TRY IF YOU CAN to forget the blind rhapsodist, the face who launched a thousand ships, the Trojan horse, wily Greeks, epic similes, rosy-fingered dawn, and dactylic hexameters. Imagine there are no gods pulling strings, intervening into human affairs, stirring up trouble, or resolving conflicts. And attempt desperately to cast from your mind that engaging *dramatis personae*: the incomparable Helen, the sulking Achilles, the bloodthirsty Hector, and the virtuous Aeneas.

Imagine instead an unremarkable Helen, a deceitful Achilles, a peaceful Hector, and a traitorous Aeneas. Consider what it must be like to hear a Trojan tale in alliterative verse, echoing throughout a hall filled with aristocrats hungry for ancient history, tales about their glorious ancestors, and, most of all, graphic violence. And as the story winds to its close, feel the air grow stale, detect gasps of despair as Troy falls, and sense the haunting presence of this destructive past.

Welcome to the Troy of medieval England. While most of us are familiar with the Troy story I have urged you to forget, that familiar tale of the theft of Helen and Greek revenge is only the sequel to a much longer tale that begins not only with a separate cast of characters, but also with an entirely different city of Troy. The Troy that falls at the hands of Agamemnon and his Greek army is a second Troy, rebuilt by Priam from the ashes of the first, which had been earlier lost by his father. While the fall of the second Troy occupies our cultural and literary imagination, the fall of the first Troy gripped
medieval audiences, particularly a group of alliterative poets who composed romances in the north of England. These poets were uniquely attracted to the dark undercurrents of the tale that contained warnings about seeking martial prowess, translating imperial power to future generations, and promoting aristocratic exceptionalism. They were drawn to the foreknowledge gained from the consequences of imperial self-fashioning explored in episodes such as the following:

Jason and the sea-weary Argonauts seek respite on the shores of Troy. A Trojan lookout spies the band of Greeks and alerts the king of Troy, Laomedon, that invaders have landed. Neglecting introduction or parley, Laomedon summarily demands that the Argonauts depart immediately or prepare for battle. Hercules, the military strategist of the Greeks, becomes enraged by Laomedon’s inhospitality and vows that they will return with a vengeance. And return they do.

After capturing the Golden Fleece in Colchis, the Argonauts land on the Trojan beach, this time with a formidable force, including the famed brothers Castor and Pollux. Hercules hatches their attack plan, which divides their host into two parties, one to guard the ships and the other to hide at the Trojan gate. Once Laomedon discovers the Greek band by the ships, he leads his army to meet them in battle. The Trojans experience temporary success, but while they are distracted by the mêlée, the second band of Argonauts, led by Hercules and Jason, clandestinely enter the city and sack it. Having learned that the city has been taken, Laomedon reverses his tracks and rallies his warriors to return to the city. The Trojans become trapped between the two bands and Laomedon is left to fight Hercules alone. Here is what unfolds, as told in the alliterative verse of one John Clerk of Whalley:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{. . . he come to } \ddot{\text{pe}} \text{ kyng in a kene yre,} \\
&D\text{ang hym derffly don in a ded hate,} \\
&G\text{rippit hym grymly gird of his hede,} \\
&P\text{rew it into } \dddot{\text{pronge of his }} & \ddot{\text{pro pepull;}} \\
&P\text{at moche sorowe for } \ddot{\text{pe sight & sobbyng of teres,}} \\
&W\text{hen } \ddot{\text{paire kyng was kylt . . . (1337–42)}}^1
\end{align*}
\]

[He approaches the king in an intense fury, smites him dearly down with deadly hate, grips him grimly, cuts off his head, and throws it into a throng]

of his people; when their king was killed, there was much sorrow and shedding of tears at the sight.]

Laomedon’s severed head becomes a visual marker, an heraldic assertion for the “sight” of the “pepull” of the destruction that will ensue. Once the “hede” of Troy has been toppled, the city and its inhabitants incur the wrath of the vengeful Greeks, who pillage the city, slaughter the men, and capture the women and children. So falls the first city of Troy.

