

The Arthurian Book in Print:  
Reading the Debts and Desires of the Early Modern English Nation

By  
Blaire Zeiders

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
(English)

at the  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
2013

Date of final oral examination: 5/3/2013

This dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

David Loewenstein, Professor, English  
Kellie Robertson, Associate Professor, English  
Karen Britland, Professor, English  
Elizabeth B. Bearden, Associate Professor, English  
Johann P. Sommerville, Professor, History  
Michael Witmore, Director, Folger Shakespeare Library

© Copyright by Blaire Zeiders 2013  
All Rights Reserved

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a variety of institutions, all of which have guided this project on its path to completion. The University of Pittsburgh, where I began my doctoral studies in 2004, served to give this dissertation a foundation, not only in coursework but also in the generous mentorship of scholars such as Jennifer Waldron, Jonathan Scott, and Hannah Johnson. Leaving that university was a difficult decision, and I owe a debt of gratitude to those who nurtured me in the early years of my graduate career. I am equally grateful for the warm reception the University of Wisconsin-Madison gave me upon my arrival in 2008, and for the receipt of a Chancellor's Summer Fellowship in 2012, which has greatly aided the completion of this project.

I wish to thank the librarians at the Bodleian Library in Oxford; the Pepys Library at Magdelene College, Cambridge; the British Library in London; and the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D. C. The work I was able to conduct at these libraries has given this dissertation the crucial primary sources that anchor every chapter. The library staff at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Wisconsin-Madison have also been enormously helpful, perhaps especially the curators of UW-Madison's special collections, who helped me to identify a unique edition of an Arthurian romance. I must also thank Pam Hynes and Sandy MacDonald at Northwest Florida State College; their tireless help with my constant interlibrary loan requests enabled me to finish this project while living many miles from a major research institution.

I am fortunate to have many friends who supported and challenged me during my graduate studies. There are too many to name here, but I especially recognize Kate Fedewa, whose friendship has notably enhanced both my work and my life over the past five years.

I am grateful to have had a fantastic dissertation committee. Johann P. Sommerville thoughtfully commented on the larger consequences of this project for early modern studies. Elizabeth B. Bearden contributed much-needed clarity with respect to the methodology and terminology, pushing the project to meet the potential she graciously identified. Karen Britland provided thoughtful feedback, many suggestions for further reading, and continual offers of help along the way. Michael Witmore has given me years' worth of perspective-changing advice, continually supplying a useful framework, metaphor, or text to use in shaping a chapter or re-envisioning the goals of entire project. David Loewenstein has been an exceedingly generous co-chair: his advice has always been enthusiastic and insightful, especially with respect to his expertise on intersections between early modern literary and national pursuits. Finally, I owe a special debt to co-chair Kellie Robertson, in many ways the formative influence on this project from its genesis at the University of Pittsburgh to its completion at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Kellie's advice, instruction, and uncompromising standards have made a tremendous impact on my work. I will remain grateful to her throughout my career for the ideas she cultivated with me, the growth she demanded from me, and doors she opened for me during my graduate studies.

Lastly, I am grateful to my family: my parents, who never ceased to encourage years of literary studies; my sisters Meghan and Erin, relentless believers in my ability; my husband's parents and brother, who always showed a keen interest in work; and my husband Dan, who never made me choose between my own career and his. Dan's love and stability have bridged enormous geographical and logistical obstacles, providing a solid foundation for my life and allowing me to fulfill my academic goals.

## Table of Contents

### Introduction:

King Arthur, the English Nation, and the Early Modern Printed Book..... 1

### Chapter 1:

Vouching For Arthur: Humanists, Hacks, and Readers of Arthurian History ..... 48

### Chapter 2:

Pushing the Limits of Arthur: National Icons in *The Faerie Queene* and Popular Romance .... 117

### Chapter 3:

Inventing with Arthur: Heavenly Fathers and Earthly Obligations in Stuart Pageantry ..... 190

### Chapter 4:

Staging Arthur: The “Lurking Carcass” of Arthurian Legend in Early Modern Drama ..... 260

### Epilogue:

John Milton’s Decision: Marking the Debts and Desires of the English Nation..... 331

Bibliography ..... 348

## Introduction

### King Arthur, the English Nation, and the Early Modern Printed Book

The first book printed in the English language was not the Bible, but William Caxton's translation of Raoul Lefevre's *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (Bruges, 1473). This text's connection to theories of Britain's Trojan origins ties it solidly to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (1138), which both establishes the Trojan Brutus's founding of Britain and places a strong emphasis on the proto-national importance of King Arthur. Thus, the first text printed in the English language was one tying together the Arthurian legend, early English nationhood, and a print culture in its infancy.<sup>1</sup> Then, in 1485—the year that Henry Tudor won the War of the Roses and established his dynasty—Caxton printed Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, once again tying important moments of English nation building with Arthurian texts in print. What Caxton began was taken up by other publishers of Arthurian books: throughout the next two centuries, Arthur, the English nation, and the trajectory of the printed book would evolve together into forms that pushed the limits of the significance of each category. From the point of view of the monarchs and authors who sought to construct the early English nation, the Arthurian book must have served as a valuable asset in structuring popular opinion. And while these rulers and writers are indeed essential to understanding the national impact of Arthurian literature, even more important are the publishers and readers whose

---

<sup>1</sup> The availability of texts important to English history *in the English language* was aided in no small part by William Caxton. In the prologue to his edition of *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, Caxton explains, “And for so muche as this booke was newe and late maad and drawn in to frenshe/ And neuer had seen hit in oure englissh tonge/ I thought in my self hit shold be a good besynes to translate hyt in to oure englishe/ to thende that hyt myght be had as well in the royaume of Englund as in other landes”; see William Caxton, *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. W. J. B. Crotch, 1 vol., EETS OS, 176 (London, 1974), 4.

interests in Arthur reflect the wider spectrum of public opinion. Beginning with Caxton's extensive folio and continuing all the way to the printers of 24-page quarto chapbooks in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, publishers vouched for Arthurian texts as attractive to customers, regardless of these customers' social station. Throughout the highly volatile sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—as the country moved from civil war to civil war and beyond—customers continued to supply a demand for a wide variety of Arthurian books in print, suggesting that the interest in an English nation represented by Arthur extended far beyond those writing the land's law and literature.<sup>2</sup>

This study's opening gesture toward Caxton illustrates its unique examination of the intersections between the early English nation, Arthurian literature, and the early printed book. In exploring this relationship I build upon the previous work of scholars of English nationhood—particularly, the conversation between Richard Helgerson and Claire McEachern—and then depart from such debates by moving the focus to Arthurian myth and print culture. Although both Richard Helgerson's *Forms of Nationhood* and Claire McEachern's *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* are valuable references regarding the way literature and language impact nationhood, and both implicitly open a space for theorizing an Arthurian nation, neither really considers the impact of the printed book on nation and myth.<sup>3</sup> McEachern's study is particularly important to mine, because she pays considerable attention to the ways in which the subject,

---

<sup>2</sup> The frontispiece to the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, preserved in the copy housed at the Henry E. Huntington Library, features a woodcut scene in which a figure (apparently Caxton) kneels and presents a book to Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy. English printing thus began by providing pseudo-Arthurian texts to aristocrats, but would eventually grow into a thriving speculative business that also produced the chapbooks that kept Arthur's legacy alive among readers in less illustrious circles.

<sup>3</sup> See Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: the Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

through intimacy with the state, creates a nation. McEachern questions Helgerson's more concrete ideas about the Tudor-Stuart nation, calling it a "remarkably concerted vision of a government, one without much scope for the role of accident or incompetence," and adds that this kind of vision (wrongly) suggests that the English nation was "hammered" into existence.<sup>4</sup> Although, like Helgerson, she is concerned with the author's agenda to procure a national (vernacular) literature, she imagines the possibility of nation itself as bound up in *subject* desire—in other words, McEachern extends Helgerson's focus on the *writing* of national texts to subjects' implied *reception* of them.<sup>5</sup> For McEachern, the corporate feeling of nationhood is not one belonging solely to authors but to all those for whom the state becomes familiar.

This dissertation extends McEachern's conceptions of the familiar sovereign to the figure of Arthur—whose early modern role inspires and responds to a *desire* for citizenship amongst English subjects—and then considers that Arthurian nation through the lens of the printed book. While McEachern deals solely with early modern texts from 1590-1612 (*The Faerie Queene*, *Henry V*, *Poly-Olbion*) and monarchs Elizabeth I and James I, I suggest that Arthur's significance as a cultural icon actually links centuries of "national" sentiment: at the very least, from 1485 to the end of the seventeenth century. Throughout this period, at stake is not only the

---

<sup>4</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, 33. Helgerson's *Forms of Nationhood*, primarily concerned with those who wrote a specific, English nation, offers a rich but very author-centered account of the move towards that goal. Just when Helgerson seems to be moving towards the possibility of uncertainty, he assigns definite motives with definite outcomes: "The Elizabethans did not produce their books in the bright light of retrospection. Their efforts were more opportunistic and more uncertain...But they did have a firm grasp on the interests they served, and they sensed that identifying those interests with the nation and the nation with those interests would satisfy several needs at once"(11). Although initially uncertain, those who *produce* the nation via literature ultimately work towards the nation as something definite and widely recognizable.

<sup>5</sup> McEachern explains, "Each of the principal texts that I will consider here imagines a governing institution of Tudor-Stuart government as if it were a person...In each a text or political institution is portrayed as a speaking, feeling, acting body. Embodied, the state becomes familiar. My thesis, in brief, is that the prosopopoetic gesture cultivates the intimate affect constitutive of corporate feeling"(12).

question of the subjects' reception of contemporary texts and the preferences of the writers and rulers that produce them, but also of the subjects' shaping desire for the concepts espoused in such literature. It is in McEachern's statement about duty and desire that she implicitly opens a space for Arthur, and gives my project its point of departure:

We might well take as evidence for nationhood the official recognition of a gap between dogma and the adherence of a subject, the description, in other words, of the place where the enigmatic intimacies between subjects and states occur. In the evolving approaches of the Tudor-Stuart state to this space, a movement from diffidence to curiosity to suspicion to the desire to court not merely its conformity but its affection, we can read the contours of a national ambition. For unlike the polity described by a contractual regulation of individual wills on behalf of the whole, the nation implies not just law, but love, as a constituent. It is the place where duty becomes desire.<sup>6</sup>

I read McEachern's powerful emphasis on the importance of intimacy between subjects and states, as well as her very language choices—love, desire—as an opportunity for Arthur's seductive power as a cultural icon, one with the power to incite a longing to believe and participate in a collective English identity.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, there is a gap between dogma and a subject's duty—a gap that, if nation is the intended outcome, must be filled with something worth wanting. It is not enough to write, record, or rule the kingdom of English: nothing so teleological and contained is possible. These astute assertions of McEachern serve as a foundation for my own project, but I depart from her work in my plan to consider the ways in which these desirous subjects become desirous *readers*—more particularly, readers of Arthurian books. The fact that Caxton chose a text with Arthurian assertions for the first printed book in English suggests that there is indeed a “national” connection not just between McEachern's

---

<sup>6</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> For the definition of “cultural icon,” see David A. Summers, *Spenser's Arthur: The British Arthurian Tradition and The Faerie Queene* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997). For a discussion of Arthur as a “cultural icon,” see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

sovereign and subject but also between Arthur and reader. Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many English subjects became English readers, the consideration of whom offers a more direct way to register desire for or rejection of a given version of the English nation.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of “nation” in early modern England underwent continual revision during the two turbulent centuries in question, and is therefore always subject to redefinition, but for the purposes of this project, references to this changing “nation” will consistently be gestures toward the construction of a collective English identity that increasingly relies on the self-identification of English subjects. This sense of subjecthood, moreover, will be located in the history of printed books, a gesture that takes into account the fact that English subjects were increasingly becoming English readers. Patricia Clare Ingham has noted the intersections between Arthur literature and the developing concept of the English nation, and Andrew Escobedo has noted the unstable, Arthurian historical foundations of that nation, but neither has explored the figure of the reader of Arthurian books in print as a way to examine the spectrum of the formative members of this nation.<sup>9</sup> It is my intention to illustrate that, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,

---

<sup>8</sup> See Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, “Introduction: discovering the Renaissance Reader” in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-40. Sharpe and Zwicker claim, “At the popular level, as social historians have begun to explore, the reader of ballads, squibs, and news created a popular political consciousness, both loyalist and oppositional. In early modern England men and women, we might say, read themselves into citizens” (19). If the nation is where duty becomes desire, and early modern subjects are reading themselves into citizens, it follows that the texts that contributed to early modern feelings of nation were those that fostered desire for national unity.

