# Wandering Imperialism: Nationalism, Hybridity, and Identity in the Matter of Britain

By

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# Wandering Imperialism: Nationalism, Hybridity, and Identity in the Matter of Britain

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how the cultural and political effects of colonial subjugation and conquest shape ideological constructions of nation and empire within the Matter of Britain. Combining the theories of ethno-symbolism and imperium studies, I challenge pre-existing notions of developing nationalism as a modern phenomenon. I argue that these Arthurian texts engage in identity exploration and construction by exploring England's imperial relations with Scotland and Wales, and in doing so, lays the foundation for a new idealized "British" (rather than English) nationalism that unifies the various peoples of the British Isles. My work takes a broad view of Arthurian romance in addressing five major texts across the late fourteenth / early fifteenth centuries: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Awntyrs off Arthur, Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, and Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. I begin by examining how borderland spaces shape ethnic identity and collective cultural memory. The last part of my analysis considers how English ethnic identity is contingent on its connection to Rome as both a physical homeland and an idealized imperial space. I conclude by considering how imagined ethnic solidarity, whether in a medieval or modern context, ignores the realities of English as a culturally hybrid ethnicity.

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I would be remiss if I did not mention Dr. Michael S. Nagy, an Associate Professor at South Dakota State University, who has been my friend and mentor over the last ten years. Under his guidance, I wrote a fledgling conference paper that I presented at the Northern Plains Conference on Early British Literature in 2014. It was this paper from which my interest in the connections between nationalism and medieval romance originated.

Above all else, I must give thanks to my wife, Hailey, for continually supporting me through this long journey. Love eternally.

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Introduction

*"The nation is always an illusion, a fantasy of wholeness that threatens again and again to fragment from the inside out. Fantasies of national identity teach peoples to desire union; they help inculcate in a populace the apparent 'truth' of unity, regulation, coordination and wholeness are always better, more satisfying and more fascinating, than the alternatives. Yet in order to promote desires for national unity, the nation, its core identity, must appear to have always been there, poised to fascinate its people, and ready to be desired."*

-Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, p. 17

In her book, *Sovereign Fantasies*: *Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*, Patricia Ingham shows that the concept of the cohesive nation is always an idealization—an elusive sense of unity that is frequently desired in medieval romance but never actualized. The "truth" of a unified national identity is that it cannot exist without transforming the alternative cultural identity, whether through appropriation, suppression, or extinction of difference. Those who wield the power of the nation and push nationalist agendas often do so through the subjugation and oppression of other nations or peoples. Discussing nationalism amidst the rise of white supremacy and alt-right movements in both America and abroad has become an arduous, albeit necessary point of discussion for medievalists. In Charlottesville, alt-right marchers held shields calling to mind the Knights Templar and many of them carried signs with Anglo-Saxon runes.[1] Neo-Nazis carry on earlier white supremacist ideology in which Arthurian legend was used to create fraternity among members through practices that rooted them in medieval chivalric ideals.[2] Despite the misappropriation of medieval symbols and historical revisionism of such acts, medievalists have been slow to enter the political discourse surrounding issues of race and ethnicity, either from a historical standpoint or our modern political context.

[1] Jennifer Shuessler, "Medieval Scholars Joust with White Nationalists. And One Another," *The New York Times, The New York Times, 5 May 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/05/arts/the-battle-for-medieval-studies-white-supremacy.html.*
[2] Andrew B.R. Elliot, "Internet Medievalism and the White Middle Ages," *History Compass*, Wiley, 2018, pp. 1-10.

I view the lack of engagement with critical issues of race and ethnicity surrounding the Middle Ages as a twofold issue. On one hand, literary theorists often lack the rhetorical means of delineating between the past and the present. Regardless of our knowledge of the cultural and intellectual influence of middle ages on later time periods, an artificial ideological division (undoubtedly Enlightenment based thinking) still separates medieval from modern. On the other hand, medieval studies remain intellectually conservative compared to many of its humanities counterparts and has remained resistant to many modern critical theories. In the cases where medieval scholars have turned toward newer critical theories, pushback has often occurred either from modernists or even scholars of their own field. One way to overcome this is to apply modern social and cultural theories to medieval works and to engage in new critical discourses surrounding what have traditionally been seen as "modern" issues. Admittedly, my work here is predominately focused on the construction of an emerging British national identity, one that focuses on a populace that is predominately northern European—the English, the Welsh, and the Scots. Yet, within an examination of the British-self lingers issues of the cultural "other," distinctly different from modern understandings of race.[3] All of the romances in this work deal with issues of the periphery, cultural difference, and political dissention.

One notable exception to this lack of engagement with critical issues of race and ethnicity is the work of Geraldine Heng, whose most recent book, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018) has re-invigorated the discussion of race in the Middle Ages. Heng's work deconstructs the definition of race to show "the ability of racial logic to stalk and merge with other hierarchical systems."[4] These hierarchical systems—such as gender, sexuality, and class—

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[3] For a larger discussion of the differences between concepts of medieval ethnicity and modern conceptions of race, See Chapter 1.
[4] Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, Cambridge UP, 2018, p. 20.

combine with race in the creation of personal intersectional identities.  Heng's concept of race moves beyond an epidermal or biological focus to incorporate religion, economics, colonization, war, sociopolitical structures, and other factors that configure racial attitudes and behaviors across multiple time periods.[5]  She defines race as "*a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content*."[6]  Where my own work converges with Heng is in a concern for these markers of "human difference."  While my own work does not explicitly grapple with the conceptual terminology of race, at times, there are undistinguishable overlaps between the concepts of race and ethnicity.  In the same way that race, as Heng argues, functions both socioculturally and biopolitically, so too does the concept of ethnicity.  Arguably, ethnicity is even further removed from biological markers of difference than is race, instead being more defined by cultural symbols established through religion, customs, language, and law.  Stemming from "ethnic," a Greek word denoting nationality or place of origin, ethnicity serves as a more useful term for my purposes to discuss the development of the medieval nation.[7]  This is not to claim, however, that concepts of race or ethnicity were ever uniform, constant, or stable concepts during the medieval period.  In fact, I would argue that the sheer messiness of shifting conceptual markers of difference during the medieval period indicate an identity in flux—developing identities that must be continually reconfigured, reinvented, and reimagined.

Considering the messiness of such shifting cultural markers of difference, in some ways it seems ironic that alt-right groups have chosen to appropriate medieval symbols, particularly those from vernacular romance.  Romance as a genre often interrogates and deconstructs cultural

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[5] Heng, *The Invention of Race*, pp. 181-2.
[6] Heng, *The Invention of Race*, p. 27. [original emphasis]
[7] "Ethnic, adj. and n," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/64786.

and social norms.  At its best, it serves as a literary act of resistance against the norms of the aristocratic elite.  This is not to say, however, that medieval romance is free of xenophobic, often exclusionary rhetoric or problematic ideas of ethnicity and nation.  What we can say for certain is that romance is involved in *identity play*, or for the English, the re-examination of how personal identity fits into a larger conceptual cultural and political framework; in other words, *what it means to be English.*

In a modern context, the question of fitting into a larger cultural and political framework becomes a question of *belonging to a nation*.  The concepts of nationhood and nationalism are not new phenomena, nor are they isolated to modernity.  Postcolonial scholars, such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, trace ideological constructions of western nationalism back as early as the late fifteenth century with Europe's colonization of the new world.  However, the cultural and political effects of colonial subjugation and conquest originate in much earlier periods.  My dissertation examines these earlier ideological constructions of nation and empire within a body of late medieval and early modern literature referred to as the "Matter of Britain."  This literature concerns itself with the development of Great Britain as shaped by legendary kings and heroes, especially those of Arthurian mythos.  I argue that the Matter of Britain engages in this *identity play* by exploring England's imperial relations with Scotland and Wales, and in doing so, helps to lay the foundation for a new idealized "British" (rather than English) nationalism that unifies the various peoples of the British Isles.

My work bridges the gap between modern postcolonial theory and medieval literary studies by combining two unique discourses, ethno-symbolism and imperium studies. Ethno-symbolism, a methodology of nationalism pioneered by British sociologist Anthony D. Smith (1939-2016), stresses the role of shared cultural symbols, myths, memories, and traditions as a

fundamental part of developing nation-states.  This theory is distinct from other theories of

nationalism in its simultaneous engagement with history, culture, and sociology.  Since ethno-

symbolism takes a cultural focus and views societal structure as developing over time, it has

become an important source on the topic of nations and nationalism in literary studies, including

the work of medieval scholars such as Randy P. Schiff and Michelle R. Warren.[8] I combine

ethno-symbolism with what Early Modernist Barbara Fuchs designates as "imperium studies."

Fuchs proposes the new designation of imperium studies to emphasize the role of empires as

precursors to the modern concept of nationhood.  Imperium studies strongly stresses the Roman

imperial notion of *translatio imperii*, meaning the westward progress of empire. For the Matter

of Britain, this concept proves critical because developing European nation-states in the Middle

Ages and the Early Modern period relied on Roman roots (whether real or imagined) and even

earlier Trojan ancestry to establish political supremacy and cultural legitimacy.  By combining

the emphasis on myth and traditions from ethno-symbolism and the notion of empire as

precursor to nation from imperium studies, I establish a new, interdisciplinary interpretive

framework that analyzes myths and historical memories as critical in the development of national

identity, while avoiding the temporal complications of a more traditional postcolonial framework

by embracing pre-modern notions of colonialism within their own historical contexts.

## I. Romance as Narrative Strategy

I believe it necessary to pause for a moment to address why I have chosen to analyze the

topic of a developing nation, a clearly historical issue, with Arthurian romance, a fictional genre.

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[8] Randy P. Schiff, *Revivalist Fantasy: Alliterative Verse and Nationalist Literary History*, The Ohio State UP, 2011. Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain: 1100-1300*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

The first reason is that vernacular romance can provide us insights into the human condition of the medieval commoner (or at least those who could read English).  As Lee Ramsey states in his book *Chivalric Romances*, "the word 'romance,' as used in France originally meant the vernacular or spoken language as opposed to Latin, the language of culture.  Applied to a book, 'romance' meant one that was written for ordinary people, in their own language."[9]  However, this original definition has failed to hold up under critical scrutiny, as "romance" has proved to be a fluid, often contested, term in literary scholarship.  Critics often disagree about its origins, history, and even how to define it; however, audiences and readers are often able to identify romance when they see it.  Romance crosses historical and cultural lines, extends from antiquity to the present, and appears in multiple languages including French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian.

My own work has adopted Barbara Fuchs's definition of romance as laid out in her seminal book *Romance* (2004).  Fuchs builds upon the scholarship of Northrop Frye and that of Patricia Parker.  Northrop Frye (1912-1991), a Canadian literary critic and theorist, provided a conceptual framework for romance that still serves as a foundation for literary critics today.  In his influential work *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (1976), he identifies romance as one of the central "modes" of literature and examines sentimental romances, which he defines as "the literary development of the formulas" derived from the oral culture of folk tales.[10] For Frye, the appearance of romance in Europe stems from Greek and Latin narratives and the differences between epic and romance is primarily one of social context. He discusses the dialectic as inherent in all literature, but romance is shaped more overtly by a

[9] Lee C. Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England*, Indiana University Press, 1983, p. 5.
[10] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, Harvard University Press, 1987, p 3.

sequence of archetypes, as Frye calls it in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), "both the wish-fulfilment dream and the anxiety or nightmare dream of repugnance."[11]  Fuchs's other primary influence, Patricia Parker, takes a post-structuralist view of romance in which she focuses on what romance "*does* and *undoes* within texts."[12]  Perhaps the most important contribution that Parker establishes in her theory of romance is its ability to appear in texts that do not fall into a specific genre or mode.  She views romance "as a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective or object" within texts that take a primary concern in "the connection between naming, identity, and closure or ending."[13]

Fuchs builds upon the contributions of Frye and Parker to form her definition of romance as a "literary and textual *strategy*," and states that "the term describes a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi, including idealization, the marvelous, narrative delay, wandering, and obscured identity, that, as Parker suggests, both pose a quest and complicates it."[14]  While my primary concern is not to argue the semantic differences between viewing romance as a genre, mode, form, or strategy, as other scholars have already provided extensive commentary on the subject, it is essential to recognize the adaptability of romance and the role romance strategies play in narrative progression and issues of identity development.  I examine these romance strategies within the Matter of Britain, as they form a narrative and historical progression to and digression from the formation of a unified British Empire.  In doing so, I view the narrative delay and identity development as forging a unique connection between romance and postcolonial concepts.  This research highlights the development, not only of the personal

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[11] Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 106.
[12] Barbara Fuchs, *Romance*, Routledge, 2004, p. 8. [original emphasis]
[13] Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode,* Princeton UP, 1979, p. 4.
[14] Fuchs, *Romance*, p. 9. [original emphasis]

identity of the characters, but also the larger cultural and national identity of an insular

premodern British Empire.

## II. Postcolonial Studies: Issues and Limitations

To discuss issues of cultural and national identity, my research draws upon postcolonial

scholarship.  Using postcolonial theory within a medieval context faces its own set of challenges,

most notably issues of definition and the temporal boundaries of colonialism.  Leading

postcolonial scholars, such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, traditionally situate

postcolonialism within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European empires with the

acknowledgement that colonialism took root in the late fifteenth century with the European

domination of the New World.  However, this view limits the confines of colonialism and

ignores the developing English nation and its territorial acquisitions in the medieval world.[15]

Caught between the Roman Empire and modern colonializations, the pre-modern world is

ignored by many theorists because it fails to suit their preconceived notions of colonial relations.

The term *post*-colonial and even colonial itself suggest that a pre-colonial historical situation

exists; however, as Barbara Fuchs and David J. Baker suggest, the past is instead "marked by

multiple, historically specific temporalities that preceded modernity and came to be integral to

colonialism as we usually think of it.  The questions raised by divergent colonialisms concern

migrations, relations of center to periphery, and contacts among European and/or non-European

peoples, as well as imperial expansion."[16]  What these scholars mean is that the concept of

colonialism should be taken as dynamic, rather than strictly static and modern, and has roots in

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[15] It is important here to distinguish a "state," that is an organized community which is politically cohesive and defined in terms of government, from a "nation," which is culturally and ethnically cohesive.  In contrast, the term "empire" is hierarchical and exists as both multi-ethnic and multi-national.

[16] Barbara Fuchs and David J. Baker, "The Postcolonial Past," *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2004, p. 339.

the cross-cultural encounters and movements of the past. When considering the development of the English nation within the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this means considering colonialism within the historical context of the Late Middle Ages, rather than situated within the modern definition of colonialism.

In working to bridge the gap between modern postcolonial theory and medieval literary studies, I build on the work of scholars such as Jeffery Jerome Cohen, Patricia Clare Ingham, Lisa Lampert-Weissig, Kathy Lavezzo and others who have contributed to the small but growing body of postcolonial medieval literary studies in the last 20 years. With this comes the acknowledgement that modernity has different power structures at play that influence imperial and colonial expansions. However, this is not to say that imperialism and nationalism did not exist in the Middle Ages. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren also criticize the traditional trajectory of postcolonial studies in that it "blocks certain routes to the past, and thus maintains certain nationalist and historicist exclusions."[17] Ignoring the Middle Ages, especially when considering the influx of vernacular literature and the changing national narrative, fails to acknowledge the political, cultural, and economic expansion of England during the Late Middle Ages. Temporally limiting the scope of postcolonial theory goes against the inclusive ideology it seems to purport; instead, this limiting practice creates its own dominant narrative that elevates modernity and print-capitalism against the historicity of the Middle Ages. This narrow view of postcolonialism privileges the English-speaking world and modernity, while largely ignoring other periods and cultures.[18] Not only that, but it creates an artificial binary between that which is

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[17] Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren, "Introduction: Postcolonial Modernity and the Rest of History," *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*, edited by Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren, Palgrave, 2003, p. 2.
[18] Fuchs and Baker, "The Postcolonial Past," p. 337.

"modern" and that which is not, rather than viewing history as a shift in ideas that shape and change the identities of peoples and cultures over time.

### III. National Identity and Ethno-symbolism

Postcolonialism views the concept of national identity as a central concern for examining the postcolonial subject.   National identity is a sense of cohesion through traditions, culture, and language.  To understand national identity, we must first turn toward distinguishing between the terms "nation" and "national*ism*."  Three major theories—perennialism, modernism, and ethno-symbolism—dominate the discussion of nations and nationalism.  Perennialists contend that nations are naturally persisting political and social units that exist in every period of history. Modernists, on the other hand, think nations are a recent development, linked with modern inventions that originated out of the French and Industrial Revolutions.[19] Unlike the perennialist or modernist views that focus on the temporal conditions of the nation, a third theory, ethno-symbolism, argues that nations originate from ethnic groups.  It is ethno-symbolism that most underpins my own research and will be the primary focus of the chapters to follow.

To understand how ethno-symbolism developed, I turn towards the work of one of the most influential modernists, Benedict Anderson.  It has been over thirty years since he published his book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), in which he defines the nation as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[20] A nation is limited because it has finite boundaries,

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[19] Krishan Kumar, "When was the English Nation?" *When is the Nation? Towards an Understanding of Theories of Nationalism*, edited by Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac, Routledge, 2005, p. 140.

[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Verso, 1983, p. 6.  Anderson continues to define *limited* in the sense that it "has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations.  *Sovereignty* refers to the right and full power of the governing body over itself, although Anderson

encompassing a specific group of people.   In his view, the concept of sovereignty, or an independent authority of the community, came into being during the Enlightenment.  He traces the origins of national consciousness to "the large cultural systems that preceded it," which he identifies as the religious community and the dynastic realm.[21]  It was only once the religious imagined communities began to decline after the Middle Ages that people were able to conceive of the nation: "Beneath the decline of sacred communities, languages and lineages, a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world, which , more than anything else, made it possible to 'think' the nation."[22]  Anderson's fault here, like so many other theorists, is that he fails to understand the complexities of the Middle Ages; instead, he oversimplifies medieval culture and language to make his point about modernity.  Since its publication, Anderson's work has been subject to numerous critiques from medieval scholars, like Lesley Johnson who asserts that Anderson "overstates the homogeneity of the medieval clerical structure, overestimates the cultural monopoly of 'sacred languages' (and ignores vernacular culture completely), and grossly oversimplifies world views in circulation in medieval culture in order to produce one dominant version in which historical cultural difference is simply not apprehensible."[23]  While Johnson's critique stems from her work on Latin texts, her point unveils two important concepts.  First, that the medieval clerical influence was not all-encompassing in its cultural influence, and second, that examining medieval vernacular culture has been undervalued in relation to concepts of the nation.  Anderson's neglect of medieval

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distinctly notes it as a "concept born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm" (7).

[21] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 12.

[22] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 22.

[23] Lesley Johnson, "Imagining Communities: Medieval and Modern," *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, edited by Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson, and Alan V. Murray, Leeds Studies in English, 1995, p. 5.

vernacular literature is, in part, exactly what my study works to unveil—how popular literature shaped the ideological structure and mythos of the nation in the Middle Ages.

A third theory, ethno-symbolism, and the methodology that most underpins my own research, was introduced by British sociologist Anthony D. Smith (1939-2016). Smith attempts to counter the ahistoricism of the perennialist and modernist views.  He argues for a historical understanding of nations and their development over time, defining nationalism as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a human population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential nation."[24] In his view, nations emerge from long standing ethnic communities, what he calls *ethnies*.  He describes ethnies as "named human populations with shared ancestry myths, historical memories and common cultural traits, associated with a homeland and sense of solidarity, at least among the elites."[25]  Furthermore, Smith acknowledges ethnies as having existed since antiquity and the Middle Ages while serving a foundation role in the development of the nation in providing distinctive mythology, symbols, culture, and ties to ancestral homelands.[26]  An ethno-symbolic approach opens up a space for considering the culture of the Middle Ages, in this case vernacular medieval literature, as playing a major role in the development of national identity.

However, a larger cohesive or pure type of ethnie, as Smith refers to it, did not develop in a linear fashion in medieval England, but rather, through a number of moving sociopolitical structures on an island nation which was shaped by the continual traffic of ideas and various peoples—despite the later construction of a mythical English origin.[27]  An ethno-symbolic

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[24] Anthony D. Smith, "'Set in the Silver Sea': English National Identity and European Integration," *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2006, p 443.

[25] Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation.* Oxford UP, 1999, p. 105

[26] For more on this, see Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1991.

[27] Smith, "'Set in the Silver Sea': English National Identity and European Integration," p. 438.

approach to nationalism provides the ability to focus on shared mythos and memory making as integral to the process of developing a national identity. For England, and its Scottish and Welsh neighbors, this sense of national identity becomes incredibly complex because of the history of warfare, which includes the Roman invasion and occupation of Celtic Britain, the Germanic invasions by the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, the Norman invasion in 1066, numerous Welsh revolts, and the Scottish Wars of Independence in the 13th and 14th centuries. Alongside the historical situations which shaped England, the literary tradition of the Matter of Britain developed to reflect and re-envision this earlier history in pursuit of discovering an English national identity.

Something particularly unique about the development of the English nation is that the cultural groundwork for a cohesive national identity began to take shape much earlier than England's formation into a cohesive nation. As Smith takes careful note, by around 900, peoples existing as communities with shared customs, ancestry, and government was already a fixed concept, later to be supported by "genealogies and myths of origin, which were often traced back to Aeneas or Noah by writers from Isidore of Seville in the seventh century to Fredegar, Orderic Vitalis and Geoffrey of Monmouth, right up to the authors of the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320."[28] Smith acknowledges a growing sense of unity through genealogies and origin myths even as early as the Anglo-Saxon period to be further refined by Anglo-Norman language, culture, laws, and institutions. He also acknowledges "an increased sense of common English identity and destiny" through England's wars with Scotland and France in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; however, he reserves the sentiment of English *national* identity to the late-

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[28] Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, Routledge, 1998, p. 175. While Geoffrey of Monmouth and the chronicle tradition are briefly addressed in this chapter, for more on the Declaration of Arbroath, see Chapter 2.

fifteenth century.  He states that "it is only from the late-fifteenth century that we can begin to speak confidently of a growing sense, among the élites at least, of an English national identity."[29] From a literary standpoint, Smith undervalues the cultural and linguistic shift of Latin works to the English vernacular apparent in the 13th and 14th centuries that developed alongside a more distinctive cultural mythos through a body of national literature, such as that of the Matter of Britain.

## IV. Intersecting Approaches: Imperium Studies + Ethno-symbolism

While my intention here is not to quibble over finding a definitive date on which to hang the concept of English nationalism, since the endeavor would seem historically superfluous as a modern concept, it is necessary to establish a framework for considering the influence of a distinct cultural literary tradition within the emergent process of nationalism as we perceive it today.  While ethno-symbolism allows for considering mythos and memory-making through cultural products such as literature, it is limited in its ability to provide terminology for pre-modern concepts of the nation and England's complex history of cross-cultural encounters.  To avoid these historical complications of ethno-symbolism as applied to medieval texts, I have chosen to combine this theory with imperium studies.  Barbara Fuchs coined the term *imperium studies* through her work on early modern Spain.  Imperium studies proves especially beneficial for extending an understanding of developing nations to even earlier periods.  Fuchs writes:

> The term *imperium studies* strongly evokes the Roman imperial tradition that
> animates early modern imperial projects, through the notion of *translatio imperii*,
> or the westward progress of empire. It also foregrounds the earlier meanings of
> imperium as sovereignty and domestic control, as in Henry VIII's 1533 Act in

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[29] Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p. 112.

Restraint of Appeals, which proclaimed the "realm of England" as an empire.

Imperium studies thus emphasizes the complex relations between nation and

empire in the period: the disaggregation of loose, largely conceptual units into

territorially bound nations organized around a strong central monarchy and,

conversely, the consolidation of contiguous territories that soon gives way to

expansion beyond those same territories.[30]

Thus, imperium studies forge a connection between the classical past and the concept of an

imperial future. The influence of Rome is an essential part of this connection because

developing European nation-states trace their roots back to Roman and even earlier Trojan

ancestry to establish political supremacy and cultural legitimacy.[31] Competing medieval and

early modern European nation-states embrace myths of a pure classical lineage with little regard

to historical accuracy or the realities of racial and cultural mixing through imperial conquest.

This mythos underlies the political and cultural identity development of England's imperial

imagining of a cohesive British Empire. In literature, this classical imperial mythos can be seen

explicitly, for example, in the trojan frame narrative of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or

Arthur's defeat of Rome in the *Alliterative Morte*.

Imperium studies views empire building as a structural process that often precedes the

concept of nation building. As Fuchs points out, "Nation-states coalesce, that is, through

overland expansion, annexing adjacent territories and gradually achieving legitimacy. Overseas

expansion continues this project, sharpening the distinctions among emerging nations as they

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[30] Barbara Fuchs, "Another Turn for Transnationalism: Empire, Nation, and Imperium in Early Modern Studies," *PMLA*, vol. 130, no. 2, 2015, pp. 412-418. (original emphasis)
[31] Barbara Fuchs, "Imperium Studies: Theorizing Early Modern Expansion," *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*, edited by Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren, Palgrave, 2003, p. 72.

compete for colonies, but the dynamics of imperial expansion predate European contact with the New World."[32] For England, overland expansion meant first annexing Wales and Scotland in a series of military campaigns and policy-making from the thirteenth through early sixteenth century, before expanding overseas, such as Henry VIII's 16th century conquest to bring Ireland under the control of the crown.

To differentiate between periods of pre-sixteenth century overland expansion and from later overseas expansion in the late sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, sociologist Krishan Kumar makes a distinction between two types of English empire: the empire of Great Britain versus the British empire. He characterizes the development of the empire of Great Britain, or the "inner empire," as an "the expansion of imperial power into adjacent lands," referring to Wales and Scotland, and eventually Ireland. This contrasts with the later Victorian British empire, or "outer empire," in which "all parts of the United Kingdom participated in imperial rule" in subjugating faraway lands.[33] Kumar's designation here draws attention to temporally different conceptions of empire. Like Fuchs, Kumar emphasizes that empire building often takes place first through overland expansion, and only once sovereignty has been gained over adjacent lands can a unified empire work to assert political and economic control of territories elsewhere. This dissertation limits its scope to insular Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland) in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with the acknowledgement that sixteenth-century Irish ethnic and geographic borderlands were influenced by such imperial successes and failures on the mainland.

Crucially, any notion of empire tends to be accompanied by cultural production in literature and art that celebrates and rationalizes the construction of empire. Fuchs explains that

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[32] Fuchs, "Imperium Studies: Theorizing Early Modern Expansion," pp. 73-74.
[33] Kumar, "When was the English Nation?", pp. 142, 145.

imperium studies offers a historically situated approach that "unravels the stories that nations tell of their own pasts, whether as colonizer or colonized, and address the fictions of empire—utopias, romances, [and] national histories."[34]  Thus, it simply makes sense to consider how imperium studies—the analysis of empire-building in the pre-modern era—intersects with ethno-symbolic myths and memory-making as the cultural product of that empire-building process. Or as I argue, classical models of empire and conquest serve as an imperial precedent for dreams of a unified Britain in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance which the Matter of Britain employs to explore England's imperial identity, while at the same time exposing the problematic notion of a unified British Empire.

**V. Liminal Spaces: The Welsh Marches and the Anglo-Scottish Borderlands**

The historical Anglo-Welsh and Anglo-Scottish relations in the Middle Ages were fraught with legal, political, and cultural issues, often resulting in warfare, revolts, and colonization.  In the late eleventh century, the Anglo-Norman king, William II sent forces to defeat the Welsh.  While he was unable to hold complete control, his partial control of Wales culminated in the creation of the Welsh March, a borderland region between Wales and England.  By 1216 the Principality of Wales was founded, and it remained independent of the March and English governance until King Edward I conquered the Principality in 1284.  The same year, Edward passed the Statute of Rhuddlan, which forbad Welsh Law, prompting a series of rebellions from the thirteenth to the beginning of the fifteenth century.  One notable Welsh revolutionary was Owain Glyndwr, who revolted against King Henry IV, the events of which are depicted in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I.* However, not until the reign of Henry VIII in the sixteenth century was Wales legally integrated into England with the passing of the Laws of

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[34] Fuchs and Baker, "The Postcolonial Past," p. 339.

Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542. Thus, Wales throughout the Middle Ages functioned as an internal colony that was continually subjected to English rule.[35]

Scotland's situation in the Late Middle Ages was one not of colonization and rebellion but one of militarized warfare. Unlike the annexed Wales, Scotland retained its designation as an independent state. Edward I of England (1239-1307; also known as the Hammer of the Scots) led a series of military campaigns to conquer Scotland, resulting in the Scottish Wars of Independence (1286-1357) led by Scottish nobles such as William Wallace and Robert Bruce, among others. The Second War of Scottish Independence ended with the signing of the Treaty of Berwick, which reaffirmed Scotland's status as an independent and sovereign state. James VI of Scotland (James I of England) would later inherit the throne of England after Queen Elizabeth I's death in 1603 forming a dynastic union between England and Scotland. Despite the Union of Crowns, Scotland would retain its political independence until the Acts of Union, forming the United Kingdom of Great Britain, in 1707.[36]

From a geographical perspective, the regions between England / Wales and England / Scotland were borderland regions. The borderland serves as "a distinctive geopolitical entity and a symbolic zone in which identities are compared, configured, contested, and reconfirmed" and plays a crucial role in the "articulation of national consciousness and cultural identity."[37] The texts I study emphasize the fluidity of cultural, social, and geographical borders. In this sense, the borderland region serves as a hybrid geographical space—a fantastic, often magical, liminal

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[35] For a comprehensive look at Welsh history, see Davies, John. *A History of Wales*. Penguin Books, 2007. For medieval Welsh history, see Davies, R.R. *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093-1343*. Oxford UP, 2000 and *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change: Wales 1063-1415*. Oxford UP, 1987.

[36] For an overview of Scottish history, see Mitchison, Rosalind. *History of Scotland*. Taylor and Francis, 2002. For medieval Scottish history, see Barrell, A.D.M. *Medieval Scotland*. Cambridge UP. 2000.

[37] Bruce, Mark P., and Katherine H. Terrell, editors. *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600*. Palgrave, 2012, p. 5.

space that promotes identity formation and exploration. These borderland regions are often depicted as natural spaces, such as the deep recesses of the forest, in which the "myth of England's centrality and political dominion" over the British Isles is explored, reconfigured, and reimagined.[38]

England's border regions were not only spaces of shifting geographic and political boundaries, but they also became sites of cross-cultural contact and hybrid identity formation. We might consider, for example, the physically incoherent body of the Green Knight, a giant whose body becomes emblematic of Anglo-Welsh cross-cultural contact and the natural environment, who, as I argue in Chapter 1, symbolically represents a Marcher Lord. As a figure originating from the Anglo-Welsh borderland, he exists as an ambiguous character who inhabits the Welsh March and dismantles expectations of chivalry and knighthood. Denial of classification serves as a form of cultural influence, whether that be to reinforce or dismantle social and cultural norms, and is best expressed as the concept of "hybridity." In the simplest terms, hybridity refers to the product of two or more merged elements. Jaina C. Sanga, a professor of Cultural Studies, states that "In terms of culture and contemporary representations of reality, hybridity involves the mélange of an incongruous array of genders, classes, nationalities, religions, and ethnicities. It implies a syncretic view of the world in which the notion of the

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[38] Thomas Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. Kalamazoo, MI, Published for TEAMS in association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1995, p. 31. The Matter of Britain perpetuates this myth of English centrality, in part, through its appropriation of the chronicle legend of Brutus of Troy, as derived from Geoffrey's *Historia*. Brutus, a descendant of Aeneas, becomes the first king of Britain, then called Albion. He defeats the island's native giant inhabitants, claims the island, and names it after himself. After his death, Brutus divides the island between his three sons: Locrinus (England), Kamber (Wales), and Albanactus (Scotland).[38] This mythos can be seen in works like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* within the Trojan frame narrative or Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), later used by Shakespeare as source material for the history plays, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Cymbeline*. These mythical Trojan roots play an integral part in nationalistic impulses in the desire for British unification and are also later used by the Tudors and English monarchical publicists for proclaiming rights to the British Isles and asserting the idea of an English "empire."

fixity or essentiality of identity is continually contested."[39]  As differing national histories

compete for cultural dominance and ethnic intermixing takes place over the span of generations,

these personal identities take on elements of both the colonizer and colonized, thus producing

complex, hybrid identities.  Hybrid identities exist as literary figures such as the Green Knight,

the ghost of Guenevere's mother, or the Giant of Mont St. Michel, and they reflect the historical

context (whether real or imagined) of multivalent cultural traditions and values of the English

and their colonized subjects.  Furthermore, the personal identity of knights and their chivalric

ideals becomes contested in romances as knights shift allegiances between lords for personal

gain, such as when the Scottish knight Galeron submits to Arthur in *Awntyrs off Arthur*.

Much of the post-colonial theoretical work on hybridization focuses exclusively on

modernity and post-modernity; however, as shall be observed here, it is also a concept that works

in conjunction with the colonial endeavors of the pre-modern empire. In Homi Bhabha's seminal

text, *The Location of Culture* (1994), he presents the liminality of hybridity as a product of

colonial anxiety; however, it exists as a point of resistance to colonial oppression.  Bhabha writes

that

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not
>
> part of the continuum of past and present.  It creates a sense of the new as an
>
> insurgent act of cultural translation.  Such art does not merely recall the past as
>
> social cause or aesthetic precedent' it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent
>
> 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.[40]

[39] Jaina C. Sanga, *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy, and Globalization*, Greenwood Press, 2001, pp. 75-76.  While Sanga's book focuses on metaphors in Salman Rushdie's work, her explanation of hybridity, derived from Bhabha, is particularly helpful for understanding the term in a wider context.
[40] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994, p 7.

Colonial identities, as a product of these cross-cultural imperial encounters, are cultural translations of colonial power and influence. The resistance to colonial oppression is formed through the creation of a new identity, one that is neither entirely colonizer nor colonized—that of an "Other." Not only does the process of hybridity create new identities, but it also creates temporally, and often geographically, liminal 'in-between' spaces which subvert colonial authority and political hierarchy. However, as Anthony D. Smith notes, this split that Bhabha identifies between past/present and self/other creates a "superimposed dualism [that] fragments the nation" and nations become frayed at the edges as "members have to rethink former assumptions about national community and identity."[41] While both Bhabha and Smith are only concerned with hybridization as it manifests in modern nations, similar hybrid identities and splitting of national identities take place in the liminal spaces of pre-modern empires. This disruption of the continuum between past and present takes place on two levels of identity formation in The Matter of Britain: 1) National identity and 2) Personal identity. Blending of contrasting national identities (English/Welsh, English/Scottish) form new hybrid nationalities as part of a cultural translation process—an integral part in striving toward a "new" unified British identity.

