courtiers cultivated “common heritage, one faith, and a shared history” (Foot 28) of their West Saxon and Mercian subjects, promoting the term “Angelcynn” as the expression of a collective identity.<sup>11</sup> The English sense of identity has developed by the end of the tenth century, but was soon disrupted by the Norman Conquest in 1066, wherein a reformation of the infra-structure of English society took place. The English monarchy, as well as the language, which served as an important tool



of education under the rule of King Alfred, was superseded by the continental French-speaking dynasty. It was generally agreed that this was a period when Anglo-Norman and Latin were linguistic hegemonies to which English was subordinate. The former was a major vehicle of aristocratic writing in official administration, while the latter dominated the literacy of the European Christian culture. Members of the Church, who played a decisive role in writing the ecclesiastical records and documents, usually deployed intellectual Latin, which had remained in a position of prestige since England's conversion to Christianity. In the course of this linguistic alteration, although English was considered unimportant and was not used by the elite ruling class, a vast majority of people naturally continued to be monolingual English speakers.

In this historical context, the twelfth century saw a flourish of historical writings mainly in Latin. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (The Ecclesiastical History of the English People) and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are chief materials of the age and provide a chronological framework for the major segment of this past: a past that is centred on the arrival of the Anglo-Saxon tribes and the ascendancy of their kingdoms. Geoffrey's Latin *Historia* established the dominant vision of the nation's past in running counter to prior accounts by William of Malmesbury (c.1095-c.1143) and Henry of Huntingdon (c.1088-c.1157), successors of the "Bedan" chronology of insular history. As R. R. Davies observes, Geoffrey "torpedoed their smug Anglocentricity by making Britain, not England, the subject of his work and by providing Britain with a glorious pre-English and non-English past" (*The Matter of Britain* 10). For the Britons, the Anglo-Saxons were vicious and perfidious latecomers to the island.<sup>12</sup> Besides the racial elements of the text, Geoffrey also drastically departs from the former chronicles in his handling of the period of the Anglo-Saxon settlement: he consigns the Saxons from the fifth to as late as the second half of the seventh century to the region north of the Humber, and instead weaves the Britons' enduring hegemony

into the period where the conventional dynastic succession of the Saxon rulers such as Alfred, Edward, Edgar, and Ethelred takes place.<sup>13</sup> This periodization was much in debate shortly after the publication of Geoffrey's *Historia*. R. William Leckie examines the reception and transition of Geoffrey's *Historia* and reveals that there were many disputes (for example, from Geoffrey Gaimar and Alfred of Beverley) with the "Galfridian" version of historical events. In addition, he also observes some attempts to reconcile the incompatible viewpoints of the two historiographical traditions ("Bedan" and "Galfridian"). He concludes:

By the end of the century the Galfridian version of events had contributed so much to the image of Britain's past that the account was not generally seen as an overt challenge to prevailing views. The *Historia* had become part of Insular historical tradition to be treated with the same respect accorded Anglo-Saxon materials. The question of Geoffrey's reliability was not resolved, it was simply forgotten. (100-01)

The vast popularity of Geoffrey's *Historia* cements a negative image of the Saxons in the *Brut* tradition, yet subsequent authors sometimes show some traces of struggle and present their own attitudes towards their ancestral past. By addressing the Saxon invasion with a special focus on the language they use, and renaming of the land, we get a glimpse of how the medieval historiographers tackled the issue of English history as well as the extent to which they were able to change or suggest alternatives. It is an integral phase of British history which, incorporated into the regional and national landscape, traces the power of the invaders and the transition from the Saxons to the English. The negative vestige of the Saxon's invasion hinges on the key quoting of alien and ominous Saxon words, which has its origin in Geoffrey's part of dramatic

denigration of the Saxons' conquest over the Britons. The Saxon language casts a dark shadow from its inception, that is, from the Saxons' arrival in Britain, an event which has been traditionally recognised as the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain. In the fifth century, at the request of the Briton King, Vortigern, who was in need of some help to protect his territory from a neighboring enemy, the Picts, the Saxons arrive and settle in Britain. Vortigern engages the Saxons as mercenaries and their military support subsequently wins the king's trust. Hengist, a Saxon chieftain, plays a central role negotiating with the Briton king, and consequently he is given land in the region of Lindsey (in modern-day Lincolnshire) as a reward for their support. After summoning more warriors from the continent, Hengist invites the king to his castle, his newly built fortress called "Thancaster," and introduces him to Rowena, his daughter. During the feast, they exchange greetings:

*Accedens deinde propius regi, flexis genibus dixit:*

*"Lauerd king, wassail."*

*At ille, uisa facie puellae, ammiratus est tantum eius decorem et incaluit.*

*Denique interrogauit interpretem suum quid dixerat puella et quid ei respondere debebat. Cui interpres dixit:*

*"Vocauit te dominum regem et uocabulo salutationis honorauit. Quod autem respondere debes est 'drincheil'." (129)*

(Going up to the king, she curtseyed and said: "Lauerd king, wassail." At the sight of the girl's face he was amazed by her beauty and inflamed with desire. He asked his interpreter what the girl had said and what he should reply. He answered: "She called you lord king and honoured you with a word of greeting. You should reply 'drincheil'.")<sup>14</sup>

Dressed in beautiful clothes and jewelry and carrying a golden goblet, Rowena kneels before the king and greets him, saying, “Lauerd (lord) king, wassail.” Not understanding what the Saxon vixen said, Vortigern asks his interpreter how he should answer and learns that he should reply “drincheil.” During this brief crosslinguistic communication, he becomes inflamed with lust, and he asks for Rowena’s hand in marriage shortly after. With Rowena wed to Vortigern, the strength of Hengist’s forces increases daily, which provokes the Britons’ terror and anger, leading them to raise Vortigern’s son (from another marriage) Vortimer to the throne. Although the newly elected Vortimer gains ground by military means and almost expels the Saxons, Rowena dampens the Briton resurgence by poisoning him.

Traditionally, a liquor-ritual by a cupbearing Germanic lady is the occasion that consolidates group cohesion and social order, but, in the scene above, it has an ironical function. Subverting the conventional significance, Rowena’s serves as an “ironic reflex of a Germanic warlord” (Bridges 186), playing a crucial role in not stabilising but destabilising the British regime. In this respect, the first greeting of “wassail” is important in that it foreshadows the Saxon betrayal and invasion by functioning as a kind of Judas kiss. The word “wassail” has a curious history. According to *Middle English Dictionary (MED)*, “wassail” is “a salutation used in drinking healths, offering toasts,” but this is not the original meaning of the word. “Wassail” comes from Old English *wes þu hal*, literally meaning “be in good health.” *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* explains that there are many recorded occurrences of this original form in Old English, such as in the scene in *Beowulf* where Beowulf first meets Hrothgar, saying “Wæs þu, Hroðgar, hal!” (407).<sup>15</sup> Obviously, this Old English version of “wassail” does not yet show any particular association with drinking. However, *OED* indicates that its general sense as a greeting transformed into that of a drinking formula owing to the

influence of the Danish-speaking inhabitants of England. This assumption is based on its lexical form, as the Middle English “wassail” derives from the Old Norse *ves heill*, which corresponds to the Old English *wes hal*. Despite its Germanic origin, however, the term seems to have been acknowledged by the Normans as a particularly English phrase by the twelfth century. Furthermore, *OED* notes that a marked characteristic of “wassail” is recorded in the *Roman de Rou* by Wace (c. 1180), who reports that the English on the eve of the Battle of Hastings were engaged in ale-swilling revelry, with concomitant cries of “weissel” and “drincheheil” being heard. The word “wassail” is also found in the *Speculum Stultorum* by Nigellus Wireker (c. 1190), who describes the addiction of English students at the University of Paris to “wassail” and “dringail.”<sup>16</sup>

Rowena’s use of the word “wassail” marks the introduction of the term into the lexicon of Middle English, from which *OED*’s meaning of “drinking salutation” is determined. An examination of *OED* and *MED* reveals that “wassail” exclusively appears in the equivalent Rowena scene of the *Brut* chronicles from the twelfth century onwards, and it is then subsumed into a historiographical tradition on which later chroniclers draw. Margaret Elizabeth Lamont’s recent article on “wassail” considers one significant implication of the word in the *Brut* chronicles. She contends that the Middle English prose *Brut* is exceptional in presenting Rowena in a remarkably positive manner, in which her “wassail” also functions as a positive maker of communal English identity.<sup>17</sup> Rowena’s use of “wassail” is not only the first appearance of the Saxon language, but also a word deeply related to the prose *Brut*’s cultural orientation, leading to the creation of a composite national identity of England. As Lamont observes:

While Hengist becomes the father of the English genealogically in the prose *Brut* because he is made the ancestor of all the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes (in

another amalgamating gesture), Ronwenne becomes, with the wassail, the mother of the English linguistically and culturally. By focusing on language and culture, particularly in an event that illustrates the ability of language and culture to cross from one ethnic group to another, the prose *Brut* explores alternatives to genealogy as a method of creating national identity. (303)<sup>18</sup>

Even as Lamont admits, however, most of the *Brut* chronicles retain the pejorative connotations of “wassail” that derive from Geoffrey’s account. Layamon, for instance, inserts another “wassailing” scene later, in which Rowena meets the new British King Vortimer to plot his murder by poison: “þus hailede him on; þe swic-fulle wimman. / Lauerd king wæs hail; Uor þe ich am swiðe uæin” (7468-69).<sup>19</sup> Having ensnared Vortigern with a honey trap, she similarly deceives Vortimer by ostensibly inviting him to drink together, and enter into communion, with her and her Saxon retinue, when, in fact, she is only offering him a chalice of malice. Rowena’s words “Lauerd king wæs hail,” evoking her initial address to Vortigern, resonate as a death knell for Vortimer’s reign, a symbolic act of what Layamon calls “muchel swikedom” (7470). Equally suggestive is the case of *An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, in which the poet recounts the unique story of “Maiden Inge”:

In þat tyme wite 3e wel  
Com wesseil & drynkheil  
Into þis lond withoute wene  
Þoru a maide bryzt & schene  
He was icluped maide Inge  
Of hure can many man rede & synge (275-80)<sup>20</sup>

In this chronicle, it is claimed that the name of England derived from that of “Inge,” who combines the figures of Hengist and Rowena (Zettl lxix-lxx). She says, “Wassail y schal sai to þe king / & sle hym withoute lesyng” (310-12), which is portrayed, surprisingly, as a gesture signaling the attack against and murder of the king. The cry of “wassail” becomes the cue to “assail” the Britons. This indicates the increasingly sinister tone and pejorative connotations of “wassail.” Even the Middle English prose *Brut* makes an apparently portentous portrayal of another “wassailing” occasion. This occurs in the reign of King Edgar when he was welcomed by Estrild the daughter of Orgar of Devonshire:

þe lady welcomede þe Kyng, and suetely him kisede; and he toke her by þe hande, & þo nexte him her sette, and so soppede þai togeder. And þo was a custume and an vsage þat, when a man drank vnto anoþer, þe drynker shulde say “Wassaile,” and þat oþere shulde ansure “drynkhaile”: and þus dede þe Kyng & þe lady meny tymes, & also kiste. (115)<sup>21</sup>

While their exchange of “wassail” and “drinkhail” seems simply cheerful and a part of a hospitable reception, it leads eventually to the murderous event that follows. At this time, Estrild was the wife of Edelwold, the king’s trusted knight, but she wanted to marry the king who loved her as well. After Edelwold dies, King Edgar immediately marries Estrild and they produce a son, Aethelred. However, after Edgar’s death, Aethelred could not succeed to the throne because of Edward, Edgar’s son by his first wife. In order for her son to reign, Estrild kills Edward during his stay at her house. The prose *Brut* reads the event as “and anone as þe drynk come, þe Quene drank to þe Kyng, & þe Kyng toke þe coppe & sette hit to his mouþ. & in þe mene-tyme whiles þat he drank, þe knyȝt þat was wiþ þe Quene, wiþ a knyf smote euen þe Kyng to þe hert, & þere

he felle adoune dede of his palfray vnto þe erþe” (117). Distracted by his stepmother’s toast, Edward was stabbed to death by one of her knights. Although the phrase “wassail” is not used on this occasion, Estrild’s initial “wassail” to the former King Edgar preserves an implicit link with the subsequent event, ending in the assassination of his son Edward. It is plausible to argue that “wassail” in this episode appears unmistakably as a portent of evil or betrayal. Interestingly, apart from the *Brut* chronicles, *OED* gives us an ironical sense of “wassail” as “a ‘salute,’ smart attack,” citing *The Laud Troy Book* (c. 1425). *MED* also describes it as “a sharp or sudden blow,” citing *Cleanness* (c. 1400). The transition of this pejorative usage of “wassail” from a drinking formula to the sense of “attack” is deeply entangled with the bloodstained Saxon history that follows.

## 2. The “Sax” and “Saxon” Treachery

The semantic shift of “wassail” should be considered in connection with the subsequent course of history as it serves as an omen for the Saxon invasion. It is apparent that Rowena’s marriage to Vortigern is what Hengist planned from the outset in order to take possession of the whole land. While Vortigern’s son, Vortimer, gains ground and temporarily drives the Saxons from the island, Hengist again returns after hearing of Vortimer’s death. Hengist subsequently arranges a truce to confirm his peace with the Britons. However, although the unarmed Britons expect to hold peace negotiations with the Saxons, Hengist plans to betray them: he commands that each of his retainers be armed with a knife, hidden in their garments. Geoffrey’s *Historia* portrays the scene as follows:

Vt igitur horam prodicioni suae idoneam inspexisset Hengistus, uociferatus est “nimet oure saxas” et ilico Vortegirnum accepit et per pallium detinuit. Audito



uero ocius signo, abstraxerunt Saxones cultros suos et astantes principes inuaserunt ipsosque nichil tale praemeditatos iugulauerunt circiter quadringentos sexaginta inter barones et consules. (135)

(When he saw that the moment was ripe for treachery, Hengist shouted, “nimet oure saxas,” and immediately seized Vortigern and held him by his robe. On hearing the signal, the Saxons drew their daggers, grabbed the chiefs beside them and killed around four hundred and sixty barons and earls, who had expected nothing of the sort.)

This episode goes back to Nennius, but is more widely acknowledged after Geoffrey’s *Historia*. Hengist instigates the act of treachery by shouting a signal in the Saxon language, “nimet oure saxas” (take out your knives). Since his command was unintelligible to the Britons, most of them are taken by surprise and massacred. Hengist’s language clearly stands out in the Latin passage, and his malicious ruse is only possible because of the linguistic difference, enabling the Saxons to achieve their plot and subsequently secure domination over the land, as well as reinforcing the sense of Otherness and perfidy associated with them. This surprise attack is the origin of the phrase the “Night of the Long Knives,” the very definition of sudden, large-scale treachery. The fact that, linguistically, “saxas” and “Saxon” sound so similar (near homonyms) may also serve to strengthen the perceived association between Saxons and inveterate backstabbing.

This episode highlights the evil nature of the Saxons. Geoffrey’s citation of the Saxon phrase is repeated in the subsequent chronicles, as shown in Table 1.<sup>22</sup>

Table 1 [Hengist’s treacherous command as cited in various the *Brut* chronicles]

Geoffrey of Monmouth <i>Historia Regum Britanniae.</i> (c.1138)	“nimet oure saxas”
Wace <i>Roman de Brut.</i> (c.1155)	“Nim eure sezes!”
Layamon <i>Brut.</i> (c.1200)	“Nimeð eoure sexes”
<i>An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle.</i> (c.1300)	“Wassail y schal sai to þe king / and sle hym withoute lesyng”
Robert of Gloucester <i>The Chronicle.</i> (c.1300)	“Nimeþ 3oure sexes”
Thomas of Castleford <i>The boke of Brut.</i> (c.1327)	“Nimid our saxes!”
Robert Mannyng <i>The Chronicle.</i> (c.1338)	“Takis out 3our sexis”
The Middle English Prose <i>Brut.</i> (c.1380-1400)	“faire sires! Now is tyme forto speke of loue and pees”
The Middle English “History of the Kings of Britain” College of Arms Manuscript Arundel 22 (c.1400)	“Hure sexes”
A Fifteenth-Century Paraphrase of Robert of Gloucester’s <i>Chronicle</i>	“Neme youre sexes”

While “nimet” is an imperative form of “niman” in the sense of “take,” which is commonly used in Old English, the use of the word “sax” is also very restricted. *MED* takes it as “a knife used as a weapon, a dagger,” and cites the passage almost exclusively in the same scene of the treachery.<sup>23</sup> With the final entry in 1450, the word seems to have faded out of general use. This suggests that, in Geoffrey’s narrative, the word “sax” calls attention to itself not only as “English” but also as “archaic English.” This unusual deployment of the rather antiquated lexicon is highly important in that it forms an etymological association between “sax” and “Saxons,” further heightening the sense of the Saxon’s treachery and conquest of the Britons.

Wace is the first Anglo-Norman chronicler of Geoffrey’s *Historia*, and he makes an interesting observation about this episode. He not only follows it but also elaborates upon the “sax” event, explaining that the English suffix “-sex” in “Sussex,” “Essex,” and “Middlesex” is derived from “sax,” the name of the weapon that Hengist commands his retainers to use:

Pur quittance de raençon  
E pur eissir de la prison  
Lur otreia en feu Sussexe  
E tut Essexe e Midelsexe,  
Pur ço que prés erent de Kent  
Que Henguist ot premerement;  
Pur remembrer la traïsun  
Des cultels, orent issi nun;  
Sexes, ço dient li Engleis,  
Plusurs culteus sunt en Franceis,  
Mais cil les nuns alques varient  
Ki ne sevent que senefient.  
Engleis le reprovier oïrent  
De la traïsun que cil firent,  
La fin de la parole osterent,  
Les nuns des cultels tresturnerent,  
Pur oblir la desonur  
Que fait orent lur anceisur. (7291-308)

(To release himself from ransom, and get out of prison, he gave them in fee Sussex and all Essex and Middlesex, because they adjoined Kent, which Hengist held before. They thus were called ‘-sex’ to commemorate the Treachery of the Knives. ‘Sexes’ is the English word for knives; there are many kinds of knife amongst the French, but they have somewhat changed their names, so that they do not know what ‘sexes’ means. The English heard themselves reproached for the treachery they had done, removed the end of the

word and completely changed the name for knives, to forget the dishonour committed by their ancestors.)<sup>24</sup>

Despite the Saxons' wish to kill the Briton king Vortigern, Hengist suggests they should let him live on condition that the king should surrender his cities and fortresses to the Saxons. After relinquishing some principal cities, including London and Winchester, in order to avoid imprisonment, Vortigern finally gives up Sussex, Essex, and Middlesex as well. Wace observes that "sax" is incorporated into these regional place names in order to "remembrer la traïsun / Des cultels" (commemorate the Treachery of the Knives). Moreover, he makes an abrupt insertion of the contemporary "English" point of view in regard to the treachery. He goes on to note that because of this act of treason, the English people changed to the name from "sax" to "knife" in an attempt to "oblier la desonur / Que fait orent lur anceisur" (forget the dishonour committed by their ancestors).

Although Wace is not abundantly clear as to who should "remembrer la traïsun," this is not the case with Layamon, the first poet to write British history in English. He follows Wace faithfully, but presents the corresponding passage as follows:

þat iseȝen Bruttes; þat balu wes on londe.  
& hu Sæxisce men; isiȝen weoren to heom.  
Bruttes scuþten þan londe nome; for Sæxisce monnen scome.  
& for þan swike-dome; þat heo idon hæfden.  
for þan þe heo mid cnifen; biræueden heom at liue.  
Ða cleopeden heo þat lond al; Æst-sæx and West-sæx.  
& þat þridde; Middel-sæx. (7675-81)<sup>25</sup>

Layamon makes it clear that it was the “Bruttes” who altered the place name; this took place “for Sæxisce monnen scome” (for the shame of the Saxons).<sup>26</sup> As Hannah McKendrick Bailey points out, the fact that the Britons themselves performed the renaming is unusual because this is usually done by the invaders (270). In addition, Layamon makes no mention of the contemporary English attitude towards the event, omitting Wace’s description of it. Although he is apparently committed to the alliterative tradition and is sometimes hailed as nationalist in sentiment,<sup>27</sup> his rewriting of the “sax” episode suggests that he has little interest in eliminating the “ignoble origin” of the Saxon settlement. By comparing both manuscripts, Mary Catherine Davidson also writes that “their shared lack of revision of the pejorative depiction of his tongue negates any suggestion that either scribe could have had the interests of framing a better origin for their English in mind” (60). With the name of the lethal weapon embedded in their local landscape, Hengist’s language dramatizes the story of conquest through violence and deception. The “sax” episode remains as a trace of a “linguistic resistance” by the Britons as well as the appropriation of the Saxon tongue.

Yet, this is not only the case with Layamon. As far as the subsequent chroniclers of the *Brut* chronicles are concerned, there is little sign of putting Wace’s comment into practice, an indication of the fact that the English replaced “sax” with “knives” to consign to oblivion the disgraceful ancestral memories embedded in the word. While the “sax” episode is not recorded in *An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, Inge’s signal of “wassail” clearly takes the function of Hengist’s “nimet oure saxas,” which implies that the chronicler grasps a linguistic association between both the Saxon words. Examining the semantic narrowing of the term from a general salutation in Old English to a specific drinking formula, and the chronicles’ vituperation of the term as being a specifically “Saxon” signal of treachery against the Britons, “wassail” functions as a highly negative word that foreshadows the Saxon conquest of the land. Correlated

with, or even replacing the homicidal signal of “sax,” “wassail” serves as a latent warning of the ethnic discord or of the changing dominion of insular power. This semantic pejoration of “wassail” speaks volumes about the minimal historiographical effort to alter the Saxon’s bloody history.

### **3. From the Saxon to the English**

It would be interesting to see how the “ignoble origin,” represented by the combination of the words “wassail” and “sax,” will turn out in the following years. There was a growing consciousness that the English people and their language come from the Saxons. Thorlac Turville-Petre writes that “the establishment and exploration of a sense of national identity is a major preoccupation of English writers of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries” (“*Havelok and the History*” 121). One great champion of the English after the Norman Conquest was Robert of Gloucester, a chronicler who wrote in the English vernacular around the late thirteenth century. He is unsparing in his praise of his native land, stating, “Engelond his a wel god lond / ich wene ech londe best” (1).<sup>28</sup> While Robert’s chronicle stems ultimately from Geoffrey’s *Historia*, he establishes the name “England” as existing from the very beginning or even before Brutus’ founding of the land: Brutus and his men “come verst to engelond / þe verste men iwis / þat euere wonede in engelond” (482-83). Perhaps due to his strong affection for his native land, the episode of Hengist’s treachery is fraught with guilt and emotional conflict: “Þis were lo vre faderes of wan we beþ suppe ycome / Þat wiþ such trayson abbeþ þis lond þus ynome” (2696-97). Despite his encomium to England, it is striking that Robert is deeply aware that “vre faderes” settled in England through “trayson,” a statement which clearly indicates the genealogical connection between the English of the present and the “Saxons” of the past who committed that “trayson” in conquering the country. By the same token, Robert Mannyng, a contemporary chronicler,

also recognised that the English and their language have their origin in the Saxons. His opening observation in his *Brut* chronicle makes this fact explicit, gives a succinct overview of the English history:

After þe Bretons þe Inglis camen,  
þe lordship of þis lande þai namen.  
South & north, west & est,  
þat calle men now þe Inglis gest.  
When þai first among þe Bretons  
þat now ere Inglis, þan were Saxons  
Saxons, Inglis hight alle oliche,  
þai aryued vp at Sandwyche  
in þe kynges tyme Vortogerne  
þat þe lande walde þam not werne,  
þat were maysters of alle þat þe toþire.  
Hengist he hight, & Hors his broþire,  
þes were hed, als we fynde,  
Where of is comen oure Inglis kynde. (35-48)

This is a strong assertion that “oure Inglis kynde” has its root in the founders of the Saxon “Hengist” and “Hors,” admitting the continuity as well as the transition of the insular dominance from “Bretons” to “Saxons” that took place earlier in the history of the island. Calling it “þe Inglis gest,” which is a noteworthy, heroic deed of the English, Mannyng corroborates the popularity of the history from the English point of view—whether the “gest” is disgraceful or not.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed subsequent authors of the *Brut* chronicles come to express slightly

different attitudes towards the ignoble origin of the English “gest.” The “sax” episode symbolises both the intrusion of the Saxon language and the remnant of the invaded Britons, still represented by certain regional place names on the island. While the moment of the Saxons’ treachery is not a definitive stage in their domination, it functions as a “linguistic arrangement” that prepares for the completion of their conquest. In this respect, the renaming of the whole island and its inhabitants from “Brutus Britain” to “Hengist England” serves as a moment of “linguistic conquest.” This occurs when Gurmund, king of Africa, launches an invasion of Britain, a turning point in history during the reign of Keredic, the fifth king to succeed Arthur. Gurmund takes advantage of the unstable and troubled condition of the land brought about by the death of Arthur. Aided by Isembard, a renegade Christian relative of the king of France, Gurmund devastates the island, eradicates Christianity, and finally hands the island over to his allies, the Saxons.<sup>30</sup> In the *Brut* chronicles, this tradition marks the complete transfer of power from the Britons to the Saxons and, finally enacts the crucial renaming of the land from “Britain” to “England.” The Middle English Prose *Brut* clearly conveys the process by which “Britain” changes its name to “England.”<sup>31</sup>

When Gurmonde hade wasted and destroiede al þe lande þrouȝ-out, he ȝaf þe londe Saxones; and þai toke hit wiþ gode wille, for þe Saxones longe tyme hade desired hit, for-as-miche as þai were of Engistes Kynrede, þat first hade al þe lande of Britain; and þo lete ham bene called Englisshemmen, for-asmiche as in his tyme hit was called Engistes lande, when he hade conquered it of Vortiger þat hade spousede his douȝter. but fram þe tyme þat Brut come ferst into Engeland, þis land was called Britaigne, & þe folc Britons, til þe tyme þat þis Gurmond eftesones conquered hit & ȝaf it vnto Saxonus, and þai anone riȝt changed þe name, as is saide. (95)



In the wake of the invasion and conquest by prince Gurmund, the Saxons not only acquire the land and change its name, but also come to call themselves “Englishmen.” The author of the Prose *Brut* reminds the reader that the land “was called Engistes lande” and Hengist “hade conquered it of Vortiger.” The use of the past participle “hade conquered” makes explicit the chronological sequence, so that it is easy to understand that “England” is etymologically derived from “Engistes lande.”<sup>32</sup> Only the Prose *Brut* makes this reference back to Hengist’s time; the construction of “Engistes lande” takes place right after the “sax” episode, when the British king and the rest of the Britons are driven to Wales:

. . . alle þe Britons fledde þenns into Walys, and þere helde ham stille. and Engist went þrouȝ þe lande, and seisede alle þe lande with ffraunchises; and in every place lete caste adoune chercheȝ and houses of religioun, and destroyede Cristendome þrouȝ þe lande, and lete change þe name of þe lande, þat no man of his were so hardy after þat tyme to calle þis lande Britaigne, but calle it Engistes lande. (54-55)

This passage deserves attention because it *displaces* the “sax” episode commonly found in other versions. In fact, on this point, the Prose *Brut* departs conspicuously from earlier chronicles. As shown above in Table 1, concerning Hengist’s speech in the Prose *Brut*, Hengist does not utter the conventional “nimet oure saxas,” but instead says “faire sires! Now is tyme forto speke of loue and pees” (54). The Saxon language never intrudes into the Prose *Brut*.<sup>33</sup> Lamont finds this revision striking because it demonstrates a linguistic similarity between the Saxons and the Britons and “shifts the focus of the episode away from the treachery embodied by the Saxon language” (294).<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, the author of the Prose *Brut* might have aimed at reducing the impact of the Saxons' atrocity by deleting the command "sax" and replacing it with a more commonly recognised form of English. However, it can be also said that Hengist's comprehensible signal sounds all the more treacherous under the guise of "loue and pees." While it makes sense to the Britons linguistically, the phrase undoubtedly serves to reinforce the Saxon's hypocrisy and brutality. Furthermore, the disappearance of the "sax" signal could suggest the author's indifference to the trace of the Britons' resistance embedded in the episode. Alternatively, the narrative of "Engistes lande" takes on a more national significance and encompasses the regional difference. After all, since this notable passage has been dated prior to the coming of Gurmund, it works to foreshadow the birth of England and emphasise the continuity between the Saxons and the English, while implicitly undermining the regional and linguistic marker of the Briton resistance (21).<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the transformation from the Saxons to the English arises from the massive and wanton destruction of the island. As shown above, not only Gurmund "wasted and destroyed al þe lande þrouȝ-out" but also Hengist "in every place lete caste adoune chercheȝ and houses of religioun, and destroyede Cristendome þrouȝ þe lande." The renaming of both the regional and the national landscape surely resulted from a bloodied devastation. This suggests that England emerged and evolved from a "tumultuous beginning." Robert of Gloucester's portrayal of the two events is unique. Despite his faithful rendition of "Nimeþ ȝoure sexes" from Hengist, he skips the etymological account of the regional names. Furthermore, while other chroniclers insert the event of the land-renaming after Gurmund's invasion, he locates this event after the death of Cadwallader, the last king of the Britons. His reign suffered serious famine and pestilence. While in Brittany, Cadwallader was warned by God that he should not return to Britain because the country was under English rule. So

instead, he went to Rome and died there. After the death of Cadwallader, Robert continues as follows:

De englisse þo & saxons · þat al one þo were  
Grete tounes & castles · bigonne bulde & rere  
Þat hii adde er ycast adoun · & louerdes were þo  
& þe brutons clene al out · mid sorwe & mid wo  
& lore þo boþe al clene · name & eke lond  
Vor þat was bruteyne ycluped er · me clupeþ nou engelond  
De vewe þat were of hom bileued · as in cornwaile & walis  
Brutons nere namore ycluped · ac waleys ywis  
...  
Po brutayne was þus ylore · & þe londes name  
To þe name of engelond · yturnd hom to gret ssame (5120-45)<sup>36</sup>

The formation of England is portrayed here not through a process of *destruction* but by way of *reconstruction*, out of the shattered debris of kingdom: they “bulde & rere Grete tounes & castles / Þat hii adde er ycast adoun.” By way of contrast with the other chronicles, Robert attempts to smooth over the tumultuous origins of England. A positive creation of a new nation is further supported by the harmonious mixture of the Saxons and the English, highlighted by the phrase “al one.”<sup>37</sup> The joining of the two groups at this point is markedly distinctive: in the other *Brut* chronicles, the term “English” is increasingly used after the conversion to Christianity. The story of St Gregory’s encounter with the fair “Angle” slaves in Rome, and his subsequent decision to send a missionary to England, is a key moment that marks it as a Christian country.<sup>38</sup> Ian Kirby contends that in Layamon’s *Brut*, the Angles are cast in a sympathetic

manner: their identity is no longer associated with Saxon guilt of the past, so there is an essential distinction in the treatment of the Saxons and the Angles.<sup>39</sup> While the other chronicles reveal the tendency to stress the English departure from the Saxons, Robert's presentation of the two groups is united and more cooperative. They are both portrayed as playing a positive role in the making of England, which in turn entails the exclusion of the Britons. After the death of Cadwallader, the island's change to "þe name of engelond" sounds a death knell for the Britons, symbolically involving the complete removal of their resistance: "boþe al clene name & eke lond." The essence of land lies in a name.

