Joanna Scott. "Betraying Origins: The Many Faces of Aeneas
In Medieval English Literature. *LATCH* 3 (2010): 64-84.

Betraying Origins: The Many Faces of Aeneas in Medieval English Literature

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Abstract
While to many, Aeneas is primarily known as the hero of Virgil's *Aeneid*, there are separate traditions in medieval literature which portray him as a traitor. Chaucer's *Hous of Fame* and *Legend of Good Women* both focus on Aeneas's romantic betrayal of Dido, and the anonymous *Laud Troy Book* depicts Aeneas as a treacherous villain to the city and king of Troy. In all of these poems he enjoys deceiving those who trust him and constantly plots to advance himself at the expense or destruction of others. Yet it is this same treasonous Aeneas whom medieval England proudly constructs as one of its mythical ancestors, as the opening lines to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* show. Ultimately, the multiple constructions of Aeneas and the fact that late medieval England bases its own mythology on a tradition fractured by treason and betrayal can be linked to the larger cultural discourse of treason and origins in England during the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV.

Keywords
Aeneas, *Laud Troy Book*, treason, Chaucer, *Hous of Fame*, *Legend of Good Women,* Troy, betrayal, Richard II, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Richard Firth Green.

Near the end of the *Laud Troy Book*, as Troy and its people are falling to Greek slaughter and chaos, the just-widowed queen Hecuba finds her son-in-law, Aeneas, and demands that he help hide her and her daughter Polyxena. It is not a plea, but a scathing indictment:

> Sche myssayde him anon right,
> Off tresoun sche him sone vmbraide:

'Fals traytour!'—to him sche sayde,—
'How might thow, for soule synne,
So ffals a tresoun to be-gynne?
How might thow In thi fals herte fynde,
Fals traytour, to be su vnkynde
To do thi lord suche schenschip,
That hadde doen alle this worship?
He ȝaff the his doghter to wyue
Be-ffore alle men that were on lyue,
He worschepid the & loued the ay,
In the was al his trust & ffay,
And thow hast made him sclayn & hise
For his godeness & ffraunchise!
How might thow, man this tresoun thence,
For ferd In helle leste thow synke?"
(lines 18312-18328)

Unable to control her fury and grief after the brutal murder of her husband and the destruction of her city, she stops in the middle of the turmoil to make sure that Aeneas knows the utter depravity of his actions. He is a traitor, and he has sold his lord and father-in-law, his city, and his fellow citizens to the Greeks. He is the most treacherous villain in a story full of traitors.

How can this be the same Aeneas who is, perhaps, most famous today as the hero of Virgil's *Aeneid?* Virgil's Aeneas is an innocent victim in the fall of Troy, somehow managing to escape the sacked city while carrying his aged father on his back. He then survives a series of perilous journeys, including one literally to hell and back, and establishes a new empire, ultimately Rome, on foreign shores. The tag most commonly associated with Virgil's Aeneas is pious, and Aeneas becomes famous for putting his duty in front of his desires, most notably in his decision to leave Dido, queen of Carthage, after she has fallen in love with him. It is the heroic willpower and fidelity to his family, gods, and destiny for which Virgil's Aeneas is best known.[1]

[1]However, recent work by Craig Kallendorf has highlighted a more nuanced version of both Aeneas and the poem itself, suggesting that neither Aeneas nor Virgil is as uncomplicated as he seems. Kallendorf's 2007 study, *The Other Virgil: 'pessimistic' readings of the Aeneid in Early Modern*

This version of Aeneas obtained in the Middle Ages as well, but as Christopher Baswell points out, "A medieval reader of the *Aeneid*[…]had to contend with widely known rival versions of the Troy story, many of which saw Aeneas as a traitor for fleeing Troy, and a cad for abandoning Dido" (78). This "cad" Aeneas is popularized by Ovid, who in the *Heroides* relates the Dido and Aeneas episode from Dido's point of view. Her Aeneas, leaving her in suicidal despair, is far from heroic. Drawing upon this version, Chaucer characterizes Aeneas as a romantically faithless "traytour" in both his *Hous of Fame* and *Legend of Good Women*. Yet it is not only his relationship with Dido that links Aeneas with treason in medieval literature. A separate and simultaneous tradition, popularized by Guido delle Colonne's 1287 *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, depicts Aeneas as a cold-blooded traitor to Troy. Guido is drawing on the twelfth-century *Roman de Troie* of Benoît de Saint-Maure, who himself draws on supposed eyewitnesses Dares (a Trojan) and Dictys (a Greek). Several late medieval Troy poems follow this tradition, including the anonymous alliterative *Destruction of Troy*, the anonymous *Laud Troy Book*, and John Lydgate's *Troy Book*. I wish to focus on the *Laud Troy Book* for several reasons. As C. David Benson points out, "None of the Middle English histories of Troy reaches out to a general audience more directly than the *Laud Troy Book*" (39), making it an ideal subject for the discussion of a general anxiety about treason I am pursuing. Moreover, the *Laud Troy Book* most clearly portrays Aeneas as villainous; Sharon Stevenson notes that it "presents only one side of Aeneas and never suggests the noble or heroic side"