This destruction of the first Troy is unknown to many of us for a number of reasons. First of all, the fall of the second Troy superseded this militaristic tale with a gripping Homeric tradition that fascinated postmedieval audiences with a compelling cast of characters including the incomparable Helen, the childish gods, the arrogant Achilles, and the crafty Odysseus. Secondly, the destruction of the first Troy cannot be found in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*—instead it was popularized in the Middle Ages through numerous translations of a Latin prose history known as the *Historia destructionis Troiae* composed by a thirteenth-century Sicilian judge named Guido delle Colonne. Its credibility as a work of history was confirmed in 1412 when John Lydgate rendered it in Chaucerian iambic pentameter at the behest of Prince Henry in an attempt to bolster Lancastrian claims to noble lineage that reached back to ancient Troy. While Lydgate’s *Troy Book* enjoyed great acclaim among the aristocratic elite until the sixteenth century, once the Greek epics began to be translated into English, vernacular versions of Guido’s *Historia* fell into relative obscurity.

Many English nobles believed that they were the inheritors of worldly power via the logic of *translatio imperii*, in which the destruction of one empire led to the birth of the next. While the destruction of Troy was lamentable, its imperial power arose, phoenix-like, once again in the form of the Roman Empire. And as Rome fell, Britain began its adolescence as a future imperial force that would strike fear in the hearts of their continental counterparts. Yet, when English aristocrats turned to Guido for indulgence of their fantasies, they found incisive critiques of their Trojan ancestors for

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their inhospitality, perfidy, and incompetence as well as a chilling prediction that the New Trojans will inherit destruction, not glory.

Guido’s critical voice was attractive to a number of English readers, including the Northwest Midlands poet John Clerk of Whalley. He produced what has become known as the alliterative *Destruction of Troy*, one of several alliterative romances that were composed during the late fourteenth century in the north of England. The most famous of these poems is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but other works, such as the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and the *Siege of Jerusalem*—comprising what Thorlac Turville-Petre calls the “bookish” set of alliterative romances—have recently begun to receive significant critical attention. These four poems will serve as the focus for my analysis. Each are written within the tradition of chivalric romance, whereby the feats and conduct of individual knights (ancient, Arthurian, or otherwise) rise to the forefront of the action, which ranges from the placidly diplomatic to the excessively violent. Likewise, these romances perpetuate and in some cases enhance Guido’s critiques of Trojan identity, attributes that distinguish these provincial histories from many popular *Brut* narratives that justified England’s royal authority and national identity by claiming an ancestry that originates in ancient Troy and Rome. By ventriloquizing Guido, these alliterative romances express a deep-seated skepticism about the possibility of a sovereign English nation. Though these militaristic narratives are written to delight aristocratic readers with chivalric accounts of Hector’s martial prowess, Vespasian’s siege of Jerusalem, and Arthur’s Roman conquest, they belie such martial fervor with graphic descriptions of violence, commentary on the suffering of innocent victims, and a preference for diplomacy that fail to satisfy expansionist sensibilities. The consistency of their northern dialects, metrical choice, and martial subject matter suggest that these romances emerged from a Trojan word-hoard of provincial skepticism toward aristocratic practice and claims to sovereignty. The unfortunate result of this dissent was their limited capacity to contribute to the canonical formation of English literary culture, which future readers placed on the shoulders of Chaucerian verse.

While many other alliterative poems, such as *The Wars of Alexander, Saint Erkenwald, Wynnere and Wastoure, The Awyntyrs off Arthure*, and even *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, also express anti-aristocratic sentiment, it would be inaccurate to suggest that all alliterative poetry—not to mention all alliterative romances—operate as a coherent poetic program. Their met-

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4. For more on the dating of *Destruction*, see chapter 2, note 1 and note 13; chapter 3, 94–99.
rical and thematic similarities, aggressive style, and northern provenance have proven to be attractive for the numerous critical attempts to establish the existence of an Alliterative Revival, a conscious and pervasive reproduction of Anglo-Saxon verse in the fourteenth century. What appears to be the almost obligatory nature of the alliterative pattern (aa/ax) has compelled critics to suggest that these texts represent a unified “revival” of alliterative verse that had previously fallen out of fashion after the eleventh century. Since the late 1970s, however, many critics have challenged this theory by identifying the metrical and stylistic differences between Old and Middle English alliterative verse and noting the fallacy of basing a “revival” on surviving evidence, among other arguments. Ralph Hanna has recently challenged the theory of revival by exploring the problems of prioritizing unrhymed long lines over its variations, which has led to a convenient exclusion of contradictory evidence.