There is no doubt that, although the *Brut* chronicles have their roots in the history of the Britons, the construction of England is an important theme by which each of the *Brut* chroniclers addresses the idea of English identity as having descended from the Saxons. Some chroniclers stress the continuity between the Saxons and the English, and make modifications to the description in relation to the naming and conquest of Britain, casting it in a positive light. Nonetheless, these verbal and structural mutations are minor and not drastically reformative. A mere glimpse at the vast range of the *Brut* chronicles shows that there is no crucial shift in the narrative gist that revolves around the unheroic figure of Hengist. Due to the medieval historiographical tradition that dictates that the writers abide by the original sources, the main narrative of the Saxons' act of treachery undergoes little change from its overtly negative portrayal in the *Brut* chronicles. If Wace was right to observe the English attitude of exonerating themselves from the shame of their ancestry, some ameliorative posture of rewriting would have presumably been adopted. This is suggestive of a discrepancy in feeling and action. Replicating the policy of the historical account hinders a positive identification with, and rehabilitation of, the ancestral history, making it difficult for a radical change to take place.

## Chapter Two: The Rewriting of Nationhood and Ethnic Harmony in *Havelok the Dane*

### 1. The Story of Havelok

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* is essentially a genealogy of British rulers, and the exclusively British nature of the history is challenged by its own dynastic conflicts and diverse ethnic, cultural divergences over the course of an insular history. This patchy and fragmented account of a nation bears testimony to what Michelle Warren calls the "performative multiplicity of border identity" (10) in medieval England. This capacity sets aside confirmation of ethnic, and cultural homogeneity; moreover, *Historia* does not even represent Anglo-Saxon history positively. The multi-layered character of Geoffrey's account has provided writers of subsequent periods with room for multiple interpretations, as well as the opportunity to make their own contributions to a page of history.

One of the "performative," yet powerful, contributions to Geoffrey's vision of history was made by Geoffrey Gaimar, who for the first time interpolated the story of the Danish prince Havelok into the main thread of the chronicle tradition. There are several versions of the Havelok narrative, ranging from a piece of a chronicle to stand-alone romances, which testify to its rich and stable popularity during the Middle Ages. It was first encountered in Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* (1136-37, henceforth *Estoire*) as an opening episode in the history of England up until the death of William Rufus, largely drawn from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Gaimar had perhaps heard the local myth of Havelok when he stayed in Lincolnshire. He dedicated this narrative to a patroness, Constance FitzGilbert who was married to Ralf FitzGilbert, a powerful Lincolnshire magnate from an old, established family. Considering Gaimar's creation of launching "English" historical writing and his commissions from the Anglo-Norman

aristocracy, Anglo-Norman England came to upset binary concepts of ethnicity, as it tended to coexist with other societies. The fact that Gaimar re-appropriated a number of Anglo-Saxon heroes seems to have made the English past retrievable and accessible to the Anglo-Normans, thereby promoting ethnic harmony not only through their interethnic marriage but also through their sharing of a “sense of the past” (Freeman 205). In terms of ethnicity, *Estoire* is truly unique since Gaimar’s opening episode sets the story of the Danish prince Havelok at the very beginning of English history, as an episode that took place in the time between British domination and Anglo-Saxon settlement, not in the days of the Vikings.

Drawing closely upon Gaimar’s *Estoire*, the *Lai d’Haveloc* (c. 1200) reworked the Havelok episode and presents itself as a “lay,” a form associated with Marie de France, who reputedly established its conventions. This reshaping of the style enhances the baronial figures and courtly colourings, providing a considerably aristocratic context. This is clear from the outset, in which the poet writes “I shall tell you, quite briefly, of the fortunes of a noble king, and of several other barons” (141).<sup>40</sup> The fact that the poem’s dialect is not dissimilar to the continental French might be an indication that the poet was a recent immigrant to England (Bell 28). It is likely, then, that the *Lai d’Haveloc* was composed by someone who had just arrived from the continent and found Gaimar’s account fitting for his or her literary taste. *Lai d’Haveloc* exhibits more international flavour, as determined by the poet’s background. When the counsellors advise Edelsi of Argentille, they say, “have her sent far away, over the sea to Brittany, and entrust her to your family” (147), which indicates that the continent seems more familiar to the poet (Bell 28). Therefore, it seems highly likely that the local myth was appropriated by new immigrants from the Britain-Norman frontier, meaning that English national interests hardly intervene in the poem. Its depiction of locale curiously omits national sentiments, and instead reaches for an international perspective.

While it was given literary attention in the form of independent romances, as in the Anglo-Norman lay, the story of Havelok was more frequently incorporated into histories. The trend can, for instance, be seen in these words of Scott Kleinman: “an interest in history, then, was a motivating factor in the transformation of the Havelok legend, and many of the changes of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries relate to attempts to adapt the story to various historical contexts” (272). This historical concern is constantly addressed by various historians, such as the author of the Anglo-Norman *Brut*, Peter Langtoft, Robert Mannyng, and Rauf de Bohun, according to whom the reign of Havelok is related to the assertion of Danish rights to English territories and identity. This seems to be the fundamental motivation for Gaimar, who allocates Havelok’s lifespan to the era of King Arthur’s nephew, Constantine, a Dane ruling the district of East Anglia. Gaimar’s depiction of Havelok’s reign in England is meaningful for the succession of history, and serves to justify what is purportedly the first Danish raid into the English coast in 787. Gaimar expands on the first landing of three ships of Northmen in his source, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and presents this occasion as an assertion of possession over the whole country through an appeal to its previous Danish kings, such as King Danr, Adelbricht, and Havelok.<sup>41</sup> Danish possession of the land also becomes an integral part of Cnut’s invasion of England. When he duels with Edmund, the king of England, he strongly appeals to the presence of former Danish kings:

‘Eadmund, un poi atent!  
Jo sui Daneis, e tu Engleis,  
e nos peres furent dous reis:  
l’un tint la terre, e l’autre l’out,  
chescon en fist ço ke li plout.

Tant com l'urent en poüsté,  
chescons en fist sa voluté,  
e bien sachez loi[n]gtenement  
l'urent Daneis nostre parent. (4308-16)

(“Edmund, wait a moment. I am a Dane and you are English; both of our fathers were kings, both ruled over the country, and each was master in the land. As long as it was in their power to do so, each did exactly as he saw fit. Our Danish ancestors, I’ll have you know, have been ruling here for a very long time.”)<sup>42</sup>

Cnut reminds Edmund of the fact that his ancestors have long ruled England, suggesting they divide the kingdom peacefully. Cnut’s right of possession through prior Danish sovereignty makes possible their reconciliation. Gaimar’s historically interconnected interpolation of the Havelok episode between British domination and the Anglo-Saxon settlement is clearly intended to confer legitimacy on the subsequent Danish settlement.<sup>43</sup>

Composed towards the end of the thirteenth or early-fourteenth century,<sup>44</sup> the Middle English verse romance *Havelok the Dane* (henceforth *Havelok*), a copy of a 3001-line poem, surviving in a single manuscript, is longer than prior analogues. Concerning author’s background, earlier studies reached a consensus that *Havelok* appeals to a lower-class audience and gives them a chance to envisage a “peasant fantasy of class ambition” (Halverson 150), but recent critics are prone to challenging this view. Susan Crane argues that the idea of it fitting the ethos of a lower-class audience is not new, but derives both from Gaimar’s *Estoire* and *Lai d’Haveloc*; in addition, the fact that Havelok works as hard as an ox without any complaints “hardly



recommends itself to a lower-class audience” (45). Christopher Stuart pays particular attention to the king’s reassertion of his authority, overlapping with Edward I’s rule in Scotland, and demonstrates that his sweating during work, which consolidates social order and economic prosperity, is after all “beneficial to the highest aristocracy” (355). Therefore, the poet may have been connected with the Crown. These perspectives throw light on more of the historical and political dimensions behind the ostensibly sentimental narrative of a rags-to-riches hero.

The poem has additional historical significance due to another prominent feature: the expansion of the setting from the regional to the national and a strong thematic concern with the realm of England. Although the Middle English *Havelok* is divorced from any clear chronological setting and contains no historiographical attempt to identify precedents for Danish rule in England, it nevertheless clearly asserts the Danish right to England, by means of expanding the narrative setting from a regional to the national domain. Differing from other versions, the poem begins with the laudatory and nostalgic recollection of the former King of England, Athelwold, who brought the country social stability and peace, as in “at hayse” (59) and “in grith” (61). He is described as “Engelondes blome” (63) and is seated at Winchester, the capital of England during the Anglo-Saxon period. The realm of England is clearly defined as “Fro Rokesburw al into Douere” (139) and is mentioned by name thirty-nine times (Speed 149). The king’s name and the location of his throne naturally evoke the Anglo-Saxon period, but the people under his reign are never referred to as the Saxons. Instead, when Godrich, Earl of Cornwall, is entrusted to serve as a regent for the King’s daughter, Goldeborw, the poet relates that all “þe Englis” (254) swear allegiance to him; the *Havelok*-poet relates the story in such a way that it looks back to this period of English history from an English point of view. Havelok’s ultimate coronation is held among “Henglische and Denshe” (2946), and, thus, his ascension to the English throne

through his marriage to Goldeborw strengthens the union of Denmark and England.

The uniqueness of this Middle English poem stands in marked contrast to the previous versions, which concern the story of the Danish occupation of East Anglia. Therefore, Havelok's ascent to the English throne in *Havelok* takes on further significance, symbolically implying the ethnic integration of the English and the Danish. A setting that replaces the provincial with the realm of England might be reflective of, as Judith Weiss suggests, "a patriotic attitude, a feeling for national unity, that reflects the emergence of English nationalism in the thirteenth century" ("Structure and Characterisation" 251). Along this line, recent scholars tend to claim that the story's evolution is a manifestation of regional identity in Lincolnshire, a place which saw substantial Danish settlement and retains cultural ties its Viking heritage. Stressing the close correlation between the local and national, Thorlac Turville-Petre maintains that the poem expressed a sense of "regional distinctiveness but at the same time demanded to be included in the image the nation has constructed of itself" (*England the Nation* 143). He contends that the regional difference, which is conventionally seen as an obstacle to the creation of a nation in medieval England, contributes to an awareness of national identity. Subsumed willingly into the English mainstream, therefore, "the Danes become part of the English national stock, of the *nation*" (154), a vision of harmonious synthesis of "Henglishe and Denshe, heye and lowe" (2946). From a slightly different perspective, Charles Phythian-Adams locates in the poem the potential supremacy of Danish rule, on the basis of the Scandinavian dominion spanning the North Sea and England, maintaining that "the myth is still appealing to those with Scandinavian roots, but in a somewhat more ambitious way" (131). He sees the ambitious nature of the poem in the ultimate union of England and Denmark, which calls up associations with the imperium under Cnut.

While Turville-Petre's argument is centred on the incorporation of the Danish

race into the national fabric of England, he concentrates solely on the meaning of the Danish prince Havelok, never taking into account how the other Danes are represented. The poem's portrayal of their identity is an important ingredient that influences its relation to England. Exploration of the Danish image (Havelok and the Danes in Denmark) invites us to reconsider the scene wherein Havelok's second landing in England is narrated by the English regent Godrich. The scene invokes the memory of the English past and reveals the way in which the English, foregrounding their Otherness, attempted to exclude the Danes. Exploiting the historical tensions between the English and the Danes, the *Havelok*-poet is certainly "ambitious" to appropriate the English perspective in questioning English nationalism, turning its failure into his advantage. Together with his eagerness to reassess the image of the Danish as barbarians, the poem shows a more dynamic preoccupation with contesting English than simply desiring "to be included in the image the nation has constructed of itself" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 143).

## **2. The Danish Otherness**

While *Havelok* is inexplicably bound up with the underlying vindication of the Danish claim to England, the positive image of the Danes is not the only one that this poem offers. The structural innovation of the English framework equally enhances the geographic and cultural meaning of Denmark and the Danes, which has important repercussions for the subsequent narrative, affecting the way the Danes are depicted. In this regard, a notable feature of the poem's narrative structure is highly pertinent to perceptions of the Danes: the parallel procession of the narrative between England and Denmark. The death of the English king corresponds to the death of his Danish counterpart, and the rightful heir to each throne is usurped by a treacherous regent. This plot-doubling, manifested by the two kings, is apparently "a means of intensifying the

drama and underlining its significance” (Mehl 169), but also serves to reveal the cultural difference between England and Denmark. In fact, the construction of English nationhood seems to be, in a way, foregrounded by the absence of description of Denmark. In contrast to the representation of England, which features plenty of recognisable place-names and a local realism, the description of Denmark is fragmentary and sprawling, a place completely lacking in specific locality and vividness. Among other things, what characterises Denmark most is Havelok’s fight with disorderly mobs. A sudden assault of “a ladde in a joupe, / And with him sixti other stronge” (1767-68) in Bernard Brun’s (a guardsman) house serves as a core image of Denmark, conveyed by roughly 170 lines which greatly outnumber the descriptions in the analogues: the scene “has been built up into something substantially different, and elaborated to astonishing proportions” (Smithers xlix).<sup>45</sup> Treated as a guest after sailing back to Denmark, Havelok is asked by a Danish nobleman, Ubbe, to stay in the house of “þe greyue” (1750), Bernard Brun, who is “þe best man of al þe toun” (1751). However, the house is attacked by a gang of thieves, and Havelok becomes entangled in the conflict. Described by Judith Weiss as “the true ‘epic’ struggle of the poem” (“Structure and Characterisation” 253), such an ordeal is intended to demonstrate Havelok’s martial prowess, which subsequently leads him to be knighted by Ubbe and eventually to become a king of Denmark. However, the scene is not only a proving ground for his potentially heroic feats, but is also the moment in which Havelok suffers an intense attack from the Danes. Here, he is compared to a baited-bear surrounded by dogs:

Þey drowen ut swerdes, ful god won,  
 And shoten on him so don on bere  
 Dogges þat wolden him to-tere,  
 Þanne men doth þe bere beyte.

Þe laddes were kaske and teyte

And vmbiyeden him ilkon: (1838-43)<sup>46</sup>

Havelok is wounded by the lads, “þe blod ran of his sides / So water þat fro þe welle glides” (1851-52). Such gory details of the combat between Havelok and the Danish men are given neither in Gaimar’s account nor in the *Lai d’Haveloc*. In addition, the explanation of the motivation for their attack differs. In the *Lai d’Haveloc*, Havelok is mauled because Sigar’s (called Ubbe in *Havelok*) retainers, enthralled by the beauty of Havelok’s wife, try to take her away. Their lustful desire leads to her abduction and triggers the conflict. On the other hand, what prompts the attack in *Havelok* is not immediately clear, but becomes clearer when Bernard tells Ubbe of the incident, “Comen her mo þan sixti þeues . . . / Me for to robben and pine / And for to drepe me and mine” (1957-60). Bernard stresses that it is “me” who was the target of the attack. He further adds that “Ich was þus greþed tonith. / Þus wolde þeues me haue reft” (2004-05). Thus, the poet ascribes the cause of strife to the mugging and looting of Bernard himself. However, in the Anglo-Norman versions, the attack is aimed at Havelok’s wife, which therefore enhances the impression that Havelok prowess are being tested by forcing him to save her, while the attackers in *Havelok* intend to “robben and pine” (1959) Bernard’s house. As Dieter Mehl argues, the scene elucidates “the lawless that has spread out under Godard’s rule and presents Havelok as the champion of law and order” (170). Robert Allen Rouse strengthens this point, claiming that lawfulness in Denmark is eminently absent, and that the place is “constructed as a legal vacuum” (104), which in turn “constructs England as a discrete legal space, subject to its own laws and punishments” (105). Indeed, the description of Denmark is significantly at odds with the social conditions formerly sustained in England under Athelwold, who severely punished “Vtlawes and theues” (41).<sup>47</sup> Therefore, this unique

episode no doubt contributes to the impression of Denmark as unsafe and fraught with physical violence, deeply influencing the way in which the Danes are depicted. I would say that this picture of the Dane's brutal and destructive nature is deliberately reinforced in order to draw a picture of Danish national character as inherently violent.

Turville-Petre asserts that English chroniclers of the time tended to define the nation in terms of the myth of the racial purity of "Saxon blood" (*England the Nation* 149). He highlights the episode in which the Danes become part of "English blood," and so one may wonder how "Danish blood" functions. As has been investigated, the "bloodstained" battle with the Danes symbolically represents the essential core of "Danish blood" and poses a potential threat to a unified English identity. This continental image hampers the positive identification of the Danes in terms of their intrinsic racial character and, by contrast, highlights Havelok's departure from them. Consideration of Denmark allows us to irresistibly uncover the contrast between two characterisations of the Danes. Denmark serves not only as a mirror-image but also as an ill-defined Other, while English society in the wake of the villain's usurpation is hardly plunged into confusion, but instead preserves a harmony in which the poet highlights Havelok's comfortable accommodation by a particular English environment, exemplifying a departure from the conventional image.

### **3. "Here" and "Ferd": Critique of English Nationalism**

*Havelok's* juxtaposition of the two nations enables us to uncover two opposing images of the Danes, which, I would argue, are effectively evoked in the climactic moment before England and Denmark meet in battle. After Havelok is restored to the throne of Denmark, he goes to England to retake his wife's inheritance. What deserves particular attention is that his landing at Grimsby is narrated by the English regent, Godrich. Upon hearing about the coming of the Danes led by Havelok, Godrich

encourages his country's soldiers to take up arms against the enemy. Here, he gives voice to a similar representation of the Danes as simple barbarians:

Lyþes nu, alle samen!  
Haue Ich gadred you for no gamen,  
But Ich wile seyen you forþi.  
Lokes hware here at Grimesbi  
Hise uten-laddes here comen,  
And haues nu þe priorie numen  
Al þat euere mithen he finde,  
He brenne kirkes and prestes binde;  
He strangleth monkes and nunnes baþe. (2577-85)

Responding to the arrival of the foreign intruders, Godrich enumerates Danish atrocities and laments the devastation of the English coast. His condemnation of the Danes as ruthless assailants leads to his invocation of national insecurity in the minds of his English subjects:

Wat wile ye, frend, her-offe rape?  
He moun us alle ouer-gange  
He moun vs alle quic henge or slo  
Or þral maken and do ful wo,  
Or elles reue us ure liues  
And ure children and ure wiues.  
But dos nu als Ich wile you lere,  
Als ye wile be with me dere:

Nimes nu swiþe forth and rape,  
And helps me and yuself bape,  
And slos upo þe dogges swiþe! (2586-97)

Although he initially seeks advice from his “frend,” he commands them to do “als Ich wile you lere.” Godrich’s anxiety over the imminent Danish invasion is reminiscent of Athelstan of *Guy of Warwick*, facing Danish raids and saying that “he wil slen ous alle, saunfeyle, / & strouen al our kende: / Than schal Ing lond euermo / Liue in thralldom & in wo” (239: 8-11).<sup>48</sup> However, a remarkable difference between Athelstan and Godrich is that the former’s speech sounds plausible, while the latter rings hollow.

Danish wrongdoing is thrown into bold relief, and the scene heightens the sense of national crisis. However, it appears that Godrich’s characterisation of the Danes as heathen marauders is exaggerated.<sup>49</sup> Godrich’s words turn out to be that incite his forces to fight against Danes; this, in turn, leads to scepticism of the negative Danish stereotypes. For example, the typical representation of Danes in medieval England is documented in a passage by Robert of Gloucester: “hii ne kepte hit holde noȝt bote robby and ssende, / And destrue and berne and sle and ne couþe abbe non ende, / And bote lute it nas worþ þei hii were ouercome ylome” (5214-16). The representation of the Danes includes overt acts of wanton violence, such as “robby,” “ssende,” “destrue,” “berne” and “sle.” Thorlac Turville-Petre points out that Godrich’s speech reflects “the standard image of the Viking pillagers” (*England the Nation* 153), but also claims that this image should be rejected because Godrich’s speech comes right after the mentions that Havelok established an abbey at Grimsby. In this plot, the structure of the poem itself certainly implies that Godrich’s speech is a fabrication, and paradoxically serves to undermine negative stereotypes about the Danes, therefore supporting the assumption that “*Havelok* presents a revisionist view of the Vikings, bringing justice, peace, and



social integration” (*England the Nation* 152).<sup>50</sup> I agree with his reading here, but I further argue that the scene echoes not only “the standard image of the Viking pillagers” but also the image created by the incident of Denmark. Godrich’s reference to Havelok’s troops as “þe dogges” resonates characterisations of the other Danes. Anne Scott points out that Middle English “dogge” registers as a negative and derogatory term, not an appropriate characterisation of such a noble person as Havelok. Therefore, she suggests that Godrich’s use of “þe dogges” is “the English poet’s rhetorical effectiveness in highlighting Godrich’s villainy” (156). In addition to his wickedness, however, it may also be that his villainous remark also indirectly associates him with the negative image of the Danish, which is impressively powerful and perhaps deeply ingrained by the time this scene occurs. By overlapping with the imagery of “dogges,” Godrich’s phrase creates the impression that *those* marauding Danish bands are again landing and wreaking havoc on the English coast. Hence, the murderous battle in Denmark should be considered the structural backbone of Godrich’s remark.

From this viewpoint, while the scene indeed offers “a revisionist view of the Vikings,” it symbolically conveys the transformed nature of Havelok, who *constructs* what the Danes would usually *deconstruct*. This is the poet’s sympathetic gesture of approval towards the Danish settlers in England. By making a false charge against Havelok, Godrich’s speech, which alludes to the negative image of a violent Denmark, serves to reemphasise the difference between Havelok and the ostensibly warlike Danish people. Here, a comparison with the *Lai d’Haveloc* reveals the extent to which the *Havelok*-poet gives weight to Godrich’s statement. The fact is that his speech cannot be found in any other sources, and instead the *Havelok*-poet omitted a certain part that can be found in the *Lai d’Haveloc*. As has already been mentioned, Havelok founds a priory for the salvation of the late Grim’s soul, but this fact is declared rather abruptly before Godrich speaks:

Vbbe in þe hond wit a fayr staf,  
And seyde ‘Her Ich sayse þe,  
Jn al þe lond, in al þe fe.’  
Tho swor Havelok he sholde make,  
Al for Grim, of monekes blake  
A priorie to seruen inne ay  
Jesu Crist, til Domesday,  
For þe god he hauede him don  
Hwil he was pouere and iuel o-bon. (2518-26)

The significance of the passage between lines 2520 and 2521 is not clear. After Ubbe’s ceremonial statement in Denmark, Havelok suddenly swears to build a priory for Grim in his memorial estate, namely Grimsby, which suggests Havelok is in England at the time. Walter Skeat notes that some passages are obviously omitted between 2520-2521 (103-04). The Anglo-Norman *Lai d’Haveloc* supplies what is here skipped:

Quant Aveloc fu reis pussanz,  
Le regne tint plus de treis anz,  
Merveillus tresor I auna.  
Argentille li conseilla  
K’il passast [mer] en Engleterre  
Pur sun heritage conquere  
Dunt sis uncles l’aveit jetée,  
E a grant tort desheritée.  
Li reis li dist k’il [le] fera,

Quant k'ele li conseillera.  
Sa navie fet aturner  
E sa gent e sun ost mander.  
Quant sun eire ot apareillé,  
N'i ad pus gueres atargé;  
En mer se met quant oré a  
E la reïne od lui mena.  
Quatre vinz nefz e quatre cenz  
Ot Aveloc pleines de genz,  
Armes portent e garisun,  
Vin e forment, char e peissun.  
Tant unt nagé e tant siglé  
K'a Carleflod sunt arivé. (981-1002)

(“Once Havelok was in power as king, he reigned for over three years and amassed great treasure. Argentille advised him to cross the sea to England, to regain her inheritance, from which her uncle had banished and wickedly disinherited her. The king said he would do it, since she advised him so. He prepared his navy and summoned his people and his army. When he had arranged his voyage, there was no more delay; once there was a breeze, he put to sea and took the queen with him. Haveloc [sic] had four hundred and eighty ships full of men, carrying weapons and food: wine and wheat, meat and fish. They rowed and sailed until they came to Charlfleet.” (156))

This passage from the Anglo-Norman version clearly conveys how Havelok, taking his wife's advice, decides to reclaim her inheritance and organise his military. It shows that

Havelok's desire to restore his wife's claim is the central motivating force behind his return to England, for which Havelok assembles "sa gent e sun ost." It seems that the absence of any corresponding passage in *Havelok* recounting Havelok's military preparation softens the impression of his intention to conquer England. Instead, the Middle English text presents us with Godrich's prejudicial statements about the Danes, enhancing the impact of his slander. The poet's rather abrupt reference to Havelok's construction, *not* destruction, of the priory is his ingenious invention of plot structure surely intended to emphasise the importance of Godrich's speech *per se*.