<sup>9</sup> See Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). Ingham also notes the importance of desire in creating nation, explaining that “Fantasies of national identity teach peoples to desire union. . . Through Arthur an increasingly literate public can learn to desire a unified further by delighting in the glories of a unified past” (17). Such assertions become important in light of this introduction’s argument, which looks to connect McEachern’s desirous subject with a desirous reader. Ingham’s comments about medieval romance also point to Arthur’s particular significance to early, (pre)-national sentiment, which becomes inextricably bound up with his early modern significance: Arthur is never entirely contemporary. See also Andrew Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foxe,*

the changing yet still-recognizable Arthurian narrative blended (in printed texts) with changing yet still-recognizable assertions of English collective identity, providing readers with a (and reflecting an already extant) shared sense of myth and history that nurtured the feelings of national belonging. This feeling of belonging is related to the subject-based sense McEachern describes but chronologically reaches far beyond (in both directions) her window of 1590-1612 and materially transcends the world of the writers and sovereigns that so engages Helgerson, McEachern, and even Ingham, opening new space for considering the English subject via the English reader. In this genre-based study, I will illustrate the many different ways in which Arthur, as an English cultural icon, responds to the changes of the volatile sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as he is revised and put into print again and again. Since the publication of any book assumes a return on an investment—assumes a *desirous reader*—this lens of print culture will allow me to see more particularly when and how “duty became desire” for the English nation—a nation consistently asserting itself in its demand for Arthurian books.

### **Arthurian Origins of the English Nation**

From the earliest appearances of Arthur, the famous king’s legacy has never been free from ideological or political value. Although Arthur had previously been known for his spotty and vague reputation as a sixth-century warrior, his presence in historical chronicle began in earnest in the early ninth century when Nennius included him as a heroic warrior in the *Historia Brittonum* (ca. 829). Nennius’s inclusion of Arthur marks a departure from the work of his predecessors, Gildas’s *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* (ca. 547) and Bede’s *Historia*

---

*Dee, Spenser, Milton* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). Escobedo convincingly illustrates why Arthur became such an important “national” figure in early modern England.

*ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (ca.731), neither of which had said anything about Arthur. Not only did Nennius introduce Arthur as a major historical figure, he embellished his text with Arthur's superhuman deeds, creating not only a historical but a fantastic figure of British history. Early tenth-century manuscripts of the Welsh *Annales Cambriae* also mention Arthur as a historical king, but it was Nennius who gave Arthur his first starring role as hero of epic proportions and set the tone for the most influential version of the Arthur legend—Geoffrey of Monmouth's.

Although he cites Gildas and Bede more often within his *Historia regum Britanniae*, Geoffrey of Monmouth owes an enormous debt to Nennius, since the Galfridian Arthur, like his superhuman predecessor, is the stuff of romance. A chronicle of hyperbolic military exploits supplemented by supernatural prophecy, Geoffrey's Arthurian section features the larger-than-life suppressor of Saxon invaders and conqueror of most of Europe (and especially Rome). The account gave Britain a war hero who asserted both legitimacy of self-rule and the desire for empire.<sup>10</sup> Dedicated to Norman rulers, Geoffrey's text could be said to have offered an assertion of pride within a performance of subjection; implicit in the document is the assertion that, whatever the current status of the ruling class, Britain boasts Trojan origins and an Arthurian legacy and, as such, is undeniably legitimate in itself.<sup>11</sup> N. J. Higham explains, "Geoffrey was keen to defend the reputation of the Britons for bravery in battle and effective military action

---

<sup>10</sup> As Christopher Dean illustrates, Geoffrey's text was enormously popular: "the more than two hundred manuscripts of the *Historia* in existence today amply demonstrate how widespread knowledge of it must have been in the Middle Ages"; see *Arthur of England: English Attitudes to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin, 1977), 51; 54-74.

against the Gildasian and Bedan vision of an incompetent and degenerate race.”<sup>12</sup> By asserting that Britain’s founder was Brutus, descendant of Aeneas, Geoffrey firmly allies the island’s sovereignty with antiquity. Furthermore, Geoffrey claims to have translated his account into Latin from “a certain very ancient book written in the British language,” establishing an (albeit fabricated) documented, material history in the native tongue and setting his text apart from those of monastic historians Gildas and Bede—or of any other writer daring to suggest the inferiority of the British race, language, or history.<sup>13</sup> Because of its ability to assert insular pride while captivating its readers with fantastic stories, Geoffrey’s history would be recycled, copied, and used as inspiration for histories, romances and pageantry throughout the Middle Ages, all of which Arthurian lore would contribute directly to the early modern conception of Arthur as he related to national concerns.

The medieval response to Geoffrey’s text from writers and rulers was immediate: whether founded in praise or censure, the reception of the Galfridian Arthur was remarkable. In terms of the chroniclers, the most spirited critical engagements ranged from awe and surprise to downright disgust. In revising his own history (originally written in 1133), Henry of Huntingdon chose not to include Geoffrey’s Arthurian account in his own, but relegated the latter’s text to the status of an appendix, prompting many to wonder whether he found Geoffrey’s text useful or merely a curiosity; in 1150 Alfred of Beverly noted Geoffrey’s text’s influence but removed Geoffrey’s section on the “Prophecies of Merlin” which was apparently deemed too fantastic for belief; in 1196 William of Newburgh openly poured scorn on Geoffrey and offered arguments

---

<sup>12</sup> N. J. Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 224.

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, 51.

against the validity of Arthur himself; and in the mid-fourteenth century, Ranulph Higden, in his *Polychronicon*, decried Geoffrey's use of magic, Merlin, and the suggestion of Arthur's second coming to restore the British. Gerald of Wales gives perhaps the most representative reaction to Geoffrey's text, as he openly slanders it yet owes a great deal of his own ideas to it. In Gerald's *Journey Through Wales* (1188), he tells the story of Meilyr, a man who could look at any book or clergyman and determine whether either contained falsehood. When any unclean spirit tormented Meilyr, Saint John's Gospel would be placed in his lap and the demons would fly away; however, if Geoffrey of Monmouth's text were placed there instead, "the demons would alight all over his body, and on the book, too, staying there longer than usual..."<sup>14</sup> Despite such elaborate slander, elsewhere Gerald cites Geoffrey's text as an important source of information, illustrating that however one evaluated it, Geoffrey's text's medieval influence could not be denied. As Robert M. Stein's work has shown, Geoffrey's text, from its genesis, occupied a contested space as both escape from history's constraints and a probing attempt to discover history's hidden "truth," and such tensions were not lost on the centuries of critics that followed. It may indeed have been the continually debated status of the *Historia* that ensured its reappearances in various genres of new Arthurian texts throughout the Renaissance.<sup>15</sup>

Geoffrey's contested Arthurian account, along with the much-disputed "discovery" of Arthur's remains at Glastonbury in 1191, were two enormously influential (though perpetually challenged) Arthurian events of the Middle Ages, and both offered kings a historic claim to

---

<sup>14</sup> Gerald of Wales, *Journey Through Wales and the Description of Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin, 1978), 117.

<sup>15</sup> See Robert M. Stein, *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1025-1180* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 125. See also Monika Otter, "Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing" in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 109-30. Otter offers particularly helpful commentary on Geoffrey of Monmouth's participation in the medieval tradition of using fiction in historical accounts.

sovereignty.<sup>16</sup> Wedding Geoffrey's text and the Glastonbury tomb in an assertion of Anglo-Norman dominance, Arthur became a politically useful figure. Henry II, who died in 1189 and whose grandson would be christened "Arthur," had allegedly ordered the excavations of Arthur's tomb. King Richard I, who acknowledged Henry II's grandson Arthur as his own heir, claimed that a sword he gave to an ally was Excalibur. Even when Henry's grandson was murdered by King John in 1203, the cult of Arthur continued: Edward I and Edward III were avid Arthurians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, respectively, and did much to endow both Glastonbury and Geoffrey's text with credibility.<sup>17</sup> Edward III even had plans to revive the Order of the Round Table at a Windsor tournament in 1344, though these plans never materialized.<sup>18</sup> Edward IV continued this legacy by portraying himself as "the British messiah and the Red Dragon, whose recovery of power over Britain had focused on his glorious successes in France, and on the Welsh belief in his continuing existence."<sup>19</sup> In short, in the years between Geoffrey's text and Malory's adaptation, English kings consistently used the Galfridian Arthur (even as chroniclers contested it) as a way to symbolically validate their own claims to the throne.

Given this long-standing tradition, it is not surprising that the Tudors would also choose to co-opt Arthurian significance to bolster their (suspect) claims to the English throne. Like his

---

<sup>16</sup> In *Myth-Making and History* Higham explains, "Arthur was taken up in many different parts of Europe, in many instances in contested or border situations. . . . From Henry II onwards until at least Henry VIII, English kings, their courtiers and their apologists took the existence of Geoffrey's Arthur as a matter of fact which was beyond doubt" (266). Arthurian legend's status as "beyond doubt" did not extend to the historians, many of whom did indeed voice opposition to Geoffrey's text—perhaps most famously, William of Newburgh. On Arthur's tomb and its importance, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>17</sup> Higham, *Myth-Making and History*, 234.

<sup>18</sup> In *Arthur of England* Dean explains, "It would have been politically unwise to question Arthur's historicity. Edward I, by his actions at Glastonbury, had set his seal of approval on the king's existence, and he was soon followed by another ardent devotee of Arthur in Edward III" (15).

<sup>19</sup> Higham, *Myth-Making and History*, 232-4.

predecessors, Henry VII used Arthurian names and symbols to link himself (via his Welsh ancestry) to the lineage established in the *Historia regum Britanniae* in an attempt to make his violent seizure of the crown into a fulfillment of prophecy—the return of Arthur’s line to rule Britain. “Henry fashioned a coat of arms that showed Brutus, Belinus, and Arthur in one quarter, thus laying claim to an ancient British lineage. More important, in 1486 he named his first son Arthur, undoubtedly hoping to capitalize on the patriotic enthusiasm for his Welsh ancestry.”<sup>20</sup> In other ways, the Tudors were unique in their treatment of Arthur; for example, given the dynasty’s shaky beginnings, sixteenth-century monarchs and the antiquarians who served them were veritably obsessed with collecting and protecting the (in no small part, Arthurian) documents that supported England’s legitimacy as a *nation*.<sup>21</sup> Andrew Escobedo claims, “The Galfridian narrative seemed to offer the Tudors an ideal solution to their seemingly barbarous history: it provided a historical continuity from antiquity through the seventh century, describing the founding of Britain by Aeneas’ great grandson Brutus and representing in Arthur’s realm a thriving national civilization independent of Catholic Rome.”<sup>22</sup> As the star of this Galfridian

---

<sup>20</sup> Dean, *Arthur of England*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> When England began to imagine itself as a *nation* is difficult to pinpoint. McEachern, for example, allows only a brief window between 1590-1612, while other critics like David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens posit the sundry attitudes towards (a still extant though changing) nationhood held by John Milton in the mid-seventeenth century (see this dissertation’s “Epilogue”). Though Benedict Anderson and Homi K. Bhabha do not extend their views of nationhood to early modern England, their focus on “imagined communities” and nations built on repeating, unstable narratives of collective identity, respectively, are helpful for noting similar patterns in early modern England. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983). See also Homi K. Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England*, 46. The Plantagenet struggle over legitimacy was not new (medieval struggles over succession complicated the use of lineage as justification), but the Tudors’ difference is made manifest in their heightened interest in the physical texts that bore these accounts of lineage. If Geoffrey’s source was out there somewhere, then their history, however barbarous it *seemed*, was one of legitimate origins.

narrative, Arthur came to be an influential figure in asserting national legitimacy—even finding new relevance in asserting a specifically English ideology.