The trend against revivalist arguments was influentially begun by Norman Blake, who suggested in his review of Turville-Petre’s *The Alliterative Revival* that arguments for an “alliterative school” pigeonhole evidence into a singular model, and accordingly do not account for the diversity and richness of the alliterative verse, fail to consider the possibilities of numerous revivals, and unnecessarily oppose alliterative and Chaucerian poetry. When Chaucer’s Parson admits, “I am a Southren man, / I kan nat geeste ‘rum, ram, ruf’ by lettre” (X.41–42), he marks alliterative verse as a northern genre, but this statement does not confirm the existence of a coherent and resurgent anti-Chaucerian school of poetics. This characterization is

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7. Turville-Petre’s *The Alliterative Revival* is the most well-known study, but many previous critics had explored the legitimacy of this theory. For example, see J. P. Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1935), I.153, II.86–7; Dorothy Everett, “The Alliterative Revival,” in *Essays on Middle English Literature*, ed. Patricia Kean (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 46–96. For a recent examination of “Revivalist” literary history, see Randy Schiff’s *Revivalist Fantasy: Alliterative Verse and Nationalist Literary History* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011), 17–44.


far from treating alliterative verse “negatively and dismissively,” as Turville-Petre suggests, and conversely may distinguish it as a particularly difficult and sophisticated literary form that the Parson does not possess the confidence to render. And it would be even more irresponsible to transfer this disapproving posture to Chaucer, who respectfully employs alliterative verse where it is most appropriate—in battle scenes in *The Knight’s Tale* (I.2605–16) and *The Legend of Good Women* (635–48).12 In characterizing previous critical attempts to denigrate and unify alliterative poetry, Randy Schiff aptly suggests that “the Alliterative Revival is a medievalist rather than a medieval phenomenon,” which serves “to narrate the rise of Chaucerian proto-modernity.”13 While it is tempting to imagine a distinct northern school of poetics opposed to Chaucerian verse, this supposition drastically simplifies the variety and depth of alliterative poetry and unnecessarily creates a division from Chaucer that is ultimately unproductive and unsustainable.14

Even though an oppositional relationship between Chaucer and alliterative verse cannot be convincingly maintained, I want to suggest that it is possible and useful to distinguish the “provincial” perspectives of alliterative poems. Previous critics such as Turville-Petre have turned to dialectical analyses to demonstrate that many of these poems have clear origins in the Northern provinces.15 Building upon these linguistic analyses, I want to expand the “provincial” identity to include the historiographic perspectives of those who draw heavily upon Guido’s Trojan history. In the opening lines of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the poet details the events of *translatio imperii*, in which Aeneas and his progeny “depreced *provinces*” [subjugated *provinces*] (5–6), a characteristically dark illustration of the events that follow the destruction of Troy.16 The *Gawain*-poet inherits this language from Guido’s *Historia*: “Et nonnulle alie propterea *provincie* perpetuum ex Troianis receperunt incolatum” [And therefore some other *provinces* received from the Trojans a lasting settlement] (11).17 As I will suggest throughout the

book, this reference to Trojan colonization highlights the westward proliferation of New Trojan provinces, which are marked by political perfidy, the death of innocent victims, and diplomatic division. As Patricia Clare Ingham has suggested, once this *translatio* becomes localized within Britain, regional contestations for sovereignty emerge between the Welsh and the English, who both claim King Arthur as their own. The alliterative romances that embrace Guido’s historiographic posture engage in what we might now call a postcolonial critique, recognizing the destructive work of imperial reason, which desires the establishment of centralized power at the expense of the marginalization of unsavory elements of empire-building, such as the collateral damage of war, the sacrifice of the innocent, and the subjugation of native inhabitants. Whereas postcolonial critics such as Dipesh Chakrabarty seek to “provincialize Europe” by decentering the historicist concept of a dominant western world, these alliterative romances provincialize Troy by interrogating the desirability of Trojan imperial inheritance. By characterizing these romances as “provincial,” I am not suggesting that they speak as outsiders to more dominant historiographies—in fact, they are intimately engaged with narratives typically associated with metropolitan sensibilities such as francophilia, chivalric fashion, noble genealogies, and the elevation of the status of the English language. For instance, if the Gawain-poet also composed *Pearl*, as most critics agree, his poetry demonstrates direct engagement with the Ricardian context of London through an increased reliance upon a French lexicon and an examination of courtly politics. Transcending the limits of their regional locales, I consider these poems provincial inasmuch as they acknowledge and interrogate the doubtful practice of celebrating England’s status as a Trojan province.