Paying attention to the diction of the Anglo-Norman passage offers further insight into the peculiarity of Godrich's speech and its nationalistic implications. It should be noticed that while in the Anglo-Norman lay Havelok's army is referred to as "sun ost," Godrich calls the Danish army "uten-laddes here" (2581) and calls his own army "ferd" (2603), through which he incites his followers to "folwe(s) alle faste me / For Ich am he, of al þe ferd" (2602-03). The Anglo-Norman "ost" was introduced into the lexicon of Middle English at the end of the thirteenth century, which was around the same period *Havelok* was composed. The Middle English word "ost" was widely used in contemporary writings, regardless of ethnicity.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, however, the *Havelok*-poet makes no mention of the word "ost" in the entire narrative, but alternatively uses either "here" or "ferd" (Both are derived from Old English). Whereas *MED* defines both terms as generally "an army,"<sup>52</sup> drawing attention to the historical implications of these two terms offers a different aspect of their usage. "Here" and "ferd" were heavily loaded words that were closely related to the ethnic and political context in the age of the Viking invasions. Richard Abels writes that "the term *fyrd* is used both in law-codes and in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to connote a royal military expedition. *Here* also seems to have meant 'army', but was mainly used to describe invading forces, especially Viking armies" (47).<sup>53</sup> While some critics counter the clear-cut definition,<sup>54</sup>

“here” in this poem seems to have a negative association with the “Danish army,” acts of plunder, and the devastation of the land, in distinction to “ferd” which indicates a national army protecting the land from foreign attack.<sup>55</sup> It seems that the connotation of “here” as a national foe is also exploited in *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild*, a nearly contemporary poem whose origin is apparently the northern England:

Out of Danmark com an here  
Opon Inglond forto were,  
Wip stout ost & vnride; (49-51)<sup>56</sup>

By calling the enemy from Denmark “an here,” the term enhances the impact of the Danish invaders through the negative connotation of the term.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, their historical connotations have gradually been lost, and these old words came to be used in a variety of senses, but it seems more likely that the *Havelok*-poet deliberately exploits these historical associations in a dramatic manner. The scene in question is the moment in which the English villain Godrich identifies Havelok’s army as “uten-laddes here,” drawing a negative association while calling his own army “ferd” to boost the morale of his forces. Thus, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the poet uses these two terms to make clear not only the different characteristics of the armies, but also to highlight a state of conflict and opposition between the English and the Danes. It has often been pointed out that contact with the Danes provided an opportunity for the English to create a sense of national cohesion and collective identity. Simon Keynes precisely notes that “the most significant aspect of the Viking impact on England in the ninth century is the impetus which the raids gave to the emergence of a sense of common identity among the English peoples” (62). The binary division formed by the connotative meanings of “here” and “ferd” contributes to

a sense of renewed English identity. Therefore, the elaborate employment of the two terms helps to bolster an intensely nationalistic atmosphere that evokes the memory of the Viking raids. To the English, the Viking raids were a historical crisis. In the poem, however, these lingering memories were deliberately forged by the English leader, Godrich, who is portrayed as a villainous and manipulative politician. The poem, therefore, provides not only an opportunity to revise understanding of the Danish settlers, but also reveals the way in which English nationalism relied upon distorted perceptions of Danish identity and the idea that the English nation is engendered through exclusion and differentiation.

It is, indeed, not uncommon for historians to assert the rise of English national identity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. R. R. Davis is one critic who observes the growing awareness of English identity, especially in the reign of Edward I. Edward's colonial enterprise against his Celtic neighbours such as Wales, Scotland, and Ireland contributed to cementing English unity, which Davis describes as the "first English empire." In this context, he comments on the nature of English power, saying that "during the course of the thirteenth century the English political community became more self-consciously, stridently, and even aggressively English in its posture" (20). He further continues that "since the ideology and mythology of English power and success remained defined in exclusively English terms, little attempt was made to create a pluralistic pan-British mythology or to explain dominance other than in terms of right and of power, English right and English power" (88). It is tempting to see *Havelok* as a conscious resistance to English supremacy. The innovation of its narrative setting explicitly attests to the poem's resonance with the political climate, but the *Havelok*-poet challenges "such an England-dominated view." What is striking in this poem is that the English military propaganda is rendered a fiction. Godrich's speech to the English is greatly significant in that it reflects a reconsideration of English

nationalism in a negative light while at the same time rewriting perceptions of Danish identity in a positive manner.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4. “Wassail” at Grimsby

It should be worth retaliating that among Middle English works, *Havelok* is unique not only in that it addresses the Danish identity but also in that it effectively revises the negative image of the Dane. This dramatises the positive ending to the poem, an ending that advocates an inclusive national identity and presents a harmonious synthesis of both English and Danish inhabitants in medieval England. Finally, I would like to point out that the poem in fact revises another historical stereotype of the pre-conquest past: the Saxons’ notorious treachery against the Britons in the *Brut* chronicle. My argument revolves around the poem’s distinctive use of the word “wassail,” which, notwithstanding its anomalous instance in the corpus of Middle English romance, has escaped consideration throughout the history of *Havelok* scholarship. By reading the medieval romance alongside the chronicle materials, I suggest that the poet’s particular deployment of the keyword “wassail” is extremely important and contributes to developing the overall theme of the felicitous merging of two cultures.<sup>59</sup> As we have seen, the term “wassail” emerges exclusively in the chronicle tradition, tenaciously linked with the episode of the Saxons’ arrival. *Havelok* is an exception which deploys “wassail” and provides the expected festive occasion: the Danish prince Havelok and the English princess Goldeborw, returning to Grimsby, share “wassailing” with the children of Grim. Although the poem does not depict the ethnic divide between the Britons and the Saxons as in the *Brut*, it features instead the reconciliation of two different peoples: the English and the Danes.

The blending of the Danish into a new English identity is a highly controversial issue. Total clarity on this point is probably unattainable as the blending of ethnic

identities into a new “English” one is an evolutionary process that occurred over centuries. Nevertheless, *Havelok* offers a glimpse of the complicated process as a literary criticism, in a way. With regards to the English-Norse linguistic mixture, Tsukusu Ito examines the extensive use of Old Norse idiomatic expressions in *Havelok* and concludes that the poem reveals, “an intricate intermingling of vocabularies, with idioms derived from both OE and ON” (174). The effect of intermingling or the co-existence of two people is also expressed in the basic plot of the story itself. Godrich’s false account is indeed important in that it not only reveals his political maneuver but also reaffirms the otherwise peaceful, not destructive, nature and process of the Danish landing and settlement in English society. Havelok embodies this. Born in Denmark as a royal heir, he is brought up and spends his formative years in England. He begins his career as Grim’s apprentice in Grimsby and optimally utilizes his trader’s expertise in Lincoln. On Havelok’s arrival in Lincoln, the poet relates the following: “Hwan he kam þe[r] he was ful wil / Ne hauede he no frend to gangen til” (864-65). The poet takes pains to describe his isolation in a new place, perhaps in a manner that evokes sympathy and underscores his subsequent adaptation to, and embracing of, it. While he spends his first two days alone, the call for bearers on the third day prompts Havelok to participate in the local industry. His prodigious physical strength and eagerness to win the job of porter earn him immediate employment by the earl’s cook, Bertram. Not only does he work harder than the others but also his character attracts the common folk of Lincoln. The poet impresses on the audience the way in which Havelok receives hospitality and unprejudiced affection from the local people. He appeals to a wide variety of people: “Him loueden alle, stille and bolde, / Knictes, children, yunge and holde / Alle him loueden that him sowen, / Bopen heye men and lowe” (956-59). Later, he acquires national attention in the local sport of “puttingge” (1042). The fourteenth-century chronicler Robert Mannyng, a Lincolnshire native, testifies to his



stone-throwing ability, reporting as follows:

Men sais in Lyncoln castelle ligges 3it a stone  
þat Hauelok kast wele forbi euerilkone,  
& 3it þe chapelle standes þer he weddid his wife,  
Goldeburgh, þe kynges douhter, þat saw is 3it rife. . . (2. 529-32)

Although he is reluctant to accept the Havelok story as fact owing to the lack of written, authoritative materials, Mannyng presents what he has actually heard people “sais”: Lincoln Castle has preserved the stone that Havelok threw farther than the other competitors as well as the chapel where Havelok and Goldeborw were married.<sup>60</sup> For the locals, the tales of Havelok’s stone and wedding are “rife,” and they intertwine to comprise the essence of the legend. Mannyng’s report thus indicates that the locals recognised the connection between Havelok’s shot-putting prowess and his subsequent wedding with “Goldeburgh, þe kynges douhter.” Indeed, the *Havelok*-poet also relates the way in which Havelok’s reputation as a champion elicits much wider attention: “þoruth England yede þe speke” (1066). His repute permeates across England, and the evil Earl Godrich, who reckons Havelok a man of low birth, forcibly marries him to the dispossessed English princess, scheming to deprive her permanently of the English throne. Godrich had promised Athelwold, on the king’s deathbed, that he would ensure Goldeborw’s succession to the throne by marrying her to the “heste/beste/fayreste/strangest” (199-200) man in the country. Although Athelwold would have meant “highest” in the sense “noblest by birth,” Godrich deliberately mistook his meaning as “tall,” saying “Hwere mithe I finden ani so hey / So Hauelok is” (1084-85).<sup>61</sup> He made Goldeborw marry Havelok because he was the most physically powerful man in the country, and it was this forced marriage to a man of supposedly low

birth that meant Goldeborw would be dispossessed of the throne. Ironically, Godrich's cunning marriage plan ultimately strengthens the princess's claim to the English throne, because Havelok turns out to be a Danish prince.

In this narrative succession, there is an indication that Havelok's marriage to Goldeborw, and, therefore, his kingship of England would not have been feasible without his local fame. This suggests that it is not only the result but also the *process* of obtaining it that the poet values highly. Robert of Gloucester, surveying the history of ethnicity in England, comments on "þe folc of Denemarch þat ne beþ noȝt ȝvt isome" (not yet integrated) (52). His statement is sometimes considered a declaration of the centrality of the Saxon descendant, so that the Danes will forever be "the Other" (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 149). However, this is not necessarily true, as Robert's account allows "noȝt ȝvt" for future possibilities. Thus, the *Havelok*-poet presents a solution to this matter by portraying the process of the Danish prince's integration into the fabric of the local life and his interaction with, and assimilation into, the body of the English people, which is a literary attempt to overcome what Robert describes as "noȝt ȝvt isome."

From this perspective, Havelok's and Goldeborw's wedding in Lincolnshire is the starting point of his successful career and can be regarded as the symbol of the assimilation of the Danes into the greater English identity. It is in this context that the "wassailing" scene in Grimsby should be examined. Shortly after the nuptial ceremony in Lincoln, Havelok and Goldeborw depart for Grimsby for fear that they might suffer further annoyance from Godrich and his retainers. In Grimsby, the children of Grim welcome them, saying "Welkome louerd dere! / And welcome be þi fayre fere!" (1214-15). Although Grim was dead by this time, the couple spend their wedding night with his children and receive a sumptuous feast:

Hwan he þis joie haueden maked,  
Sithen stikes broken and kraked,  
And þe fir brouth on brenne,  
Ne was þer spared gos ne henne,  
Ne þe hende ne þe drake.  
Metē he deden plente make  
Ne wantede þere no god mete.  
Wyn and ale deden he fete  
And made hem glade and bliþe;  
Wesseyl ledden he fele siþe. (1238-47)

Not only the convivial atmosphere but also a genuine sense of unity and communion can be seen here. As shown in the verb endings of “haueden,” “deden” and “ledden,” the agency of the actions is not a single person but the third-person plural “he” (they). I agree with Aaron Hostetter, who suggests that “their identity is not entirely clear and not important” because “the collectivity of the feast is what gives it significance” (68). This observation further contributes to the understanding of their mutual gesture, “Wesseyl ledden he fele siþe.” The expression appears loaded with significance and needs to be appreciated against the backdrop of historical and ethnic complexity. The lexical distribution of “wassail” is limited in medieval writing, predominantly appears in the chronicle histories of the *Brut* which spawned from Geoffrey’s Latin *Historia*. The use of “wassail” by the Saxon princess Rowena was an ominous foreshadowing of the Britons’ slaughter and decline, strongly recalling the negative historical connotation. By the time of the fourteenth-century, the term even tuned into a signal of slaughter by Inge, combined figure of Hengist and Rowena in an abridged version of the *Brut*, taking on increasingly negative overtones. However, it is used here with a pleasant connotation

in the shared company of the English and the Danes, symbolically represented by the English princess and Danish prince. In a more expansive sense, the phrase depicting “wassailing” among “them,” lacking in pronoun referents, reflects the communal celebration of their marriage, highlighting the harmonious hybridization and combination of different peoples.

The wedding feast in Grimsby is a turning point in the narrative. On that night, observing a miraculous flame issuing from Havelok’s mouth and a noble birthmark on his shoulder, and also hearing the voice of an angel, Goldeborw realises that her husband is in fact a great Dane, the rightful heir to the throne of Denmark. Encouraged by his wife, Havelok resolves to return to his native land to claim his inheritance and establish peace throughout the country. He is successful: the anarchic state of the land, caused by an evil regent, is restored to peace by the just rule of Havelok. The symmetry is striking between events in England and those over in Denmark: both countries’ rightful rulers are displaced by evil usurpers only for the royal lines to be gloriously restored at the end with the long reign of Havelok and Goldeborw and the perpetuation of their line in both countries through the many children of their happy union. Havelok’s impetus to reclaim his throne in Denmark also comes from communal “wassailing”; when he and his retinue are invited to the local magnate Ubbe’s court, there is a description of the joyful sharing of a toast among Havelok, Goldeborw, and the Danes:

. . . he haueden the kilþing de[y]led,  
And fele siþes haueden wosseyled,  
And with gode drinkes seten longe, (1737-39)<sup>62</sup>

It is even more significant in this light that Havelok’s ultimate rule over Denmark and

England stems from the banquet in Grimsby. It is often noted that feasts and dinners play a significant role in medieval romance and signal “important stages in the hero’s development” (Aertsen 45). In addition, Robert W. Hanning suggests that the feast in Grimsby particularly “prefigures Havelok’s final coronation feast . . . [in that it] . . . looks both forward and backward along the arc of the hero’s development” (597). Havelok’s wedding banquet occupies a central position, serving as a springboard for his ascent to both the Danish and English thrones. “Wassailing” with the children of Grim also takes on a greater resonance, considering that the poem ends with the weddings of Grim’s daughters: Havelok let Gunnild marry the Earl of Chester, who battled on Godrich’s side, and Leuiue marry Bertram the cook, who was given the earldom of Cornwall in place of Godrich. The intermarriage of Grim’s daughters anticipates Havelok’s subsequent distribution of land and property to his retinue, “His Denshe men to feste wel / Wit riche lands and catel” (2939-40). At the closing of the poem, hence, there is a peaceful dissemination of the Danes, and their collaboration and coalescence with the English, as symbolized by Grim’s daughters, strongly conveys that “the Danes become part of the English national stock” (Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* 154).

Furthermore, the ritual of “wassail” in the Danish colony, Grimsby, is of paramount importance and can be understood as a geographically-nuanced parallel to Rowena’s “wassail” in the chronicle. It should be stressed that Grimsby in *Havelok* is a more distinct locus than in any other version: in contrast to *Havelok*, Gaimar’s *Estoire* seldom mentions where Grim landed, and in the *Lai d’Haveloc*, realising that Grimsby is not an appropriate setting for a prince’s education, Grim tells Havelok to “go to England” (Weiss, *The Birth of Romance* 144), indicating that Grimsby is situated outside the English domain. In *Havelok*, the location of Grimsby is precisely specified: “In Humber Grim bigan to lende, / In Lindeseye, rith at the north ende” (734-35). It is the gateway for Havelok both to land in England and to set sail for Denmark, standing

as a pivotal site, and a liminal locus, eventually to become enmeshed in national combat (the battle of Havelok and Godrich). The distinctive nature and role of Grimsby, as well as the positive “wassailing” in it, stand out when we recall the place of Rowena’s “wassail”: a stronghold called “Thancaster,” the new construction that Hengist made using a bull’s hide, where Rowena treacherously toasts the British king Vortigern. “Thancaster,” in Geoffrey’s *Historia*, is accepted as the modern Caistor in Lindsey, located between Grimsby and Lincoln.<sup>63</sup> Although Hengist is later given the land of Kent, his initial possessions include the region of Lindsey, in which “Thancaster” is specifically identified as a “very early Saxon foothold” (Phythian-Adams 128). Charles Phythian-Adams, comparing the myths of Hengist and Havelok existing in the nearby areas, discusses the competing nature of the legends in northern Lincolnshire in the twelfth century:

It is Hengist and Haveloc who are severally seen or claimed to be connected to British Lindsey in the post-Arthurian period. As near contemporaries, it was therefore they who were the direct mythic rivals in the regional context and, beyond the pages of Gaimar, are likely to have been thought of as such in the collective memories of the two different ethnic traditions during the twelfth century. (128)

Although his observation is based on the situation around the time of Gaimar, it provides an insight into the deeper implication of the “wassailing” in Grimsby in *Havelok*. As has been demonstrated, the *Havelok*-poet displays a considerable inclination to present Grimsby as the site of every key action as well as the cradle of the Havelok legend. It seems that the poet’s apparent regionalism is underpinned by an awareness of “the collective memories of the two different ethnic traditions” which

persisted in the region. In this respect, the poet's arrangement of the "wassailing" in Grimsby appears to be a veiled response to the Saxon episode, pointedly recasting the keyword with much more positive connotations. It is possible to argue that the *Havelok*-poet subsumes the important scene of a rival's legend and encodes a history of the Saxon invasion because his narrative aims to show the ethnic affinity between the English and the Danes. By incorporating the long-held memories of the Saxon treachery and undermining the association of conflict and bloodshed, therefore, the *Havelok*-poet provides a contrasting occasion of "wassailing" in dramatizing the scene, one that puts a new, positive spin on it.

Considering the contemporary context in which the term "wassail" had tenacious ties with the *Brut* chronicles, *Havelok* represents a specific and atypical deployment of "wassail." The significance of the use of "wassail," overlapping with the established use but newly nuanced, is not only lexical but also historically and thematically relevant, a fact which has not previously been expounded upon. The *Havelok*-poet's motives for writing the poem undoubtedly arise largely from his interest in representing a smooth integration of the Danish identity into the larger English population, the re-imagining of an Anglo-Danish society in a positive way. In this respect, Havelok's local fame and his rightful marriage to Goldeborw are inextricably linked, heightening the dramatic effect of the resulting "wassailing" ceremony in Grimsby. The Saxon ritual practice, derived from the events of nearby Caistor, turns into a symbolic gesture of unity among the English and the Danes, which eases the undercurrent of ethnic tension and treachery in the chronicles. The scene serves as a contrasting alternative or antidote to the Saxon episode in that it portrays an act of "wassailing" without any invidious connotations but, rather, to celebrate the communion of two peoples. In this sense, it functions as a conscious reworking of the potentially divisive historical legacy during a time of transition of ethnic power. Consequently, the *Havelok*-poet's deployment of the term

“wassail” can be conceived of as a “literary strategy” to develop an influential leitmotif of smooth cultural assimilation between the English and the Danes.



### Chapter Three: Trojan Ancestry and Territory in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

#### 1. Troy, Aeneas, Gawain

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (henceforth *SGGK*) is widely regarded as one of the greatest of the Middle English romances, surviving in a single manuscript. Because of alliterative versification and the localised setting, the poem was once considered as a work produced in the baronial household of the northern magnates who opposed the flourishing of the central capital. However, the *Gawain*-poet can no longer be associated with a man of a parochial locality and mindset: the poem is now more aptly read as a work which negotiates the matrix of local, national, and international points of view.<sup>64</sup> As Ad Putter cogently puts it, the author is apparently “cosmopolitan, but not oblivious to regional identity” (*An Introduction* 36). This would suggest that Gawain’s individual adventure in the tale cannot be appreciated without its underlying framework, the so-called “Trojan frame.” Initiating his alliterative poem with a reference to the European civilization by the noble Trojans, the poet stakes a claim to an international heritage (Turville-Petre, “Afterwords” 345).

Overall, the opening stanza has generally escaped critical attention; for example, distinguished scholars such as Larry D. Benson and A. C. Spearing presented hardly any views on this stanza, nor did Elizabeth Brewer’s *Source and Analogue* consider this classical material. In his *Ricardian Poetry*, J. A. Burrow even once related that the prologue “introduces an adventure which has no significance at all for the history of kings of Britain” (96). The lack of critical attention to the prologue has stemmed partly from the assumption that the Trojan topos is a kind of literary convention, or as Derek Pearsall regards it, “something of a signature of alliterative poetry” (*Old English and Middle English Poetry* 158). Since then, several scholars have attempted to discuss the thematic relevance of the Trojan myth to the ensuing narrative that it enfolds; for

example, Malcolm Hebron regards the significance of the siege of Troy as a “metaphor of tragedy” (92) in the Middle Ages and suggests that *SGGK*’s opening reference is indicative of the doom that inevitably befalls the Arthurian court. Considering that Gawain’s humiliated adventure is received, ultimately, with light laughter by Arthur and his court, the poem could imply that “the court understandably remains unaware of its future demise” (Hodapp 26), or that “the seeds of a catastrophe that equalled the destruction of Troy” (David 408) are already sprouted. While it is tempting to situate the poem within the trajectory of the Arthurian dynasty and to read the initial destruction of Troy as an implicit parallel to the eventual downfall of Camelot, such focus on this thematic link overshadows the varied implications rich in the prologue. This chapter discusses the relatively unexplored relationship between the Trojan opening stanza and its implication for Gawain’s experience in the province. In addition, I posit that the heroic enterprises of the Trojan forefathers overlap with, and form the underpinning basis for, an individual quest of a Knight of the Round Table to the Green Chapel, which in turn reveals a unique aspect of the region—a space conventionally marginalised in the Arthurian narrative.

In essence, the opening lines of *SGGK* primarily tell of the heroic, adventurous Trojans, a powerful attraction for people of the aristocratic and royal community, as the legendary history of the siege of Troy has been both influential and inspirational in the development of Western culture. In general, most European countries have taken pains to trace their origins back to ancient Troy in order to reinforce the legitimacy of their monarchs and burgeoning national identities. In England, for example, Geoffrey’s *Historia* contributed largely to the invention of Trojan Britain, connecting Arthur, a Briton king, with an ancient lineage of Brutus, Aeneas’ grandson and eponymous founder of Britain. Regarding the use of Trojan history in the Middle Ages, Lee Patterson observes that “while on the Continent the claim to Trojan origin was asserted

perfunctorily in the course of pursuing other interests, in England it remained a powerful instrument of royal propaganda” (203). The series of introductory passages of *SGGK* indeed shows a glimpse of Britain’s origin and stresses the genealogical continuity from the Trojans to Brutus and Arthur, but it unfolds with some twists:

Sipen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,  
þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondez and askez,  
þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt  
Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe:  
Hit watz Ennias þe athel, and his highe kynde,  
þat sipen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicom  
Welneȝe of al þe wele in þe west iles. (1-7)

The founding journey of Aeneas and his kin’s westward *translatio imperii* (transfer of rule) are presented here with a special focus.<sup>65</sup> There has been much debate as to the identity of “þe tulk who þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt” (3), because a man convicted of treason would not normally be considered “þe trewest on erthe” (4). While some consider “þe tulk” to be Antenor, a recent consensus is that it refers to Aeneas, the hero being at once treasonous and honorable.<sup>66</sup> Malcolm Andrew insists that the Trojan’s contradiction, which fits well with the motif of “bliss and blunder” (18) in the following lines, needs not be resolved. I concur with his reading that “the Troy frame will prove a rich but ambivalent context for the following story of Gawain” (82). Blending both his inglorious and honorable elements, the poet seems to rather deliberately support the duality of his heroism and ambiguity of his treachery.

This paradoxical nature is produced by the poet’s reference to the heroic deeds performed by Aeneas after the sack of Troy, an aspect which becomes further noticeable

when compared with the contemporary account of Aeneas. In fact, Aeneas' betrayal of the city in complicity with Antenor during the time when the Greek forces surround Troy was widely recorded and invoked in medieval England. Aeneas urged Priam, the king of Troy, to negotiate peace with them to get outside the city, plotting to sell out his country to the Greeks for the sake of his own life and property. Thus he was, among others, widely recognised as an evil turncoat in the contemporary Guido-based Trojan narratives, such as *The Gest Historiale of the Destruction of Troy*, *The Laud Troy Book*, and *The Seege or Batayle of Troye*.<sup>67</sup> Sharon Stevenson points out that, in these Trojan narratives, Aeneas is portrayed consistently as “a foul traitor” who never again has the same power or influence after his flight from Troy. His lack of reputation as a martial, territorial trailblazer—an aspect that belies the effect of what Patterson calls “a powerful instrument of royal propaganda”—might reflect the literary current of the contemporary Trojan narrative as a whole, which James Simpson crisply summarizes as follows:

In the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a powerful tradition of the Troy narrative, then, has no sympathy for ancestral or imperialistic pretensions. Instead, this tradition represents the failures of militarist societies, and those failures are produced from the very territorial and matrimonial dynamics by which such centuries are driven. (419)

With this in mind, it can be said that *SGGK*, purportedly written toward the close of the 14th century, makes a rather exceptional presentation of Aeneas and his descendants as founders of the Western countries; Aeneas begets “his highe kynde,” who afterwards “depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicomme / Welneze of al þe wele in þe west iles.” Fleeting and slight as the passage may be, the crux of the Trojan prologue is

characterised by what Simpson refers to as “ancestral or imperialistic pretensions.” What is strikingly unique to the poem, then, is the initial highlight that the “treachery” serves as the very impetus for the territorial conquests and the concomitant birth of Western nations.

One question, however, arises from the series of discussions: Since ancestral treachery gave birth to the kingdom of Britain itself, what happens to Gawain after his treachery? One might also ask if he can follow the path of the Trojan eponymous heroes Romulus, Tirus, Langaberde, and Brutus, arriving at and establishing new lands. In order to address these questions, I will examine the moment and the way in which the theme of Gawain’s treachery takes place. His exchange with Lady Bertilak is one of the crucial ordeals during his sojourn in the provincial residence, which I argue evokes the curious resonance of the Trojan motif, culminating in the common issue of treachery. I suggest that the consequence of this parallel structure between the westward journey of the Trojan forefathers and that of the knight of Camelot, in terms of their territorial preoccupation, provides a new angle from which to understand Gawain’s experiences in the northwest province.

## **2. Gawain’s Treachery on the Bed**

There is little doubt that the Trojan dissemination and settlement of new lands serves as the backdrop against which the Arthurian adventure unfolds. Both Aeneas and Gawain travel into unexplored land, while their respective destinations become the setting of narrative action. In this regard, the opening passage serves to establish a parallel between the regional and national settings embedded in the story that follows. It is worth noting that while Britain is merely an outpost within the European framework of the time, this poem further pursues the island’s local regions. The names of the Trojan eponymous heroes, enumerated as “Romulus to Rome” (8), “Tirus to Tuskan”

(11), “Langaberde in Lumbardie” (12), echo the well-detailed locations of Gawain’s trek northwards from Camelot. Setting out to journey from “ryalme of Logres” (691), Gawain makes his way all over “Norþe Walez” (697). While the structure of the knight’s quest is not uncommon, the poet offers remarkably precise and detailed geography, as in “þe illes of Anglesay” (698), “Holy Hede” (700), and “Wyrle” (701). These specific areas are the setting for Gawain’s “anious uyage” (535), in which the Lady of the provincial castle represents a powerful confrontation. She appears as though she were the real combatant of the story, as the Green Knight announces to Gawain that his wife was “your enmy kene” (2406). While the exchange with the Lady might be a “romantic” interlude during Gawain’s arduous path to his destination, the scene is of paramount importance not only because it serves as an unspoken trial determining his outcome in the Green Chapel, but it also culminates in the theme of common treachery with Aeneas, the fundamental catalyst for his heroic success and territorial expansion.