Arthur's influence was not only ideological but also material—tied to the physical documents and objects that verified his legacy. Geoffrey's text and Arthur's tomb provided the evidentiary basis for the *material* Arthur: whether via “certain very ancient” documents or the bones themselves, the medieval fascination with text and tomb prefigures sixteenth-century Tudor desires to equate material, tangible artifacts with truth.<sup>23</sup> Though in many ways “ideal,” as Escobedo suggests, reliance on the Galfridian Arthur was no easy solution, as it was one born of pride in a heritage but also of anxiety about the absence of one. “The Tudors thus began to re-create Arthurian history most urgently at the moment their historical inquiries started to make them suspect that their history was either fictitious or simply lost.”<sup>24</sup> This idea of Arthur as both ideal national representative and one always threatening to evaporate not only characterizes the Tudor anxiety about itself as a legitimate dynasty, but also aptly represents the concept of nation itself. Just as McEachern explains that the phenomenon of early modern nationhood is not a prototype moving towards a teleological, identifiable goal of unity, but an ideological identification that is recognizable only after its time has come and gone, so Arthur's power is also strongest in his absence.<sup>25</sup> Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe claim, “There is no Arthurian ‘now.’ At every stage of the Arthurian tradition, the narrative moment, the moment of

---

<sup>23</sup> The year 1485 is especially representative, as it brought both William Caxton's printing of Sir Thomas Malory's (Geoffrey-indebted) text as well as Henry VII's march through Wales under a banner bearing the Arthurian Red Dragon, a march which would lead to defeating of King Richard III at Bosworth field and gaining the English crown. Caxton's production of the material Arthur, coupled with Henry VII's choice of banner, illustrates the status of late-fifteenth-century Arthurian influence as both materially and figuratively significant.

<sup>24</sup> Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> McEachern, *Poetics of English Nationhood*, 6.

the tale's telling, hesitates between a past irrevocably lost and a future return forever awaited...Such narration hovers then between its historic past and its apocalyptic future."<sup>26</sup>

Although Baswell and Sharpe's conclusions seem bound in far more linear conceptions of time than McEachern's, such associations of nation as "ever just beyond reach" with a king whose identity was entrenched in fantasy, absent documents, and vague promises to return and unite communities, firmly link Arthur and the nation in their "belatedness." As I will illustrate, the continually more prevalent presence of print in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England would serve to unite these unwieldy entities in a new genre of materiality—just as physically and ideologically fragile as the decaying manuscripts, but rife with new opportunities for reaching citizens.

### **Negotiating English Legitimacy in the Early Modern Period**

In order to fully grasp the national implications of early modern manifestations of Arthur, one must first attend to the two significant anxieties that accompanied the establishment of the Tudor dynasty: the hopeful look forward toward the legitimization of vernacular writing, and an anxious look backward for a tangible, documented material history. Both of these anxieties—one desiring freedom to be specifically English and the other to be acceptable within continental circles—built community, and both bore traces of Arthur via the new humanist methodology.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe, eds. *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in the Arthurian Tradition* (New York: Garland, 1988), xi.

<sup>27</sup> Although some critics maintain, as does Rebecca W. Bushnell, that "humanism was never a coherent ideology," the features of humanism pertinent to my study were a return to reading classical literature, a focus on grammar and rhetoric—especially Latin—and deep and broad reading with the ultimate goal of discovering truth; see *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 19. Bushnell's skepticism arises from her assertion that the tenets and performance of "humanism" were constantly

Humanism first flourished in Italy and spread throughout the continent before reaching England, and during the sixteenth century, many English humanists-in-training spent time studying on the continent. Although this scholarship abroad may be seen as a push to earn legitimacy on strictly Latin, continental terms, as Rebecca W. Bushnell has shown, humanist study in England was in fact far more ambivalent.<sup>28</sup> Further, Protestantism and the arrival of the printing press, with their emphasis on personal, private readings of texts, would complicate the kind of essential truth humanists claimed to be after—and open the door to feelings of nationhood by empowering the reading subject. Exploring Arthur’s contribution to nationalism via humanism becomes intriguingly tricky: a new emphasis on broad research and factual integrity threatened to close the door on such a fabulous king, but an equally potent desire to raise a banner for English legitimacy made him an attractive figurehead. As a methodology, humanism gained wide support, but the ambivalence Bushnell observes is a critical facet of the dual anxieties to be continentally valid yet uncompromisingly English.

The genres in which Arthur had become a well-known medieval protagonist—history and romance—received fresh attention in the sixteenth century, participating in the shift in attention away from universalizing, Latin documents toward specifically English vernacular writing that would support England’s emerging claims of sovereignty.<sup>29</sup> This emphasis on a common,

---

changing according to the argument its users were trying to make. Humanism did not exist in itself but was a tool for alternately representing change through acquiring new knowledge, or for reinforcing traditional ideas.

<sup>28</sup> In *A Culture of Teaching* Bushnell suggests, “in both theory and practice early English humanist pedagogy—with its fluctuations between the extremes of liberation and control, variety and limits, play and discipline—matched the heterogeneity of early modern society and politics. Its own ambivalence was a symptom of a world of uncertain hierarchies, shifting relations, conflicting authorities, and contradicting values”(26).

<sup>29</sup> As most medieval Arthurian romances were written in the vernacular, and many early modern histories continued to be written in Latin, this statement is a bit problematic. However, Spenser’s status as poet of Arthurian romance,

specifically English purpose reflects even as it incites the desire for a common language to represent that purpose—to legitimize English would mean legitimizing England itself as an autonomous nation.<sup>30</sup> In *Forms of Nationhood*, Richard Helgerson considers Spenser’s complaint in a letter to Gabriel Harvey in 1580: “Why a God’s name...may not we, as else the Greeks, have the kingdom of our own language?”<sup>31</sup> The desire for vernacular literature and history was a significant characteristic of the sixteenth century, as well as “just” another manifestation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s claim to have translated into Latin from the original Welsh. Interestingly, both Geoffrey’s and Spenser’s claims have as their genesis a desire to assert independence, and both are couched in anxieties. Helgerson explains:

Instead of an ideal representation, Spenser’s sentence provides a dramatic expression of ambition, cultural envy, and frustration. The Greeks had the kingdom of their own language. Why, Spenser asks, can’t we? Why must we be consigned to perpetual subjection and inferiority? This pressure, this tension, this conflict of aspiration and insecurity, brings us close to the crisis from which both Elizabethan poetry and the larger project of English self-representation emerged, close to the desperately hopeful sense that, were England to rival the greatness of Greece and Rome, something decisive needed to be done.<sup>32</sup>

It is the “desperately hopeful” anticipation that seems most important with respect to Arthur: his status as the hero of a text asserting the value of a pre-Latin vernacular document, and one whose

---

political writer, and advocate for English vernacular writing makes clear how fluid these genres are, and how *attitudes* toward the documents become just as important as any visible changes therein.

<sup>30</sup> See F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1967). Levy claims: “Just as the interest in history revived, as it did with the Tudors, the divisions of the Wars of the Roses ended, and men no longer felt that their loyalty belonged to one or the other of the warring factions but to England. The Reformation, by cutting some of the ties binding England to the common body of Catholic Christendom and by raising up new enemies to force Englishmen into a common purpose, served to increase the power of the new national feeling. And the emphasis on English as a language equal in its potentialities to any other...operated in the same way. Men wanted to read English history first”(8).

<sup>31</sup> Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

promised second coming lent something desperately hopeful to believers, reflects desire for a legitimate land and language that is both ancient and yet-to-come.

Bound up in both the humanist study of English history and the prioritizing of the vernacular was the need to find the material documents that would support the legitimacy of both. Henry VII's seizing the English throne (one of many British and English dynasty changes) illustrates the difficulty of any attempt to present a stable, authentic English history, and the Tudor emphasis on a legitimate past spoke to the fear of a lack of one. The anxiety was of a two-fold nature: on one hand was the fear that no documents proving a stable history existed, and on the other was the fear that such documents were either lost or decaying. Andrew Escobedo explains:

Many historical writers saw in Arthur (and in the entire account of Britain's founding as set down by Geoffrey of Monmouth in 1136) a means of undoing their sense of historical embarrassment. This embarrassment had grown, ironically enough, partly as a result of increasing sophistication in historiographical method. The sixteenth century advances of humanist and antiquarian research on national history, while shedding new light on the English medieval past, also awkwardly revealed England's isolation from classical civilization. Lacking a connection to the Greek and Roman heroic dispensation, many writers concluded that England had simply not taken sufficient care of the historical records that might have established the connection.<sup>33</sup>

Here Escobedo gives both sides of the Tudor anxiety: that no legitimate (under humanist standards) history existed, or that it had disappeared due to neglect. Both dilemmas resulted in hopeful looks toward Geoffrey's Arthur, and both emphasized the importance of this hopeful history's materiality. During the sixteenth century, books were increasing in number, but this increase in new texts highlighted the fragility, abuse, and disappearance of ancient texts that supposedly bore the sought-after English history. In 1534, John Bale provided an account of

---

<sup>33</sup> Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss*, 46.

fellow antiquary John Leland's journey in search of England's material history, and his words are telling in light of Escobedo's claim:

Neuer had we bene offended for the losse of our lybraryes, beyng so many in nombre, and in so desolate places for the more parte, yf the chiefe monumentes and moste notable workes of our excellent writers, had bene reserued...But to destroye all without consyderacyon, is and wyll be vnto Englande for euer, a moste horrible infamy amonge the graue senyours of other nacyons. A great nombre of the~ which purchased those superstycyonse mansions, reserued of those lybrarye bokes, some to serve theyr inkes, some to scoure theyr candelstyckes, & some to rubbe their bootes.<sup>34</sup>

Not only is English history lost through the destruction of libraries and the scattering of its "chiefe monuments," but its absence is also a source of "horrible infamy" amongst other nations, which know how to protect their books. Bale makes the connection between materiality and fragility explicitly clear, lamenting the irreverent use of England's chief monuments as scouring brushes and boot polishers. How can England be expected to sustain the legitimacy needed to become a kingdom of its own language when it lacks both the authorizing historical records *and* the will to protect them? Bale's comments point to the emerging need to defend and/or create the missing evidence that would serve as the foundations of English nationhood.

### **Forging Trust in Arthur, Nation, and Book**

The late fifteenth century introduced England to the printing press and all the changes—technological, social, hermeneutical, etc.—it would bring. And just as the relationship between Arthurian legend and the early modern English nation was constantly in flux, so these changes brought on by the printing press created new, unpredictable situations for rulers and subjects, writers and readers. While Elizabeth L. Eisenstein acknowledges that the shift from manuscript

---

<sup>34</sup> John Bale, *The New Year's Gift in John Leland's Itinerary*, ed. John Chandler (Dover, NH: Alan Sutton, 1993), 4.

to print was not instantaneous or seamless—or even immediately recognizable—she famously describes the advent of printing as a revolution. Although Adrian Johns would later challenge some of Eisenstein’s conclusions, the latter’s description of the “revolutionary” implications of print culture remains pertinent.<sup>35</sup> Eisenstein terms it thus not only because of the printing press’s role in increasing the availability of books, and the ease and accuracy of mass replication, but also the ways in which these features altered ways of thinking; she explores the ways in which shifts in technology influence interpretation. “It is one thing to describe how methods of book production changed after the mid-fifteenth century or to estimate rates of increased output. It is another thing to decide how access to a greater abundance or variety of written records affected ways of learning, thinking, and perceiving among literary élites,” she explains.<sup>36</sup> Eisenstein’s work on print culture’s effects on the literary “élites” is important for thinking through the effects of print for those who were already literate and/or capable of getting information, but it does not offer a way to consider the importance of the continually increasing number of new readers, many of whom would not merit “élite” status. Books were indeed often written with a particular audience in mind, but such an audience could not be guaranteed after a book went to

---

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980). The differences between Eisenstein and Johns were somewhat “smoothed” in a more recent collection of essays, *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, ed. Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007). In the editors’ introduction they claim that even Adrian Johns’s work has been shown to be more complementary to Eisenstein’s than antagonistic to it.