## VI. Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1, "Ethnic Identity and The Welsh Wilds in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" uses the fourteenth century poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to examine borderland geographies and identities, especially the ways in which Gawain is constructed as "English" and how Bertilak can be viewed as a Marcher Lord. The chapter begins by discussing how the trojan framework allows for a simultaneous critique of the past, as well as the fourteenth century

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[41] Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, p. 202, 204.

context of colonial relations with Wales.  In this chapter, I argue that the poem conceptualizes the English/Welsh cultural and political relationship as one of competing ethnies—communities that share common ancestry and cultural elements.  Within this larger framework, I examine the hybrid Welsh March culture, English identity, Marcher identity, and the appropriation of the Green Girdle as an Anglo-Welsh borderland symbol.

Chapter 2, "Militarized Borderlands: Ethno-history and Collective Memory of the Anglo-Scots Borderland in Two Arthurian Tales," builds on the idea of borderlands as a site of cross-cultural encounters by turning towards the Anglo-Scots borderland to examine the role of collective memory in constructing ethno-history.  In this chapter, I argue that two lesser known Arthurian tales, *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and *Awntyrs off Arthur*, reflect a fractured collective memory of violence and militarism within the Anglo-Scots borderland while promoting an imperial model of peacefully subjugation of Scotland.  Again, we see hybrid characters, either physically or culturally, within the characters of the ghost of Guenevere's mother, Sir Galleron of Galloway, and Carle of Carlisle.  Developing the discussion of Chapter 1, this chapter envisions these hybrid characters as absorbing and reflecting the collective ethnic memory of Anglo-Scots borderland conflict.

Chapter 3, "Failed Conquests, Failed Dreams: The Legacy of Rome and *Translatio Imperii* in the *Alliterative Morte* and Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*," argues that these two texts establish the success of the empire as contingent on Rome as both a physical homeland and as an imperial ideological construct that promotes ethnic solidarity.  This concept is grounded in the Roman notion of *translatio imperii*, in which power is transferred in a linear fashion from one divine ruler to the next.  Yet, this ethnic solidarity is typically followed by internal division and loss.  The fourteenth-century *Alliterative Morte* and the fifteenth-century *Le Morte d'Arthur* face

a shift in political and cultural anxieties amongst the internal division of the War of the Roses. In *AMA*, these anxieties come originate from the loss of imperial connection to Rome and external sources, such as the cultural otherness of Lucius's army. For Malory, anxieties surrounding ethnic solidarity originate much closer to the political center, and while Malory never sees the end of the War of the Roses, his work provides a glimpse of a much more ethnically diverse imperial reality that leads to the early development of the English nation.

As the following chapters demonstrate, a number of different shared determinants make up ethnicity. Ethnicity is shaped by shared ancestry and culture (ethnies), memory (ethno-history), and geographic space (ethnoscape). As a group begins to self-identify as a cultural group and these shared elements begin to solidify, the ability to conceive of a national identity begins to develop. Cultural groups start to distinguish themselves in contrast to the cultural "other" through means of subjugation, appropriation, and erasure. Yet ethnicity is never stable and ever-shifting, continually being re-imagined as new cultural relationships are merged through imperial expansion, conquest, and colonization. While forming ethnic solidarity is never a simple or linear process, within a relatively small geographic space, such as the British mainland, the process becomes even messier. This is even more apparent in contested geographic spaces, such as borderland regions, which become sites of cross-cultural contact. Within the chapters that follow, I hope to not only show how Arthurian literature serves as a means of constructing and deconstructing such imagined narratives of empire and ethnic solidarity but also to provide a broader conceptual framework for imagining a developing pre-modern nation.

Chapter 1

Ethnic Identity and The Welsh Wilds in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Siþen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,
Þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondez and askez,
Þe tulk that þat þe trammes tresoun þer wroȝt
Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe.

[Since the siege and the assault was ceased at Troy, / The walls demolished and burned to brands and ashes, / The man that had framed the treasonable plots / Was tried for his treachery, the truest on earth.]

-*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 1-4[1]

The Gawain-poet opens *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*) with a Trojan mythological frame narrative that invokes major events from Virgil's *Aeneid*. As several scholars have noted, "The man that had framed the treasonable plots" likely refers to Antenor, the counselor to Aeneas, who turns traitor and plots with the Greeks.[2] By invoking the Trojan frame narrative, the Gawain-poet portrays Arthur's empire as part of a broader imperialist perspective that traces Arthur's lineage from Aeneas to Romulus, and finally to Brutus, the founder and first king of Britain. This lineage is an example of the Roman tradition of viewing history through a linear succession of transfers of imperial authority from one supreme power to the next.[3] Establishing a direct ancestral line from Aeneas to Arthur became a familiar tactic in texts of the Late Middle Ages to assert imperial English supremacy. This Virgilian perspective, as Sylvia Federico refers to it, "allows for a self-consciously political present, one that looks backward at the past and forward to the future—and that imagines itself in relation to both. From this secular

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[1] All direct quotes from *SGGK* come from Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, editors. *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. University of Exeter Press, 1987. The translations provided are my own with the assistance of Andrew and Waldron's editorial notes.
[2] See Andrew and Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, p. 207, n. 3f.
[3] This Roman concept, often referred to as *translatio imperii*, is discussed at length in Chapter 3.

historiographical perspective comes the idea not only of nation but also empire."[4]  For the

English, establishing a classical lineage was essential since the Welsh claimed descent from the

ancient Britons, a group whose inhabitants long pre-date the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons and the

Normans.  Thus, Welsh ethnic identity was problematic for Anglo-Norman and later English

writers who wished to claim sovereignty over the British Isles.  Many Anglo-Norman or English

writers who mean to construct a national mythos; consequently, sought to diminish or minimize

the ancient "Celtic" origins of the Welsh.  However, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a poem

originating from the North-West Midlands near the Anglo-Welsh border, reveals a much more

complicated relationship between the English and the Welsh.  Invoking the Trojan past, the poem

simultaneously examines the colonial present in relation to neighboring Wales.

 In asserting an imperial claim over the British Isles, *SGGK* creates a complex depiction

of medieval ethnicity.  Written in the county of Cheshire, *SGGK* exhibits a unique hybrid

Cestrian identity—one that is neither fully English nor Welsh—that complicates modern

understandings of pre-modern ethnicity.  In *SGGK*, the Green Knight embodies this hybrid

identity and metaphorically functions as a Marcher Lord.  Taking an ethno-symbolic perspective,

I argue that *SGGK* conceptualizes the English/Welsh relationship as one of competing cultural

and political ideologies through depictions of cultural public codes, territorial control, and

symbolic appropriation.  I base this on four major claims: 1) The Welsh Marches contain an

inter-mixed heterogeneous culture, 2) Arthur's court is representative of an English identity as

defined by public codes and cultural ideals, 3) Hautdesert functions as a metaphorical Marcher

Lordship, and 4) The Green Girdle serves as a symbol of the Anglo-Welsh borderland.

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[4] Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages*, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. xv.

**I. The March of Wales and Heterogenous Ethnic Identity**

In recent years, scholars have shown a growing interest in colonial readings of *SGGK*, most notably Patricia Clare Ingham, Rhonda Knight, and Lynn Arner whose readings are concerned with issues of the border and the Welsh periphery. Although their readings focus on the colonial struggle between the English and the Welsh, there is little consensus on what influence ethnic differences play in the poem. Ingham views the poem through the lens of gender studies. She argues that the "ethnic and regional differences" vanish "in favor of an easy split between 'masculine' agency and 'feminine' aggression."[5] In her view, the text produces a culturally unified empire that privileges heterosexual, brotherhood bonds between knights. Debating Ingham's claim of cultural homogeneity, Knight states that the poem "challenges the very idea of homogeneity" while using the Green Knight/Bertilak to "disrupt Camelot's attempts to create such an illusion."[6] Knight views Bertilak as an example of the hybrid Anglo-Welsh culture at the English/Welsh border. In contrast to these views, Arner criticizes Ingham's and Knight's readings of the text for making the power relations between Wales and England seem more equitable than they really were.[7] Arner asserts that "*SGGK* encourages English readers to resist identifying with or sympathizing with people from these regions and, instead, instructs audience members to understand themselves to be a superior form of humanity to the Welsh and therefore entitled to dominate them."[8] However, I would contend that more attention must be placed on the complexities of cultural identity. English and Welsh ethnic identities were not strictly in binary opposition to one another, as evidenced by the *Gawain*-poet's unique Cestrian

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[5] Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 131-2.
[6] Rhonda Knight, "All Dressed Up with Someplace to Go: Regional Identity in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 25, 2003, p. 262.
[7] Lynn Arner, "The Ends of Enchantment: Colonialism and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2006, p. 80.
[8] Arner, "The Ends of Enchantment," p. 81.

regional identity.  Like Arner, I acknowledge that the English and the Welsh continued to have a

contentious relationship through the turn of the fifteenth century.  Yet, I also find that *SGGK*

reflects the unstable hybridization and cultural tension of Anglo-Welsh borderland.  What is

unique here is that while a small collective of scholars have acknowledged the cultural hybridity

present in the poem and the underlying borderland tensions, scholars have not fully explored the

link between the Welsh Marches and the symbolic ethnic codes as presented in *SGGK*.

For medieval writers, ethnicity was largely defined by culture, e.g., a group's customs,

language, and laws, as much or more so than biological markers.  To examine ethnic difference, I

use ethno-symbolism, a theory of nationalism, as a lens to approach my reading of *SGGK*.

According to Anthony D. Smith, nationalism's power comes from the "myths, memories,

traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the way in which a popular *living past* has been

and can be rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias."[9]  For ethno-

symbolists, the emphasis on culture allows for ethnicity to change over time based on population

replenishment and cultural borrowing, which allows for social and cultural adaptions within the

ethnic group, or *ethnie*. [10]  Ethnies are defined as "a named human population with myths and

common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more common elements of culture,

including the association with a homeland, and some degree of solidarity, at least among the

élites."[11] These shared "elements of culture" can take a variety of forms, for example religious

practices and beliefs.  Religion plays a central role in providing a symbolic basis for forming a

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[9] Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford UP, 1999, p. 9.

[10] Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2001, p. 47 [original emphasis].  For more on medieval conceptions of race and ethnicity, see the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* special issue on Race and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages.

[11] Smith, *Myths and Memories*, p. 13.  Within a larger cultural framework, ethnies are the building blocks of a nation, with ethnic solidarity as a precondition to the formation of nationalism.  Whereas ethnies are defined by ancestral myths and historical memories, nations are defined in terms of historic territory, mass culture, and common laws.

"distinct public culture" as it consists of "a set of public rituals and ceremonies such as festivals of independence or remembrance, public symbols such as assembly buildings, anthems and coinage, and various public codes—of dress, gesture, image, music, name and word."[12]  As a cultural product, literature reflects and often critiques these cultural and religious public codes, while simultaneously disseminating them to a larger public audience.

Another important element of ethnie formation is the desire for territorial control.  Part of the aristocracy's desire to form a culturally homogenous English ethnie stems from a fight for land.  As Smith has discussed, "Whatever else it may be, nationalism involves an assertion of, or struggle for, control of land.  A landless nation is a contradiction in terms."[13]  Ethnies may not have achieved stable control over territory deemed as historic homelands to the same degree as nations, but they at least display a desire for such connections to historic territories. The English desire for control over the British Isles stems from an attempt to consolidate power.  In doing so, the Trojan frame in *SGGK* attempts to justify this consolidation of power through a mythologized lineage tracing the English back to the Greeks and the Romans, as well as an ideological imperial power structure that transfers power from one ruler to the next.

*SGGK*'s depiction of ethnicity is, in part, informed by the historical relations of the English and the Welsh that preceded it, as evidenced by the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Anglo-Norman *Historia Regum Britanniae* on the poem.  In *Historia*, Geoffrey diminishes the Welsh's cultural influence and power by constructing a colonialist historiography in which the insular power of the Isles transfers from the ancient Britons, now the unworthy "barbaric" Welsh, to the Saxons.  An example of this can be seen in the following passage:

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[12] Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, Routledge, 2009, p. 51.
[13] Smith, *Myths and Memories*, p. 149.

For sixty-nine years they fought with great ferocity against the Angles but with little success, for the abovementioned plague and famine, as well as their own penchant for civil war, had caused this once proud people to degenerate to such a degree that they could no longer fend off their enemies. Through their habitual barbarity, they were no longer called Britons but 'Welsh,' a term derived either from the leader Gualo or from Queen Galaes or indeed from their own barbarity . . . Having degenerated from the nobility they had enjoyed as Britons, the Welsh never again regained kingship of the island. [14]

In the passage above, Geoffrey of Monmouth uses claims of the Welsh's "habitual barbarity" and their "penchant for civil war" as evidence of a degenerated nobility. "Welsh" from the Anglo-Saxon *wealh* literally means "slave" or "foreigner," a term further used to separate the Welsh from any ancestral claim of culture or territory.[15] Geoffrey's *Historia* exemplifies a developing notion of Welsh ethnicity in the twelfth century as stemming from an Anglo-Saxon (and later "English") opposition to ancient Briton ancestry. Within this developing English mythos, King Arthur, as a prophetic figure tied to the ancient Britons, was claimed by both the English and the Welsh as a cultural icon and national hero. The attitudes of Geoffrey's *Historia* far outlast the author's lifetime, and they are crucially relevant to understanding how the fourteenth-century romance *SGGK* exemplifies English perceptions of Welsh ethnicity during a period of developing English nationalism.

A closer examination of the history of the borderland reveals the blurred geographic and cultural boundaries between the two developing ethnies. In 1095 and 1097, William II sent

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[14] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, translated by Michael Faletra, Broadview Editions, 2008, pp. 216-7.

[15] Michael A. Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 24.

forces to conquer Wales, but he was unable to completely subjugate the Welsh. He was, however, able to ensure the endurance of pre-existing Norman lordships in Wales and to extinguish the possibility that Wales would be united under Welsh rulership.[16] This partial subjugation of Wales led to the creation of the Welsh March (*Marchia Walliae* in Latin), a borderland region between England and the Principality of Wales—Welsh territories that were conquered by the English but allowed to remain under Welsh rule. The Welsh March would serve as a rough geographical boundary, often in state of flux, and an important part of the history of Wales for nearly four hundred years.[17] Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the border became increasingly militarized as hundreds of castles were built by the English in defense of Welsh cross-border raids and rebellions. During his reign, Edward I (1272-1307) squashed the post-conquest Welsh rebellions of the 1270s and 1280s. In 1284 Edward I imposed the Statue of Rhuddlan, in which the Principality of Wales was incorporated into England and provided an English government framework. However, further rebellions soon followed, most notably that of Madog ap Llywelyn, a prominent Welsh prince, in 1294. Llywelyn's rebellion would remain the biggest Welsh uprising until that of Owain Glyndwr over a hundred years later.[18] The partial subjugation of Wales, the increase of castles along the border, and the continued Welsh rebellions into the fourteenth century marks the Welsh March as a militarized zone with ambiguous geographical boundaries and a space contested among the English and the Welsh.

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[16] John Davies, *A History of Wales*, Penguin Books, 2007, p. 106.

[17] Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 106. Also see Max Lieberman, *The March of Wales 1067-1300: A Borderland of Medieval Britain*, University of Wales Press, 2008. Lieberman notes that the Welsh borders in modern terms are referred to as the "March of Wales or the "Welsh Marches." The tradition of calling the borders as the "March" has a long tradition, as can be seen to their references in documents such as the Doomsday Book (1086) and the Magna Carta (1215).

[18] Davies, *A History of Wales*, pp. 162, 172.

Not only was the border geographically contested, but it was also legally contested among English lords. The March was controlled by the Lords of the March, border warlords who were subjects of the king of England. However, the March was legally and politically not part of England, and thus was not subject to English government but instead followed March Law. Historian John Davies observes "The law they administered was the Law of the March – Welsh Law as seen through Norman eyes. While there were restrictions upon the freedom of the barons of England to build fortifications and to indulge in private warfare, there were no restrictions upon the right of the Marcher Lords to erect castles and to wage war against their neighbours."[19] While Marcher Lords combined elements of English and Welsh Law and owned allegiance to the king, they ultimately established their own laws over their lands. In addition, they also often had land holdings not only in the March, but in larger estates in England. As early as the thirteenth century, the Magna Carta recognizes three distinct bodies of law—English law, *leges Walliae*, and *leges Marchiae*.[20] While *Leges Marchiae* (the Laws of the March) varied between Marcher Lords, the distinction as a separate type of law distinguishes the peculiarities of March Law as different from that of the English political center.

The Anglo-Welsh borderland was also culturally and ethnically contested as evidenced by Cheshire, the border county where *SGGK* was composed. Robert Barrett views the Cestrian population as early as 1195 as "neither truly English nor truly Welsh" and states that "Their preconquest Mercian origins connect them with their eastern neighbors, but their daily traffic (marital, mercantile, and military) with their western neighbors pulls them in the opposite

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[19] Davies, *A History of Wales,* p. 107.
[20] Brock W. Holden, *Lords of the Central Marches: English Aristocracy and Frontier Society, 1087-1265*, Oxford UP, 2008, p. 44.

direction."[21]  For the English during the Anglo-Norman period, Cheshire was a violent frontier space, but what followed was a period of relative peace in Cheshire between the English and the Welsh.[22] Fourteenth century chronicler Ranulf Higden (1280-1364) in *Polychronicon* characterizes Cheshire in the 1320s as a place where the English and Welsh were intermixed.[23] Through the intermixing of English and Welsh, the Cestrian population developed independently from the dominant cultures of the Welsh and English at their political centers.  One example of this is evidence of existing Welsh naming practices in south-west Cheshire as a sign of "a surviving ethnic minority" and the appearance of the annual Welsh due, *clych*, in manorial accounts as evidence of "the survival of some Welsh customs" which existed alongside English cultural practices.[24]

Cheshire was also a site of conflict between neighboring English counties.  By the time of *SGGK's* composition (1360-1400), Bristol and neighboring counties raised various parliamentary complaints against Cheshire and the Welsh border region. In April 1379, January 1380, October 1382, November 1384 and again in November 1390 complaints were made to the crown about the people of Cheshire who made armed raids into various English counties and committed crimes including rape, murder, robbery, and kidnapping.  Although charges were filed, Cheshire residents could not be punished because the border county retained partial independent sovereignty from the king's writ, meaning that they could not be punished for crimes outside their county.[25]  While my own analysis is not concerned with the specifics of Cestrian regional

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[21] Robert W. Barrett, *Against All England: Regional Identity and Cheshire Writing, 1195-1656*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2009, p. 2.  Barrett uses the earliest known piece of Cheshire writing, *Liber de Luciani laude Cestre* ("The Book of Lucian in Praise of Chester") in his introduction to discuss Cheshire's unique regional identity.
[22] Philip Morgan, "Cheshire and Wales," *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages*, edited by Huw Pryce and John Watts, Oxford UP, 2007, p. 203.
[23] Morgan, "Cheshire and Wales," p. 203.
[24] Morgan, "Cheshire and Wales," p. 204.
[25] Christian Drummond Liddy, *War, Politics and Finance in Late Medieval English Towns: Bristol, York and the Crown, 1350-1400*, Boydell and Brewer Ltd, 2005, pp. 164-5.

identity, it is important to recognize Anglo-Welsh border spaces, like Cheshire, as important

points of cross-cultural contact between the English and the Welsh.  In addition, borderland

counties, regardless of their sworn allegiance to the English king, developed an ethnic identity

defined by unique customs, languages, and law that stood in opposition to the central English

governing body.

Beyond the regional differences, the last quarter of the fourteenth century saw a

resurgence in tensions between the English and the Welsh.[26]  These tensions were the result of

English lords who raised land subsidies, imposed fines for punitive offensives, and underfunded

the Welsh church.[27]  As R.R. Davies notes, "What was particularly disturbing about this

campaign was the openly racialist tone of its attacks on 'pure Welshmen' and the descendants of

'pure Welshman' . . . Racial tension and hysteria were being deliberately raised."[28]  While

Davies uses "race" loosely here, the emphasis on England's ethnic discrimination, along with

cultural and political subjugation, show that the relations between the English and the Welsh

were anything but civil.  In 1400, tensions reached a boiling point in a revolt by Owain Glyndwr,

a member of a prosperous family from the Anglo-Welsh marches and the last native Prince of

Wales.[29]  Considering *SGGK* as a literary product of these historical tensions and a regional

Cestrian ethnic identity, I suggest that we view *SGGK* as an interrogation of the English / Welsh

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[26] While I do not intend to pick a definitive date of composition for *SGGK*, I would like to note that the text was likely written sometime between 1360-1400. Andrew and Waldron in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript in Modern English Prose Translation* (2013) date the text as composed between 1360-1390.  In Marie Borroff's edition (2010), she chooses the slightly later date of 1400, giving it a Ricardian dating (1377-99).  Regardless, the Gawain-poet would have been a contemporary of other prominent authors such as Chaucer, Langland, and Gower.
[27] R.R. Davies, *Conquest*, pp. 439-441.
[28] R.R. Davies, *Conquest*, p. 441.
[29] It might be noted that Glyndwr himself was aware of the usefulness of Arthurian mythos.  In his letter in 1400 to Robert III of Scotland he refers to "the prophecy" [i.e. the prophecies of Merlin] and shows the lineage of their mutual descent from Brutus.  In 1405, Glyndwr negotiated the Tripartite Indenture, an agreement to divide England between Owain Glyndwr, Edmund Mortimer, and Henry Percy.  Wales was to be given to Owain Glyndwr with an altered border that included "the ash trees of Meignon," a place steeped in the prophecies of Merlin.

ethnic divide at a critical point in resurgence of cultural and political conflict. Rather than depicting straightforward military aggression between two developing nations, the poem depicts ideological cultural warfare and competing ethnic identities.

**II. Cultural and Religious Codes in Arthur's Court**

Arthur's court depicts an English ethnie, as shown through shared religious public codes and cultural ideals of chivalry. Having already established a sense of a superior English lineage through the Trojan frame narrative, the poem opens to a scene of Christmas festivities in Arthur's court during a fifteen-day celebration:

> Þis king lay at Cameylot vpon Krystmasse
>
> With mony luflych lorde, ledez of þe best—
>
> Rekenly of þe Rounde Table alle þo rich breþer—
>
> With rych reuel oryȝt and rechles merþes.
>
> Þer tournayed tulkes by tymez ful mony,
>
> Justed ful jolilé þise gentyle kniȝtes,
>
> Syþen kayred to þe court, caroles to make; (ln 37-43)[30]
>
> [This king resides at Camelot upon Christmas / With many gracious lords, the best of men— / Worthy of the Round Table all the prosperous brothers— / With rich revelry and carefree amusements. / Their men tourneyed very many times, / Jousted very gallantly these gentle knights, / Then came to the court to make carol-dancing;]

In this passage, Camelot's Christmas celebration provides evidence of cultural elements shared between the brotherhood of knights in Arthur's court. Knightly tournaments, jousting, and carol-dancing are all festivities displaying a distinct European, although not uniquely English, public

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[30] In Marie Borroff's translation of the poem, she notes that "Caroling in this context, means singing while dancing in a circle. Such carols were not necessarily religious, though at a Christmas feast some of them were probably what we think of as Christmas carols today." See Marie Borroff and Laura L. Howes, editors, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, translated by Marie Borroff, W.W. Norton & Company, 2010.

culture.  In accordance to French romance, Arthur held court "five times a year on the great

Christian festivals, Easter, Ascension, Whistun, All Saints, and Christmas."[31]  Carole-dancing, or

*carole* as derived from French, provides an interesting example of the mix of cultural influences

shaping the English ethnie.  The term *carole* first appears in England in twelfth-century Anglo-

Norman translations of the Psalter; however, it doesn't appear in English writings until around

1300.[32]  This suggests that carol-dancing was known in England through the cultural influences

of Anglo-Norman French—making notable appearances in other 14th-century texts such as

Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale," the English translation of *Roman de la Rose*, and Gower's

*Confessio Amantis*.  The Round Table itself becomes a distinctly English symbol through

Layamon's Middle English *Brut* derived from Wace's first mention of the Round Table in the

Anglo-Norman *Roman de Brut* (c. 1155).  Both Layamon and Wace contend that the Round

Table stems from Breton storytellers.[33]  Here, one can see evidence of cultural borrowing.

Ethno-symbolism's emphasis on culture allows for this type of cultural borrowing in the

continual development of the English ethnie.  The examples from this brief passage shows how

the English ethnie adapts to social and cultural influences, such as those from Anglo-Norman

French and Breton.

The English ethnie is further emphasized through the historical memory of past and

contemporary kings—most notably Edward III and Richard II—in relation to the literary Arthur.

While numerous scholarly readings of the text have chosen to stress either Edwardian or

Ricardian readings of *SGGK*, I would argue that these readings are not irreconcilable from one

another.  Instead, the text's focus on the fall and rise of empires, as depicted through the Trojan

[31] Andrew and Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, p. 209, n. 37.
[32] Robert Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of Medieval Dance*, Ashgate, 2011, p. 112.
[33] Norris J. Lacy, editor, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Garland Publishing, 1996, p. 391.

frame, incites memories of multiple histories.  We might take, for example, the depiction of

Arthur at the beginning of the poem.  Arthur holds a large banquet, but he "wolde not ete til al

were serued, / He watz so joly of his joyfnes, and sumquat childgered" [would not eat until all

were served / He was so jolly with joyfulness, and somewhat boyish] (ln 85-6).  The emphasis on

Arthur's youthfulness is a unique detail that requires further examination.  Francis Ingledew

argues for an Edwardian reading of Arthur, noting that Edward III was only fourteen years old

on his coronation day.[34]  In addition, it might be noted that Edward III's Christmas coronation

parallels the *Gawain*-poet's young Arthur residing at court on Christmas. Edward III's Christmas

coronation in 1326 also takes on imperial symbolic significance.  More notably, William I was

crowned in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day in 1066 marking the beginning of Norman

rule in England.[35]

However, Arthur's youthfulness might also be read within the context of the

contemporary Richard II.  Richard II, like Edward III, was also crowned as a young boy, coming

to the throne at the age of ten. Christine Chism, for instance, argues that "The poem constructs its

central characters to invoke and amplify contemporary tensions between the royal court and the

provinces of the North West Midlands. Its picture of Arthur in particular resonates with the self-

presentations and cultural perceptions of Richard II, opening at the same time to a range of late

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[34] For an Edwardian reading of *SGGK*, see Francis Ingledew, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Order of the Garter, University of Notre Dame*, 2006.

[35] Becky Lawton, "Christmas Coronations," *Medieval Manuscripts Blog*, The British Library, 24 Dec. 2016, blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2016/12/christmas-coronations.html.  Also see John Jolliffe, trans, *Froissart's Chronicles*, Random House, 1967, p. 128.  Froissart recounts in his Chronicles: "First, the better to embark this honourable and pleasant history of the noble Edward, King of England, he was crowned in London in the year of our Lord God 1326, on Christmas Day although the King his father as well as the Queen his mother, was still alive. Since the time of King Arthur it has often been observed in England that between two valiant kings there has most commonly been one less sufficient both in wit and valour" (4).  The king "less in both wit and valour" refers to Edward II, an ineffectual ruler who was forced to resign the crown to Edward III, his fourteen-year-old son. As propaganda, Froissart's writing effectively links Edward III in a lineage of kings which includes the "good King Arthur." Froissart's account of Edward III's coronation is likely an embellishment since he was crowned in Westminster Abbey in February of 1327.

medieval anxieties concerning monarchical self-definition."[36]  In Chism's reading of the text,

Richard's self-promoting royal identity is stressed through the poem's depiction of Arthur's

youth and inexperience, especially in regards to the fringes of the empire (such as the North

West Midlands and the borderland) and his historical predecessors.  This is precisely why the

poem moves from the imperial lineage within the Trojan frame narrative to Arthur's youthful

court.  As a genre, romance allows for the fluidity of multiple historical readings of the text,

whether that be Edward III, Richard II, or memories of earlier English kings.  Invoking these

multiple histories reinforces common ancestry and shared historical memories that help to shape

an idealized English ethnie.

The members of Arthur's court, constructed as English, soon clash with the ethnic other,

the Green Knight.  This clash of ethnic identities is defined by the Green Knight's demeanor,

physical appearance, and dress.  His arrival interrupts the festivities as he appears abruptly: "Þer

hales in at þe halle dor an anglich mayster" [There rushes in at the hall door a fearsome lord] (ln

136).[37]  The *Gawain*-poet describes him as "Half etayn" [half-giant] in size and states that "þe

here of his hed of his hors swete" [the hair of his head matched his horse] (ln 140, 180).  He is

clothed in the noble finery of "silk bordes" [embroidered strips of silk] and "blyþe stones"

[shining gems], indicating his status as a noble or lord (ln 159, 162).  However, his dress and

body also appear unfamiliar as they are "grayþed in grene" [arrayed in green] (ln 151).  These

depictions present the Green Knight as physically intimidating in terms of size, but his green

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[36] Christine Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, p. 68.
[37] The word "anghlich mayster" here seems to be a bit contested.  Andrew and Waldron translate it as "fearsome lord," whereas Borroff translates it as "unknown rider."  However, I would add that "anghlich" may reasonable be an alternative form of a(u)ngelik, meaning "angelic."  While there is no evidence to suggest that the Green Knight has any divine origin, it could function as an adjective to emphasize his otherworldly nature.  See MED s.v. a(u)nǧelīk (adj.) def. 1.a.

body and dress also make him a cultural oddity. As nature readings and eco-critical approaches

to the text have recognized, the Green Knight can be read as a figure of nature whose body

connects him to the green space of the natural environment from which he derives.[38] However, I

would suggest that reading the Green Knight as an embodiment of the natural environment also

comes with socio-political consequences. In this case, that natural environment exists on the

fringes of Arthur's empire—a landscape that Gawain will soon have to travel in his search for

the Green Chapel. To read the Green Knight only as a one-dimensional representation of the

natural landscape ignores the very real cultural identities of those who lived in this borderland

region during the fourteenth century. If we read the Green Knight as embodying this natural

landscape, then we must also take the cultural and political symbolism that works with it to

construct him as an ethnic outsider.

Commonly found in other medieval literature, giant-like figures are often inextricably

linked to both the natural and political landscape in which they reside. More specifically, giants

are associated with uninhabited or uncivilized lands prior to the Trojan founding of the British

Isles. We might take for example Brutus's founding of Albion in Geoffrey's *Historia*:

> In those days, the island was named Albion, and was uninhabited except by a few giants.
>
> It was a beautiful place filled with forests and rivers that teemed with fish. It inspired
>
> Brutus and his companions with a great desire to settle there. As they explored the
>
> various regions of the island, the Trojans discovered giants who had fled to caves in the
>
> mountains. With the approval of their leader, the Trojans then partitioned the land among

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[38] For readings of the Green Knight as the Green Man, see for instance, Derek Brewer, "The Colour Green," *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, edited by Derek Brewer and Johnathan Gibson, Brewer, 1997. For more eco-critical readings of the poem, see Ann Martinez's treatment of the Green Knight in "Bertilak's Green Vision: Land Stewardship in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," *Arthuriana*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2016 and William F. Woods, "Nature and the Inner Man in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2002.

themselves.  They began to cultivate the fields and construct the buildings, so that after a

short space of time, you would think they had lived there forever.  Then Brutus called the

island Britain, after his own name, and called his comrades Britons.  In devising these

names, he hoped to be remembered forever.  This in later days, the language of the

people, which was originally called Trojan or crooked Greek, was known as British.[39]

In this passage, we see an interesting bit of Geoffrey's influential revisionist history.  Geoffrey's

account of the exiled Trojan's settling in Albion entirely ignores the realities of the pre-existing

Celtic peoples on the isle, instead depicting the land as "uninhabited except by a few giants." The

giants of Albion are dismissed as inferior inhabitants of the isle.  Exhibiting territorial control as

they divide up the land amongst themselves, the Trojans cultivate the land and begin to build

cities.  Geoffrey's assertion that "you would think they had lived there forever" suggests that his

audience should take the Trojans as the first real inhabitants of the island.  In the last sentence of

this passage, Geoffrey manipulates history into drawing a linear connection between the Trojan

language and British.  In reality, the British language stems from Common Brittonic, or a

language that would split by the sixth century AD into Welsh, Cornish, and Breton.[40]  Geoffrey,

writing for the Norman lords, attempts to erase the Celtic history of Britain; whereas, the

*Gawain*-poet sensationalizes the giant to critique and interrogate the ethnic boundaries between

English and Celtic.[41]

[39] Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, p. 56.
[40] "Brittonic, adj. and n," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/23485.
[41] While giants serve as one example of a fascination with transgressive bodies, this theme is also apparent in accounts of the Welsh borderlands.  In Gerald of Wales's twelfth century *Itinerarium Cambriae* ("The Itinerary Through Wales"), he describes "a cow partaking the nature of a stag," a dog "pregnant by a monkey," and a Chester woman "without hands, to whom nature had supplied a remedy for that defect by the flexibility and delicacy of the joints of her feet, with which she could sew, or perform any work with thread or scissors, as well as other women." Gerald of Wales, "The Itinerary of Archbishop Baldwin Through Wales," *A Vision of Britain Through Time*, University of Portsmouth, 2017, www.visionofbritain.org.uk/travellers/Cambrensis_Tour/27.

The Green Knight's opposition to his English hosts is apparent in his demeanor and decorum in Arthur's court. After interrupting the festivities, the Green Knight appears disrespectful and arrogant to the members of Arthur's court. Already headed towards Arthur sitting on the high dias, he asks the court "Wher is . . Þe gouernour of þis gyng?" [Where is . . . the ruler of this company?] as if it were unclear that Arthur were the ruler (ln 225). He further insults the knights by calling them "berdlez chylder" [beardless children]— indicating an inexperienced, youthful Camelot (ln 280). Questioning Arthur's bravery, he exclaims, "Bot if þou be so bold as alle burnez tellen, / Þou wyl grant me godly þe gomen þat I ask" [But if thou be so bold as all men tell, / Thou will kindly grant me the game that I ask] (ln 273-4). In addressing King Arthur, the Green Knight uses the pronoun *thou,* indicating a subordinate or someone of lower social rank.[42] Andrew and Waldron interpret this as a sign of disrespect that contrasts with Gawain's later use of ȝe ("you") when he addresses Arthur.[43] At the very least, the Green Knight positions himself to be Arthur's social equal, perhaps an independent lord from the fringes of the empire, and his behavior provides a direct contrast to that of the knights in King Arthur's court.