Culture, argues that the so-called "Harvard school" of critics, a group of scholars post WWII who focused on a more "pessimistic" view of the *Aeneid* were not the first to recognize an ambivalence both in Virgil's sometimes clear sympathy with those whom Aeneas must destroy on his path to glory, including Dido, and in Aeneas's own behavior. Kallendorf argues that problematized readings of the Aeneid existed long before the twentieth century, citing examples from a wide range of Early Modern British and American sources. Thus "pessimistic" readings of the *Aeneid*, and Aeneas in particular, are to be found throughout the centuries. What strikes me here, and why I have spent so much time on this point, is that these readings are all based on what is possibly the most sanitized version of Aeneas to be had.

(375). In the *Laud*, Aeneas not only flees Troy but, through repeated treasons, causes its ultimate destruction.

Yet it is this same Aeneas whom medieval England proudly constructs as one of its mythical ancestors. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* for example, famously begins with an allusion to Aeneas and his traitorous Trojan past, and then unblinkingly links him to Brutus, Britain's founder as imagined by the Middle Ages, all within a poem centered around another key imaginative space for constructions of British origins, Arthur's court—a court which also falls because of betrayal and deceit. What does it mean for a society to base its own mythology on a tradition fractured by treason and betrayal? While scholars have noted the tension in the multiple versions of Aeneas in late medieval literature, most have simply observed the description of Aeneas's treasons and moved on from there. I wish here to focus on the treasons themselves, both romantic and political. Examining their valence and scope more carefully, particularly within the context of the political instability of England in the late fourteenth century, may provide one way of explaining the variously treasonous depictions of Aeneas in Chaucer's *Hous of Fame*, *Legend of Good Women*, and the *Laud Troy Book*. These works are being composed in a cultural climate of political uncertainty and heightened sensitivity to treason, in which betrayal seems inevitable and perhaps even necessary.

Treason in Late Medieval England

Treason, as Richard Firth Green points out, was a "keyword" of the late fourteenth century, and continued to present challenges of interpretation and control throughout the fifteenth century (207). The concept of treason has a thoroughly complicated history, ranging from Anglo-Saxon ideals of mutual oaths and responsibilities to more Roman ideas of treason as a category of crime directed primarily at the country's ruler—the idea of treason as *laesa majesta*. In 1352, under Edward III, England had codified the increasingly complex and idiosyncratic definitions and applications of treason charges, so that the focus revolved around protecting the ruler, his line, and his realm. The 1352 statutes say nothing about betrayal against anything other than the king or the realm, defining treason as follows:

> (1) to compass or imagine the death of the king, his queen,

> or eldest son; (2) to defile the king's wife or his eldest unmarried daughter or his eldest son's wife; (3) to levy war against the king in his realm; (4) to be adherent to his enemies, giving them aid and comfort; (5) to counterfeit the king's great or privy seal or money; (6) to bring false money into the realm; (7) to slay certain officers or justices being in their places doing their offices.
>
> (Pollock and Maitland 502, note 6)

The main concerns of the statutes are to narrow the definition of treason to movement—whether it be physical action or mere thought—against the king or the realm. However, despite the seeming clarifications of the 1352 Statutes, by the reign of Richard II, the boundaries of what could be termed treasonable were again constantly being pushed, often by Richard himself. Green cites the example of a 1397 ruling, in which "It was declared that if anyone at all, whatever his status or condition, should encourage or incite the commons of Parliament, or any one else, to remedy or reform anything which concerns our person, our rule, or our regality, he should, and shall, be held a traitor," as proof of Richard II's ability to manipulate "a particularly submissive Parliament" into expanding treason definitions (222). The broadness of definition inherent in terms like "compass" and "imagine," and possible in "adher[ing]" to unnamed enemies, allowed such manipulations on both sides.