As a means to define the nature of provincial politics in alliterative romance, I have limited my analysis to a networked group of alliterative romances that share the following characteristics: 1) a reliance upon Guido’s Trojan historiography; 2) Northern dialectical features and provenance; 3) critiques of chivalric practice and aristocratic claims to sovereignty; 4) metonymic relationships between the destruction of bodies and cities. As I will
suggest throughout this book, the skepticism of these romances is based on shared understandings of the relationship between natural and political bodies. In contrast to the logic that undergirds theories of sovereignty, such as _translatio imperii_ and the transcendence of the body politic, which are based on a messianic redemption or resurrection of the political body (i.e. that of the empire or the sovereign), these alliterative romances highlight the finality of the death of the physical body and its inextricable connection to sovereign power. That is, while aristocratic claims to sovereignty rely on an imperial authority that can be transferred via the destruction and subsequent redemption of a sovereign body, these alliterative poems reflect little faith in this fantasy, suggesting instead that the natural and political bodies cannot be separated and inevitably share the same fate. A useful analogy can be found in Michel Foucault’s well-known exploration of biopolitics, in which the body is inextricably subject to mechanisms of power. As a way out of this bind, Foucault suggests a future in which the body may liberate itself from power through a “different economy of bodies and pleasures,” a kind of jailbreak of sexuality from the binds of institutional authority. Characterizing such a divorce is an impossible dream, Giorgio Agamben argues, “Like sex and sexuality, the concept of the ‘body’ is always already caught in a deployment of power. The ‘body’ is always already a biopolitical body and bare life, and nothing in it or the economy of its pleasure seems to allow us to find solid ground on which to oppose the demands of sovereign power.” For these alliterative poets, a ruling nobility justified by a redeemed Trojan bloodline represents a kind of hollow sovereignty that is “always already” marked by the corporeal violence and death that follow assertions of authority. In contrast to the optimism of _Troynovant_, these romances emphasize the lamentable fate of the physical body within such imperial ambitions.

The poems of my study realize this critique of biopower by envisioning the sovereign body as a metonym for the larger city or empire it rules. Turning back to the scene of Laomedon’s beheading in John Clerk’s _Destruction_ as one example, we see that the dismemberment of the king leads directly to the destruction of the city. After Hercules tosses the Trojan king’s head into the crowd of his people, the plundering of the city ensues, which forces the inhabitants to evacuate, leaving their possessions behind. And just as Her-

21. The seminal work on medieval theories of sovereignty is Ernst Kantorowicz’s _The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).


cules beheads Laomedon, “Grippit hym grymly gird of his hede” [grips him grimly, cuts off his head] (1339), the Greeks topple the first Troy, “Grippit vp the ground girdyn doun þe wallys” [dig up the ground, cut down the walls] (1376). Using the same collocation of “Grippit/gird” and “Grippit/girdyn” to describe the destruction of Laomedon and Troy, John Clerk alliteratively connects the fates of the sovereign and the city. As a challenge to the late medieval belief in the sempiternity of the king’s body, the metaphor of the death of the natural body of the Trojan king leads directly to the death of the political body of Troy. While the future sovereigns such as Priam, Vespasian, and Arthur, who appear within the pages of these alliterative romances, make multiple attempts to redeem Troy through imperial inheritance, these efforts lead directly to more destruction and death. In this sense, Laomedon’s severed head at the feet of his people is a cipher for what Agamben might call the “bare life” of New Troys, which will always be subject to the destruction from which they emerged.

This book contributes to recent scholarship that has departed from arguments about the unity of alliterative verse and embraced examinations of corporeality, violence, and fantasies of empire within these poems. Randy Schiff’s recent book, 

Revivalist Fantasy, 

marks this decisive shift away from the tragic “rise and fall” narrative of the Alliterative Revival to uncover the nationalist desires that canonized Chaucer and relegated alliterative verse to the literary historical trash bin. To complicate the assumed coherence of a singular revival, he analyzes the multiple “alliterative zones” that produced this verse and reveals the divergent agendas of the poems. While Schiff’s argument helpfully localizes the various and often divergent concerns of many alliterative poems, I seek to interrogate the shared topics of alliterative romance, such as military campaigns and the destruction of cities, which are remarkably cohesive and suggest a common interest in corporeal revivals—from the raising of the dead to miraculous healings—a thesis that has been pursued by Christine Chism. Likewise, this book builds on the work of Geraldine Heng and Patricia Clare Ingham, who have analyzed the militarism in poems such as the alliterative Morte Arthure to establish romance as a repository for nationalistic fantasies. Heng even goes so far as to suggest that romance serves as a means to reimagine crusade history and its

24. Schiff, Revivalist Fantasy, 7.
“unthinkable” and “undiscussable” bodily transgression, cannibalism, which emerges prominently in my discussion of the *Siege of Jerusalem*.  