The Green Knight further disrupts the court by inciting the beheading game. He proposes a "Crystemas gomen" [Christmas game], in which whoever accepts the challenge will strike the Green Knight with his own axe, on the condition that the challenger receive an axe blow in return a year later (ln 283). Tauntingly, he goes on to exclaim that Arthur's court "dares for drede without dynt schewed" [cowers in fear without a blow being offered] (ln 315). It seems likely that a fourteenth century audience would sympathize with a fearful Arthurian court since they would likely be familiar with other literary and/or cultural connotations of beheadings. The

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[42] MED s.v. thǒu (pron.) def. 1.a.
[43] Andrew and Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, p. 217, n. 254.

association between giants and beheadings has a long history in Arthurian literature. For example, the Welsh *Mabinogi* Arthurian story "Culwch and Olwen" (11th c.) depicts a morally neutral depiction of beheading through Goreau's beheading of the giant Ysbadden. In addition, The Giant of Mont St. Michel, first appearing in Geoffrey's *Historia*, is also beheaded by Arthur on his journey to conquer Rome. There are also cultural connotations attached to real historical beheadings. Within a historical Christian context, beheading was reserved for traitors as a form of divine judgement. We might take for instance the example of Simon de Montfort (1208-1265), a French born noble, who led baronial opposition to King Henry III. The armies of two of the king's subjects, Prince Edward and Roger Mortimer III, defeated Montfort. Montfort was subsequently killed and beheaded. His body was then mutilated, and his head was paraded around on a spear before being sent to his wife at Wigmore in the Welsh March.[44] A cultural reading of the beheading reveals the extent of the insult—the Green Knight not only calls them cowards, but failure of the game he proposes will result in a traitor's death. However, Arthur does not undertake the Green Knight's challenge because Gawain takes his place. Arthur certainly appears to consider the offer as he takes hold of the Green Knight's axe, but Gawain tells him, "And syþen þis note is so nys þat no3t hit yow falles" [And this affair is so foolish that it does not befit you] (ln 358). As Gawain realizes, not only are the king's bravery and honor at stake but also his life. By taking Arthur's place and trivializing the challenge, Gawain accepts

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[44] Ordelle G. Hill, *Looking Westward: Poetry, Landscape, and Politics in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, University of Delaware Press, 2009, p. 127. This is just one of the several accounts of beheading that Hill traces in his book. He also provides notable examples of the beheadings of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and Thomas Lancaster. Hill notes that the early Celts viewed death as a positive experience and beheadings were dignified, sacred practices of self-sacrifice. Respect for defeated opponents can be seen in the recorded conflict as told by Livy of the battle between the Boii, an Iron Age Gallic tribe, and the Romans in 216 BC. After killing the Roman consul, Posthumus, the Boii decapitated him at the temple and made his skull into a sacrificial gold-plated cup. For the medieval Welsh, decapitation for warriors in battle was venerated; however, decapitation of non-warriors or deceitful beheading off the battlefield served as an insult to the victim. However, my own reading of the text views the beheading in *SGGK* as interpreted through a primarily English, rather than Welsh, lens.

his role as knight to protect and honorably represent the kingdom.  Gawain takes up the axe, and

in a single deadly blow, decapitates the Green Knight.  To the court's astonishment, the Green

Knight retrieves his head and mounts his horse.  Before his departure, the Green Knight tells

Gawain: "To þe Grene Chapel þou chose, I charge þe, to fotte / Such a dunt as þou hatz dalt—

disserued þou habbez— / To be ȝederly ȝoden on Nw ȝeres morn" [To the Green Chapel come, I

charge you, to take / Such a blow as you have dealt—you have deserved the right—To be

promptly repaid on New Years morn] (ln 451-3).  The Green Knight charges Gawain to find him

at the Green Chapel on the next New Year's Day to receive the same axe blow.

Like the Green Knight, Gawain's identity is constructed as a sum of his values.  His ideal

values are associated with Arthur's kingdom at its political center and, consequently, the larger

ethnie of England. Randy Schiff argues, "Gawain's identity is exterior to himself—not anterior

to his public persona, but rather produced by the codes circulating within the social collective of

Camelot."[45]  Social codes shape Gawain's identity, as indicated by his adherence to the virtues of

the pentangle.  These public codes inform an idealized identity, one in which Gawain strives to

reach but finds himself coming up short in the end.  This idealized chivalric identity as it is

presented at the beginning of the poem is *constructed* as English.  Instead, the *Gawain*-poet—

and indeed most authors of Arthurian literature—collapse regional and ethnic identities of

knights to construct the virtuous, chivalric qualities of Arthur's men as quintessentially

"English," even if that ignores other competing possible identities.  This idealized "English"

Gawain is the one we see at the beginning of the poem, but as we shall see, his identity becomes

more ambiguous the longer he stays in the Anglo-Welsh borderland.

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[45] Randy P. Schiff, "Unstable Kinship: Trojanness, Treason, and Community in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *College Literature*, John Hopkins University Press, vol. 40, no. 2, 2013, p. 92.

In Fitt II, Gawain's identity is constructed as English through the cultural description of bodies, armaments, and dress. Seasons pass, and Gawain dons his armor as he prepares to leave Arthur's court to find the Green Chapel. Gawain examines his "gyld gere" [gilded armor] as he places it a "dublet of a dere tars" [dublet of expensive cloth] with "luflych greuz" [beautiful greaves] and "polynez piched þerto" [knee pieces fastened about his knees] with "knotz of golde" [fastenings of gold] (ln 569, 571, 576-7). Since the poem recounts arming in such detail and each piece of armor corresponds to a part of his body, the scene is, as William F. Woods calls it, "an anatomization of the hero."[46] Gawain's arming is a construction of his physical body and what it seeks to represent. His golden armor signifies his noble status as a knight, and consequently, an idealized depiction of knighthood.

Gawain, as an idealized chivalric knight, publicly displays the pentangle virtues to which he attempts to adhere; however, this symbol is more ambiguous than it would first seem. According to the poem, Solomon designed the pentangle (referred to as the Endless Knot by the English), a five-pointed star that represents a virtue tied to the group of fives:

> Fyrst he watz funden fautlez in his fyue wyttez,
>
> And efte fayled neuer þe freke in his fyue fyngres,
>
> And alle his afyaunce vpon folde watz in þe fyue woundez
>
> Þat Cryst ka3t on þe croys. (ln 640-3)
>
> [First he was found faultless in his five senses / And he never failed in his five fingers / And all his faith was firmly in the five wounds / that Christ received upon the cross]

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[46] William F. Woods, "Nature and the Inner Man in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2002, p. 215.

The Gawain-poet also stresses the five joys of Mary in Christ: the Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, and Assumption. And finally, the fifth five stresses the five virtues of chivalry: generosity, fellowship, chastity, courtesy, and charity.[47] On the surface, the symbol is undoubtedly Christian, perhaps even overwhelmingly so. However, the pentangle symbol appears infrequently in Middle English literature. In fact, as Eugenie Freed and other scholars have noted, the symbol contains multicultural pagan origins, appearing in ancient Babylonia and ancient Greece.[48] Freed states that, "the sole medieval association between the Biblical King Solomon and the 'sygne' attributed to him in [S]*GGK* is to be found in books of magic."[49] The added pentads beyond the pentangle's immediately associated virtues, attempts to shift the pentangle's symbolism further from its pagan origins to a greater Christian significance. Even within the context of a Christian symbol, the pentangle does not represent Gawain's own virtues, but instead, it represents the virtues to which he *aspires*. This distinction is important because by the end of the poem, Gawain must face the reality of his human imperfections as they contrast with the idealized nature of English chivalry that his armor symbolizes. Gawain attempts to conform to English idealized virtues through his armor as a sign of religious solidarity with his knightly brethren, but ultimately, he seems unable to distance himself from the proliferation of pagan symbols and magic that inhabit the poem.

The poem collapses Gawain's identity into that of an "English" knight. While Gawain's outward facing exemplarity is constructed as English, his identity is ethnically contested within

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[47] See Andrew and Waldron, *The Poems*, p. 232, n. 651-5. The five virtues of chivalry correspond with Saint Thomas Aquinas's Justice, or Truth, which includes liberality (*liberalitas*), affability (*amicitial*), religion (*religio*), obervace (*observantia*), and piety (*pietas*).

[48] Eugenie R. Freed, "'Quy the Pentangle Apendes . . .': The Pentangle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Theoria*, no. 77, 1991, p. 126.

[49] Freed, "Quy the Pentangle," p. 126.

the larger framework of the Arthurian mythos. Gawain's early associations in Celtic folklore impact his depiction in English literature. Translations of Geoffrey's *Historia* and Welsh romances first make it clear that Gawain serves an English equivalent of the Welsh character Gwalchmei.[50] We might also consider Gawain in the Old French Vulgate cycle where the image of Gawain's excessive worldly materialism is emphasized, and he exhibits a much less-flattering depiction of knighthood. Even if we see Gawain as an exemplary knight, he never seems to reach the pious nature of some of his brethren, such as Galahad or Perceval in *Quest del Saint Graal*. Although Gawain's depictions across Welsh, French, English, and Latin literature share some similarities, Gawain remains a fractured knight at best. In many ways, Gawain's mixed cultural background makes him the perfect figure for a borderland encounter in *SGGK*. Perhaps Gawain's ethnic identity—that is his identity as formed by English customs—is not as solidified as the public codes of his armor would seek to suggest.

In viewing the interactions of Fitt I as a clash of ethnic identities, it becomes evident that Arthur's court is defined by its religious public codes, such as its Christmas festivities and carol-dancing, and its adherence to cultural hierarchical expectations, such as loyalty and respect for the king. The Green Knight's appearance at Arthur's court disrupts these cultural expectations. He appears both familiar and foreign, containing the hybrid physical qualities of both man and giant with his body symbolic of a strange and distant imperial past. The Green Knight's game, too, appears both familiar and foreign conjuring images of both literary and historical

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[50] For more on Gawain's literary history, see Norris J. Lacy, editor, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Garland Publishing, 1996, p. 178. Also see Alan Lupack, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend*, Oxford UP, 2005, p. 291. Lacy notes that "Another possible indication of a distant Celtic origin may be the phenomenon of his strength waxing and waning with the sun in some romances; this could suggest a relationship with a solar deity. An early mention of the Latin Walwanus, probably inspired by popular British insular tradition, is to be found in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, but the character first appears in a role of any importance in Geoffrey of Monmouth. However, occurrences of the name Walwanus (and variants) in charters suggest the popularity of stories about him in the eleventh century on the Continent" (178).

beheadings. For Gawain, a knight containing an oversimplified "English" identity, the religious symbol of the pentangle attempts to override and erase Gawain's Celtic past. Gawain must come to terms with his own identity, as the ethnic fringes of the Arthur's empire come to its political center.

### III. Territorial control and Bertilak as Marcher Lord

Gawain's journey to find the Green Chapel is marked by a shift away from the familiar public codes of Arthur's court to the ambiguous ethnie of the Welsh borderlands. As a border romance, *SGGK* complicates issues of territorial control by depicting fluid, unclear boundaries between Camelot and Hautdesert. These unclear boundaries, both geographic and cultural, designate a movement in and out of actual and imagined spaces. While scholars such as Ingham, Arner, and Knight have acknowledged the cultural hybridity of the Green Knight / Bertilak, I propose to take this one step further by suggesting that we view Bertilak as a Marcher Lord and Hautdesert as a Marcher Lordship. Within this context, the Marches, as a space of hybridized identities, raises the stakes of Gawain's journey into Bertilak's border realm. Gawain travels into the unknown border region of the wilderness of Wirral and beyond before coming upon Bertilak's castle. From the start, Bertilak assumes the role of a lord (albeit by Morgan Le Fay's magic) and displays a sense of territorial control through hunting laws and practices. Bertilak's hunt is juxtaposed with the imperial discourse of the bedroom, in which Gawain must carefully navigate his chivalric identity. While the first part of the poem saw an instance of the periphery meeting the political center with the Green Knight's arrival at Arthur's court, the second half of the poem explores the inverse. The space of the unfamiliar terrain of the March deconstructs Gawain's English identity.

The first part of Gawain's adventure in search of the Green Chapel takes him through North Wales, grounded in real geographic and political landmarks. After equipping his armor, Gawain rides off on his horse, Gringolet, as he heads off into the wilderness in search of the Green Chapel. He travels into North Wales, along the west coast of England:

> Til þat he neȝed ful neghe into þe Norþe Walez.
>
> Alle þe iles of Anglesay on lyft half he haldez
>
> And farez ouer þe fordez by þe forlondez;
>
> Ouer at þe Holy Hede, til he hade eft bonk. (ln 697-702)
>
> [Until he had came very close to North Wales. / All the Isles of Anglesey he had on his left / And crosses over the fords at the headlands; / Over the Holyhead, until he had again come ashore / In the wilderness of Wirral. There but few lived / That either God or a man with a good heart loved.]

Gawain travels a great distance across Arthur's territory of Logres, following specific geographic landmarks, such as Anglesey and Holyhead.[51] The distinction of North Wales (rather than simply "Wales") is important here because it relates to the Principality of Wales, the Welsh lands that were united and annexed under the English crown. For a fourteenth-century audience from the March or the West Midlands, North Wales would likely symbolize the Welsh fight for independence against the English, ending with conquest of the territory in 1282.[52] Hill notes that a journey from through North Wales would involve moving through the Principality in the northwest and the March in the northeast.[53] Due to the specificity of the landmarks in this

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[51] The place name of Holyhead has been debated in the scholarship. Andrew and Waldron posit that it may refer to Holywell where the Roman road connects with the Dee river. Most scholars agree that Holyhead is not the same Holyhead as that in Anglesey. For more on this see Andrew and Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, n. 699.

[52] Hill, *Looking Westward*, p. 61.

[53] Hill, *Looking Westward*, p. 61. However, not all scholars agree with this reading. For instance, Joshua Byron Smith claims the poem "shows no real interest in the Welsh" and that North Wales was "a familiar landscape full of friendly English outposts—not the land of exotic marvels that much criticism suggests" (299). Smith's claim rests on the idea that the depiction of North Wales was only influenced by the Gawain-poet's own fourteenth century

passage, many scholars have attempted to trace Gawain's journey. However, without knowing exactly where the mythical Camelot is located, it remains difficult to trace the trajectory of the first part of Gawain's journey before reaching these specific landmarks. I would contend that this is precisely the point of the Gawain poet mixing real and imagined spaces.[54] Gawain's journey is both located in our world and outside of it—a true romanticized space that allows for temporal and spatial fluidity. More importantly, Gawain moves through Arthur's territory of Logres, meaning that Camelot is located somewhere in England, rather than Wales—another Galfridian tradition that erases the cultural heritage of the Welsh.

The next part of Gawain's journey marks his entry into the county of Cheshire. After Gawain crosses Holyhead, he enters "þe wyldrenesse of Wyrale" [the wilderness of Wirral] (ln 701). Historically, the peninsula of Wirral fell entirely into the county of Cheshire.[55] It remains no coincidence that this happens to be the same area from which the Gawain-poet lived, and that Cheshire played an important role in late fourteenth century politics. As John M. Bowers has noted, the Earldom and County Palatine of Chester had gained a reputation as a militarized zone, and it was politically used as a fortification against the Welsh.[56] For Richard II, Cheshire took on personal political and military significance. In 1394, Richard II recruited over 700 Cheshire knights, esquires, and archers, 312 of whom were selected as personal bodyguards—a clear move to re-establish his political and military power after the 1387 rebellion by the Lords

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context. I would suggest that if we read SGGK as true to romance conventions, then our reading of the text embodies multiple historical and imagined contexts. In addition, the depiction of North Wales as "familiar" and "friendly" may be true from the propagated perspective of the English elite; however, historical evidence suggests regional ethnic and political tensions. For more on this perspective, see Joshua Byron Smith, "'Til þat he neȝed ful neghe into þe Norþe Walez': Gawain's Postcolonial Turn," *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2016.

[54] For more on the connection of real and imagined spaces to ethnicity, see the concept of *ethnoscapes* in Chapter 3.

[55] Modern-day Wirral peninsula is made up of Cheshire county in the south and the county of Merseyside in the north, as established by the Local Government Act of 1972.

[56] John M. Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II*, D.S. Brewer, 2001, p. 70.

Appellant.[57]  In 1397, Richard II raised Cheshire to a principality and had marcher lands added to its territory, an honor that had never been bestowed on any other English county.[58]  In these years from 1397-1399, Richard seemed to intend Cheshire to become the new "inner citadel" of the empire; however, Richard's plan never came to fruition and by August 1399 Cheshire had surrendered to Henry Bolingbroke.[59]

Based on the politics of the court in the late fourteenth century, it is of little wonder that the Gawain-poet characterizes Wirral as a lawless place: "Wonde þe bot lyte / Þat auþer God oþer gome with goud hert louied" [There but few lived / That either God or a man with a good heart loved] (ln 701-2).  Within the Gawain-poet's own fourteenth century historical context, this sentiment is also reflected in the work of the chronicler Thomas Walsingham, a staunch critic of Richard II, who reports that "the king, fearing for his safety, summoned as his bodyguard a large number of ruffians from the country of Chester who took turns standing watch around him by day and by night." [60]  Walsingham's depiction of these Cheshire knights as "ruffians" reflects this popular mentality of Wirral as a lawless space.  Several scholars have also commented upon the characterization of Wirral as a peripheral zone for outlaws and criminals who preyed upon law-abiding citizens.  For instance, Andrew and Waldron call it "a notorious refuge for outlaws in the 14th c."[61]  Although Wirral was politically under the jurisdiction of the king, there was little actual control of the physical space of the peninsula, as the dense forested region provided refuge for outlaws and other criminals.  In fact, in 1376 Edward III completed a royal

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[57] Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl*, p. 71.
[58] See R.R. Davies, "Richard II and the Principality of Chester 1397-9," *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, edited by F.R.H DU Boulay and Caroline M. Barron, The Athlone Press, 1971, pp. 256-279.
[59] R.R. Davies, "Richard II," pp. 272-6.
[60] Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl*, p. 72.
[61] Andrew and Waldron, *The Poems*, p. 234, n. 701f.

proclamation for the deforestation of Wirral, thus removing the forest as a protected space of outlawry.[62]  It is possible, as Robert Barrett has indicated, that fourteenth-century Wirral "was a space of mixed character, one in which lawlessness coexisted with lordship."[63]  Like the larger border region in which it inhabits, Wirral takes on hybrid qualities—as both civilized / uncivilized and tame / wild.

This region, as I suggest, should be read as a space in which English, Anglo-Norman, and Welsh ethnic identities remained in constant tension.  Marcher lords raided border communities and shifted allegiances for political gain, while outlaws and other criminals took advantage of the ensuing disorder.  In the realm of Arthurian fantasy, *SGGK* depicts Wirral as a region identified by its unhospitable nature to travelers and as a land of giants, monsters, and mysterious hybrids.  Gawain takes "gates straunge" [strange roads] into "contrayez straunge" [strange country] as the landscape becomes increasingly ambigious (ln 709, 713).  Soon, Gawain finds himself among indistinguishable hills fighting a mix of mundane and fantastic creatures, such as dragons, giants, wolves, bulls, and bears.  Most interestingly, he encounters "wodwos" a hairy man of the forest, exhibiting hybrid qualities of both man and animal ["wodewose," OE *wudu wasa* 'wood man'] (ln 721).  The wood man may stem from other classical mythological creatures, and it has similar mythological counterparts in various other cultures, such as Greek and Roman.  As William Sayer's evidence indicates, the *Gawain*-poet's use of the word incorporates its original etymology and meaning as a "terrifying woodland being."  He views "wodewose" as a "hybrid British-Old English" noun that links the Wildman to a "remote territorial past."[64]  From an

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[62] Gillian Rudd, "'The Wilderness of Wirral' in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Arthuriana*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2013, p. 56.

[63] Barrett, *Against All England*, p. 138.

[64] William Sayers, "Middle English wodewose 'wilderness being': A Hybrid Etymology?," *ANQ*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2004, p. 16.

etymological standpoint, the wood man is a hybrid figure that is ethnically contested, containing cross-cultural influences.  In addition, "wodwos" in *SGGK*, like the giants of Albion in Geoffrey's *Historia*, invoke the original inhabitants of the land.  Neither entirely Welsh nor English, the area's native inhabitants are reduced to primitive beings with unidentifiable ethnic ties and no territorial claims.

While the narrative explores ethnic and political tension in the forest, the narrative action then shifts to focus on imperialist discourse, an important component of ethnie formation.  This imperialist discourse can be seen in the following scene taking place at Bertilak's castle, Hautdesert.  After travelling through the wilderness of Wirral, Gawain stops on Christmas Day and prays to find a place to hear mass.  Miraculously, a castle appears in the distance.  The lord of the castle, Bertilak, greets Gawain and introduces him to his wife.  Bertilak proposes a deal with Gawain: he will go out hunting each day and return with whatever game he catches; in return, Gawain will provide his host whatever he has acquired back at the castle.  What follows is a series of three hunts that are juxtaposed with Lady Bertilak's attempted seduction of Gawain in the bedroom.  From the outset of the hunting pact, Gawain misinterprets language and the unfamiliar cultural game in which he participates.  Bertilak makes him agree that "Quatsoeuer I wynne in þe wod hit worþez to yourez / And quat chek so ȝe acheue chaunge me þerforne" [Whatsoever I win in the wood of worth is yours / And whatever you so achieve give me in exchange] (ln 1105-6).  The word "chek" here takes on major significance.  "Chek" refers to "an assault or attack" or even more specifically "A call uttered in chess when the opponent's king (or another important figure) is under attack."[65]  Chess in itself is a game of imperial conquest, and during the Middle Ages it was frequently used as a form of warfare training and as an exemplum

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[65] MED s.v. *chek* (interj & n.) def. 1a, 2.

for moral instruction. In Caxton's 1483 *The Game and Playe of Chesse*, chess pieces were used to allegorize the political community, and each specific role was paired with its' own moral code. For example, the knight "ought to be wyse, lyberalle, trewe, strong, and ful of / mercy and pyté, and keplar of the peple and of the lawe" [ought to be wise, selfless, true, strong, and full of / mercy, piety, and keeper of the people and the law] (2.448-9).[66] These are the same attributes that Gawain works to embody within his own chivalric identity—an identity that the poet constructs as quintessentially English. Gawain fails to recognize the dangers of Bertilak's game as testing his knightly virtues and English cultural identity. Bertilak and his wife intentionally place Gawain in a position where he is ethically and morally restrained by his identity to not sleep with Lady Bertilak, and yet, he believes he must compromise his ability to remain "trewe" if he is to survive the beheading game to come. Like a game of chess, Bertilak strategically places Gawain in a checkmate.

In viewing Bertilak's deal through an imperial lens, we might also consider how "Luf-talkyng" [love-talking] functions as a game of political and imperial dominance through language (ln 927). For example, during the second day while Bertilak is out hunting a boar, Lady Bertilak attempts to seduce Gawain:

> 'Ma Fay,' quoþ þe meré wyf, 'ȝe may not be werned;
>
> ȝe ar stif innoghe to constrayne with strenkþe, ȝif yow lykez,
>
> ȝif any were so vilanous þat yow devaye wolde.'
>
> ȝe, be God,' quoþ Gawayn, 'good is your speche;

[66] William Caxton, "The Game and Playe of the Chesse," edited by Jenny Adams, *Robbins Library Digital Projects*, Medieval Institute Publications, 2009, http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/adams-caxton-game-and-playe-of-the-chesse. Caxton's edition is a translation of Jacobus de Cessolis' thirteenth-century political treatise, the *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium ac popularium super ludo scachorum* (*The Book of the Morals of Men and the Duties of Nobles and Commoners, on the Game of Chess*).

> Bot þrete is vnþryuande in þede þer I lende,
>
> And vche gift þat is geuen not with goud wylle. (ln 1495-1500)
>
> ['By my faith,' said the beautiful wife, 'you may not be refused; / You are strong enough to constrain with strength, if you like, / If any were so ill-mannered that they would refuse you,' 'Yes, by God,' said Gawain' you speak correctly; / But force is considered ignoble in the land where I live, / and such gift that is given not with good will (against one's desires).]

Gawain's conduct in the bedroom is distinctly marked as a sign of cultural difference between Gawain and his hosts. While Lady Bertilak tells Gawain that he could easily take her by force (i.e. rape), Gawain attributes his refusal to the customs of "the land where he lives" (i.e. Camelot and Arthur's court). He situates Camelot, as Arthur's central seat of English government, as standing in opposition to Bertilak's peripheral Hautdesert. Gawain does not engage in the sexual conquest of Lady Bertilak because he is, as Woods suggests, shaped by "social and ethical constraints of his courtly persona."[67] Thus, Gawain emphasizes that ill will and sexual transgressions against women go against both his English chivalric code and the expected social behaviors of the guest / host relationship. Furthermore, the reference to rape also takes on a connotation of imperial conquest and serves as an exercise of power. Female bodies serve as a common trope for imperialist discourses and frequently use female bodies as a metaphor for feminized colonial submission. Ingham has noted that "Histories of colonial conquest narrate the agency of militarism in just such terms: virile power overcomes a feminized native resistance, a power frequently (and unfortunately) figured in metaphors of sexual conquest and rape."[68] However, here we see an inverse of the typical imperialist trope. Instead of Gawain forcing his

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[67] Woods, "Nature and the Inner Man," p. 222.

[68] Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, p. 130. Knightly "sexual conquest" often features as a reward for political dominance or making the correct chivalric choices, such as in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, along with other similar tales of the loathly lady tradition. However, rape was forbidden within the chivalric code, a point emphasized in Chaucer's own loathly lady tale, *The Wife of Bath's Tale*.

will on Lady Bertilak, she takes on the role of the aggressor. Lady Bertilak, at the behest of her husband, attempts to lure Gawain into a game of metaphorical sexual conquest. Just as Bertilak hunts the deer, boar, and fox, Lady Bertilak "hunts" Gawain through her sexual advances. If we view Lady Bertilak within this context as "feminized native resistance," then it becomes possible to view this landscape as one that is not only resistant to Arthur's imperial conquest but as a landscape that serves as a direct threat to the king's authority and empire.

**IV. Gawain's Unstable Ethnic Identity and the Green Girdle**

Despite his best attempts, however, Gawain, does not uphold the English chivalric ideal. At the end of Fitt III as Bertilak hunts the fox, Lady Bertilak gives Gawain three kisses and asks him for a token of his love, such as a glove or a gold ring. Gawain refuses to give Lady Bertilak a gift or take anything from her until she tells him of the silk green girdle that will protect the wearer from death. She offers Gawain a green girdle so that "he myȝt not be slayn for slyȝt vpon erþe" [he might not be slain by trickery of any means] (ln 1854). Gawain, quick to realize the value of such an object for his quest, accepts the girdle: "Þen kest þe knyȝt, and hit come to his hert / Hit were a juel for þe jopardé þat hym jugged were: / When he acheued to þe chapel is chek for to fech, / Myȝt he haf slypped to be vnslayn þe sleȝt were noble." [Then the knight considered, and it came to his mind / It was a valuable object for the danger that judged him: / When he reached the chapel to receive his blows, / Might he escape to be unslain the feat was wise] (ln 1856-8). Upon Bertilak's return from the hunt, Gawain exchanges the three kisses for the fox's pelt, but he tells him nothing of the girdle. By not revealing the girdle, he not only fails to uphold the terms of Bertilak's deal, but he has also violated his "English" chivalric identity.

The act of keeping the girdle becomes the main point of contention in Fitt IV, and it becomes the focal point for judging Gawain's success. On New Year's Day, Gawain sets out

from Hautdesert to meet the Green Knight.  At the Green Chapel, the Green Knight feigns to

deliver the same blow to Gawain that Gawain dealt to him in Arthur's Court. Upon the first

swing, Gawain flinches, and the Green Knight mocks him, saying, "Such cowardise of þat knyȝt

cowþe I neuer here" [Such cowardice of that knight I never heard accused] (ln 2273).  On the

third swing of the axe, the Green Knight nicks Gawain's neck.  Angered, Gawain tells the Green

Knight that he has met the terms of the contract and will now defend himself if necessary.  The

Green Knight laughs and reveals his identity as Bertilak.  While the first two feigned blows

represented Gawain's honest exchange of his wife's kisses from the first two days, his nick

represents his failure to return the girdle.  The Green Knight's judgement is not that of a purely

Welsh figure but rather, his actions reflect his hybrid cultural identity as a Marcher Lord.  It is

his judgement in the borderland as a (mostly) sovereign ruler that matters—not Arthur's or even

God's.  Gawain must conform to the Green Knight's rules that are dictated by unfamiliar mixed

cultural practices.  In playing by rules of the game, his failure is not in accepting the green girdle;

instead, his fault is in keeping it secret and thus violating Bertilak's hospitality.

    In viewing Bertilak as a Marcher Lord, I suggest that we view the girdle as a symbol of

the Anglo-Welsh borderland—one that disrupts and complicates the ethnic identity of both

Gawain and Arthur's court.  On the surface, the girdle is a symbol in opposition to the pentangle,

as a sign of shame and chivalric imperfection: "He groned for gref and grame; / Þe blod in his

face con melle, / When he hit schulde schewe, for schame" [He groaned for grief and anger /

That blood in his face with flame / When he showed it, for shame] (ln 2501-4).  Yet, the girdle

also carries with it connotations of Celtic symbolism and pagan magic.  Celtic symbolism has

also long been recognized as a major component of the girdle tradition.  R.S. Loomis, as early as

1946, identified a number of Celtic connections to *SGGK*, claiming that the Irish tales of Cúroi,

Cúchulainn, and Blahnat informed the depiction of the girdle given to Gawain by Lady Bertilak.[69]  More recent criticism, such as that of Rhonda Knight, reads the girdle as a symbol of Anglo-Welsh border culture.  Knight claims that "By wearing the girdle, he [Gawain] expresses his desire to incorporate his experience of the border culture into his identity collage."[70]  The identity collage, as Knight asserts, "communicates wholeness and individuality, actuality and potentiality, construction and deconstruction"[71] Knight makes the important point here that the girdle represents cultural and ethnic identity in conflict.  Building on the notion of the identity collage, I suggest that the girdle becomes an individual, deconstructive symbol of Gawain's cultural identity.  In all actuality, the girdle is a destabilizing force for Gawain.  In wearing the girdle, he appropriates a symbol of the Anglo-Welsh borderland that serves as a constant reminder that despite his intended loyalty to Arthur, he remains tied to his own Celtic ancestry.  Perhaps Gawain is more like the Green Knight and his Welsh neighbors to the west than he would like to admit.

At the same time, the girdle's appropriation by Arthur's court constructs a newly formed symbol of the communal whole.  I suggest that we read the girdle as representative of a potential or idealized English ethnie that incorporates their Celtic neighbors.  When Gawain returns, the rest of the English court does not seem to express the same internal conflict that he exhibits in relation to his own personal ethnic identity.  Having little frame of reference for Gawain's personal strife and his Celtic heritage, they instead view the girdle as a symbol of honor and imperial exceptionalism for the triumphant Arthurian knight who survived the Green Knight's challenge:

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[69] Loomis, R.S. "More Celtic Elements in 'Gawain and the Green Knight.'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1943, p. 166.
[70] Knight, "All Dressed Up," p. 282.
[71] Knight, "All Dressed Up," p. 261.

Þe kyng comfortez þe kny3t, and alle þe court als

La3en loude þerat, and luflyly acorden

Þat lordes and ladis þat longed to þe Table,

Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue,

A bende abelef hym aboute of a bry3t grene,

And þat, for sake of þat segge, in swete to were. (ln 2513-8)

[The king comforted the knight, and all the court, / Laughed loudly thereafter, and lively understood / That lords and ladies that belonged to the table, /All of the brotherhood, a baldric should have / A band slantwise about him of a bright green / And that, for the sake of that knight, wear it agreeably]

It becomes difficult to discern the meaning of such a notable item, as the green girdle, when its symbolism shifts from one of moral poverty to that of an item of honor. The Court's reaction trivializes Gawain's concerns; instead, the green girdle becomes a symbol of conquest and cultural appropriation, or as Arner refers to it, "a medal of the colonial campaign."[72]  But it becomes more than just a trophy, the girdle is appropriated into their own dress, and through what has now become public custom, functions as a developing symbol of a new English ethnie. Of course, the conception of a pure English ethnie serves imperialist impulses and works toward the erasure of a separate Welsh ethnie.  As the previous historical discussions have shown, the English frequently manipulated symbols for political gain.  This was done through cultural erasure, such as the English circumventing Welsh territorial rights by claiming Trojan ancestry, or through cultural appropriation, as in the case of Edward I's Round Table.  The girdle represents yet another case in which the English take control of an "othered" symbol and redefine it in terms of their own nationalistic impulses.   Only though the strategies of cultural appropriation and minimizing Welsh ethnic influence can a new homogenous identity be

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[72] Arner, "The Ends of Enchantment," p. 94.

formed—an identity that furthers the goals of Merlin's prophecy and progresses imperialistic control of the British Isles.

In returning to the "Brutus bokez" [Brutus books, i.e. chronicles of Britain] at the end of the poem, the *Gawain*-poet one last time ties together history and Arthurian legend through literary symbolism (ln 2523). David A. Lawton notes that the historical frame "distances the reader from the Arthurian court just as Gawain is detached from it by his experience of solitary quest and moral failure."[73] Despite Gawain viewing the girdle as a symbol of his violation of his English knightly values, his true detachment from the Arthurian court stems from his cultural encounter with the Anglo-Welsh borderlands. The narrative does not show evidence of either Gawain or the court's true understanding of the imperial maneuvers in which they are engaged. That is, the poem makes a point of the court's assumption of ethnic homogeneity and solidarity by wearing the green sashes to represent Gawain's adventure. They are unaware of the imperial machinations of Arthur's larger empire and unconsciously participate in the erasure of Welsh culture and symbols. While the historical frame may temporally distance the reader form Arthur's court, it establishes the Roman and Trojan past as a model for an imperial future. In my view, this critical distance between audience and the poem stems from the disparity between the English identity as constructed through the imagined Arthurian mythos and the historical reality of an island of conquered peoples. Over time, cultural appropriation of Welsh ancestry and symbolism slowly became diffused within a collective English identity, and distinct cultural differences between the English and the Welsh became more difficult to untangle. Still, awareness of cultural difference and fractured hybrid identities persisted much longer into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries at the point of cross-cultural contact—the Anglo-Welsh

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[73] David A. Lawton, "The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Speculum*, vol. 58, no. 1, 1983, p. 92.

borderland.  The *Gawain*-poet channels these competing ethnic identities into a new symbol of English cultural identity.  However, the symbol of the girdle might not be so easily appropriated as one might like to imagine.  While the knights of Arthur's court take on the girdle as their own symbol, they simultaneously highlight the cracks in the imagined cultural cohesion of the English ethnie.