<sup>36</sup> Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 8. My own interest extends beyond these “literary élites,” a perspective shared by Roger Chartier, who extends his focus to “humbler” readers. Chartier asserts: “Popular receptivity to printed matter did not create a literature specific to the popular audience; it meant that the humblest of citizens handled texts that were also read by ‘notables’ great and small”; see *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. L. Cochrane (Princeton University Press, 1987), 180.

print.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, a critical point for Eisenstein is that the printing press allowed for the “fixity” of print—the replication of a text free from the errors of scribal copying. While print did have this capacity in theory, things were never quite so simple in practice: just like the intended audience, the content itself could change as a result of the printing process, illustrating that print did as much to disturb the status quo as to aid its dissemination.

While Eisenstein’s “revolution” is still justly given credit for its theories on the culture-changing impact of the printing press, the work of Adrian Johns has done much to refocus what this “revolution” really meant. Challenging Eisenstein on the grounds of print’s ability to “revolutionize” culture via fixity, Johns suggests that things were never so simple. The printing press, like Arthurian legend and the concept of English nationhood, was in a constant state of change throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Therefore, the stability or “fixity” of text and culture was never actually a part of the early modern reader’s experience. Johns argues, “what we often regard as essential elements and necessary concomitants of print are in fact rather more contingent than generally acknowledged. Veracity in particular is, [I argue], extrinsic to the press itself, and has had to be grafted onto it.”<sup>38</sup> Johns argues that an early modern reader would not necessarily have assumed that any given printed book was, in fact, what it claimed to be; in

---

<sup>37</sup> This unpredictability continued to increase as the printing press’s influence gained more and more ground in early modern culture. See Lotte Hellinga, “Prologue: the first years of the Tudor monarchy and the printing press” in *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, ed. John N. King (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15-22. Hellinga explains: “The developments that took place in the production of printed books in the British Isles in the years between 1485 and 1603 are so far-reaching and diverse that books printed in its early years and those at the end of the period have very little in common in appearance, in subject matter, and in readership and dissemination. Only in the early years of the period were printers to some extent dependent on the reigning monarchs, or at least seeking their patronage. Once the press had gained independent power, as it did early in the sixteenth century, roles became reversed, and monarchs or their governments sought to bend or curb it to their purpose”(15).

<sup>38</sup> Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2.

other words, printing did not guarantee that knowledge was reproducible, standardized, and *preserved intact*, so textual validity had to be forged. “If an early modern reader picked up a printed book...then he or she could not be immediately certain that it was what it claimed to be...What could one know in such a realm, and how could one know it?”<sup>39</sup> Such a question highlights the problem of “knowledge” as something stable that one could theoretically (to use what Rebecca W. Bushnell posits as a favorite humanist term) *harvest* from books as if it were as simple as reading, gathering “truth,” and moving on with no lingering questions.<sup>40</sup> According to Johns’s revised revolution, the early modern reading experience was unstable; indeed, the credibility a given book enjoyed was entirely dependent on the reputation of veracity with which readers decided (or refused) to endow it. Thus, forging trust in a text did not necessarily mean learning to accept one sanctioned or even consensual interpretation, but instead, exploiting the adaptability of the text throughout varied occasions and readerships.<sup>41</sup>

The idea of the active reader whose choices and desires influence the value of a text complicates any conception of static meaning. Perhaps ironically, early modern writers repeatedly combined three unstable concepts—Arthurian legend, the concept of the English nation, and the printed book—to provide support for their vision of insular greatness. In fact, this combination illustrates the constantly fluctuating yet continually desirable assertion (under

---

<sup>39</sup> Johns, *The Nature of the Book*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching*, 117.

<sup>41</sup> Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer agree with Johns’s assertions. They argue, “In general, early modern books seem to have been more dynamic and fluid, less dogmatic and authoritarian than some modern stereotypes would imply. An overemphasis on concerns with authenticity and authorship may have distracted us from what contemporaries took to be essential features of print culture: its instability, permeability, sociability, and adaptability to particular occasions and readerships”; see “Current Trends in the History of Reading” in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies* ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 1-2.

Arthur) of the importance of English nationhood. The problem inherent in Arthur's role as bearer of national meaning is also the source of its greatest potential: Arthurian texts are inevitably printed in a variety of editions and read by audiences both intended and unintended, making their significance unwieldy but also endlessly applicable. In the opening passage of *The Order of Books*, Roger Chartier quotes Michel de Certeau's *L'invention du quotidien*: "Writing accumulates, stocks up, resists time by the establishment of a place and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction. Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself and also forgets), it does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly, and each of the places through which it passes is a repetition of a lost paradise."<sup>42</sup> Here are some striking parallels to the early modern writers' relationship to Arthur; authors attempted to resist the destruction caused by time both by rescuing decaying documents and in writing new, vernacular (in most cases) versions of old "truths," acquiescent to the fact that in order to actually carry the meaning for which they were valued, these books would have to be turned over to readers. No matter how well known the sanctioned interpretations, each new reader could interpret Arthur and nation according to his or her own experience and understanding. The lack of implicit trust in books signals a complication—if not a rejection—of an "author-centric" interpretive method and demands consideration of the communities of readers who chose (or refused) to forge the bond of trust with the printed book. In the long run, the reader's engagement with Arthur may have been a more successful vehicle for sustaining the legend's importance than was the writer's interest. An increased volume of texts meant that more readers

---

<sup>42</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. trans. L. Cochrane (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1. Compare to Homi K. Bhabha's repeating national narratives and David A. Summers's description of cultural icons over time (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation).

could “get their hands on Arthur” and adapt him to their own desires: by eschewing the idea of a fixed text and exceeding the limits of an “intended” audience, the possibilities for enlarging Arthur’s national relevance increase dramatically.

Methods for considering readership are varied, but fall mainly into two (simplified) categories: the first considers the reader the *recipient* of the author’s and publisher’s labors, and the other posits the reader as an *agent*, a contributor to the labors of the author and printer.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps the most famous “receiver” argument is that of Robert Darnton, who posits the reader as the last step in his “communication circuit,” which “runs from the author to the publisher...the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. The reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition.”<sup>44</sup> This looks promising for reader agency in many ways, illustrating the aspects of “demand” to which writers respond.

However, Darnton qualifies his point: “But texts shape the response of readers, however active they may be...The history of reading will have to take account of the ways that texts constrain readers as well as the ways that readers take liberties with texts.”<sup>45</sup> In Darnton’s theory, the reader is active, but on a larger scale is only the last link in a chain that is more about distribution

---

<sup>43</sup> Determining the actual readership of a given set of texts is an almost impossible task, but any consideration of Arthurian literature as contributing to national sentiment must also be a consideration of its reader. Due to the difficulty of studying readers, such considerations often run the risk of oversimplification. William H. Sherman’s concept of the “imagined actual reader” is helpful with respect to traces left by readers: using the evidence available to him, he constructs what he believes to be the closest approximation of “actual” readership while allowing that this must remain to some extent the scholar’s fantasy. See *Used Books: Marking Readers in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). As I will discuss in the following chapters, the publishers’ and authors’ prefaces, coupled with the content of the texts in question, can contribute much to the formation of the “actual imagined reader” of a given Arthurian book. See also the work of Harold Love, who argues, “the study of cultures of consciousness is a legitimate and important one. Its drawback is that it is only pursued at an astronomically high level of generality”; see “Early Modern Print Culture: Assessing the Models” in *Parergon* 20, no. 1 (2003): 45-64; 55.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?” in *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65-83; 69.

<sup>45</sup> Darnton, “What is the History of Books?”, 70.

and how the text finds its way to the reader than about reader choices. Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker criticize Darnton on a number of levels, claiming they want to explore not the impact of a book (and the progression of “steps” it takes) on society, but of society on a book. They claim that Darnton’s method is flawed because it is a study of communication, not of books.<sup>46</sup> For Adams and Barker books are not static artifacts but “living tools” that have no fixed pattern of use. Indeed most considerations of the reader as agent are those that reject the notion of an intended audience, as such an audience can rarely if ever be guaranteed. “The evidence that points to the intended audience includes the nature of the text, the size of the edition...[etc.]. Of equal importance is the unintended audience: that is, the people to whom the publication found its way, unanticipated by the author or publisher.<sup>47</sup> “Intended audience” would be a good substitution for the figure in Darnton’s “communication circuit,” an audience that would influence—but not subvert—the author’s agenda. Chartier’s work, with his characteristic focus on the reader, is especially pertinent, as it deals with the ways in which cultural practices do not remain perfectly intact but are *appropriated*.<sup>48</sup> In short, the abiding thread in such theories of active readership is the emphasis on the ways in which attempts at homogeneous, “intended” interpretation break down in the face of reader agency. The concept of a reader as recipient of an

---

<sup>46</sup> Nicolas Barker and Thomas Adams, "A New Model for the Study of the Book" in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, ed. Nicholas Barker and Thomas Adams (London: British Library, 1994), 5-43; 10.

<sup>47</sup> Barker and Adams, "A New Model for the Study of the Book," 16. Note the similarities between this sentiment of intended audience and the “remarkably concerted” view of teleologically writing a nation Claire McEachern decries. Both McEachern and these historians of the book who embrace reader agency are urging their readers to take the “accidental” and heterogeneous nature of interpretation into account instead of fixing an unwavering pattern or model.

<sup>48</sup> In *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, Chartier argues that examinations of printing as a cultural practice enable us to consider the texts, the words, and the examples that were aimed at shaping the thought and conduct of the common people: “[Such cultural practices] were less than totally efficacious and radically acculturating. Such practices always created uses and representations not necessarily in accordance with the desires of those who produced the discourses and fashioned the norms”(7).

author- or publisher-centered “gift” is vastly different from that of a reader never imagined by author (or publisher, for that matter), whose desires work with and against the text. The first method posits books and readers as fulfilling static roles as shapers and recipients of stable meaning; the second allows—and even depends upon—the possibility of subverting those roles, of interacting in ways not prescribed.<sup>49</sup> In any consideration of the ways in which printing facilitated or destroyed a public fascination with Arthur, it is necessary to posit neither writers nor publishers as the genesis of reader sentiment; to truly discover what Arthur meant to the emerging English nation, one must constantly interrogate notions of received, concrete meaning on both sides of a producer/reader binary. Author, publisher and reader combine to endow the Arthurian text with its constantly fluctuating national significance.