However, no critic to date has noted how extensively the alliterative romances are invested in the topic of Trojan history. This lacuna is easily ignored because—with the obvious exception of John Clerk’s *Destruction*—these poems do not set their scenes in ancient Troy. Rather, they invoke Troy explicitly through direct reference and implicitly through subtle connotation or imperial genealogy. Sylvia Federico has helpfully surveyed the figure of Troy in the works of Chaucer and his contemporaries, but her investigations are largely limited to Lancastrian London. In great contrast to most of their metropolitan counterparts, the alliterative romanciers of my study decentralize, rather than embrace, this figure of Troy as the paradoxical eastern origin of western authority. In each romance, the destruction of Troy haunts justifications of aristocratic identity, martial violence, and sovereign power.

Because of the deeply cherished connections between heritage and nobility, the alliterative romanciers’ investment in the figure of Troy becomes a full-scale critique of the Trojan politics largely embraced by the cultural milieu of the south. They resist the fashion of their metropolitan contemporaries, such as Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower, to envision London as a “New Troy” or the last stop of *translatio imperii*, the translation of empire from Troy to Rome to Britain. Unlike their renowned alliterative cousin, *Piers Plowman*, the alliterative romances are defined by their vernacular engagements with Latin chronicles of militaristic enterprises. They translate Latin history into alliterative long lines that are well suited for the rhythm, pace, and spectacular violence of battle. This alliterative sensibility is expressed both through their consistency of meter and self-conscious revelations about the historical function of such formulaic verse. Based on the modest conditions and limited numbers of the manuscripts, their ambivalence about aristocratic sovereignty was not well received by or beyond their readership. Even though the audience is clearly imagined as aristocratic, the surviving manuscripts suggest that the readers ranged from clerics to educated country gentlemen. It is striking that while *Piers Plowman* is extant in fifty-four manuscripts, most all of the alliterative romances survive in single copies. In fact, these poems resist the popularizing thrust of English romance and instead express great dismay at the clerical disenfranchisement endorsed by Langland and his contemporaries. Their lack of affinity with *Piers Plowman*

is demonstrated by their distinctive “provincial” politics that belie any revivalist sensibilities or fantasies of empire. Rather, these poems vernacularize their Latinate sources to express their hesitations about revivals of Troy to a lay audience with aristocratic pretensions. Readers expecting to hear glorious tales of their imperial ancestors would have been disappointed by the pessimism of these alliterative romances.

The sole surviving manuscript that contains the *Destruction* is a helpful case in point. It only takes a glance at Glasgow University Library's Hunterian MS V.2.8 to notice that the modest paper codex was obviously at some remove from an armigerous patron. Its archaic vocabulary and alliterating units were so foreign to the Victorian scholar G. A. Panton that the description he sent to F. J. Furnivall in 1865 announced that the manuscript contained “[a] stately poem called the *Destruction of Troy*, wrote by Joseph of Exeter, who lived in the reign of King Henry the Second, from 1154 to 1189. In Old English verse.” This early editor of the manuscript not only misidentified the text and verse form, but also assumed it to be a work composed in the twelfth century. Without a precedent or an analogue, this Trojan history expressed through what appeared to be archaic Anglo-Saxon verse left Panton, and subsequent readers, at a loss.

To complicate matters further, the text itself suffered a loss at the seventh folio, one that proves to be provocative. As the poet details the achievements and personalities of each Argonaut, the description of Hercules is cut short and the manuscript proceeds into a latter point of Guido's second book, Jason's arrival at Colchis. Book II would have fascinated English readers since it is here that Guido both presages the destruction of the first Troy and tracks the city's influence upon the establishment of Rome and the Trojan heritage of Britain. Guido's account, however, does not include a glorious prophecy about the prestige and authority of the Trojan line. Instead, Guido recalls the origin of the strife between the Greeks and Trojans to Laomedon's dismissal of Jason and Hercules from the shores of Troy and then digresses to discuss the future ramifications of this inhospitable action, saying, “Propter quas tante cladis diffusa lues orbem terrarum infecerit” [On account of these things, a far-reaching plague of great destruction infected the whole world].

(11). For post-Black Death readers who claimed the Trojans as ancestors, this pessimism about the destiny for New Troys would have been received with great discomfort or even indignation. Was the section’s content too disagreeable for the English patron to tolerate?