With the opening reference to Aeneas in mind, the presence of the Lady on the way to the Green Chapel evokes an association with one aspect of Aeneas’ passage to the founding of a new Troy in Italy: his famous dalliance with Dido, Queen of Carthage. Examining the dialogue between epic and romance in Virgil’s *Aeneas*, Gayle Margherita elucidates the nature and subversive role of the female in *SGGK*, especially Morgan le Fay, who interrupts and delays the patriarchal, imperial discourse (i.e. the founding of an empire inevitably involves an encounter with feminine distraction). If Gawain’s odyssey to the Green Chapel is a shadow of Aeneas’ feat, the fact that Aeneas’ liaison with Dido is utterly omitted in the first stanza also heightens the impact of the similar confrontation between Gawain and the Lady, providing an opportunity to reconsider the consequence of Gawain’s journey. The point I find relevant here is that Gawain’s bedroom escapade neither serves as a springboard for establishing influence over the province, nor leads to a strengthening of the Arthurian empire. On the contrary, Gawain

is challenged in a manner that contests and even exploits his martial prowess. In essence, the heroic ineptitude of the knight is ironically foregrounded through the lens of the Trojan achievement.

During an unexpectedly amorous “hunting” by the host’s wife, Gawain strives to fend off her keen propositions, never resulting in more than prevarication and a simple kiss. Here, an inversion of the normal roles of a knight and lady is observable; the Lady takes the initiative and Gawain is forced into a passive position, as if he were prey that the Lady attempts to capture, as she gloats about many other ladies who wish to embrace him. On the first day, the Lady creeps into Gawain’s room and places herself by the bed, saying to Gawain that “Ȝe ar a sleper vnslyȜe, þat mon may slyde hider; / Now ar Ȝe tan as-tyt! Bot true vus may schape, / I schal bynde yow in your bedde, þat be Ȝe trayst” (1209-11). Her intention to bind him clearly matches the knight’s request to “deprece your prysoun” (1219), assuming a vision of conquest and subjugation (Mills 68). Vexed by the unexpected intruder, Gawain uses a great deal of wit in his response to the Lady and identifies himself as a prisoner; in fact, the scene is couched in either military terminology or connotations. The scene continues with the Lady’s blatant declaration of complete submission: “Ȝe ar welcum to my cors, / Yowre awen won to wale, / Me behouez of fyne force / Your seruaunt be, and schale.” (1237-40). “Yowre awen won,” collocated with the verb “walen,” means “take your course of action” as J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon put it, but the context suggests further nuances of martial combat. The Middle English word “won” has a wide range of implications, from “room, chamber” to “country, realm, domain,” though its central semantic core is “a place of habitation.”<sup>68</sup> In this sense, the Lady is deploying dwelling-related terms and metaphors of landholding, identifying her own “cors” as land ready for someone’s dominion. Despite her willingness, Gawain misses the opportunity for physical “conquest,” which further dramatises the knight’s impending danger.

On the third day, the Lady intensifies her advances and assumes a tenser demeanour, as the poet emphasises the manner in which she goes to the knight's chamber, dressed in intentionally titillating and radiant clothes, with her breasts and back partly exposed. The scene gradually reaches a climax of intimacy, revealing their mutual attraction:

With smophe smylyng and smolt þay smeten into merþe,  
Pat al watz blis and bonchef þat breke hem bitwene,  
And winne.  
Þay lanced words gode,  
Much wele þen watz þerinne;  
Gret perile bitwene hem stod,  
Nif Maré of hir knyzt mynne.  
For þat prynces of pris depresed hym so þikke,  
Nurned hym so neþe þe þred, þat nede hym bihoued  
Oþer lach þer hir luf, oþer lodly refuse.  
He cared for his cortaysye, lest craþayn he were,  
And more for his meschef 3if he schulde make synne,  
And be traytor to þat tolke þat þat telde a3t. (1763-75)

Even without conversation, the convivial atmosphere as well as their shared intimacy, is highlighted at the beginning of this passage, depicting a situation peppered with various words pertaining to “joy” or “happiness”: “smylyng,” “merþe,” “blis,” “bonchef,” “winne,” and “wele.” Putter notes that “the personifications of Gawain’s feelings . . . suggest Gawain is no longer acting, but being acted on. Gawain and the Lady still speak, but the poem no longer lets us listen in on their conversation, as if to suggest it has



become too private” (138). Shortly following this, however, the poet mentions a rather reversed idea, the “Gret perile” that might descend upon the two. Strikingly, this sudden change of tone recalls the motif of “bliss and blunder,” which alternate abruptly during the aftermath of the Trojan foundation of Britain mentioned in the opening stanza.<sup>69</sup> It is not inconceivable that the magnificence of the Trojan *translatio imperii* finds an unexpected articulation in a small bedroom of one provincial residence in Britain; in essence, Gawain’s bedroom adventure is a miniaturized version of his ancestral legacy.<sup>70</sup>

With the Trojan backdrop, the scene takes on a more ironic undertone. Here, it is truly the Lady, “þat prynces of pris” (that princess of honour), who “depreced” (pressed) Gawain “so þikke” (so thick). Tolkien and Gordon gloss her act of “deprese” as “press, importune,” apparently based on *OED*’s definition “to press hard; to ply closely with questions, entreaties.” According to *OED*, the record of “deprese” as “press hard” is unique to this scene throughout the history of English.<sup>71</sup> What is compelling is that the Lady’s aggressive seduction is presented using exactly the same term as the Trojan descendants who “depreced prouinces” (subjugated provinces).<sup>72</sup> The Trojans’ “depressing” of unknown regions with the use of force is transformed into the manner of the Lady’s coercive advances; her strong military-loaded approaches finally bear an identical tone to that of the Trojans.<sup>73</sup> Viewed in this light, the next phrase, “Nurned hym so neze þe þred” seems to be something of a territorial invasion, just as in the previous case with the Lady pronouncing “Ʒe ar welcum to my cors, / Yowre awen won to wale.” *MED* cites the phrase as the idiomatic expression of “near the limit,” so Gawain is understandably torn between discourtesy to the Lady and adultery to the Lord, facing a decisive moment in which to either succumb to her (or his) sexual desire, or to adamantly reject her request. The scene invokes an implicit picture of the Lady trying to cross the boundary of Gawain’s “territory” due to his unwillingness to step into her

“won.” *OED* describes this “pred” as the first instance of a sense of “a (fine) dividing line or boundary line,” which suggests that the scene implies a martial landscape. The Lady makes use of the martial self-image and engages in a military conquest over the knight, which in turn emphasises the knight’s potential inability to actualize his calibre, supposedly a gene inherited from his great ancestors.

The similarity of tone and vocabulary employed in each stanza is not a coincidence, since the concept of “treachery” underlies each scene; “great peril” for Gawain is essentially the possibility of “making sin” and becoming a “traitor” to Lord Bertilak. The word “traitor” that arises from the agony in his mind not only anticipates his acceptance of a green girdle from the Lady, but also readily echoes the treason committed by Aeneas. His chivalric principles prevent him from being unfaithful to Bertilak, but Gawain eventually betrays his loyalty to the Lord, a breach of their covenant, by not showing him the sash he obtained from the Lady. It is reasonable that Gawain attributes his fault to “treachery and vntrawthe” (2383) in the presence of the Green Knight, and vehemently condemns his own ethical lapse. While the Green Knight scarcely blames him, Gawain is humiliated and remorseful for what he has done during his stay at the castle. For Gawain, his act of treason against Bertilak hardly paves the way for anything related to territorial expansion, as it did for the Trojans. Rather, his treacherous journey concludes not with the acquisition of land but with only a piece of cloth “Loken vnder his lyfte arme” (2487).

### **3. “Here” and “Pis Londe”: Territory in Britain**

The course of the bedroom exchange with the Lady is of crucial significance for Gawain regarding the way in which he aligns himself with the legacy of his Trojan ancestry. While the bed as a locus has been “a conventional site for knightly adventure” (Mann, “Sir Gawain and the Romance Hero” 111) since the 12th century romances of

Chrétien de Troyes, the bedroom struggle further plays a vital role in the preservation and extension of Arthurian territory. Cory J. Rushton maintains that in a number of Arthurian texts, “Gawain’s willingness to jump into bed is beneficial to the stability of Arthur’s realm” (37). This is, however, not the case with the unwilling Gawain in *SGGK*, in which his bedroom combat seldom results in enhancing “the stability of Arthur’s realm.” It is worth noting here that Gawain’s devastation at the end of *SGGK* also differs significantly from contemporary poems known as “Gawain romances.” In other Middle English romances featuring Gawain as a main character, the peripheral space or populace in the area he usually visits are portrayed as unlawful and in need of central order and control. Thomas Hahn generalizes the narrative space structured between the central court and marginal sphere in Gawain romances as follows:

Their peripheral location defines a symbolic geography, and their conquest consequently enhances the myth of England’s centrality and political domination. In locating fantasies of triumph in exoticised Celtic realms, the Gawain romances render these marginal spaces a proving ground for the superiority of centralized royal prerogative. (31)

Hahn, although he writes from a postcolonial perspective, brings to light some ideological implications inherent in the relationship between the centre and the margin. The destination of the knight’s quest serves as an “exoticised” or “colonised” locus, from which the “central” knights derive their sense of superiority. In regard to *SGGK*, however, the tendencies of the surviving Gawain romances do not necessarily hold true; Gawain’s quest hardly offers a celebration of supremacy and mastery over marginal spaces.<sup>74</sup> On the contrary, the lack of his territorial success becomes even more conspicuous by the invocation of treachery in the prologue, as it does not motivate

Gawain to embark on an imperialistic undertaking, despite having such colonising potential as a progeny of Aeneas. Instead, in the wake of his treason against the host, the marginal space gains more weight and looms larger than it had previously. The geography of the areas during the knight's ride to the Green Chapel becomes prominent, and the verisimilitude of the bleak countryside landscape is conveyed through stronger alliteration; for example, Gawain rides down "þe roʒe bonk ryʒt to þe dale" (2162), while there is "no syngne of resette bisydez nowhere / Bot hyʒe bonkkez and brent vpon boþe halue / And ruʒe knokled knarrez with knorned stonez" (2164-66). It should be noted that these areas are covered by a rough slope and banks, which serve as a genuine reflection of the island of Britain; indeed, the opening stanza on the occasion of Brutus' landing states, "On *mony bonkkes* ful brode Bretayn he settez" (14) (emphasis added).

While the pilgrimage to the Green Chapel unfolds on the soil of Brutus' Britain, the knight of Camelot does not have as clear an understanding of local areas as that of native Bertilak, who constantly hunts "ouer þe londez" (1561). The geographical gap is emphasised and serves as a device for the poet to dramatise Gawain's growing anxiety and insecurity, to the extent that it leads him to conceive an undisguised prejudice against the local areas. A certain degree of misconception toward the space reaches its pinnacle in the Green Chapel, located at the bottom of the valley:

Þenne he boʒez to þe berʒe, aboute hit he walkez,  
 Debatande with hymself quat hit be myʒt.  
 Hit hade a hole on þe ende and on ayþer syde,  
 And ouergrowen with gresse in glodes aywhere,  
 And al watz holʒ inwith, nobot an olde caue,  
 Or a creuisse of an olde cragge, he coupe hit noʒt deme  
 with spelle.

‘We! Lorde,’ quop þe gentyle knyzt,  
 ‘Wheþer þis be þe grene chapelle?  
 Here myzt aboute mydnyzt  
 Þe dele his matynnes telle!’  
 ‘Now iwysse,’ quop Wowayn, ‘wysty is here;  
 Þis oritore is vgly, with erbez ouergrowen;  
 Wel bisemez þe wyze wruxled in grene  
 Dele here his deuocioun on þe deuelez wyse.  
 Now I fele hit is þe fende, in my fyue wyttez,  
 Þat hatz stoken me þis steuen to strye me here.  
 Þis is a chapel of meschaunce, þat chekke hit bytyde!  
 Hit is þe coredest kyrk þat euer I com inne!’ (2178-96)

The place is obviously unfamiliar to the newcomer knight, making him wonder “quat hit be myzt.” The Green Chapel is described as having a hole that is covered with patches of grass, looking like a cave or a fissure in an old rock. The specific and elaborate description of “þe berze” has energised scholars to specify the actual site of the Green Chapel. Ralph W. V. Elliott famously identifies this with Ludchurch, a part of a local abbey’s endowment in Staffordshire (45), confident that the poet is an innovator in describing the regional landscape, drawing less on conventions than on his own vision and experience (34-72). Despite its particularity, however, Gawain “couþe hit nozt deme / with spelle” and views it as “wysty,” “vgly,” “a chapel of meschaunce,” and “the coredest kyrk.”<sup>75</sup> The portrayal of the Green Chapel is fraught with negative speech, involving an eventual distortion. In addition, Gawain’s prejudicial understanding of the place is linked to its owner, the Green Knight: “Wel bisemez þe wyze wruxled in grene / Dele here his deuocioun on þe deuelez wyse.” His frequent allusions to the space as

“here” (2187, 2189, 2192, 2194) indicate that Gawain’s sense of belonging is far removed from that of the provincial residence he had previously enjoyed, thus alienating himself from the seemingly horrifying place.

The process by which Gawain installs his own value merits attention, particularly because his underlying assumption is totally negated. The scene takes place just prior to the revelation that the Green Knight is neither a devil nor a merciless murderer, but rather a decent country gentleman. As Sara Stanbury rightly suggests, “Gawain is repeatedly confronted with the new, with situations where his eye provides the chief interpretive focus” (110) and his dominantly “visual” interpretation turns out to be mistaken due to his lack of topological knowledge. Despite the many revelations disclosed during this scene, there still remains a disconnect between the two knights’ interpretations of the Green Chapel:

‘Bolde burne, on þis bent be not so gryndel.

No mon here vnmanerly þe mysboden habbez,

Ne kyd bot as couenaunde at kynges kort schaped. (2338-40)

These are the Green Knight’s first words immediately following the intentionally harmless third blow during the attempted beheading. Contrary to the Green Knight’s soothing manner, Gawain rushes to make necessary preparation for the expected next attack. I would like to draw attention to the Green Knight’s casual mention of the space in the passage as “here.” Obviously, “here” points to where he stands at the moment, the Green Chapel, but this explanation would have been puzzling to Gawain, since the Green Knight literally says “vnmanerly mysboden” (at the very spot). For Gawain, “here” in this context means the Green Chapel (which he has frequently identified as somewhere exotic), the very place where he was almost killed. It should be noticed that

the Green Knight's thoughts include his own household, while his use of the past participle "mysboden habbes" suggests the continuity of their shared time and place. Therefore, there is a gulf between their perceptions of the shared site, the Green Chapel.

This spatial distinction becomes further marked when Gawain asks the true name of the Green Knight. Perhaps the *Gawain*-poet's regional identifications are most clearly articulated near the end of the narrative, via Bertilak:

Syn 3e be lorde of þe 3onder londe þer I haf lent inne  
Wyth yow wyth worschyp—þe wy3e hit yow 3elde  
þat vphaldez þe heuen and on hy3 sittez  
How norne 3e yowre ry3t nome, and þenne no more?"  
þat schal I telle þe trwly, ' quop þat ober þenne,  
'Bertilak de Hautdesert I hat in þis londe. (2440-45)

Gawain and Bertilak seem to be at odds with each other. While Gawain assumes that Bertilak is the Lord ruling "þe 3onder londe," Bertilak proclaims that "Bertilak de Hautdesert I hat in *þis* londe." This suggests that, for Bertilak, the Green Chapel is his property and incorporated fully into his domain, likely a part of his hunting ground "ouer þe londez." The distance between the homely provincial court and the seemingly diabolical chapel turns out to be only two miles. When Gawain first discovers the castle in the woods, the poet relates that the palisades attached there surround "mony tre mo þen two myle" (770) (Bertilak also comments that the Green Chapel is only two miles from their location). In whichever direction Gawain heads, the Green Chapel is very close, or, rather, is a part of the provincial estate. However, Gawain's sense of spatial as well as emotional detachment from the Green Chapel persists to the end, whereas Bertilak retains his own geographical sensibility.

While Bertilak's statement might reflect the poet's sense of locality, the importance of his regional orientation is heightened if placed within the context of what the poet refers to as "Þe Brutus Bokez" (2523). While the term generally refers to any chronicles or romances about Britain (Tolkien and Gordon 131), it is readily associated with the *Brut* chronicle tradition sprung from Geoffrey's *Historia*. The *Brut* chronicles that evolved from *Historia* are assuredly one of the key sources on which the *Gawain*-poet drew, particularly in creating the Trojan foundation of Britain as the Trojan frame indicates. The reference to "Þe Brutus Bokez" reflects the poet's wish to situate Gawain's adventure of "an outrage aventure of Arthurez wonderez" (29) within a larger historical context. Putter has pointed out that the poem, though apparently removed from historicity, appropriates and takes pain to relegate marvelous adventures to the twelve years of peace in British history that Geoffrey recounts ("Finding Time" 4). In a similar vein, Richard Moll reasonably suggests that "an author could enrich a romance by implying a relationship between the hero's individual adventure and the larger narrative of Arthur's reign" (124). These readings suggest that the *Gawain*-poet surely has the *Brut* tradition in his mind. Apart from the collapse of Troy, however, the poet's primary debt to the chronicle's description in the opening stanza is the "territorial" issue of conquest and possession, which is attested to by the following passage:

Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swyþe,  
With gret bobbaunce þat burȝe he biges vpon fyrst,  
And neuenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat;  
Tirius to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes,  
Langaberde in Lumbardie lyftes vp homes,  
And fer ouer þe French flod Felix Brutus



On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez

wyth wyne . . . (8-15)

Clearly, the poet's emphasis is concentrated on the construction of new lands ("burȝe," "teldes," "homes") through the Trojans' conduct of topological naming. Following Romulus, who "neuenes hit his aune nome," the pioneers of the West together inscribed their own names on the newly discovered terrain. Named after Brutus, "Britain" is no exception, preserving its name into the present, as is the case with Rome "as hit now hat." As the poet describes the relationship between "Brutus" and "Britain," the naming is tantamount to occupying the land. This seemingly unimportant notion of assigning names is the one aspect constantly expressed in the *Brut* tradition.

In the formation of British history, "þis londe" always points to England/Britain and becomes particularly prominent due to the vernacular writer Laȝamon, of which emphasis is neither found in Geoffrey's *Historia*, nor in Wace's *Roman de Brut* (c. 1155). When recounting the story of King Lud, Laȝamon explains how the name of London was frequently changing and laments foreigners' recurrent invasions of "þis lond."

Swa is al þis lond iuaren. for uncuðe leoden;

þeo þis londe hæbbeð bi-wunnen. and ef[t] beoð idriuen hennene.

And eft hit bi-zetten oðeræ; þe uncuðe weoren. (3550-52)<sup>76</sup>

Notwithstanding that the situation is rife with invasion and conquest, his main affection and attraction for British history lie not in any specific group of people ("leoden"), but in "þis lond." Strikingly, "þis lond," neither pointing to "England" nor "Britain," is a hero of the narrative in the English *Brut* chronicle (Cannon 23-4).<sup>77</sup> This *Brut* context enables us to see a dramatic reversal of the specific through a single reference to "þis

londe” in the final confession of Bertilak in *SGGK*—it is not Gawain of Trojan pedigree but Bertilak, a provincial landowner, who, claiming that “Bertilak de Hautdesert I hat in bis londe,” exercises the same practice of naming exercised by the Trojans. This is another ironic consequence that Gawain confronts, the fact that the worldwide splendour of the Trojans’ territorial success is appropriated by the local master Bertilak, a mere dweller in the periphery of Britain. The multiple Trojan founders who manifest each territorial identity finally find a rightful heir, not upon the “centre” of Camelot but upon the “margin” of the island. The *Gawain*-poet, perhaps having a residence like “Hautdesert” and committing himself to Bertilak’s local sensibility, draws upon the significance of the phrase “bis londe” in the chronicle tradition, in an attempt to highlight his own regional, rather than national, perspective.

#### **4. Richard II and Regionalism**

The poet’s unique sense of locality is pertinent to the provenance and historical background of the poem, making the poem more than just a fictitious romance of the Arthurian world. Recent critics have increasingly narrowed down the likely origin of the poem to “a very small area either in SE Cheshire or just over the border in NE Staffordshire” (McIntosh 396), areas with a tenacious link to the royal politics of King Richard II. Toward the last quarter of the 14th century, he committed military support to the west Midlands in order to protect himself against his political opponents based in the south; his policy of peace with France provoked the discontent and rebellion of the magnates who craved war as a means of increasing their wealth. Subsequent to the exile or execution of his favourite entourages, the king began to enlist a retinue, particularly, of loyal Cheshire men to be his bodyguards, and then the region itself was valued as a royal recruiting ground, affording opportunities for numerous locals to achieve distinction in the royal service. As Michael J. Bennett demonstrates, “the regionalism of

Richard II's politics in his last years is very striking" (86). What is crucially relevant to *SGGK* here is that Gawain's bedchamber struggle takes place within the very areas of the region in question, a place interspersed with exceptionally precise allusions to the local areas of the northwest England; the knight's itinerary correlates inevitably with the contemporary movement of politics.

The Ricardian context makes it possible to view the knight's bedroom adventure inside the provincial household as a politically motivated parody. Gawain's behaviour toward the Lady resonates with a comment by Thomas Walsingham, a contemporary chronicler, that Richard II's reluctance for military action was so commonly recognised that he satirizes the courtiers by saying that "several of them were soldiers of Venus than of Bellona [Goddess of War], more valorous in the bedchamber than on the field of battle" (248).<sup>78</sup> This passage is more than just a critique of courtliness in the context in which a reputation for moral inadequacy prevails in the royal household during the 1380s and 1390s. W. M. Ormrod suggests that such an effeminate depiction of the courtiers could be "compatible—and even complicit—with the more explicit allegations of homosexuality" (298). In this context, the validity of viewing Gawain's bedroom scene through Walsingham's remark can also be supported by the fact that if Gawain had had sex with the Lady, he would have done likewise to the host, a veiled insinuation of homosexual relations. The implied homosexual relations between Gawain and the Lord could have been a warning to the sexually decadent milieu of the court and also an attempt to otherwise promote heterosexuality according to the Christian norm (Dinshaw 222-23). In any case, it is highly likely that Gawain's behaviour in the "bedchamber" instead of "battlefield" functions as an implicit caricature of the courtiers of the time, turning the overall temptation scene into a "wicked satire" of the Ricardian royal ethos (Bowers 18).<sup>79</sup> A specific example of this satire is in the term employed for Lady Bertilak, "þat prynces of pris" (that princess of honour), which might also have an

intentional mocking effect.<sup>80</sup> That the title is attached to the Lady during the critical situation that threatens the knight reinforces Gawain's comedic role, as he has been repeatedly referred to as "prince" up until the time of the bedroom scene.<sup>81</sup> The title "prince" is inappropriate and unusual for Gawain, since only Arthur is qualified for that title in the kingdom of Camelot. There are, however, several occasions in *SGGK* where Gawain is referred to as "prince" in the sense of "the knight."<sup>82</sup> The anomaly of the reference to Gawain as "prince" can be demonstrated, for example, in comparison with that of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, a contemporary poem that recounts the waning of the Arthurian empire. According to my count, there are 33 occurrences of the term in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, most of which are used in the general sense of "a person who has the chief authority in any society or group; a ruler, commander, governor" (*OED*, 3. a). The term also points to Arthur (1726 2155, 2477, 2844, 4014, 4049, 4224): the poet twice refers to Arthur as "our prince" (2155, 4224), as if identifying himself with the side of the Britons. Despite so many uses, however, the term never refers to Gawain. By contrast, his challenger, Sir Priamus, is referred to as "prince" several times (2595, 2811, 2916), perhaps because it alliterates with his name.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, it should not be overlooked that the range of its use in *SGGK* is concentrated on the scene following Gawain's arrival at the provincial court, when he receives a warm welcome by the local denizens who "presed þat prynce to honour" (830). This rousing hospitality by a great "press" of people eager to rubberneck and learn skillful manners and noble speech results in an unexpected, ironic turn of events, when "prince" Gawain is "depressed" by the "princess" (the Lady) to the point of committing treason against the host.

The skilful turn of the poet's address to the princely term has further relevance for royal and regional politics of the time, highlighting a distinctively local, territorial history. The use of "prince" was part of Richard II's strategy to promote the use of new terms concerning royal address. From 1390 onward, the king increasingly employed a

number of new titles such as “your highness” and “your majesty.” The adaption of this new vocabulary was a tactics by the king to restore and reassert his royal authority, dignifying the image of the king to his subjects. “Prince” was an old and familiar term of lordship, and not an invention of this period, although this era was the first in which the royal subjects innovatively addressed the king as “prince” in correspondence. Previously, this had been a customary practice of the clerical elite. Dating back to Roman law, behind the promotion of the term lies the king’s wish to be an independent law-maker who brings peace and unifies the kingdom (Saul 863-4).<sup>84</sup> It is interesting that this highly charged form of address is preferably deployed in *SGGK*, especially within the context of provincial courtiers heartily inviting Gawain into their household. Furthermore, from a regional point of view, the title “prince” is evidently a keyword that conveys the unique regional history of Chester. In 1397, the county palatine of Chester was elevated to the status of a principality, due to Richard II’s tremendous affection for the region, and the new title of Prince of Chester—*princeps Cestrie*—was incorporated into the royal style of letters issued by Exchequer of Chester (Davis 261-2). With the new seal of the principality engraved, the area assumed the importance of political geography, capturing a notable concentration of royal power to the extent that, whether temporarily or not, it established a status equivalent to England itself.<sup>85</sup>

Therefore, Gawain’s regional experiences in the bedroom locus and the Green Chapel take on significant, if not explicit, actuality. What is particularly striking is that both provincial scenes relate to and contest Gawain by calling attention to the matter of territorial, regional identity reflected in the opening stanza. The knight’s quest is far from “depressing provinces” like his Trojan ancestry, rather culminating in the discovery of one of the salient “provinces” in one corner of Britain. Including the final destination of the Green Chapel, the provincial household (and, by extension, the regional property of Bertilak, “*pis londe*”) emerges as a clear site within the region that

articulates its identity.

## Chapter Four: The *Reeve's Tale* and Regional/Marginal Identity

### 1. The “Strange” North of England

The *Canterbury Tales* is a hotchpotch of literary genres, such as romance, the saint's life, fabliau, moral exemplum, beast-fable, and other kinds of narrative, recounted by an assortment of tellers characterised by different age, sex, profession, and social background. The location of the narratives also ranges from the English local village to the cities of Rome, Greece, Syria, and others. Chaucer cherishes this diversity, often celebrating a scene as “Diverse folk diversely they seyde” (I 3857) or “Diverse men diverse thynges seyden” (II 211). However, the mélange of people and their tales is bound together with one condition, namely, nationality. The pilgrims rushing into the Tabard Inn are all “from every shires ende / Of engelond” (I 15-16). The *General Prologue* unfolds with the Christian culture of pilgrimage “to seken straunge strondes, / To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes” (I 13-14) and then places “England” within that tradition. The Middle English word “strange” here, modifying “a country/region/location, or geographical feature”, is employed in the sense of “foreign; unfamiliar, unknown, remote” (*MED* 2 (a)). Obviously the “ferne halwes” (distant shrines) indicates places such as Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela, contemporary religious destinations for pilgrimage. With an adverbial tag of “specially,” the opening lines establish a shift of focus from the “straunge strondes / sondry londes” overseas to the domestic (here, the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral). This opening anticipates the further extension of multiple regional identities.

