Willing Body, Willing Mind: Non-Combatant Culpability According to English Combatant Writers, 1327-77

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It is often stated that people in the Middle Ages accepted war and its commonplace violence against non-combatants with fatalism. They argue that because attacking non-combatants was a pragmatic way to conduct war people had no reason to object.[1] Accordingly, devastation found widespread acceptance amongst English writers during periods of success, such as Edward III's reign (1327-77).[2] Late-medieval war is also sometimes seen as a mark of brutality, especially in contrast with the seemingly less violent ideals of chivalry and Christianity. [3] However, it is rarely asked what combatants thought of their own actions. Indeed, some claim that the many surviving letters by combatants "tell us little about the men who wrote them", while ignoring their careful use of rhetoric entirely.[4]

In this essay I challenge these notions by exploring English combatants' presentation of devastation and attacks against non-combatants during the wars of Edward III.[5] First I investigate how

1 The key proponents are ALLMAND, 1971, p. 181; ALLMAND, 1999, p. 264; STRICKLAND, 1996, pp. 291-329. This view has gone largely unchallenged in the works of military historians.

2 As, for example, argued by COX, 2014, p. 13.

3 MCGLYNN, 2008.

4 BARBER, 2013, p. 23.

5 All documents are interpolated in cited chronicles unless noted otherwise, and all translations are my own. I use the terms "combatant" and "non-

combatants justify their bellicosity by elevating non-combatants to equal combatant status. I then consider how combatants sidestep the issue of representing non-combatant victims of devastation through the use of short formulaic phrases and paying more attention to exciting actions like skirmishes and battles. I conclude by showing how combatants expressed a keen interest in the ethical problems of attacking non-combatants.

During Edward III's reign there are few examples of English writers trying to rationalise defeat and setback, as they were rare. More often they write of their successes, such as the battles of Halidon Hill (1333), Sluys (1340), Crécy (1346), Neville's Cross (1346), and Poitiers (1356), and the sieges of Berwick (several), Caen (1346), and Calais (1346-47).[6] The English people suffered relatively little in these conflicts compared to their enemies, especially the French.[7] Accordingly, writings by English combatants hold rather unique views on war. The French perspective is different because their people suffered considerably from war. Their writings complain loudly, but they have already been studied in detail and are beyond the scope of the present essay.[8]

Many English combatants during the fourteenth century wrote about war in personal correspondence, newsletters, and, sometimes, longer texts. For example, Edward III, his son Edward of Woodstock (later called the Black Prince), Walter Bentley, Bartholomew Burghersh, Henry of Lancaster, John Wingfield, and others, wrote letters to major figures or cities to be disseminated throughout the country in the mid-fourteenth century.[9] Many of these were intended to be read at church

combatant" throughout for simplicity. For difficulties of terminology (e.g. fighter, knight, soldier, squire), see PRESTWICH, 1996, pp. 12-18.

6 English chroniclers were more interested in examining victories than defeat, as is evident from the far more numerous surviving letters on successes.

7 See for example KING, 2002; HUGHES, 1994.

8 See for example the French friar Jean de Venette's critical presentation of various actions against non-combatants, particularly those in 1360: VENETTE, 2011, pp. 226-46. But also see HEWITT, 1966, pp. 133-39; WRIGHT, 1998; CONTAMINE, 2003, pp. 452-68. Few fourteenth-century Scottish writings survive that comment on non-combatants.

9 On the mechanics of proclamations and news, see DOIG, 1998. Although these writings may not always have been personally penned by combatants, they consistently represent what the combatants intended to be written as is evident by comparing their attitudes with other writings by combatants. Because there has not been a comprehensive study and collection of military

services to people of all stations.[10] Combatants intended them to inform on military events, provide reassurance, sway opinion, and often to ask for supporting prayers from the people.[11] An unknown number of these letters are found in various collections, but the most important of them are interpolated directly by chroniclers into their texts, such as those by Adam Murimuth (*c*. 1325-47), Robert Avesbury (*c*. 1356), and John Tynemouth (*c*. 1347-50), as well as the anonymous *Lanercost Chronicle* (*c*. 1346), 1327-47 continuation of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* (*c*. 1347), and *Gesta Edwardi Tertii* (*c*. 1340-77).[12] In other cases they were paraphrased or otherwise integrated into chronicles. English knights also produced more literary texts, such as Thomas Gray's *Scalacronica* (1357-62), a lengthy chronicle, and John Clanvowe's *The Two Ways* (1391), a penitential treatise.

I. Non-Combatants in Reality and Theory

In the later Middle Ages war was conducted through large-scale campaigns of devastation.[13] Armies routinely burned the countryside, pillaged towns, and attacked non-combatants during campaigns. They took what they could carry and burned the rest. The extent of devastation greatly increased as armies grew in size and emphasised mobility in the fourteenth century. English campaigns of devastation during the so-called Hundred Years War (1337-1453) were known particularly for their impact, so much so that they are given the distinguishing term *chevauchées* by scholars.[14] In these campaigns the English moved through enemy territory on a broad front so that they could destroy as much as possible while avoiding enemy forces and lengthy sieges. Some

letters during the later Middle Ages I cannot claim to have seen every text or compared all surviving versions, but see FOWLER, 1991.

10 See notes 51 and 52 below.

11 See HEWITT, 1966, pp. 159-65; J. TAYLOR, 1987, pp. 217-35; FOWLER, 1991; BARBER, 2013, pp. 23-26.

12 For texts discussed throughout see introductions to editions and J. TAYLOR, 1987.

13 On devastation, raids, and pillaging, see WRIGHT, 1998, pp. 26-79; ALLMAND, 1999.

14 For example in DEVRIES, 1991; FOWLER, 1991; PRESTWICH, 1996; ROGERS, 2000.

regions suffered annual devastation and took many years to fully recover.[15] It was advantageous for leaders to devastate territory because it allowed them to draw supplies from the land as they passed through, pay their men's wages with loot, destabilise local government, and undermine enemy political legitimacy, rather than confront enemy strength directly.[16]

There was a clear distinction in England, France, and Scotland between combatant and non-combatant during the later Middle Ages. This was largely because non-combatants were untrained and stood no chance against the well-equipped and experienced armies of the day.[17] Gratian, in his widely disseminated *Decretum* (*c*. 1150), lucidly declares that "pilgrims, preachers, clerics, monks, women, or the defenceless poor" should not be targeted in war.[18] The absence of significant change or addition to these prescriptions in later decretals and commentaries suggests that these categories of non-combatants remained valid to writers over the following two centuries.[19] Later English thinkers made similar proclamations in their own treatises, such as William Pagula (writing *c*. 1331-32), who states that "in time of war priests, monks, lay brothers, country folk going and returning, who are engaged in agriculture, ought have security".[20]

15 It is difficult to discern the reality of war from chronicles, or intention from results. For an evaluation of the effects of devastation based predominantly on records rather than narratives, see ROGERS, 2002.