Moreover, there were still the older ideas of treason which kept it more broadly in the realm of betrayal. Green explains the two most common: "a personal conception of treason in which the offense was committed against someone who had good reason to trust the traitor, often because they were bound to one another by oath, and an institutional view of treason according to which it could only be committed against someone in political authority, particularly the king, his immediate family, or his judicial officers" (207). In the literature of the Middle Ages, no matter the sphere—legal, social, romantic—treason always involved the element of deliberate deception, of hiding malicious intent. Aeneas's treasons, as we shall see, center on conscious, deliberate deception of those who put their trust in him, whether it is his lover, Dido, or his king, Priam, and his fellow citizens of Troy, and the actions he takes to bring about his treason.

Aeneas as Romantic Traitor

In the *Hous of Fame*, Chaucer's Aeneas enters primarily as a cross between Virgilian hero and Ovidian lout. As Baswell says, "Chaucer overtly manipulates and refashions Virgilian themes of passion, pathos and power" with a "subtly modulated fidelity and infidelity to Virgil's text" (221). In the beginning of the poem, Chaucer focuses on Virgil's version of Aeneas's story, in which outside forces propel Aeneas to leave the sacked Troy to found Italy. Yet even here there is an ambiguity to the portrayal of Aeneas. Chaucer plays with the famous opening lines of the *Aeneid*, keeping the emphasis on destiny, forward movement, and Italy:

> I wol now singe, yif I kan,
> The armes and also the man
> That first cam, thurgh his destine,
> Fugityf of Troy contree,
> In Itayle, with ful moche pyne
> Unto the strondes of Lavyne.
> (lines 143-148)

"Fugityf" is fraught with meanings here, the most basic being a reference to the fact that Aeneas leaves Troy as one of the conquered. However, it also is suggestive of Aeneas's treason. Already we see that multiple readings of Aeneas and his treasons are possible. The poem will focus on his betrayal of Dido, a romantic treason, but since he is called specifically a "Fugityf of Troy" this line can be read as a reference to his treachery there, not at Carthage. Yet such a reading is complicated by the fact that Chaucer immediately follows this with the description of the clearly traitorous Sinon, the Greek, who "with his false forswerynge, / And his chere and his lesynge" convinced the Trojans to let in the horse (153-154). While this could be seen as linking two traitors together, it can also be seen as a way of distinguishing an accidental traitor from a "real" one. Moreover, Chaucer follows Virgil in giving Aeneas plenty of legitimate reasons for fleeing the burning city: both Venus (his mother) and Creusa's ghost tell him to flee, Creusa specifically telling him that "he moste unto Italye, / As was hys destine" (187-188). It is Venus, furthermore, who is responsible in the *Hous of Fame,* as in the *Aeneid*, for Dido's falling

in love so quickly with Aeneas when he and his men are shipwrecked on Carthage (240-241).

But as the poem continues, Chaucer weaves back and forth between excusing and condemning Aeneas, playing with the idea that Aeneas becomes less and less the blameless hero and more and more the sly villain. This is accomplished largely through a construction of Aeneas as a love-traitor, breaking oaths he has gallantly made to Dido. After a description of Dido's loyalty to Aeneas,[2] the narrator reveals that despite her love, "he to hir a traytour was" (267). Only a few lines later, Dido finally realizes "That he wolde hir of trouthe fayle, / And wende fro hir to Itayle" (297-298). Yet even this seeming condemnation is ambiguous; although Chaucer is clearly pointing out the betrayal, the rhyming of "trouthe fayle" and "Itayle" highlights the fact that Aeneas does have more pressing issues: the founding of a new nation. This breaking of truth is not entirely his own doing, as the references to the gods and his destiny remind us. Further muddying the picture, Chaucer returns to meditate on Dido's sorrow, interrupting himself to present a long list of other male love-traitors, seemingly indicating that Aeneas belongs right there with them. Yet after a brief diatribe against Theseus and his terrible treatment of Ariadne, the narrator returns abruptly to Aeneas—now to *excuse* him:

> But to excusen Eneas
> Fullyche of al his grete trespass,
> The book seyth Mercurie, sauns fayle,
> Bad hym goo into Itayle.
> (lines 427-430)

Is Aeneas a traitor or not? Is it his fault, or not? In drawing on both Virgil and Ovid, Chaucer leaves it open-ended. Sylvia Federico argues that "Chaucer's narrator enacts the literary equivalent of Aeneas's betrayal of Dido. Like Aeneas's, however, this act of betrayal is foundational" (54). Thus, she argues, the changes establish Chaucer as a poet in his own right, creating his own version of the story and the characters. In the *Hous of Fame*,

[2]Baswell points out that Chaucer, in both *Hous of Fame* and *Legend of Good Women,* leaves out Dido's own prior oath of fidelity to her deceased husband, Sychaeus (396, note 46).