Situated within this continental overview, the narrowing of focus creates an impression that the nature of English people is essentially “strange.” Gathered at Tabard by sheer coincidence, they are in essence “strange” to each other. *The Canterbury Tales*

is a collection of tales by “strange” and “sundry” folk from every corner of England, such as the Wife of Bath, the Clerk of Oxford, the Shipman of Dartmouth, and the Reeve of Norfolk. Crucially, regionalism is at the thematic heart of *The Canterbury Tales*. Therefore, the pilgrimage is not merely a visit to “straunge strondes” abroad, but also fundamentally a chance encounter with “internal” differences in England, a great opportunity to make new acquaintances.

A visit to “distant places” means that, for some, the pilgrimage to Canterbury is a journey from far-off provenances and remote counties in England. The adjective “far” is frequently attached to people and events that relate to the North of England in *The Canterbury Tales*. Constance in *The Man of Law’s Tale* drifts to the shore “Fer in Northumberlond” (I 508) and the yeoman in *The Friar’s Tale* dwells “fer in the north contree” (III 1413).<sup>86</sup> The most impressive of all is in *The Reeve’s Tale* in which Cambridge students come from “fer in the North” (I 4015). This sense of distance is physically referenced and its alterity mentally and culturally constructed. In the Middle Ages, the North of England is a geographic, cultural alterity, occupying a peculiar presence for the rest of the region. Originating from a passage of the prophet Isaiah as well as St Augustine’s paraphrase, there are well-known biblical discourses that associate the North with the home of Lucifer, a diabolical realm forsaken by God’s grace (Kellogg 414). In reality, it was an important borderland responsible for the military protection of English territory from the foreign incursion of the Scots, while at the same time it evoked fear as a landscape. In the early Anglo-Saxon period, there were seven principal kingdoms, Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex and Wessex. In the seventh and eighth centuries Northumbria, among others, flourished as a locus of cultural and intellectual learning, attested by the fact that most Old English extant writings have a Northumbrian origin. However, the polarity of the North/South divide was accentuated by Viking raids that reoccurred from the eighth century. It is



well known that, during the turmoil of the Danish invasion, King Alfred lamented in his preface to *The Cura Pastoralis* that “So completely was learning fallen away in England that there were very few on this side of Humber who could understand their divine service in English or translate even a letter from Latin into English; and I think that there were not many beyond the Humber.”<sup>87</sup> The river Humber often stands as a borderland that demarcates the North and the South, as in the case of *Havelok the Dane*, in which Grim, Havelok’s foster father, initially lands by the shores of Humber. By the twelfth century, Geoffrey of Monmouth takes over the territorial concept of the North beyond the Humber, a region subject to invasion and friction of different peoples. The region provides a refuge for the Saxons in danger, where they fortify towns against the Britons. The proximity to Scotland helps to strengthen the defence, while the area was chaotic and threatening for the Britons. Geoffrey notes, “It was an inhospitable place, devoid of Britons, but readily accessible to foreigners. Its very position had made it suitable for Picts, Scots, Danes, Norsemen and the others who landed to lay the island waste” (162). The disorder and conflict among different races compounded the image of the North/South divide, and this progressed over time to build a negative image—an image also projected onto the people in general. John Trevisa precisely notes, “men of þe north be more vnstable, more cruel, and more vnesey,” as opposed to, “men of þe souþ beþ esier and more mylde” (II. 167).<sup>88</sup>

The hybrid nature of the northern territory also affected the language. This evocation is best observed in John Trevisa’s treatise in his translation of Ranulf Higden’s early fourteenth-century Latin work *Polychronicon*. By the fourteenth century, the historical change of the language was well known by the vernacular chronicler who makes some interesting observations on language in Britain:

As it is i-knowe how meny manere peple beþ in þis ilond, þere beþ also so

many dyuers longages and tonges; . . . Englische men, þey [þei] hadde from the bygynnyng þre manere speche, norþerne, sowþerne, and middel speche in þe myddel of þe lond, as þey come of þre manere peple of Germania, noþeles by comyxtioun and mellyng firste wiþ Danes and afterward wiþ Normans, in meny þe contray longage is apayred, and som vseþ straunge wlafferynge, chiterynge, harynge, and garrynge grisbayting. (II. 157-59)

Here, internal diversity of language in Britain is caused by “comyxtioun and mellyng” with other nations. Although Englishmen had three manners of regional speech from the beginning: northern, southern, and middle, (derived from the three manners of people of Germania), an intermingling with Danes and Normans further “apayred” (worsen, corrupt) the language. People thus speak a “straunge wlafferynge, chiterynge, harynge, and garrynge grisbayting”; that is, a strange stammering, stuttering jargon with a harsh roaring or snarling sound in speech and a gnashing of teeth accompanied by a grinding or chattering, with sounds characteristic of harsh and uncouth speech.<sup>89</sup> Trevisa goes on to describe the nature of the northern language as follows:

Al þe longage of þe Norþhumbres, and specialliche at 3ork, is so scharp, slitting, and frotyng and vnschape, þat we souþerne men may þat longage vnneþe vnderstonde. I trowe þat þat is bycause þat þey beþ nyh to straunge men and naciouns þat spekeþ strongliche, and also bycause þat þe kynges of Engelond woneþ alwey fer from þat cuntrey; for þey beþ more i-torned to þe souþ contray, and 3if þey gooþ to þe norþ contray þey gooþ wiþ greet [help] and strengþe. Þe cause why þey beþ more in þe souþ contrey þan in þe norþ, [is] for hit may be better corne londe, more peple, more noble citees, and more profitable hauenes. (II. 163)

The core of this linguistic note is extracted from Higden’s “stridet inconditum,” which dates back to William of Malmesbury’s description in his twelfth-century *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (c. 1125). Tim William Machan suggests that Higden and Trevisa only retain their faithfulness to their source as “rhetorical setpieces” (96). Nonetheless, it would be hard to deny Trevisa’s skilful expansion of original phrases, which show a drastic increase of adjectival referents in northern speech.<sup>90</sup> In particular, the difficulty of speech is marked by its idiosyncratic “sound” as “scharp, slitting, and frotynge, and vnschape”; that is, harsh-sounding, shrill, piercing, frothing, and strident speech—not clearly articulated, rude, and formless.<sup>91</sup> This causes modifications that strengthen the grating sound on the “southerner’s” ear (“we souþerne men”). Trevisa underscores this “strange” quality, attributing it to the proximity of “straunge men and naciouns þat spekeþ strongliche,” as well as to geographical distance, royal absence, and agricultural, commercial, and economic differences. Trevisa’s emphatic observation on northern language reflects a southern perspective, and therefore a slightly prejudiced evaluation of the northern tongue. The regional identification “we souþerne men” could underlies the Parson’s comment in *The Canterbury Tales*: “. . . trusteth wel, I am a Southren man; / I kan nat geeste ‘rum, ram, ruf,’ by lettre” (X 42-43). It is highly likely that Chaucer, the Londoner, had this naïve preconception and sensitivity in mind before writing about the North in his narrative, an image manufactured over time.

## **2. *The Reeve’s Tale* and the Northern Dialect**

The classic romance of *The Knight’s Tale* is followed by earthy comic story set in local areas of England. The tales in Fragment I dramatically shift the geographical focus from ancient Athens to contemporary dwellings at Oxford, Trumpington, on the outskirts of Cambridge, and finally to the back alleys of London: it “begins globally and

ends locally” (Ganim 207). Tied to local settings, it is here that interest in the North of England, or, Chaucer’s regionalism, is most clearly articulated through the form of fabliaux. While the extent of the location scales them down, the French-derived fabliaux were fundamentally a narrative genre for a broader spectrum of people, largely written by and for aristocracy and clerics. As “Diverse folk diversely” (I 3857) find the bawdy, scatological *Miller’s Tale* amusing, the fabliaux are potentially a “class-neutral” genre (Minnis 81), not restricted to the people of lower rank. Firmly associated with crude manners of the peasantry and the townsmen, the fabliaux contain a variety of themes such as sex, fornication, obscenity, which works as a satire on the groups’ perceived inferiority.

*The Reeve’s Tale* is a fabliau intended by the Reeve Oswald to “quite,” or answer, *The Miller’s Tale*. Unlike other pilgrims who laughed at the tale by the Miller, Oswald is offended by the misfortunes of the cuckolded carpenter in *The Miller’s Tale*, taking it perhaps as an affront to the carpentry profession to which he once belonged. The tale of the bested carpenter makes Oswald determined to give the Miller tit-for-tat, by the two Cambridge students who humiliate Symkyn’s wife and daughter by adultery—a double punishment for the Miller’s tale. Oswald’s tale of revenge revolves around the exchange between the proud and dishonest miller, Symkyn, in Trumpington near Cambridge, and Aleyn and John, two Cambridge students. As a miller, Symkyn was notorious for his theft and vileness, and he steals meal and corn from King’s Hall at Cambridge. In order to prevent Symkyn’s theft, John and Aleyn set out by horseback toward Symkyn’s mill. While they watch the corn being ground, Symkyn sees through their intention and unties their horse’s bridle in order to distract them from watching over the mill. The students chase their missing horses while Symkyn steals most of the flour he ground for them. Spending all day catching their horse, the two clerks must beg to stay the night at Symkyn’s house. That night, Symkyn and his family fall asleep, while Aleyn and John

lie awake, contriving a plan. Aleyn seduces the miller's daughter, Malyne, and John has sex with the miller's wife. When the miller wakes and realises what has happened, he tries to beat the students, but, his wife, mistakes her husband for one of the students, and hits him with a club. The students also beat him and flee with their stolen bread. Thus, the miller Symkyn is revenged by the students, and the riposte to the Miller's tale is complete.

While Chaucer purportedly uses several French, Flemish, and Italian sources for the basic plot,<sup>92</sup> he departs from these by introducing two Cambridge students, Aleyn and John, who hail from "Strother / Fer in the north" (I 4014-15). The clerks, who set in motion the bawdy and slapstick fabliau, are stock figures, but the creation of the two clerks speaking northernisms is Chaucer's notable departure from convention. Here, the tale intersects with the issue of the North or the geographical division between the North and the South in England, in which Chaucer addresses an aspect of his regionalism. Thus, with the two students characterised by the crowning touch of northern speech, *The Reeve's Tale* captures the founding moment of the use of dialect in the history of English literature. Chaucer's inclusion of dialectal features is certainly an attempt to enhance the literary style. For example, here are John's words to Aleyn:

Oure hors is lorn, Alayn, for Goddes banes,  
Step on thy feet! Com of, man, al atanes!  
...  
"Allas," quod John, "Aleyn, for Cristes peyne  
Lay doun thy swerd, and I wil myn als wa.  
I is ful wight, God waat, as is a raa;  
By Goddes herte, he sal nat scape us bathe!  
Why ne had thow pit the capul in the lathe?

Ilhayl! By God, Alayn, thou is a fonne! (I 4072-89)

Spurred by a sense of panic for their missing horse, John talks with a straightforward, obviously familiar mode of speech, which is a natural expression of his daily, unpretentious conversation. The northern features are exemplified at the phonological, lexical, and grammatical level. These include the unrounded reflex of the Old English /a/ sound in ‘banes/atanes, waat/raa, and bathe/lathe’ instead of the southern rounded vowel /o/. Words of Scandinavian origin (purportedly intended as a northernism, since there is no other record in his work) occur in “lathe” (ON *hlaða*) and “Ilhayl” (“*ille* + ON “*heill*”). There is also the use of “is” from the verb “to be” for the first and second-person singular of the present indicative, instead of “am” and “art.” In addition, the vocative use of “man” is worth attention as it is still used in Northern England, “to indicate familiarity, amicability, or equality between the speaker and the person addressed” (*OED*, 16 (b)). In this scene, the intense distribution of these northern elements conveys the clerks’ desperation, a sense of vividness, and emotional commitment.

The role of the northern accent and the colloquialisms of the two clerks is discussed by a number of critics from various points of view. It is true that French fabliaux frequently adopt what Chaucer calls “cherles termes” (I 3917), to exploit a variety of crude and scurrilous languages. In one way, conventional fabliaux have a liking for wordplay and double meaning, and some episodes “turn on words rather than on actions” (Muscatine, *Medieval Literature* 167). They have “sophisticated linguistic play,” which John Hines refers to as “marked” language—a language with “colloquial and familiar terms for parts of the body or basic bodily acts” (17-18). This stylistic difference in the genre might have motivated Chaucer to use a different mode of speech.<sup>93</sup> There is, however, little attempt to use specific dialects in all the analogues

of *The Reeve's Tale*, and source studies do not account for the choice of northern dialect. To explore this issue beyond the source study, J. R. R. Tolkien's "Chaucer as a Philologist," a classic influential study of the dialect, is undoubtedly a starting point. He argues the clerks' use of the northern dialect is primarily a "linguistic joke" and presents three implications of the dialect (2). These are a heightening "dramatic realism," "by-product of a private philological curiosity," and a way of gratifying "popular linguistic prejudices" (2-3). As the title "Chaucer as a Philologist" implies, Tolkien makes a thorough investigation of Chaucer's philological ingenuity in a laudatory manner as if to project his ideal image of philologist onto this great fourteenth-century poet. He admits the use of southernisms are exceptionally found in the clerks' speech, but the instance is so small and mainly due to rhyme and metre that "even a philological examiner would award Chaucer a fairly high mark for his effort" (16).<sup>94</sup>

However, Tolkien's assumption has been partially revised by the deepening of editorial and textual studies of *The Canterbury Tales*. In their text of *The Canterbury Tales* (1940), John M. Manly and Edith Rickert reveal that the Ellesmere manuscript (El), a base text for Tolkien, had in fact undergone editorial revisions, and conclude the Hengwrt manuscript (Hg) is closer to the original.<sup>95</sup> In addition, as the study of the poet's language praxis reveals, the scribe was empowered with more positive discrepancies than previously thought. For Tolkien, the remarkable accuracy of the northern dialect demonstrates Chaucer's own linguistic expertise, while critics like Norman F. Blake place more emphasis on the deliberate colouring of northernisms during the course of textual transmission, evaluating attempts by some copyists to detect and improve the original (*Non-Standard Language* 32-33). For example, the Paris manuscript (Ps), thought to have been written around 1430 by a North Midland scribe, Johannes Duxworth, displays a propensity to exert a northern influence throughout the

tale, irrespective of each character's speech. Martin Michael Crow points out the manuscript contains northern dialectal markers in both the clerks' speech and elsewhere in *The Reeve's Tale*, so that "the dialectal passages in Ps do not stand out sharply" (24). Blake values the manuscript, but does not want to argue the scribe is more skilful than the poet because Chaucer might have deliberately restrained the dialectal variations despite his great acquaintance with them. Therefore, he concludes that Chaucer intended to sprinkle "only a general flavour of a northern dialect so that his audience would readily understand what he included" (*Non-Standard Language* 33). One of the leading critics of *The Reeve's Tale*, Simon Horobin, concludes in accordance with Blake that "it seems more likely that Chaucer was concerned with imposing a flavour of the Northern dialect on the students' speech rather than achieving absolute philological accuracy or consistency" ("J. R. R. Tolkien as a Philologist" 104). Whether or not it is correct to claim Chaucer is the ideal philologist Tolkien imagines, the primary function of the dialect nevertheless seems to reside in a "linguistic joke" produced by a smack of northern atmosphere. In light of the plot, the dialect serves not only to place the characters in a comic light, but also reinforces the degree of ironic consequences on Symkyn the miller. The miller is defeated and devastated by "country bumpkins" (Muscatine, 201) or "rustic buffoons" (Pearsall, *Canterbury Tales* 188). As these labels indicate, the dialect is considered a mark of the clerks' boorishness or provincial ineptitude, a potential that dramatises subversive farce and enhances the intrinsic absurdity in the final debacle of the pompous miller.

In addition to the philological and literary perspective, more critical attention has recently focused on Chaucer's cultural and social orientation toward the North. The implication of dialect moves beyond linguistic effects and some recent critics explore the cultural and ideological dimension of dialectology that Chaucer, consciously or not, might have intended. Robert Epstein suggests that Chaucer shares an ideology close to



what Edward Said defines as an “Orientalist” project (in which philology plays an integral part) and unwittingly participates in the discourse of privileging Chaucer’s cultural centrality. For Joseph Taylor, the North is like the space Freud calls “uncanny,” which looms as “a grave threat to Chaucer’s national imagination” (474). Although common representations of Northern strangeness/otherness may be domesticated into part of a broader community, the region in *The Reeve’s Tale* nevertheless remains as “the still disembodied state of the English nation” (488). These interpretations are important in the way in which the tale brings to light, intentionally or unintentionally, the political underpinnings that legitimate Chaucer’s subject position, or, a superior image of the South as opposed to the North. Yet, these readings tend to depart from the text and are not always attested to by the plot. For example, from another perspective, Wendy Scase presents the possibility that the clerks’ vernacular simplicity of speech works as part of their “theatricals,” or pragmatic performance to pretend that “they are not from the area, and therefore cannot yet know of Symkyn’s reputation for dishonesty” (333). For Scase, the significance of the northernisms provokes humour and represents “the complex social dimensions of the conflict in which the clerks and the miller are engaged” (333). While she hypothesises that an exaggerated expression of dialect serves as a deliberate cloak for the students in fulfilling their scheme to outwit Symkyn, the exchange in their initial contact in the story denies such potential attempt:

. . . “Al hayl, Symond, y-fayth!

Hou fares thy faire doghter and thy wyf?”

“Aleyn, welcome,” quod Symkyn, “by my lyf!

And John also, how now, what do ye heer?” (I 4022-25)

Here, it is evident that they have known each other previously. Their greeting on

Christian-name terms as well as the genitive singular of the second-person “thy” conveys their familiarity, while the way the students ask of Symkyn’s daughter and wife sounds as if they had some affection for them. From the moment when Aleyn greets Simkyn “Al hayl,” they speak in an unpretentious manner in order to conceal from the miller their true purpose. However, Symkyn’s reply deserves attention as it also shows the way he receives the guests, despite their unexpected visit:

This millere smyled of hir nycetee,  
And thoghte, “Al this nys doon but for a wyle.  
They wene that no man may hem bigyle,  
But by my thrift, yet shal I blere hir ye,  
For al the sleighte in hir philosophye. (I 4046-50)

He immediately sees through their intention “for a wyle” (I 4047) and tries to compete with them for “the sleighte in hir philosophye” (I 4050). There is no need for Symkyn to care about their northernism. He just chuckles to himself, assured of outwitting them—not from the way they speak—but because of their simple-mindedness.<sup>96</sup> Symkyn is less concerned with their speech than their clerkly education and intelligence, and their dialect is not the butt of his taunt and ridicule. The well-quoted passage from Towneley’s *Second Shepherd’s Play* (c. 1430) demonstrates a contrast regarding this situation. In the play, Mak, a sheep-stealer, puts on airs like the retinue of the king, and speaks with a prominent southern accent, starting with “What! ich be a yoman” (201).<sup>97</sup> In response to this, the First Shepard demands, “Now take out that Sothren to the, / And sett in a torde!” (215). This chiding of Mak’s affection is clearly a jibe against his southern pretension.<sup>98</sup> The speaker is aware of the regional difference and its implication, and despises this manner of speech.

As represented by the first conversation between Symkyn and the students, the characters in *The Reeve's Tale* hardly have contempt for the clerks' northernisms, nor the rusticity purportedly associated with it. Rather, the scene of their encounter epitomises the rejection of dialectal potency as initiating and amplifying a "sophisticated linguistic play" inherent in conventional fabliaux. Indeed, Chaucer might be playing on the potential amusement by giving his characters northern accents, but such a linguistic effect is never actualised in the surface of storyline. On the contrary, it appears that this association is shunned in a manner that undermines opportunities for the northerners to display it. According to Higden and Trevisa, the salient feature of northern speech is not vocabulary, syntax, or grammar, but phonology, or, sound, which causes the communicative difficulty (Blake, "Nonstandard Language" 135). For example, Trevisa argue that, in "Hit semep a greet wonder how Engliche, [þat is þe burþe tonge of Engliſshe] men and her owne language and tonge, is so dyuerse of *sown* in þis oon ilond" (161), the linguistic difference between North and South dialects is marked by "sound" (emphasis added).

The purpose of the students' visit to Symkyn's place is to grind their corn and carry it home. The mill has a sexual association and the grinding of corn into flour is a metaphor for reproduction of new life. The locus of mill thus anticipates the clerks' eventual "swiving" of Symkyn's family (Lancashire 166-67). In addition, the place produces an uncomfortable sound. "Grind" also suggests the manner of speech and carries a sense of "to grind (one's teeth, tusks), gnash" (*MED* 2 (b)). The association of the mill with grinding sounds is deployed by the *Gawain*-poet, who describes sounds of the Green Knight, sharpening his scythe in the Green Chapel located northward at the border of England:

Þene herde he of þat hyȝe hil, in a harde roche

Biʒonde þe broke, in a bonk, a wonder breme noyse,  
Quat! hit clatered in þe clyff, as hit cleue schulde,  
As one vpon a gryndelston hade grounden a syþe.  
What! hit wharred and whette, as water at a mulne;  
What! hit rusched and ronge, rawþe to here. (2199-2204)<sup>99</sup>

The honing of his axe for one blow against Gawain gives off “wonder breme noyse,” which, making a whirring noise, is compared to running water at a mill. What the simile conveys is its strident din “rawþe to here.” The simile of the mill in “as water at a mulne” is presented as a place producing a head-splitting sound loathe to the ear. The northern students can be suitable candidates for making ominous noises, but they are merely looking at the mill and exchanging their northern words innocently and awkwardly.

Ironically, the eventual triumph of the northern students over the miller was triggered from the moment when Aleyn hears the bodily “sound” of Symkyn’s family at night. After they retire to bed, Aleyn and John are kept awake by Symkyn’s fart and the family’s “rowtyng” (I 4166) that resounds “two furlong” (I 4166). Aleyn takes their fart and snore as a “melody” (I 4168) and “sang” (I 4170). The scene mirrors the musical expression of *The Miller’s Tale*, in which Nicholas and Alison delight in their lovemaking described as a “revel” and “melodye” (I 3652). Here, the lover’s amorous melody is reduced to family’s noisy sleep. Such vulgar music is interestingly retold from the clerks’ perspective, which indicates that the nature of sound is indeterminate, depending upon who hears it.

In this way, while the northern dialect sounds quite different perhaps to the southern audience (like the Parson) as well as modern critics, it does not resonate a difference with the characters in the tale. So what is the role of the dialect featured in *The Reeve’s Tale*? What does Chaucer want to convey by the use of dialect missing the

opportunity to develop “sophisticated linguistic play”? Certainly, for Chaucer, the northern dialect is by no means a roughhewn travesty of a local language, because, as Tolkien admits, it is a “genuine thing” (3): Chaucer’s use of the northern dialect is not based on superficial knowledge nor halfhearted motives. Close attention to the distribution of the northern dialect in the poem provides a more positive interpretation of Chaucer’s frame of reference for the dialect. Throughout the scholarship of *The Reeve’s Tale*, few critics have discussed the way northernism fades toward the end of the tale. Tolkien first takes note of this as a “curious fact” (17), briefly explaining that “Chaucer himself probably allowed the linguistic joke to fade away as the knock-about business approached. Or he may have got tired of it before it was quite finished, as he did of other things” (17). This comment, especially that Chaucer “may have got tired of it,” seems rather surprising in light of Tolkien’s scrutiny of the accuracy and consistency with which Chaucer presents his philological insight.<sup>100</sup> This curious cluster of southernisms is evidenced after line 4236, when Aleyn, after spending a night with Malyne, says goodbye to her:

. . . “Fare weel, Malyne, sweete wight!

The day is come; I may *no* lenger byde;

But *everemo*, wher *so* I *go* or ryde,

I *is* thyn *awen* clerk, *swa* have I seel!”

. . .

Aleyn up rist, and thoughte, “Er that it dawe,

I wol *go* crepen in by my felawe,”

. . .

“By God,” thoughte he, “al *wrang* I have *mysgon*.

Myn heed is toty of my swynk to-nyght,

That makes me that I *ga* nat aright.

I *woot* wel by the cradel I have *mysgo*;

Heere *lith* the millere and his wyf *also*.”

. . .

. . . “Thou john, thou swynes-heed, awak,

For Cristes *saule*, and heer a noble game.

For by that lord that called is Seint Jame,

As I have thries in this shorte nyght

Swyved the milleres doghter bolt upright,

Whil thou hast, as a coward, been agast.” (I 4236-67) (emphasis added)

There are 98 lines assigned to Aleyn and John, of which Aleyn’s final soliloquy accounts for 18. Of course, it is not that the passage is fully rendered by southernisms, as one can easily find the occasional northernism as in “is” for “am” (I 4239); “swa” for “so” (I 4239); “wrang” for “wrong” (I 4252); “makes” for “maketh” (I 4254); and “saule” for “soule” (I 4263). This could be a scattering of “northern flavour,” but the passage contains a much more “southern flavour.” As the highlighted passages show, the density of the previous northern features peters out in favour of a drastic increase in southernisms. The most notable concentrations of southern features is the pronunciation of /o/ instead of /a/ as in “no,” “everemore,” “so,” “go,” “mysgon,” “woot,” and “also.” Tolkien points to 37 cases where Chaucer substitutes the northern /a/ for his usual southern /o/, and in this passage of 18 lines, there are at least 9 that should be a northern /a/.<sup>101</sup> Regarding the total number, 9 cases out of 18 lines are highly concentrated in one section. There are also other southern features, which includes the verbal inflection in “lith” (I 4256), which should have been “lis” (with “-s” or “-es” endings for the third-person singular of the present indicative verb).

The peculiar occurrence of southernism in this section additionally stands out when we examine this section in other manuscripts.<sup>102</sup>

Table 2 [The expected part of northernisms after line 4236]

EL	Hg	Cp	Ha4	Dd	La	Gg	Ad3
no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
evermore	evere mo	euermoo	euermo	euere more	euere mo	euere more	euer mo
so	so	so	so	so	so	so	so
go	go	go	go	go	go	go	go
is	is	am	am	is	am	is	is
awen	awen	oughne	owen	owen	owen	owene	own
swa	so	so	so	so	so	so	so
go	go	go	go	go	go	gon	go
wrang	wrang	wrang	wrong	wrang	wrange	wrong	wrang
mysgon	mysgon	mysgon	goon	mysgon	mys gone	mys go	mysgon
maketh	maketh	makeþ	makes	makes	makeþ	makyth	maketh
go	go	go	ga	go	go	go	go
woot	woot	wot	wot	wat	wote	wot	wot
mysgo	mysgo	mysgo	mys go	mysgaa	mys go	mys go	misgo
lith	lyth	lith	lith	lyes	liþe	lyth	lith
also	also	also	also	alswa	al so	also	also
saule	saule	sawle	sowle	soule	soule	soule	soule

Overall, although each manuscript varies, the great proportion of expected northernisms is changed to southernisms. This is a conspicuous tone-down of the northernisms. In addition, the above-mentioned Paris manuscript (Ps) offers a striking result. As noted earlier, this scribe shows intensification of northern features throughout so that Crow concludes “the dialectal passages in Ps do not stand out sharply” (24). However, the passage in question shows exactly the opposite with a strong tendency to embellish the lines with southernisms:

[and said] fare wel Malyn my sweet wight  
the day is comyn I may lenger byde  
but evyr *more* where *so* I *go* or ryde

I *am* thyn *owne* clerk *so* have I seel  
 . . .  
 [Aleyn upryseth ad thought] or yt were daw  
 I will *go* crepe in my felaw  
 . . .  
 be god [thought he] al *wrong* have I *gon*  
 my hed is toty of my swynk to nyght  
 that makys me that I *go* not aright  
 I *wot* wel by the cradil that I have *mysgo*  
 here *liggith* the mylner and his wife also  
 . . .  
 [and said] thou Johan thou swyneshed awak  
 for Crystes *soule* and here a noble game  
 for by the lord that callid seynt Jame  
 I have thryes in this short nyght  
 swyvyd the mylner doughtir bolt up right  
 while thou hast as a coward been agast<sup>103</sup> (emphasis added)

Regarding the entire manuscript, Crow writes that the dialect of the northern clerks may “(1) be preserved as in the original, (2) be changed to Midland, (3) be made more Northern than in the original” (22). He notes that “Northern coloring in the students’ speech in Ps depends almost entirely upon the increased number of *a*-sounds for *o*-sounds (at least three times as many as in all the rest of the manuscript) and upon the half dozen Northern words not found elsewhere in Ps” (24). Obviously, the most notable marker that distinguishes a northern speaker from a southern is the unrounded /a/ instead of /o/. However, the passage above reveals that the “*o*-sound” instead of the



“a-sound” is exclusively used and more “southern” than any other part. As far as the section in question is concerned, Aleyn’s soliloquy is therefore consistently characterised by southern dialect and the salient features of northern pronunciation are substituted for the /o/ sound.