While that question cannot be definitively answered, it is clear that the scribe of Hunterian MS V.2.8 perceived the missing section as noteworthy. The first folio lists an index of chapters and their descriptions inscribed with letters that are mostly consistent in size. Book II, which is almost entirely absent in the manuscript, is listed as “The ij boke: how the grekes toke lond vpon troy. CAWSE of the first debate” (Figure 1). It is important to note that the word “CAWSE” is noticeably large and bolded in comparison to the words of the other chapter descriptions. In fact, no other word or phrase in the table of contents, with the exception of the title and prologue, match the size of “CAWSE.” While the Destruction contains the section that describes the Greeks arrival at Troy, it does not include subsequent text that would have included a discussion of the “CAWSE.” The importance of the lacuna is confirmed if we turn to the lines preceding this missing section, which conclude a discussion of the life of Hercules and begin the story of one of the greatest imperialists of all time, Alexander the Great:

The mighty Massidon kyng maistur of all,
The Emperour Alexander aunterit to come:
He wan all the world & at his wille aght. (313–15)

[The mighty Macedonian king, master of all, the Emperor Alexander ventured forth. He conquered the world and controlled it at his will.]

A reference to one who conquered the world is an appropriate, albeit hyperbolic, convocation to a discussion of empire and praise of Alexander’s ancestors, but here is where the lacuna begins—these lines end the folio and the text restarts on the next page with an account of Jason and the Argonauts’ arrival at Colchis. Since the transition is so rough and the book is intact at this point, editors Panton and Donaldson not only concluded that folios are missing from an earlier manuscript, but also include in their edition the part of Guido’s text which presumably would have been there. In fact, its absence may be the best testament to its importance.

To fill this void, I offer this book in an attempt to read medieval romance “against the grain” and open up new avenues of inquiry about its aristocratic, historical, and provincial nature. Since these alliterative romances express

33. My method is informed by Gayatri Spivak’s essay, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing
FIGURE 1. The table of contents, which emphasizes the “CAWSE” of the great debate. Hunterian MS V.2.8, f. 1a. Reproduced by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections
their regional Trojan politics through critiques of objects of chivalric value, my individual readings are structured around the following constituents of knightly identity: genealogy, war, violence, heraldry, and territory. And in keeping with the ancestral claims to nobility, the order of the chapters follows the itinerary of the *translatio imperii*, starting with Troy, continuing with Rome, and ending with Britain. I start with a survey of the historiographic landscape from which alliterative romance emerged, focusing on the genealogical concerns of two Latin books of Troy, the histories of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Guido delle Colonne. Moving into alliterative romance, I begin with the critiques of war that emerge in John Clerk’s *Destruction of Troy*, continue with analyses of Roman violence in the *Siege of Jerusalem* and Arthurian heraldry in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and conclude with a reassessment of textual and geographic territories in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. My readings of each poem are driven by the following questions: If medieval romances exemplify aristocratic ideals and justify royal bloodlines, why do these alliterative romanciers characterize Britain’s foundation as the product of treachery and destruction? What are the politics of alliterative invocations of Troy? And how do these writers indulge and subvert English fantasies of sovereignty through vernacular translations of classical history? As I have been suggesting, the answers to these questions supplement and interrogate current understandings of Trojan historiography in England, the genre of romance as cultural fantasy, the social function of literature, the relationship between metropolitan and provincial poetics, the unity of alliterative poetry, and the theory of the “alliterative revival.”

I begin the first chapter, “Genealogy,” by calling into question the pervasiveness of Galfridian historiography on English fantasies of empire through the analysis of the Guido-tradition that proves to be an attractive source for English romance. Scholars have attended to the alliterative *Destruction of Troy*, since it is a direct translation of Guido’s *Historia*, but they have not fully accounted for the effect of the Guido-tradition on the other alliterative poems. These romances not only perpetuate a concern with the image of a destroyed Troy, but also contain anti-war themes and critiques of territorial expansion that they inherit from the *Historia*. Rather than expand upon the glorious genealogy from Priam to Aeneas to Brutus to Arthur, these poems treat Troy as a didactic and portable figure that represents the dire consequences of usurpations, sieges of cities, and the breaking of vows. Through these representations, Troy assumes characteristics of a body that experi-

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ences dismemberment, literally through diplomatic disagreement, sieges and looting, and metonymically through graphic descriptions of bodily mutilation inflicted upon the defenders and inhabitants of fallen cities. This metonymy is horrifically realized in the Siege of Jerusalem, in which the Roman extraction of gold from Jewish bodies prefaces the actual Roman looting of Jerusalem for its treasure. The beheadings of warriors, consumption of children, and disembowelment of besieged citizens represent or foretell the crumbling of towers, the enslavement of captives, and the liquidation of booty. Acts of treason drive and/or frame these narratives to serve as exempla that do not support aristocratic claims to sovereignty, but rather emphasize the eventual death and destruction of cities and bodies.