Chaucer "refashions" Aeneas into a possible love-traitor, allowing for multiple readings of Aeneas in the same poem.

Such is not the case in *The Legend of Good Women*. The picture of Aeneas here is clearer and far more negative. This is, of course, the whole point; the premise of the poem is that Chaucer has been ordered to present a list of wicked, treacherous men in order to make up for having portrayed women, via the faithless Criseyde, in a negative light in the *Troilus*. Chaucer is unabashedly drawing on Ovid here, focusing on the Dido and Aeneas affair explicitly and exclusively from her point of view. In the *Legend*, Chaucer is at pains to highlight the conscious, deliberate nature of Aeneas's deception of Dido. We are told immediately that the tale is about "How Eneas to Dido was forsworn" (972), and the Aeneas we see is one who seems to relish his performance as the faithful lover despite knowing that he will have to leave Dido. This is what separates the *Legend*'s Aeneas from the *Hous of Fame*'s. Chaucer reminds us at every step that Aeneas is fully conscious that he is deceiving her. He betrays her from the start, deliberately "feyneth hym so trewe and obeysynge" (1266) that she cannot help but fall in love.

In fact, the descriptions of his repeated gestures of love and commitment take on an almost comic tone as the narrator overexcites himself in trying to explain Aeneas's hyperbolic courting of Dido. He is

> So gentil and so privy of his doinge,
> And can so wel don alle his obeysaunces,
> And wayten hire at festes and at daunces,
> And whan she goth to temple and hom ageyn,
> And fasten til he hath his lady seyn,
> And beren in his devyses, for hire sake,
> Not I not what; and songes wolde he make,
> Justen, and don of armes many thynges,
> Sende hire letters, tokens, broches, rynges—
> Now herkneth how he shal his lady serve!
> (lines 1267-1276)

Aeneas's behavior is so conspicuously correct that the narrator cannot even relate it in a coherent manner, the description devolving into an anaphora of "And"s until the narrator simply

gives up.[3] He does not even know what else Aeneas gets up to in expressing his devotion to Dido, breaking off into admissions of uncertainty ("Not I not what") and vagueness ("don of armes many thynges"). Aeneas is so clever at courting Dido that he even outsmarts the narrator.

Chaucer also makes it clear that Aeneas's distress at leaving her is feigned, as he cries "false teres" (1301) to a finally suspicious and indignant Dido.[4] Ultimately, he steals away at night (1327), and Chaucer is clear in his condemnation. It is "as a traytour forth he gan to sayle" (1328). There is none of the *Hous of Fame's* ambiguity here, nothing of the stoic Aeneas who is only doing his duty in leaving her. He is cruel, using Dido for his own gain and pleasure. Chaucer works to undercut any excuse Aeneas may have had to leave Dido by showing an Aeneas who does not simply love and leave her, but enjoys deceiving her about both.

Aeneas as Political Traitor

As we can see, multiple identities and interpretations of Aeneas were available to authors in the Middle Ages: a hero who has no choice but to leave a town he couldn't save and a woman he didn't entirely seduce on his own, or a sly deceiver who doesn't even have the decency to say goodbye to his betrayed lover. This seems problematic enough. But if Aeneas the romantic betrayer is bad, Aeneas the political traitor is even worse. In the *Laud Troy Book*, Aeneas is the ultimate villain, a trusted counselor and kinsman who makes a secret deal with the enemy and then actively participates to destroy his town, lord, and people. Benson argues that the poet's "most extreme hatred is reserved for the traitors Antenor and Aeneas" (82).

Aeneas's identity as a traitor is constructed in multiple ways in the poem, most simply through an initial and unrelenting identification as such. However, the range of his treasons in the poem reflects the various conceptions of treason in late medieval England. Almost completely eschewing any notion of a heroic Aeneas, the poem consistently highlights Aeneas's role in Troy's

[3]Sheila Delaney notes the use of anaphora as well (196).

[4]Ovid's Dido shows flashes of bleak humor; she realizes that when Aeneas told her about losing Creusa, she "should have known that you were only giving me fair notice" (61).

doom, through references to his initial status as a wise and trusted advisor to Priam, through forward-looking references to his and Antenor's treason at key moments in the story of Troy's fall, and through his presence (and possible actions) as Troy is destroyed.