It would be difficult to argue that this concentration of southernisms is fortuitous; it leaves room to explore further implications of the softening of Aleyn’s dialect beyond the suggestion that Chaucer got “tired” as he approached “the knock-about business.” It should not be ignored that this striking phenomenon arises just after Aleyn’s intercourse with Malyne. A series of remarks are made at the break of dawn after Aleyn “had swonken al the longe nyght” (I 4235). This implies that he experienced what Trevisa calls “comyxtioun and mellynge.” In Trevisa’s context, the “comyxtioun and mellynge” leads to the adaption of a grating sound as “straunge wlafferynge, chiterynge, harraynge, and garraynge grisbayting.” In contrast, it is striking that Aleyn’s speech, far from being unintelligible, takes on a more southern tone. It alleviates rather than exacerbates the foreignness of the northern dialect, gesturing towards an admixture of the two distinct regional languages.

Viewed in a literary context, the bedroom escapades of Aleyn and John in Symkyn’s household result in various mergers and re-orientations, culminating in the following situation:

Who dorste be so boold to disparage  
My doghter, that is come of swich lynage?  
And by the throte-bolle he caughte alayn,  
And he hente hym despitously agayn,  
And on the nose he smoot hym with his fest.  
Doun ran the blody strem upon his brest;

And in the floor, with nose and mouth tobroke,

They walwe as doon two pigges in a poke; (I 4271-78)

In the wake of Symkyn's sally of anger, they get into a rough-and-tumble fight to the point that it is almost impossible to identify who is beating whom. Interestingly, it is extremely difficult to know whom the pronouns are referencing, especially from line 2774 ("he/hym/his"), which refer either to Aleyn or Symkyn, and this obscurity of identification leads to the third-person plural "they." The following scene also adds to this vagueness: the miller's wife, while assuming that both fighters are clerks, cannot determine, "nyste who was who" (I 4300). "The bloody stream" also symbolises Symkyn's failure to climb the social ladder. Beginning with Symkyn's attempt to bring his wife into his family, he was most interested in "lynage" or family "blood." In a way, Symkyn's family, including his parson father-in-law, are attracted to "worthy blood of auncetrye" (I 3982). While Taylor observes that "the violence the clerks perpetrate implies a decidedly unfunny remainder of the North that redoubles not only on the miller but on the tale's nationalist impulse" (486), it seems that the final brawl between the clerks and the miller underscores more that they have coalesced and become both linguistically and physically indistinguishable.

The decrease of northernisms contributes to the inclusive, if not pleasant, consequence in which the nature of the clerks and the miller's family merges, indicated by the linguistic shift from northernism to southernism. Towards the end of the tale, this gestures towards the removal of regional boundaries. Aleyn's eventual aptness in speaking with a southern accent might demonstrate one way of adapting to different modes of speech. This is hardly surprising in *The Canterbury Tales*, in which linguistic shifts often occur within each tale. Investigating the use of English, French, and Latin words in *The Summoner's Tale*, Tom Shippey elucidates the degree of linguistic shifts

among the characters, observing that “the friar adapting his role to different audiences . . . Thomas’s wife wavering between her natural way of speech and her loyalty to her husband, on the one hand, and her desire to please and impress a distinguished visitor on the other . . . Thomas also responding to the friar’s language and beginning to imitate it, but with sarcastic contempt rather than pleased coquetry” (“Bilingualism and Betrayal” 143).<sup>104</sup> This can also be applied to the language shift in the passage in question in *The Reeve’s Tale*. Regarding the shifts in language use, Trevisa also notes as follows:

As it is i-knowe how meny manere peple beep in þis ilond, þere beep also so many dyuers longages and tonges; nopeles Walsche men and Scottes, þat beep nouȝt i-medled wiþ oþer naciouns, holdeþ wel nyh hir firste longage and speche; but ȝif the Scottes þat were somtyme confederat and wonede wiþ þe Pictes drawe somewhat after hir speche; but þe Flemmynges þat woned in þe weste side of Wales haueþ i-left her straunge speche and spekeþ Saxonliche i-now. (II. 157, 159)

The passage points to the diversity of insular language and the possibility of a linguistic shift and accommodation to a different manner of speech, as “þe Flemmynges þat woned in þe weste side of Wales” can now speak “Saxonliche.” With this diversity in mind, Chaucer might have wished to hint, through minimizing northernisms, that the northern clerks “i-left her straunge speche and spekeþ *Southernlice* i-now” (although no character in the tale initially regards the clerks’ speech “strange”). Chaucer creates the scene of a conscious switch by the northern student from one potentially unfamiliar language to one with more familiarity, which is not thoroughly southern but is spoken “southernlice.” Accordingly, the northern speech thus proves to be a variety of insular

languages that particularly demonstrates the changeable and flexible nature of the English language.

### **3. The North through a Norfolk Teller**

The use of northernisms should be examined through the lens of the teller, because the northern students are a creation of Oswald the Reeve (by way of Chaucer). His role as a teller of *The Reeve's Tale* provides a rationale for the appearance of the northern students. In fact, attention to Reeve the teller is indispensable in further examining the significance of the dialect. The conditions that the interpolation of the dialect is connected with as well as the particularity of the regional/social background of Oswald, accounts for the reason why the dialect only occurs in the tale by Reeve, not the Shipman of Dartmouth, nor the Wife of Bath. The Reeve's regional origin is explicit in the *General Prologue*: "Of Northfolk was this Reve of which I telle, / Biside a toun men clepen Baldeswelle" (I 619–20). This geographic reference specifies a village in northern Norfolk and carries wider implications.

It is often noted that Norfolk men had a reputation for being crafty, treacherous, and avaricious.<sup>105</sup> These negative images were fomented perhaps as they gradually gained influence in the city. Given the growth of wool production in East Anglia, the area supplied enormous numbers of immigrants to the city of London. Norfolk merchants especially prosper and accumulate wealth with cloth manufacture and the wool trade, becoming parvenu immigrants. While they had occupied the highest proportion of influx into the capital in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, their social and economic contribution did not go hand in hand with their linguistic influence.<sup>106</sup> Although immigration population persisted, dialectal influence on the English of London was most prominent from the Central Midland regions, not from East Anglia, especially after the mid-fourteenth century (Samuels 411).<sup>107</sup> This might

escalate the overall irony that underlies *The Reeve's Tale* narrated by a Norfolk man. In this connection, Thomas J. Garbaty points to an additional level of humour regarding the local's use of northernisms:

Translated into Chaucerian context it means, what all Londoners knew, that Oswald the Reeve, a Norfolk man, spoke a kind of backwoods patois which was not only ludicrous in polite society, but which would have been barely understood with the best intentions. And of all the pilgrims *en route*, this man . . . took it on himself to mimic a provincial dialect in his own barbarous jargon. What hilarious nonsense and what a brilliant connotative linguistic joke! (6-7)

If this is true, a “linguistic joke” becomes “brilliant” and “connotative” in terms of what Chaucer has acutely perceived as the status of Norfolk language as it gradually changed and yet was incomprehensible to the London ear. While this would heighten the irrationality of the tale by the Norfolk man, the sequence of the Reeve's verbal communication in the prologue can hardly be labelled as a “backwoods patois” nor “barbarous jargon.” As for the students' northernisms, Chaucer must have inserted it “with sufficient frequency to maintain the impression of their native speech without courting the danger of making it incomprehensible” (Elliott, *Chaucer's English* 390). Oswald's utterance is intelligible, but his dialect in the prologue carries a more positive nuance than his “nonsense” self-deprecation.

As is well known, not only the clerks from the North but also the Norfolk Reeve are granted the use of certain recognisable features of regional speech. Horobin suggests that while the density of the Reeve's dialect does not match the students' northernisms, the characterisation of Norfolk speech is more thorough than has been

credited (“Chaucer’s Norfolk Reeve” 611). The most prominent linguistic feature the Reeve presents is the occasional use of the first-person singular pronoun “ik.” This pronoun is used three times “Ik” rather than “I”:

“So theek,” quod he, “ful wel koude I thee quite.” (I 3864)

But ik am oold; me list not pley for age. (I 3867)

And yet ik have alwey a coltes tooth. (I 3888)

Here, the verb “theen” is combined with first-person pronoun “ik” in the emphatic phrase “So theek” (so may I thrive) to abbreviate “so thee ik.” In fact, other characters in *The Canterbury Tales* make use of this expression, but with the more standard forms “so theeche” (VI 947) and “so thee’ch!” (VIII 929), but “theek” only occurs in the Reeve’s prologue. The “ik” form has been frequently associated with the linguistic traits of Norfolk, a view underpinned by several critics. For example, Richard Beadle mentions that it “doubtless intended to be recognized as East Anglianisms” (94). Drawing on the same phrase in *Piers Plowman*, William Langland has Covetise make his confession with exactly the same asseveration, “I swere now (so thee Ik!)” (224), found in the A, B, and Z versions (Fletcher 102). Only in the B version, Covetise adds, “I kan no Frenssh, in feiþe, but of the ferþest ende of Northfolk” (235).<sup>108</sup>

Recently, however, Philip Knox reconsiders the Reeve’s unique language and casts doubt on the received assumption that “ik” has a distinctly Norfolk connection. Surely, there is some evidence for “ik” being the first-person singular pronoun in the region’s dialect, but a close examination of the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English (LALME)* shows that there is no graphemic record of a Norfolk “ik” in the period of late Middle English. Therefore, this would exclude the composition of the *Canterbury Tales*. In fact, “ik” is no longer the dominant form in East Anglia by the

first quarter of the fourteenth century, replaced by the “I” form with no final consonant. Consequently, by strongly associating the character of the Reeve with the more popular, literary type of Langland’s Covetise, Knox undermines Oswald’s tenacious “dialectal” link as well as Chaucer’s “attempt at realistic mimesis of contemporary Norfolk speech habits” (122).

Knox also maintains that the clerk’s northernisms should be taken as “something very different from the language of the Reeve, not merely in the extensiveness of their characterisation, but in their fundamental nature” (122-23). It is, however, fairly difficult to consider the Reeve’s marked language separately from another marked northernism that appears afterwards. Knox’s discussion owes much to the chronological record of the “ik” form in a contemporary linguistic map of East Midland, but he does not turn his eye to Oswald’s characterisation as an old man. Knox suggests at one point that the use of “ik” form could be “a deliberately archaic form, regional in the sense of being identifiably non-Southern, but more appropriately thought of as backwards or anachronistic” (121). In fact, this possibility of a “provincial anachronism” can be validated considering the fact that Oswald is an elderly man with a morbid reflection on old age. In the prologue, he demonstrates repetitious harping as a sign of the elderly. He variously exclaims, “ik am oold” (I 3867); “This white top writeth mine olde yeris” (I 3869); “We olde men” (I 3874); “oure asshen olde” (I 3882); “Thise foure sparkles longen unto eelde” (I 3885); and “Our olde limes” (I 3886). Defining himself as one of an aged cohort, “We olde men,” he bemoans his advanced years, but claims a moral superiority over the miller by virtue of his maturity. His identification with an “open-ers” (literally “open-arse” in its appearance) or the fruit of the medlar tree is nicely put, as the fruit cannot be eaten until it softens to a state of rottenness when stored. This simile justifies maturity or the belated ripeness of the elderly as opposed to its absolute lack in youth. Oswald is a man who has lived through his long life. Therefore, even if the “ik”

form is out of use in contemporary Norfolk, it does not follow that Chaucer failed to exploit this dialectal feature. The strong invocation of the Reeve's senility rationalises the literary context in which the Reeve is old enough to remember the dialectal residue and able to speak the language with "a deliberately archaic form." Strikingly, this is why the two northern clerks do not employ the "ik" form in their dialogues, and why Oswald does not have them speak with it.<sup>109</sup> By doing so, the Reeve displays a generational gap from the young clerks. The setting of *The Reeve's Tale* does not hark back to happenings of the time of "whilom" as in *The Knight's Tale* (of Athens) and *The Miller's Tale* (of Oxford), but of the present rural landscape in the small village of Trumpington. As the narrative setting reflects the actuality, the two students do not declare themselves as "ik," presumably because the first-person pronoun has lost its word-final consonant altogether in the northern area of England early in the history of Middle English.<sup>110</sup> Aleyn's use of "slyk" (I 4170) "swilk" (I 4171) corroborates the otherwise possibility of its use.

The Reeve's lengthy monologue on old age foreshadows and enlivens the characterisation as well as the action of the two northerners. This is not surprising as the two northern clerks are, in a way, the Reeve's "agents" in the scheme of retaliating against the Miller. Oswald's justification of his retributive justice over the Miller, "For leveful is with force force of-showve" (I 3912) echoes the legal right to redress stolen property given by Aleyn. As the latter exclaims, "Som esement has lawe y-shapen us, / For, John, ther is a lawe that says thus: / That gif a man in a point be agreved, / That in another he sal be releved" (I 4179-82). Aleyn's "esement" ("compensation, redress" with a legal association) is also relevant to the Reeve's craving for sexual "esement" (as is also the case with Aleyn). Although he states "me list not pley for age" (I 3867), he still finds in the maturity of age some vitality equal with the time of youth.<sup>111</sup> The Reeve's speech is marked by the contrast of youth and age, functioning as a specific



context that anticipates and dramatises the triumph of the youthful students over the miller. Oswald stresses no diminution of his sexual capability. With a “coltes tooth” (I 3888), he shares the same youthful desire as young Alison in *The Miller’s Tale*, described as a “joly colt” (I 3263, 3282). His “coltes tooth,” as unwaning lust, is frequently evoked through the horse-related metaphor, “Gras tyme is doon, my fodder is now forage” (I 3868). The horse he sits on is itself “a ful good stot” (I 615) and specifically named “Scot” (I 616), which, until recently, remained a popular East Anglian name for a horse. In a way, horse is the hallmark of his locality and identity. The description of the Reeve using equine terms provides the suggestive prologue since “this is the very man to relish the spectacle of the clerks’ ‘capul’ running madly after the wild mares while they shout and whistle after it” (J. A. W. Bennett 87).

The slapstick horse-chase does not conclude as sheer humiliation for the students, but moves toward the students and the Reeve’s revenge. Crucially, John’s intercourse with the wife is described with the highly connotative term, “He priketh harde and depe as he were mad” (4231). The Middle English word “priken” has a sense of the “galloping of a horse” (*MED* 4 (b)), and here the verb serves unmistakably as a pun for “sexual penetration,” with John represented as “rider.”<sup>112</sup> Symkyn’s unbridling of the clerk’s horse earlier, unexpectedly comes back on him in the form of unleashing the young students in his household.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, the moment of John’s “hard-riding” conjures up a powerfully descriptive image of the narrator Oswald. He performs his tale in a saddle of his local horse. This horseman makes repeated allusions to his “will” (I 3877, 3880, 3887) or sexual desire in which “nail” sticks. According to *MED*, citing this passage, “nail” is used figuratively in proverbs and proverbial expressions in a sense of “a piercing desire, a desire which either irritates one or binds one to someone or something” (2 (c)). A nail also literally means a “metal spike,” taken as a metaphor for Oswald’s phallus. The sharp attribute of the nail climaxes in the form

of clerks' enthusiastic "swyving" or "pricking" of Symkyn's wife and daughter. Oswald's old, but still lingering "nail" thrusts into Symkyn's wife by figuratively transforming itself into the vigorous "prick" of the young student.<sup>114</sup> John's "spurring" on the bed can therefore be read not only as the clerk's comeback for the former mortification but also as unleashing of the teller Oswald's frustration, a fulfilment of his otherwise unattainable desire. In sum, the Reeve's prologue and his tale, especially Oswald's elderly characterisation and the students blessed with youthfulness, should not be considered separately.

To return to the issue of dialect, these structural and thematic ties are further underlined by their shared geographical standing of the story of a "non-southerner." Viewed in this light, the eventual fading of the northern dialect in *The Reeve's Tale* might reveal Chaucer's conscious attempt to incorporate "Otherness," a project in which he makes sensible by making the figure of a Norfolk man as a go-between. Trevisa writes that "men of myddel Engelond, as it were parteners of þe endes, vnderstondeþ bettre þe side langages, norþerne and souþerne, þan norþerne and souþerne vnderstondeþ eþer oþer" (II. 163). Furthermore that "þe myddel men beþ somdele partyners wiþ boþe" (II. 167). Here, "partner" means "one who shares certain qualities or traits" (*MED* 2 (d)).<sup>115</sup> Oswald is the "partner" who, through Aleyn and John, ventriloquises his linguistic ability to imitate northern as well as southern dialects. It should be noted that, while his prologue smoothly "prepares the audience for the linguistic hurdles ahead" (Elliott 393),<sup>116</sup> it also suggests a glimpse of his linguistic flexibility as a Norfolk teller in the manipulation of speech without a North-South axis. By comparison with the high degree of consistency in the clerks' northernisms, the Reeve's dialect is patchy, sporadic, and more fluctuates. As the Reeve's first words in his prologue indicate, "ik" of "So theeke" immediately shifts to "I" in the following "ful wel koude I thee quite" (I 3864). The form of "I" continues to dominate especially

toward the end of the prologue (I 3871, 3874, 3883, 3891, 3910, 3911, 3915, 3916, 3917, 3918). It seems that the usage coincides with the way he regains his composure, while the earlier outburst of “ik” reflects his excited mood toward the miller. In other words, his utterance is indicative of his ability to have a command of both usages according to his mood.

The presence of a “partner” like Oswald plays a pivotal role as a “buffer” in mitigating the general anxiety over the North. As Trevisa notes, for people attuned to the southern country, but head to north, Oswald can provide “greet [help] and strengþe” (Trevisa II. 163). His marked dialect is both a “linguistic hurdle” and a linguistic *cushion*, as it were. While making ready for the appearance of the elaborate northernisms, he accommodates the levelling of his northernisms. The sparse and seemingly inconsistent, but unusual deployment of Oswald’s unique delivery in the opening of the tale implicitly agrees with or even gives grounds for the manner of Aleyn’s toned-down northernisms, integrating the northern dialect into the general diction of *The Canterbury Tales*. As a whole, forging the local affiliation between Oswald and the two clerks, Chaucer apparently tries to alleviate the impact of an allegedly “strange” dialect. Through the mouthpiece of a Norfolk man, the northern dialect and its otherness becomes part of a more realistic, daily landscape, rendering physically and mentally a remote place familiar. By way of cultural means rather than political, this could have been one solution Chaucer sought from his early career, a resolution, based on his heightened sensitivity and insight: to overcome a vernacular instability shown in the famous ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*, “ther is so gret diversite / In Englissch and in writing of oure tonge” (V 1793-94).<sup>117</sup>

#### **4. Chaucer’s Marginal Otherness**

Norfolk man Oswald is definitely a necessary piece in representing men from

every shire's end of England. He is a linguistic expert in bridging the perceived gulf between South and North. Certainly, on a personal level, Oswald the Reeve seems to be nasty and unattractive in character. People are afraid of him "as of the death (I 605). In a way, most of the pilgrims Chaucer presents are "a pretty unsavory lots" (Pearsall, "Chaucer and Englishness" 90), people with no chance to celebrate the virtue of the national character. Oswald is exactly a type in keeping with and representing this negative characterisation. Perhaps fundamentally most unpopular of all, his position in the party is "the hyndreste" (I 622). Proceeding at the rear of the group, he is situated on the "margin" of the pilgrims. Perhaps his final position is relevant to his place in the span of human days. Toward the end of the prologue, his meditation on his passing life is shown through an evocative metaphor of a wine barrel:

For sikerly, whan I was bore, anon  
Deeth drough the tappe of lyf and leet it gon,  
And ever sithe hath so the tappe yronne  
Til that almost al empty is the tonne  
The stream of lyf now droppeth on the chymbe.  
The sely tonge may wel rynge and chymbe  
Of wrecchednesse that passed is ful yore; (I 3891-97)

Drawing an analogy between a man's life and the dripping of wine in a barrel, this is a highly revealing and original metaphor of human life by Oswald. The moment of birth is envisaged as the time when a hole is broached in a new cask, from which wine flows until the end of one's life. Approaching old age, the wine does not run steadily but "drop" feebly on the "chymbe" of the barrel. Oswald's life is ending.

His perception of life in this form could inform Chaucer's sympathy toward the

character. A. H. MacLaine has shown the passage reveals Chaucer's acquaintance with the detailed structure and handling of wine casks, a description based on "exact knowledge" (129) acquired from the family's vintner business. Perhaps not far from Oswald in age, it is also possible that Chaucer, in his later years, was more drawn to the situation and a sentiment close to his, expressed symbolically as the "chymbe" of life. Here the noun "chymbe" (rim) ingeniously rhymes with the verb "chimbe(n)" (of speech, "ring out, be voiced").<sup>118</sup> Oswald's masterly use of the two homonyms strikes the crux of Chaucer's national identity on the fringe of European countries. In a broader sense, the idea of the North, spun through the Norfolk man's "sely tonge," places Chaucer as a vernacular writer of English.<sup>119</sup> Being the most sustained engagement with the image of Northern England, *The Reeve's Tale* reveals a geographical and cultural concept of the North similar to the image that Chaucer projects onto the creation of England as a whole.

Chaucer's notion of English vernacular identity in fact lies in the "chymbe" of the world, an idea that cannot be separated from his immersion in the European intellectual community. While he is regarded as the most canonical of English authors and often as its highest representative of "Englishness," recent studies have increasingly deprived Chaucer of the titular associations on the ground that there is little to prove in his literary works.<sup>120</sup> As Derek Pearsall demonstrates, Chaucer was more concerned with seeing himself as a member of the European literary set of his time, rather than vigorously trying to assert his national identity ("Chaucer and Englishness" 90). Having military and diplomatic experiences abroad, Chaucer visited a number of countries, including France, Italy, and Spain, which were imbued with the latest literary, theoretical, and cultural trends of the continental milieu. Chaucer's idea of nationhood should be situated within his engagement with internationalism, and therefore his use of English can be read as "the triumph of internationalism" (Salter 79) as well as part of

his “European project” (Pearsall, “Chaucer and Englishness” 90). However, this is not intrinsically opposed to his national sense of pride and ambition. It is highly likely that his constant exposure to the cosmopolitan environment would have fostered a distinctive English sense of national identity, further energising him to aggrandise his English identity by shrinking the distance between his native land and continental “triumphant” nations. As we can see by Chaucer’s consistent and unflinching use of his mother tongue throughout his career, it is extremely difficult to decouple the concept of his national sentiment from “the establishment of a distinctly English participation in contemporary European letters” (Olson 580). Combined together, it seems more appropriate to say that, as a vernacular writer from England’s emergent metropolis, Chaucer has an enhanced awareness of the “marginal” or “regional/provincial” identity of the English writer and explored ways to express himself, like “the projecting rim at the ends of a cask” in Oswald’s life. From this point, the representation of Chaucer the pilgrim in his tales (his own self-presented persona in *The Canterbury Tales*) deserves attention in relation to the marginal/provincial dynamism of transformation. An interesting description of Chaucer appears when Harry Bailey questions his identity:

. . . “What man artow?” quod he;  
“Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare,  
For evere upon the ground I see thee stare.  
“Approche neer, and looke up murily.  
Now war yow, sires, and lat this man have place!  
He in the waast is shape as wel as I;  
This were a popet in an arm t’enbrace  
For any woman, smal and fair of face.  
He semeth elvyssh by his contenance,

For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce. (695-704)

Chaucer is depicted as both a “popet” (young girl) in a woman’s arm and something “elvish.” The reference to Chaucer the pilgrim as “elvish” is ironic, as he literally embarks on a tale peopled by denizens of popular romance as the “elf-queene” and the giant, which conclude in a blunt rebuff by the host. The Old English “elf,” used synonymously with the French-derived “faierie,” is also mentioned in the preamble to *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* in a manner that foregrounds its absence, “now kan no man se none elves mo” (III. 864). This stands in a stark contrast to the plenitude of the magical in the old days of King Arthur, when “Al was this land fulfild of fayerye” (III. 859). For Chaucer, the fairies are a vanished race (although this is, of course, through the Wife of Bath), or something that existed in the distant past. It is therefore surprising when the reference to the “elf” as an adjective is revoked and modified by Chaucer as if he was from the realm of the otherworld, or even a remnant of a creature from the ancient past.

This portrayal is more nuanced when considering Chaucer’s personality and identity. *OED* cites this mention of “elvish” and defines it as “tricksy, mischievous” (2 (b)), while *MED* offers the literal “(c) elf-like, otherworldly.” Obviously, Chaucer does not behave “elvishly” in the *OED* sense. On the contrary, when he looks down, he is asked to “looke up murily” by the host. The host’s inviting him to “Approche neer” suggests that Chaucer is slightly distanced from his fellow-pilgrims. J. A. Burrow suggests that the reference to “elvishness” is related to Chaucer’s own poetic self-portrayal. Throughout his corpus, there are pervasive images of Chaucer as someone who is reserved and private. His reluctance to socialise, “unto no wight dooth he daliaunce,” prompts the outgoing Harry to pose a question as to his identity. The consistent description of his “introverted” persona overlaps with his “elvish” appearance to present him as “mysterious, strange” (*MED* (b)); it could even be, as

Burrow suggests, more to do with preserving “his authorial privacy and privilege against readerly intrusion” (“Elvish Chaucer” 106).

However, beyond the personal note, there is much deeper significance in Chaucer’s representation as “elvish.” By presenting himself as part of a vanished race in a highly self-deprecatory manner, Chaucer is questioning this association. After his earlier composition of works focusing on continental themes, *The Canterbury Tales* was the culmination of Chaucer’s literary career. An heir to classic French, Italian, and Latin legacies, it is curious that his persona keeps a low and undistinguished profile among the pilgrims. This is even more surprising if, as Helen Cooper suggests, “Englyssh Gaufride” (1470) in *The House of Fame* is not Geoffrey of Monmouth, but the author himself, Geoffrey Chaucer, who implicitly places himself among his great predecessors (“The Four Last Things” 58-9).<sup>121</sup> Indeed, Chaucer seems to have positioned himself humbly, while transposing his ambition to compete with and rival other European writers. Calling his poem *Troilus and Criseyde* “litel book” and “litel myn tragedye” (V 1786) (emphasis added), he presented a determined, albeit reserved, resolution to “kis the steppes” of classical authorities such as “Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace” (V 1791-92). Chaucer’s seemingly *belittling* demeanour regarding vernacular composition cannot be appreciated without noting “the layers of irony and concealed assertion” (Evans, et al. 320).