Chapter 2

Militarized Borderlands: Ethno-history and Collective Memory of
the Anglo-Scots Borderland in Two Arthurian Tales

"How shal we fare," quod the freke, "that fonden to fight,
And thus defoulen the folke on fele kinges londes,
And riches over reymes withouten eny right,
Wynne worship in were thorgh wightness of hondes?"

["How shall we fare," asked the warrior, "that undertake to fight, / And thus put down the folk on diverse king's lands, / And riches over realms without any right / Achieve renown in warfare through prowess of arms?"]

-- *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, ln 261-264[1]

In the fourteenth century poem *The Awntyrs off Arthur,* Gawain and Guenevere encounter the ghost of Guenevere's mother in Inglewood Forest.  After the ghost counsels Guenevere on the consequences of sexual love and material wealth, the conversation turns towards the implications of obtaining material wealth through conquest and warfare.  Gawain asks how the knights will fare maintaining a chivalric ethos of conquering and pillaging the lands of foreign kings.  In response, the ghost turns her attention to the subject of Arthur's kingship: "Your King is to covetous, I warne the sir knight. / May no man stry him with streght while his whele stondes" [Your king is too covetous, I warne you sir knight. / May man may overthrow him by force while Fortune holds him high on her wheel] (ln 265-6).  Gawain's question reflects an anxiety surrounding imperialism and warfare, but the ghost never provides a direct answer. Instead, she cryptically alludes to Arthur's kingship and his fall from Fortune's Wheel.  In doing

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[1] The primary texts of *Awntyrs off Arthur* and *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* are taken from Thomas Hahn, editor, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1995.  All in-text citations for these works are presented as line numbers.  Translations are my own with the aid of Hahn's editorial notes and the MED.  Wherever possible, I've chosen to provide a literal translation, rather than adhere to any specific poetic structure.  For the readers' convenience, all translations are interlinear unless otherwise noted.

so, the ghost conjures an image of the future through an understanding of her own fate and the consequences of her worldly past life.

This example demonstrates how the poet relies on the audience's ability to move forward and backward in time through the events of the Arthurian mythos to stress the importance of the fall of the Round Table. For romances originating from the Anglo-Scots border, such as *The Awntyrs off Arthur* and *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* (*SGCC*), the fall of empire is attributed to imperial militarism and violence.[2] In these texts, imperialism is understood through the memory of English-Scottish border conflicts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I argue that *SGCC* and *Awntyrs* reflect the fractured collective memory of violence and militarism within the Anglo-Scots borderland; and in doing so, they promote a late fourteenth-century imperial model of peaceful subjugation of Scotland by England. To clarify these claims, I first construct a deeper understanding of collective memory as it contributes to the ethno-history, or ethnic historical realities of the Anglo-Scots borderland. I then turn to examine *SGCC* for ways that its poet constructs an ethno-history of borderland violence and imperial subjugation. Finally, I demonstrate how *Awntyrs* complicates these notions of violence and subjugation in relation to the larger Arthurian mythos and the historical realities of shifting political allegiances.

## I. From Collective Memory to Ethno-history

History is a cultural construction recounted in texts—not just texts that purport to be 'historical' but also literary texts, which are shaped by the historical and cultural contexts in which they originate. At the same time, such texts also become part of the popular imagination,

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[2] Both *SGCC* and *Awntyrs* are part of a group frequently referred to as the Northern Gawain Group, an underexamined group of Arthurian tales originating from Northern England and the Midlands. Other tales of this group include *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, *The Avowing of Arthur*, and *The Greene Knight*. See Thomas Hahn, editor, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1995.

crafting for later readers certain perceptions of the historical past. Lee Patterson stresses historicism as "the various forms of resolution at which historicist negotiations are governed neither by empirical necessity, nor (at least of all) theoretical correctness, but by values and commitments that are in the last analysis political."[3] These political values, as Patterson asserts, influence how history is recounted through literature and how historical criticism shapes modern understanding of such texts. This is true for ways that medieval romances construct perceptions of English and Scottish nations. Nations are, in the words of Anthony D. Smith, created "in the historical and sociological imagination, through identification with generalized communal heroes set in equally generalized but vividly detailed locations and times; though we can never meet them, we 'know' our fellow-citizens, the members of our cultural nations, through these identifications and descriptions in newspapers, journals, plays, and operas."[4] Smith makes an important point about the historical and sociological imagination: that they construct nations through identifiable symbols that are circulated through various forms of literature and art. However, he is focused on modernity and thus overlooks earlier forms of narrative. Oral and written romances often contain what Smith calls communal heroes, such as Gawain and Arthur, that make the characters accessible to their shared cultural audience. This is particularly true in vernacular romances, especially Arthurian works that have a long tradition of identifiable characters and motifs. Admittedly, it is more difficult to know the precise circulation for manuscript romances than for printed texts; however, the consistent popularity of Arthurian romances attests to an earlier form of cultural production that worked to establish what Smith would call collective memory and social cohesion.

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[3] Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature,* The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, p. x.
[4] Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford UP, 1999, p. 44.

Collective memory is a memory shared by many members of a cultural community, constructed through shared values, ideas, and interpretations of historical events or narratives of ancient origins.  It is a key part of emergent notions of national identity because it helps define one group against another. As Duncan S.A. Bell explains,

> The notion of shared ideas, values, and interpretations concerning either real events (slavery, the First World War, the Holocaust) or narratives of ancient origins or of prelapsarian 'golden ages' (the epic Finnish Kalevala, or King Arthur and the Round Table) locates collectivity inside a shared history, a history constantly reaffirmed and reproduced through resonant rituals and symbols. This memory acts as a powerful cohesive force, binding the disparate members of a nation together: it demarcates the boundary between Them and Us, delineating national self from the foreign, alien Other.[5]

While Bell situates his examples of prelapsarian golden ages as they serve the construction of modern nationalism, he also reaffirms the idea that nationalism is contingent upon such narratives.  However, it's important to note that these narratives often take varying perspectives, and even at its best, collective memory is often fragmented, incomplete, or at times, can generate conflicts of interpretation.[6]

These collective memories in literary texts that shape a specific ethnic group's perception of the past participate in the formation of what may be more narrowly defined as *ethno-history*. As defined by Anthony D. Smith, ethno-history is "the ethnic members' memories and

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[5] Duncan S.A. Bell, "Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2003, p. 70.
[6] Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism*, University Press of New England, 2000, p. 68.

understanding of their communal past or pasts, rather than any more objective and dispassionate analysis by professional historians."[7]  Ethno-history is shaped by a communal understanding of the past, or collective memory, often translated through written and oral cultural works. By "professional historians" Smith refers to modern historians who have developed an ethical responsibility to present history as objectively as possible.  Medieval chronicles recount historical events, but they have little regard for maintaining objectivity or untangling fact from legend; because they straddle the line between history and fiction, we can locate in them elements of ethno-history, just as we might any literary text. Arthurian romances, on the other hand, unapologetically actively draw on ethno-historical narratives.  By examining the medieval relationships between England and Scotland within border romances, one can analyze how English memory of conflict with the Scots serves as delineating marker that draws distinctions between an ostensibly cohesive English national identity and the Celtic, Scottish "Other."

As the present chapter demonstrates, *SGCC* and *Awntyrs*, likely written near the turn of the fifteenth century, contribute to the construction of a fragmented ethno-historical Scottish Wars of Independence and border warfare between the English and the Scots in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.  Both poems interrogate the shared values of a militaristic chivalric ethos of knighthood that had been waning since the thirteenth century.  As Arthurian romances, these texts are also layered with an imagined mythology that was used by English kings, especially Edward I and Edward III, to bolster their claims for imperial control of the British Isles.  Edward I, for example, sent a letter to Pope Boniface VIII in 1301 to explain his right as "immediate and proper lord of the realm of Scotland."[8]  The contrived letter included the pseudo-

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[7] Smith, *Myths and Memories*, p. 16.
[8] R.R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles: 1093-1343*, Oxford UP, 2000, pp. 41.

history of King Arthur. Arthur's role, drawn on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, was central to Edward I's argument. According to historian R.R. Davies, "Arthur's role [in the letter] was pivotal: he trounced the Scots, installed his own nominee as king of Scotland, and required him to carry the sword at Arthur's coronation, as a sign of the subjection of Scotland to the kings of Britain."[9] This historical letter shows us that the chronicle tradition may have originally led to the exploitation of the Arthurian narrative for claims of political legitimacy of the British Isles. However, as Patricia Ingham suggests, Geoffrey's historical method situates him as a "historical innovator" who "crafts an influential fantasy productive for an oppositional history of British identity."[10] Geoffrey's "historical chronicle" contains much by way of fantasy that becomes the basis for the romance tradition, which equally helped to concretize the mythos in the popular imagination.

For those romances that originate from the Anglo-Scots borderland, this popular mythos of English imperial right is further complicated by English collective memory of relations with the Scots. The formation of this collective memory that is foundational to borderland romances is best understood through the historical realities that shaped them. The historical context that influenced *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and *The Awntyrs off Arthur* began no later than the late thirteenth century and the start of the Scottish Wars of Independence (1286-1357). Despite common perceptions of England and Scotland as being at continuous war during the Middle Ages, prior to the Scottish Wars of Independence, relations between the two states was often peaceful. During the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, only a small number of castles occupied the border region and early peaceful relations were the result of royal marriages and

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[9] R.R. Davies, *The First English Empire*, pp. 41-2.
[10] Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 24. For more on the boundaries between fiction and history, see Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts*, Princeton UP, 1992.

feudal bonds between nobles.  Since many barons held lands on both sides of the border, it

would have been against their interests to engage in armed conflict in which they would have to

forfeit their lands on one side of the border to an opposing faction.[11]

All of this changed in 1286 when the last Scoto-Norman king, Alexander III, died,

leaving fourteen different claimants to the Scottish throne.  This ushered in a period of crisis and

uncertainty for Scotland, one that led to English kings quickly becoming involved in Scottish

affairs.[12]  In order to prevent civil war, the Scottish lords decided that Edward I of England

(1239-1307; also known as the Hammer of the Scots) would be allowed to decide the next

successor.  Edward I saw his chance to assert English legal control over Scotland. He chose John

Balliol, Lord of Galloway, and used his influence over Balliol to subjugate Scotland, much to the

frustration of the second claimant, Robert Bruce.  This perceived weakness would taint John

Balliol's reputation and would cause him to be remembered as a puppet of the English.[13]

In 1295, Philip IV of France and John Balliol, under the influence of the nobility, signed

the Auld Alliance, an alliance between Scotland and France that would help to ward off

England's influence and numerous invasions.  This alliance would influence political decisions

not only in the Scottish Wars of Independence but also in other major historical events, such as

the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453).  Of course, this decision greatly angered Edward,

prompting him to invade Scotland and depose John in 1296.[14]  While English control over

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[11] A.D.M. Barrell, *Medieval Scotland*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 67-8.

[12] Barrell, *Medieval Scotland*, p. 92.

[13] Rosalind Mitchison, *A History of Scotland*, Routledge, 2002, pp. 40-42.  The amount of direct influence Edward had over Balliol is subject to interpretation.  Popular accounts of King John as entirely subservient to Edward were likely part of pro-Bruce propaganda.  Barrell notes that "It is important to remember that John Balliol received the kingdom of Scotland by due legal process, and that his case was cogent.  Furthermore, Balliol was supported by much of the political establishment in Scotland, most notably by the powerful Comyn family.  The problems he experienced at the hands of Edward I have made King John seem like a puppet of the English monarch, but there is no reason to suppose the Bruces would have acted appreciably differently, or have been able to resist the inevitable retribution of Edward I had they chosen to defy him" (104).

[14] Mitchison, *A History of Scotland*, pp. 43-4.

Scotland now seemed assured, English occupation in Scotland quickly faced opposition from

rebel leaders, including William Wallace and Andrew Murray.  For Scotland, this period is

mythologized in the creation of William Wallace as a folk-hero, and it serves as an important

marker in the development of Scottish national identity.  Wallace was revered for his military

prowess and his success at Stirling Bridge (Sept 11, 1297), and he became a natural leader

among the Scottish upper-class.  However, in 1305 he was captured and executed by the English,

only to be followed by the death of Edward I two years later in 1307.[15]

In the years following William Wallace's execution, John Comyn and Robert the Bruce

were assigned as joint guardians of the realm, and shortly thereafter, Bruce became the next king

of Scotland.  Throughout his reign, hostilities with the English under Edward II continued.  On

April 6, 1320, the Declaration of Arbroath, which declared Scottish independence, was submitted

to Pope John XXII.[16]  In the document, Scotland asserted itself as an independent and sovereign

state, rather than a land under control of the English.  However, many modern historians and

theorists of nationalism dispute the document as evidence of a Scottish nation.  Barrell refutes

the idea that the Declaration of Arbroath serves as evidence of Scottish nationhood on the basis

that "notions of exclusive national identities and ethnic purity were alien to the fourteenth-

century mentality."[17]  While perhaps the idea of ethnic purity was not fully developed in the

fourteenth century, it is clear that the English and the Scots were aware of their cultural

differences in language, culture, and law.  At least among the Scottish elite, there was also a

sense of desire for political sovereignty, regardless of if that took the form of what we today

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[15] Barrell, *Medieval Scotland*, p. 108.
[16] While some scholars have interpreted the Declaration as a statement of popular sovereignty, many scholars view the document as pro-Bruce propaganda.  The document itself was written in Latin.  The only surviving manuscript is currently housed in the National Archives of Scotland (Edinburgh).
[17] Barrell, *Medieval Scotland*, p. 129.

would identify as nationhood. While the Declaration of Arbroath does not provide irrefutable evidence of Scotland as a sovereign nation, it does provide historical evidence of a constructed mythos of emergent nationhood, one that would, along with other major events such as the hero-making of William Wallace, work to form a *developing* sense of Scottish national identity in the early fourteenth century. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine Scottish national identity in its entirety, it is worth noting that both Scottish and English identities were being formed simultaneously in the notions of "us" vs. "them" inevitably constructed by the continuing hostilities between the two regions. Furthermore, as Barrell notes, the borderland region was moving toward recognizing a more distinct divide between the Scots and the English.[18]

After Robert the Bruce's death in 1329, Edward III, having recently inherited the throne from his father, began further incursions into Scotland—this time to restore Edward Balliol (son of John Balliol who had taken the throne from the Bruce's young son David II) to the Scottish throne. This sparked the Second War of Independence; however, the English were never successful in restoring Balliol to the throne permanently, and they soon turned their attention to France with the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453). In 1341, David II, Robert the Bruce's heir who was exiled in France for his safety, returned to take the Scottish throne. Ultimately, the war between Edward Balliol and the supporters of David II served as a continuation of an internal struggle between two families. According to historian A.D.M. Barrell, "The wars, however, also had a national dimension, and this is how they are regarded in the popular imagination. Indeed, the very term 'Wars of Independence' implies that this was a struggle for liberty, for the right to self-determination."[19] Certainly, the rhetoric of the Wars of

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[18] Barrell, *Medieval Scotland*, p. 129.
[19] Barrell, *Medieval Scotland*, p. 133.

Independence implies an assertion of independence from the hands of the English, and this idea helps to emphasize the role of popular imagination in constructing national identity. The very notion of the Wars of Independence has worked to build a retrospective shared mythos and memory-making of a distinct Scottish identity, separate from that of the English.

This tumultuous political and cultural climate between the English and the Scots informs the identity formation of the characters and landscapes in *SGCC* and *Awntyrs*. However, these two texts depict a much more complicated notion of imperial identity than a simply "us vs. them" mentality. For those living near the border, allegiances were much more fluid, as border warlords often shifted loyalties for personal gain. These are the sorts of complex notions of identity and nationhood that come to the foreground in such border romances. In doing so, these works reflect the violent history of the Anglo-Scots border and provide an idealized imperial model of peaceful subjugation situated in the golden age of Arthur's court.

## II. "Carrlus Corttessy": Borderland Violence and Imperial Subjugation

In *SGCC*, "carllus corttessy" [carle's courtesy] distinguishes the Carle as an ethnically Scottish "other" whose domestic customs and violent nature appear foreign to the English colonizers, Kay, Baldwin, and Gawain (ln 278). The Carle's title, which has a cognate in the Old English word *churl*, literally refers to a man of low estate and serves as a particularly patronizing term for the border warlord who, by the end of the poem, kneels to King Arthur.[20] The paradox of churlish courtesy (a non-noble sense of courtesy) subverts audience expectations of the Carle throughout the poem. While he exhibits churlish behavior, the Carle is redeemed by the end of the poem through Christian salvation and peaceful subjugation into King Arthur's court. *SGCC*

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[20] MED s.v. *carl* (n.) def. 1.a. The term "carl" is used in various other ME texts, including Chaucer's *CT Prologue* in which he refers to the Miller as "a stout carl for the nones" (ln 545). All Middle English definitions are from the Middle English Dictionary, hosted through the University of Michigan [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/].

critiques imperial militarism and the violence of the Anglo-Scottish borderland under the guise

of domestic rivalry and argues for a political ethos of peaceful subjugation and Christian

morality.

     *SGCC* is, as Sean Pollack suggests, "a border text that both comes from and explores the

ambiguity of boundaries: political, geographic, class, and literary."[21] The poem was likely

composed around 1400, and only one manuscript survives, Porkington MS 10, which dates

around 1460.[22] Like the other texts of the Northern Gawain Group, the tale has received

relatively little critical scholarly attention, especially when compared to more canonical

fourteenth-century literature like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. It has however, been the

subject of a handful of articles and passing references in longer book-length Arthurian studies.

Most often, scholars focus on the grotesque violence and monstrous nature of the Carle and the

inherent conflict between upper nobility and the lower class. For instance, Lee Ramsey views

Gawain and the Carle as representing "two conflicting classes and life-styles," the noble romance

heroes of Arthur's court and the lesser nobility, but even he questions the aesthetic quality of the

poem.[23] More recently, the poem's location in the borderland has garnered scholarly attention.

Pollack treats *SGCC* as a border text and examines issues of sovereignty and identity through the

poem's parodic form; however, like Ramsey, Pollack is most interested in unequal class

relationships.[24] While acknowledging Pollack's class-based reading, Joseph Taylor expands the

discussion of sovereignty in *SGCC* by taking a biopolitical view of border governance. He

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[21] Sean Pollack, "Border States: Parody, Sovereignty, and Hybrid Identity in *The Carl of Carlisle*," *Arthuriana*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2009, p. 11.
[22] Thomas Hahn, editor, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*. Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1995, p. 83. Hahn also notes that Porkington MS 10 (also known as Harlech MS 10, and Brogyntyn MS) is housed in the National library of Wales at Aberystwyth.
[23] Lee Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances*, Indiana University Press, 1983, p. 204.
[24] Pollack, "Border States," p. 14.

argues that the forest in *SGCC* serves as a liminal ecological space that shapes Marcher loyalties and political identity.[25]  Building on the work of Taylor and others, my own analysis considers how collective memory shapes liminal Marcher identities and loyalties within the microcosm of the foreign domestic space.  By focusing on the collective memory of militarism and violence as shaped by borderland romance, I further dismantle the friend/enemy paradigm that Taylor calls the "binary logic of sovereignty."[26]

The tale begins with a royal hunt, during which Sir Gawain, Sir Kay, and Bishop Baldwin become lost in the woods while hunting a deer.  Eventually, they stop for the night at the nearby castle ruled by the Carle of Carlisle where a hesitant porter grants them access.  Even though the Carle is a giant well-known for mistreating guests, Gawain insists that the knights act courteously.  Inside the castle, the gigantic Carle sits with menacing beasts—a bull, a boar, a lion, and a bear—and warns that he can only offer Carle's courtesy.  The Carle proceeds to initiate a series of challenges to test the chivalry of Gawain and his companions.  During a large feast, Kay, Baldwin, and Gawain go out to the stables in turn to check on their horses in the stable where the Carle's foal is also feeding.  Baldwin moves the foal because it is eating alongside their horses, and Kay later drives the foal out of the stable and into the rain, but Gawain treats it with respect.  The Carle then demands that Gawain try to strike him with a spear, and although Gawain throws it with a great deal of force, the Carle dodges, and the spear smashes into the wall instead.  Next, the Carle invites him to woo his wife and kiss her; however, he stops them just before they have sex.  As a reward, Gawain is granted a night with the Carle's daughter.  The following morning after mass, the Carle reveals that he vowed to never allow

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[25] Joseph Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2017, p. 185
[26] Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics," p. 184.

anyone to leave his castle alive unless they were entirely obedient, and Gawain is the first to succeed (and his behavior in fact causes the Carle to also spare Gawain's less obedient companions). Now reformed because of Gawain's behavior, the Carle promises to build an abbey for monks to pray on behalf of the many victims he has killed. The tale ends with reconciliation between the Carle and Arthur's knights, culminating in the Carle inviting Arthur to dine at his court. Arthur, pleased with the treatment he receives at the Carle's court, makes the Carle a knight of the Round Table and grants him the lands surrounding Carlisle.

From the outset of the narrative, the forest serves as a symbolic representation of real marcher spaces in the Anglo-Scots borderland. Two stanzas introduce Gawain as a knight having "Dedus of armus wyttout lese / Seche he wolde in war and pees / In mony a stronge lede" [Deeds of arms without disloyalty / Seek he would in war and peace / in many strange lands] (ln 7-9). Gawain, a knight known for his martial prowess, seeks adventure in "strange lands." While "stronge lede" serves as a romance convention, it also designates Gawain as someone who seeks adventure far from the safety of the Round Table on the outskirts of England, in this case the mysterious recesses of the forest. The strange border region of the forest exists as a liminal space in-between the civilized court of Arthur's knights and the untamed wilderness. For *SGCC*, this wilderness naturally draws on the familiar Anglo-Scots borderland, an area with unclear boundaries, laws, and political loyalties. As Taylor asserts, the liminal forest "maps onto the real marcher spaces and vertiginous political and class identities that underlie their plots."[27] The *SGCC* relies on the collective memory of borderland tensions to establish the unstable laws and loyalties of Carle's forest. Gawain and his companions find themselves in a politically subversive space where the English lack complete sovereignty.

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[27] Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics," p. 191.

Textual evidence suggests that the forest in question may refer to Inglewood, an archetypal setting for northern Gawain romances, and a forest that lies directly within the Anglo-Scots borderland.  The second stanza geographically situates Gawain, not as a noble knight of England, but as a knight having earned much honor in Britain:

> Muche worshepe in Bretten he wan,
>
> And hardy he was and wyghte.
>
> The Yle of Brettayn icleppyde ys
>
> Betwyn Scotland and Ynglonde iwys,
>
> In story iwryte argyhe.
>
> Wallys ys an angull of that yle;
>
> At Cardyfe sojornde the Kynge a whylle
>
> Wytt mony a gentyll knyghte
>
> That wold to Ynglonde to honte . . . (ln 14-20)
>
> [His name was Sir Gawain / He earned much honor in Britain /And he was hardy and strong / The isle of Britain the area is called / That takes in Scotland and England indeed / In history well written / Wales is a corner of that isle; / At Cardiff sojourned the King a while / With many noble knights / That went to England to hunt . . .]

This passage presents Gawain as having earned great honor in Britain, a land encompassing Scotland, England, and Wales.  In doing so, it invokes the vastness of what Arthur views as his rightful empire.  However, the geographical distance between Carlisle and Cardiff has led some scholars to suggest possible manuscript corruption from the original source and to assert a reading of "Cardyfe" as "Carllyll" [Carlisle] and "Ynglonde" as "Yngleswode [Inglewood]."[28]

If we interpret "Cardyfe" as Carlisle and "Ynglond" as Inglewood, then the location of the action

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[28] See, e.g. Auvo Kurvinen, *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle in Two Versions*, Suomalaisen Tiedakatemian Tomituksia Annales Academiae Scientarum Fennicae, 1951.

places Carlisle, a border city, under the Arthur's imperial control. As Pollack has further shown, "yle" may refer to a domain or province, rather than an island at sea. In this case, the poem emphasizes a domain in-between England and Scotland – the borderland region where people identified as British, rather than English or Scottish.[29] Furthermore, it also regionally places *SGCC* in line with the settings of *Ragnelle*, *Avowying*, and other texts of the Northern Gawain Group, texts with which *SGCC* shares an emphasis on Carlisle and the surrounding northern region, uses Gawain as a central protagonist, and fantasizes the monarchical control of peripheral Celtic lands.[30] This passage presents Gawain's unified British fame as a shared cultural symbol of honor in both England and Scotland. Consequently, Gawain serves as culturally hybrid symbol to assert Arthur's imperial claims over borderland regions.

In addition, this reading of Carlisle conforms to the version of the tale, *The Carle of Carlisle*, as it exists in its seventeenth century ballad form in the Percy Folio Manuscript.[31] While the ballad version attests to the popularity of the tale and contains the same core storyline, it does not directly use *SGCC* as its source material—an indication of an independently circulating analogue with Carlisle as its focus. The ballad version eliminates the reference to Cardiff altogether and adds "Where King Arthur sojourned a while, / With him twenty-four knights told / Besids barrons and dukes bold (ln 12-4). The twenty-four knights are plausibly a historical reference to the twenty-four knights who convened on the Anglo-Scottish borderland in the Spring of 1249 to write down the laws and customs of the march. As historian Cynthia

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[29] Pollack, "Border States," p. 15.

[30] For more on the qualities of the Northern Gawain Group, see Hahn, pp. 24-35.

[31] A seventeenth century ballad version of the text also exists, which attests to the popularity of the tale. A notable difference in this version is a beheading-disenchantment scene, much like that within *SGGK*. In Gawain's beheading of the Carle, he breaks the enchantment, transforming the Carle into a respectable knight. This version depicts a more favorable (and less ambiguous) view of chivalry. For more on the ballad version, see Hahn's *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*.

Neville discusses, a mixed group of landowners, twelve from each realm, composed the first code of border law. This new code of border law quickly became part of both English and Scottish legal culture, and "in its written form became part of the collective memory of the borderers."[32]  These historical facts, committed to the collective memory of inhabitants of the Anglo-Scottish borderland, lend themselves to serious consideration of Carlisle as the appropriate romance setting for the poem, with Cardiff as a manuscript error.

While the setting invokes collective memory by mapping Inglewood onto the Marcher lands, the hunt that follows thematically links imperial militarization to these spaces and presents the borderland as space with unclear boundaries and land rights.  Arthur displays his imperial power by bringing "Fife hundered and moo" [five hundred or more] archers along with him on the hunt (ln 105).  The massive size of Arthur's hunting party, akin to a small invasion force, kills "Fife hunderd der dede" [five hundred deer dead] (ln 113).  The size of these numbers is significant for several reasons.  By the High Middle Ages, hunting had become a stylized noble pastime, but it also functioned as a form of warfare training.  Bringing five hundred soldiers into the borderland signals a display of military power and an assertion of political sovereignty through armed conflict.

Arthur's massive hunting force also violates landowner's property and land rights. Within the confines of medieval law, wild game were not seen as property, but hunting rights were reserved to landowners of specific hunting grounds.  Hunting game through trespass and entering another realm without permission were both issues of concern specific to March Law.[33] Arthur's men kill "Bothe hert and eke heynde" [Both hart and also hind], an indication that they

[32] Cynthia Neville, *Violence, Custom and Law: The Anglo-Scottish Border Lands in the Later Middle Ages*, Edinburgh UP, 1998, p. 1.
[33] Peter T. Leeson, "The Law of Lawlessness," *Journal of Legal Studies*, vol. 38, 2009, p. 483.

hunt both male and female deer without any regard for the need for animal re-population (ln 111).  Pollack interprets the hunting scene as a "portrayal of game poaching" and states that "English law after the conquest held that the king had hunting rights throughout the realm, but in a region on the border that assumption would be a matter of contention."[34]  Building on Pollack's reading of the passage, I would add that the shifting geography of the forest provides further insight to the scene.  As Gawain, Kay, and Baldwin become separated from the rest of the hunting group in pursuit of the stag, they move from the hunting grounds further into the "woode" [wood] (ln 134).  A distinction must be made between "wood" as "spaces covered with trees, but smaller than forests" and "forests" referring to "larger areas of tree-covered land."[35]  Therefore, the area in which Gawain, Kay, and Bishop wander shifts from what might be deemed as the larger royal forest (although perhaps still disputed in the borderland region) into a separate woodland in which the Carle has dominion over the land.  The Carle's wood may be something akin to a *chase*, a private forest with reserved hunting land, or a *deer park*, a private structurally enclosed hunting ground stocked with fallow deer. From the arrival of the Anglo-Normans until the ascension of Henry VII in 1485, parks were a major part of the countryside in England with over 1900 parks during the Middle Ages.[36]  Originally parks were a symbol of great social power and privilege; however, by the mid-fourteenth century ownership of parks had descended through the ranks of the lesser nobility.[37]  The wood into which Arthur's knights hunt may be a privatized hunting land of the Carle, a member of the lesser nobility. Hunting laws were subject to questions of borders and land enclosure.

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[34] Pollack, "Border States," pp. 19, 16.

[35] Ann M. Martinez, "Bertilak's Green Vision: Land Stewardship in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," *Arthuriana*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2016, p. 118.  Martinez refers to Bertilak's stewardship in *SGGK*, but the delineation of wood vs. forest is important to *SGCC* as well.

[36] L.M. Cantor and J. Hatherly, "The Medieval Parks of England," *Geography*, vol. 64, no. 2, 1979, p. 71.

[37] William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature*, D.S. Brewer, 2006, p. 108.

Mass poaching and displays of militarized aggression in hunting lands were real concerns, ones that *SGCC* recalls through the memory of an event that became known as the Northern Rebellion of Sir William Beckwith. Between 1387 and 1392 a private poaching war was sparked between officials administering John of Gaunt's lands (forests, chases, and parks). Sir William Beckwith had laid claim to a wardenship in the chase of Knaresbrorough based on ancestral right; however, the constable and master-forester, Sir Robert Rokely, granted the office to another man.[38] Angered, Beckwith started a private war against those who wronged him. He attacked the Lancastrian steward and then his challenger in office, Sir Robert Doufbygging. On Palm Sunday of 1389, Beckwith and his followers ambushed Doufbygging in his chase as he was on his way to church. He escaped, but they killed two of his followers in the encounter.[39] Beckwith's men proceeded to "[carry] out a staggering ruin of hart and venison."[40] Not until 1391, after Gaunt's return from campaigning in Spain, were Beckwith and 500 of his men driven into forest outlawry.[41] Beckwith's rebellion has striking similarities to Arthur's invading hunting force in *SGCC*. A late fourteenth century audience would likely recall the five hundred archers of Arthur's hunting party as an allusion to Beckwith's five hundred exiled poachers. This event and many other armed conflicts between rural land owners was a constant subject of debate. As Beckwith's rebellion took place in West Yorkshire less than 130 miles away from the Scottish border during the time of *SGCC*'s composition, the poet would have been well-aware of such conflicts in northern England.

These contentious relations over territory are further developed in the poem's critique of militarism and violence through the portrait of Sir Ironside. Even though Sir Ironside takes no

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[38] William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature,* D.S. Brewer, 2006, p. 159.
[39] Marvin, p. 159.
[40] Marvin, p. 159-160.
[41] Marvin, p. 160.

narrative action in the poem, the poet spends thirty-five lines on the description of his character

and armaments before describing the hunt:

> Ironsyde, as I wene,
>
> Iarmyd he wolde ryde full clene,
>
> We the sonn nevyr so hoot.
>
> In wyntter he wolde armus bere;
>
> Gyanttus and he wer ever at were
>
> And allway at the debate. (ln 74-78)
>
> [Ironside, as I understand / He would ride completely armed / Were the sun never so hot. / In the winter he would bear arms; / He was at always at war with giants / And always filled with strife.]

Sir Ironside's portrait focuses on his armaments and his tendency toward violence with giants.

The name of "Ironside" draws attention to a knight's armor and his identity as a warlike figure.

In addition to his appearance in *SGCC*, Sir Ironside also appears in Malory's *The Tale of Sir

Gareth* as the "Rede Knyght of the Rede Laundys." Lynet asks help from Arthur's court to free

her sister because Ironside is a "tyrraunte that besegyth her and destroyeth hir londys" [tyrant

that besieges her [castles] and destroys her lands] (ln 34-45).[42]  Later, he reveals himself to be

the father of the other colored knights, including the Grene Knyght, whom Gareth defeats.  This

detail remains consistent with *SGCC* identification of Sir Ironside as a knight who "Gat the

Knyght of Armus Grene" [begot the Green Knight] (ln 68). Hahn's speculation that Sir Ironside

in *SGCC* and *The Tale of Sir Gareth* may come from a shared popular story that is now lost

seems plausible.[43]  If we take the two portraits of Ironside as one and the same, it then adds a

further emphasis on territorial conquest and militarism.  Even if we take Sir Ironside purely as a

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[42] Thomas Malory, *Complete Works*, edited by Eugene Vinaver, 2nd ed., Oxford UP, 1971, p. 179.
[43] Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p. 107, n.64.

stock Arthurian character, it remains clear that he serves as a cultural symbol of a fading militaristic chivalric ethos.

What is crucial to recognize is that, this militaristic ethos of chivalry links Sir Ironside more with Sir Kay than it does with Sir Gawain, fracturing our notion of what "chivalry" and martial prowess mean for the author of this text. In referring to chivalry in this context, I generally refer to the central ideology of ideal knightly behavior, both literary and historical, as it contains three key elements—martial prowess, courtesy, and religious piety. For the Anglo-Scots borderland, martial chivalry serves as a primary concern, as space involved in perpetual (although intermittent) warfare. Hahn notes that Gawain and Ironside share a similarity in the description of their arms: Ironside's arms in *SGCC* are depicted as a gold griffin on an azure field, while Gawain's arms contain three golden lion heads on an azure field (or as three golden griffins on a green field).[44] However, as Christopher Maslanka notes, despite drawing parallels between Gawain and Ironside, the description of Ironside ironically foreshadows the behavior of Kay, rather than Gawain. Maslanka argues that "Sir Kay, like Sir Ironside, demonstrates the potential for conflict between the chivalric and the domestic by going so far as to assume that the household is subject to the martial knight's authority."[45] Kay's behavior highlights tension between martial authority and domestic space, and in my view, the domestic space of the Carle's household functions as a microcosm of the borderland—a space that is not privy to the same power structure as Arthur's court. While Gawain can navigate this new, unfamiliar cultural and domestic space of the Carle's household, Kay fails to do so. Kay, known for his unchivalric behavior and uncouth demeanor, questions the tenuous relationship between chivalry, violence,

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[44] Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p. 107, n. 80ff.
[45] Christopher Maslanka, "Knighthood in a Carl's House: Chivalry and Domesticity in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*," *Enarratio*, vol. 15, 2008, p. 49. For more on Ironside and Kay, see Lindsay, "The Courteous Monster," pp. 407-8.

and the role of martial authority in the space of the borderland.  By the end of the poem, we are

asked not only to condemn Kay's unchivalric (yet humorous) behavior, but also to interrogate

the cultural problems of chivalric identity and militarism.