The very first time Aeneas is mentioned in the poem, he is labeled a traitor. In describing Priam's children, the narrator informs us that Clusa [Creusa], Priam's eldest daughter, "weddid was/ Vnto that traytour Eueas, / That afftirward trayed Troye; /God ȝeve him sorew and neuere Ioye!" (1877-1880). Time collapses, as it often does in this poem which occasionally makes reference to Biblical figures such as Adam, Eve, and Cain.[5] Benson suggests that this is "a foreshadowing passage informing us that Aeneas will later be traitor to Troy" (93). However, the fuzzy chronology of the line seems to suggest that Aeneas has always been a traitor, that betrayal has always been his defining feature. The "afftirward" of the following line does little to clarify the confusion. Moreover, as Benson points out, the equivalent passage in Guido's text end with a suggestion to the reader to see Virgil for Aeneas's future deeds, which could mitigate the negative portrayal of Aeneas (93). But in the *Laud*, as Stevenson notes succinctly, "There is no mention of Virgil's work" (375). At the same time, this is a reminder that those whom Aeneas will betray are not just his king and fellow citizens, but his family. As we will see, he makes provisions for his wife and children (ironically, given that he ends up literally losing Creusa anyway) but will have no qualms betraying his father-in-law to death.

Even more important to the poem's construction of the treasonous Aeneas is his initial role as a trusted advisor. The poem makes several mentions of this, which works to make his final betrayal of Priam's trust so damning in the "personal conception of treason" which Green mentions. Aeneas's cool head and wise advice prevails when Priam wants to kill the Greek prisoner Thoas, instead of using him as a bargaining chip (ironically, he will ultimately be exchanged—with Criseyde—for Antenor):

> Eueas was wis, witti, and lered,

[5]James Simpson points out that only the *Laud* poem, of the three late medieval English Trojan works which follow Guido, does this (421); Benson also notes several examples of religious anachronisms (79).

To speke than was he not fered
[. . . . .]
By-fore the kyng Eueas stode,
And spak to him with milde mode,
And sayde to him as the wyse.
(lines 7137-7138; 7143-7145)

We see here a strategist, bold but respectful before his king. Even the Greeks think of Aeneas as a trusted counselor to Priam: Diomedes recognizes Aeneas as "the kynges conseler" (6595).

This is crucial to the poem's construction of Aeneas as a traitor, as it his through his advice that Aeneas will, with fellow trusted advisor Antenor, betray Priam. Once it is clear that the Trojans cannot win, Aeneas, his father Anchises (the same father whom he so piously carries out of the ruins in Virgil), Antenor, and his son Polydamas "be-gan the compass" (17237). "Compass," of course, is the first and most difficult to detect form of treason in the 1352 statutes. How do you determine a person's treasonous thoughts? In this poem, the "compass" is a perverse use of Aeneas's "wis, witti, and lered" mind. The conspirators decide "To consayle the kyng that it gode wore / A final pees of Grues to craue," (17256-17257), along with the return of Helen (17260). The plot will thus take the form of what Aeneas and Antenor are most famous for, and most trusted with: counsel. Advice, as we have seen, was a problem for Richard II. Part of the anxiety surrounding the control and application of treason charges during Richard's reign has to do with the impossibility of preventing what begins essentially as a thought-crime, a perversion of loyalty cloaked in deception. The traitors' initial plan is simple: "her tresoun thei wol slely hele, / Thei wil not telle what thei thence—" (17288-17289). They are hiding "what thei thence," thereby demonstrating one of the most pernicious aspects of treason, and one that runs throughout portrayals of Aeneas as a traitor; Aeneas hides his thoughts from Dido, too, in the *Hous of Fame*. Even when their treachery is suspected, Priam cannot fight against it,[6] and in

[6]Priam sees what the two traitors are doing, but is powerless to stop it:
He saw right wele here two assent,
To traye the toun that thei haue ment,
And not-for-thi he held him stille

fact takes their advice about letting in the horse from the Greeks. Again at an impasse, and again relying on counsel, Priam listens to their advice: "But Antenor & Eueas / That both were ther In that plas, / Thei seide: 'It was wel to do: (18101-18103). The horse is let in, and the end begins for the Trojans.