### **Malory, Caxton, and the Arthurian Legacy in Print**

This dissertation’s opening gesture establishes Caxton’s choice between the Bible and Trojan history. This is no arbitrary pairing, but one that was apparently made throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance—and one that would culminate in the reversal of Caxton’s decision when in the seventeenth century John Milton abandoned his tentative plans to write an Arthurian epic, choosing biblical themes instead. To a certain extent, Caxton’s decision reprises a story recounted by Thomas Gray in 1355, concerning a dream Gray had in which a Sibyl tutored him in history writing. Gray and the Sibyl climb a ladder, and on each rung Gray finds a different historian: Walter, archdeacon of Exeter; the Venerable Bede; Ranulph Higden (author

---

<sup>49</sup> As Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker assert in their “Introduction: discovering the Renaissance reader”: “Whatever the hopes of authors and publishers, and however idealized the ‘implied reader’ of traditional literary criticism, early modern readers followed generic prescription neither homogeneously nor slavishly”(10).

of the fourteenth-century *Polychronicon*); and the vicar of Tynemouth. Even more critically, lying under this ladder of historians are two books—the Bible and the “gest de Troy.” Gesturing towards these two volumes, the Sibyl recommends that Gray study them both. This medieval gesture not only legitimizes Trojan history but also places it on the same level as the Bible itself—and perhaps, as Francis Ingledew infers, above it. “Troy emerges as a concept expressing a new historical consciousness, intimately associated with an aristocratic and lay cultural environment and at odds with the biblically oriented Augustinian-Orosian paradigm, which instead of claiming birth in Troy, confessed birth in the Fall.”<sup>50</sup> As the early modern antiquaries would show two hundred years later, the importance of Trojan origins to England’s legitimacy as an autonomous nation (with a history apart from Rome) cannot be overestimated; indeed, it even competed with the Bible itself. Though some other writers and publishers would undoubtedly have elevated the Bible over a (proto-) Arthurian text, it is significant that the first book printed in the English vernacular was one under the ladder in Gray’s medieval tale—and not the one many scholars would have expected. English printing, and the nation whose ideology it increasingly came to represent, had an Arthurian genesis.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his choice for the first text in English, Caxton himself set into motion one of the prime examples of the ways in which the Arthurian book changed and reflected these desires of the English nation as it moved through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1485, two very important national events occurred: Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field, and William Caxton printed Sir Thomas Malory’s Arthurian account *Morte Darthur*. Thus, the inception of the Tudor dynasty coincided with the appearance

---

<sup>50</sup> Francis Ingledew, “The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History,” *Speculum* 69, no. 3 (1994): 665.

in print of a major Arthurian work—one that would be reproduced in five more editions over the next 200 years.<sup>51</sup> The continued reprinting of Malory’s text is significant in that it transfers the intensely Arthurian national sentiment that the Tudors cultivated during and after the Wars of the Roses to new contexts as the years passed—and reflects English subjects’ desire to continue to read about Arthur.<sup>52</sup> England changed drastically from 1485-1685, and the fact that Malory’s text remained a sound investment for publishers speaks volumes about readers’ endorsement of an English nation represented by Arthur. The trajectory of Malory’s text in print serves as a window on the methodology of the following four chapters of this dissertation: by focusing on which Arthurian texts of a given genre were thought to be sound financial investments for publishers at various periods in early modern English history, one can gain a sense as to which texts most appealed to readers, and why. What Caxton set into motion at the inception of the Tudor dynasty would continue as Malory’s text—as well as the histories, romances, masques, pageants, and plays that followed it to the printing press—appeared for sale at critical moments in the evolution of the English nation.

Apparently perceiving and helping to cultivate consumer demand for Arthurian books, Caxton couched his business decisions in the rhetoric of nationhood. Besides the enormously important printing of the history of Troy, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and his

---

<sup>51</sup> Patricia Clare Ingham’s *Sovereign Fantasies* notes a significant increase in manuscript production from 1380-1485 of such Arthurian texts as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *Awntyrs off Arthure*, *Avowynge of King Arthure*, the prose *Merlin*, and Malory’s *Morte Darthur* (5). In light of this circulation, Caxton’s endorsement of Malory’s (relatively recently composed) text in 1485 would seem to acknowledge both authorial and public interest in Arthur at the dawn of the sixteenth century.

<sup>52</sup> As it turns out, in fact, the Arthurian legend was one of the most reproduced romance texts. A. S. G. Edwards has shown that Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, along with Caxton’s translation of the *Recuyell of... Troye*, was “the only prose romance to continue to be reprinted in full until the mid-seventeenth century, albeit in forms increasingly removed from their originals”; see “William Copland and the Identity of Printed Middle English Romance” in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Philippa Hardman (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 139-48; 147.

edition of Malory, discussed below, Caxton printed various other texts that sought to foster a sense of national pride. In his epilogue to his translation of Ramon Lull's *The Order of Chyualry* (c. 1484), Caxton praises chivalry and laments that it is currently being neglected.

O ye knightes of Englund where is the custome and vsage of noble chyualry that was vused in the dayes/ what do ye now/ but go to the baynes (and) playe at dyse And some not wel aduysed vse not honest and good rule ageyn alle ordre of knyghtehode/ leue this/ leue it and rede the noble columes of saynt graal of lancelot/ of galaad/ of Trystam/ of perse forest/ or Percyual/ of gawayn/ (and) many mo/ There shalle ye see manhode/ curtoyse (and) gentylnesse.<sup>53</sup>

Only by reading about the chivalric—and more specifically, Arthurian—tradition, can one hope to resurrect the noble order of knighthood that bolsters patriotic pride. Although Caxton is not necessarily arguing for nationhood here, he is certainly suggesting to *readers* that England is defined, at least in part, by the actions of knights who follow an Arthurian example. Caxton had/would put forth such themes in other printed texts, such as *The Recuyell of... Troy, Godfrey of Boloyne* (1481), John Trevisa's translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* (1482), Malory's *King Arthur* (1485), and *The Fayttes of Armes* (1489). "Caxton's canon" as a publisher thus consistently reiterates the call for better civic action through chivalric reading.

And this was not just any chivalric literature, but that printed in English. A century before Spenser called for the "kingdom of [the English] language," Caxton was hard at work bringing Latin and French books to readers of English. From his own prefaces and epilogues, it is clear that this was one of his main goals. In his "Prohemye" to his edition of *The Canterbury Tales* (1484), Caxton praises Geoffrey Chaucer who "by hys labour enbelysshed/ ornated/ and made faire our englisshe."<sup>54</sup> In his prologue to *The Fayttes of Armes* (1489) he notes that the

<sup>53</sup> William Caxton, *The Order of Chyualry*, in *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. Crotch, 83.

<sup>54</sup> Caxton, "Prohemye" to *The Canterbury Tales* in *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. Crotch, 90.

improvement and dissemination of the English language through the reading of printed texts is of utmost importance in ensuring England's reputation in the world, as these books will teach its best citizens how to act. Caxton recounts how King Henry VII himself had asked Caxton to print *The Fayettes of Armes*, "to translate this said boke (and) reduce it in to our english (and) natural tonge/ (and) to put it in enpryte to thende that euery gentyلمان born to armes (and) all manere men of where captains/ souldiours/ vytayllers (and) all other shold haue knowledge how they ought to behaue theym in the fayettes of warre (and) of bataylles..."<sup>55</sup> Caxton was apparently very invested in the health of the Tudor dynasty and the England it represented and, while this may seem unsurprising to some extent, it is worth noting that Caxton's canon's focus on literary texts was in fact a departure from what would be the later Tudor propensity to print a greater volume of religious documents.<sup>56</sup> Caxton's rhetoric about teaching through vernacular literature featuring chivalry (among other historical or romance-related themes) was no small part of his output—as a printer, he helped to ignite the "kingdom of English" that would increasingly come to be represented by another of Caxton's favorite projects, Arthurian literature.

Although he printed a variety of documents with related chivalric emphases, Caxton's most famous contribution to the vernacular chivalric tradition was unquestionably his edition of

<sup>55</sup> Caxton, *Fayettes of Armes* in *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. Crotch, 103.

<sup>56</sup> John N. King argues, "To a considerable degree, Caxton catered to elite taste for translations of French romances and historical texts that were fashionable at the Burgundian court from which Caxton initially received patronage. Aristocratic fashion presumably determined his selection of works of English poetry, history, romance, and other kinds of writing"; see John N. King, "Introduction" in *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, 1-14; 3. Complementing King's sentiments in the same volume, Lotte Hellinga offers some statistics on Caxton's career: "Caxton published in Westminster ninety-eight distinct items, varying in size from single sheets to his Golden Legend, a large folio volume of 449 leaves. His surviving work (quantified as edition-sheets) represents 34.3% of all English printing before 1501...91% of Caxton's production was English, destined for laymen; 9% was Latin, for clergy and for schools. Caxton's material was not quite evenly divided into literary texts (the majority) and texts for lay devotion. The other printers contemporary with Caxton until c. 1486 worked largely for more specialized markets"(18).

Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Originally composed in 1469, this lengthy prose text translates and/or borrows from the French Vulgate and post-Vulgate cycles, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*—all of which had been sparked in no small part by Geoffrey of Monmouth's text. Like the works of his predecessors, Malory's text is a mixture of supernatural prophecy and superhuman martial skill, which proceeds chronologically from Arthur's Merlin-aided conception at Tintagel castle to his tragic death during combat with Mordred.<sup>57</sup> Providing a proto-national emphasis to his version of the Arthurian story—one that Caxton would echo in his preface—Malory transposes Arthurian literary history into late-medieval political critique. At the point in the story when Arthur's knights are beginning to be swayed by Mordred's false promises, Malory inserts his own opinion in the text, decrying the fickle nature of his countrymen in their turning away from Arthur: "Lo all ye Englysshemen, se ye nat what a myschyff here was? For he was the moste kyng and nobelyst knyght of the worlde...and yet myght nay thes Englyshemen holde them contente with hym...Alas! thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thyng us please no terme."<sup>58</sup> As this tirade illustrates, Malory's intends that his text be "used" for more than mere entertainment—it should convince Englishmen to take their (Arthurian) history seriously and loyally uphold it.

Furthermore, it suggests an already-existent sense of community: "no thyng us please no

---

<sup>57</sup> Malory's text actually ends with Lancelot, who is arguably the central character in the text (the creation of Lancelot's importance is one of Malory's most lasting legacies). In terms of national import, however, Lancelot cannot compete with Arthur—a fact that Caxton's prologue would reflect.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. Eugène Vinaver (Oxford University Press, 1971), 708. Using Vinaver's edition may seem strange, given my focus on Caxton, because Vinaver famously believed that Caxton had overstepped his bounds by creating twenty-one chapters from Malory's various adventures. Therefore, in this edition of the *Works*, Vinaver organizes the Winchester manuscript into the eight sections he believes best represent Malory's intentions. Ironically, in his own way, Vinaver is doing precisely what Caxton also did. Since the text of both editions is similar enough for my purposes, I have chosen to use Vinaver's edition, which does indeed include and comment upon Caxton's prologue and other textual "packaging."

terme,” Malory claims of his fellow Englishmen. This acknowledgment of a shared English “defaughte” is essential to Malory’s text’s value as a national vehicle: it asserts a community of Englishmen who identify as such. Written on the brink of the sixteenth century and printed at the inception of the Tudor dynasty, Malory’s text (via Caxton’s edition) was poised to become the representative of the Arthurian canon and the Englishman’s responsibility to honor it as the country moved from the Middle Ages into the era of print.

Caxton’s edition of Malory’s text illustrates the way Caxton turned national rhetoric into advertisement for his new (vernacular) product.<sup>59</sup> Caxton’s description of Arthur’s popularity illustrates the early modern publisher’s role in facilitating national sentiment. In his preface to Malory’s text, Caxton creates a narrative of public demand for his publication:

After that I had accomplysshed and fynysshed dyuers hystories as well of contemplacyon as of other hystoryal and worldly actes of grete conquerours & princes/... Many noble and dyuers gentlemyn of thys royaume of Englund camen and demaunded me many and oftymes/ wherfore that I haue not do made & enprynte the noble hystorye of the saynt greal/ and of the moost renommed crysten kyng/ Fyrst and chyef of the thre best crysten and worthy/ king Arthur/ whyche ought moost to be remembred emonge vs englysshe men tofore al other crysten kynges.<sup>60</sup>

In this preface Caxton presents Malory’s text both as a “noble hystorye” fitting into a larger genre of “hystoryal and worldly actes,” but also as a much-requested text—the reading public itself “demaunded” of Caxton why he had not yet printed Malory’s Arthur. In fact, his preface in part presents this edition of Malory’s text as a response to the public’s sour reaction to Caxton’s

---

<sup>59</sup> See N. F. Blake, “William Caxton,” vol. 1, no 3 of *Authors of the Middle Ages (English Writers of the Late Middle Ages)*, ed. M.C. Seymour (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1996). Blake makes precisely this point when he emphasizes Caxton’s career as a Merchant Adventurer: “But it would be incorrect to think of [Caxton] as a printer, though he presumably learned the basics of the trade. He was rather a publisher, editor and translator who acquired his own press because that was the best way to get uninterrupted access to printing. In a new business it is easier to control the methods of production if one wants to achieve a regular supply of material to sell”(23).