16 HEWITT, 1966, pp. 93-110. See also ROGERS, 1994; ROGERS, 2000, which promote a theory that English military leaders conducted devastation in order to draw the opposing army into battles that were advantageous to the English. However, the strategic intentions of devastation are drawn from rhetorical narratives and far from objective.

17 Large-scale professional militias were more common in the German and Italian states, the Low Countries, and Switzerland. They were rare and mostly ineffectual in England, France, and Scotland: GUNN, 2010; WRIGHT, 1998, pp. 62-70; DEVRIES, 2008, pp. 55f.

18 GRATIAN, 1959, C. 24 q. 3 c. 25 (p. 997): "peregrinos, uel oratores cuiuscumque sancti, siue clericos, siue manachos, uel feminas, aut inermes pauperes".

19 RUSSELL, 1975, pp. 161, 186. See also KEEN, 1965, pp. 189f.

20 PAGULA, 1891, p. 132: "tempore guerre debent securitatem habere presbiteri, monachi, conversi mercatores, rustici euntes et redeuntes, in agriculturam existentes".

English narrative sources also envision untrained non-combatants as unfit for enduring war. The *Long Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* (written 1333-35) describes the English non-combatants that move to resist the 1319 Scottish invasion as "monks, priests, friars, and canons as well as laymen. Alas! what sorrow and what a shame, for the English farmers who knew nothing of war were killed there".[21] In several fourteenth-century English texts, David II, king of the Scots, is said to invade England in 1346 in the expectation that, because all of Edward III's knights and soldiers were fighting in France, there remained in the country only various categories of non-combatants: "monks and canons, friars and priests, swineherds and shepherds, cobblers and skinners".[22] As is evident from the texts described above, there is a clear distinction between combatants and non-combatants that diffused widely through preaching and other means in fourteenth-century England. These sources and other chronicles list categories of non-combatants, who are inherently innocent and exempt, in order to portray attacks against them as immoral.[23]

The common English practice of devastation was sometimes at odds with justifications for going to war. The Hundred Years War, principally fought between England and France, was founded on the English claim

21 Anglo-Norman Prose Brut, 1995, pp. 237f.: "moignes, prestres, Ffreres & chanoun come Seculers [...] Allas, quelle dolour & quelle Damage, qar les Engleis housbonde qe rien ne sauoient de Guerre illoeqes furent tuez".

22 Anonimalle Chronicle, 1970, pp. 25f.: "moignes et chanouns, freres et prestres porchers et berchers, suers et pelters". See categories of non-combatants similarly invoked in the same episode in AN Prose Brut Continuation, 1307-77, fol. 177v; AN Prose Brut Continuation, 1327-47, fol. 196v; Brut, 1906-08, p. 299; Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, p. 348; DENE, fols 93r-93v; READING, 1914, p. 102; the poems "Letre de Dauid le Bruys" and "Tractatus belli apud Crucem", edited in MINOT, 1914, pp. 112-14 and 127 (here lines 10-12, 38-40), 114-22 and 127-29 (here lines 102-06, 109-12). Nearly every contemporary English chronicle claims that either Philippe VI incited David II's invasion, that no resistance was expected, or both. These appear in a variety of forms, despite the claim that they "all carry the same meaning": ROGERS/BUCK, 1998, p. 54 n. 11. In these cases the addition of non-combatant categories adds a moral element to the episode.

23 See for example the particularly critical portrayal of David II's 1346 invasion of England in Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, pp. 344-52; and analysis in SMITH, 2014.

to the French crown.[24] Some saw the contradictions in English kings enforcing their rights by attacking the people they claimed to rule. The poet John Gower highlights this problem in his *Confessio Amantis* (*c.* 1386-90) through the allegorical story of Athemas and Demephon, who are deprived of their lands and plan to exact vengeance by attacking their people in a particularly ruthless fashion.[25] But Gower challenges this strategy by asking "to what final conclusioun / thei woulde regne Kinges there, / if that no poeple in londe were?"[26] He concludes that it is better to use diplomacy because of the immoral and impractical nature of devastation.

II. Non-Combatants Bearing Arms

Representations of siege warfare clearly illustrate combatants' considerations of the ethical problems of non-combatant victims because they neatly compartmentalise the violence of war to one place over a period of time. The city as a whole is besieged and attacked instead of any individual components or persons. Combatants portray sieges as if they were made up solely of combat between legitimate combatants in contrast to the reality of non-combatants suffering from starvation and attack during the violent sacks that followed cities that were taken by force.[27]

24 Edward III claimed his right to the French throne in a widely publicised letter to the pope and college of cardinals in 1339. See the many copies surviving in contemporary chronicles: AN Prose Brut Continuation, 1327-47, fols 185r-188v; Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, pp. 319-26 (a geneological table to support this claim is included after two more letters, on p. 330); Gesta Edwardi Tertii, 1882-83, pp. 140-47; MURIMUTH, 1889, pp. 91-100; TYNEMOUTH, fols 230v-232v. For other versions of the *Lanercost* genealogical table, see TYSON, 2008, pp. 93-98, 103-05; PAGAN, 2016, p. 163 n. 53; and generally also HEWITT, 1966, p. 163; JONES, 1979, pp. 25-28; C. TAYLOR, 2001. In reality there were other concerns which encouraged the conflict, but these rights are given precedence in English chronicles.