The poet never lets the reader forget that what happens to Troy, what Federico calls the "tragic future" (74), happens because of a vicious Aeneas and his partner in crime, Antenor. At the initial siege, the poet jumps right to the tragic and perverse way the war will end:

> And thus was thane the sege be-gonne,
> That laste ten 3er, or Troye was wonne;
> 3it was it neuere wonne with fight,
> With the Gregeis, ne with ther might;
> Hit was be-trayed falsly—Alas!—
> With Antenor and Eueas.
> (lines 4701-4706)

The pathetic nature of Troy's fall is highlighted, along with Aeneas's role in it, and made worse by the long and intense battle which preceded it. The war goes on for ten years before Troy loses, and when it does, it does not go out in a final blaze of "fight" or "might" and glory, but through a dirty plot brought about in part by one of its most trusted citizens. The convenient rhyme of "Alas" with "Eueas" heightens the irony, linking Aeneas with the sense of doom surrounding Troy's fate

The poet continues to flash forward to the eventual betrayal, linking it with another (perhaps the most) disastrous moment for the Trojans: the death of Hector. The narrative jumps to a consideration of the two horrifying realities Troy will experience as it falls. Before Hector's actual death, the poet takes a moment to consider what will happen once Troy's strongest defender falls:

> When he was ded, than ros here bale;

> And lete him speke & say here wille,
> For he wolde not lette hem perceyue
> That he saw thei wolde him disceyue.
> (lines 17299-304)

Alle thei died by oure tale,
Alle were dede and put to prisons
And put In gret subieccions,—
Saue Eueas and Antenor,
Goddis curs haue thei ther-for!
Their were saued and alle theirs,
Seruaunt, mayden, wiff, and Ayres.
For thei dissayued her lige lord,
The deuel hem honge vpon a cord!
Haue thei neuere so good pardoun,
For thei wrouȝt suche a gret tresoun!
(lines 8583-8594)

In this long and rich passage, the poet emphasizes the pathos by repeating that "alle" will suffer, will die or be captured and enslaved, the women taken to be given to Greek men, "alle," that is, except the two traitors Aeneas and Antenor, and "alle" of their people, servants alongside their families. This is one of the rare occasions on which the poet provides a mitigating circumstance for the treason.[7] Ultimately, though, the price of their families' safety will be the betrayal and destruction of "her lige lord." The scale of the betrayal is underscored by the suggestion that there can be no pardon, not for "suche a gret tresoun." They will aid an opposing army to kill their king and place his people "in gret suieccions," clearly violating the idea of loyalty to a king, crystallized in the 1352 Statute's clause which prohibits being "adherent to the King's Enemies in his realm." There can be no attempt to "excusen" Aeneas here: he is nothing but villain.

[7]The only hint the poet gives of a possible reprieve is that this is a worst-case scenario: ultimately, they agree

That if thei were dryuen ther-to
That thei might no more do,
Thei scholde the kyng & his be-swyke,
To saue hem foure and that hem lyke,
Alle here kynreded & here frende,—
And Priamus & his to schende.
(lines 17249-17254)

They feel themselves "dryuen" to it, and the rhyme pattern and chiasmus emphasize the contrast between the two fates.

Aeneas's treason and the perverse manner though which Troy falls is repeated at another key moment. After the last truce, right before the death of Penthesilea, Troy's last great defender, the narrator tells us once again that Troy's destruction is both inevitable and ugly, and all at the hands of Antenor and Aeneas:

> But that schal be by fals tresoun;
> God ȝeue hem his malesoun
> That the tresoun schope & wroght
> And that hit so aboute broght!
> That was Antenor & Eueas—
> God ȝeue hem an euel gras!
> Come thei neuere In heuene riche,
> That thei wolde so her lord be-swyke
> And al that gentil nacioun!
> (lines 17061-17069)[8]

The dogged repetition of "tresoun" here leaves little doubt about the nature of the fall, but also points to the fact that treason, as it is constructed here, is not an accident, a momentary lapse of judgment or crime of passion. It is planned, crafted, and implemented; it must be "schope & wroght," and then "aboute broght."

What cements the characterization of Aeneas as a villainous traitor is his active participation in the sacking of the city. Not only does he "compass" the plan, putting his cognitive powers to use in a twisted way, he also materially enacts the treason. After hearing of Priam's plan to (finally) get rid of the traitors, Aeneas switches into high gear. He and Antenor promise

[8]Stevenson also cites these two passages in her article, arguing that "this foreshadowing in the *Laud* is apparently the poet's unique embellishment done for the purpose of amplifying the treachery and creating a tragic effect" (376). Benson notes that this may be linked to the poem's origin as an orally told tale: "the poet adds many original summaries and foreshadowings, especially in the beginning, designed to help the audience keep the long and complicated story in mind" (68). The overall effect, however, is an increase in the pathos and the horror of the betrayal.

That thei scholde fight to-geder there,
The toun to traye and tho ther-In,
And do sle hem & alle her kyn
Thei schal not lette for leue no lothe
And ther-to haue thei sworn her othe.
(lines 17493-17497)

Replacing his loyalty to the king and city with an oath to destroy both, Aeneas is committing clear treason here. Now he will "fight" not merely to sell the Trojans to the Greeks in a possible, if not plausible, ignorance of what might happen to them, but to "sle hem & alle her kyn" without pity.

