Reading Lydgate's Troy Book: patronage, politics, and history in Lancasterian England

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Abstract:

This thesis, Reading Lydgate’s Troy Book: Patronage, Politics and History in Lancasterian England, discusses the relationship between John Lydgate as a court poet to his patron Henry V. I contend that the Troy Book is explored as a vehicle to propagate the idea that the House of Lancaster is the legitimate successor to King Richard II in order to smooth over the usurpation of 1399. Paul Strohm’s England’s Empty Throne was a key influence to the approach of this thesis’ topic. I examine that although Chaucer had a definitive impact on Lydgate’s writing, Lydgate is able to manipulate this influence for his own ambitions. In order to enhance his own fame, Lydgate works to promote Chaucer’s canon so that as Chaucer’s successor, he will inherit more prestige. The Trojan war is seen in context with the Hundred Years War, and can be applied contextually to political events. Lydgate presents characters that are vulnerable to human failings, and their assorted, complicated relationships. Lydgate modernises the Troy Book to reflect and enhance his Lancasterian society, and the thesis gives a contextual view of Lydgate’s writing of the Troy Book. Lydgate writes for a more varied target audience than his thirteenth-century source, Guido delle Colonne, and there is a deliberation on the female characters of the Troy Book which promulgates the theory that Lydgate takes a proactive and empathetic interest in women’s roles in society. Furthermore Lydgate has never really been accepted as a humanist, and I look at Lydgate’s work from a different angle; he is a self-germinating humanist. Lydgate revives antiquity to educate his fifteenth-century audience, and his ambition is to create a memorial for his patron in the vernacular, and enhance his own fame as a poet separate from Chaucer’s shadow.