25 GOWER, 1900-01, bk 3 lines 1781-86 (vol. 1 p. 274).

26 GOWER, 1900-01, bk 3 lines 1816-18 (vol. 1 p. 275).

27 See HEWITT, 1966, pp. 118-23; WRIGHT, 1998, pp. 96-116; CONTAMINE, 2003, pp. 207-26, 342-50.

Combatant writers commonly portray non-combatant casualties of sieges as having willingly fought against the English. When Edward III describes the defenders of Caen in 1346 he includes among them "the commons, armed and capable of defence" and again, when listing casualties, as "a great number of commons".[28] He explicitly states that the common people (i.e. non-combatants not trained for war) who had taken up arms to fight against his army were amongst the victims. This letter was widely circulated and copied in a variety of forms, but in every one of them these terms are preserved intact.[29]

At Caen Burghersh similarly lists non-professionals fighting as combatants when he states that the "commons of the country and the city, who had decided to have held the said city against the king, my lord, and all his power" were in the French force.[30] The Augustinian Canon, Henry Knighton, integrates into his *Chronicle* (*c.* 1379-97) a version of this letter translated into Latin that has the non-combatants take up arms by describing them as "citizens and countrymen, who disposed themselves to hold the city against King Edward", and when casualties as "burghers, truly, and the commons and rabble".[31] His version makes explicit the

28 In his letter to the chancellor, treasurer, and other members of his council in London, edited in FOWLER, 1991, pp. 83f.: "communes armez et defensables", "communes grant nombre"; see also note 43 below.

29 See for example: to the archbishop of York, in Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, pp. 342f (here 342).: "communes armes et defensables", "communes grant noumbre"; a similar version, but integrated into the text without salutations, in Anonimalle Chronicle, 1970, pp. 19f. (here 20): "communes armes et defensables", "communes graunt noumbre"; to London and changed into third-person, edited in FROISSART, 1867-77, vol. 18 pp. 286f. (here 296): "communes armés et defensables", "communes graunt nombre". This letter was reused and continued in Edward III's letter to Thomas de Lucy later that year, in a miscellany with many texts on the war (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 789, fols 148r-148v), edited in COXE, 1842, pp. 351-55 (here 352): "comunes armes et defensables", "communes grant noumbre" . See also FOWLER, 1991, p. 91 n. 87.

30 Burghersh's letter to the archbishop of Canterbury, in Murimuth, 1889, pp. 202f. (here 202): "comuns de pais et de la ville, les queux se avoient ordeyne daver tenuz la dite ville encountre le roi mon seignur et tot soun poair"; see also note 72 below.

31 KNIGHTON, 1995, pp. 54, 56: "ciuium et compatriotarum, qui disposuerant se tenuisse ciuitatem contra regem Edwardum", "De burgensibus uero et communibus ac plebeis, capti sunt et mortui circiter .v. millia".

meaning of *communes* as amateurs drawn from the city's populace, rather than any sort of less-wealthy professional combatant.

Michael Northburgh similarly portrays non-combatants who take up arms as combatants at Caen in his newsletter. Initially he describes "a great quantity of men of arms were in the city" fighting against the English.[32] However, he also includes non-combatants amongst the captured and killed, in perhaps questionable places: "there were killed knights, squires, and other people of the city in great quantities, in the streets, houses, and in the gardens".[33]

Combatants portray what were clearly large numbers of formerly non-combatants as casualties, some perhaps unarmed in reality, as if they had been evenly matched combatants. In reality, however, the capture of Caen was more of a sack, as is reported by the eyewitness account of the *Acta bellicosa* (*c.* 1346-49):

> "Everywhere [the English] killed by the sword all those caught. But those who had taken refuge in houses, the strong and powerful, having discerned so many of their people dead, and nothing except death for them to be imminent, surrendered themselves captive to their pursuers, but the footmen of the English army, did not accept any for ransom, neither from nobles nor average men, and cut them down for no reason."[34]

32 Northburgh's newsletter, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 358-60 (here 359): "graunt foisoun dez gentz darmes fusrent deinz la ville"; translated into Latin in MURIMUTH, 1889, pp. 212-14 (here 213): "galeatis et armatis aliis erat plena"; see also note 62 below. Murimuth misidentifies Northburgh, Edward III's counselor, as the king's confessor. Northburgh conveys the king's attitudes in his two newsletters because of his closeness to the king through the campaign. Some reports by English non-combatants during campaigns take similar attitudes to those of combatants because their writings are similarly meant as propaganda. See CARLSON, 2012, p. 39.

33 In AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 358-60 (here 359): "mortz chivalers, esquiers, et autres gentz de la ville graunt foisoun, en lez rues, mesouns, et es gardines"; translated into Latin in MURIMUTH, 1889, pp. 212-14 (here 214): "sunt occisi milites et armigeri et alii, in hortis, domibus, et plateis jacentes"; see also note 62 below.

34 Acta bellicosa, 1894, p. 166: "omnes deprehensos undique gladio perimiebant. Sed qui domibus confugerant, valentes et majores, tantam cernentes mortalitatem sue nacionis, et nil aliud nisi mortem eisdem imminere, ipsos prosequentibus se captivos reddebant, sed pedestres

However, combatant writers make no suggestions that any people were killed outside of combat. They thereby suggest that those killed were licit targets because they had willingly fought against the English. Combatants deliberately ignore the reality of Caen, which they surely knew of or witnessed themselves, and in their letters they turn the sack into a willing contest fought solely between combatants.

Combatant writers focus on the actions of their men rather than any elements of the siege of Caen itself, brief though it was. They ignore the besieging force's culpability in forcing the city-dwellers into the role of combatants. Equally, combatant writers describe what may have been non-combatant victims of the sack as if they had been combatants. They clearly sidestep the ethical issues in the supposedly accepted "right of storm", wherein everything and everybody in a fortified place taken by force were at the will of the conquerors.[35] But some non-combatant writers found these actions troubling. For example, Jean Froissart emotionally condemns Edward of Woodstock's 1370 sack of Limoges:

> "there is none so hard a heart, if he had been at Limoges and he thought himself on God, who would not have wept tenderly over the great suffering that took place there, for more than three thousand persons: men, women, and children, were there killed and beheaded that day. God have their souls, for they were indeed martyrs!"[36]

Anglorum exercitus tam proceres quam mediocres, nulla admissa redempcione, in frustra concidebant". See also the first-hand account of Richard Wynkeley, Edward III's confessor, in his letter to the Prior and Convent of the Blackfriars, London, in MURIMUTH, 1889, pp. 215-17 (here 215), 245-48 (an expanded version integrated in London, British Library, Cotton Nero D X); the first part of which is also in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 362f. (here 362).