Even worse, it is specifically Aeneas and Antenor who bring about Priam's murder. Once again moving from plotting to taking action, they direct Priam's eventual murderer right to him: "Thai ledde tho sir Pirrus / To the Castel of Priamus." (18277-18278). The narrator summarizes the damage, indicting the traitors in language that again clearly invokes the 1352 statutes:

Kyng Priamus is ded & sclayn,
Lord & lady, knyght & swayn,
And al that euere In Ilyon was,[9]
By these fals traytoures compass,
By Antenor and Eueas;
In helle mot be her wonyng-plas!
(lines 18353-18358)

There is also a suggestion that Antenor and Aeneas literally take part themselves in the destruction themselves. Eventually, the narrator says, the two traitors are exiled from the land for good because of their behavior (18599-18606). However, he says, "al the while that thei were thare, / Thei did the Cite moche care / And halp the Gregeis to distroye / And alle the folk foule annoye" (18607-18610). In the *Laud*, Aeneas plots against his king and city, lies repeatedly, and aids the enemy army with both information and action. The circumstances of his treason are different than in the

[9]The town is destroyed: "alle saue the traytoures mansions / And alle her kynnes possessions / That the toun so foule be-swyked" (lines 18379-18381).

Hous or *Legend*—there is a higher body count, for one thing—but the basic elements are similar. Those who trust Aeneas, who believe in him and put their faith in his loyalty, ultimately find themselves deceived, and fall.

Aeneas as Ancestor

And yet this is the same Aeneas who will continually be invoked as the heroic ancestor of the West. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain,* he explains that "After the Trojan war, Aeneas fled from the ruined city with his son Ascanius and came by boat to Italy" (54). Interestingly, there is no mention of Dido, and there is certainly no mention of his treachery in Troy, either. The trajectory goes straight from Troy to Italy, to the West. Later in the text, Geoffrey relates that Julius Caesar himself delights in the shared ancestry: "Those Britons come from the same race as we do, for we Romans, too, are descended from Trojan stock. After the destruction of Troy, Aeneas was our first ancestor, just as theirs was Brutus, that same Brutus whose father was Silvius, the son of Ascanius, himself the son of Aeneas" (107). Caesar, of course, sees this as a reason for the British to pay tribute to the Romans. While the British scoff at this request, interestingly, they invoke the same lineage in order to explain why they will *not* comply with Caesar's request. Cassivelaunus testily responds that the "common inheritance of noble blood comes down from Aeneas to Briton and to Roman alike and our two races should be joined in close amity by this link of glorious kinship" (108).

This "link of glorious kinship" continues to be invoked throughout the Middle Ages. Jerome Singerman points out that "As the thirteenth-century reader would have perceived it, the fall of Troy is part of the same story as the rise of Eneas," and thus "Eneas' career is the necessary prologue to the chronicles of the British kings" (134-135). But what happens when the "common inheritance" is of blood that does not always act so nobly? Aeneas's treacherous actions against Dido and Troy in the "rival versions" of his story are just as well known in the Middle Ages. The opening lines of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are a famous case in point:

Siþen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,

> Þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondez and askez,
> Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt
> Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe.
> Hit watz Ennias þe athel and his highe kynde,
> Þat siþen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicome
> Welneȝe of al þe wele in þe west iles.
> (lines 1-7)

As Federico argues, the poem actually starts "with the vexed genealogical history that translated Troy to Britain" (33). At the center of this "vexed" lineage is Aeneas, and his simultaneous various roles as survivor, hero, faithless lover, and political traitor. The transition from Aeneas-as-traitor to Aeneas-as-founder seems relatively unproblematic, with both sides receiving equal representation here. The poem, as Alfred David notes, "moves smoothly and logically from the destruction of Troy to the reestablishment of the Trojan race throughout Europe and, with special relevance for this poem, by Brutus in Britain" (404).

Some scholars, however, have found this move troubling, and have tried to represent the "traitor" as Antenor, despite the fact that Aeneas is actually named in the poem.[10] For David, this is an indication of modern readers' wish "to exonerate Aeneas, 'pius Aeneas', from the charge of treason" (405). Treason was the most horrible (and dangerous) crime with which a person could be charged in the Middle Ages, and a reluctance to ascribe such behavior to a hero is, perhaps, understandable. Yet David proposes that this agonizing is actually unnecessary: the reference to a checkered past is perfectly appropriate and enriching for a poem such as *Gawain* which is concerned with admitting and overcoming personal fallibility. He argues that: "For the poet, Aeneas was neither an unsullied hero nor a deep-dyed villain. He was one of the great figures of the past, capable of heroic deeds but also subject to base temptations" (407). The idea of a nuanced understanding of "great figures" is attractive, and, I think, useful. However, the specific circumstances here are slightly problematic.