Kay also exhibits his tendency toward violence when entering the Carle's castle.  After

becoming lost in the forest while pursuing the deer, the party decides to stop to find lodging at

the Carle's castle.  Baldwin tells his other companions that the Carle will provide them lodging,

but "Hit wer but Goddus sonde" [Only though God's will] will they leave with their lives (ln

150).  Kay chimes in that he will beat the Carle and oust him from his own household: "He schall

be bette that he schall stink, / And agenst his wyll be thar" [He shall be beaten (so fiercely) that

he shall stink, /And he won't wish to stay] (ln 161-2).   Once at the gate of the castle, the Porter

discourages them from entering the castle and warns the party that they will not escape "wyttout

a vellony" [without a villainy] (ln 194).[46]  In an aggressive manner, Kay threatens to use the

"kyngus keyis" [king's keys] to get past the Porter (ln 203).  The fact that he believes he can

even use the "king's keys" as an act of political expedience, shows his pompous disregard for the

Carle and a violation of both chivalry and the guest-host relationship.[47]  Kay's comment is

evidence that he views his knighthood as a rank he can hold over the Carle and those whom he

views as the Carle's "churlish," lower-class servants.  Kay's actions—threatening the Porter,

turning the Carle's foal out into the rain, lusting after the Carle's wife—all display his disrespect

for the Carle and his household.  Kay's uncouth behavior is contrasted with Gawain's courtesy:

"The sayd Gawen curttesly, / 'We beseche the lord of herbory, / The good lord of his holde'

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[46] MED s.v. *vileinī* (n.) def. 2a, 4a. The term villany may refer to Churlishness or rudeness (def. 2a), but also may refer to the state of being dishonored or humiliated (def. 4a).  Both definitions lend themselves to reflect the condition more of Kay and Baldwin, rather than the Carl himself.

[47] Pollack, "Border States," p. 17.  Also see MED s.v. *keie* (n.) def. 1.a.  The MED lists "kinges keies, crowbars and hammers used to force locks or doors."

[Then said Gawain courteously / We seek the lord for lodging / The good lord of this household]" (ln 184-6). If we view the Carle's household as a border territory, Kay exemplifies an English ideology of control based on brute force; whereas, Gawain becomes symbolic of a more calculating, diplomatic political approach.

As a giant of the borderland, the Carle is set apart from his English guests as an "Other" whose subversive sense of order must be reined into the English fold. Upon entering the Carle's castle, Gawain and his companions encounter "carllus corttessy" when they come face to face with four beasts in the main hall: the "gresly" [grisly bear], "wyld bole" [wild bull], "felon boor" [a killer boar], and "a lyon" [lion] who are only held back from slaying the adventurers from the Carle's command to "Ly style! Hard yn!" [Lie still! Stay back!] (ln 278, 225-7, 241). These beasts – which are clearly under the Carle's control – not only show his strength but also his menacing features. The poem describes the Carle as "a dredfull man" who stands "nine taylloris yerdus" [nine taylor's yards] (ln 259), which would be 27 feet tall.[48] Even with the Carle's menancing physical features, reputation for violence, and statement that they will receive "no corttessy," he houses the adventuring knights, gives them wine, and allows them to stable their horses (ln 277). Like other giants of Arthurian romance (e.g. The Green Knight), the Carle becomes a knight who cannot be overcome by brute strength or martial ability, but rather, he can only be overcome by following a carefully designed set of rules within the domestic space.

Gawain's success in the Carle's household results from his adherence to chivalric virtues, namely his ability to follow the Carle's orders, however arbitrary, even when following his host's request leads to paradoxically uncourteous behavior. The Carle "bade Syr Gawen go to bed" [bade Sir Gawain to go to bed] with the Carle's wife only for the Carle to stop the "prevey

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[48] A tailor's yard is equivalent to three feet. Hahn notes that this makes the Carle six feet across the shoulders and twenty-seven feet tall—a truly imposing figure.

far" [private act, i.e. intercourse] before it can be completed (ln 445, 466). Simply the act of being in bed with the host's wife would be considered a violation of the guest-host relationship under normal circumstances, but under the giant's subversive control, Gawain must adapt to his wishes. Since Gawain has adhered to the Carle's "byddynge" [bidding], he is rewarded with a night with his daughter. Likewise, throwing a spear at the head of a host seems like violent and unchivalric behavior; however, within the Carle's household, "carllus corttessy" subverts the typical expectations of the guest-host relationship. Gawain successfully completes the Carle's challenges not through martial prowess or courtly love, but instead, he succeeds by being obedient and respecting the Carle as a lord within his household, regardless of the Carle's churlish behavior.

If we once again view the Carle's household as a microcosm of the borderland, then the seemingly paradoxical controlled sense of subversive rules within the Carle's household symbolically reflects the collective memory of border tensions with March Law. According to Peter T. Leeson, during the fourteenth century, the office of the warden of the marches was established and march law faced further refinement. In theory, each march was to be governed by warden who was appointed by his respective king. Wardens administered domestic law during times of peace and raised military forces during times of war. In practice, however, the march suffered from a lack of government oversight. Some wardens engaged in violent behavior, and others were too weak to control their respective lands. Since wardens were supposed to use their own coffers for expenses, they were often indifferent to borderland issues and failed to enforce domestic laws. Other marches went periods of time without any wardens at all.[49] The Anglo-Scottish border suffered from unclear, ambiguous, and partially drafted laws,

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[49] Leeson, "The Law of Lawlessness," p. 475.

often leaving self-governing border clans to be subjected to shifting political and cultural climates. While the borderlands lacked social and cultural cohesion, the system of wardens represents an English attempt at control of the borderlands and further evidence of developing national boundaries.

The Carle's subversive expectations symbolize the inadequacies of March Law. Like the ambiguous rules of the Carle's household, the Anglo-Scots border suffered from ambiguous laws and customs. However, Gawain's actions are based in romance convention, rather than any specific real historical situation. The uncertain rules of the Carle's household force Gawain to triumph through his ability to adapt socially and culturally. Glen Wright refers to Gawain's "ethical relativism, his ability to recognize and adopt whatever code of conduct best suits the circumstances."[50] When we consider Wright's assertion in conjunction with historical and cultural conflicts, this ethical relativism allows Gawain to navigate Anglo-Scottish relations within the liminal borderland. Gawain's ethical relativism within domestic space serves as a microcosm for the ethical relativism of the northern English and Scottish lords, while his counterpart Kay remains lost in the seemingly lawless nature of Carlisle.

The poem comes full circle by providing an alternative to Kay's militaristic ethos— Christian redemption and imperial subjugation. This Christian redemption represents a desire for a shared public culture through religious cohesion. That is, for Arthur to create a cohesive British Empire—one in which he integrates the Scots—they must conform to English cultural customs, law, and religion. The Carle reveals that twenty years ago he made a vow that "Ther shulde never man logge in my wonys / But he sholde be slayne, iwys, / But he did as I hym bad" [There should never man lodge in my dwelling / Except that he should be slain, surely / Unless

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[50] Glenn Wright, "Churl's Courtesy: Rauf Coilȝear and Its English Analogues," *Neophilologus*, vol. 85, 2001, p. 657.

he did as I bade him] (ln 520-22).  As the first to heed the Carle's wishes, Gawain releases the

Carle of his vow, opening the door to the Carle's reformation.  The Carle leads Gawain to a

desolate dwelling containing "ten fodir of dede men bonys" [ten cartloads of dead men's bones]

and then forsakes his "wyckyd lawys" [wicked customs] (ln 533, 541).  As part of his

reconciliation, he gifts the Bishop a cross, a mitre (Bishop's headdress), and a ring.  Kay receives

a powerful blood red steed.  Gawain, the worthiest of praise, receives a white riding horse, a

pack horse laden with gold, and the hand of the Carle's daughter.  The jewelry and gold serve as

a symbol of the empire's wealth and power, and, the hand of the Carle's daughter forms a unique

bond between the Carle and Gawain.  By allowing Gawain to marry his daughter, the Carle

assures that his bloodline will be strengthened with the mix of both English and Scottish

heritage, while politically connecting him to Arthur's centralized imperial power.[51]  The

marriage of Gawain and the Carle's daughter ensures that his "churlish" family lineage will find

itself in a more suitable social position amongst the English nobility.  The Carle also raises his

own social status when he kneels before Arthur and becomes a knight: "A dubbyd hym knight on

the morne; / The contré of Carelyle he gafe hym sone; / To be lorde of that londe" [He dubbed

him a knight in the morning / The country of Carlisle he gave him at once / To the lord of that

land] (ln 628-30).  This appears to be a mutually beneficial transaction between both parties – the

Carle rises in social status and keeps his lands, while Arthur, by extension of the Carle as a new

northern magnate, has acquired further land and power within the borderland.  Of course, what

the poem fails to comment on are the real historical issues of Scottish subjugation and loss of

cultural identity.  Instead, the Carle becomes simplified as a monstrous "Other" with "wyckyd

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[51] On this topic, see Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics," p. 198.

lawys" who must be reformed as a Christian to become worthy of a noble status in Arthur's court.

The final stanza of the poem further emphasizes this idea of Christian conversion. Carle builds a rich abbey in Carlisle for Cistercian monks to read and sing "tille domysday" [until doomsday] for "the men that he had slayne" [the men that he had slain] (ln 656, 658). The last two lines read: "Jesu Cryste, brynge us to Thy blis / Above in hevyn, yn Thy see" [Jesus Christ, bring us to your bliss / Above in heaven on Thy throne] with a final Amen (ln 659-60). The shift to a prayer for the dead has several important functions. Most obviously, it allows for the repentance of the Carle for his heinous murders and condemns violence. In building a chantry for the slain, the Carle disposes his former "churlish" identity. As the Carle invokes doomsday, he also conjures images of religious rapture, repentance, and Christian salvation that further work to emphasize the Carle's religious transformation. Curiously, Kay and Baldwin are never forced to repent in the same manner as the Carle, despite their hostile, disrespectful behavior. After all, there is no need since they are English Christians and already members of the court.

While it is clear that religious cohesion serves an important role in forming ethnic identity, the narrative is not altogether convincing of the Carle's transformation. Geraldine Heng states that "Christianity's trafficking in conversion is, in a fundamental sense, unavoidable. Conversion is the cornerstone of Christianity, the *sin qua non* at its beginning, middle, and end . . . Conversion thus vexingly shares some of the character of racial *passing*, a phenomenon in which questions of inscrutability, volatility, and uncertainty also rule."[52] Like most medieval

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[52] Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, Cambridge UP, 2018, p. 78 (original emphasis). Heng also places conversion within the context of sexual politics, stating that "conversion can thus be seen to initiate a proves in which identity is queered, where a destabilization of relationship between categories of religious identity produces a fluid indeterminacy. The queering process that is conversion points to the very queerness of conversion itself and to the queerness of the new, fledging religious identity being proclaimed" (79).

romances that feature a conversion scene, the act is over simplified.  In reality, religious conversion is a process, rather than an act of immediate divine inspiration.  Nevertheless, just as Heng compares conversion to racial passing, we might view it also as a form of ethnic passing. The Carle's religious transformation, legitimate or not, is needed for the Carle "to pass" as a member of King Arthur's court and for closure at the end of the romance narrative.

*SGCC* is a remarkable text for its concerns with cultural, social, political, and geographical borders.  The poem explores the limitations and boundaries of chivalric identities and imperial authority, while also considering how they both intersect with the ambiguous politics of the liminal borderland.  In advocating for peaceful subjugation of the colonial other, *SGCC* draws upon the collective memory of borderland issues stemming from as early as the twelfth century.  While the poem does not outright condemn English violence towards the Scots, it does present violence as an inherent part of March Law and customs that must be carefully navigated.  In navigating unfamiliar customs and laws, only Gawain successfully adapts to the moral relativism of the borderland.

**III. "Muse on my mirror": Imperial Temporality and Political Instability**

The late fourteenth- / early fifteenth-century text *The Awntyrs off Arthur* was composed in the Northern Midlands (possibly Carlisle) and like *SGCC*, it exists as a Gawain borderland romance.  The first episode in the text begins, like *SGCC*, in the liminal space of the forest (ln 1-338).  At Tarn Wathelene within Inglewood forest, Gawain and Guinevere encounter the ghostly apparition and tortured soul of Guenevere's mother who provides both a personal lament and a warning.  In the second episode (ln 339-702), Gawain must battle Sir Galeron of Galloway, a Scottish knight, to settle a land dispute.  When considered within the confines of Arthur's imperial conquest, both episodes reveal commentary on the troubled state of England and the

complex political loyalties of the Anglo-Scottish borderlands.  The following discussion of

*Awntyrs* complements *SGCC* by complicating the themes of border violence and imperial

subjugation by discussing two additional unique themes—imperial temporality and political

instability.  I argue here that, like *SGCC*, *Awntyrs* provides a model of peaceful political

subjugation; however, in emphasizing the cyclical nature of the Arthurian mythos, it

simultaneously draws attention to the imperfections of its characters as contributing to the

inevitable decline of the empire.  The collective memory of the violent Anglo-Scots border

combined with this cyclical sense of time informs the Arthurian romance's critique of cultural

imperialism through an understanding of the repeated inevitability of the rise and fall of empire.

The *Awntyrs*-poet frames the narrative with what I refer to as *imperial temporality*.

Imperial temporality is the awareness of the past, present, and future consequences of empire.  It

is based on the Roman notion of *translatio imperii* and medieval historiographic conceptions of

time.  *Translatio imperii* is the idea of transferring imperial power from Greece or Troy to Rome

and its European successors.[53]  This concept reflects medieval historiographical tendencies to

view the past as unbound by time.  Patterson asserts that medieval writers viewed the past "[ . . .]

not as a process that has its own temporality but as a storehouse of disconnected and timeless

*exempla* that assume authority because they are no longer timebound," but he acknowledges that

"medieval writers also used the past historiographically—sometimes to delineate an instructive

chronology of secular empire."[54]  Based on *translatio imperii* and medieval historiographical

concepts of time, imperial temporality exists as ahistorical time in which both real and imagined

conceptions of the imperial past are (re)constructed and (re)imagined.  Imperial temporality is

particularly useful for understanding Arthurian literature within the framework of a cyclical

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[53] For more on this see Fuchs.
[54] Patterson, *Negotiating the Past,* p. 198.

Arthurian mythos—one in which the audience anticipates the inevitable death of Arthur and the fall of the Round Table.  For *Awntyrs*, imperial temporality helps unpack how the poet uses the Arthurian mythos and the inevitable fall of Arthur's empire as *exempla* for both the characters and the audience.

*Awntyrs* begins with a conventional romance opening with Arthur's knights headed to the forest for a hunt.  At the Turne Wathelene, a lake between Carlisle and Penrith, Gawain and Guinevere encounter the ghost of Guinevere's mother, who advises them on earthly morality and warns them against the sins of adultery and pride that she committed in life.  She tells them to "Have pité on the poer" [Have pity on the poor] and warns Guinevere about "luf paramour" [sexual love] (ln 173, 213).  In the second part of her speech she prophesizes the fall of the Round Table:  Arthur will "lese Bretayn" [lose Britain] to the "knight kene" [bold knight; i.e. Mordred] through "treson" [treason] (ln 285-6, 291).  The ghost's speech ends with a call to remember her through prayer in mass.  The second half of the poem takes a different turn, focusing on Sir Galeron of Galloway, a knight who requests honorable combat for lands seized unlawfully by Arthur and Gawain.  Gawain brutally fights Galeron, and when the two are near death, Guinevere pleads with Arthur to stop the combat.  Arthur grants Gawain the disputed lands, and Gawain, in turn, gifts some of the lands to Galeron.  At Carlisle, both the knights are made dukes, Galeron marries his lady, and Arthur dubs Galeron a knight of the Round Table.  The tale ends with Guinevere arranging mass for her mother's soul, and all Britain rings church bells.

Despite its popularity in the late fourteenth / early fifteenth century, *Awntyrs* has received little scholarly attention. It exists in four different medieval manuscripts, and as Thomas Hahn asserts, the stylistic elements and complex rhyme scheme designate it as a "distinctly literary

effort," one that evolved from a written, rather than oral tradition.[55]  Yet, the poem has often

been regarded by modern scholars as suffering a structural and thematic discontinuity; as a

result, many scholars have approached the text in two parts – *Awntyrs A* and *Awyntrs B*, a debate

that once dominated conversations.[56] However, most scholars now agree with A.C. Spearing's

emphasis on *Awntyrs* as a unified form much like the diptych, a medieval artform in which two

complementary images are placed side by side and connected with a hinge.[57] Spearing is

concerned with the Inglewood Forest episode and the Rondelet Hall episode as the two

complementary pieces of the poem that share stylistic and structural unity.  Following Spearing, I

recognize the complementarity of the poem, but I wish to call attention to the unifying themes of

imperial temporality and political instability.  If we view this poem as a diptych as Spearing

suggests, the ghost provides a warning in the first half of the poem, only to have the characters

cause their own downfall in the second half, with the image of Arthur firmly ensconced at the

center as the hinge, or connection, between the two parts.  In the first half of the poem, the

ghost's prophecy of the fall of the Round Table implements imperial temporality—the past,

present, and future consequences of empire—and, in the second half, it exhibits how political

instability precipitates the fall.

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[55] Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p. 169.

[56] For an example of this treatment, see Ralph Hanna III, "The *Awntyrs Off Arthure*: An Interpretation," *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1970, pp. 275-297 and Stephen H.A Shephard. "'Heathenic' Catechesis and the Source of *Awntyrs* B," *Medium Aevum*, vol. 81, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-17.

[57] A.C. Spearing, "*The Awntyrs off Arthure*," *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach, Kent Ohio State University Press, 1981, p. 183-202.  For a more recent take on the structural unity of the text building off of Spearing from a psychoanalytic perspective, see Alexander J. Zawacki, "A Dark Mirror: Death and The Cadaver in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*," *Arthuriana*, vol. 27, issue 2, 2017 and Brett Roscoe, "Reading the Diptych: *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, Medium, and Memory" *Arthuriana,* vol. 24, issue 1, 2014.

*Imperial Temporality*

  *Awntyrs* presents a concern with imperial temporality through its use of the chronicle tradition and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (*AMA*) as source material. As Richard J. Moll and others have discussed, the poet drew from the chronicle traditions of Layamon's *Brut* (ca. 1190-1215), and elements of the ghost's prophecy, such as the reference to Frollo (the Roman viceroy to France) and Mordred's heraldic device, indicate that the poet borrowed from *AMA*.[58] In fact, one of *Awntyrs* manuscripts, Thorton MS, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91, contains the lone surviving copy of *AMA*.[59] This has led Moll and others to read *Awntyrs* as a precursor to the events in *AMA*, taking place at the apex of Arthur's sovereignty in the nine-year period of peace before the confrontation with Rome.[60] This Arthurian period functions as a temporal space of fantastic adventures and wandering narrative digressions for the characters, while often reminding the audience of the pre-destined outcome of Arthur and his knights through prophetic warnings. *Awntyrs* shapes character identities by interweaving chronicle and romance perspectives, focusing on Fortune's Wheel, the ghost's prophetic warning, Arthur's imperial designs, and the imminent fall of the Round Table.

  The setting of the poem establishes it as a borderland narrative and evokes imperial temporality within the first stanza: "In the tyme of Arthur an aunter bytydde, / By the Turne Wathelan, as the boke tells, / What he to Carlele was comen, that conquerour kydde" [In the time of Arthur an adventure occurred / By the Tarn Wadling as the book tells, / When that famous conqueror came to Carlisle] (*Awntyrs* ln 1-3). "In the tyme of Arthur" positions this narrative

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[58] Richard J. Moll, *Before Malory: Reading Arthur in Later Medieval England*, University of Toronto Press, 2003, p. 133. For Frollo, see ln 275.

[59] Although it's worth noting here that my primary analysis is drawing from Hahn's edition which uses Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 324.

[60] Moll, *Before Malory*, pp. 134-135.

alongside other similar Gawain narratives such as *The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain*, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* and *Gawain and the Green Knight*, which all make reference to "Arthur's day" or "Arthur's time."[61]  Such lines are not only part of  romance convention, but they are also indicators of how tales invoke "Arthur's time" to establish themselves as cultural-ideological myths.  In situating themselves in "Arthur's time," they attempt to draw a linear timeline between an imagined Arthurian past and the contemporary medieval present.  According to Anthony Smith's theory of ethno-symbolism, the aim of cultural-ideological myths as created by chroniclers and poets is to "recreate the heroic spirit (and heroes) that animated 'our ancestors' in some past golden age; and descent is traced, not through family pedigrees, but through the persistence of certain kinds of 'virtue' or other distinctive cultural qualities, be it of language, customs, religion, institutions, or more general personal attributes."[62]  Invoking Arthurian time cues the reader that these poems are establishing an idealized imperial past.  Implicit in such evocations of a unified golden Arthurian age are the dream of Arthur's return or the return of an Arthur-like figure, which will usher in a new, unified imperial future.  In addition, the Arthurian court embodies idealized chivalric virtues and emphasizes human fallibility making Arthurian themes universal across various historical contexts.  These myths of ethnic descent are, as Smith notes, "[ . . .] vital both for territorial claims and for national solidarity."[63]  While invoking Arthurian time in and of itself does not constitute a cultural-ideological mythos, it does help to identify these northern Gawain works as a distinct body of cultural work.

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[61] Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p. 202, n. 1.
[62] Smith, *Myths and Memories*, p. 58.
[63] Smith, *Myths and Memories,* p. 58.

The poem's border setting and imperial temporality (liminal time) share a concern with

liminal space.  The same opening lines that situate the narrative in "Arthur's time" connect the

Arthurian timeline to the real-world borderland setting of the Turne Wathelan.  "Turne" is a

northern Middle English term for a lake, pool, or pond, and "Turne Wathelan" is a borderland

location in Inglewood Forest, itself a historical royal forest located between Carlisle and

Penrith.[64]  Turne Wathelan or Tarn Wadling makes its appearance in *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*

and *The Avowing of Arthur*, and it is frequently associated with magical or spectral encounters

during the Middle Ages.  Historically, it existed as a small legendary lake situated near the

village of High Hesket, just off the Roman road from Scotland and was likely used as a place for

drovers to rest on the route between England and Scotland.  The setting of the appearance of the

ghost of Guinevere's mother highlights the poem's concerns with liminality and borders by

juxtaposing land (Inglewood forest) and water (Turne Wathelan).[65]  Thus, the setting is a hybrid

geographical space, both of land/water and marsh/forest that mirrors the liminal identity of its

Marcher inhabitants.

From a political perspective, the poem immediately identifies Arthur as a conqueror and

draws attention to dukes and other English nobility, emphasizing the poem's focus on

sovereignty and territorial acquisition.  Like *SGCC*, Carlisle serves as a temporary seat of

governance for Arthur along the Anglo-Scottish border.  The narrative action, also like *SGCC*,

begins with a hunt and exhibits the imperial authority of Arthur's empire.  Arthur and his

knights, with Guenevere escorted by Gawain, come to Carlisle to hunt in Inglewood forest "the

herdes that longe had ben hydde" [the herds that long had been hidden] that were "Fayre by the

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[64] MED s.v. *turne*, also Tarne in names (n.) def. 1.a, 1.b.  For Tarne Wathelene in *Avowing* see lines 131 and 338.
[65] Rosamund Allen, "Place-Names in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*: Corruption, Conjecture, Coincidence," *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler, D.S. Brewer, 2004, p. 190.  Mark P. Bruce and Katherine H. Terrell, editors, *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600*, Palgrave, 2012, p. 1.

fermesones in frithes and felles" [Thriving because of the closed season in the woods and the

hills] (ln 5, 8). "Fermesones," a term for the closed season (approx. Sept to June) when hunting

male deer is prohibited, shows the author's use of technical terminology and hunting expertise.[66]

Like the deer who are thriving after the closed season, Arthur's court is also thriving at the

pinnacle of their imperial power during a time of peace before warfare and internal conflict

precipitates the fall of the Round Table and Arthur's empire. The hunting scene conjures the

collective memory of England's shared hunting cultural practices. What happens next, as Carl

Grey Martin describes it, is a "reversal of roles" in which time and death stalk the hunters

become prey.[67]

      The imperial glory of the hunt quickly fades, and the poet's focus shifts to imperial (and

personal) shame. The poem exhibits a darker tone as "The day wex als dirke / As hit were

mydnight myrke" [The day became as dark / As if it were murky midnight] (ln 75-6). The deer

are no longer the only ones running for shelter as the party "ranne fast to the roches" [ran fast to

the rocks] to avoid the severe rainstorm (ln 81). Staying behind, Gawain and Guinevere

encounter a ghastly sight as the ghost of Guinevere's mother rises from the Turne Wathelene:

> There come a lowe one the loughe – in londe is not to layne
>
> In the lykes of Lucyfere, laytheste in Helle
>
> And glides to Sir Gawayn the gates to gayne,
>
> Yauland and yomerand, with many loude yelle. (ln 83-6)
>
> [There appeared a fire in the lake – not to conceal a word / in the likeness of
> Lucifer, most hateful in Hell / And glides toward Sir Gawain blocking the path /
> Howling and wailing, with many loud yells.]

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[66] Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p. 203, n. 8.

[67] Carl Grey Martin, "*The Awntyrs off Arthure*, an Economy of Pain," *Modern Philology*, vol. 108, issue 2, 2010, p. 183.

The arrival of the ghost comes with descriptions of Lucifer, hell, and Christian sin.  Turne

Wathelene exudes supernatural or otherworldly qualities and functions as a gateway between

realms.  Like that of the giant Carle in *SGCC*, the ghost functions an "othered" monstrous figure

of the borderland.  As a supernatural entity, the ghost's hybrid body exists between life and

death. Rather than being granted absolution in heaven, Guinevere's mother faces eternal

damnation, only granted reprieve to the earthly plane to provide a warning.

As I argue here, a political analysis of the ghost's body opens specific readings of

imperial temporality as exhibited through memories of loss of sovereign power and land.  By

sovereign power, I generally refer to the medieval sovereignty of nobility regarding authority and

territorial control.  Patricia Clare Ingham, taking a gendered approach to sovereign power, has

stated that "In its opening adventure this text explicitly pairs representations of land with

remorseful female lust and with losses to sovereign power."[68]  Ingham's reading of the ghost's

body as a representation of the loss of sovereign power complements my own reading of

imperial temporality within the text.  Sovereign loss, as expressed through Guenevere's dead

mother, brings the Arthurian past to bear on the Arthurian present. The ghost's hybrid body

reflects romance liminality, as well as the contested political identity of the border's inhabitants.

In death, her political status has been changed from a noble woman to a sinful ghost removed of

earthly finery and beauty.  She exists as neither entirely dead nor alive: "Bare was the body and

blak to the bone" [Bare was the body and black to the bone] and "biclagged in clay uncomly

cladde" [clotted with earth foully covered] (ln 105-6). The lines here emphasize the lack of

material clothing, jewels, and other noble accoutrements—all signs of her nobility. This

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[68] Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 180.  Although beyond the confines of the discussion here, Ingham provides an interesting analysis of the parallels between the ghost of Guenevere's mother and the loathly lady tradition as seen in Gower's "Tale of Florent."

immediately evokes images of Guenevere's own excessive materialism by providing a stark contrast to the earlier description of Guinevere's finery: "In a gleterand glide that glemed full gay / With riche ribaynes reversset, ho so right redes / Rayled with rybees of riall array" [In a glittering gown that gleamed fully beautiful / With rich strands of material reversed to show their colors, whoever takes proper notice / ornamented with rubies of royal quality] (ln 15-17). Viewed together, the ghost's naked body and Guenevere's well-ornamented clothes remind the audience of future events: the eventual loss of Guenevere's own sovereign power as queen and her fall from grace. The ghost's black bones, which she later attributes to "luf paramour" [sexual love] (ln 213) also point the audience's attention to Guenevere's infidelity with Lancelot as a contributing factor to the fall of the Round Table, and thus a further loss of not only Guenevere's sovereign power but also the whole of the Arthurian empire.[69] Finally, her body covered with clay, a subtle detail in the text, connects the ghost's female body (sovereign power) to the land.

The ghost also laments her own loss in terms of land, stating that

> Gretter then Dame Gaynour, of garson and golde,
>
> Of palaies, of parkes, of pondes, of plowes,
>
> Of townes, of toures, of tresour untolde,
>
> Of castelles, of countreyes, of cragges, of cloes. (ln 147-150)
>
> [More (I enjoyed) than Dame Guenevere, of treasure and gold / Of palaces, of enclosures, of ponds, of estates, / Of towns, of strongholds, of treasure untold, / Of castles, of lands, of mountains, of valleys.]

The ghost juxtaposes civilized spaces (palaces, towns, estates, strongholds, castles) with natural spaces (land, mountains, valleys, enclosures, ponds). For Ingham, in this passage, "Land

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[69] The ghost's speech makes this explicit as she states "Al blendis my ble – thi ones arn so blake! [All branches my countenance – (because) your skeleton is so black] / That is luf paramour, listes and delites [The cause is sexual love, pleasure, and delights]" (ln 211-12).

signifies both the glorious wealth of aristocratic privilege and the unbelievable breadth of the realm. And the loss of these glories links the apparently sinful and disfigured female body with sovereign loss."[70] Again, the ghost's body links sovereign loss and imperial temporality. In other words, the ghost's list of places provides a catalogue for what is at stake for the empire. While the ghost frames this in terms of her own loss, she implicitly invokes the past (lands lost to her in death) to stress the possible outcome of the future (loss of territory and imperial decline).

While the ghost provides a warning of sovereign loss through her speech to Guenevere and Gawain, the ghost's fate also serves as an exemplum for the audience. An audience familiar with Arthurian mythos already knows the future failings of Guenevere and Arthur's court and the inevitability that that they will not heed the ghost's advice. Instead, the ghost's speech serves as a reflective tool for the audience. She goes on to plead with Guenevere (and indirectly the audience) to "Muse on my mirrour; / For, king and emperour, / Thus dight shul ye be" [Muse on my mirror / For king and emperor / So treated shall you be] (ln 159-169). In making the imperative statement to "Muse on my mirror," the *Awntyrs*-poet evokes the mirrors for princes literary tradition, a form of political writing during the Middle Ages and Renaissance that instructed kings and other noble rulers in aspects of governance and proper behavior.

In conjunction with the mirrors for princes tradition, we also find Boethian influences. As Anthony Cirilla has carefully noted, whether directly or indirectly, the poet of *Awntyrs* would have been influenced by Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*.[71] The ghost's advice echoes Lady Philosophy's inquiry, "Do you try to satisfy your desires with external goods which are foreign to you because you have no good within you which belongs to you?" This appears in

[70] Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, p. 181.
[71] Anthony Cirilla, "Ghostly Consolation: *Awntyrs off Arthure* as Boethian Memorial," *Enarratio*, vol. 19, 2015.

Book II, Prose 4 in which "Boethius protests the worst sorrow is the remembrance of lost joys."[72]

Within a Boethian framework, this anxiety over "lost joys" is experienced through memory.

While reflecting on the past may serve as an instructive tool, it also can produce anxiety and

sorrow in a person remembering what has been lost.  The text employs Boethian didacticism in

advocating leadership based on lived virtue and morality, rather than on material wealth and

power.  The ghost's usage of "king and emperor" asks the audience to reflect on the imagined

past of Arthur and his empire, as well as possibly the twelfth and thirteenth century Plantagenet

kings.  We might also consider the advice as an exemplum to contemporary late fourteenth /

early fifteenth century kings, such as Richard II and Henry IV, who faced numerous Scottish

border raids during the Hundred Years War.  If we consider this tale as an exemplum for

kingship, it functions as a reminder of both real and fictional rulers of the imperial past and

present through the adaptable symbols Arthur and his empire.

One can also see Boethian influence in the *Awntyrs*-poet's focus on Fortune's Wheel in

relation to the fate of Arthur's empire, which comes out in Gawain's discussion with the ghost.

After the ghost warns Guenevere against sexual love and material wealth, Gawain asks how

knights will fare who fight and "defoulen the folke on fele kinges londes / over reymes withouten

eny right / Wynnen worshipp in were thorgh wightnesse of hondes?" [oppress the folk on diverse

kings' lands / over realms without any right / Achieve renown in warfare through prowess of

arms] (ln 261-4). Gawain shows an awareness of problems of militant chivalry, violence, and

warfare.  Gawain invokes concerns over territorial acquisition as it leads to the oppression over

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[72] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, edited by Richard Green, Macmillian Publishing Company, 1962. *The Consolation of Philosophy* was an influential philosophical allegory written in Latin.  Since its original composition in 524 C.E., the work has undergone numerous translations.  One of which was written by the *Awntyrs*-poet fourteenth century contemporary, Geoffrey Chaucer.  For Chaucer's *Boece* see *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Oxford UP, 1987.

the colonial "Other." While Gawain's question opens more universal concerns of chivalry and

territorial acquisition, the ghost answers by delivering a pointed response about Arthur's

kingship and the larger fate of the empire. The ghost asserts, "Your King is to covetous, I warne

the sir knight, / May no man stry him with strenght while his whele stondes" [Your king is too

covetous, I warn you Sir Knight / No man may overthrow him by force while fortune holds him

high on her wheel]" (ln 265-26).  As all readers know, while Arthur is momentarily on top at this

point in the narrative trajectory, he will ultimately receive his fate and will fall from Fortune's

wheel.  Drawing from the *AMA*, the ghost prophesies his fall over roughly the next sixty lines,

referencing such events as warfare with France and the Romans, Mordred's betrayal, Gawain's

death, and Arthur's lethal battle wound.[73]

The ghost alludes to past, present, and future events, thereby creating a temporally

cyclical Arthurian mythos that relies on the audience's sense of collective memory.  Helen

Philips notes that "We see Arthur enthroned in prosperity after hearing of his fall; we heard of

Mordred's kingship before the vignette of him as a child today; the ghost's confession of 'luf

paramour' and broken vow remind readers of Guenevere's future role in the ruin of the Round

Table."[74]  Not only does the ghost bring past and future events into the present, but these

temporal shifts make "kingship insubstantial" and "show earthly glory as doomed in this world

and the next."[75]  To make this point, the *Awntyrs*-poet relies on collective memory and cultural

solidarity among the English audience through a shared understanding of the Arthurian tradition.

