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Threatening the Body Politic from the Inside:

Eloquence and Falsehood in John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes**

Tatsuya Nii

John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* (c. 1421–22) is often read as a didactic poem that conveys the virtue of prudence, which is said to be accomplished by means of eloquence.¹ In the poem, eloquence is thought to bring forth peace and amity, which is contrasted with the violence of the Theban War. Speaking of the ways of bringing a country under rule, Lydgate refers to both eloquence and violence, which are represented by Mercury's harp and Mars's sword respectively, and he ostensibly affirms that the former is preferable to the latter:

Wherfor me seme mor is Fortunat
Of Mercurye e sootë sugred harpe
Than Mars swerd whetted kene and sharpe,
Mor accepted wi asspectis goode
Than is this god with his lokës woode. (*Siege*, 272–76)²

The idea of situating eloquence in opposition to violence is thought to be derived from the Ciceronian tradition of rhetoric and, to some extent at least, Lydgate's praise of eloquence and his abjuration of violence may be seen as an outcome of this tradition.³ The *Siege of Thebes*, however, betrays the fact that eloquence cannot always be idealised in contrast to violence. In other words, the eloquent speeches described in the poem turn out to be more or less harmful in their own right. The present paper argues that the eloquence is associated with such problems in the poem by focusing on how Lydgate describes the body politic of Thebes. The descriptions of the body politic are focused on here because Ciceronian eloquence is

fundamentally engaged with the unification of a state and, as will be discussed later, in the poem such descriptions represent the state as unified by eloquence.

The history of Thebes, as retold by Lydgate, begins with the mythic triumph of eloquence over violence. Amphion, the legendary founder of Thebes, uses his silver-tongued speech to lead his people to build the walls surrounding the city:

Wher-by He [Amphion] made the contrès envyrour
To han such lust in his wordës swete,
That were so plesaunt faourable, and mete
In her Eerys that shortly ther was noon
Disobeyaunt with the kyng to goon,
Wher so euere that hym list assigne. (*Siege*, 228–33)

This episode of wall building, which roughly follows Boccaccio's account in *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*, one of the sources used by Lydgate, symbolically illustrates the unification of Thebes under the sway of Amphion.⁴ Lydgate emphasises the fact that Amphion ensures the construction of the walls using only his words, without needing to resort to force: '[Amphion] byltë Thebës be his elloquence | Mor than of Pride or of violence' (*Siege*, 287–88). This contrast between eloquence and violence echoes the Ciceronian discourse on eloquence. Cicero demonstrates in his *De inventione* that eloquence can unify a society, arguing that, during the primitive age, when humans lived a savage life, society must have been governed by a ruler who persuaded others to renounce force, as well as to comply with righteousness, by means of his eloquence:

[T]here was a time when men wandered at large in the fields like animals and lived on wild fare [. . .] when through reason and eloquence they had listened with greater attention, he [a great and wise man] transformed them from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk. [. . .] Certainly only a speech at the same time powerful and entrancing could have induced one who had great physical strength to submit to justice without violence[.]⁵

Eloquence was thus idealised as a method for persuading others and, ultimately, for constructing a unified society.⁶

The constructed nation of Thebes is presented in the form of a body politic. Generally speaking, in relation to the idea of a body politic, the whole nation is understood to be like the physical entity of a man, with each social estate within the nation being compared to each member or organ of the body.⁷ As Amphion does not arrogantly oppress his subjects, he is likened to the head, which does not despise its feet:

And ageyn kynde it is out of doute,
That eny hed be recorde of the wyse,
Shuld the foot of disdeyn despise
Which bere hym vp, who so can takē hede,
And Susteneth in his mostē nede
As his Pylar and his sowpowayle. (*Siege*, 262–67)

The ordered state of Amphion's Thebes is described as a wholesome body politic, in which the head, that is, the seat of reason, is obeyed and supported by the other members. Additionally, as Thebes is united by Amphion's eloquence, its body politic can be seen as an embodiment of the Ciceronian ideal of eloquence.