[10]David cites the 1940 Early English Text Society version of *Gawain*, whose editors, Sir Israel Gollancz and Dr. Mabel Day, argue that since "it is Antenor who takes the lead in treachery" in Guido's version, the line must refer to him and not Aeneas (qtd in David 403).

Aeneas's dalliance with Dido can surely be classified as "base temptations," but what about his continually treasonous actions during the fall of Troy as related in the *Laud Troy Book*? The opening lines of *Gawain* refer to Troy, not Carthage. It would be an extreme euphemism to see Aeneas's actions during the fall of Troy as seen in the *Laud* as the result of "base temptations." They are calculated and cold-blooded treasons which result in the murder of his king and fellow citizens, and the utter destruction of his city. This depiction of Aeneas as crafty and ruthless traitor seems to problematize any attempts at placing Aeneas in the same category as Gawain in Sir *Gawain and the Green Knight*, who does betray a trust, but never really hurts anyone but himself.[11] Moreover, Gawain feels remorseful, even if no one else in Arthur's court thinks he should. The Aeneas of Chaucer's poems and the *Laud* feels no remorse.

Aeneas is, thus, as Stevenson points out, a "paradox: traitor in Troy, but founder of nearly all the provinces in Western Europe" (377). What are we to make of the willing construction of such a lineage? How do all these versions of Aeneas hold, especially all coming at the turbulent end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of what will prove to be an equally turbulent fifteenth century for England? The answer, I would suggest, lies in the turbulence itself. In his comparison between Aeneas and Gawain, David offers the idea that the poet links the two because they share a "common instinct for survival" (408). And one indisputable quality of Aeneas is that he is a survivor. It is, after all, his destiny, whether he achieves it through divine grace, as in Virgil, or through treachery, against Dido in Chaucer, and against Priam and Troy in the *Laud*. Whether Aeneas is seen as a hero, or a romantic or political traitor, the end result for the late medieval England is that he does survive Troy, he does make his way to Italy, and he does found what will become the Roman Empire. His lineage, treacherous though it may be, is what flourishes.

Treason was a particularly powerful and destructive force at the end of the fourteenth century, but the suggestion that the nexus of ideas and emotions it encompassed could also pave the way for a

[11]Federico points out that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight's* Gawain is unlike the Gawain of other poems, which is another parallel the two heroes share (39).

positive end has obvious resonance and, perhaps, appeal. To deliberately perpetuate an origin story based on the treason of your hero works, in effect, to normalize the confusion of a treacherous present. Stevenson suggests that the reference to Aeneas's treachery in Gawain reflects a common human anxiety about the binary between good and evil: "Because all Britains are presumably descendants of Aeneas, all suffer the same duality: they too have the potential for treachery or for heroism" (377). This is especially true in the late fourteenth century England of Chaucer and the *Laud* poet. After the chaos of Richard's reign, the parliaments which ended repeatedly in treason charges and (often) executions, England was left with a new royal line, the Lancastrians. Yet they, too, would experience their own problems with maintaining and controlling definitions of treason. The relief with which poets like Lydgate and Gower greet the future Henry V is tempered, as Federico points out, by the uncomfortable knowledge that he "has only pretendedly inherited" the crown (100). The threat—or promise—of treason was always lurking in the background.

This is reflected in the various depictions of Aeneas available in late medieval England. Aeneas is clearly depicted as romantically treacherous in Chaucer's *Hous* and *Legend*, and is an even worse political traitor in the *Laud*. Chaucer claims to use Virgil's version of a heroic Aeneas in the *Hous*, but complicates it by cleverly pardoning Aeneas of a "grete trespass" against Dido that he only intermittently charges him with, and foregoes Virgil's version entirely in his unrelentingly negative portrayal of Aeneas in the *Legend*. As for the *Laud's* version of Aeneas, Stevenson notes wryly that "The *Laud* poet never once in all 18,664 lines mentions Aeneas' glorious deeds after Troy" (376). Yet this Aeneas was only one option, and even this Aeneas ultimately succeeds in his quest, whether despite or because of his betrayals. Thus, perhaps the reminder that survival of the fittest sometimes requires treason and betrayal may help to explain the many faces of Aeneas in late medieval English literature.

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