35 See KEEN, 1965, pp. 119-33, esp. 122f. n. 3 (where he notes that the right of storm is found in narratives and not legal texts); STRICKLAND, 1996, pp. 222-24.

36 FROISSART, 1869-1975, vol. 7 p. 250 (§ 666): "Il n'est si durs coers, se il fust adonc à Limoges et il li souvenist de Dieu, qui ne plorast tenrement dou grant meschief qui y estoit, car plus de trois mil personnes, hommes, femmes et enfans, y furent deviiet et decolet celle journée. Diex en ait les ames, car il furent bien martir!" ("B" recension), see also vol. 7 pp. 249-53 (§ 666-67) for other details of the sack and pp. 427-29 for slight "A" recension variants. The "Amiens" and "N" recensions present different but equally critical

In contrast, English combatant writers only indirectly suggest that there might have been non-combatants present at Caen, and only in so much as they were not immune from violence because they took up arms and willingly attacked English forces.

Non-professionals are not shown as, nor implied to be, forced to fight in battles in combatant writings.[37] Instead, they willingly become combatants and are made out to be fair opponents for the professionals in English armies. Some of these apparent skirmishes seem to be descriptions of devastation that are altered so that their victims instead willingly resist. For example, Gray describes an attack on the land as the English "had a great fight, in a fury like war, with the local peasants who were there killed and defeated".[38] In a similar fashion Northburgh, narrating the English army's march from Poissy to Calais in his 1346 newsletter, repeatedly describes non-combatants taking up arms to fight against the English: "there came a great number of men of arms with the commons of the country and of Amiens, well armed. And the earl of Northampton and his men issued upon them so that there were killed more than 500 of our enemies", the English "killed a great abundance of the commons of France and of the city of Paris and others of the country, [who were] well armed, of the army of the king of France', and the English attacked "the commons of the country, who were assembled and well-armed, and they defeated and killed 200 and more".[39] The people of the French countryside are not shown to be merely defending their homes and farms against devastation, but rather as actively seeking out the English to fight. Northburgh describes the non-combatants as "well-armed" and includes them amongst the combatants in every case in order to portray them as enemies that are worthy to fight and kill.

versions of the sack: FROISSART, 1991-98, vol. 4 pp. 111f.; FROISSART, 1867-77, vol. 17 pp. 501f.

37 See WRIGHT, 1998, pp. 80-83.

38 GRAY, 2005, p. 102: "ils auoint vn graunt puynez au fure de guere od lez paysens enuyroun, qi furount illoeqes mortz et descoumfitz".

39 In AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 367-69 (here 367f.): "vindrent gentz darmes a graunt nombre od les comunes du pais et de Amyas, bien armez. Et le counte de Northamptone et ses gentz issirent sur eaux, issint qe fusrent mortz plus qe D. de noz enemys", "tuerent graunt plente de comunes de Fraunce et de la ville de Paris et aultre du pais, bien armez, del host de roy de Fraunce", "issiront sour les comunes du pais, qe fusrent assemblez et bien armez, et lez desconfiteront et occirount CC. et plus".

Combatant writers directly discuss all aspects of warfare except non-combatants. Edward III, in his 1347 letter to the archbishop of Canterbury, instead of including such details as non-combatants suffering in sieges, focuses on the challenge his men faced by French forces that attempted to lift the English siege of Calais. He repeatedly mentions his desire for a combat between champions to decide the siege's outcome, and once the French propose a fight on even terms he states that "we accepted their offer and took up the battle willingly", but the French "began to change their offers and to speak of the city all anew, as if ignoring the battle" and avoid the confrontation. Edward III is eager to equate this to defeat, as he claims that the French depart the confrontation "as if defeated".[40] Many other English non-combatant writers mention this episode to suggest the French were cowardly, not confident in their own abilities, and therefore their actions weakened their right to rule France.[41]

English combatant writers are keen to portray their leaders as bravely seeking battle whenever possible. Gray consistently claims that English forces move towards the enemy for battle and, in one case while campaigning in France in 1360, explicitly states that they "had traversed as much of France as was in their ability, seeking battle, to prove their lord's rights".[42] During the 1346 Normandy campaign, Edward III states he and his army will "hasten towards our adversary, wherever that he might be from one day to another, as best as we can".[43] Wingfield claims that Edward of Woodstock, during his 1355 campaign in southern France, eagerly turned his army to attack the French force upon news of

40 In AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 391-93 (here 393): "nous acceptasmes lour offre et prendissoms le bataille voluntiers", "comencerent de varier en lour offres et de parler de la ville tut novele, auxi come entrelessant la bataille", "auxi com descomfit".

41 See for example Edward III's willingness to remove his siege-works to allow the French army to better approach for a pitched battle, only for the French to flee in the night before the battle in KNIGHTON, 2005, p. 82. See similar portrayals of this episode that link the French departure with cowardice in LE BAKER, 1889, pp. 90f.; Brut, 1906-08, p. 300; READING, 1914, p. 104.

42 GRAY, 2005, p. 188: "ou auoint enuyrounez le plus de Fraunce en qanqe en lour fust, queraunt batail, dauoir derenez le droit lour siris".