<sup>60</sup> Malory, *Works*, xiii.

edition of *Godfrey of Boloyne* (1481): Caxton mentions that customers were angry with him for having printed a version of Godfrey before printing one of Arthur—who was clearly the more important national hero.<sup>61</sup> On many levels, then, fifteenth-century text and context are feeding one another in service of Arthur. Henry VII (as ruler) marches under Arthurian banners; Malory (as writer) constructs a text that, Caxton (as publisher) claims to print as a response to the public's clamoring for the chance to buy this latest account of Arthur. Critically, Caxton's is not an account of the public-as-receiver thanking Caxton (or Malory) for a gift of sorts; on the contrary, this is a demanding public characterized by desire and even outrage when that desire is disappointed.<sup>62</sup> Finally, Caxton's preface places Malory's text within the larger context of nationality and echoes Malory's commentary on Mordred's supporters: Arthur is "moost to be remembred emonge vs englysshe men tofore al other crysten kynges," and thus the most responsible citizens will make sure to serve country and king by buying this historical romance, brought into being by Caxton the patriot, public servant, and, most importantly, salesman.

---

<sup>61</sup> For a thoughtful discussion of Caxton's ability to form public opinion by creating narratives of demand, see William Kuskin, *Symbolic Caxton: Literary Culture and Print Capitalism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 196-235.

<sup>62</sup> Balancing Caxton's need to respond to this purported "desire" is his practice of revising the text according to what he believes will make it most readable. For example, in his edition of Malory, he divides the original, undivided text into sections that he believes form logical chapters. These chapters persisted in every early modern edition of the text, illustrating the power of the printer to mold a text's reception. This was a regular practice for Caxton; interestingly, however, he rhetorically presents the book as faithful to his copy text. This is perhaps most evident in his edition of *The Canterbury Tales*: "I dyde do enprynte a certain nombre of [the Tales], whyche anon were sold to many and dyuerse gentyll men, of whome one gentyllman cam to me, and said that this book was not accordyng in many places vnto the book that Geffery Chaucer had made/ To whom I answered that I had made it accordyng to my cople/ and by me was nothing added ne mynussed/ Thenne he sayd he knewe a book whyche hys fader had and moche louyd/ that was very trewe/ and accordyng vnto hys owen first book by hym made/ and sayd more yf I wold enprynte it agayn he wold gete me the same book for a cople/ how be it he wyst wel/ that hys fader wold not gladly departe fro it/ To whom I said/ in caas that he coude gete me suche a book trewe and correcte/ yet I wold ones endeuyte me to enprynte it agayn..."(91).

After all, despite Caxton's professions of cultivating a strong, chivalric English aristocracy via vernacular print, his first objective was to sell books. Not just a printer but publisher who put his own capital on the line, Caxton needed to make a profit. Caxton chose to print a Trojan history in 1473 and Malory's text in 1485, and these were choices made *perhaps* by an English nationalist, but *definitely* by a motivated businessman. In Lucien Febvre's and Henri Martin's *L'Apparition du livre*, the authors explain that, with respect to printers, "the decision had to be made as to which of the many thousands of medieval manuscripts were worth printing...booksellers were primarily concerned to make a profit and to sell their products, and consequently they sought out first and foremost those works which were of interest to the largest possible number of their contemporaries."<sup>63</sup> Caxton's own alternation between jobbing (made-to-order printing, usually handbills, pamphlets, etc.) and speculative book publishing makes clear that printing was not a beneficent act to "give the people what they want" but a way to earn a living. With jobbing, the return was guaranteed: "a customer had already paid or was waiting to pay and to dispose of the printed matter."<sup>64</sup> Speculative book production was another story, as it required a larger investment of time and money with no guarantee that buyers would respond favorably.<sup>65</sup> Under these circumstances, the sincerity of Caxton's rhetoric is not as important as his speculation that an Arthurian text would appeal to English customers—he knew that printing Malory's book was worth the financial risks involved. David R. Carlson claims that printing an

---

<sup>63</sup> Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, trans. David Gerard, ed. Geoffrey Nowell Smith and David Wootton (London: Verso, 1976), 260.

<sup>64</sup> David R. Carlson, "A Theory of the Early English Printing Firm: Jobbing, Book Publishing, and the Problem of Productive Capacity in Caxton's Work" in *Caxton's Trace*, ed. William Kuskin (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 35-68; 45.

<sup>65</sup> Carlson asserts, "Demand for printed books had always at least to be stimulated and fostered, never simply exploited, and still: some books moved, while others sat"(45).

untried edition was uncharacteristic, as Caxton's usual preference was for texts that had established themselves firmly in manuscript circulation and that he knew would sell. The fifteen years between writing and printing would not have been much time for Caxton to feel "safe" in printing an edition of the *Morte Darthur*. His choice to print it, then, speaks to the guarantee that Arthur himself carried, which set Malory's text apart from more risky ventures. Carlson again:

The *Morte D'Arthur*... appears to be the exceptional novelty: though it cannot have had wide manuscript circulation between its completion in 1469-70 and its publication in 1485, Malory's English compendium of Arthurian prose romance, an already well-established literary type, already widely successful before printing, in fact represents another conservative publishing decision.<sup>66</sup>

Even in situations where profit outweighs patriotism, printing Arthur proves a canny decision; the legendary king provides financial security as only another such "exceptional novelty" could. Thus, it is important to keep in mind both the printer's concerns for self-preservation *and* his response to a public's desires when considering the relationships between authors, printers, and readers: rarely was the decision to print motivated solely by one group or the other.<sup>67</sup>

What Caxton established in 1485 continued for nearly 150 years, as five other editions followed from 1498-1634. Malory's text's reappearance in print serves as a microcosm of the Arthurian tradition at large, a phenomenon this dissertation attempts to trace. As editions of Malory's text went from Caxton to Stansby (and, in abridged form, well into the eighteenth century), the nation and print culture changed dramatically. Caxton printed during a time when the Tudor dynasty and print culture were in their infancy, both still reeling from recent civil war.

---

<sup>66</sup> David R. Carlson, "A Theory of the Early English Printing Firm," 57.

<sup>67</sup> In *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, Eisenstein claims, "It seems... accurate to describe many publishers as being *both* businessmen *and* literary dispensers of glory... The point is that the profit motive was combined with other motives that were self-serving *and* altruistic..."(23).

By the time Stansby's edition appeared in 1634, Charles I was on the throne, and post-Reformation England was on its way toward more civil conflict. The formats of the various editions of Malory's text—not to mention the fact that it was reprinted at all—serve to highlight the continued relevance of the Arthurian printed book to ideals of English nationhood. Significantly, though each edition changed to some extent, even the most drastically altered included Caxton's patriotic advertisement. The books of Caxton's successor, Wynkyn de Worde, are most similar to Caxton's: published in two very similar editions, in 1498 and 1529, these texts are printed as dual-column folios in black letter type. Each of Caxton's "chapters" is preceded by a woodcut illustration, sometimes of a rather generic chivalric scene but often directly related to the story. In 1557 William Copland printed another folio edition containing many of the same woodcuts Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde had featured. Thomas East's 1582 edition is the final early modern edition to mimic Caxton's original: printed in black letter with woodcuts throughout, East's edition illustrates how publishers and printers sought to recall the past through their formatting choices. Although it is clear that much has happened both in the nation and in book history between 1485 and 1582, East's edition strongly recalls its predecessors. The final edition, however, does not: William Stansby is the first publisher to print Malory's text as a quarto, and to accomplish this he cuts almost every woodcut illustration from his text. He does, however, add a large woodcut facing the title page that depicts the round table, at which are seated many knights. Rising up from the middle of the table is King Arthur himself, dressed in early modern armor. Like its text will also proclaim in even greater detail, Stansby's edition is solidly the product of the seventeenth century, setting itself apart from its sixteenth-

century predecessors who sought to recall the works of Caxton, Wynkyn de Worde, and the medieval tradition from which Arthur sprang.

During my perusal of various editions of early modern Malory printings, held at the British Library and the Bodleian Library, I found that two particular volumes stood out in their illustration of the ways in which scholars can gather preliminary evidence for readership.<sup>68</sup> In the first example, a heavily annotated copy of Copland's 1557 edition, copious readers' marks and drawings throughout the text illustrate an interactive reading experience with the volume, suggesting that reading about Arthur was serious (there are "corrections" to certain assertions) and whimsical (beards and "extra characters" are drawn in quite a few of the woodcuts). Since evidence like this is scarce, William Stansby's 1634 edition, in its publisher preface and formatting choices, provides another way to ascertain what readers might have made of Arthur at the time of its printing. By way of introduction, Stansby provides a lengthy Arthurian history, followed by a meditation on the ways that "times have changed"—a logical introduction to his abridged, "updated" edition of the text. Each text in its own way illustrates the way "actual readers" (marginalia) and "imagined actual readers" (publishers' prefaces) may have approached the text.

In the case of BL 634. k. 4 (Copland's edition), a variety of readers have left their marks on the text. In more than one woodcut, a beard has been drawn on the face of Arthur or one of his knights, and there are various other figures strewn throughout the text, often peeking out of or into windows depicted in the woodcuts. Most interesting with respect to the unpredictability of a

---

<sup>68</sup> I examined Wynkyn de Worde's 1498 *Le morte d'Arthur* (BOD Facs. d. 62); Wynkyn de Worde's 1529 *Le Morte Darthur* (BL c.11 b.12); William Copland's *The story of the moste noble and worthy Kyng Arthur* (BL 634. k. 4); Thomas East's *The story of the most noble and worthy Kyng Arthur* (BL G.1054); and William Stansby's *The most ancient and famous history of the renowned prince Arthur King of Britaine* (BL G. 10480).

text's significance, however, is the editorial work of one reader who has actually incorrectly annotated the text. In the first book, in which Igrayne is explaining to the accusatory Ulfyus how Arthur was conceived, the text reads: "More she said Merlin knoweth well a ye syr Ulfius how kyng Uther came to me in the Castel of Tyntagyll..." A reader has crossed out "Uther" and replaced it with "Arthur." According to the reader's mistake, King Arthur visited his mother in Tyntagell castle on the night of his own conception. The correct name is indeed Uther, as the printed text illustrates, but readers make the text their own—either through the addition of graffiti or "learned" corrections to the content. Both the drawings and the corrections suggest that more than one lively reader has left his or her mark on the text, and while they do not tell us exactly what the readers thought of Arthur, they betray the spectrum of serious annotations (incorrect though they may be) to whimsical picture drawing. The marks illustrate the text's attractiveness to active readers of many kinds.

While the aforementioned edition of Copland's text illustrates an "actual" reader's engagement with the text, Stansby's text illustrates an anticipated reader/customer. Not only does Stansby separate Caxton's prologue into two sections (itself a very Caxton-like thing to do), he also includes a remarkably lengthy set of background and editorial details, suggesting that Stansby is intentionally producing this text for a reader who appreciates the important texts of England's past, but is ultimately forward-facing.

[And] though the times are now more acute and sharp-witted, vsing a more eloquent and ornated stile and phrase in speech and writing then they did, who liued so many yeares past, yet it may be that in the age to come, our successors may hold and esteeme of vs as ridiculously as many of our ouer-nice Critickes doe of their and our Progenitors, as we are refined in words, I wish we were refined our deeds, and as we can talke better, it were well if wee would not due worse. Wee perceiue their darknesse through our light, let not our light blind vs that we may not see our owne ignorance. In many places this Volume corrected (not in language but in phrase) for here and there, King Arthur or some of his

Knights were declared in their communications to sweare prophane, and vse superstitious speeches, all (or the most part) of which is either amended or quite left out, by the paines and industry of the Compositor and Corrector at the Presse; so that as it is now it may passe for a famous piece of Antiquity, reuiu'd almost from the gulph of obliuion, and reuued for the pleasure and profit of present and future times.<sup>69</sup>

In a rhetorical move that veritably shouts the early modern belief that the Middle Ages were over, Stansby acknowledges that the 1630s are far more “sharp-witted” than was the fifteenth century, but he also advises that readers should bracket their dissatisfaction and think on the virtues of the text in question. To aid them in that endeavor, he has amended the text, clearing it of popish superstitions and “prophane” vows. What might be called the “national” significance of Malory’s original is preserved yet updated in Stansby’s edition: Arthur wins great glory for Britain before dying tragically with the vague promise of a return—and he does so in a way that has been cleared of its Catholic associations. In Stansby’s edition the “packaging” of Malory’s text has changed dramatically, suggesting that Stansby was either trying to cultivate or to respond to the existent demand of a serious reader who would rather look forward than back.