However, it might be rather hasty to construe Lydgate's depictions of the body politic of Amphion's Thebes as simply representations of the ideal political state, in which eloquence overcomes violence, since, in Lydgate's other texts written almost contemporaneously with the *Siege of Thebes*, the bodies politic are not free from security risks without having to resort to violence or, at least, other means of elimination. Take, for example, *A Defence of Holy Church* (c. 1414), wherein Lydgate cites an episode from the Old Testament (2 Samuel 5. 6–9) in which David, as a new king, enters and reforms Jerusalem, which is being menaced by the faithless. David eliminates such enemies from the city:

And thynke how Daudid ageyn Iebusee,
When that he fouht, in Regum as I fynde,
How he made voide from Syon his Citee

Unwedy, crokid, both lame and blynde[.] (85–88)⁸

David's enemies are depicted as being, whether literally or figuratively, physically impaired ('Unwedy, crokid, both lame and blynde'), which presumably indicates the originally unsound state of the body politic of Jerusalem.⁹ By forcefully purging them from the city, David reclaims the healthy body politic. Likewise, in the *Troy Book* (1412–20), a purge is necessary for the Trojan body politic if it is to be kept in a good condition, although it is not so clearly related to violence as the situation in *A Defence of Holy Church*. Reconstructed by Priam after its initial destruction, Troy is described as being like a human body, with the drainage system removing the filth from the city:

oru3 condut pipis, large & wyde with-al,
By certeyn meatis artificial,
at it made a ful purgacioun
Of al ordure & fyl es in e toun,
Waschyng e stretys as ei stod a rowe,
And e goteris in e er e lowe,
Pat in þe cite was no filþe sene[.] (ll. 747–53)¹⁰

Carole Rawcliffe points out that these lines reflect the idea of an urban body politic during the Late Middle Ages.¹¹ At the time, it was considered vital for rulers to cleanse cities because sewage and miasma were thought to result in plagues. In this case, the body politic of Troy represents an idealised version of the city, which is kept safe from such sanitation problems by Priam's rule: 'Wher-by þe toun was outterly assured | From engenderyng of al corrupcioun, | From wikked eyr & from infeccioun, | Pat causyn ofte by her violence | Mortalite and gret pestilence' (ll. 760–64). Thus, in Lydgate's other works, written just before the *Siege of Thebes*, the representations of bodies politic illustrate just how significant it is for rulers to expunge risks in order to maintain social order within their realms.¹²

Probably, the body politic was a convenient literary device used by Lydgate to illustrate the necessity of such social exclusions. As a kind of physical metaphor, the idea of the body politic can be considered to depend on the principle of intelligibility, which Judith But-

ler formulates in terms of the materiality of the body, considering the Aristotelian definition of matter: ‘to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what “matters” about that body, its very intelligibility’.¹³ When imagined to be like material bodies, bodies politic seem to exist as intelligible entities, of which the intelligibility stands for their interpretability as representations that convey their normative regimes as moral or political lessons. Conversely, anything that stands in opposition to such regimes must be violently excluded and kept ‘outside’ of such entities.¹⁴ In this sense, it can be argued that Lydgate’s representations of the body politic, as discussed above, signify the binary oppositions that exist between inside and outside, for example, the opposition between the faithful and the faithless in *A Defence of Holy Church* and the opposition between the healthy and the unhealthy in the *Troy Book*. The outsides in these cases, however, are subject to the normative regimes of the bodies politic inasmuch as they serve to demarcate the insides. By deliberately opposing those who remain outside of the body politic, monarchs can claim the legitimacy needed to unify the insides.¹⁵

Unlike the above-mentioned examples, Amphion’s Thebes seemingly does not face any risk of being purged. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Amphion is not at all connected with violence. Rather, a process of purging is certainly referred to in the poem, although its violence is carefully concealed. Lydgate relates another history regarding the foundation of Thebes, thereby digressing from the main plot concerning Amphion. According to the alternative history, it is not Amphion but rather Cadmus who first built the city: ‘But sothly 3it Some expositours, | Groundyng hem vpon olde auctours, | Seyn that Cadmys the famous olde man, | Ful longe afor this Citè first began’ (*Siege*, 293–96). This allusion to Cadmus is remarkable not only because it questions the reliability of Amphion’s foundation story but also because it hints at Amphion’s use of violence. In this account, Amphion arrives after Cadmus and then expels him from the city:

But Cadmus ther hath longe not sojourned,
lik in Story as it is compyled;
For shortly he from thennys was exiled,
Neuer after to dwellen in this toun,
Be the *knyghthode* of this Amphioun[.] (*Siege*, 306–10; emphasis added)