Due to its regional development as a borderland text, an increased focus on material acquisition

and territorial acquisition is attributed to the fall of the Round Table, serving as an exemplum to

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[73] While the specifics of these events as told in the *Alliterative Morte* need not be recounted here, see lines 275-312. Also see Hahn, p. 210, n. 273.
[74] Helen Phillips, "The Ghost's Baptism in 'The Awntyrs off Arthur,'" *Medium Aevum*, vol. 58, no. 1, 1989, p. 56.
[75] Phillips, "The Ghost's Baptism," p. 54.

the audience. Knowledge of the Arthurian mythos is rendered inaccessible and elusive to the human characters; however, the recalling the mythos through the ghost's prophecy reminds the audience of the faults of empire to come.

*Political Instability*

Arthur's appearance in the middle of the episode defines the poem geographically and thematically, bringing the two seemingly disparate parts of the narrative together.  The first part ends with Guenevere returning to Rondoles Hall where Arthur sits ready for supper.  As Allen indicates, Rondoles Hall, like settings of Tarn Wathelene and Inglewood Forest in the first part of the poem, situates the poem in Cumberland, just south of the English-Scottish border.[76] The setting of the poem shifts from the romantic fringes of the wilderness to the courtly political center.  The ghost's prophecy soon comes to bear, as the very warnings given to Guenevere and Gawain are reflected in Arthur's flawed sense of justice and imperial expansionism in his dealings with the Scottish knight, Galeron.  Arthur's interactions with Galeron reflect the political instability that is characteristic of the Anglo-Scots borderland.

To understand Galeron's Marcher identity as tied to political instability, we might turn toward the historical example of Sir James Douglas (c. 1289-1330), a Marcher lord from the prominent Douglas family. Marcher lords were those nobles who inhabited the Anglo-Scottish border during the Late Medieval period, in which the border was subject to violence and cross-border raids from both sides. The Douglas family's power was a direct result of English and Scottish borderland tensions, and their fortune was made by their support of Robert Bruce and the passage of the English crown to the Stewarts in 1371.[77] As Randy Schiff notes, if we assume

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[76] Allen, "Place-Names," p. 190.
[77] Robin Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles 1100-1400*, Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 201.

the dating of 1400-1430 for the *Awntyrs* is correct, then the date of composition falls into a period in which the Douglas family's power was threatened as a result of declining border conflict; however, it is positioned before the deterioration of the family's fortunes after 1452.[78] While Sir James Douglas lived nearly one hundred years before the composition of *Awntyrs*, the Douglas family reign of the marches during the period opens the possibility of such events surrounding Sir James Douglas as current in cultural memory and useful for the *Awntyrs*-poet to explore Anglo-Scottish borderland relations.

During his lifetime, Sir James Douglas's lands were unjustly seized by the English, much like Gawain's unjust seizure of Galeron's lands. Sir James Douglas, also known as the Black Douglas, was son to Sir William Douglas, a notable supporter of William Wallace. As a young boy, he left for Paris, France for safety at the beginning of the Scottish Wars of Independence where he met William Lamberton, Bishop of St. Andrews. [79] Lamberton made him a squire and returned with him to Scotland, only to find that his lands had been taken by the English and given to Robert Clifford, an English soldier responsible for defending the border who was made the 1st Lord Warden of the Marches. Following the capture of Stirling Castle in 1304, Lamberton took Douglas to the English court to petition for the return of his land. However, Edward I, upon realizing the Douglas family's history of support for the Scottish rebels, quickly forced him out.[80]

James's altercation with the English Sir Robert Neville also provides a parallel to the conflict between Galeron and Gawain. In one successful raid in which Douglas reclaimed the

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[78] Randy P. Schiff, *Revivalist Fantasy: Alliterative Verse and Nationalist Literary History*, The Ohio State UP, 2011, p. 119. Schiff relies on Ralph Hanna's dating of *Awntyrs* here; however, without an original version of the text, a precise dating is difficult.

[79] David R. Ross, *James the Good: The Black Douglas*, Luath, 2008, p. 8.

[80] Ross, *James the Good*, p. 8.

castle of Berwick-upon-Tweed from the English, he came face-to-face with Sir Robert Neville,

elder son to Ralph Neville, 1st Baron Neville de Raby, whom he killed in single combat.[81]  These

two events—his lands seized by the English and his martial combat with Sir Robert Neville—

create striking parallels between Douglas's own life and the depiction of Galeron.  Additional

evidence links the Neville family to the poem as well.  Rosamund Allen speculates the patron of

*Awntyrs* to be Joan Neville, the wife of Ralph Neville, 1st earl of Westmorland (c. 1364-1425).[82]

Allen makes several connections between Joan's eldest son, Richard and his role as warden of

the West March.  Richard held "jurisdiction over Inglewood, including Tarn Wadling . . . The

warden was based at Carlisle castle, and although Richard was a notorious absentee, there is

evidence that he was present at Carlisle in 1424-5."[83]  Allen goes so far as to even suggest that

Robert may have written part or all of *Awntyrs*, although the evidence remains inconclusive.

Regardless, it appears clear that the *Awntyrs*-poet drew on border hostilities between such

families as the Douglases and the Nevilles and the personal and political issues that arose from

them, such as family rivalries, border raids, and the illicit appropriation of lands.

     Like Sir James Douglas, Galeron becomes a victim of border hostilities.  As Galeron

enters Rondoles Hall, he quickly initiates a challenge: "Whether thou be cayser or king, her I the

becalle / Fore to find me a freke to fight with my fille" [Whether you be emperor or king, here I

challenge / you to find an opponent to fight to my satisfaction] (ln 410-11).  Galeron enters the

court seeking to display his martial prowess and regain the lands unjustly taken by Gawain.  As

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[81] Sir William Fraser, *The Douglas Book* IV, Edinburgh, 1885, p. 133.
[82] Joan was also the half-sister of John, Duke of Bedford, son of John of Gaunt.  Westmorland, Joan's husband, appears in Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I*, *Henry IV Part II*, and *Henry V*.  This also makes Westmorland the great-nephew of Robert Neville who was slain by James Douglas.
[83] Rosamund Allen, "Place-Names in *The Awntyrs Off Arthure*: Corruption, Conjecture, Coincidence," *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler, D.S. Brewer, 2004, p. 192.

Martin notes, Galeron appears at court to settle a land dispute, which is "a direct outcome of Arthur's expansionist militarism . . . A timely instantiation of the ghost's reference to Arthur's 'covetousness,' Galeron presents himself as a victim of an aristocracy bent on conquest through voracious and voluntary wars."[84]  In effect, the conflict between Galeron and Arthur's court serves as a microcosm of English and Scottish affairs.  Like the conflict between the Carle and Arthur's knights in *SGCC* and true to romance conventions, the larger cultural commentary is masked under the guise of interpersonal conflict.

Part of the underlying cultural conflict stems from Galeron's Scottish identity.  He tells the court "Mi name is Sir Galaron, withouten eny gile, / The grettest of Galwey of greces and gyllis, / Of Connok, of Conyngham, and also Kyle" [My name is Sir Galeron, without any guile / The greatest (knight) of Galway, of thickets and ravines / Of Connok, Of Cunningham, and also of Kyle] (ln 417-19).  Sir Galeron's title as the greatest of Galloway positions him as a landholder in southwestern Scotland, just northwest of Carlisle.  Galloway's position on the Irish Sea subjected the territory to numerous conquests in the Middle Ages.  The Norse dominated the region, supplanting the rule of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Bernicia between the ninth and eleventh centuries.  In the twelfth century, Galloway existed as an independent territory under the leadership of Fergus of Galloway.[85]  His familial reign under his sons, grandsons, and great-grandson shifted Galloway's allegiance between Scottish and English kings. The area remained a central focus for both the English and the Scots during the Scottish Wars of Independence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in the sense that one of the Scottish claimants to the throne

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[84] Martin, "The *Awntyrs off Arthure*," p. 190
[85] Fergus of Galloway likely inspired the main character of Fergus in the 13th century Old French Arthurian romance entitled *Roman de Fergus*.  A middle Dutch version of the tale also exists entitled *Roman de Ferguut*.

was John Balliol of Galloway.[86]   The other place names mentioned in the original manuscript

are much harder to directly identify due to scribal issues, but they too are likely placed in

Scotland.[87]   Land ownership serves as a central factor for establishing chivalric identity.

Galeron's Scottish lands and the illegitimate seizing of his lands by an English king reflects

tension between England and Scotland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but it also places

Galeron as a knight of contested political identity, often characteristic of Marcher Lords.

What follows in *Awntyrs* is nearly two hundred lines that intensely focus on the combat

preparation and fight between Galeron and Gawain.  The *Awntyrs*-poet provides a detailed

description of Gawain and Galeron's armor as being "Al in gleterand gold" [All in glittering

gold] (ln 496).   While this is not an uncommon romance motif, it does remind the reader of the

ghost's warning against the excessive materialism from the first half of the poem, and the

violence that ensues because of it.  The combat does not end until both knights are severely

wounded.  Gawain almost kills Galeron, but Galeron's lady beseeches Guenevere to intervene:

"Than wilfully Dame Waynour to the King went; / Ho caught of her coronall and kneled him

tille" [Then willfully Dame Guenevere went to the King / Who removed her crown and kneeled

to him] (ln 625-626).  In kneeling before Arthur, Guenevere performs a physical expression of

humility and serves the role of a queenly intercessor.  Guenevere shows concern for the knights

who are "wonded full ille" [wounded grieviously] and states that "The grones of Sir Gawayn

does my hert grille" [The groans of Sir Gawain does torment my heart] (ln 630, 632).  She makes

a grand spectacle of begging for Arthur's mercy and even takes her crown off as she kneels

before him.  She refers to him as "Roye roial, richest of rent" [King majestic, most powerful

[86] Mitchison, *A History of Scotland*, p. 38.
[87] Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p. 217, n. 419

overlord], appealing to Arthur's status as imperial landholder (ln 627).[88]  The removal of her

crown signifies a concession to the masculine sovereign power of her husband, but it also

foreshadows the loss of kingship and empire under Arthur's flawed imperial reign.

In considering Guenevere's plea for mercy as a stylized example of queenly intercession,

we might refer to the historical example of Queen Philippa of Hainault in Froissart's *Chronicles*.

Philippa, the wife of Edward III, frequently travelled with her husband on military campaigns to

Scotland and other parts of Europe during the Hundred Years War.  Known for her compassion,

Philippa is depicted as an intercessor saving the lives of the Burghers of Calais in 1347:

> The Queen of England, whose pregnancy was far advanced, then fell on her
>
> knees, and with tears in her eyes implored him: 'Ah! My lord, since I have
>
> crossed the sea in great danger, I have never asked you any favour.  But now I
>
> humbly beg you, for the Son of the Blessed Mary and for the love of me, to have
>
> mercy on these six men!'  The King looked at her some minutes without
>
> speaking, and then said: 'Ah, lady, I wish you were anywhere else but here.  You
>
> have entreated me in such a way that I cannot refuse.  Therefore, though I do it
>
> with great reluctance, I hand them over to you.  Do as you like with them.'[89]

I would like to draw attention to this passage for two reasons.  First, Philippa's plea to Edward

sheds some light on the larger tradition of queenly intercession.  Paul Strohm argues that

Philippa's kneeling shows "the implications of humility and the weakness that attend it" and

serves as a display of "Philippa's sympathetic self-identification with the threatened or

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[88] Hahn translates "richest of rent" to "most powerful overlord"; however, for the sake of specificity, "rent" refers to "a plot of land yielding revenue."  MED s.v. *rent* (n.) def. 2.a.

[89] John Jolliffe, trans, *Froissart's Chronicles*, Random House, 1967, p. 157.  Also see Hahn, p. 624, n. 625ff.

oppressed."[90]  If we apply this same symbolic meaning to Guenevere's kneeling before Arthur in *Awntyrs*, then we might view Guenevere as self-identifying with the oppressed Scots.  In removing her crown, she presents humility by discarding her symbol of sovereign power and wealth.  Second, Philippa's intercession on behalf of the Burghers of Calais provides a historical parallel for Guenevere's actions.  Philippa's actions, or other similar historical acts of queenly intercession, would be familiar to the *Awntyrs* late fourteenth / early fifteenth century audience. Thereby, the *Awntyrs*-poet uses the collective memory queenly intercession as an exemplum tool.  Philippa and Guenevere become models for good counsel and political reform.

All of this seems to raise the question: Has Guenevere learned anything from her mother's ghost?  As Leah Haught astutely notes, "[Guenevere's] intervention also guarantees that [Gawain and Galeron] will both be ready to fight again when the court's next challenger arrives; she has both postponed and prolonged the cycle of conquest to which her mother alluded, and ironically, she can be seen as having done so in the name of mercy."[91]  While Guenevere has followed her mother's advice in employing mercy as a lived virtue, her role of queenly intercessor only functions to allow for a political solution to Gawain and Galeron's conflict, rather than a martial one.  In my own view, Guenevere's act of humility serves to precipitate a model of peaceful subjugation of the Scots to serve the political interests of the English.

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[90] Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts*, Princeton UP, 1992, p. 102. Philippa's pregnancy, while not immediately relevant to Guenevere, also draws attention to Edward's imperial authority.  Strohm writes, "The central themes of this passage, are, in fact, brought together when Edward pauses before speaking and we are told what he sees: 'his' wife, her pregnancy guaranteeing 'his' dynasty, recognizing his superior authority in the very form of her pleas, and further recognizing it by sinking to her knees, and exhibiting diffuse tenderness all the while" (102).  For additional information on the role of the queenly intercessor see Misty Schieberle, *Feminized Counsel and the Literature of Advice in England, 1380-1500*, Brepols, 2014.
[91] Leah Haught, "Ghostly Mothers and Fated Fathers: Gender and Genre in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*," *Arthuriana*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2010, p. 17.

Arthur exhibits a flawed sense of justice in his redistribution of the contested lands.

Upon his submission to Gawain's martial prowess, Galeron relinquishes his territorial claims.

He makes a "releyse" of Gawain's lands (or as Hahn notes a "quit-claim") "before thiese ryalle"

[before these royal persons] (ln 640-641).  By releasing his lands in front of a royal audience,

Galeron makes an orally binding agreement between himself and Gawain.  Arthur then proceeds

to give Gawain the "The worship of Wales" [the lordship of Wales], in addition to "Glamergan,"

"Ulster Halle," "Wayford and Waterforde," and "Two baronress in Bretayne,"—a seemingly

significant portion of Celtic lands (ln 665, 668, 669, 670).  As Hahn notes, many of these

locations are difficult to identify.  "Glamergan" (or Glamorgan), a present day historic county of

Wales, takes up the southeast portion of Wales and contained a large concentration of twelfth

through fourteenth-century castles.  "Bretayne" may refer to Brittany. "Wayford," "Waterforde,"

and "Ulster Halle" may refer to towns in Wales, England, or possibly even Ireland.[92]

Regardless, the gifting of lands demonstrates Arthur's imperial power not only over those who

serve him but also over the Celtic fringes of his empire.

Relying on recent collective memory of the late fourteenth- / early fifteenth-century

audience, "The worship of Wales" would be an apparent reference to the Principality of Wales –

the portion of Wales that was directly controlled by the king or his eldest son and divided into

shires. [93] In the fourteenth century under Edward III, the title of Prince of Wales was made to be

a dynastic title which was bestowed upon the king's eldest son to designate royal succession.

Hahn goes even as far as to claim that this may hint to the possibility of Gawain, as Arthur's

sister's son, as Arthur's intended heir. [94]  Arthur's bestowal of "The worship of Wales" on

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[92] Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p. 224, n. 664ff.
[93] Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p. 224, n. 664ff.  For more on the principality, see R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change: Wales 1063-1415*, Oxford UP, 1987, pp. 391-408.
[94] Hahn, *Sir Gawain*, p. 224, n. 664ff.

Gawain would be appropriate, since Arthur has no legitimate heir. Even if this does not

designate a direct line of succession, it still indicates Arthur and Gawain as having a close

relationship akin to that of father and son. Regardless, Arthur's gifting of Celtic lands to Gawain

shows his total lack of acknowledgement of the injustices committed against Galeron and the

unlawful seizure of his lands. Instead, Gawain himself seems to acknowledge Galeron's claims

by giving Galeron "Al the londes and the lithes fro Lauer to Layre, / Connoke and Carlele,

Conyngham and Kile" [All the lands and vassals from Lauer to Layre / Connoke (?) and Carlisle,

Cunningham and Kyle] with the added condition that Galeron must join the fellowship of the

Round Table (ln 678-9).[95] While these lands are largely unidentifiable, Galeron now holds lands

in both Scotland and England including Carlisle, the center of border power. This indicates

Galeron's new status as a Marcher Lord of the Anglo-Scottish borderland in service of the

English. However, there is a notable absence of Galloway (unless this is included in Lauer to

Layre) which may mean that Galeron has lost possession of his homeland. The gift to Galeron is

not simple generosity. By restoring only portions of Scottish land, Gawain ensures Galeron's

allegiance to Arthur's court, while also preserving the popular image of Arthur as a strong,

unwavering king and conqueror. Galeron's new landholdings, along with his submission to

Arthur, help to solidify the empire's control over the Scottish borderland region.

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[95] Although unsubstantiated, I would like to posit that Lauer may refer to Lauder, a town in the Scottish borders. Lauderdale, the Royal Burgh of Lauder, was granted to King David I of Scotland to Hugh de Morville (d. 1162). The land later passed to Alan of Galloway (d. 1234). The land was then passed to his grandson, John Balliol. After the lands forfeiture to Robert I (a.k.a. Robert the Bruce), it was granted to Sir James Douglas (d.1330). This is the same James Douglas who killed Ralph Neville in single combat. Although related, he is not to be confused with James, the second earl of Douglas, who is depicted at the Battle of Otterburn by Froissart. For more on Lauder, see Charles S. Romanes, C.A., *Melrose Regality Records*, Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1917, vol.3: xxxv-xxxvi.

**IV. A Peaceful Imperial Model?**

Both *SGCC* and *Awntyrs* promote a model for subjugation of the Scots within the Anglo-Scottish borderland. These narratives condemn violence while privileging peaceful political solutions, as can be seen through the repentance of the Carle or Guenevere's queenly intercession of the combat between Gawain and Galeron. However, as an examination of imperial temporality shows us, despite these isolated episodes of peace, the audience is aware that violence will ultimately tear Arthur's empire apart. One cannot help but feel, for instance, that the resolution in *Awntyrs* comes too easily. Galeron's loyalty appears tenuous at best—at least if we consider the *Awntyrs* in conversation with other Arthurian texts. In Malory's *Morte Darthure*, Galeron of Galloway is among those who follow Mordred to Castle Carlisle to catch the adulterous Guenevere and Lancelot—part of Mordred's plan to destroy Arthur's empire through civil war.[96] By the end of the Arthurian narrative, Carlisle once again becomes a focus of political instability at the border, and ethnic divisions re-draw the lines of political allegiances.

If we return to Smith's understanding of ethno-history as "shaped by collective memories of an ethnic group's shared past," we find that these Arthurian romances both absorb and reflect the historical memory of English-Scottish border conflict, and in turn, function as social and cultural exempla for later readers. However, this memory is anything but linear. For borderland romances such as *SGCC* and *Awntyrs*, imperialism can only be understood through a coterminous invocation of the past, future, and present consequences of empire. The poems themselves become conduits for examining the history, laws, and customs of the borderland, such as the Scottish Wars of Independence, March Law, Sir James Douglas's personal duel with Robert Neville, or the Philippa's intercession to Edward III. True to the conventions of romance,

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[96] Malory, *Complete Works*, p. 675. Also see Schiff's commentary on the subject in *Revivalist Fantasy,* p. 199.

these tales end happily with the Scottish "Other" reconciling with Arthur's court.  Of course, this

is one of the appeals of romance—its ability to reconcile fictitious conflicts amid brutal historical

realities.  Both poems serve as exemplum for its audience, providing happy resolutions for their

morally flawed characters.  However, while these romances employ peaceful subjugation as a

means of individual redemption, such as in the case of the Carle or Galeron, the political

decisions that result from them cast a dark shadow over the empire of the larger Arthurian

mythos.

Chapter 3

Failed Conquests, Failed Dreams: The Legacy of Rome and *Translatio Imperii*
in the *Alliterative Morte* and Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*

"Whan the senatours had this answere, unto Rome they turned and made rydy for his corownemente in the moste noble wyse.  And at the day assigned, as the romaynes me tellys, he was crowned Emperour by the Poopys hondis, with all the royalté in the worlde to welde for ever.  There they suggeourned that seson tyll aftir the tyme, and stabelysshed all the londys from Rome unto Fraunce, and gaff londis and rentys unto knyghtes that had hem well deserved."

[When the senators had this answer, unto Rome they turned and made ready for his coronation in the most noble custom.  And at the day assigned, as the romances tell me, he was crowned Emperor by the Pope's hands, with all the royalty in the world to wield forever.  There they resided that season until after the time, and established all the lands from Rome as far as France, and gave lands and rents onto knights that had well deserved them.]

*-Le Morte d'Arthur*, p. 145[1]

When King Arthur conquers Rome and vanquishes Lucius and his enemies, he not only establishes himself as Holy Roman Emperor, but he also re-maps the Arthurian world by placing his knights in positions of political power in continental Europe.  Asserting both political and religious sovereignty over Rome, Arthur calls on both senators and cardinals to assist with the coronation (p. 144-5).  The crown, as a symbol of this sovereignty, bestows upon him "all the royalté in the worlde to welde for ever."  While this may seem to be an embellishing turn of phrase, it seems equally as likely that Arthur's sovereignty, idealized as it may be, transcends temporal boundaries even beyond his own death.  Arthur's sovereignty transforms into a metaphor for the universal divine authority of the English over both insular and external lands and peoples.  Transgressing from his primary source, the *Alliterative Morte*, Malory re-writes the "Arthur and Lucius" episode.  In *AMA*, Arthur defeats Rome but quickly abandons his eastward

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[1] *Malory: Complete Works*, edited by Eugène Vinaver, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, 1971.  All primary citations for Malory are provided in in-text citations and are recorded by both page and line number.  Translations are my own.

march towards the Holy Land, turning his attention instead to Mordred's usurpation of Britain. By contrast, Malory repositions the war with Rome to a much earlier moment in Arthur's military career, and thus, removes the narrative obstruction allowing Arthur to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor.[2] The newly crowned Arthur carries with him the divine judgement of God against his enemies to come. In many ways, Arthur becoming the Emperor consolidates his enemies as non-European and non-Christian, while simultaneously uniting culturally diverse knights under a shared goal of Christian imperial conquest. As I argue here, these texts establish the success of the empire as contingent on Rome as both a physical homeland and as an imperial ideological construct that promotes ethnic solidarity.[3] While *Alliterative Morte* views the lack of ethnic solidarity through its inability to reconquer Rome, Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* presents an Arthur who succeeds in reclaiming Rome, but the weight of the empire and personal ambitions ultimately collapses in on itself.

Medieval English Arthurian literature's continued fascination with ethnic unity stems from its need to respond to the various historical cultural invasions, namely the Romans, the Saxons, and the Normans, along with the internal disunity of its original Celtic occupants. The Romans had the largest impact on imperial ideology with Rome becoming a symbol of idealized Western culture. Intrinsic to this sense of English cultural solidarity was a sense of a historic birthright, stretching as far back as the ancient Romans to the ancestral homeland of Britain and its occupying territories. As Kenneth Hodges has noted, for Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*,

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[2] The earlier positioning of the Roman War is also apparent in the Vulgate Cycle; however, Arthur deviates from the French tradition as well by having Arthur crowned as Emperor. It remains possible that this detail was adapted from John Hardyng's chronicle, appearing in two different versions during the reigns of Henry VI and Edward IV. Terence McCarthy, "Malory and his Sources," *A Companion to Malory*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Anthony Stockwell, D.S. Brewer, 1996, pp. 75-6.

[3] As in earlier chapters of this dissertation, "ethnic solidarity" and "ethnicity" are used in reference to Smith's concept of the ethnie. In this context, ethnicity is not defined in terms of race, but rather, shared elements of culture, such as myths, historical memories, and the connection to a geographical homeland.

making the British descendants of Brutus and Aeneas gave Britain a Roman origin. Writing for

Norman Aristocrats, Geoffrey made Arthur the protector of Roman Britain from the Saxon

enemies, and the Normans were portrayed as the final conquerors of the Saxons and the

preservers of a classical Roman heritage. Thus, the Normans of Geoffrey's *Historia* are

liberators of the Saxons rather than another enemy imposing a foreign culture on Britain's

populace.[4] Written centuries later, *AMA* takes little concern with Saxons, instead focusing more

on the Saracen allies of Lucius's Rome. By the fifteenth century, Malory's concerns lay not only

with the Romans but also with the French in the wake of the Hundred Years War. As Andrew

Lynch states, "It is a complex situation: Rome embodies what is pre-eminently desirable but the

Romans are enemies; the idea is for the British to beat them, not to be them."[5] Lynch makes an

excellent point, but it seems to me that the goal of the British was not simply to beat the Romans

militarily but rather to reclaim the imperial authority once held by Rome and reshape it into a

new British empire. In other words, they want to *surpass* Rome, not resemble it.

This re-imagining of a new British empire relies on the Roman notion of *translatio*

*imperii*, a historiographical concept that emphasizes the linear transfer of power or *imperium*

from one divine ruler to the next. *Translatio* in Latin literally means "to carry across," and as Sif

Rikhardsdottir discusses, it was "used originally to indicate the physical movement of objects

through space, whether those objects were material entities, such as relics, or more intangible

entities, such as knowledge or power."[6] Rikhardsdottir further asserts that "the act of 'carrying

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[4] Kenneth Hodges, *Forging Chivalric Communities in Malory's Le Morte Darthur*, Palgrave Macmillian, 2005, p. 64.

[5] Andrew Lynch, "Imperial Arthur: Home and Away," *The Cambridge Companion to Arthurian Legend*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge UP, 2009, p. 176.

[6] Sif Rikhardsdottir, "Chronology, Anachronism, and *Translatio Imperii*," *Handbook of Arthurian Romance*, edited by Leah Tether and Johnny McFayden, De Gruyter, 2017, p. 140.

across' implies both a border and a movement in space, a spatial transfer and a conservatory notion in the sense that an object, whether physical (such as a manuscript containing texts being brought from one location to another), or more conceptual (an idea or an ideological concept) that is *translocated*."[7]  In the context of *AMA* and Malory, I would contend that these texts employ *translatio imperii* in both a physical sense (conquest of Rome) and as an ideological concept (re-claiming Roman transmissions of power).  England frequently uses *translatio imperii* to justify expansive claims to territorial rights of both the British Isles and the larger Christianized Continent.

In order to view *translatio imperii* within the broader context of English as a developing proto-nation, it is important examine how claims to territorial rights and ancestral homelands serve as foundational concept of nationalism.  As Anthony D. Smith has stated, "Whatever else it may be, nationalism always involves an assertion of, or struggle for, control of land . . . the creation of nations requires a special place for the nation to inhabit, a land 'of their own.' Not any land, but a historic land, a homeland, an ancestral land.  Only an ancestral land can provide the emotional as well as physical security required by the citizens of a nation."[8]  For a developing British (rather than English) identity stemming from multiple narratives of various oppressors and their subjects, the poetic landscape of an ethnic community, or *ethnoscape*, is formed through cultural mythos in the lapse of a cohesive historical narrative.  For the *AMA* and Malory, these ethnoscapes are both foreign and domestic—a homeland that is geographically confined by the British Isles, but it is also ideologically situated in land abroad, Rome and its Christian territories.

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[7] Rikhardsdottir, "Chronology," p. 142.

[8] Anthony D. Smith. *Myths and Memories of the Nation,* Oxford UP, 1999, p.149.

The following sections of this chapter examine the various ethnoscapes—both Roman and British—and their influence on shaping British identity. In Part I, I analyze the core of the Roman war narrative in *AMA* through the landscapes of Rome, Mont Saint-Michel, and Britain. In Part II, I study how Malory complicates the narrative by re-writing Rome and displaying the divisions of Orkney and Guyenne.

## I. Imperial Dreams in the *Alliterative Morte*

The *Alliterative Morte* exists in a single copy (Lincoln Cathedral MS 91, fols. 53a-98b) and was likely written near the turn of the fifteenth century. The work is often heralded by critics as an exceptional text for its alliterative style, and its narrative contents draw on the earlier chronicle tradition of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, making it a blend of chronicle history and romance. As numerous critics have noted, the poem takes a much greater interest in the realities of warfare than the supernatural elements and domestic affairs of other Arthurian romances, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the various tales of the French Vulgate Cycle. The poet pays a great deal of attention to precise dates, location names, and the nuances of realistic battle accounts, such as the sieges of Metz (France), Como (Lombardy), and Tuscany (Italy). The Arthur of the *AMA* is an established imperial ruler of both insular Britain and its outlying colonial territories (e.g. Wales, Scotland, and Ireland) and the narrative content focuses on the familiar episode in which King Arthur goes to war with Emperor Lucius and the Romans. In *AMA*, Roman emissaries interrupt Arthur's New Year's festivities at Carlisle, bringing word that Lucius demands tribute. With the support of his advisors, Arthur refuses to give tribute and declares war on Rome. After several battles on the Continent and defeating Rome, he hears word that in his absence Mordred has usurped the throne and married Guenevere. Leaving the continent, Arthur engages in a series of land and sea battles with

Mordred's supporters with each side suffering heavy losses. Mordred slays his brother Gawain,

and Arthur defeats Mordred, only to receive a fatal wound in the process. The wounded Arthur

asks his knights to take his body to Glastonbury for burial, and he bestows the throne on his

cousin, Constantine.

Amidst the numerous battles of the narrative, dreams play an important role in justifying

Arthur's imperial claims. Dreams in the *AMA* are used to rationalize reclaiming familial territory

and engaging in a holy war with Lucius and his Saracen allies. In referring to "imperial dreams,"

I draw attention to both the actual dreams of Arthur in the poem and the wish fulfillment of

reclaiming the physical and ideological Roman ethnoscape within the larger British empire. In

separating *AMA* into three different ethnoscapes—Rome, Mont St. Michel, and Britain—we can

gain a more complete picture of the role in which space and place plays in Arthur's imperial

dreams.

Despite *AMA*'s far-reaching geographical scope, taking place both at home in the British

Isles and abroad, very little scholarly attention has focused on the importance of place and space

as it shapes imperialism within the narrative. Two major scholars, Geraldine Heng and Patricia

Clare Ingham, have provided the foundation of my initial thoughts on imperialism in *AMA*.

Heng has focused extensively on *AMA* as it processes trauma, especially that of cannibalism as

practiced by the crusaders in the First Crusade on the bodies of their Muslim enemies in Syria;

however, she finds no major conceptualization of nationalism in *AMA* but instead sees the

interests of a specific chivalric class.[9] Engaging with Heng's work, Ingham views *AMA* as

encoding "unending longing and loss," but argues that the poem also provides subversive

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[9] *Geraldine Heng, Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*, Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 179.

"possibilities and potentialities" of colonizing Europe's western border.[10]  Within the context of

imperialism and ethnoscapes, I suggest that we consider how these insular traumas and utopian

visions are inscribed on the cultural spaces of Rome, Normandy, and finally Britain itself.

Imperialism reshapes and affects not only those victims of the military aggressor but also the

people of the empire and its conquered territories.  For *AMA*, Arthur's empire suffers from

disunity as established through its cultural debt to Rome, the consequences of tyrannical

imperialism, and internal cultural dissension.

*A (Dis)unified Empire and the Threat of Rome*

The Arthur of the *AMA* has already conquered insular Britain—uprisings of the Welsh

have been quelled, the Scots are subdued, and the outlying isles have all come under Arthur's

imperial subjugation—a true dream for a late Middle Ages audience living through the

tumultuous reigns of Edward III and Richard II.  The mid to late fourteenth century was marked

by turmoil, including the ongoing Hundred Years War, in which the Scots allied themselves with

the French against the English, and numerous Welsh uprisings.[11]  In *AMA*, Arthur's empire

includes many "diverse rewmes" [diverse realms], and he anoints his relatives as kings in various

countries where they "covet crownes" [desire crowns]  (ln 49, 51).[12]  Here we see not only the

expansiveness of Arthur's empire but also how he controls distant territories.  Arthur's military

strategy is one of colonial imperialism—one in which he frequently suppresses the populace and

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[10] Patricia Ingham. *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, pp. 79, 91.

[11] For more on this, see Ch. 2 "Militarized Borderlands: Ethno-history and Collective Memory of the Anglo-Scots Borderland in Two Arthurian Tales."

[12] All quotes from the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* are taken from Larry D. Benson, editor. *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, Western Michigan University, 2005.  All translations are my own with the assistance of Benson's editorial notes.

places his kinsmen in positions of political power based simply on those lands that they "covet."

By installing his kinsmen in various countries, Arthur can ensure stability in regions where Lords

refuse to profess loyalty to Arthur.  In the poet's following discussion of Arthur's conquests and

territories, special attention is paid to the territories of the British Isles:

> When that the king Arthur by conquest had wonnen
>
> Castles and kingdoms and the countrees many,
>
> And he had covered the crown of that kith riche
>
> Of all that Uter in erthe ought in his time:
>
> Argayle and Orkney and all these oute-iles,
>
> Ireland utterly, as Ocean runnes,
>
> Scathel Scotland by skill he skiftes as him likes,
>
> And Wales of war he won at his will . . . (ln 26-33)
>
> [When that king Arthur had by conquest won / many castles and kingdoms and countries, / And he had recovered the crown of that rich country / Of all Uther in earth owned in his time: / Agayle and Orkney and all these outer-isles, / Ireland entirely, where the Ocean flows, / Harmful Scotland with skill he rules as it pleases him, / And Wales by war he won to his will . . .]

Scotland, Wales, Ireland, as well as all the "outer-isles" have come under Arthur's control.

The poem privileges warfare as a skill or tool to subdue troublesome countries, such as

"scathel Scotland."  From there, the poem goes on to list various other places within Arthur's

realm, including France, Norway, Brittany, and many others.  Arthur's conquest is framed as one

to retake all the lands that his father, Uther Pendragon, once owned.  Uther, as recounted in

Geoffrey's *Historia*, is the youngest son of the Roman King of Britannia, Constantine III, giving

further credence to the argument of Arthur's noble Roman lineage.