43 In his letter to the chancellor et al. in London, edited in FOWLER, 1991, pp. 83f. (here 84): "hastier devers nostre adversaire, queu parte q'il soit de jour en autre, tant come nous purrons"; see also notes 28 and 29 above.

its approach.[44] Many English challenges to enemy leaders are interpolated in chronicles, such as Edward III's challenge to Philippe VI in 1340.[45] In this letter Edward III states his desire to avoid Christian bloodshed and offers many options for his adversary to meet him in battle. However, Philippe refuses because, he claims, the letter was not addressed to him, King Philippe VI of France, but "to the so-called Philippe of Valois", a pejorative in English diplomatic writing.[46] In all of these examples the enemy either accepts the challenge but fails to show, or makes weak excuses as to why they are not obliged to fight, in order to portray the English as brave and confident in their claims and their enemies as cowards in their clearly propagandistic writings.[47]

Writings by combatants are crafted to fulfil certain objectives depending on what sort of audience was intended. If writing for a military audience, combatants emphasise the achievement of their men and their martial prowess. Edward III, writing to Edward of Woodstock in 1342, claims that his achievements are "held a great success for our war" and elsewhere focuses on the difficult challenges he overcame.[48] Similarly, in his 1339 letter to Woodstock, Edward III repeatedly focuses on his expectation that the French will meet him in battle.[49] However, when writing for an audience of churchmen, combatants focus on divine will and prayer rather than the particulars of war. Edward III's letter to Woodstock describing the battle of Sluys in 1340 focuses on military aspects: "our said enemies had assembled their ships in a most strong array and they put up a most noble defence all day and the night after",

44 In his letter to the bishop of Winchester, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 439-43 (here 441); see also notes 54 and 70 below.

45 In MURIMUTH, 1889, pp. 110f.; AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 314f.; translated into Latin in TYNEMOUTH, fol. 235v; also translated into Latin and paraphrased in Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, p. 334.

46 In MURIMUTH, 1889, pp. 112-14 (here 112): "au dite Philippe de Valoys"; AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 315f. (here 315): "al dit P(helipe) de Valeis"; TYNEMOUTH, fols 235v-236r (here 235v): "philippo de ualesio"; Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, p. 334: "quia litera non fuerat sibi tanquam regi Franciae directa".

47 See also CONTAMINE, 1979, pp. 71-74; STRICKLAND, 1998, pp. 320-26.

48 In AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 340-42 (here 340): "quele chose homme tient une graunt esploit a nostre guerre".

49 In AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 304-06; paraphrased and translated into Latin in KNIGHTON, 2005, pp. 16-18.

with the result the dead littered the coast of Flanders.[50] In contrast, his letter to the archbishop of Canterbury on the same battle focuses on giving thanks and prayer without focusing on martial glory by claiming that "our hope was Christ himself, and God allowed us to prevail", along with several other similar passages.[51] Equally, in his 1333 letter to the archbishop of York describing his victory against the Scots at Halidon Hill, Edward III minimises military glory and instead focuses on divine will and prayer.[52] These two perspectives, on either divine will or human agency, appealed to different audiences and were clearly understood by combatant writers in their selective rhetoric.

III. Formulaic Representation and Absence of the Non-Combatant

Writing about devastation was problematic because the events were not easily or accurately concentrated into a single description, as in reality they were carried out continuously throughout campaigns that often lasted months. It is difficult to convey the scale, duration, and extent of the destruction in a manner that does not seem excessive or critical. Writings by English non-combatants describe devastation in simple, short, and formulaic phrases, such as "they invaded and burned up Galloway, and led away spoil and cattle", or "Cumberland and other

50 Edited in NICOLAS, 1827, pp. 200f.: "nos ditz enemys qi avoyent assemble lours niefs en moult fort array et lesqu'x fesoient ml't noble defens tut cel iour et la noet ap's [...] se gissent les corps mortz et tut pleyn de lieux sr la costere de fflaundres".

51 In AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 312-14 (here 313): "ipse spes nostra Christus Deus [...] nos praevalere concessit"; also in AN Prose Brut Continuation, 1327-47, fols 192r-193r; in Tynemouth's *Historia aurea* variant in GUISBOROUGH, 1848-49, vol. 2 pp. 357-59 (not in primary Tynemouth manuscripts). See also Edward III's letters asking for prayer before campaigns and after victories, similarly devoid of martial language, such as that to the archbishop of York, 1338, in Gesta Edwardi Tertii, 1882-83, pp. 135f.; to his bishops, 1342, in TYNEMOUTH, fols 240v-241r; to the archbishop of Canterbury after the start of his 1346 campaign, edited in FROISSART, 1867-77, pp. 285f. See also HEWITT, 1966, pp. 160-65.

52 In Gesta Edwardi Tertii, 1882-83, pp. 116-18.

areas were devastated by slaughter and blaze".[53] Combatants employ this language in their own writings, such as "they burned and destroyed Plaisance and all the country around", "they ravaged and destroyed all the country of Astarac", "they put to fire and destruction all the country of Commingues", and "they put to fire and destruction several *bonnes villes* in the country of Lisle".[54] These are terse and often only use one or two short phrases to represent devastation that lasted throughout an entire campaign.[55] Hewitt, without considering the moral implications, claims that these formulaic phrases were understood by readers as shorthand that referred to the violent details of raids.[56] However, these consistently subdued representations of unsavoury acts are intentional and should not be dismissed.

There are clear reasons for the varying levels of attention to the violence of war in texts. Sometimes this seems to be because non-combatants do not care about devastation in their own writings.[57] However, in many cases this is because the events were distant and relatively unimportant to the writers.[58] For example, the *Lanercost Chronicle*, written in either the Lanercost Priory or Carlisle, gives a narration of David II's 1346 invasion of northern England that is three

53 Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, pp. 269, 341: "invaserunt Galwithiam et combusserunt, et spolia et pecora abduxerunt", "Cumberlande [...] caede et incendio devastantes", also 259f., three times on 272, 278f., 279, 281f., 282f., 285f., 286f., 287, twice on 288, 290f., 291, 291f., 292, 292f., 293, 335, twice on 341. See also SMITH, 2014.

54 Wingfield's letter to the archbishop of Winchester, 1355, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 439-43 (here 440): "laad ars et destruit [Pleasance] et tut la pays enviroun", "gasty et destruit tout le pays [de Astrik]", "lez fist ardre et destruire et tout le pays [de Comenge]", "fist ardre et destruire plusors bones villes [en la countee de Lylle]"; see also notes 44 above and 70 below.

55 See for example the consistent usage by GRAY, 2005, pp. 10, 16, 18, 20, twice on 36, 40, 42, 68, 80, 86, 88, twice on 96, 98, 100, 114, 118, 122, 124, twice on 126, twice on 128, 132, 134-41 (many in Lelands abstract), 152, 160, 166, 170, twice on 172, 176, 178, 182, 184, 186, 188, 194, twice on 196, 202.