Chaucer’s attitude of effacing his identity allies him with the tradition of the romance genre, which is “a kind of national trope of modesty in which the vernacular is too insignificant even to be mentioned as a corpus” (Smith 101). In his own way, Chaucer followed this English tradition of modesty, even though he may not really have considered his work as insignificant. This strategic humility is applicable to his “elvish” representation. Drawing on Richard Firth Green’s argument that the fairy/elf is the entity that represents the geographical and cultural fringe of the world, Kathy Lavezzo



suggests as follows:

Green well demonstrates the geographic isolation of fairies, nicely suggesting how Chaucer's distance from the pilgrims offers a kind of microcosm of the place of fairies in the human world. Chaucer's spatial relationship to the pilgrims offers, of course, a microcosm of the place of England in the world as well. Like fairies (and like Moslems), the English inhabit the borders of Christendom. Chaucer's elvishness, in other words, suggests the problem of English isolation engaged by Guy of Warwick and cited by Thopas. When Chaucer gazes upon the ground—that is, English territory—and calls himself elvish, he is also calling himself English. (“England” 62)

Representing “a microcosm of the place of England in the world,” Chaucer's otherworldliness turns out to be no less than a manifestation of his genuine Englishness. His English identity is best articulated through a sense of separation and isolation from the “global” hubs of Rome or Jerusalem: however, this also contains a covert resolution to overcome England's marginality and otherness.

As a player on an international stage, Chaucer the pilgrim must have been gazing downwards with a sneaking hope and confidence that England would one day become a prestigious nation on a par with other European nations. In order to promote his homeland into the continental mainstream, Chaucer presented his vernacular literary tradition with a lighted-hearted distance. *Sir Thopas* might be seen as a literary backwater, yet it has a high degree of “sophistication,” and is more than a simply burlesque vernacular composition (Cooper 309). Moreover, the tale seems to cast doubt upon the notion of exaggerated nationalistic feeling. In a way, *Sir Thopas* can be read as a lampoon of excessive national fantasy. It is interesting that *Sir Thopas*, or Chaucer's

“beste rym” (VII 928), suffers misery, as it is not only interrupted by the host Harry Bailey halfway through, but also receives heaps of abuses: “thy verray lewednesse” (VII 921); “drasty rymyng” (VII 923); “rym doggerel” (VII 925); “nat worth a toord” (VII 930). This blunt criticism, which could represent an inner reflection of the creator Chaucer, reveals the mockery of the vernacular tradition, and the tale serves as “Chaucer’s deliberate and delicious parody” (Loomis 139) of the English tail-rhymes romances, especially *Guy of Warwick*. Turning it into a butt of joke, it is clear that Chaucer is not associating himself as an English writer with the old “rym”: far from representing the vernacular literary tradition, Chaucer registers an emotional detachment from it.

In this regard, it should be noted that the *Tale of Sir Thopas* is cut off shortly after Chaucer enumerates chivalric heroes like “Horn child, Ypotys, Beves, Sir Gy, Sir Lybeux, Pleyndamour” (898-900) as well as “Sire Percyvell” (916). The idea underlying the catalogue of the heroes (whatever their nationality) somewhat echoes the opinions voiced in Higden’s *Polychronicon*, and Trevisa’s translation. In the section that depicts King Arthur’s feats of arms against the Saxons, Higden butts in and poses a question about the historical veracity of Arthur, although the continental deeds of this king of the Britons are highly eulogised by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Interestingly, what puzzles Higden is that Arthur’s continental deeds and victories were not recorded by writers abroad (Geoffrey himself wondered about this historical absence). Trevisa’s translation runs as follows:

Also Gaufridus seiþ þat hym wondreþ þat Gildas and Beda in al here bookes spekeþ nouzt of Arthur; but I holde more [wondre] why Gaufridus preyseþ more so moche oon þat al þe olde, famous, and sooþ writers of stories makeþ of wel ny3 non menciouun. But on cas it is þe manere of everiche nacioun to overe

preyse som oon of þe same nacioun, as þe Grees preyseþ here Alisaundre, and þe Romayns here Octovianus, and Englishe men here Richard, and Frensche men here Charles, and Britouns here Arthur. þat happeþ ofte, as Iosephus seiþ, for fairenesse of þe storie, oþer for likynge of reders, oþer for to preyse here owne blood.

. . .

But it may wel be þat Arthur is ofte overpreysed, and so beep meny oþere. Sop sawes beep nevere þe wors þey madde men telle magel tales, and som mad men wil mene þat Arthur schal come aȝe, and be eft kyng here of Britayne, but þat is a ful magel tale, and so beep meny oþere þat beep i-tolde of hym and of oþere. (V 337, 339).

Trevisa astutely observes the general proclivity to “overe prayse” someone from each nation, establishing a highly “objective” view as to how respective nations acclaim their national heroes. Admitting that these stories tend to exaggerate, Trevisa goes on to interpolate the comment and describes the story of the return of Arthur to Britain as “magel tales” (botched, tall story) as against “Sop sawes” (true statements), and those who believe it as “some mad men.” Trevisa’s dispassionate analysis indicates the presence of “some mad men” craving for heroes to privilege their “owne blood,” while it also reveals a form of articulating a nation that existed in medieval English: one that is created by means of emotional commitment or the creative exercise of “magel tale.”<sup>122</sup>

Viewed in this light, Chaucer’s creation of *Thopas* is more than a mere parody of vernacular romance. On the surface, Chaucer does not seem to be presenting an English hero, since, geographically, *Sir Thopas* is entirely set in Flanders, and Thopas himself is born “in fer contree, / In Flaundes, al biyonde the see” (VII 718-19). However, the

national image of Flanders is readily associated with England. David Wallace suggests that “in the field of vernacular literature . . . Flemish and English were as peas in a pod: retarded, west Germanic, country cousins in the kingdom of the French” (102). According to the mainstream of European culture, England and Flanders are like two sides of the same coin. It is fair to say that what happens in the tale really relates to Chaucer’s homeland.<sup>123</sup> Cutting a prominent figure among other “romance” heroes, Thopas bears “the flour / Of roial chivalry!” (VII 901-2). He gallops on the field “as he were wood” (VII 774) in search of the “elf-queene” (VII 788) for the sake of his “love-longynge” (VII 772). His motive to spur for the elf-queen in “The contree of Fairye” (VII 803) is not ascertained. Thopas can be read as one type of what Trevisa refers to as a “mad” man. He projects a chivalric ideal onto “roial” heroes, and his “wood” pricking serves as an equivalent act to the fantastical or imaginative formation of a “sovereign” nation. Even the host’s round abuse of the tale “drasty/doggerel” sounds as if it is spurning its innate “magelness,” as well as its inartistic dullness. One of the reasons that the *Tale of Sir Thopas* is mocked could be that the “fairy” element constitutes an entire theme of the tale, in which the comical knight neither accounts for nor calls into question the identity of these creatures of fantasy.<sup>124</sup>

As far as Chaucer is concerned, he is neither one of the “mad men” nor as “wood” as a naive-looking Thopas in pursuit of something “less tangible” in a fairy country. Thopas is not just a comic figure, but also an implicit caricature of the “mad men” who are involved rather innocently in imagining a sovereign nation. This in turn reflects Chaucer’s mild, distanced critique of this mental psyche in his attempted formation or presentation of a larger, more dynamic community.<sup>125</sup> On one hand, Chaucer, like Higden and Trevisa, renders Thopas as a pseudo-nationalistic figure as if to create a form of national exultation. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Chaucer’s light burlesque captures the essence of another vernacular tradition, characterized by “romantic”

adventure that takes place in a provincial setting. *Sir Thopas* probes into the presence of peripheral region of a “far country,” from which a sense of desire for a larger community arises. From the vantage point of a London-based cosmopolitan, *The Tale of Sir Thopas* not only encapsulates a standard element of vernacular literary convention, but also bears witness to the way in which the tradition, rooted in and emerging from a “far country,” has the imaginative dynamics to desire a broader community. By the end of the fourteenth century, Chaucer had been exposed to the vernacular romance writings that existed, and had also broadly grasped the “provincial” vitality that was embedded in them. This marginal or local vigour can be applied to the situation in England with a much broader geographical perspective. As a tale recounted by “elvish” Chaucer, the world of *The Tale of Sir Thopas* was an allegory of England, his homeland replete with “strange/fairy” inhabitants, but also a “strange” country not locked up in mystery, but open to scrutiny. Located at the perceived edge of Europe, Chaucer engages in a negotiation of the English identity by deliberately cloaking, as well as highlighting, an “elvish” otherness/strangeness.

Chaucer’s calm judgement toward the fictitious construction of the nation points towards the potential transformation and dynamism of future change. In this respect, Chaucer’s sense of Englishness can be best extracted from the process in which he switches from what is seemingly “Other” to something more prestigious. Returning to the issue of region and language, the image of the North, narrated through the lens of a Norfolk man, represents an essential part of Chaucer’s vision of England, which has inherent provincial/marginal dynamism. *The Reeve’s Tale* reveals a geographical and linguistic marginality analogous to this notion that Chaucer projects onto the creation of England as a whole. As to the language, Chaucer knew well not only that “ther is so gret diversite / In Englissh” (V 1793-94) but also that it varied greatly over time:

Ye know eek that in forme of speche is chaunge  
Withinne a thousand yeer, and words tho  
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge . . .  
(*Troilus and Criseyde* II. 22-24).

Having an acute consciousness of linguistic changes over time, he must have also been aware that the phenomenon could happen *vice versa*: the purportedly “strange” northern dialect would have “*pris*” (esteem) in the future. This is why the northernisms in *The Reeve’s Tale* are neither the butt of a joke nor malicious slander, but an attribute of the victors that is capable of being incorporated into the southern mode of speech. In making the first attempt to imitate a dialect in the history of English literature, Chaucer’s intention in introducing the northern dialect arises not only from his personal philological interest, but also from his underlying ambition to include dynamically provincial otherness and transform it into a prestigious nationality.

## Conclusion

Middle English texts register a particular preoccupation with the reconsideration of the British historical landscape from the local/regional standpoint. As represented by the deeply ingrained cultural memory of Hengist's and Aeneas's treachery, every stage of England's coalescence and development was overwhelmed with dynastic conflicts and moments of discontinuity. The chronicles recount how the island experienced repeated intrusions and invasions by different peoples and feature a narrative rife with linguistic, ethnic, and cultural divergences over the course of an insular history. Robert of Gloucester celebrates the land of England "So clene lond is engelond · & so cler wip outen hore" (180) and its people "Þe veireste men in þe world . . . So clene & vair & pur 3wit" (181-82), highlighting the purity of both: "So clene is al so þat lond · & mannes blod so pur" (184). However, behind the ostensibly nationalistic manner expressed in this admiration of the "purity" of the English, Robert has a keen awareness of the troubled historical trajectory of the territory and the people: "Engelond hap ibe · inome & iwerred ilome" (43); "Supþe hap engelond ibe iwerred ilome" (51). Therefore, the primary purpose of his chronicle is to "telle of al þis *wo*" (56) engendered by continued "*war*" (emphasis added). These times of suffering and tribulation caused by attacks from outside, according to Robert, coincided also with an insight into "our father's" settlement in England through Hengist's treason, serves as the potential impetus for the (re-)creation of a new collective vision of national identity.

The complicated history that unfolded on the English soil provides a backdrop for engagement with Middle English literary creation. This is best observed in the opening stanza of *SGGK*, in which after the Trojan founding of Britain by the eponymous Brutus, the *Gawain*-poet alludes *not* to a celebration of the new nation's foundation but to the changing and conflicting nature of the insular terrain:

On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez  
 Wyth wyne,  
 Where werre and wrake and wonder  
 Bi syþez hatz wont þerinne,  
 And oft boþe blysse and blunder  
 Ful skete hatz skyfted synne.  
 Ande quen þis Bretayn watz bigged bi þis burn rych,  
 Bolde bredden þerinne, baret þat lofden,  
 In mony turned tyme tene þat wroʒten.  
 Mo ferlyes on þis folde han fallen here oft  
 Þen in any oþer þat I wot, syn þat ilk tyme. (14-24)

Recalling the fluctuating fortunes whose rise and fall the island has seen, the poet never assures us that Brutus achieved a lasting peace. The realm is unstable and fickle, a place where “werre and wrake and wonder” by turns befall, and “blysse and blunder” occur simultaneously. The formation of Britain is conflation of tumultuous history and placid advancement, hardly enshrining a smooth succession of homogenous people, but instead foregrounding the division of internal difference. This is a passing summary of the contour of the *Brut* chronicles, embodying the essence of views of British history in medieval England.

It is during this sequence of historical changes that the poet has the Green Knight rush into the Arthurian court. While the internal friction among “Bolde . . . baret þat lofden” (The men who love strife) is a fitting context with which to herald the intrusion of the Green Knight, the knight turns out *not* necessarily to be a seed of discord as he shares his words with the court upon his arrival: “What, is þis Arthures hous . . . Þat al þe rous rennes of þurʒ ryalmes so mony? / Where is now your sourquydrye and your



conquestes, / Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes?" (309-12). The Green Knight's provocation reminds the court that the spread of Arthurian fame through many realms has revolved around the court's military deeds and imperial conquests. These inflammatory words suggests that the "battle-loving warriors" are in fact Arthur and his followers and that the uncertainty of the insular province has rendered itself a proving ground for the weakness and flaws of the court and the central authority. The *Gawain*-poet introduces the Green knight of a "local emissary" from the Northwest Midland border area of England in an attempt to contest with the central court and reform its concept of "Otherness." The poet's arrangement of the Green Knight's entry within the historical frame of the alleged Trojan founding of Britain clearly evinces the heightened local/provincial influence, a culmination of regional literary consciousness in Middle English texts that appeal to and challenge an aspect of national identity.

*Havelok* is also a story that arises from a snippet of British history and lends energy and dynamism to nation-forming. Through the English villain's remark that plays on the savage potential of the Danes to label them simply invaders "uten-laddes here," the *Havelok*-poet reveals to the audience that his statement is sheer propaganda, contesting the mechanism of an English nationalism that inevitably involved the exclusion of the Other. At the same time, however, the poem also orients towards cultural accommodation by showing the uniting effect that Havelok's life in the local community has on the local English population. This is dramatically expressed in the rehabilitation of the term "wassail": the ethnic tension inherent in the "wassailing" moment of British history is erased, and the poet is able radically to redeploy the term in a far more positive way to express the felicitous circumstance of the Dane's integration into a larger English community. The *Havelok*-poet's distinct use of the term heralds the happy ending and highlights the fortunate effects of bonds of matrimony and community between the Danish and the English, powerfully appealing to an ethnically

collaborative and peaceful future.

In *Havelok*, the tiny local port of Grimsby becomes an indelible location where battle between nations breaks out. The English army's march to the decisive battlefield is, as if to emphasise that fact, recounted repeatedly, "And toward *Grimesbi*, ful god won, / He foren softe bi þe sti / Til he come ney at *Grimesbi*" (2618-20) (emphasis added). Thus, a small village, which was a mere deserted place in the Anglo-Norman *Lai d'Haveloc*, transforms into a monumental location deeply imprinted with the historic moment in *Havelok*. The scene at Grimsby also serves as an occasion to investigate the authentic value of the Danish "Other." The "region" needs and desires "national" recognition and mutual understanding. In this respect, the representation of the Green Knight is a highly developed expression of regional "otherness" and identity that appropriates the concept of "romance"; the *Gawain*-poet's use of "romantic" elements, such as the knight's quest, an encounter with supernatural foes, and the operation of magic, is very interesting in that the motif is rationally employed and a product of conscious choice. The man in green breathes a fantastic air into the narrative, whose quality is as tricky to grasp as that of the "romance" genre per se. The Green Knight is initially portrayed as "aghlich mayster" (136), a term almost oxymoronic in semantics and etymology, whose deft combination of Old English (*aghlich*) and Old French (*mayster*) lexicons anticipates the subsequent description, which resists and complicates any easy categorisation. The figure of the Green Knight is not merely an "Other" to the Arthurian mind-set: his wild bushy appearance, his burly and entirely green form, his horrible axe, and his intimidating voice contradict his apparent courtly accoutrement and rich finery, which are evidently steeped in the ethos of aristocratic culture. Where *SGGK* departs from the other Arthurian romances is in its focus on the puzzling nature of this interloper, which elicits people's attention and emotional reactions:

Al studied þat þer stod, and stalked hym nerre  
 Wyth al þe wonder of þe worlde what he worch schulde.  
 For fele sellyez had þay sen, bot such neuer are;  
 Forþi for fantoum and fayryze þe folk þere hit demed.  
 Þefore to answare watz arze mony apel freke,  
 And al stouned at his steuen and stonstil seten  
 In a swoghe sylence þur3 þe sale riche; (237-42)

Despite the courtiers' familiarity with "fele sellyez" (many wonders), the knight standing in front is a thoroughly new phenomenon, prompting the courtiers to "study" and "stalk" him closely. After a series of deliberations, they reach a conclusion and "deem" the challenger a "fantoum" and "fayryze." This conception of the knight is maintained until Gawain's departure for the Green Chapel: the people describe the strange knight as an "aluisch mon" (681). It is worth noting here that the protagonists in this romance do not take the mysterious for granted (Kline 108-09).<sup>126</sup> In a conventional Arthurian romance, supernatural adversaries and events govern the narrative without any view of objectivity, and hence are tacitly *internalised* within the characters; however, they are hardly deemed commonplace for the people in this poem. For instance, the poet of *Avowyng of Arthur*, a near contemporary to the *Gawain*-poet, employs the phrase "This is no fantum ne no fabull" (17) in order to enhance the story's sense of veracity, while, by contrast, the *Gawain*-poet creates within the Arthurian framework characters who ponder the "Other" as a "fantoum" and "fayryze." For the *Gawain*-poet, the fantastical association or the "romance" of the Green Knight is rationalised in order to mark, in a way, the boundary between the Arthurian society and the "Other" it encounters, providing the characters with the interpretive moment to

consider and detect what the Other means.<sup>127</sup> Consequently, the Green Knight's visit to the court is not only an indication of a heightened regional influence on the metropole, but also represents the cultural interaction between the region and the nation, in which the region desires to be properly understood by a wider community beyond the original regional provenance.

We may recall in this context the telling fact that both the *Gawain*-poet and Geoffrey Chaucer portray their persona-like characters under the mysterious veil of "romantic Otherness": in the case of the *Gawain*-poet's "aluisch mon" and Chaucer's "elvish" pilgrim, "their" identities are each based on creatures of fantasy. They share an ethos represented by the way they initially hide their identities. That ethos arises from the sensitivities of writing from a perceived margin, but it then provides them with the chance to grasp the provincial or marginal dimension and dynamics, and demands to be unravelled and incorporated into the cultural mainstream, without losing its distinctiveness. Chaucer's representation of Northern England deserves consideration, since *The Reeve's Tale* does not utilise the conventional image of the Northern region of the realm as "strange"; on the contrary, as suggested by the subdued nature of the use of northern dialect towards the tale's end, the local language assumes significance as evidence of a flexible and assimilatory manner of linguistic change. The process of unearthing the pronounced foreignness or "Otherness" that marks the perceived division of centre and margin, local and national, is related to the imagination of a more all-embracing vision of community. Northern clerks in *The Reeve's Tale* and the Green Knight represent a dynamism of understated local or regional identities articulated through negotiation within a wider national framework. In conclusion, the regional character of Middle English texts, as epitomised in these local visitors, is closely interwoven with the exploration of an extended community, displaying a greater degree of affinity for national themes and wider historical implications.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is why the intersection between medieval and postcolonial studies has recently been a matter of great concern. See Kabir and Denne, and Chapter One of Lampert-Weissig. However, medievalists' approaches are also frequently biased, since the beginning of professional medieval studies was deeply implicated in nineteenth-century nationalism. Inquiry into medieval national identity has been seen as a gaze "more patriotic than analytic" (Lavezzo, "Introduction" ix). Butterfield also notes that "medievalists cannot avoid the term 'nation' because the discipline of medieval studies has always been in its shadow" (27).

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines the "nation" as "A large aggregate of communities and individuals united by factors such as common descent, language, culture, history, or occupation of the same territory, so as to form a distinct people. Now also: such a people forming a political state; a political state" (1 (a)).

<sup>3</sup> This comment is repeated in his article (2006) 29.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson's formulation of "imagined communities" is preferable for medievalists, because, Warren writes, "they do not depend absolutely on the technology of the modern nation-states" (10).

<sup>5</sup> For example, Robert Mannyng, an early fourteenth-century chronicler, writes: "Frankysche speche ys cald Romaunce, So sey þis clerkes & men of ffraunce" (Mannyng 16701). See *OED*, s. v. "romance" II 8.

<sup>6</sup> Despite the poet's direct reference to "the Brutus bokes," or, namely, a reliance on the *Brut* chronicle, study of the relations between the poem and the chronicle has long suffered neglect simply because no story like Gawain's is to be found in any extant *Brut* chronicles known to us.

<sup>7</sup> His observation is apparently indebted to the idea brought forth by Paul Strohm who, referring to the same passage, suggests that the poet is encouraging us to "draw

back from him [Gawain], to see him as a literary-historical figure” (18). Both claim that the two closing references reinforce the sources “worthy of memory and thought” (Strohm 18).

<sup>8</sup> I will discuss this connection in detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Bloch’s introduction in the latest collection of fabliaux, *The Fabliaux: A New Verse Translation*, xxi-xxii.

<sup>10</sup> All references to Chaucer’s work are from Larry D. Benson ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, referenced by fragment and line numbers.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion on Alfred’s contribution to and the invention of the English as a political community, see Foot. Regarding the origin of “England,” *OED* adds that “From the Old English period onwards the name England has been used to denote the southern part of the island of Great Britain, usually excluding Wales, and in early use including territory extending as far north as the Firth of Forth.” See *OED*, “England.”

<sup>12</sup> Frantzen and Niles writes that the Saxons are characterised as “little more than a band of cutthroats and intruders” (7).

<sup>13</sup> Campbell concisely notes that Geoffrey’s narrative “put much of Anglo-Saxon history in the shade” (144).

<sup>14</sup> All references to and translations of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia* are from the Reeve and Wright edition. William of Malmesbury, a contemporary “Bedan” chronicler does not interpolate any Saxon language, but simply describe the event as follows: “A banquet was arranged on their return, and Hengest [sic] ordered his daughter to act as cup-bearer, that the king might feast his eyes on her as he sat at meat. The ruse succeeded. The king, who always lusted after fair women, was at once deeply smitten with the girl’s beauty and graceful movements, and conceived the hope of securing her for his own” (25) (The translation is from the edition of *Gesta Regum*

*Anglorum* (Deeds of the English Kings) by Mynors, Thomson, and M. Winterbottom). Henry of Huntingdon briefly mentions the story, yet in a slightly different way: “It is said by some, moreover, that King Vortigern, in fear of their power, married the pagan daughter of Hengist” (81) (The translation is from the edition of *Historia Anglorum* (The History of the English People) by Greenway)

<sup>15</sup> The quotation is from Jack’s edition of *Beowulf*.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas observes that the English exclamation “wassail and drink hale” was a prevalent stereotype in the twelfth century as well as uncovering further attestations. See especially 301-02. It should be mentioned that, among English people from the early Middle Ages, drinking ceremonies were highly important not as an act of merriment, but as an occasion that takes on social and communal value. Magennis makes this point as follows:

In Old English poetry there is much serving of drink, carrying of drink, receiving of drink, making vows over drink, and so on, but not much actual drinking. Reference is made to the activity of drinking, not the act, to the idea of drinking, and hence to the social and symbolic significance of drinking, not to its physical reality. (26)

<sup>17</sup> While mentioning the negative associations of Rowena’s use of “wassail” in her seduction of Vortigern, Lamont foregrounds Rowena’s positive presentations that do not occur in other versions of the story. For example, when explaining her motive to murder Vortimer in the prose *Brut*, Lamont emphasizes Rowena’s sorrow and love for Hengist, who was driven from Britain by Vortimer, instead of her hatred of Vortimer. Rowena’s secret letter to Hengist that reveals Vortimer’s death and the opportunity to conquer Britain is also motivated by her deep devotion to Hengist as his daughter. See Lamont,

especially 298-300.

<sup>18</sup> Her discussion on the significance of “wassail,” especially in terms of the potential to cut across ethnic boundaries, can be applied to *Havelok*, which I examine in Chapter 2.

<sup>19</sup> The quotation is from Brook and Leslie’s edition of *Layamon Brut*.

<sup>20</sup> All references to *An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle* are from Zettl’s edition.

<sup>21</sup> All references to the Middle English prose *Brut* are from Brie’s edition.

<sup>22</sup> The following quotations from the *Brut* chronicles are based respectively on the following editions: Geoffrey of Monmouth *Historia Regum Britanniae* (Reeve and Wright); Wace *Roman de Brut* (Weiss); Layamon *Brut* (Brook and Leslie); *The Short English Metrical Chronicle* (Zettl); Robert of Gloucester *The Chronicle* (Wright); Thomas of Castleford *The boke of Brut* (Eckhardt); Robert Mannyng *The Chronicle* (Sullens); *the Chronicles of England* (Brie); College of Arms Manuscript Arundel 22 (Gabiger); A Fifteenth-Century Paraphrase of Robert of Gloucester’s *Chronicle* (Lipscomb).

<sup>23</sup> *MED*, s. v. “sax,” (a).

<sup>24</sup> The translation is from Weiss’s edition, 184-85.

<sup>25</sup> Layamon’s *Brut* survives in two manuscript copies, and this passage is taken from British Library Cotton Caligula A.ix (C). Another manuscript, BL Cotton Otho C.xiii (O), is dated from the late thirteenth to the early fourteenth century, and is said to have modernized the archaic language of C. See Stanley.

<sup>26</sup> This is obviously a comment from the Britons’ perspective. When the Saxons, with the aid of Gurmund, finally possesses the island of Britain (of which occasion I argue later), Layamon says that “heo binomen heore namen; al for Bruttene sceome / and nomen al pis lond; and setten hit al an heore hond” (14681-82).



<sup>27</sup> The inconsistency between the Anglo-Saxon verse style and the anti-Anglo-Saxon content has been a matter of heated debate. This apparent contradiction tended to have been solved through the lens of nationalism, in which the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons are both incorporated into a united England. However, Daniel Donoghue disagrees with this view, claiming that it is not nationalism but “divine providence” that contributes to forming the vision of Layamon’s history. He also cautions that “Layamon’s nationalism . . . is a modern invention. It is the product of a generation of scholars primarily from the first half of this century . . . who assumed that Layamon’s sense of Englishness was similar to their own sense of nationhood” (557).

<sup>28</sup> All references to Robert of Gloucester’s *Chronicle* are from Wright’s edition.

<sup>29</sup> See *MED*, s. v. “gest,” 2 (a).

<sup>30</sup> Geoffrey’s story of Gurmund seems to have its origin in one of the earliest *chansons de geste*, *Gormont et Isembart*. In William of Malmesbury, Gurmund is identified as Guthrum, a chief Viking who fought against King Alfred. See Pace 52-54.

<sup>31</sup> The Middle English Prose *Brut* is a close translation of an Anglo-Norman text. Marvin notes that “the widely diffused Common Version of the Middle English Prose *Brut* is an extraordinarily close, even slavish, translation of its source” (2).

<sup>32</sup> As to the naming of England, the Oldest Anglo-Norman Prose *Brut* is more specific, adding that the Saxons had called themselves English “par le noun Engist remember” (184). Recall that, while in Wace the Britons “remember” the Saxon’s treason by “sax,” this author states that the Saxons “remember” Hengist.

<sup>33</sup> Hengist’s command in the Oldest Anglo-Norman Prose *Brut* reads “Beaus seignurs, ore est temps de parler de amour” (138).

<sup>34</sup> Davidson also points out the omission of Hengist’s sax signal in the *Anglo-Norman Brut*, suggesting that it does not “dramatize conflict in multilingual terms” (56).

<sup>35</sup> At the point of Gurmund's conquest and the subsequent change of name to England, Robert Mannyng adds a compelling story of the Briton Engle and his champion Scardying. Mannyng writes that Engle and Scardying came to carry out revenge on the Angles who had expelled his ancestors from Britain. Since they were so powerful that the Angles made Engle a king and Engle names the land "England" after himself. Turville-Petre suggests that the tale of Engle "distances us, the English, from our wicked ancestors the Saxons, and associates us—morally rather than racially—with British *antecessores*" (*England the Nation* 87).