At this point, Amphion is not presented as a peaceful and highly eloquent king but rather as an illegitimate usurper of the crown. Moreover, as the word ‘knyghthode’ reveals, Amphion uses force to exile Cadmus.¹⁶ This usurpation casts a dark shadow over the moral superiority of eloquence when compared to violence, which is exemplified by Amphion’s harmonious foundation of Thebes. In other words, the moral interpretation of the body politic of Amphion’s Thebes can be subversively destabilised by this subplot regarding Cadmus’s exile. The body politic in this poem differs from those described in *A Defence of Holy Church* and the *Troy Book* in that it embodies the idea of prudence through the example of Amphion’s distinguished eloquence. As discussed above, except for the *Siege of Thebes*, Lydgate’s representations of the body politic demonstrate the significance of purging risks from the realm. However, in this poem, such a solution, which could be accompanied by force, cannot be overtly associated with Amphion, since eloquence is idealised in opposition to violence. As a consequence, the subplot concerning Cadmus is abruptly concluded with a brief remark reaffirming that Amphion is the founder of Thebes, as if to retract the allusion to his savage usurpation: ‘And now 3e knowē first how Amphyoun l Bylt and began this Cité and this toun’ (*Siege*, 325–26). Due to Amphion’s violence concealed in this way, the moral interpretation of his foundation narrative is narrowly defended. After all, Cadmus is not merely an outsider who is excluded from the body politic like those described in Lydgate’s other two works. Indeed, the episode of his exile appears to be an uninterpretable part of the body politic because it cannot be subsumed within the grand narrative of Lydgate’s Theban history, that is, within the opposition between eloquence and violence.

Oddly enough, Lydgate seems to have inserted the subplot concerning Cadmus by design despite his effort to later retract it. To be sure, it could be said that he is simply following his sources. It is certainly true that, when writing this part of the poem, he refers to Boccaccio’s *Genealogie*, wherein both Amphion and Cadmus appear. In *Genealogie*, however, many other figures are also mentioned alongside the two kings in the foundation story of Thebes, although Lydgate omits all of them from his version. For example, Zethus, a brother of Amphion, who aids his brother in usurping Cadmus’s throne in *Genealogie*, is not touched upon at all in the *Siege of Thebes*.¹⁷ Therefore, it could be maintained that Lydgate deliberately chose to insert the story of Cadmus into this poem.

Yet, why did Lydgate take the trouble to incorporate this ticklish subplot, which seems not only digressive, but perhaps even baffling? The reason behind his choice might be understood by considering that, as Butler suggests by quoting Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray, the outside produced by the exclusion can remain internal to the dominant regime and hence threaten it from the inside.¹⁸ From this perspective, Amphion's hidden violence, as indicated in the subplot, can be seen as an internal threat for the Theban body politic because it suggests that his apparently eloquence-based regime is false. At least, through the insertion of the subplot, Lydgate appears to cast doubts on the value of eloquence.

This interpretation may be corroborated by examining Lydgate's attitude towards eloquence in other parts of the poem. As Lee Paterson notes, in this poem Lydgate refers to two traditions of eloquence, namely the Ciceronian and the Chaucerian traditions.¹⁹ In some cases, Chaucerian language is applied to the aim of Ciceronian eloquence, that is, to persuade others. Adrastus, for instance, makes an effort to achieve peace by means of his oratory, which is replete with borrowings from Chaucer. When his army passes Nemea on their way to Thebes, the soldiers become thirsty. They are saved by Hypsipyle, who is nursing a son of Lycurgus, the king of Nemea, although the child is killed by a snake while she is telling the Greeks where to find water. In order to save her from punishment, Adrastus visits Lycurgus' palace and consoles him on his son's untimely death by delivering a speech. In this speech, he employs the metaphor of pilgrimage, which amplifies Egeus's words in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. Egeus compares human life to pilgrimage, and he stresses the mutability of this world: 'This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo, | And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro. | Death is an ende of every worldly soore.'²⁰ In a similar way, Adrastus emphasizes the transience of life and the worldly pains associated with it: 'And our lif her, who taketh hed ther-to, | Is but an exile and a pilgrymage, | Ful of torment and of bitter Rage' (*Siege*, 3418–20). He concludes his pessimistic observations with a consolatory commentary on the tragic death of Lycurgus's son: 'And who in 3outhē passeth þis passage, | he is eskapēd al the woodē Rage, | Al sorowe and trouble of this present lyff' (*Siege*, 3437–39). Although Adrastus succeeds in persuading Lycurgus not to punish Hypsipyle, it cannot be denied that his rhetoric arbitrarily shifts the focus from Hypsipyle's responsibility for the child's death to the transience of human life in general. In short, it falsely obscures the issues of justice and morality. Additionally, it can be suggested that Adrastus's speech is not necessarily wholly