56 HEWITT, 1966, p. 102.

57 Briefly considered by HEWITT, 1966, pp. 97, 100-02, 114f., 121-23.

58 Their lack of attention was not because they were not aware of what happened. Non-combatants were informed by widely-circulated newsletters and other testimony.

times as long as that for Edward III's 1346 Normandy campaign.[59] The southern clerk, Geoffrey le Baker, represents the two campaigns in an equally disproportionate fashion, but with more attention to the campaign in France.[60] For combatant writers, devastation did not act as mere background information, noise, or colour. They directed and witnessed devastation first hand throughout the course of campaigns. Combatant writers focus on what their armies do, rather than on simple news itself. Sometimes they include considerable details of their armies' movements through the countryside, such as Edward III's day-to-day report of part of his 1339 campaign.[61] By focusing on action, when armies attack the land, combatant writers suggest that they are acting and conducting some form of war rather than manoeuvring aimlessly. This focus on actions is skewed, however, considering that battles, skirmishes, and sieges were historically rare, especially in proportion to the raids conducted daily throughout campaigns of devastation. Overall, this fulfils newsletters' sometimes-stated objectives to earn financial and spiritual support from England by praising the actions of English armies and demonstrating progress.

Combatants do not state that people are attacked, but rather that the English are moving through the area or attacking an armed force. They were clearly aware of the reality of their campaigns and might simply think these details were implied in their descriptions. However, their consistent lack of such details suggests that it was thought unsavoury to discuss non-combatants as victims openly, especially in writings that were ostensibly meant to praise their own actions and receive acclaim. Sometimes they explicitly state that non-combatants are absent during devastation. During the 1346 Normandy campaign Burghersh reports that as the English advanced "there was not man nor woman of estate who dared to wait in towns, castles, or in the country through which the army passed, but all fled away" and Northburgh similarly states that

59 Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, pp. 342-44 (Normandy), 344-52 (northern England).

60 LE BAKER, 1889, pp. 79-86 and 89-92 (Normandy), 86-89 (northern England).

61 Edward III's newsletter, 1339, in a miscellany of several documents (London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula D III, fol. 25), edited in FROISSART, 1867-77, pp. 84-86. See also Wingfield's letter to Richard Stafford, 1356, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 445-47; and note 71 below.

when the English arrive at Barfleur they "thought to have found many people, but found none".[62] Consequently, the English attacks in the early portion of the campaign are made to be without violence or opposition. Similarly, Edward of Woodstock reports that during his 1355 campaign in southern France "those who were in [the town of Samatan] left at the coming of our men".[63] Because these incidents are noted as being exceptional, they suggest that non-combatants were thought normally to be in the path of such attacks. Combatants' versions of events take this into account to suggest that their campaigns were less violent than normal.

Combatant writers omit the historically common suffering of non-combatants during sieges entirely. None of the combatant letters on Caen directly mention the killed as non-combatants, but always as armed defenders.[64] No mention is made of the commonly used trope of the besieged suffering from starvation during longer sieges, such as is described in grisly detail by the Middle English poem *Siege of Jerusalem* (*c*. 1370-89) and in much fourteenth-century historical writing.[65] Several writings by English non-combatants on the siege of Calais (1346-47) include such details in their own narratives.[66] Some, such as the poet Laurence Minot (writing in the mid-fourteenth century), link this suffering to Calais' role as a haven for raiders who attacked the English coast in order to suggest their suffering served as punishment for their involvement.[67] At least three letters by Edward III from the siege of

62 Burghersh's letter to the archbishop of Canterbury, in MURIMUTH, 1889, pp. 202f. (here 202): "il ny avoit home ne femme destat qe osa attendre en villes, chastels, ne en pays, la ou le oust passa, qe touz ne sen fuyrount"; see also note 30 above; Northburgh's newsletter, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 358-60 (here 358): "quidoient avoir trove plusors gentz, et troverent nulles a regard"; translated into Latin in MURIMUTH, 1889, pp. 212-14 (here 212): "credentes ibidem magnam hominum multitudinem invenisse; non tamen invenerunt aliquos respective"; see also notes 32 and 33 above.

63 In his letter to the bishop of Winchester, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 434-37 (here 434): "ceaux (qe) dedeinz estoient voideront a la venue de noz gentz"; see also note 72 below.

64 See notes 28-33 above.

65 Siege of Jerusalem, 2003, lines 1067-1100 (pp. 72-75).

66 See for example the many Latin and French texts that depict suffering at Calais, described and listed in DEVRIES, 1991, pp. 141-44, 158f., 170f. n. 71, 178 n. 158.

67 MINOT, 1914, poem 8 lines 1-16 (p. 27). See also HUGHES, 1994.

Calais survive, all of which are have various details except those on non-combatants or their suffering.[68] Gray only once mentions a city suffering from starvation amongst his nearly forty descriptions of sieges, but briefly and without comment.[69]

Combatants only praise attacks on non-combatants that are represented as such with qualifying conditions. Wingfield, during Edward of Woodstock's 1355 campaign in southern France, describes devastation eight separate times in contrast to the standard one or two mentions of devastation for an entire campaign found in other writings. He does this to emphasise the scale of the English army's devastation when he asserts that "there was never such loss or such destruction as there has been by this *chevauchée*", because he believes non-combatants readily contribute to the French war effort, "for the lands and good towns that are destroyed by this *chevauchée* found for the king of France more each year to maintain his war than did half of his realm".[70] His repeated descriptions of attacks on towns and the countryside, without mentioning non-combatants who were surely attacked in reality, make English actions all the more praiseworthy. In a letter from the following year Wingfield claims that the English army attacks the land in order "to destroy their supplies" rather than for its own sake.[71] In both letters Wingfield portrays non-combatants as contributing to war and therefore

68 All of these letters date from 1347. Two with unknown addressees are edited in FROISSART, 1867-77, vol. 18 pp. 301f.; and another to the archbishop of Canterbury, in AVESBURY, pp. 391-93.