Despite this seemingly unified empire, Arthur's need to justify his territorial conquests by asserting his ancestral ties to Rome subtly exposes the underlying disunity. In asserting his ancestral ties to Rome, Arthur can further solidify the control over his kingdom through Rome as a site of Christian memory, while simultaneously denying Britain's subservient role to Lucius as the Roman emperor. After Lucius's emissaries arrive in Carlisle demanding tribute, Arthur exclaims,

> He asked me tyrauntly tribute of Rome,
>
> That teenfully tint was in time of mine elders,
>
> There alienes, in absence of all men of armes,
>
> Coverd it of commons, as cronicles tells. (ln 273-7)
>
> [He tyrannically asked me for Roman tribute, / That painfully was taken in the time of my elders, / There foreigners, in absence of all men of arms, / obtained it with commoners as chronicles tell.]

Arthur refers to Lucius as a tyrant, or a usurper, of Rome.[13] By denying tribute to Lucius, Arthur positions himself as a Brutus-like figure—as a refugee who was exiled from Rome by "alienes" [foreigners]. Here, Arthur charges the usurpers of Rome with using "commoners" in war rather than trained soldiers, an act that Arthur views as unjust and cowardly.[14] I view his claims here as further pressing *translatio imperii*, building an argument he supports by invoking the chronicle tradition. Arthur rhetorically re-positions himself to state: "I have title to take tribute of Rome; / Mine auncestres were emperours and ought it themselven" [I have right to take tribute of Rome; / My ancestors were emperors and owned it themselves] (ln 275-6). Since Arthur's ancestors were emperors of Rome, Arthur reasons that *he* should be demanding tribute from Rome, rather

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[13] MED s.v. tĭraunt (n.) def. 2.b. All Middle English definitions are from the Middle English Dictionary, hosted through the University of Michigan [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/].

[14] See also lines 3075-83 as an example of Arthur's own adherence to the ethics of warfare.

than Lucius of him.[15] He masterfully tells next of his predecessor and kinsmen, Emperor Constantine, who is both emperor of Rome and heir of England (ln 282-3) and stating that he "conquered the cross by craftes of armes, / That Crist was crucified, that King is of heven" [He conquered the cross by skill of arms, / That Christ was crucified on, that King is of heaven] (ln 284-5). According to Geoffrey's *Historia*, Constantine's mother, Helen, discovered the True Cross.[16] This westward progress of empire to Rome is seen as divine preparation for the second coming of Christ, and since Christ was originally born in the Pax Romana, a renewed Empire will usher in his rebirth.[17] Thus, the creation of an English ethnoscape is also a Christian one, linking the larger ethnic British community to Rome as a site of Christian memory formation.

The poem places Lucius in opposition to the formation of the Christian ethnoscape and his army is depicted as a grotesque corruption of the ethnic community. When Lucius begins to assemble his army for war, he sends letters "into the Orient" to numerous exotic eastern Saracens in such places as Africa, Egypt, and Turkey (ln 571). Among Lucius's army are "sixty giauntes," "witches and warlaws," and "coverd cameles of towrs" [camels covered with towers] (ln 612-3, 616). Thus, *AMA* depicts Rome as a site of Christian importance that has been overtaken by Muslims, "othered" giants, and the unnatural pagan magic of witches and warlocks. Arthur's attempt to re-take Rome, as much as it is an expansion of empire, is also a holy war for the fate of European Christendom. Again, we might return to the notion that Arthur wants to

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[15] Arthur identifies these ancestors as "Belin and Bremin and Bawdeyne the third" (ln 277). Benson notes that Geoffrey of Monmouth recounts that Belinus and Brennius conquered Rome before Caesar; however, this is entirely ahistorical. Baldwin's origin is unknown, but he may have been added for the sake of alliteration. See Benson p. 265 n. 277.

[16] Emperor Constantine (c. 375-411AD) is not to be confused with Arthur's supposed heir, Constantine, in the sixth century. For more on Constantine, see Benson p. 265 n. 282.

[17] Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature*, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, p. 215.

surpass Rome rather than defeat it. "Rome" itself is not the enemy of Arthur, but rather, the enemies of Christendom that Lucius has brought to Rome.

By positioning Lucius as a usurper of Rome, Arthur unites traditionally dissenting ethnic voices and binds lords to him with the shared goal of defeating a common enemy. When viewed within the framework of ethno-symbolism, this shared goal helps to form a cohesive British ethnie. Rome as a site of Christian memory rallies ethnic minorities to Arthur's cause but so do the perceived transgressions of Lucius's Rome to other countries. King Aungers, a king of Scotland, replies to Arthur's indictment of Rome with a list of his own charges: "I dare say for Scotland that we them scathe limped; / When the Romans regned they ransound our elders / And rode in their riot and ravished our wives" [I dare say for Scotland that we suffered harm from them / When Romans reigned they ransomed our elders / And rode in their chariot and seized (i.e. raped) our wives] (ln 292-4).[18] As he makes a vow to Christ to be avenged of the "grete vilany" done to him by Rome, the Scottish king's war-cry laments the loss of his fallen ancestors while pledging twenty thousand men to fight alongside Arthur (ln 298). Likewise, the Welsh king promises to "wreke full well the wrath of our elders," [avenge full well the injury to our elders] rallying knights "Of Wyghte and of Welshland and of the West Marches" (ln 321, 334).

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[18] Benson notes that King Aungers is identified ". . . as Geoffrey of Monmouth's Auguselus, a king of Scotland, son of Bryadens, grandson of Igerne, and brother of Lot and Urien. He was, like Lot, an enemy of Arthur who later became an ally" p. 265, n. 288. This also places King Aungers alongside other notable Scots of borderland literature, such as the Carle of Carlisle in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and Galeron in *Awntyrs*, who have pledged themselves to Arthur.

While Scotland's existence as a sovereign state during the Roman period is pure fantasy, there is a historical precedent for Roman troop's mistreatment of Celtic peoples. The rape of Celtic women raises to mind Boudicca, the British Celtic queen of the Iceni tribe that rose an army against the Roman forces in AD 60/61. According to Tacitus in the *Annals*, the cause of the rebellion was a mistreatment by the Romans. Boudica had been lashed, her two daughters raped, and Iceni lands had been confiscated. There is no evidence that the author of the *Alliterative Morte* knew the story of Boudicca, since it had fallen out of favor in the Middle Ages and remains absent from the likes of Monmouth, Bede, or the Mabinogion. However, Geoffrey does mention the "Roman histories" several times throughout his *Historia*, and historians favor the West Midlands as the location of Boudica's defeat. See Tacitus, *Annals*, translated by John Jackson, Harvard University Press, 1937.

Even the independent lords of the Welsh Marches have fallen in line to support the war with Rome. If we consider other Arthurian texts that concern themselves with the allegiance of Welsh and Scotsmen, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Awntyrs off Arthur*, as taking place earlier in Arthur's reign, this later episode shows the idealized progression of such allegiance.

In his goal to unite the dissenting ethnicities of the Round Table, Arthur not only attempts to conquer familial Roman lands, but he also wishes to re-claim Roman symbols, such as that of the dragon. Arthur's original association with the dragon standard stems from the Geoffrey's *Historia*, the source material for *AMA*, where it is both a symbol of Uther Pendragon's sovereign power and appears as Arthur's battle standard. Furthermore, as Brent Miles notes, the dragon emblem was historically used by English kings from Richard I through Edward III. [19] In *AMA*, the dragon emblem first takes prominence in "The Dream of the Dragon and the Bear," where Arthur "dremed of a dragon" [dreamed of a dragon] arising as a victor in a sky battle with a "black bustous bere" [strong black bear] (ln 760, 775). Two philosophers among Arthur's men interpret the dragon as a representation of Arthur and the bear as a representation of the tyrants that torment his people (ln 824). It does stand to reason that the bear does represent multiple tyrants, and Arthur does in fact engage in singular battle with three adversaries—the Giant of Mont St. Michel, Lucius, and Mordred. If the bear, at least in part, represents Lucius, then it remains curious that Lucius is later associated with dragon heraldry. The dragon appears on the armor of Lucius as he "drawes into douce Fraunce, as Dutch-men telles, / Dressed with his dragons, dredful to shew" [arrives into sweet France, as Germans tell, / Dressed with his dragons, dreadfully displayed] (ln 1251-2). Lucius's knights also later display the dragon on their armaments as they prepare for the Battle of Sessye (ln 2026). Several scholars, such as

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[19] Brent Miles, "'*Lyouns Full Lothely*': Dream Interpretation and Boethian Denaturing in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*," *Arthuriana*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2008, p. 49.

Rebecca Beal and Karen Hodder, have commented on the moral and ideological implications of

the bestial imagery in the dream who have read Arthur as a conqueror and the ambiguity of the

dream as a commentary on Arthur's morality that draws a parallel between Arthur and Lucius's

Roman army.[20]  I do not, however, wish to pass moral judgement on Arthur here.  If any parallel

exists between Arthur and Lucius it is the fact that they both attempt to use dragon heraldry as an

imperial symbol representing sovereign power.  For Arthur, the dragon symbol exists as a trophy

to reclaim through battle—a trophy that rightly belongs to him and one that in the Galfridian

tradition originates with Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon.  I suggest that we then view Arthur's

defeat of Lucius's forces as reclaiming the dragon and reforming it into a multi-ethnic symbol of

the larger ethnoscape—the ethnic community and larger empire over which Arthur works to

assert his sovereign power. Reclaiming this imperialist symbol unites the disparate ethnic

communities beyond the sea as part of his larger empire.

*Mont Saint-Michel and the Embodied Tyrannical Empire*

Mont Saint-Michel can be historically viewed as the imperial ethnoscape in miniature, or

the collective cultural landscape that Arthur deems as part of his empirical right through his

ancestral identity.  Understanding the role of ethnicity in relation to the Mont Saint-Michel is a

complex web of intertwined identities.  Michelle R. Warren, describing the limitations of ethnic

genealogy writes:

> For Britain, ethnic genealogy begins with the Trojans who became the Britons.  Their
>
> descendants (Welsh and Breton) and their descendants' conquerors (Anglo-Saxons and

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[20] See Rebecca S. Beal.  "Arthur as the Bearer of Civilization: *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ll. 901-19," *Arthuriana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1995. Karen Hodder et al. "Dynastic Romance," *The Arthur of the English*, edited by W.R.J. Barron, 1999, p. 93.

Normans) all actively constructed Trojan-Briton history as part of their own identity. These genealogical constructions strategically deploy ethnic and family resemblances while defending social and political differences.[21]

*AMA,* using Geoffrey's *Historia* Anglo-Norman chronicle, positions Arthur as a Briton king with cultural and social ancestral ties to the fourteenth / fifteenth century English through Norman ancestry in opposition to their pagan Breton ancestors. Mont Saint-Michel's imperial history as a military outpost, and later as an important site of Christian pilgrimage, designate it as an area of interest to the English. Positioned between Normandy and the sea, the island sits just off France's northwest coast. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the island served as a Breton fortress before its fall to the Franks.[22] This Breton landscape as depicted in Geoffrey's *Historia* was, as John Friedman suggests, "unusually rich in monstrous pagan features, such as giants and their architectural remains . . . [that] became highly influential in the Arthurian tradition."[23] Thus, the text paradoxically claims Mont Saint-Michel as a larger part of the Arthurian ethnoscape while working to distance Breton claims to the region by asserting religious and cultural differences through the monstrous Giant of Mont Saint-Michel.

This tension between Norman and Breton heritage is also evident in Mont Saint-Michel's geographical position as a border region in the following centuries. It was an important location in the Marches of Neustria, a march created by the Carolingian king Charles the Bald, in the ninth century. In the eleventh century, the abbey's location on the Norman-Breton border

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[21] Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 9.

[22] Katherine Allen Smith, "Architectural Mimesis and Historical Memory at the Abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel," *Negotiating Community and Difference in Medieval Europe: Gender, Power, Patronage, and the Authority of Religion in Latin Christendom*, edited by Katherine Smith and Scott Wells, Brill, 2009, p. 74. The first written text about the abbey is *Revelatio ecclesiae sancti Michaelis in monte Tumba*, a latin 9th century text.

[23] John Block Friedman, "The *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and 'Monstrous' Breton Geography," *Enarratio*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2008, p. 124.

marked it as a site of conflict between ambitious Norman dukes and the counts of Brittany.[24]

After serving as a military outpost, it became a religious site when the Bishops of Avranches

built an abbey and dedicated the church to the archangel Michael.  Later, the abbey became a

major pilgrimage site, as well as a center of ecclesiastical and political power during the Late

Middle Ages.  As conflict was incited during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), the island

was once again turned into a major military installation by the French—the only site in

Normandy that was not taken over by the English.[25]  *AMA* portrays Arthur as a Norman Christian

liberator freeing the people from the tyrannical Breton paganism of the giant.

In order to distance Arthur's Christian knights from the pagan giant, the text establishes a

parallel between the tyranny of the Giant of Mont Saint-Michel and the tyranny of Lucius.  Soon

after Arthur lands in Normandy, he takes a side-quest to Mont Saint-Michel to defeat a giant

ravaging the countryside.  A knight reports to Arthur: "Here is a tyraunt beside that tormentes

thy pople, / A grete giaunt of Gene, engendered of fendes" [Here is a tyrant nearby that torments

your people / A great giant of Genoa, born of fiends] (ln 842-3).  Immediately, the text reiterates

the word "tyraunt" in a near-exact repetition of line 824 of Arthur's dream, drawing a parallel

between the giant and the tyrant Lucius.  The giant heralds from Genoa, an Italian city-state that

was historically allied with the French during the Hundred Years War.  Like the giants of

Lucius's army, the monster of Mont Saint-Michel serves, as Kateryna A. Rudnytzky Schray

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[24] Smith, "Architectural Mimesis" p. 74.
[25] Alexander Stille, "Make Over for Mont-Saint-Michel," *Smithsonian*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2014.  Many of Mont Saint-Michel's current architectural features were built during this period, including a statue of St. Michael in which the archangel stands on top of a spire, holding a sword and crushing a serpent with his heel.  It might be noted that Arthur as sovereign conqueror also defeats the demon spawn Giant of Mont Saint-Michel—in some ways paralleling St. Michael.  Kateryna Schray notes Arthur as "a Christian hero who comes to save his people from the giant's tyranny and resoter the mountain to its proper owner, St. Michael . . . Arthur lacks this religious dimension in the chronicles; in Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon, his motivations are purely secular, with all references to the Divine fairly standard conventions rather than genuine spiritual concerns" (8).  For Schray see n. 231.

points out, an "enemy of Christendom who threatens Arthur's domain."[26] As a pagan antithesis

to Christian ideology, the giant of Mont Saint-Michel devours Christian children: "He has freten

of folk mo than five hundredth, / And als fele fauntekins of free-born childer" [He has devoured

more than five hundred people, / And as many infants (baptized babies) of noble children] (ln

844-5). He drags off any "knave childer" [male children] in the country of Constantine who are

not safely secured behind the walls of a castle in an attempt to wipe out the noble heirs of Arthur

and his allies (ln 850). The giant seeks to wipe out the noble heirs of Arthur and his allies,

serving as a tyrannical threat to ancestral Christian lines.

In addition to wiping out Christian ancestral lines, the giant's physical hybridity also

serves as evidence of a pre-Christian past. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has shown, the giant's

liminal body is suspended between the categories of the human and that of an archaic other.

While he cooks meat, he also eats it raw. Like a man, he fights with a weapon, but it is unrefined

club indicating ancient barbarity.[27] This can be seen in the metaphorical description of the Giant

of Mont St. Michel's body: "Bull-necked was that berne and brode in the shoulders, / Brok-

brested as a brawn with bristeles full large, / Rude armes as an oke with ruskled sides" [Bull-

necked was that man and broad in the shoulders, / Spotted-breasted as a boar with bristles full

large, / Sturdy arms as an oak with wrinkled sides] (ln 1094-6). His boar-like characteristics and

his arms like oak-tree emphasize his incredible strength, a force of nature with which to be

reckoned. These natural elements indicate a culturally pagan past before the refinement of

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[26] Kateryna A. Rudnytzky Schray, "The Plot in Minature: Arthur's Battle on Mont St. Michel in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*," *Studies in Philology*, vol. 101, no. 1, 2004, p. 2.
[27] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 38.

And sithen garnisht in Greece full graithely togeders;

It is hided all with here, holly all over

And bordered with berdes of burlich kings (ln 995-1002)

[For both lands and nations he thinks little of / Of wealth nor of red gold reckons he never / For he will live outside the law, as he wishes / Without title of property, as prince in his own (right) / But he has a gown on, that he keeps for himself / That was spun in Spain by maidens / And sewn in Greece full readily together, / It is covered all with hair, wholly all over / And bordered with the beards of noble kings]

Obviously, the cloak functions as a symbol of masculinity and power that the winner has taken from those "burlich" (noble/excellent/powerful) men he has defeated, but crucially and uniquely in *AMA*, the poet forges a deliberate link between the cloak and nations and land.[30] Larry Benson glosses "lythes" as "nation," but the word may be more closely related to "landed property" or possibly "a country."[31] While the poet may not be invoking the nation directly, he does distinguish between land in a general sense and "lythe" as land with governed borders. The giant's disobedience to the laws of civilized society and his disregard for land rights establish him as a political outsider. Moreover, the beard also takes on a cross-cultural dimension. Spun in Spain and sewn in Greece, the beards of kings serve as a display of imperial tribute. Although the giant receives tribute from "fifteen rewmes" [fifteen realms] every Easter, one prize has remained outside his grasp—Arthur's beard (ln 1005, 1015-7). As Schray has argued, the giant's collection of beards parallels Roman imperialism and that the giant's tyranny links him to Lucius.[32] Adding to this notion, I would argue that the giant's cloak also amplifies the threat to established borders and land. That is, the giant's cloak is a symbol of loss—the loss of Christian ethnoscapes, the loss of borders, and the loss of civilized order.

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[30] MED s.v. borlī(ch) (adj.) def. 1.a. Of persons: (a) excellent, noble; handsome, beautiful, -- also as a noun; (b) stout, sturdy, and burly.
[31] MED s.v. līth (n.(4)) def. a, b.
[32] Schray, "The Plot in Miniature," p. 16.

I suggest reading the rape of the Duchess of Brittany in a similar way as a symbol of sovereign loss. As scholars such as Ingham and Heng have shown, the female body is representative of sovereign power insofar that women are viewed as responsible for carrying on patriarchal lines through child-birth.[33]  In *AMA*, the Duchess of Brittany is a victim of sexual violence so aggressive that it results in her death. [34]  The rape of the Duchess, like the murder of the male children, is a symbolic imperial act in which women serve the interests of men.  In medieval literature, noble women are important in establishing the bonds between men, and rescuing damsels-in-distress serve as opportunities for men to perform chivalric deeds and display martial prowess.  In this case, the Duchess's rank is important: she is either the wife of a duke or possibly even a sovereign ruler in her own right.  If we view her as holding a high-ranking noble position, as I suggest we do given the *AMA* poet makes her Guenevere's cousin, the Duchess's rape is also an unlawful seizure of sovereign power by a dangerous tyrant.[35]  While Arthur is too late to save the Duchess, he avenges her death: "Even into the in-mete the giaunt he hittes / Just to the genitals and jagged the in sonder!" [Even into the meat (intestines) the giant he hits / Right up to the genitals and cut them asunder] (ln 1122-3).  Arthur displays excessive brutality as he castrates, disembowels, and then beheads the giant.  The giant's castration parallels the murder of the Duchess in that it also symbolizes the end of ancestral line, this time for the pagan conqueror.  However, on a deeper level this also foreshadows, as we shall see, Arthurs's own symbolic castration and future loss of sovereign power as Mordred usurps his throne and conceives children with Guenevere.  On the narrative level thus far, we have seen

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[33] See Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001 and Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*, Columbia University Press, 2003.

[34] An old widow reports: "He has forced her and filed and sho is fey leved; / He slew her unslely and slit her to the navel" [He raped her and defiled and she is left dead; / He slew her crudely and slit her to the navel] (ln 976-979).

[35] In other chronicle sources, the Duchess is also Guenevere's cousin, and she is identified as Helena.

how Mont St. Michel exists as an imperial ethnoscape in miniature, one in which the giant rules

as tyrant, destroying patrilineal lines with little regard to sovereign borders and land. These

events in some ways parallel Arthur's conflict with Lucius and imperial success, while in others

they point towards his own eventual loss of his throne and life. What I have been arguing is that

both the giant and Lucius represent corrupted lineages that Arthur must effectively end in order

to ensure a culturally solidified, Christian ethnoscape.

*The Fight for the Homeland: Britain as Ethnoscape*

The ethnoscape, or ethnic landscape, most important to Arthur's sovereign rule is Britain

itself. Arthur's Round Table is made up of knights from around the world; while most of them

are Christian, some are even Saracen (such as Palomides) and other knights are often converted

and dubbed knights by Arthur (such as the many colored knights in *Sir Gareth*). Thus, the bond

between the Knights of the Round Table insists on a shared vision and cultural code of conduct.

Throughout his reign, Arthur seeks to control this empire through assimilation and political

subjugation of cultural and political outsiders; however, when Arthur's knights turn-against

themselves violence throws the empire into disarray.[36] In *AMA*, the shared vision and cultural

solidarity are challenged by Mordred's treacherous seizure of the British crown while Arthur is

abroad battling Lucius and defeating Rome. A major turn in the narrative from Arthur's imperial

successes to his imperial decline is signaled by his dream of Fortune's Wheel in which Lady

Fortune shows him the rise and fall of the Nine Worthies. The poem presents three pagan

worthies (Alexander the Great, Hector of Troy, and Julius Caesar) in conjunction with three

Jewish worthies (Judas Maccabeus, Joshua, and David). Arthur himself is placed among the

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[36] For more on models of subjugation, see Chapter 2.

three Christian worthies, alongside the future Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon who are preparing to mount Fortune's wheel. Arthur is then given a scepter, diadem, and an orb set "full of fair stones" (ln 3354). The orb has a painting of the world on it, serving as a symbol of Arthur as "soveraign in erthe" [sovereign in earth] (ln 3357). But at midday, Fortune's mood changes, stating that he "has lived in delite and lordshippes ynow" [has lived in delight and lordship enough] (ln 3387). Thus, he will now face the fate of his conqueror forbearers and be "quasht" [smashed] under Fortune's wheel (ln 3389).

As other scholars have observed, the poet of *AMA* codes historiography within the dream of Fortune's wheel. Lee Patterson views the dream of Fortune as it "represents historical recurrence and functions in the narrative as the agency of recall."[37] The dream reminds us of a pattern of heroism, a heroic life in which Alexander serves as a "prototype whose achievements are endlessly, and meaninglessly, reenacted."[38] As the first of the Nine Worthies, Alexander serves as the heroic archetype that all other worthies will follow—meaning they are all fated to the same rise and fall of Fortune's wheel. Ingham additionally notes that this repetition not only reminds the reader of the unattainable nature of true imperial progress, but it also serves as a "memorialization of victimization."[39] In calling attention to the repetition of the Arthurian tragedy, Ingham underscores the repeated failures of tragic kingship, stressing that victimization and suffering is too often repeatedly visited upon certain bodies and peoples—that of the oppressed.[40] What both Patterson and Ingham show is that the dream functions as enacted historical memory. Building on this notion, I view *translation imperii* as part of this historical memory and cycle of repetition and failure. Arthur, like Alexander, seeks imperial

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[37] Patterson, p. 224
[38] Patterson, p. 225
[39] Ingham, p. 85
[40] Ingham, p. 86

expansionism. In seeking to expand his empire and conquer Rome, Arthur has stretched his power beyond his means to the detriment of the insular British empire.

However, Fortune alone cannot take full responsibility for the downfall of British empire. Arthur's poor decision to appoint Mordred as regent to protect his lands and wife proves to have dire consequences. Arthur makes Mordred "a soveraign" with "lordshipps ynow / Of all my lele lege-men that my landes yemes" [present control / Of all my loyal liege-men that possess my lands] (ln 644, 646-7). However, Mordred attempts to refuse the honor—an act unique to *AMA*. Kneeling, Mordred pleads,

> "I beseek you, sir, as my sib lord,
>
> That ye will for charitee chese you another,
>
> For if ye put me in this plitt, your pople is deceived;
>
> To present a prince state my power is simple;
>
> When other of war-wisse are worshipped hereafter,
>
> Then may I forsooth, be set but at a little.
>
> To pass in your presence my purpose is taken
>
> And all my perveance appert for my pris knightes." (ln 681-8)

> [I beseech you, sir, as my blood-related lord, / That you will for charity choose another, / For if you put me in this state, your people are deceived; / To present a princely estate my power is simple; / When other of cunning in warfare are worshipped hereafter, / Then may I forsooth, be little regarded. / To travel in your presence my purpose is taken / And all my provisions ready for my noble knights.]

Mordred appeals to kinship with Arthur to stay by his side. According to the chronicle tradition, the Mordred of *AMA* is Gawain's sibling and Arthur's nephew, rather than Arthur's son by incest. He pleads his case that someone else would better be placed in this position of power. True to chivalric knighthood, he sees his honor as defined by the role of warrior on the battlefield

rather than politician. This depiction of Mordred has led several scholars, such as Gillian Adler and Dorsey Armstrong, to view him in a sympathetic light, as a victim of Arthur's imperialism.[41] Adler argues that Arthur effectively divorces Mordred from his chivalric identity by relegating him to the domestic context of the court and excluding him from the social and political fellowship of knights going off to battle.[42] Likewise, Armstrong sees Mordred as the product of "an ideology in which warfare and conquest are the dominant ideals," which naturally leads him to attempt to hold onto that ideology, "even if it means rebellion against his uncle."[43] Since Arthur has no legitimate heir, it stands to reason that he may leave a near relative to hold the throne in his absence, but it would seem like a better choice would be Gawain, his nephew, Mordred's oldest brother, and a much more prestigious knight (but Arthur takes Gawain with him instead). Whatever the reason Arthur has behind the appointment of Mordred as regent, he is explicitly counseled against it by Mordred himself. Yet Arthur fails to heed that advice.

Mordred's treason brings into question the very condition of the pre-conceived unity of Arthur's Britain that the beginning of the poem presents. Rather than presenting Arthur's insular Britain as a unified body of various ethnies, the empire crumbles under its own weight. Soon after the Dream of Fortune's wheel, Sir Craddok delivers the distressing news:

> Sir thy warden is wicked and wild of his deeds,
>
> For he wandreth has wrought senn thou away passed.
>
> He has castels encroached and crownd himselven,
>
> Caught in all the rentes of the Round Table;

---

[41] The poet of the *Alliterative Morte* substantially diverges from the depiction of Arthur as he is in Layamon's *Brut*. Rather than a symbol of justice and a model ruler, the *Alliterative Morte* focuses much more heavily on the Arthur's kingship as it relates to imperial losses and masculinized violence. For more on this, see Adler.

[42] Gillian Adler, "'Ȝit þat traytour alls tite teris lete he fall': Arthur, Mordred, and Tragedy in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*," *Arthuriana*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2015, p. 3.

[43] Dorsey Armstrong, "Rewriting the Chronicle Tradition: The *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and Arthur's Sword of Peace," *Parergon*, vol 25, no. 1, 2008, p. 91.

He devised the rewm and delt as him likes;

Dubbed of the Denamrkes dukes and erles,

Disservered them sonderwise, and citees destroyed;

Of Sarazens and Sessoines upon sere halves

He has sembled a sorte of selcouthe bernes,

Soveraignes of Sergenale and soudeours many

Of Peghtes and paynims and proved knightes

Of Ireland and Argyle, outlawed bernes; (ln 3523-3534)

[Sir, your warden is wicked and wild of his deeds, / For his misery has brought since you left. / He captured castles and crowned himself / Caught in all the property of the Round Table; / He divided the realm and dealt it as he likes; / Dubbed Danes dukes and earls, / Scattered them everywhere, and cities destroyed; Of Saracens and Saxons upon both sides / He has assembled a sort of foreign men, / Sovereigns of South Wales and many mercenaries / Of Picts and pagans and proved knights / Of Ireland and Argyle, outlawed men;]

Mordred is quickly accused of being wicked and reckless in his governing. He has not only taken land from Arthur himself, but he has also threatened the stability of the kingdom by placing ethnic outsiders in positions of power. The poet of *AMA* juxtaposes losses of land (property, castles, and cities) with Mordred's gifts of them to outsiders with foreign ethnicities and identities (Danes, Saracens, Saxons, foreign mercenaries, sovereigns of South Wales, Picts, pagans, and outlaws). Like Lucius's corrupted Roman army filled with giants and Saracens, Mordred fills Britain with what are presented as cultural and religious outsiders. This mix of othered ethnicities threatens the constructed historical narrative of Arthur's Norman lineage. However, what both Sir Craddok and Arthur fail to realize is that Mordred is not responsible for dividing the realm. These divisions already exist. Imperialism insists on expansion beyond cultural and religious borders, while erasing the histories of the oppressed. These "foreigners"

are as much of Britain as Arthur's knights; however, they fit outside the ethnic expectations of a

national rhetoric that insists on cultural solidarity.

Towards the end of the poem, the poet of *AMA* once again highlights this cultural

divisiveness by pitting Mordred against Gawain.  The children of King Lot of Orkney and

Arthur's sister Anna, Mordred and Gawain contain mixed Scottish / English heritage.[44]  Often

viewed as the climax of *AMA*,  Mordred's battle with Gawain becomes, as Ingham asserts, "an

image of tragic insular violence of brother against brother," as the poem returns to a "utopian

realm of insular Britain fighting spaces that are narrow, tightly circumscribed, and

compressed."[45]  Among the cultural outsiders, Mordred aligns himself with "hethenes of Orkney

and Irish kinges" and those inhabitants of various Celtic spaces (ln 4164).[46]  Gawain, on the

other hand, aligns himself with Arthur's army.  Despite the illusion of Arthur's cohesive Round

Table, fractures exist within its very foundation at the level of familial intimacies.  Here again,

the poet of *AMA* provides us with a sympathetic Mordred, who after defeating Gawain, delivers

eleven lines lamenting the loss of the brother he just killed (ln 3875-3885).  I suggest that this

"insular violence," as Ingham refers to it, situates both Gawain and Mordred as casualties of

Arthur's imperialism.  Mordred's added complexity as a sympathetic character makes him, like

the cultural outsiders whom he aligns himself with, victim of imperial loss in the sense that he

too is excluded from Arthur's empire.  Thus, Mordred's own construction of the British empire

becomes a symbolic division of the cultural self—a split not only between knights but also of

imperial ideology.

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[44] This heritage takes different forms in various iterations of the Arthurian tale; however, the Alliterative Morte uses Monmouth as its primary source material.  See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, translated by Michael Faletra, Broadview Editions, 2008, p. 170.

[45] Ingham, p. 100.

[46] As Monmouth indicates, Mordred makes "alliances with the Scots, Picts, and Irish, all of whom had a long-nurtured hatred for his uncle" (197).

Finally, I suggest that we view Arthur as the final victim of his own imperial expansionism. Not only does he lose his life but also the insular core of the imagined British ethnoscape—Arthur's Round Table—effectively comes to an end. In his military advances abroad and his insistence on conquering Rome, Arthur has left Britain vulnerable to Mordred's treasonous seizure of the throne. In Arthur's absence, Mordred has not only taken the kingdom, but he has also fathered children with Guenevere—a tainting of the Pendragon bloodline. The idea of a tainted royal bloodline comes up multiple times in the final episode of the poem. Mordred fatally wounds Arthur in his *felettes* [loins], a metonymic association with genitals (ln 4237). As several scholars have noted, this is the same injury Arthur perpetrates on the giant of Mont Saint-Michel; Arthur has been stripped of his masculine power and imperial authority. As Jeff Westover proposes, Arthur's injury should be read as symbolic, rather than literal, castration.[47] Arthur dies childless, and thus, the lineage of his kingdom is also destroyed: "Here restes the rich blood of the Round Table, / Rebuked with a rebaud, and rewth is the more!" [Here rests the noble blood of the Round Table, / Rebuked with a scoundrel and ruined is the lineage] (ln 4282-3).[48] Finally, Arthur's killing of Mordred's children also draws parallels between himself and the giant of Mont Saint-Michel. In a final heinous act and exertion of power, Arthur orders that Mordred's children be slain and their bodies slung into the water (ln 4320-1).[49] Arthur tells his knights to "Let no wicked weed wax ne writhe on this erthe" [Let no wicked weed grow nor flourish on this earth] (ln 4322). The fact that Mordred conceived children with

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[47] Jeff Westover, "Arthur's End: The King's Emasculation in the Alliterative 'Morte Arthure,'" *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1998, p. 311.

[48] As a noun here, more may figuratively refer to stock, lineage, or ancestry. See MED s.v. mōr(e (n.1) def. 3.c.

[49] It is unclear how old Mordred and Guenevere's children are when Arthur reaches them. The 13th century *Morte Artu* is credited with the original invention of Mordred's children, where they attempt to take over the kingdom but are killed by Lancelot and Bors. However, these children whom are themselves full-grown knights were unlikely to be Guenevere's. See Maureen Fries, "The Poem in the Tradition of Arthurian Literature," *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Reassessment of the Poem*, edited by Karl Heinz Goller, D.S. Brewer, 1994, p. 38.

Guenevere when Arthur could not places Arthur's metaphorical castration on display. Arthur's

castration is a cultural and sociological one in that he does not leave any heirs to inherit the

kingdom, nor is his dream of conquering Rome and uniting all the British empire ever fully

realized.

Arthur's greatest tragedy, however, is not his lack of male heir nor the familial violence

between knights. These are symptoms of much bigger issues. *AMA* suggests the inevitability of

the fall of great figures due to the turning of fortune's wheel. But the imperial ethos of Arthur,

like Alexander, is what seals his fate at the hands of Lady Fortune. The greatest tragedy is that

despite the knowledge of his historical predecessors, Arthur's imperial overreach—that is his

incessant need to prove his Roman worth, define the ethnic limits of his people, and expand his

empire beyond its means—creates a political and cultural environment that facilitates insular

violence.[50]

## II. Re-Writing Rome in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*

The fifteenth century saw the rewriting of the Galfridian tradition and a

reconceptualization of the Arthurian ethnoscape with Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Drawing

from its principal sources of *AMA* and the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, Malory compiles the longest

cohesive narrative of the Arthurian mythos prior to the fifteenth century, and in doing so, blends

elements of the chronicle tradition and romance. As Malory's narrative unfolds, imperialistic

and nationalistic ideologies rise to the surface with the Round Table established as the

quintessential pinnacle of late medieval civilization. Like *AMA*, Arthur's knights come from a

diverse number of territories and countries—Lancelot and his kin are French (or from Guyenne),

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[50] Perhaps this is also why *AMA* continued to be relevant well into the fifteenth century in a time of political turmoil as it was extant in the mid-15th century Lincoln Thorton Manuscript.