successful. Drawing on Boccaccio's account, Lydgate relates how Hypsipyle, stung by her conscience, escapes from Nemea by herself:

For this autour afferme , out of dred
That, whan this child was by the serpent ded,
She durste not for her gret offence
Neuer after comen in presence
Of lygurgus, but of intencioun
Fledde anon out of that Regioun;
Att herte she took the childës deth so sore.
what fille of hir I fyndë can no more
Than 3e han herd aforne me specifye. (*Siege*, 3511–19)

This passage indicates that Adrastus actually fails to solve the essential aspect of the problem, that is, Hypsipyle's guilt over the child's death. His speech is, it could be said, merely a temporary measure that falsely conceals the violence and later results in another problem for her. This episode, hence, arguably reveals Lydgate's view of eloquence to a certain degree: eloquence is by definition expected to realise harmony in human society, although when it is used to deceive others, it can prove harmful.²¹ Along the same lines, Amphion's rule, which deceptively suppresses his violent past, can be considered to be charged with danger.

Moreover, Amphion seems relevant to the destruction of Thebes. In this poem, as Dominique Battles demonstrates, Amphion is elaborately connected with other Theban monarchs from later generations through a radical revision of the genealogy.²² At the end of the account of Amphion's foundation of the city, Lydgate begs his readers (or listeners) to permit him to omit the history that occurred between Amphion's reign and Layus' reign in order that he can proceed to the main subject of his tale, that is, the decline of Thebes:

Not tellyng here how the lynë Ran
From kyng to kyng be successioun,
Conveying doun e stok of Amphyoun
Cereously be lyneal discent[.] (*Siege*, 330–33)

Due to this omission of the family line, the genealogy of the dynasty is rendered rather misleading. Lydgate explains that the crown has been straightforwardly passed to Amphion's descendants until the time of Layus. However, as mentioned in Boccaccio's *Genealogie*, Layus is actually a son of Labdacus, a brother of Cadmus.²³ Lydgate, thus, presents Amphion rather than Cadmus not only as the founder of Thebes but also as the progenitor of the royal bloodline, which extends to Oedipus and his offspring. He refers to the royal bloodline of Thebes as 'vnkyndē blood' several times throughout the poem. When Eteocles and Polynices fight their fatal battle, it is suggested that their hatred stems from their cursed bloodline: 'Thenvious fyr so her hertys brente | with haate Cankered of vnkyndē blood' (*Siege*, 4272–73). The curse of the royal bloodline is a motif traditionally used in earlier Theban romances than Lydgate's poem.²⁴ Following that tradition, he alters the origin of the curse by making Amphion the progenitor of the bloodline.

Due to this curse of the bloodline, it could be maintained, the problem of falsity that appears as a result of the concealment of Amphion's violence recurs in later generations.²⁵ Amphion's descendants resort to violence, which is concealed in order to defend the social order of the realm, as is the case in the subplot concerning Cadmus. When Layus hears via a prophecy that he will be murdered by his own son, he orders Jocasta to kill the infant so as to avoid his doom. Consequently, the king's servants take Oedipus to a forest located far away from Thebes in order to assassinate him, but, overcome with pity for the child, they leave him hung on a tall tree so that nobody could notice him: 'And anon ful hygh vpon a tre, | In a placē that no man myght se, | They henge hym vp' (*Siege*, 425–27). By means of this exclusion of Oedipus from the body politic, Layus attempts to defend both himself and his rule, with the exclusion being executed secretly to hide its violence. A similar depiction of violence can be seen in the relationship between Eteocles and Polynices. After Oedipus's death, they argue over who should succeed to the crown. Following the arbitration by Theban citizens, the brothers compromise and determine to govern Thebes alternately year by year. During the first year, Eteocles rules the city subject to the agreement that Polynices will be permitted to rule the following year. The agreement also dictates that while one brother is reigning over Thebes, the other should leave the city and engage himself in chivalric errantry. Hence, as soon as Eteocles' reign begins, he exiles his brother from the city. In this case,