69 GRAY, 2005, p. 136 (for suffering at the 1346-47 siege of Calais, but this may be inaccurate as the original portion of this text is missing and only Leland's abstract survives), 38-42, 42, 44, 46, 48-52, 62, 72, 86, twice on 100, 110, 116, 118, 120, 124, 128, 130, 142, 148, three times on 156, 164, three times on 166, twice on 172, twice on 174, 176, twice on 178, twice on 182, 184, 196. I do not include in this count the Creation-1272 portion of the text because it is largely based on an amalgamation of Tynemouth's *Historia aurea* and, especially for 1100-1272, an Anglo-Norman *Brut*.

70 In his letter to the bishop of Winchester, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 439-43 (here 442): "y nont unqes tiel part eu tiel destruccion come il aad eu a ceste chivachee. Car les pays et lez bones villes qe sount destruits a ceste chivache trova a roy de Fraunce plus chescun an a maintenir sa guerre qe ne fist la moite de soun roialme"; see also notes 44 and 54 above. On this concept see ROGERS, 2000, pp. 323-34; HEWITT, 1966, pp. 50-74; KEEN, 1965, pp. 139f.

71 In his letter to Richard Stafford, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 445-47 (here 447): "pur destruire lours vives"; see also note 61 above.

implies that attacking them is strategically sensible and praiseworthy. Woodstock, during his 1355 campaign in southern France, gives a more humanitarian purpose to devastation when he claims it was meant to relieve allied lands and people from attack.[72] These justifications are meant to show that non-combatants willingly contributed to war, although indirectly, and were therefore licit targets.

IV. Ethical Sensitivities

Combatants were not ignorant of the ethical problems of war as is shown by their rationalisations and preferred representation as knights fighting in idealistic wars that were devoid of non-combatant victims.[73] The English resort to devastation only because the French refuse to fight openly, according to John Fastolf, when he states that the king of England

> "hathe offered unto his adversaries, as a goode Cristen prince, that alle menne of Holy Chirche, and also the comyns and labourers of the reaume of Fraunce [...] that the werre in eithere partie shuld be (and) rest alonly betwixt men of werre and men of werre, the whiche offre the said adversarie have utterly refused, and be concluded to make theire werre cruelle and charpe, without sparing of any parsone."[74]

Devastation clearly had no place in an ideal war. But war was rarely, if ever, practiced without devastation before Richard II (r. 1377-99) and Henry V (r. 1413-22).[75] Some texts, such as the *Acta bellicosa* and

72 In his letter to the bishop of Winchester, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 434-37 (here 434); see also note 63 above.

73 See for example writings that omit devastation entirely in favour of skirmishes, battles, and sieges: Lancaster's newsletter, 1346, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 372-74; Bentley's letter to "reverent piere en Dieu", 1352, in AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 416f.; Burghersh's letter to John Beauchamp, 1356, edited in COXE, 1842, pp. 369f.

74 Edited in STEVENSON, 1861-64, vol. 2 pp. 575-85 (here 581). Note however that he wrote his letter in the early-fifteenth century. This ideal of war fought solely between combatants also prevailed in fourteenth-century English romance.

75 See for example their ordinances that prohibit devastation: CURRY, 2011; CURRY, 2008.

William Dene's *History of Rochester* (*c*. 1350), suggest that Edward III attempted to restrain his men during his 1346 campaign in Normandy.[76] However, the majority of contemporary English texts that describe the campaign fail to mention such restraint. Many of these writings draw upon newsletters that would have surely included such details if they had actually occurred.[77] None of the letters by combatants suggest any attempts at restraint in their campaigns.[78] Therefore, suggestions of restraint by chroniclers are likely rhetorical rather than a reflection of reality. This is further borne out by the historical extent of devastation and the elaborate descriptions by contemporary writers, some of whom were eyewitnesses.

Occasionally English combatants were bothered by these acts in relation to their ideals. Gray laments this disproportionate suffering by stating that "the people bear the burden of the sins of kings" in his conclusion to the *Scalacronica*.[79] He was aware of the ethical issues in the conduct of war, especially as they contrasted with justifications. However, the attitudes in his presentation of war are inconsistent and he makes no other moral commentary on the suffering of non-combatants.

76 Acta bellicosa, 1894, p. 160; DENE, fol. 91r. This is unquestioningly accepted as historical reality by many, such as ROGERS, 2000, pp. 238-40; AYTON, 2005, p. 62.

77 See the many contemporary English chronicles that describe the campaign and battle of Crécy, often in great detail: many are given in LIVINGSTON/DEVRIES, 2015, pp. 248-50 (*Anonimalle Chronicle*), 198 (Anonymous of Canterbury's *Chronicle*), 158-64 (le Baker's *Chronicle*), 198 (*Chronicon brevis*, fairly brief), 86-88 (*Lanercost Chronicle*), 148-50 (Continuation "A" of Higden's *Polychronicon*), 134-36 (Dene's *History of Rochester*), 198-200 (*Eulogium historiarum*), 192 (Leland's abstract of Gray's *Scalacronica*), 140-44 (variant of Murimuth's *Continuatio chronicarum*), 212 (Reading's *Chronicles*), 140 (Tynemouth's *Historia aurea*); but in addition see AN Prose Brut Continuation, 1307-77, fols 175r-176r; AN Prose Brut Continuation, 1327-47, fols 195v-196v; St Albans "A" Continuation of Higden's *Polychronicon*, 1343-77, fol. 294r (some similarities to Continuation "A", but greatly expanded); Long Kirkstall Abbey Chronicle, fols 82v-83v; Northern Latin Brut, pp. 66f (similar to *Anonimalle Chronicle* and *Lanercost Chronicle*); and the many other terse or short chronicles that remain unedited.

78 See notes 28, 29, 30, and 68 above; as well as Edward III's letter to the mayor and bailiffs of Newcastle, edited in FROISSART, 1867-77, vol. 18 pp. 289f.

79 GRAY, 2005, p. 194: "le poeple port coup dez pecchez dez roys".

Edward III, in his 1328 letter asking for peace, laments the suffering and destruction of war: "the massacres, misfortunes, crimes, destruction of churches, and countless evils, which by misfortune of this manner of wars, have in many ways affected subjects of both kingdoms".[80] Instead of simply stating that non-combatants are targeted in devastation, he recognises that their suffering can be lamentable. Both of these cases show combatants perceiving non-combatants as innocent rather than as licit targets.