Palomides is a Saracen, and Gawain and his kin are Scottish. In fact, Arthur's Round Table

extends to so many ethnicities and races, that as Andrew Lynch states, "peace at home in

Camelot feels more imperial than far away."[51] This international assemblage of knights are

joined together through Christianity and English chivalric ideals. However, by the end of the

narrative, these bonds break, exposing the internal territorial and ideological divisions between

Arthur's knights. Malory reshapes the ethnic identities and political geography of Arthur's

knights to fit a fifteenth-century context by re-positioning the Roman conquest episode (as seen

in *AMA*) and adding a focus on Gawain's Orkney heritage. Unlike *AMA* in which Mordred

seizes the crown during Arthur's campaign abroad, Malory's *Morte* envisions a Round Table left

unsecured by the internal conflict at home between Gawain and Lancelot. Through an analysis

of the "Arthur and King Lucius" episode (Book II) and the re-writing of "The Death of Arthur"

(Book VIII), I argue that Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* re-imagines Britain as repossessing Rome's

cultural and political power, but yet is unable to surpass the greatness of Rome because the

emerging nation is still divided among Franco-Scottish ethnic lines.

　　　While several scholars have taken an interest in imperialism and geographical concerns,

there has been significantly less research on how the model of Roman imperialism impacts the

ending of the Malory's *Morte*. Perhaps the most in-depth analysis of geography and imperialism

in Malory is provided by Kenneth Hodges and Dorsey Armstrong in *Mapping Malory* (2014). In

their collaborative study, they explore how different territories, such as Cornwall,

Northumberland, Orkney, Wales, Ireland, and Rome, contribute to the larger rise of the emergent

British nation as situated within Anderson's concept of "imagined communities." However,

Rome is treated more independently with a concern to what Armstrong calls Malory's

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[51] Andrew Lynch, "Imperial Arthur: Home and Away," *The Cambridge Companion to Arthurian Legend*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge UP, 2009, p. 177.

"(il)logical space" rather than as a model for imperialism that impacts the internal political divisions of Arthur's empire.[52] In part, these treatments of the text are a consequence of seeing the two episodes as disparate parts: Arthur conquers Rome in Book II, only for any mention of it to disappear by the end of Book VIII. However, as I demonstrate, Arthur's conquering of Rome reimagines the ethnoscape and establishes a divine authority and religious unity that exists in contrast to these internal regional differences.

*Fifteenth Century Divisions: The War of the Roses and Malory*

Malory's own fifteenth-century context was rife with warfare and political divisions that likely influenced his depiction of Arthur's internally divided empire. The Hundred Years War, which had begun in the 1337, had carried on well into the reign of Henry VI (1421-1471). Along with the conflict between England and France, the Auld Alliance, the treaty between Scotland and France continued to play a role is staving off English invasions.[53] Where Henry V had experienced military success against the Franco-Scottish army, Henry VI experienced military failure. However, as John Watts has discussed, Henry VI's perceived "weak kingship" was a result more of constitutional failure, rather than defeat in war or poor counsel. This constitutional failure resulted from a poor representation of the "needs of the *communitas*," which was soon realized when France was lost in 1450.[54] Henry VI's perceived weak rule provoked interest in Richard of York's claim to the throne. Indecisive lords failed to agree on

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[52] Dorsey Armstrong, "Trudging Toward Rome, Drifting Toward Sarras," *Mapping Malory: Regional Identities and National Geographies in Le Morte Darthur*, edited by Dorsey Armstrong and Kenneth Hodges, Palgrave, 2014, p. 113.
[53] The Auld Alliance is further discussed in Ch. 2. The alliance continued to play a major role in the Hundred Years War, and it was renewed four times during the War of the Roses, despite England's wavering military influence.
[54] John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, Cambridge UP, 1996, p. 365.

where the power of the crown should lie, resulting in Henry VI's deposition in 1461 and the outbreak of civil war. [55] While Henry VI had lost English territory, Edward IV worked to establish a national identity contingent on reclaiming the lands lost in France.   Edward IV declared war against the French in parliament in 1468, following through with an invasion of France in 1475.[56]   Under Edward IV, the first Yorkist king, propaganda showed the Lancastrian Henry VI as "a traitor who wanted to destroy the entire realm of England."[57]

Historical evidence suggests that Malory, as a member of the minor gentry, was well-aware of such contemporary politics.  As P.J.C Field has noted,

> [Malory] was born into a gentry family that lived for centuries in the English Midlands near the point where Warwickshire, Leicestershire, and Northamptonshire meet . . . Thomas himself is recorded from 1439 on as a respectable country landowner with a growing interest in politics.  He dealt in land, witnessed deeds for his neighbours, acted as a parliamentary elector, and by 1441 had become a knight.[58]

However, Malory's life quickly took a turn (for reasons not entirely known), as he became a continual law-breaker, seeing multiple charges over the rest of his lifetime.  He allegedly conspired with other nobles to murder the Duke of Buckingham, he stole money and valuables from the abbot at the abbey of Blessed Mary of Coombe, and he had various other allegations made against him regarding thievery and *raptus* (rape, kidnapping, or theft).  While Malory denied these charges, he served eight imprisonments, with his last arrest taking place in 1460.

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[55] Watts, p. 366.
[56] Robert L. Kelly, "Penitence as a Remedy for War in Malory's 'The Tale of the Death of Arthur,'" *Studies in Philology*, vol. 91, no. 2, 1994, p. 120.
[57] Raluca Radulescu, "Malory and Fifteenth-Century Political Ideas," *Arthuriana*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2003, p. 45.
[58] P.J.C. Field, "The Malory Life-Records," *A Companion to Malory*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, D.S. Brewer, 1996, p. 115.

After he was released in 1462, he followed the Earl of Warwick to Northumberland under the banner of Edward IV to fight against the Franco-Scottish army. Later, after the Earl of Warwick defected to the Lancastrians, Malory followed.[59] He was eventually imprisoned in Newgate Prison, and he was denied at least four pardons under Edward IV.[60] It was during his time in Newgate, as a knight prisoner that he writes *Le Morte d'Arthur*, asking for God to send him "good delyveraunce" from his imprisonment (p. 726, ln 17). While Malory's criminal activities cannot be definitively marked as politically motivated or even ordered by the Earl of Warwick (e.g. Buckingham conspiracy), it does situate him within the context of the larger nobility. If his actual political beliefs influenced his writing, then his association with Warwick may also help to explain Malory's shifting allegiances.

Several scholars have attempted to situate Malory's work within the context of specific fifteenth-century politics. For instance, Robert Kelly argues that Malory's work serves as "propaganda for the Lancastrian view of Anglo-French relations."[61] However, as Radulescu argues, there is not enough textual evidence to support a clear vision of Malory's political ideology, but the *Morte d'Arthur* does reflect "anxieties over the contradictions present within Arthur's political system."[62] Like Radulescu, I view Malory's work, at least in part, as an expression of political anxieties rather than reading the text as exhibiting Pro-York or Pro-Lancastrian sentiments. But even more than just an expression of political anxieties, Malory's work attempts to overcome these fifteenth-century political divisions through an Arthurian vision

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[59] The 16th Earl of Warwick was Richard Neville (a.k.a "The Kingmaker"). This is the same notable Neville family that rose to power in the Welsh Marches during the fourteenth century. Malory allegedly became involved in a plot with Richard Neville to overthrow Neville's cousin, Edward IV. Richard Neville also feuded with the Duke of Buckingham, Humphrey Stafford (1402-1460), who had a contentious relationship with Malory in the Midlands. Stafford personally arrested Malory on July 25, 1451.

[60] Malory, *Works*, pp. v-vi.

[61] Kelly, "Penitence," p. 135.

[62] Radulescu, "Malory," p. 37.

of imperial authority, or in this case, the "right" of English kings to conquer territory and peoples that extends above and beyond the normal lines of succession. This concept may be significant considering the male candidates for succession from both the York and Lancastrian families were eliminated through the Wars of the Roses.

*Establishing a Universal Empire: Arthur as Holy Roman Emperor*

While Malory retains much of the same narrative as his source material, *AMA*, his changes transforms the "Arthur and King Lucius" section from one of building imperial tragedy to one of the most glorious events of King Arthur's reign. Malory, following the structure of the Vulgate Cycle, repositions the Roman War to an earlier moment in the Arthurian mythos.[63] The earlier narrative timeframe allows for the fall of the Round Table not to be attributed to Arthur's imperial conquests and over-reach in Europe, but instead, attributed to the cultural and political internal divisions between Arthur's knights. The tale begins by recounting military successes, and highlighting the role of Lancelot:

> Hyt befelle when kyng Arthur had wedded quene Gwenyvere and fulfylled the Rounde
>
> Table, and so aftir his mervelous knyghtis and he had venquyshed the moste party of his
>
> enemys, than sone aftir com sir Lancelot de Lake unto the courte, and sir Trystrams come
>
> that tyme also, and than kyng Arthur helde a ryal feeste and Table Rounde."
>
> (p.113, ln 1-5)

> [It befell when King Arthur had wedded Queen Guenevere and fulfilled the Round Table,
> and so after his marvelous knights and he had vanquished most of his enemies, then soon
> after came Sir Lancelot de Lake unto the court, and Sir Tristram come that time also, and
> then King Arthur held a royal feast and Round Table]

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[63] Catherine Nall, "Malory's 'Morte Darthur' and the Rhetoric of War," *Medium Aevum*, vol. 79, no. 2, 2010, p. 208. Ralph Norris attributes the repositioning of "The Tale of Arthur and Lucius" to the influence of the Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* as a minor source. For more on this, see Ralph Norris, *Malory's Library: The Sources of the Morte Darthur*, D.S. Brewer, 2008, p. 54.

The opening lines depict a joyous Arthurian court in which Arthur has defeated most of his foes, minus the upcoming conflict with the Romans. What we see here is a similar pattern of ethnic solidarity that we have in *AMA* with an increased focus on individual knights. Of course, this results in part from a shift in genre from chronicle to romance, but Malory continues to emphasize ethnic and cultural differences. Malory elevates Lancelot in the English tradition from a side-character to taking a leading role—an important change needed to develop his character for the rising internal conflict in the final section of the *Morte*. More importantly, however, both Lancelot and Tristram represent the regionally diverse body of Arthur's knights. Lancelot is from Guyenne and Tristram hails from Cornwall. Just as *AMA* emphasizes Arthur's knights heralding from diverse realms, Malory establishes them as "the beste peple of fyftene realmys" (p. 115, ln. 32). The empire unites knights from different realms with the shared goal of defeating their Roman enemies. Kenneth Hodges argues that "'Arthur and Lucius' is nationalistic in the sense that it celebrates a collective English enterprise, headed and personified by a king, backed by a united group of knights who win glory and land on the continent."[64] Hodges's emphasis on "glory and land" is particularly important for considering the shifting imagined ethnoscape. United under the ideals of English chivalry, the knights seek to reclaim a territory that holds religious and cultural significance. In other words, Rome functions, as it does in other iterations of the tale, as a site of memory that plays an important role in the development of English national identity.

Something unique to Malory's account of the tale is that Arthur's reign is cast in a more positive light, as Arthur places two regents in charge of Britain before going off to war with

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[64] Kenneth Hodges, *Forging Chivalric Communities in Malory's Le Morte Darthur*, Palgrave Macmillian, 2005, p. 15.

Rome. Arthur assigns "two chyfftaynes, that was sir Baudwen of Bretayne, an auncient and honorable knight, for to counceyle and comforte; sir Cadore of Cornuayle, that was at the tyme called sir Constantyne, that aftir was kynge aftir Arthurs dayes" [Two chieftains [regents], that were Baldwin of Britain, an ancient and honorable knight, for to council and comfort; Sir Cadore of Cornwall, that was at the time called Sir Constantine, that after was king after Arthur's days] (p. 117, ln 44). By placing two regents in charge of Britain, Arthur's poor decision to make Mordred regent, as he does in *AMA*, is deferred. Constantine, as discussed in the *AMA* section, was a Briton on his mother's side (through Helen). Thus, Arthur's decision to elevate Constantine to not only that of inheritor of the crown but also regent, shows Arthur as a master strategist, rather than a passive figure of an unfortunate fate. We might also consider the pseudo-historical depiction of Constantine in the fifteenth century. As Lynch has shown, Constantine's inclusion as a "British" Emperor was used in fifteenth-century stained glass windows alongside Arthur in imperial garb and images of Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI. Such images were an attempt to "exalt the Lancastrian dynasty through association with famed rulers of the past."[65] While this should not be regarded as any specific evidence of Malory's political ideology, it does reflect an appropriation of Arthurian mythos as a form of political propaganda.

While the narrative of the Round Table's knights in conflict with Lucius (and his Saracen allies) mirrors that of *AMA*, Malory's ending to the "Arthur and Lucius" marks a dramatic turn from the original narrative. Here, Malory must delicately deal with Arthur's taking of Rome. As Dorsey Armstrong argues,

> [. . .] the memory of the historical Roman empire is held in balance and simultaneously
> alongside a vision of Rome that is a fantastic land of giants and ogres. This center of the

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[65] Lynch, "Imperial Arthur," p. 176.

Christian world in Europe exists in what postcolonial scholars might term a 'hybrid'

state, an 'impossible simultaneity: In which Rome is both Christian and non-Christian,

central to medieval European identity but marginal to it in the description of the exotic

behavior and allies of the secular emperor Lucius.'[66]

Armstrong's passage here is important in acknowledging the existence of two contradictory

representations of Rome. To place it in my own ethno-symbolic terms, Malory must contend

with two different depictions of the Roman ethnoscape simultaneously—both the memory of the

real historical Rome and the one as imagined romance landscape of a Roman empire corrupted

by Eastern influence. Once Lucius and his Saracen allies are defeated, the role of Emperor

allows a space for Arthur to be depicted as a healer of the greater Christian empire. In other

words, Arthur restores the integrity of a Roman ethnic landscape as defined by Christian values.

*Internal Divisions: Guyenne and Orkney*

Despite Arthur becoming the Holy Roman Emperor with a divine right to rule, the

internal ethnic divisions of Arthur's knights tear apart his empire from within. As many other

fifteenth-century writers, Malory incorporates internal division as an important motif. We might

take for instance, John Lydgate's *Serpent of Division* (1422) in which he recounts the life of

Julius Caesar. He states that Rome falls "also sone as fals covitise brought Inne pride and vayne

ambicion.'[67] The "serpent of division," in this case referring to the Roman Senate, is blamed for

their greed, pride, and lack of loyalty to Caesar. This indictment conjures images of the English

royal council in Lydgate's own fifteenth-century context. The War of the Roses brought about

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[66] Armstrong, "Trudging Toward Rome," p. 115.
[67] *John Lydgate's Serpent of Division*, edited by H. N. MacCracken, Oxford University Press, 1911, p.49. For another example of late medieval internal divisions see George Ashby's *Active Policy of a Prince (*1460s).

unstable loyalties, conflicting claims to the throne, and the occasional propensity of noble families to exploit the chaos of civil war for personal or political gain, such as the Earl of Warwick's rebellion against King Edward IV (1469-1471).  In *Le Morte d'Arthur* the most serious threat to Arthur comes from those knights closest to him.  Malory exhibits this division before Mordred's usurpation of the throne through the characters of Lancelot and Gawain.  I argue here that Lancelot and Gawain's ethnic backgrounds are not as simple as they first may seem.  Through Lancelot and Gawain, Malory exposes the problem of clashing loyalties due to hybrid ethnic identities.

Traditionally, scholars have viewed Lancelot as explicitly French and Gawain as Scottish; however, these characters are inherently more complex and are in fact representative of hybrid regional identities.  Lynch refers to Lancelot as "the king of most of France" stating that "Arthur finally wages war on him there like a contemporary English campaigner."[68]  Similarly, Kelly argues that Arthur's "ill-conceived war" against Lancelot serves as an implicit criticism of Edward IV's invasion of France, thereby serving as Lancastrian propaganda.[69]  However, viewing Lancelot as strictly French is anachronistic and oversimplifies France in the Late Middle Ages.  Malory states that "And so [Lancelot's men] shypped at Cardyff, and sayled unto Benwyke: som men calle hit Bayan and some men calle hit Beawme, where the wyne of Beawme ys" [And so they set sail at Cardiff, and sailed to Benwick: some men call it Bayonne and some men call it Bommes, where the kinsman of Beaune is (p. 669, ln. 19-21).  Malory means to say that those who refer to Benwick as Beaune (a city in Burgundy) do so in error; instead, Lancelot and his kinsmen sail to Bayonne, a city in southwestern France near the Atlantic coastline.  Lancelot then comes from Guyenne.  Dictated by the Treaty of Brétigny in

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[68] Lynch, "Imperial Arthur," p. 175.
[69] Kelly, "Penitence," p. 134-5.

1360, King Edward III had full sovereignty of Guyenne, in addition to Saintonge, Poitou,

Angoumois, Gascony and the Channel Islands, Bigorre, Quercy, Périgord, Gaure and the

Agenais, Pontieu, Calais, and the county of Guines.[70]  In 1451, it was re-conquered by Charles

VII.  By the time of Malory's composition of the *Morte*, Guyenne had switched hands from the

English back to the French at the end of the Hundred Years War.  We might read Guyenne then,

as Hodges does, with "varying degrees of Frenchness and Englishness."[71]  If we read Lancelot's

character as any kind of fifteenth century political commentary, which we should at least to some

degree given Malory's choice to make Lancelot lord of Guyenne, it can be said that he represents

an anxiety of English territorial loss.

Examining Malory's fifteenth-century work in conjunction with the larger Arthurian

mythos canon, we can see how Malory critiques the very type of imperial model that was once

celebrated in earlier Arthurian literature.  Malory goes to great lengths to stress that the loss of

territory and allies is not due to an external "othered" threat as it is in *AMA*, but instead, an

internal one.  As Hodges notes, despite the English losses of French territories with Lancelot's

betrayal, the fall of Arthur's Round Table does not begin overseas fighting the French, but

instead, take place at the Anglo-Scottish border.  Lancelot then flees to the Joyous Gard in

northeast England after rescuing Guenevere, and it is there that the Arthur and Gawain first lay

siege against Lancelot.[72] At Carlisle, Mordred and Aggravain expose Guenevere's adultery with

Lancelot.  Mordred gathers twelve knights:

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[70] John Le Patourel, "The Treaty of Brétigny, 1360," *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 10, Cambridge UP, 1960, p. 24.

[71] Kenneth Hodges, "Why Malory's Lancelot is Not French: Region, Nation, and Political Identity," *Mapping Malory: Regional Identities and National Geographies in Le Morte Darthur*, edited by Dorsey Armstrong and Kenneth Hodges, Palgrave, 2014, p. 136.

[72] The Joyous Gard was formerly titled Dolorous Gard due to an evil enchantment before being broken by Lancelot. The Vulgate cycle places the Joyous Gard in Humber, but the English tradition moves it to a site in Northumberland. Malory identifies it with Bamburgh Castle.

And these were their namys: sir Collgrevaunce, sir Mador de la Porte, sir Gyngalyne, sir
Mellyot de Logris, sir Petipace of Wynchylsé, sir Galleron of Galoway, sir Melyon de la
Mountayne, sir Ascomore, sir Gromoresom Erioure, sir Curselayne, sir Florence, and sir
Lovell. So these twelve knyghtes were with sir Mordred and sir Aggravayne, and all they
were of Scotlonde, other ellis sir Gawaunes kynne, other [well]-wyllers to hys brothir"

. . . all of them were from Scotland, or else sir Gawain's kin, otherwise (p.675, ln 11-
20).[73]

Malory takes careful note that all of them are Scottish, Gawain's kin, or other supporters of

Aggravain. While Malory's Arthur first faced rebellion against Lot and the northern lords, by

the end of the narrative, the Orcadians and Scots aid Arthur "against the treason of his

continental knights."[74] Here we see the once-othered foreigners, the Orcadians and the Scots,

now making up the political center. However, by adopting an imperial model of conquering

enemies and converting them to his cause, the knights of Arthur's Round Table still bring with

them their underlying rivalries and allegiances.

These underlying rivalries and allegiances are also concentrated in Gawain's hybrid

ethnic identity. Just as Lancelot functions as a character who is both French / English with

shifting cultural and political borders of Guyenne, Malory makes Gawain contain an Orcadian

identity, rather than being identified as strictly Scottish by recounting a version of the Arthurian

mythos where King Lot, Gawain's father, dies as an enemy of King Arthur. Because of this,

Gawain's character trajectory sees him transition from a son of a perceived traitor to one of

Arthur's most trusted kinsmen and allies. In doing so, Malory removes the reflected tension of

[73] We might make note that Sir Galeron of Galloway, a Scottish knight who kneels to Arthur in *Awntyrs*, is listed
here among Mordred's fellow conspirators.
[74] Kenneth Hodges, "Sir Gawain, Scotland, and Orkney," *Mapping Malory: Regional Identities and National
Geographies in Le Morte Darthur*, edited by Dorsey Armstrong and Kenneth Hodges, Palgrave, 2014, p. 94.

the cultural memory in which the Scots were allied with the French during the Hundred Years

War, along with the rebellions of the Scots, such as that of Owain Glyndwr at the turn of the

century.  As Hodges notes, another reason for emphasizing Gawain's Orcadian history was to

navigate around Scottish claims to the English throne:

> In the fifteenth century, King Arthur was popular among Scottish kings, and Scottish
>
> authors began reshaping the legend to suite nationalistic purposes.  The irregularities of
>
> Arthur's conception and birth cast doubts on his legitimacy, raising the possibility that
>
> the true heir was Anna, Arthur's aunt or sister, marred to Lot(h).  If she were heir, then
>
> Gawain, Mordred and their brothers might have a stronger claim to the English throne
>
> than Arthur did . . .  If Gawain is Scottish (and his father Lot as king of Lothian clearly
>
> is), then this would mean the crown of England should properly have passed to Scotland
>
> and had been usurped by the southern Arthur.[75]

Just as England had a history of using the Arthurian mythos as political propaganda, as Edward I

and Edward III regularly did, the Scots saw the potential to use the same mythos to justify their

own claim to the British Isles.  By making King Lot die a traitor and Gawain failing to inherit

Lothian, Malory engages in (at least partially) a sense of Scottish cultural erasure.  For a fifteenth

century audience, Orkney's contested cultural background made Gawain's cultural identity even

more ambiguous.  Orkney had a long history of Norwegian rule beginning in the 8th century, and

it was not until the late fifteenth century that Orkney became part of the Kingdom of Scotland.[76]

Gawain's hybrid cultural background as both Scottish / Norwegian or Scottish / English

typically make him an effective negotiator between multiple ethnies, as he does in multiple

borderland romances; however, in Malory, Gawain turns to a personal vendetta at the cost of

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[75] Hodges, "Sir Gawain," p. 77

[76] Hodges, "Sir Gawain," p. 79.

failing to uphold his status as a cultural mediator. Initially, Gawain attempts to dissuade his brothers, Aggravain and Mordred, from telling Arthur of Guenevere's affair with Lancelot:

> "Nat be my counceyle,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'for, and there aryse warre and weake betwyxte sir Launcelot [and us], wyte you well, brothir, there woll many kynges and grete lordis holde with sir Launcelot. Also, brothir, sir Aggravayne,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'ye must remember how oftyntymes sir Launcelot hath rescowed the kynge and the quene; and the beste of us all had bene full colde at the harte-roote had not sir Launcelot bene bettir than we, and that hathe he preved hymselff full ofte." (p. 674, ln. 33-40)

> ["I do not counsel it," said sir Gawain, "for there will make war and weakness between sir Lancelot and us. Witness you well brother, there are many kings and great Lords faithful to sir Lancelot. Also, brother, sir Aggravain," said sir Gawain, "you must remember how many times sir Lancelot has rescued the king and queen; and the best of us all would have died had not sir Lancelot been better than we, and he has proved himself completely often."]

Gawain counsels against his brothers' intended actions based on Lancelot's personal and military strength. He also knows that acting against Lancelot will strain the relationship between the Orkney clan and Arthur. Gawain removes himself from the initial actions of Aggravain and Mordred, and he even tells Arthur their deaths were deserved (p. 683, ln 15-20), but he acts once Lancelot accidently slays his unarmed brothers, Gareth and Gaheris. Arthur appears to know Gawain's reaction before Gawain is even informed of Gareth's death, bidding that no one tell Gawain of sir Gareth's death, lest Gawain "go nygh oute of hys mynde" [go nearly out of his mind] (p.685, ln. 17). Despite, Arthur being willing to reconcile with Lancelot and take back his queen, Gawain convinces Arthur and his knights to pursue the "false recrayed knyght" [false recreant (i.e. unfaithful) knight] (p. 690, ln. 4). Even with Gawain's pledged loyalty to Arthur, his brothers' deaths cause him to seek vengeance and push Arthur to initiate a civil war.

Although Arthur is the Holy Roman Emperor and seeks to solidify his empire through a cohesive Christian ethnoscape, Arthur seems to abandon his role as divine ruler, instead sliding back into his past role as warmongering king.  This becomes evident when the Pope intervenes in the war between Arthur and Lancelot: "So thys warre that was between kynge Arthure and sir Launcelot hit was noysed thorow all Crystyn realmys, and so hit cam at laste by relacion unto the Pope" [So this war that was between king Arthur and sir Lancelot was known throughout all Christian realms, and so it came at last by report to the Pope] (p. 692, ln 24-26).  While Arthur adheres to the Pope's advice insofar as he observes a truce with Lancelot and accepts Lancelot's return of Guenevere, Lancelot's reconciliation is ultimately denied.  Lancelot offers to perform penance for the deaths of Gaheris and Gareth by walking barefoot and founding religious houses every ten miles (p. 696, ln 12-25).  Unpersuaded by Lancelot's plea, Gawain convinces Arthur to pursue Lancelot across the English Channel.  However, in contrast to Arthur's conquering of Rome, Arthur's cause does not follow the Roman notion of *translatio imperii* for any divine purpose instead engaging in civil war for Gawain's personal vengeance.

The conflict overseas fatigues the people of Arthur's kingdom, causing people to turn to Mordred as an alternative form of governance.  Mordred writes to all the baronies in the land, drawing many supporters: "And muche people drew unto hym; for than was the comyn voye amonge them that with kynge Arthur was never other lyff but warre and stryff, and with sire Mordrede was gete joy and blysse" [And many people drew onto him for then was the common voice among them that with King Arthur was never any other life but war and strife, and with sir Mordred was great joy and bliss] (p.708, ln. 27-30).  Malory goes on to make major changes to the list of Mordred's supporters: "Than sir Mordred arraysed muche people aboute London, for they of Kente, Southsex and Surrey, Esax, Suffolke and Northefolk helde the moste party with

sir Mordred.  And many a full noble knight drew unto hym and also [to] the kynge; but they that

loved sir Launcelot drew unto sir Mordred" [Then sir Mordred mustered people of London, for

they were from Kent, Sussex and Surrey, Essex, Suffolk and Northfolk made up most of

Mordred's army.  And many full noble knights drew onto him and also to the king; but they that

loved sir Launcelot drew onto sir Mordred] (p.711, ln 14-18).  Whereas Mordred's allies in *AMA*

consist of Danes, Saracens, Saxons, and other outsiders, in *Le Morte d'Arthur,* Mordred's allies

namely members of the English political center.  In re-writing Mordred's rebellion as a civil war,

Malory presents Arthur's empire and internal conflict as a reflection of 15th century politics.

However, the most important take-away here is that this internal conflict is intensified by the

presence of ever more complicated ethnic identities.  Lancelot, Gawain, and Mordred are all

culturally hybrid knights representing personal and political anxieties, broken ties of loyalty, and

territorial loss.

### III. The Roman Shadow of Empire

Examining the shifting ethnoscapes of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* in conjunction with

the *Alliterative Morte* unveils a changing mentality toward social and cultural cohesion from the

fourteenth to the fifteenth century.  For the poet of *AMA*, despite Arthur's perceived success in

uniting the British Isles, his authority is overshadowed by Lucius and the Romans who seek to

control him.  Arthur claims legitimacy through the Roman lineage of Constantine III (Uther

Pendragon's father), while Lucius is seen as a usurper with foreign, alien ties.  The need to

conquer and expand his kingdom, this Roman notion of *translation imperii*, dictates Arthur's

desire for control of the British Isles and beyond.  However, he never escapes Rome's shadow

and fails to conquer Rome; instead, he returns home to thwart Mordred's seizure of the throne.

On the other hand, Malory's Arthur conquers Rome and becomes the Holy Roman Emperor.

Despite the supposed cohesion of a Christian empire, Arthur falls prey to internal dissension among the English and their allies—a point that Malory emphasizes by focusing on opposing regional loyalties, including those of Guyenne, Orkney, and even the split of the English political center itself.

What we observe in both *AMA* and *Malory* is a pattern of a seeming ethnic solidarity followed by internal division and imperial loss. However, the reasons for these divisions and the way in which they manifest in the narrative differ. In *AMA*, Arthur's imperial campaign against the Roman's leaves his kingdom to be influenced by Mordred and his outsider allies. For Malory, Arthur is crowned Holy Roman Emperor, but his kingdom is vulnerable to the divisions of political insiders. Malory moves the boundaries of the foundational concepts of England. England is no longer indebted to its Roman heritage, but instead, has found its home in an international array of lineages. Although Malory would not see the conclusion of the internal dissension of War of the Roses, his work reflects 15th century political and cultural anxieties, portraying a new ethnically diverse imperial reality—a reality that would later give way to the identity of the early England nation.

Conclusion

*"Fer floten fro his frendez, femedly he rydez."*

[Wandering far from his friends, he rides as a stranger]

*– Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ln 713

I return to *Gawain and the Green Knight*, not only as the starting place of my research, but also to reflect on what it truly means to *wander*. Gawain's journey into the foreign wilderness of Wirral and progression into the Anglo-Welsh borderland depicts a quintessential example of the *wandering* romance motif. Wandering, however, does not need to be without purpose. Gawain has a goal in mind—to meet the Green Knight's challenge—even if he does not know the means by which he will achieve his goal. Of course, he does survive the beheading game. In doing so, he removes himself from the public codes of Arthur's court and immerses himself in the hybrid culture of Bertilak's Marcher Lordship. In the end, he unknowingly brings the girdle back to court as a symbol of an evolving new English ethnic identity. In many ways, these Arthurian texts function in the same way. Navigating the problems of the contemporary world within the strange, foreign space of fantasy allows for this type of identity play. These poets may have had a specific political or cultural agenda in the act of writing such a piece but wandering narrative digressions along the way often reveal much more important insight into *what it means to be English*.

This wandering reveals the messy nature of these Matter of Britain texts. These narratives of Arthurian empire invoke an imperial temporality that re-shapes and re-envisions imperial relations in the past, present, and future. Yet, this re-imagining of colonial relations builds this narrative on an unstable foundation of historical and cultural realities. The reality of late medieval imperialism is that clear, delineated lines between cultures and peoples on the

British Isles did not always exist, despite the insistence of national narratives propagated by the

English elite.  Nowhere is this more apparent than in the borderland, a liminal space where ethnic

identities (and often loyalties) were constantly in a state of flux.  Borderland identities, whether

fictional (such as Galeron or the Carle of Carlisle) or historical (such as the Neville family or

even the *Gawain*-poet himself), exist as culturally hybrid figures whose personal identities are

continually re-defined and re-negotiated.

In considering the larger impact of this work on the theoretical framework of nationalism,

we might return to Smith's claim that only from the late-fifteenth century can we "begin to speak

confidently of a growing sense, among the élites at least, of an English *national identity*."[1]  In

reflecting on my research, it seems clear to me that Smith's claim of a growing national identity

only in the late-fifteenth century is an overly conservative dating.  Monmouth's *Historia* and

other chronicles begin to establish a pseudo-historical foundation on which to build a cultural

mythos in the twelfth century.  I would argue that by the time the Matter of Britain romances

appear in the vernacular in the late fourteenth / early fifteenth century, a *developing* English

national identity is apparent.  English writers, while still beholden to their numerous

predecessors (colonial peoples and their conquerors), present new concerns of empire and nation

building.  The Matter of Britain questions practices of cultural assimilation, territorial conquest,

and blind allegiance.

Within an even broader context, this research exists within critical dialogues of

nationalism, empire, race, and ethnicity.  Scholars such as Ingham, Heng, Warren, Cohen, Schiff,

and others have taken numerous avenues into discussing concepts of the nation in medieval

romance.  What strikes me as particularly unique about combining the modern theoretical lenses

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[1] See p.14, n. 28 above.

of ethno-symbolism and imperial studies is its ability to tell us something new about the way in which late medieval romance explores issues of personal and collective identity. Romance, as I have defined it here, exists as much more than a group of narrative motifs. Rather, it engages in often subversive cultural dialogues that attempt to grasp cultural difference, peripheral spaces, and acts of political dissention. Romance is distinct from other medieval genres in its ability to deconstruct, and at times reassemble, the cultural mythos that works to define collective identity—*what it means to be English*. However, this sense of collective identity within temporal and spatial constructs differs greatly, whether that be due to regional-specific contexts, such as that of Cheshire as a hybrid space of inter-mixed English and Welsh heritage, or historical-specific contexts such as the inner political and cultural turmoil surrounding the fifteenth-century War of the Roses.

Within our current world political climate, what we really gain here by complicating issues of national identity is an ability to subvert white nationalist appropriations of medieval symbols, traditions, and culture. In no way does this exonerate the explicit or implicit colonial oppression enacted upon racial and ethnic minority groups of the Middle Ages. What it does do, however, is deconstruct the false narrative of a predominately white, English sense of purity in the Middle Ages. Despite assertions of imagined ethnic solidarity, using an ethno-symbolic lens reveals that the English have never been and never will be ethnically or racially "pure." In many ways, English culture exists as a hybrid established through an assemblage of Anglo-Saxon, Roman, Norman-French, Welsh, and Scottish influences. These inherently white identities also came into constant contact with other non-white identities, such as the Saracen allies of Emperor Lucius's Rome. Yet, these identities too are often never far from the cultural center. An examination of these texts makes it clear that especially in a late fourteenth, early fifteenth

century context the true threat to solidarity is not the racial or ethnic other, but instead, the toxic

climate that fosters hate and violence within the cultural and political center of the empire.

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