the agreement, which seemingly reconciles the conflict between the brothers, obscures the violence behind the resultant exile. Fleeing from Thebes alone, Polynices fears that Eteocles will betray and assassinate him: ‘Beyng aferd to kepe the heghē way, | In his herte hauyng suspecioun | To his brother of malice and tresoun’ (*Siege*, 1154–56). Although he is not killed in exile, the agreement, which crowns Eteocles the king first and banishes his brother, actually enables Eteocles to infringe its very purpose in order to keep the crown indefinitely. Considering these episodes, it could be argued that both Layus and Eteocles falsely conceal their violence so as to maintain their dominance, as seen in the episode of Cadmus’s exile.

When describing the cursed bloodline, the poem seems to address a problem of social construction. In the opening lines of the *Tercia Pars*, the fate of Thebes is discussed. Lydgate explains the tragedy as follows:

Of Cruel hatē rooted and begvnne,
And engendred, the story maketh mynde,
Oonly of blood corrupt and vnkynde,
Bynfeccioun callēd Orygynal[.] (*Siege*, 2562–65)

Here, it is possible to see the two different factors that Lydgate regards as the causes of the tragedy: one is the evil bloodline of the Theban dynasty (‘blood corrupt and vnkynde’), while the other is the Original Sin of humanity (‘[y]nfeccioun callēd Orygynal’). Although these two factors might at first seem irrelevant to each other, both can be understood in the context of the debates over human nature and the construction of society that took place during the Late Middle Ages. In some discourses from the medieval tradition of Ciceronianism, the eloquence needed to unite a society, which is articulated in Cicero’s works, was thought able to overcome the postlapsarian condition of the human race, that is, the tendency to be anti-social, when it can successfully evoke the reason of men.²⁶ Reason in this context, which for human represents the motive to come together to form a society, was identified with human nature. John of Salisbury, for instance, refers to the union of human society as a ‘uniquely distinctive brotherhood of the sons of nature’.²⁷ From this perspective, disturbing the social order would be unnatural for men. Therefore, the ‘blood corrupt and vnkynde’ can be construed as indicating that the royal bloodline is contrary to the human nature of reason, and

it can be related to the '[y]nfeccioun callēd Orygynal', namely postlapsarian sinfulness, in terms of the anti-socialness. In this respect, these factors seem to oppose both the reason and the eloquence with which societies are to be constructed.

However, it should not be overlooked that the anti-socialness referred to here comes not from the outside of the Theban body politic, but from the inside. As we have seen, the attempts to defend the social order are associated with falsehood in this poem. Such attempts are destined to fail eventually. While Amphion's violence is obscured so that his reign may appear wholesome, Layus's and Eteocles' reigns are explicitly distorted due to their falsehoods. They are represented by images of disabilities, whether figurative or literal, which are not subject to the regime of the body politic and, therefore, threaten it from the inside. The attempted assassination of Oedipus renders it impossible for him to know his own identity, which leads to his patricide and incest. Due to this ignorance, he is described as if he were blind when he marries his mother Jocasta: 'Al be that he wrought of ignoraunce, | Ful derk and blynde of his woful chaunce' (*Siege*, 809–10). Additionally, the tragic truth is only recognised through a deformed feature of his body, namely the old wounds he received to his legs when he was deserted in the forest. Although the wounds reveal both his identity and the sins he has committed, he cannot understand their meanings until Jocasta notices them: 'Or he was war Iocasta gan byholde | The Carectys of his woundēs olde, | Vpon his fete enprented wonder depe' (*Siege*, 899–901). The meaning of the wounds is concealed, but, once revealed, it endangers the order of the Theban body politic. It seems remarkable that the wounds function as signs that signify hidden violence, since the word 'carect' can mean 'a written symbol' as well as 'a scar'.²⁸ The choice of this word was probably made by Lydgate because, in the *Prose Thebes*, his main source, the wounds are merely expressed as 'les traces des plaies'.²⁹ Similarly, Eteocles' arrogance is associated with imagery concerning disabilities. At the end of the first year, when he is due to yield the throne to Polynices, he reneges on the agreement. For that reason, Tydeus, who arrives in Thebes as an ambassador from Polynices, accuses him of ignoring justice, comparing his deceitfulness to physical deformities:

For god aboue of his rightwisenesse,
Swich open wrong shal in hast redresse,

And of his myght al such collusioun
Reforme ageyn and al extorsioun.
For this the fyn falshede shal not availe,
Ageynës trowth in feeld to hold batayle.
Wrong is croked bothen halt and lame. (*Siege*, 2073–79; emphasis added)

The imagery of a deformed body here signifies Eteocles' immorality. The morally deformed nature of Eteocles bears a certain resemblance to the disabled faithless described in *A Defence of Holy Church*, who are eliminated from the body politic. Unlike David's Jerusalem, however, the Theban body politic cannot be thoroughly purified, since Eteocles remains at its centre as the king and continues to menace the nation. Like Oedipus's wounds, Eteocles' 'deformities' bring about calamity for Thebes when they are disclosed. After accusing Eteocles, Tydeus returns to Argos to describe Eteocles' hostility to Adrastus and Polynices, which leads them to wage war against Thebes. These images of disabilities, therefore, represent the 'unintelligibility' that cannot be understood in accordance with the dominant regime of the body politic. It is generated by the Theban monarchs' falsehoods when they attempt to hide their violence, and it reappears and radically destabilises the social order from within.³⁰ At this point, it could be argued, Lydgate suggests a counterargument to Ciceronian politics and eloquence, namely that anti-socialness can emerge from the process of social construction itself when it involves falsehoods.

In sum, it could be said that this poem evinces anxiety over the possibility that false attempts to unify a nation may result in a threat within the society. From this perspective, it is notable that, while some forms of purging function successfully in Lydgate's descriptions of other bodies politic, the falsehoods concerning the purging leads to the destruction of the whole body politic from the inside in this poem. These falsehoods concerning Thebes generate 'unintelligibility', not only for the body politic, but also for eloquence, which is originally intended to be used to unify society. Having such a problem lurking within and threatening a nation might prove menacing for Lydgate himself, as well as perhaps for his early readers. He mentions '[t]he whiche serpent [i.e. Satan] hath the Cokkyl sowe | Thorgh al erth of envye and debat' (*Siege*, 4668–69) in the epilogue to this poem, while next to the word 'Cokkyl' a marginal note saying 'Lollium', which is a popular pun on the Lollards, is

added in MS Arundel 119, one of the best known manuscripts of this poem.³¹ At the time, when multiple internal problems, including heresy, haunted England, Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* seems to have expressed scepticism with regard to the optimistic belief that reason and eloquence can enable humans to construct an ideal society.³²

NOTES

- * This is a revised version of the paper that was originally read in Japanese at the 32nd Congress of the Japan Society for Medieval English Studies, on 10th December 2016. I am profoundly grateful to Professor Takami Matsuda of Keio University for his insightful comments throughout all the stages of this research. This work was supported by the Grant-in-Aid for JSPS Fellows.
- 1 Lois Ebin, *John Lydgate*, Twayne's English Authors Ser., 407 (Boston: Twayne, 1985), pp. 52–59; Ebin, *Illuminator, Makar, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 40–48; and James Simpson, “‘Dysemol daies and fatal houres’”: Lydgate's *Destruction of Thebes* and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, in *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. by Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 15–33.
- 2 All quotations from the *Siege of Thebes* are taken from Axel Erdmann and Eilert Ekwall, eds., *Lydgate's 'Siege of Thebes'*, EETS, e.s., 108, 125, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1911–30), I (1911).
- 3 Simpson, pp. 18–21.
- 4 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, ed. and trans. by Jon Solomon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 734–37 [v. 30].
- 5 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De inventione*, ed. and trans. by H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library, 386 (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 5–7 [I. ii. 2–3].
- 6 J. J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 106–23.
- 7 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); and Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), esp. pp. 78–89.
- 8 Henry Noble MacCracken, ed., *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, EETS, e.s., 107, o.s., 192,