Some English combatants recognised the problems of English military conduct. Others felt it unacceptable and joined convents in penance for their bloody lives.[81] A few even vehemently criticise their own acts during war in their writings. Clanvowe dismisses the conduct of war and pursuit of worldly chivalry entirely: "byfore God alle vertue is worsshipe and alle synne is shame. And in þis world it is euene þe reuers, ffor þe world holt hem worsshipful þat been greete werrey ours and fiȝteres and þat distroyen and wynnen manye loondis [...] and in lyuyng in eese, slouþe, and many ooþere synnes".[82] He claims that leading the knight's life, with all its violent excess and greed, was a sure way to Hell, and conversely, that avoiding it was the way to Heaven. Clanvowe explicitly condemns the actions that made up devastation when expounding on the Commandments: "þoo þat sleen any man in þouȝt, in woord, or in deede, þei breken þe fifthe comaundement [...] alle þoo þat robben or stelen, taaken by maistrie, or be extorcoun, or by any gyle, or falsheede here neiȝebores goodis, þei breken þe seuenþe comaundement".[83] He based his text on sermons in both form and language, which further illustrates his intention for it to be read as a moralistic lesson.[84]

Combatants' presentation of war often became the *de facto* version of events and understanding of the common conditions of war. Sometimes they clearly influenced other writers' attitudes, such as the representation

80 In Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, p. 262: "caedes, occasiones, scelera, ecclesiarum destructiones et mala innumerabilia, quae hujusmodi occasione guerrarum regnicolis utriusque regni multipliciter contingebant".

81 See the examination of knights considering the morality of their actions by Kaeuper, 2009, pp. 12, 14, 19, 23f., 34.

82 Clanvowe, 1975, p. 69.

83 Clanvowe, 1975, p. 74.

84 For sermon composition and structure, see Ross, 1940, pp. xliii-lv.

of war in Knighton's *Chronicle*. At other times, however, writers clearly disagreed with them, such as when the writer of the *Lanercost Chronicle*, after the interpolated letter of Edward III that focuses on English military achievements, gives only a simple description of the noteworthy battle of Crécy, in which Edward III "engaged in a grave battle and overcame his adversary, as the Lord concedes", but "not by human, but by Divine power, was it ended".[85] When combatants' letters are included in chronicles they commonly take the place of the chroniclers' own version of events. This then prevents other writers from voicing their own, possibly dissenting, opinions, as is evident in the presentation of Edward III's Normandy campaign in 1346 in the document-laden chronicles of Murimuth and Avesbury.[86] Therefore, the differences between writings by combatants and those non-combatants who had access to such documents are sometimes blurred

Conclusions

Chivalric and bellicose attitudes were appealing representations of the ethically problematic warfare conducted in the later Middle Ages. Combatants were not simply mindless, patriotic, and pugnacious brutes, ignorant of these issues, but instead carefully produced writings to promote their perspectives in light of these ideals. They justify their actions to both themselves and their audiences by portraying war as palatable and praiseworthy with a clear awareness that some might perceive their acts as unsavoury.

Combatant writers rationalised their campaigns by portraying their victims as willing contributors to war. In skirmishes, battles, and sieges they always portray those killed as having willingly fought and on equal terms to the professional English armies. They quietly ignore the fact that many killed in these events were unarmed and, in all respects, exempt from attack. Instead, they focus on the challenge of these events and the

85 Chronicon de Lanercost, 1839, p. 344: "conserto gravi proelio, suum adversarium vicit, Domino concedente", "non humana sed Divina potentia consummatum". Compare with the other representations of Crécy in note 77 above.

86 MURIMUTH, 1889, pp. 198-218; AVESBURY, 1889, pp. 357-69, 384-87, 390-402.

laudable display of martial prowess. The human victims of devastation are mostly ignored by combatant writers in favour of formulaic language and details of more exciting actions. Sometimes devastation is justified because the goods and people destroyed contributed to the enemy's ability to wage war, or through other pragmatic pretexts. Non-combatants are portrayed in combatants' writings as licit targets because they are shown willingly choosing to involve themselves in war.[87]

This military perspective was meant for wide-ranging public consumption. There was a general interest in military affairs, so much so that most surviving English sermon collections include *exempla* on contemporary, classical, and biblical war.[88] Therefore, it was not too difficult to convince the common man to accept the conduct of war if it was presented in the particularly distorted fashion of combatant writings because it seems morally acceptable, exciting, and praiseworthy, just like these sermons were.

However, these notions of non-combatant culpability are rarely found together or explicitly stated, especially before the fifteenth century. It should not be assumed that everybody agreed with them as part of a sophisticated philosophy against non-combatant rights. The notion of "total war" is a modern one and should not be retroactively applied by piecing together disparate sources. Enemy non-combatants were not always assumed to be licit targets or perceived as part of an entirely hostile group that was "the enemy", or rebels, especially in writings by non-combatants. In many cases it is evident that combatants could see non-combatants differently from these common representations. More rarely they actively questioned the legitimacy of their own actions.

We cannot accept the current evaluation of combatants' brutal disregard for non-combatants or, more generally, the perception of war by English writers during Edward III's reign. Knights did not revel in killing and were cautious about how their conduct might be criticised. The issues were far more complex, especially through time and place, and the perspective of combatants during the later Middle Ages deserves further attention. There was a rich and varied dialogue on the nature of

87 All of these elements are combined in the newsletter by an anonymous English combatant at the 1340 siege of Tournai, in DENE, fols 85v-86v.

88 See for example the many sermons in BRINTON, 1954, but note that nearly every sermon collection has such stories. See also SHERWOOD, 1980, pp. 287-301.

non-combatants in the large body of English writings, and combatants recognised and engaged with these issues through the rhetoric they carefully employed in their writings.

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89 See DEAN/BOULTON, 1999, no. 46 (pp. 32f.); manuscript list corrected by Oldest Anglo-Norman Prose *Brut*, 2006, p. 51 n. 192.

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93 See J. TAYLOR, 1952.
94 The 1346 Neville's Cross invasion is edited in OFFLER, 1984, pp. 57-59.
95 See GALBRAITH, 1927, pp. 390-95.

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