While an ideal situation would provide marginalia for every text in question, that is not the case in much of the extant Arthurian canon. Therefore, much more often, my methodology in the chapters that follow consists of considering together: a given text’s national agenda, its particular depiction of Arthur, and the decisions made in the material and rhetorical “packaging” of the text. In combination, these three categories can do much to suggest, if not the “real” reader, at least the projected customer for the edition in question. The book history of Caxton’s Malory is suggestive of the implications of the entire dissertation: throughout the period between the Wars of the Roses and the Glorious Revolution, the depiction of King Arthur, the ideology of the English nation, and the materiality of the printed book changed dramatically. Yet Malory’s

---

<sup>69</sup> William Stansby, “Prologue,” 5.

book—and a wide variety of books indebted to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Malory, and their early modern descendents—continued to appear in new editions. However “sharp-witted” the English nation was becoming, it had not lost its desire for Arthurian books, a preference that linked it to the Middle Ages even as it propelled it past the “profanity” of those times. In the chapters that follow, I look at the print history of Arthurian literature as it manifests as histories, romances, masques, pageants, and plays, constantly examining the ways in which the rhetoric of nationhood, the portrayal of Arthur, and the printed vehicle that conveys them combine to provide an unstable yet desirable object worth forging the trust required for belonging to an imagined English community.

### **Chapter Breakdown: A Genre Study of History, Romance, Pageantry, and Plays**

Each chapter has as its central focus the print history of the most significant Arthurian text of a given genre. By “significant” I mean the text that has the most thoroughly Arthurian content (the Arthurian element is not merely the background but the subject), and/or is the best-known example of the genre in the Renaissance. Around this “important” text hovers a constellation of less Arthurian or lesser-known works, those that citizens of a much wider range of education and income might have been reading. After all, as intriguing as the data on Malory’s print history is, none of the editions discussed above would have been inexpensive. Yet there were, in fact, Arthurian chapbooks and abridged “histories” bringing the content of Geoffrey and Malory to readers outside the aristocracy. Therefore, I examine this “constellation” of minor Arthurian texts in order to consider the national rhetoric attending to the desires of the greater populace. Lest a genre study seem an arbitrary approach in a project that purports to trace the

influence of Arthur over time, I want to emphasize that, while each chapter is topical, it also traces the (non-teleological) evolution of Arthur and genre in the period under examination (1485-1685). I begin with history because knowledge of Geoffrey of Monmouth and his descendents is indispensable to understanding Arthur's national import. I then move to romance, as it is most strongly tied to history and, under the title of "histories" romances brought national chronicle to new audiences. Having established the iconic nature of Arthurian history (discussed in Chapter 1) and romance (Chapter 2), I then move to pageantry and masque, which illustrate the Stuarts' attempts to co-opt the Tudor Arthurian iconography for their own use. Finally, I move from the confines of the court to the genre that was perhaps most immediately public: early modern Arthurian drama. Within each genre, it is clear that Arthur's importance to English nationhood waxed and waned for different groups at different moments, and it is that constant fluctuation and refusal to disappear that makes Arthur an unwieldy and ideal cultural icon from the late fifteenth century to the late seventeenth.

Chapter 1, "Vouching for Arthur," illustrates the continually useful yet perpetually contested status of Arthur as a historical figure. As this introduction has already shown, the medieval tradition incited by Geoffrey of Monmouth had an enormous impact on the writers and readers of early modern England; indeed, no serious consideration of Arthur's importance in the Renaissance—in any genre—can neglect Geoffrey's influence. And this impact was due in part to the *Historia regum Britanniae*'s mixed reception: while Geoffrey's text offered England a legitimate history outside of Roman influence, it also contained elements too fantastic to be believed, and came under constant scrutiny. In this chapter, I trace the ways in which writers creatively "vouched for Arthur" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Central to this

chapter is the work of the most famous Arthurian defender, John Leland—and that of his translator, Richard Robinson. Leland's *Assertio inlytissimi Arturii* (1544) was a response to Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* (1534), which had argued that Geoffrey's text could not possibly have been accurate, and that if Arthur had been such an important figure, Gildas and Bede would have written about him. Leland responded by refuting Vergil's skepticism, defending the books and bones of Arthurian historical record—Geoffrey of Monmouth's text and Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury. Central to Leland's project was the concept that one should not discard an entire historical tradition simply because it had been polluted with a few "old wives' tales"; it was far better, Leland argued, to remove the unbelievable elements and concentrate on the latent truth of the Arthurian story.

Although Leland's text undoubtedly raised the spirits of the Arthur-defenders in his circle of antiquarians, it figures more prominently in my study when it is translated into English by Richard Robinson and printed by John Wolfe in 1582. Robinson's translation, dripping with patriotic vitriol, offered readers of the vernacular a way to participate in the heated debate over Arthur's historicity. So impassioned is Robinson's translation that it has come under attack by James P. Carley, who argues that Leland's tract was far more reserved than Robinson's heated tirade, drawing the line between sober humanist practice and patriotic ranting. Although Robinson is a particularly zealous translator, this line was especially pertinent with respect to all Arthurian history, as the legend boasted historical "evidence" but also had so many fantastic elements that it continually needed someone to vouch for it. During the seventeenth century, the Arthurian debate died down as discerning scholars like William Camden and John Selden qualified or replaced those that had given voice to passion—from Richard Robinson to Michael

Drayton; however, even these sober historians' obligatory references to Arthur's continued importance among the "common sort"—an increasingly literate group that still participated in the oral culture that had contributed to Geoffrey's text, lived in the landscape that yielded Arthurian evidence on which Leland depended, and possibly read Robinson's translation explaining the importance of both—make clear that the growing disillusionment with Arthur amongst the most prominent historians may not have extended to those outside of Latin-reading circles. There may in fact have been plenty of seventeenth-century citizens still willing to vouch for Arthur.

In Chapter 2, "Pushing the Limits of Arthur," I examine the ways in which romance writers and publishers revised the Arthurian cultural icon to fit the needs of a changing early modern nation. In the central text for this chapter, *The Faerie Queene* (1590-6), Edmund Spenser thoughtfully combines the influences of Arthurian histories like Geoffrey's and Arthurian romances like Malory's in creating his own, Elizabethan version of Arthurian magnificence. Reconstructing Arthurian significance in a way that Leland either did not or could not admit, Spenser does not attempt to edit the romantic elements of Arthurian legend but uses them to assert the legitimacy of the English nation. *The Faerie Queene* constructs its Arthurian icon such that it pays homage to its medieval roots yet adapts it to suit the ideology of a post-Reformation culture: as the recognizable chivalric warrior "updated" to also embody the ideal Protestant reader, Arthur remains a recognizable cultural icon revised to serve new ends.

Following Spenser's lead, more than one romance writer attempted the revision of the Arthurian icon throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with results that sometimes threatened to push the limits of the famous king beyond recognition. It is in romance, however, that Arthur's longevity was never in danger. Even when authors put forth satiric or outlandish

portraits of the king (always in the name of the glory of England), readers apparently continued to supply the demand for further printings of Arthurian tales—satiric or serious, familiar or novel. And while *The Faerie Queene*, in both its original two-volume quarto or the succeeding folio editions, would have been an expensive text to produce (and procure) simply in light of its length, it was preceded and followed by a constellation of shorter, more cheaply printed Arthurian romances that contributed to and sprang from Spenser's impressive volume. Texts like *Arthur of Little Britain*, *Guy of Warwick*, and *Tom a Lincoln* illustrate Spenser's debts to and participation in a romance tradition that would have been accessible to a wider audience. The connections between Spenser's courtly romance and more "popular" romances like *Guy of Warwick* illustrate that these texts are not "high" and "low" with "aristocratic" and "common" audiences, respectively; on the contrary, readership of romances spanned the full spectrum of English subjects. The fact that these romances sometimes pushed the limits of Arthur's iconic status suggests not that Arthur was becoming a less useful figure but that he was worth exploring in a variety of new contexts and printing in a variety of new forms. The record of print suggests that there was continued demand for new versions of Arthurian romance in books that ranged in price from 3*d* to 9*s*, illustrating that everyone from laborers to gentlemen was supplying demand for national romances like those of Spenser and his "lesser" contemporaries.

Although the central texts of Chapters 1 and 2 originate in the Tudor period, in Chapter 3, "Inventing with Arthur," I turn to the genre that, in its *printed* form, was unique to the Stuarts: masque and civic pageantry. In these genres, the Stuarts and the writers that produced their pageantry sought to capitalize on the often-Arthurian themes of Tudor pageantry as a way to provide continuity and smooth transitions between the two dynasties; in short, they "invented"

Arthurian identities for the Stuarts. Illustrating a continued national investment in Arthur as a cultural icon, Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones's *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610) links James's royal body to the Arthurian icon. Jonson's masque, written for Prince Henry's investiture, praises James as Arthur's heir but also drastically revises Arthur: the famous warrior becomes a shield-distributing pacifist. The heavy revision of Arthurian significance in Jonson's masque turns into outright rejection of it in Thomas Carew and Inigo Jones's *Coelum Britannicum* (1633), which makes the statement that Arthur is a mere shadow of the greatness embodied by Charles I. In these two Stuart masques, although heavily indebted to Tudor images and themes, Arthur loses much of his former splendor, betraying fundamental differences between the Tudor dynasty and that of the Stuarts. In the early seventeenth century, Arthur was still worth revising, but by the 1630s it appears that the iconography at court has no place for him. It is clear that Jonson and Carew attempt to capitalize on the central myth of the Tudors, but may have ultimately found Arthur an ill-fitting avatar for James I and Charles I. Within the confines of the court, then, Arthur becomes a link to the past, but one so heavily revised and/or devalued that much of his earlier influence is lost.

The fact that Arthur was such an ill-fitting avatar for the Stuarts had implications outside the confines of the court—specifically, when it was on display in civic pageantry or in printed masque and pageant texts. The depiction of the Stuarts as Arthur's heirs had one meaning for the king and court, but may have taken on new significance when it came before English subjects. Civic pageants like Anthony Munday's *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* (1605) and John Webster's *Monuments of Honour* (1624) decline to posit an Arthurian role for the Stuarts, but both draw on Galfridian elements that would be certain to invoke an Arthurian association.

Those spectators who noted Arthur's absence and/or felt the distance between the current rulers and the legend that had informed so much of the national rhetoric of the sixteenth century might have been influenced in their conception of their sovereigns' legitimacy. Furthermore, when Jonson's and Carew's masques went to print, readers could get a glimpse into the court and evaluate their kings' attitude towards national myth—an attitude that might have displeased the more patriotic among readers. For the writers “inventing with Arthur,” the legendary king had the potential to neatly knit the Stuart present to the Tudor and medieval past; for spectators and readers, however, the compromised performances of the kings taking up or rejecting the Arthurian role may have been unable to foster the kinds of feelings needed to bridge the gap between duty and desire.