In chapters two through five, I track the influence of Guido’s Trojan historiography on specific poems that comprise the genre of alliterative romance. I have selected John Clerk’s Destruction of Troy, The Siege of Jerusalem, the alliterative Morte Arthure, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight as representatives of this tradition because, in addition to their common formal, topical, and political sensibilities, they are indelibly marked by Guido’s Historia. Chapter two, “War,” focuses primarily on the alliterative translation of Guido’s Historia, the late fourteenth-century Destruction of Troy. Its author, John Clerk of Whalley, negotiates between his roles as translator, historian, and alliterative poet to produce his account of the fall of Troy for English readers. According to Clerk, his translation of Guido’s Historia provides vernacular access to historical truth that had not previously been available to his audience. By comparing Clerk’s text with another translation of Guido’s Historia, John Lydgate’s Troy Book, I argue that Clerk’s translational method, which he calls a “linking of letters,” reflects his commitment to connecting a destructive past with an English present. The Destruction is an appropriate starting point, not only because of its status as a direct translation of Guido’s Historia, but also because of its provenance in the Northwest Midlands, the residence of the Gawain-poet and the much contested origin of the Alliterative Revival. Furthermore, since the fall of Troy is the subject of the poem, the figure of Troy as both a city and body emerges with a historicity unparalleled in the rest of the alliterative corpus. If civil and corporeal fates are inextricable, as the Destruction suggests, then the exhumation and presentation of dead bodies revise history by establishing new narratives and genealogies of power. In all of the alliterative romances of this book, the dead wield authority that often leads to tragic consequences. The Destruction not only provides a graphic illustration of the revival of Hector’s body, but also describes the construction of the New Troy in language that conjures up images of a ritual exhumation. These corporeal revivals are attempts to reas-
sert lost power, but in the end, these undead bodies fail to regain authority and eventually inflict greater pain and death upon those they were supposed to protect. The embellishments of the destruction and resurrection of cities and bodies found in the *Destruction* reflect an enhanced pessimism about Britain’s Trojan inheritance. Using Guido as its authority, the *Destruction* presents English readers with a narrative that in the very least is ambivalent about their Trojan identity, making readers privy to the war councils of their ancestor Priam, in which Homer’s bloodthirsty Hector becomes a pacifistic diplomat who advises against war. By professing to tell the whole story from an accurate source, the *Destruction* asks readers to grapple with the complex and fractured nature of their Trojan ancestry and to ponder the value of an idealized New Troy in England.