<sup>36</sup> A Fifteenth-Century Paraphrase version reads here "Thenne was the Englysshe and the Saxones alone in this londe and bilde and made grete townes and castelles that they had cast done before. And then they chaungede this names and called this londe Englund that before were called Britaigne" (Lipscomb 63).

<sup>37</sup> The combined phrase "the Saxons and the English" or "the English and the Saxons" appears abruptly after the reign of Carrik. The allusions until the death of Cadwallader come up in line 4619, 4659, 4705, 4736, 4821. There is also a phrase "Saxons þe englisse" (4655).

<sup>38</sup> In Geoffrey's *Historia*, while "Saxones" is used throughout the story of the Anglo-Saxon invasion, the term "Angli" begins to be used in the account of Augustine's mission to convert the English. See Tatlock 19.

<sup>39</sup> Kirby's theory is contested by Neil Wright, who argues that Layamon's use of the term relies ultimately on that of Geoffrey's *Historia*, saying that there is "no rigid distinction" between them (167). Nevertheless, he partially admits Kirby's point at the end of the article, and this means that Kirby's discussion is still influential.

<sup>40</sup> All quotations from *Le Lai d'Haveloc* are from Bell's edition of *Le Lai d'Haveloc and Gaimar's Haveloc Episode*, and all modern English translations are from Judith Weiss, *The Birth of Romance*.

<sup>41</sup> See Bell, “Gaimar’s Early ‘Danish’ Kings” 629-31.

<sup>42</sup> The quotation from *Estoire des Engleis* is from Short’s edition.

<sup>43</sup> See also Short, footnote 37.

<sup>44</sup> G. V. Smithers places the date of composition between 1295 and 1310. See Smithers lxiv-lxxiii. All quotations from *Havelok the Dane* are from Smithers’ edition of *Havelok*.

<sup>45</sup> Mills claims that the fighting episode derives from the thirteenth-century French romance of *Richars li Biaus*.

<sup>46</sup> A band of robbers are constantly referred to as “dogs” (1884, 1923, 1968), while Havelok is referred to as a “boar,” “lion,” and “hound” (1867-68, 1990, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> This special attention to the safety of traveller is curiously observed even by the evil regent: “Schireues he sette, bedels, and greyues, / Grith-sergeans with longe gleyues, / To yemen wilde wodes and papes / Fro wicke men þat wolde don scapes . . .” (266-69). It should be noted that “greyues” in England functions prominently here.

<sup>48</sup> The quotation is from Zupitza’s edition of *Guy of Warwick*.

<sup>49</sup> As his manipulative statement indicates, Godrich is not just a traitor but “a traitor of some distinction” (Weiss, “Structure and Characterisation” 256). In fact, Godrich and his title of “Earl of Cornwall” are peculiar to the Middle English poem, which could be related to the ethnic issue. In Gaimar’s *Estoire* and other Anglo-Norman versions, the equivalent figure to Godrich is Edelsi, a British king ruling Lincoln, Lindsey, and the land from Humber to Rutland. The fact that Edelsi is a Briton might have affected the creation of an Earldom of Cornwall in *Havelok*, as Cornwall is a region deeply associated with the Celts. Concerning the ethnicity of Godrich, Speed makes an interesting observation:

The English villain is himself a Celt, and his defeat by a Germanic leader

recalls the historical sequence of celtic then germanic holders of the land. The development of the Havelok story thus encodes a history of the English nation, and it may be no accident that the English romance, whose construction of the nation comes as the culmination of the story's development, is one of the earliest romances of the matter of England. (150)

<sup>50</sup> Hordern also demonstrates that the statement reflects a common view among English people of the Viking ages, which is evinced by the accounts of Alcuin and Symeon of Durham, in which the Vikings plunder the treasure in a church and claim a number of people's lives (71-85).

<sup>51</sup> See *MED*, s. v. "host(e)" n. (1).

<sup>52</sup> See *MED*, s. v. "here" n. (1) and "ferd(e)" n. (2).

<sup>53</sup> "Here" and "ferd" used to have ethnic and political overtones as Bosworth and Toller writes "HERE; gen. heres, heriges, herges; m. An army, a host, multitude, a large predatory band [it is the word which in the chronicle is always used of the Danish force in England, while the English troops are always the fyrd], hence the word is used for devastation and robbery" (532).

<sup>54</sup> See Pulsiano and McGowan.

<sup>55</sup> The portrayal of the English king certainly echoes that of Birkabeyn, but on closer inspection, there exists a difference: "Of bodi he was þe beste knieth / Þat euere micte leden uth here, / Or stede on-ride or handlen spere" (345-47). While Athelwold leads "folc," Birkabeyn leads "here." Godard also commands "here." The poet also mentions afterwards that Godard appoints Godard as a regent until Havelok grows up and can "leden vt here" (379). The lexical distinction here is also instrumental in shaping the image of Denmark as a battlefield.

<sup>56</sup> The quotation is from M. Mills' edition of *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild*.

<sup>57</sup> Holford suggests that the poem has a particular preoccupation with “the defense of the realm against foreign attacks” (164). See also his footnote 60.

<sup>58</sup> Their revised identity is, in a way, curiously shown in the exclusive use of “ferd” for Havelok’s army after Godrich’s speech. Interestingly, the use of the word “ferd” increases after Godrich’s account as follows: “With al his ferd cam hem agein” (2623); “þer þe ferdes togidere slowe” (2684); “His bodi þer biforn his ferd” (2733); “Of þe erldom, biforn his ferd” (2924). These examples all refer to Havelok’s army and it seems that the poet is keen to spurn the impression that the Danish army is “here.” Here, the poet’s consistent employment of “ferd” to Havelok’s troop serves to exaggerate the inappropriateness of Godrich’s stigmatization of the Danish enemy, thus disparaging that aspect of English nationalism that relies on distorted perceptions of the Danes.

<sup>59</sup> All in all, the Middle English romances do not feature the Anglo-Saxon literature and culture. This is perhaps because of Geoffrey’s publication of the *Historia*, which at once sides with the Britons and writes the Anglo-Saxon past in a negative light. However, this does not mean that the history of the Anglo-Saxon period was entirely ignored by later English writers. Investigating a broader range of the medieval English romances, Robert Allen Rouse locates even in Middle English literature “some of the more significant cultural discourses and literary strategies that are involved in the process of remembering the pre-conquest past” (10).

<sup>60</sup> For a detailed analysis of Mannyng’s testimony in relation to the oral circulation of Havelok’s story, see Bradbury.

<sup>61</sup> For a cynical pun used by Godrich, see Smithers 91-92.

<sup>62</sup> Attention should also be paid to the *Havelok*-poet’s use of “wassail” as a verb, “wessaylen,” which is the first recorded such usage in the history of English. It should be noted that, except for in *Havelok*, only Robert Mannyng uses “wassail” as a verb in his chronicle, using it to describe Rowena’s toast: “Ffele sithes þat maidin ȝing /

Wassaileð & kist þe king” (7487-88). Another occurrence is when Ubbe discovers a bright light emanating from Havelok’s room in the middle of the night. He suspects that they “sitten nou and wesseylen” (2099), but the light turns out to be a sign of his royal birth.

<sup>63</sup> Although there are few identifiers, the context indicates that “Thancaster” is within the region of Lindsey. Furthermore, John S. P. Tatlock insists that “the best conclusion is that the modern Caistor has modified its name” (24).

<sup>64</sup> Not only the *Gawain*-poet, but also the so-called phenomenon of “alliterative revival,” should be considered in tandem with a cultural milieu of a metropolis like that of Chaucer’s. Hanna maintains that while alliterative poetry remains alien or “Other” to Chaucer, “this Otherness essentially occupies a space of consciousness, not of geography” (511).

<sup>65</sup> As to *translatio imperii* and medieval reception of the classical past, see Baswell, “England’s Antiquities.” It should be noted that often-quoted passages of the similar opening of *Wynnere and Wastoure* do not make an allusion to Aeneas: “Sythen that Bretayne was biggede and Bruyttus it aughte, / Thurgh the takynge of Troye with tresone withinn, / There hathe selcouthes bene sene in seere kynges tymes, / Bot never so many as nowe by the nyne dele” (1-4). The quotation is from Ginsberg’s edition.

<sup>66</sup> The identification of “þe tulk” has been a recurring issue since the earliest scholars, such as Sir Frederick Madden (in favour of Aeneas) and Sir Israel Gollancz (in favour of Antenor). The interpretation is still divided, but generally swings toward Aeneas. From a syntactical point of view, Burnley analyzes that the connection between “þe tulk” and “Hit watz” (referring back, not forward) is similarly found in that of *Cleanness* 979-81, taking the side of Aeneas. Perhaps in order to solve the contradiction, some editors, such as Cawley and Anderson translate the phrase “þe trewest on erthe” as “the most certain on earth” (167). On the other hand, *MED* cites “true” here and defines

it as “honorable, noble; true to one’s word; also, as noun: the noble one.” See *MED*, s. v. “treu(e),” adj. 3 (a).

<sup>67</sup> The story of the fall of Troy comes to England mainly through Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s *Roman de Troie* (c. 1160) and its Latin version of Guido delle Collonne’s *Historia Destructionis Troiae* (1287). The nature of Aeneas and his treachery vary depending on the versions of the Troy story, most of which portray him as a traitor for fleeing Troy. See Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, especially 17-21.

<sup>68</sup> See *OED*, s. v. “wone,” n. 4. Mills notes that the Lady is making some puns here, “cors” (body) and “cor(t)s” (court), and “won” (delight) and “won” (dwelling), adding that “the physical sense is clear” (616).

<sup>69</sup> I do not think it is a coincidence that “winne,” used in the “bob” line in each stanza, only appears in the scene when Brutus founded Britain “wyth wynne” (15). The Middle English word “win” has two contradictory meanings: one is “conflict, strife,” the other is “joy, happiness, pleasure, delight.” The poet’s twice deployment of the word becomes a kind of signal that prefigures the crucial consequence that will soon follow. See *MED*, s. v. “win,” n. (1) and (2).

<sup>70</sup> The overall situation is, as the Lady declares, that she has “al þe wele in þe worlde were in my honde” (1270), which resonates with the lines in which Aeneas’ progeny became patrons “Welneþe of al þe wele in þe west iles” (6-7). Moorman notes that Gawain’s adventure is “a microcosm, or better said, a semi-allegorical presentation of the whole history and meaning of the Round Table” (170).

<sup>71</sup> *MED* similarly only cites here with the meaning of “to urge (sb.), press upon.”

<sup>72</sup> *OED* shows that this “depress” in the sense of “to put down by force, or crush in a contest or struggle; to overcome, subjugate, vanquish” is also the first citation.

<sup>73</sup> See Tolkien and Gordon 140. This was a new term in the English poetic lexicon, which suggests that the poet might have added a subtle nuance to the physical act of

“deprese” by the Lady. Gawain himself uses “deprece your prysoun” (1219), but his intention is not to “conquer or subjugate” but “to relax (custody), release (a prisoner),” as *MED* only cites here. Turville-Petre argues that the “depreced” in line 6 is intentionally ambiguous in both senses (“Afterwords” 344). In response to Turville-Petre, Mueller notes that “the *Gawain*-poet encourages readers to consider the amusing image of the lady as an imperialist who conquers Gawain and seizes his body” (175).

<sup>74</sup> Likewise, from a postcolonial viewpoint, some scholars find in the description of the Green Knight a reflection of the regional hybrid culture: the exoticism and otherworldliness of Wales (the area Gawain visits) and the sophistication and realism of England. Ingham locates in the scene a resonance with Homi Bhabha’s argument that “the ambivalence of mimicry—almost but not quite—suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal.” (129-30). She argues that “colonial mimicry” was performed in the representation of the Green Knight and the scene implies “a dialogic space rich in imperialist ideology and oppositional discourse” (“In Contrayes Straunge” 83). Knight also locates in the contradictory semblance “subversive to the dominant metropolitan culture,” stating that the litany of his descriptive elegance or “courtly drag” mocks courtly excess (275).

<sup>75</sup> There is a sign that “at this point of supreme tension and suspense Gawain’s perception of the situation seems more fearful than that of the audience is likely to have been” (Puhvel 15).

<sup>76</sup> The quotation is from the *Caligula* manuscript edition of Brook and Leslie.

<sup>77</sup> Warren also writes that it is “the most striking sign of post-colonial settlement in English versions” (89). See also Hiatt 180; Allen 126.

<sup>78</sup> The quotation is from Preest’s translation.

<sup>79</sup> It is ironic that the Lord’s engagement with a swine is described as “werre” (1628).



Putter points out that the words and expressions used to describe the Lord, such as “knight” (1581), “blonk” (1581), “coursour” (1583), “Braydez out a bryzt bront” (1584) are indications of his heroic prowess. See his and Stokes’ latest edition, *The Works of the Gawain Poet*, 725-26.

<sup>80</sup> The title “princess” is only once employed in reference to the Lady, which stems from more than just the demands of alliteration. The other terms referring to the Lady are as follows: þe lady (941, 1187, 1212, 1281, 1472, 1504, 1657, 1733, 1757); þat gay (970); þe gay burde (1003); gay lady (1208, 1248); þat swete (1222); þe menskful (1268); þe (þat) burde (1283, 1296, 1779, 1846); þe clere (1489); þe meré wyf (1495); þe worþy (1508); þat fre (1549); þat comly (1755); þat wyzt (1792); þat lufsum vnder lyne (1814).

<sup>81</sup> The word appears eight times, in lines 623, 830, 873, 902, 1014, 2072, 2398, 2473. Line 1014 is “prynce gomen,” used adjectively as “princely.” Bowers perhaps first contextualizes the term in reference to Ricardian politics and sees it as one of “exaggerated gestures of hospitality” by the castle’s servants (*An Introduction* 34).

<sup>82</sup> See *MED*, s. v. “prince,” 5 (c).

<sup>83</sup> The quotations of alliterative *Morte Arthure* are from Benson’s edition.

<sup>84</sup> See also Federico 131-32 and Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl* 69-70.

<sup>85</sup> This sense of separateness from England is implied in the poet’s single reference to “English.” Describing the pentagon of Gawain’s shield, the poet notes: “and Englych hit callen / Oueral, as I here, þe endeles knot” (629-30). Taking the trouble to say “Englych” would indirectly show that the poet is *not* English and detached from the country. While the pursuit of the authorship and intended audience of *SGGK* is beyond the scope of this thesis, it surely is an important one for further investigation, especially in relation to Richard II’s regionalism. What I am certain of is that Gawain’s experience in the northwest Midland can be discerned as an expression of the heightened regional

influence notable in the last years of Richard II's reign.

<sup>86</sup> See Jewell 191. It is logical to assume that *The Friar's Tale* would take place somewhere in Yorkshire since the Summoner (who seems to know the Friar) sets his own rebuttal tale in Holderness. The devil-yeomen in *The Friar's Tale* is a conduit for the Summoner's damnation, waiting for the Summoner to make a mistake so he can drag him to Hell. Bowers examines Chaucer's intention not to make knight's yeoman tell his tale, considers the political reason in the light of Richard's regionalism ("Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*" 16-19). Rather interesting is the similar case in the *Gawain*-poet, who apparently reverses the convention: when Gawain the southerner rides North from Wales into the wilds near Chester to find the Green Chapel, he views (perhaps out of fear) the Green Knight is as a "dele" (2188, 2192 "Devil"). It turns out, however, that the Green Knight is not a devil at all, on the contrary, the Green Knight is actually Bertilak, a knight who is, in the end, a conduit for Gawain's salvation as Bertilak teaches Gawain about sin so that Gawain may avoid it in the future.

<sup>87</sup> The quotation is from Burnley's *Source book* 22-24.

<sup>88</sup> The following quotations from John Trevisa are Babington's edition.

<sup>89</sup> See *MED*, s. v. "wlaffinge" (stammering, stuttering); "chiteringe" (c) (jargon); "harringe" (a harsh roaring or snarling sound in speech); "garringe" (b) (of gnashing with the teeth: accompanied by clicking or chattering); "grisbating" (b) (grinding or chattering of the teeth; esp. such sounds as characteristic of harsh and uncouth speech).

<sup>90</sup> Murphy also notes that Trevisa's translation of the part is "a fairly enthusiastic rendering of 'stridet incondite'" (71).

<sup>91</sup> See *MED* s. v. "scharp" 5 (b) (harsh-sounding; strident, shrill); "slitten" (c) (*fig.* piercing, shrill); "frotten" 3 (b) (froting, strident or harsh (speech); "unschapen" 2 (c) (of a variety of speech: ?not clearly articulated; ?rude, formless).

<sup>92</sup> Beidler includes four versions of the possible sources for *The Reeve's Tale*: the

two texts of the French *Le meunier et les .II. clers*, the Flemish *Een bispel van .ij. clerken*, and the sixth tale of the ninth day of Boccaccio's Italian *Decameron*. Chaucer's sources are categorised as the type of tale known as a "cradle-trick story," in which the wife gets into the wrong bed because the cradle has been moved to another place. See Beidler 23-26.

<sup>93</sup> Blake also notes that French fabliau customarily adds some linguistic twists as a source of laughter (*Non-Standard Language* 29).

<sup>94</sup> "Chaucer as a Philologist" was initially a lecture delivered to the Philological Society of Oxford. Tolkien's bestowal of the epithet "philologist" on Chaucer should be seen within a context of the literature and language feud at the Oxford English department. See Fitzgerald.

<sup>95</sup> This change of emphasis after Tolkien's publication is summarised by Horobin (2001).

<sup>96</sup> See also Epstein 101-02.

<sup>97</sup> The passages are from Cawley's edition. With regard to the use of southernism in the play, see Appendix IV, 131. He summarises that "the Wakefield dramatist was evidently determined that his southernisms should be southerly as possible in order to enhance their comic effect" (131).

<sup>98</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the use of southern dialect in *Second Shepherd's Play*, see Irace.

<sup>99</sup> Delasanta also cites this passage to show the apocalyptic connotation of the mill (275).

<sup>100</sup> Tolkien's statement has hitherto escaped consideration, except, as far as I am aware, for brief notes in Jill Mann's edition of *The Canterbury Tales*. Apparently following Tolkien's remark, Mann notes that Aleyn's use of dialect begins to dwindle "rather noticeably" (855). She attributes it to Chaucer's lack of interest in perfect

accuracy of Northern speech, since he is more concerned with the general impression that it gives (855). Concerning the use of dialect, Cooper also observes that “Chaucer is not totally consistent in their dialect, nor does he particularize it to any one area, but the effect recurs throughout their speech, though it is most marked at the start (*Oxford Guide to Chaucer* 117).

<sup>101</sup> Tolkien’s 37 phonological examples of /a/ for /o/ are: “na/nan” (4026, 4027, 4134, 4175, 4176, 4183, 4185, 4187); “wange” (4030); “swa” (4030, 4040, 4239); “ham” (4032); “ga/gan/gas” (4037, 4078, 4101, 4254); “fra” (4039); “banes” (4073); “atanes” (4074); “aslwa” (4085); “waat” (4086); “raa” (4086); “bathe” (4087, 4112, 4191); “twa” (4129); “sang” (4170); “wha” (4173); “lange” (4175) “a” (4181); “sale/saule” (4187, 4263); “tald” (4207); “halde” (4208); “awen” (4239); “wrang” (4252). In *The Riverside Chaucer*, “gan” appears as “geen” (4078).

<sup>102</sup> The survey is from *The Multitext Edition*, eds. Stubbs, Estelle, Michael Pidd, Orietta Da Rold, Simon Horobin, Claire Thomson, and Linda Cross (2013). The Norman Blake Editions of *The Canterbury Tales*. University of Sheffield. Available at: <<http://www.chaucermss.org/multitext>> [Accessed 8 March 2015]. These are based on the following manuscripts: California, San Marino, Huntington Library MS. Ellesmere 26 C 9 (Ellesmere); Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS. Peniarth 392 D (Hengwrt); Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS. 198; London, British Library MS. Harley 7334; Cambridge University Library MS. Dd.4.24; London, British Library MS. Lansdowne 851; Cambridge University Library MS. Gg.4.2.7; London, British Library MS. Additional 35286.

<sup>103</sup> The quotations are from Crow’s article.

<sup>104</sup> Shippey’s analysis of the language of *The Summoner’s Tale* takes its inspiration from Tolkien’s article. As he states, while *The Reeve’s Tale* engages on audience’s recognition of dialect geography, *The Summoner’s Tale* takes advantage of “strong

contemporary awareness of linguistic class markers” (“Bilingualism and Betrayal” 126).

<sup>105</sup> See Mann, *Estates Satire* 166; Fletcher 100-03.

<sup>106</sup> Linguistic features of Norfolk language was recognised as distinct from as early as the twelfth century (Beadle 92).

<sup>107</sup> The Central Midland Counties, especially, Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, and Bedfordshire were the areas that, under the religious auspice of Wycliffites, propagated their regional documents, and contributed to the emergence of what was perceived to be the “literary standard” (Samuels 407-08).

<sup>108</sup> The quotation from *Piers Plowman* is from Schmidt’s edition. See also Beadle 94.

<sup>109</sup> When Aleyn makes up his mind to venture into the bed of Symkyn’s daughter, he could have used “So theeke” like Oswald. However, Aleyn states “als evere moot I thrive” (I 4177).

<sup>110</sup> See Knox 107.

<sup>111</sup> Perhaps because of this, he cares about the things in the past as if to emphasise that present maturity cannot exist without the former achievements of youth. He cannot shake off the good image of the past. He had learned “a good myster” (trade) in his youth and must have been a country entrepreneur. This explains why he is extremely sensitive to the Miller’s tale about the cuckold carpenter, although he has already risen to a higher profession.

<sup>112</sup> Curiously, *OED* does not record “prick” as a sexual connotation, while *MED* records only one instance in the figurative sense “to have sexual intercourse” (*MED* 4b (g)). This is from *Ladd Y the daunce* (c. 1450) in early English carols, which runs, “Tho Jak and yc wenten to bedde; He *prikede* and he pransede; nolde he neuer lynne; Yt was the murgust nyt that euer Y cam ynne.” See also Scott-Macnab 374.

<sup>113</sup> This point is noted by several critics. See Lancashire 168 and Hines 133. Kolve

summarises the structural relationship of the situation as “after a day spent trying to regain control of the runaway college horse, the clerks now let their own libidinous horses run free in the bedroom darkness” (251).

<sup>114</sup> In Middle English “nail” is commonly “used in the crucifixion of Jesus. Freq. as a symbol of the Passion, esp. in devotion or meditation” (*OED*, 5 (a)). *OED* adds that “this is one of the most common senses of the word in Old English and early Middle English texts.” “Prick” has a similar usage “(a) A pointed object, something that punctures or stabs; spike” (*MED* 1 (a)), while “priking(e)” also means “a wound resulting from a piercing, puncture wound; perforation of a nerve or tendon; also, marks resulting from piercing the flesh; the print of the nails in Christ’s hands” (*MED* 1 (c)). *MED* cites a passage including both words from *South English Legendary: Temporale (Passion of Christ)*: “Ðo sede seint Thomas to hem, ‘bote ich miȝte yseo ywis þe prykyng of þe nayles þat in his honden is . . . y nelle hit leoue nouȝt.” (2130) (emphasis added).

<sup>115</sup> Taylor states that “it is not surprising, then, that the Reeve can mimic northern dialect in his tale and also speak to southerners such as those on the pilgrimage with him. He is truly a “myddel man” (473). Tolkien also claims that Oswald is “at once the symbol of the direction from which northerly forms of speech invaded the language of the southern capital, and the right person to choose to act as intermediary in the tale” (6).

<sup>116</sup> In a more negative way, Pearsall claims that the Reeve’s dialect “tap[s] the phobia that Londoners had for people from the provinces” (“Strangers” 51).

<sup>117</sup> Chaucer’s two northerners may be rough and vindictive, but they are in the first place victims harassed by the miller’s habitual cheating. There is little imagery of threat and fear associated with the North in Chaucer’s representation of John and Aleyn. As to this point, King suggests:

Severely provoked by the miller's cheating, John and Aleyn revenge themselves by sleeping with his wife and daughter—and not by burning down his mill, ravaging his cottage and holding him to ransom. This depiction of northerners is in keeping with Chaucer's contemporaries in the late-fourteenth century, who were more likely to criticise Northumbrians for not being war-like enough, in failing to defend the borders against Scottish incursions. In fact, their accents and swearing apart, there is little specifically 'northern' in Chaucer's representation of John and Aleyn." (103)

Chaucer's interest in the North of England is carried into *The Man of Law's Tale*. A highlight of the tale is no doubt the conversion of the pagan Northumbria to Christianity. This curiously entails a shift of reference to the regional space. Eventually reuniting both with her father, the Emperor, and with her husband, Alla, Constance's return to Northumbria is described: "To Engelond been they come the righte way" (II 1130). "Northumbria" transforms into "Engelond."

<sup>118</sup> Kokeritz says that "In medieval poetics the linking in rhyme of two homonyms or of the same word in different senses was considered a tour de force and was widely practised" (945). Oswald furthermore shows this elegant rhyming in "for age/forage" (I 3867, 3868) in the prologue.

<sup>119</sup> *MED* cites "tonge" here as "(b) the clapper of a bell" (6), but it is more broadly to do with the general language of a country and region.

<sup>120</sup> While Chaucer is traditionally described as "the father of English poetry," this does not mean that he was consciously working on making a national poetry, an image which was otherwise perpetualised by John Dryden and also ideologically cultivated by generations of Victorian scholars. It is also worth considering the current tendency to

unveil the ideology underlying the concept of the Middle Ages.

<sup>120</sup> See also Meecham-Jones 15-18.

<sup>121</sup> The following quotations from Ranulph Higden and John Trevisa are Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, Monachi Cestrensis; Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century, ed. Churchill Babington (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1869)

<sup>122</sup> See also Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge* 90.

<sup>123</sup> It can also be said that by setting the narrative location in Flanders, Chaucer alleviates the direct ridicule of his homeland.

<sup>124</sup> This is not to say that Chaucer dismisses the fantastic as being insignificant and irrelevant to life. Chaucer is concerned with the supernatural element, as long as it entails the inner process of contemplation. In *The Squire's Tale*, there is a kind of “reasonable” reaction to the encounter with a creature that is seemingly a “fairy.” In the opening, King Cambuskan is holding a sumptuous feast, during which a strange knight suddenly intrudes with a brazen horse. Following the event, the reaction of the people in the court is shown:

But everemoore hir mooste wonder was  
How that it koude gon, and was of bras;  
It was a fairye, as the peple semed.  
Diverse folk diversely they demed;  
As many heddes, as manye wittes ther been.  
They murmureden as dooth a swarm of been,  
And maden skiles after hir fantasies . . . (V 199-205)

The mystery of the brazen horse strikes the attendants as if it was “of Fairye” (201).



This scene resembles the reactions to the Green Knight by the Arthurian courtiers in *SGGK*. The scene in *The Squire's Tale* also refers to "Gawain's courtesy" in reference to the good manners of the strange knight, convincing B. J. Whiting that Chaucer has *SGGK* in the back of his mind when writing it. It is interesting in both cases that the people facing the brass horse conceive it as something "fairy," reminding them of Gawain "out of fairy," while in *SGGK* it is the people of the "fairy" Arthurian court who wonder about the marvel.

<sup>125</sup> This is not only the case with Chaucer. No pilgrims are praised for their nationality or "owne blood," despite the fact that they are all "from every shires ende / Of engelond" (I 15-16). Equally striking is the fact that, with one exception, Chaucer uses "English" only to refer to the language, and not for the nationality (Cooper, "Four Last Things" 58).

<sup>126</sup> See also Putter, *An Introduction* 61.

<sup>127</sup> One of the poems in the *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (ed. Carleton Brown) "Think on Yesterday" also records the phrase "Hit nis but fantum and feiri" (28) followed by "Þis erþly Ioye, þis worldly blis / Is but a fikel fantasy" (29-30). By this time, it seems that the phrase becomes commonplace to refer to the secular vanity of life.

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