- 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1911–34; repr. 1961–62), 1 (1911; repr. 1961).
- 9 For representations of bodies politic and physical impairments, see Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 51–52.
- 10 Henry Bergen, ed., *Lydgate's 'Troy Book': A.D. 1412–20*, EETS, e.s., 97, 103, 106, 126, 4 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1906–35).
- 11 Rawcliffe, pp. 190–91.
- 12 For further discussion of the rulers' duty to purge in *A Defence of Holy Church* and the *Troy Book*, see Michael P. Kuczynski, *Prophetic Song: The Psalms as Moral Discourse in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 152–64; and Paul Strohm, 'Sovereignty and Sewage', in *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 57–70, respectively.
- 13 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 7.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 8–11.
- 15 Cf. Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399–1422* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
- 16 'Knighthod(e)' Def. 1. *Middle English Dictionary [MED]*, ed. by Sherman M. Kuhn and others (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1952–2001).
- 17 Boccaccio, pp. 288–93 [ii. 63].
- 18 Butler, pp. 11–22.
- 19 Lee Paterson, 'Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate', in *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. by Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 69–107 (pp. 75–76).
- 20 *Canterbury Tales*, i. ll. 2847–49. Larry D. Benson and others, eds., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988; repr. 2008).
- 21 It is often discussed that Lydgate suggests the moral insufficiency of Chaucerian rhetoric in his works. Scott-Morgan Straker, for example, reveals an ironical implication of the phrase 'Sugrid mouth', which Lydgate uses to express Chaucer's eloquence in the *Siege of Thebes*. See Scott-Morgan Straker, 'Deference and Difference: Lydgate, Chaucer, and the *Siege of Thebes*', *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 52 (2001), 1–21 (p. 6).
- 22 Dominique Battles, *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the OF 'Roman de Thèbes', Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 152–58.
- 23 Boccaccio, pp. 289–99 [ii. 69].

- 24 Battles, pp. 147–48.
- 25 Battles argues that Lydgate’s expression ‘vnkyndē blood’ should be interpreted as referring to the incestuous blood of Eteocles and Polynices rather than to the royal bloodline as a whole, focusing on the reference to ‘vnkyndē blood’ (*Siege*, 868) in the description of Oedipus’ wedding to Jocasta (pp. 168–69). The word ‘unkind(e)’, however, can be interpreted as ‘hostile or violent in violation of a blood relationship’ (‘unkind(e) adj. Def. 4a (a), *MED*). In this sense, the ‘vnkyndē blood’ seems relevant to the falsity that other Theban kings share.
- 26 Cary J. Nederman, ‘Nature, Sin and the Origins of Society: The Ciceronian Tradition in Medieval Political Thought’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), 3–26.
- 27 John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by J. B. Hall, *Corpus Christianorum in Translation*, 12 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), p. 125 [I. i].
- 28 ‘Carect(e)’, Def. 2, *MED*.
- 29 Molly Lynde-Recchia, ed., ‘The Prose *Thèbes* as Found in the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César* (MS B.N.F. fr. 20125, fols. 89a–117c)’, in Molly Lynde-Recchia, *Prose, Verse, and Truth-Telling in the Thirteenth Century: An Essay on Form and Function in Selected Text*, Edward C. Armstrong Monographs on Medieval Literature, 10 (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 2000), pp. 127–93 (p. 141). Lydgate is thought to have used this prose reduction of Old French poem, *Le Roman de Thèbes*, as a source, although the manuscript he consulted is not identified. See Léopold Constans, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes*, Société des anciens textes français, 2 vols, (Paris: Didot, 1890), II. pp. clx–lxiv; Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 151–56; and Battles, pp. 149–50.
- 30 This observation could be compared with Rosamund S. Allen’s comment that, in this poem, the walls of Thebes ‘emblematically’ signify the domestic peace of the city and thereby enclose corruption within it. Rosamund S. Allen, ‘*The Siege of Thebes*: Lydgate’s Canterbury Tale’, in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen, King’s College London Medieval Studies, 5 (London: King’s College, Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991), pp. 122–42 (pp. 136–37).
- 31 London, British Library, MS Arundel 119, fol. 78r. This marginal note is printed in Erdmann’s EETS edition. See *Lydgate’s ‘Siege of Thebes’*, I. p. 191.
- 32 Lee Paterson elaborately examines the historical context behind the relationship between truthfulness and falseness described in Lydgate’s works including the *Siege of Thebes*, which can be interpreted as the opposition between unity and division within the Lancastrian regime, although he does not mention the problem of eloquence. See Paterson, esp. pp. 77–87.