The *Siege of Jerusalem* is the subject of chapter three, “Violence,” not only because it may have been influenced by the *Destruction*, but also because it addresses the next stop for the *translato imperii*: the Roman Empire. Critics have read the *Siege* as an unremarkable example of medieval antisemitism because of its perceived delight in the destruction of Jewish bodies. I want to suggest that these previous readings, while justified, have effaced the *Siege*-poet’s critiques of war and imperialism. The *Siege*-poet modulates his antisemitic homily with a condemnation of the Roman Empire: the disciplined bodies are on display, creating a collective image that teaches its audience both the vengeance of God and the cruelty of Roman imperial siegecraft. Reinterpreting scenes in his sources that would normally incite virulent antisemitism in medieval Christians, such as Christ’s passion, the flaying of Caiaphas, and the Jewish mother Maria’s eating of her child, the *Siege*-poet transforms them into moments that exhibit the pitiable fate of the Jews and evince his disgust for the cruelty of the Roman conquerors. As the humanity of the besieged Jews grows, the newly baptized Romans, Vespasian and Titus, increasingly embody the surfeit of their pagan predecessor Nero by expressing exorbitant enthusiasm about their imperial stature and exacting excessive punishment of their enemies. Vespasian and Titus confront moral and corporeal dilemmas that efface their Christian identities, enhance their desire for power, and reflect their moral inferiority to Jews like Josephus. The result is an unexpected redirection in the poem’s object of critique from the bodies of Christ-killing Jews to those of the bullion-hungry Romans. Through an analysis of these scenes of corporeal violence and their relationship to the historiography of the Northwest Midlands, I demonstrate that these illustrations of bodily dismemberment elicit sympathy for the Jewish victims and highlight the cruelty of the Roman conquerors.
Continuing to follow the itinerary of *translatio imperii*, chapter four, “Heraldry,” addresses the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, a poem that not only establishes King Arthur as the inheritor of the Roman Empire, but also uses the *Siege* for one of its source texts. Whereas the *Destruction* exhibits ambivalence about Trojan historiography through its faithful adherence to Guido’s text and the *Siege* questions Roman imperialism through illustrations of horrific scenes of violence, the *Morte* draws from an extensive catalogue of English, Latin, and French works to present a highly subtle and conflicted portrait of King Arthur. Capitalizing on the powerful ability of the alliterative line to illustrate the frenetic pace of battle, the *Morte*-poet continually draws on the Guido-tradition as a basis for his contention that the sacrifice of the innocent is inextricable from empire building. In the process, the *Morte*-poet engages in what I call “heraldic historiography” by attaching multiple meanings to recurring chivalric signs and symbols, made particularly manifest in the enigmatic sign of the dragon. Rather than bolstering hereditary claims to nobility, these heraldic devices attenuate martial fervor, obscure sovereign identities, emphasize the collateral damage of war, and reveal the danger of territorial expansion. By juxtaposing signs of empire with graphic scenes of evisceration and cannibalism, the relationship between heraldic assertions of royal authority and the extermination of innocent life becomes inseparable.

Chapter five, “Territory,” is an examination of the most well-known alliterative romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and specifically its Trojan “frame,” which rehearses a Trojan past that appears to bear no relevance to the present action of the Arthurian romance. The abrupt transition in genre from ancient history to playful romance highlights the disconnectedness of the aristocracy and their propaganda from the realities of empire formation. As a misappropriated symbol of glory, Gawain’s girdle becomes a heraldic marker of the chivalric amnesia that obscures the images of a burning Troy, treasonous Aeneas, and the subjugation of provinces that surround the text. I want to suggest that this separation between Arthurian heraldry and infidelity is representative of the *Gawain*-poet’s satiric use of historiographic and geographic borderlands as peripheral spaces that critique the central subjects of chivalry and “trawþe” in the romance. I focus on two such “margins.” The first is the Trojan “frame,” the first and last stanzas of the poem that operate as a textual border and historiographic lens through which we view the central action. The second is the topography of the Northwest Midlands and adjacent Welsh March, which serves as the “uncivilized” ground that Gawain treads in his journey to Hautdesert. Through an analysis of the historiography of the *Gawain*-poet’s provenance in the Northwest Midlands and the
intersections of Trojan and Anglo-Welsh geographies, I argue that the recita-
tion of ancestry in the opening and closing stanzas highlights Britain’s ter-
ritorial violence, critiques the frivolity of the royal aristocracy, and displays a
late-fourteenth-century provincial distrust of assertions of England’s Trojan
identity.

The conclusion synthesizes my examinations of alliterative poetry to
identify these alliterative perspectives on war and interrogate the utility of the
historical theory of the 
translatio imperii et studii. This “transferral of empire and learning” has been used to describe the pervasive medieval perception
of the progression of history and knowledge that, for England, is based in
the transfer of textual authority from the clergy to the lay aristocracy. I sug-
gest that 
translatio imperii is fundamentally optimistic and providential in its
design, which is in direct contrast to the remarkably pessimistic and retro-
spective conception of empire in these alliterative poems. If these poets were
clerics who worked at the behest of aristocratic patrons, as the evidence sug-
gests, these alliterative romanciers contributed in projects to which they were
trenchantly opposed. Since these alliterative romanciers are not identifiable,
I turn to the example of John Trevisa, whose translation projects and allitera-
tive prose provide instructive analogues for the relationship between clerks
and their employers and reaffirm the skepticism of these alliterative poets.
Through a comparative reading of the Trojan text that held the greatest cur-
rency in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Geoffrey Chaucer’s 
Troilus and Criseyde, I more precisely identify the unique nature of these alliterative
romances and their perspectives on the English aristocracy and England’s
imperial potential. For these poets, the larger consequence of the 
translatio
imperii et studii is the disenfranchisement of the clergy and the destruction
of innocent life.