From the confines of the court to the public stage, Chapter 4, “Staging Arthur,” examines Arthur's legacy on the early modern stage and in the printed playtext. Although Arthur's role in drama was a rather limited one if compared to history and romance, the appearance of plays like Thomas Hughes's *The Misfortunes of Arthur* illustrates the unique possibilities created by staging Galfridian history. Written by Hughes and his fellow members of Gray's Inn, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* explores the divine right of kings, as well as the terrors of uncertain succession and civil war. Adding to these characteristic Arthurian elements is an emphasis on the king's responsibility to the subjects of his realm. This is of critical importance, especially in light of the fact that the play was only performed once—for Queen Elizabeth at Greenwich in 1587. Given this performance history, the fact that the play places equal if not more emphasis on the *responsibilities* of the monarch to his subjects sheds new light on the concept of Arthur's importance to the people (not just the monarchy) of England. Reflecting this element, the play

went directly into print after its performance, an unusual occurrence for a private entertainment in the 1580s. Since this was such a unique instance of printing, its subject matter and its handling thereof become even more critical: transposing Arthurian history into a reflection on what a monarch owes to his realm—and then bringing that updated history into print—*The Misfortunes of Arthur* illustrates the ways in which even the most elite Arthurian entertainments repeatedly made their way into the lives of more “common” subjects.

Reinforcing and building upon the popular emphasis of Hughes’s play, two public entertainments—Thomas Middleton’s *Hengist, King of Kent* (1621) and William Rowley’s *The Birth of Merlin* (1622)—further illustrate the implications of combining Galfridian history with emphases on the English subject. Middleton’s play is particularly interesting for its combination of British chronicle history—the tragedy of the Saxon invasion of Britain, occasioned by Vortigern’s foolish selfishness—with a “common” subplot involving Simon, a tanner who becomes mayor of Quinborough. While many early modern plays intertwined plots involving characters of different social strata, Middleton’s is especially important in an Arthurian context for its ability to “interrupt” the royal use of Galfridian chronicle with the demands of the citizen. Published as *The Mayor of Quinborough* in 1661, the title change reflects the competitive “common” influence in the play. Rowley’s play, also focused around the fall of Vortigern, tells the story of Merlin’s conception and birth, before staging an elaborate series of prophecies subsequently glossed by the newborn, fully grown Merlin. As were Hughes’s and Middleton’s, Rowley’s play is centered on the dangers of usurpation, uncertain succession, and civil war, and while Rowley does not really reflect upon the role of the subject, his play performs a lesson in reading Arthurian icons via the staging of Merlin’s prophecies. Printed in 1662, Rowley’s play—

with Middleton's—illustrates the continued relevance of what began with Hughes's play in the 1580s. And while this seems like a popular vote of confidence for Arthur, I conclude the chapter by briefly discussing the fact that Shakespeare never explored Arthurian themes, asking whether this marked omission is enough to threaten the thoughtful combination of the national foundations in chronicle history and the needs of the citizens that defines early modern Arthurian drama.

Extending the implications of Shakespeare's neglect of Arthur, this dissertation concludes with a gesture towards John Milton's decision to abandon his plans for an Arthurian epic. Milton's choice of biblical themes over those of British history reverses Caxton's choice of a Trojan history over the Bible for the first text printed in English. This reversal, in some sense, seems to denote the fact that by the 1660s England had become disillusioned with the kind of nation Arthur represented; after all, the seeds of satire sown in Richard Johnson's romance *Tom a Lincoln* and Thomas Carew's masque *Coelum Britannicum* had raised the question of Arthur's relevance decades before Milton changed his mind about Arthur. However, Milton's rejection is particularly potent in light of his political and literary perceptions of the nation. A firm believer in the rights and responsibilities of the subject in constructing the nation, Milton was a champion for the kind of readers' rights this project seeks to trace over two centuries of Arthurian literature in print. Furthermore, Milton's imaginative approach to everything from court masque to political tracts to British history suggests that he would have been the perfect writer to capture the characteristic Arthurian mix of sober fact and fabulous myth. Milton's abandonment of his initial plans to write about Arthur raises difficult questions about the legend's relevance after the English Civil Wars. However, this dissertation argues that the Arthur of the writers and rulers

who capitalized on his legend, while it is essential to understanding the concept of early modern English nationhood, does not necessarily trump the Arthur of readers and publishers whose desires kept Arthur in print even during periods when the most talented authors of all genres chose other subjects for their literary and historical endeavors. The Arthurian text's continued presence in bookstalls suggests that regardless of whether English writers were currently vouching for, pushing the limits of, inventing with, or staging Arthur, English readers continually created demand for the products of those who had.

## Chapter 1

### Vouching For Arthur: Humanists, Hacks, and Readers of Arthurian History

Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote his *Historia regum Britanniae* in 1138, and ever since then, the subject of Arthurian history has been fraught with conflict. Medieval authors like William of Newburgh and Ranulph Higden felt the need to criticize and qualify Geoffrey's factually vexed version of British history; yet, in a gesture that would endure into the Renaissance, they always bracketed Arthur as a subject open to interpretation. Given the Galfridian tradition's medieval instability, is not surprising that Arthurian histories printed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued to take the form of attacks on or defenses of Arthurian legitimacy. In other words, Arthur's historicity never "went without saying"—it needed continual defense. The most notable early modern iteration of the Arthurian historical argument was John Leland's *Assertio inclytissimi Arturii* (1544), an assertion of Arthurian historical significance, written for two main reasons: to refute Italian historian Polydore Vergil's Arthur-slighting *Historia Anglica* (published in 1534) and to offer evidence for England's ancient origins and contemporary supremacy. Leland's text is a brilliant example of the humanist scholarship gaining steady ground in the sixteenth century, and of the growing sense that the emerging English nation would need a legitimate history to validate its claims to power. Its preoccupation with lost and absent Arthurian sources also testifies to the mutual instability of material documents, Arthurian historical proof, and, in light of the flimsy nature of the first two, English nationhood itself.

Leland's text was published in roman-type Latin and therefore would have only been read by a select group of readers, but in 1582 Richard Robinson translated and published Leland's text in black-letter vernacular, a form that spoke both to its antiquity and its

contemporary relevance. Robinson's flimsier, more widely accessible version of Leland's text suggested that there was a broad demand to read about Arthur's historical significance. Just as Leland had taken up and added to the work of medieval historians working within the Latin tradition, so Robinson continued that tradition; however, by introducing the Arthurian debate to the vernacular reader, he both recalled Geoffrey's original claim to be translating into Latin from a vernacular original and paved the way for Holinshed, Camden, Drayton and Selden (and relevant translators) and their discussion of Arthur's historicity in printed English.

In this chapter I argue that the collective voice of English subjects "vouching for Arthur" must take into account those readers who only had access to editions like Robinson's translation of Leland's text—and that these vernacular readers should be considered no less important to the project of cultivating English nationhood than those reading Leland's defense in Latin. Recent scholarship like that of James P. Carley has often noted the particular contribution of Leland's passionate assertion of Arthurian national importance, but has either entirely neglected the impact of print culture or focused only on the original 1544 edition, dismissing Robinson's translation as the work of a "hack." This chapter seeks to validate the work of "hacks" like Robinson as very different yet equally important contributors to the sense of Arthur's essential status as a foundational figure of England's national history. While Leland should rightfully be praised for his learned defense of Arthurian books and artifacts, Robinson should also be acknowledged for his bringing the Arthurian debate into a form accessible by a greater number of readers. The legacies of both writers suggest that Arthur is a figure who transcends the arbitrary divide between "humanist" and "hack," easily transitioning from a sober humanist treatise to a passionate rant. Leland's descendants—Camden, Holinshed, Drayton, and Selden—

are important figures in illustrating Arthur's "life after Leland" in English print history. Just as important, however, are the efforts of authors such as Martin Parker, whose romance/history "hybrids" owe a debt to Robinson's passionate vernacular endeavor. Together, the works of Leland and Robinson, along with those of their historical-literary descendants, suggest that "vouching for Arthur" was a mission shared between many readers who ranged in education and advantage from classically-trained antiquaries to working men who could only afford and/or understand the vernacular "fond fables" marketed under the name of "history." And even more important: this group of customers for Arthurian histories in print was far less hierarchized than scholars who seek to separate the products of humanists and hacks have previously considered. Given these various readers' shared agenda, this chapter blurs the line between the two categories of Arthurian defenders, and even privileges the works of "hacks" like Robinson, whose work brought Arthur to new book markets.

### **Leland's Sources: The Historical Arthur of the Middle Ages**

Although it is arguably the most famous and formative version of the Arthurian story in the Middle Ages, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1138) was not the first iteration. In fact, two Welsh texts were almost certainly the origins from which Geoffrey drew his material. From the very start, as these medieval sources suggest, Arthur's role was both useful and vexed. The first of these is the *Historia Brittonum* (829-830), a text often associated with Nennius, who contributed some of the material contained therein. In this text, the Britons (who have Trojan origins, a feature on which Geoffrey would later capitalize) are led to victory in battle against the Saxons by a Christ-like warrior King Arthur. This Arthurian role was, in no

small part, a response to the “Briton bashing” in Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (731). N. J. Higham explains,

Bede had constructed a vision of an English people of the Lord taking over Britain from an indigenous race who had sinned so badly that they had fallen out of salvation history. The *Historia Brittonum* is a rebuttal, written by a man who owned and valued the idea of ‘Brittishness’, and who saw a need to reinvigorate this identity over and against ‘Englishness’. The central meaning of his narrative lay not in such details as Arthur and his battles, but in the greater myth of an honorable, righteous, and courageous nation, of which Arthur was symbolic.<sup>1</sup>

In this analysis of the first (extant) Arthurian account, Higham draws attention to Arthur’s dual role as historical and mythic figure, one that would continually make the king a useful political icon and folk hero. Such a role is also evident in the other significant Welsh offering, the tenth-century *Annales Cambriae*, which offers slight but tantalizing information on Arthur. There are two entries in the *Annales*, the first for 519: “The battle of Badon in which Arthur bore the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulders, and the Britons were victorious”; and for 539: “The battle of Camlann in which Arthur and Medraut fell.”<sup>2</sup> Although these entries are brief and offer little information on Arthur, their inclusion of Arthur’s name suggests a continuing sense of his importance to Welsh historical identity.

For those hoping to “fill in the blanks” in Arthur’s historical identity, the Welsh oral tradition offers an intriguing yet inconsistent picture. Since the poetic adventures that feature King Arthur are only extant in twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts, the question arises as to whether Arthur’s historical influence was truly as ancient as the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales* claim. The Welsh romances that contain his name, notably *Culhwych and Olwen* and *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, date in manuscript form to the thirteenth century, and therefore

---

<sup>1</sup> N. J. Higham, *King Arthur-Myth Making and History* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 269.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

provide an inconclusive portrait of Arthur's importance to ancient British history. As Richard W. Barber suggests, there are two main theories when it comes to Arthur's role in Welsh stories: either there had indeed been a strong Arthurian oral tradition, which was later written down in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; or, Arthur's name was only later inserted into stories that were originally about other heroes, once Arthur had become sufficiently popular in the (post-Galfridian) High Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> This proves an impossible question to settle, but there is one important consistency amongst the Welsh documents: Arthur's role as a Christ-like warrior king, sent to defend his (British) people from outside dangers. Higham suggests:

The most plausible conclusion is...that the historicized Arthur of the central Middle Ages had his roots in a Roman *Artorius* who had been taken up and developed within British folk stories already widespread by the beginning of the ninth century. Thence he was adapted into overtly political, 'historical' texts in order to provide a prototype of the successful British warrior, which was an image necessary to sustain current political agendas... This historicized, warrior Arthur was, therefore, created to sustain the vision of a superhuman strength, whose steadfastness in resisting the heathen barbarians who had taken over the diocesan heartlands would eventually be rewarded by God. The likeliest origin was a military leader of repute in Roman Britain who had become legendary and who later evolved into a [folk hero].<sup>4</sup>

Although a lack of evidence calls into question Higham's belief in a long-standing Arthurian oral folk tradition, the fact that many medieval authors also make the same assumption points to its usefulness in understanding the spectrum of Arthur's significance. In fact, references to Arthur's appearances in the oral culture of singing bards spring up in the histories of everyone from Nennius to Geoffrey of Monmouth to William Camden. Therefore, whatever the "truth" might be regarding theories of Arthur's ancient significance, his reputed role as a folk hero certainly

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard W. Barber, *The Figure of Arthur* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1976), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Higham, *Myth-Making and History*, 97.

colored his appearances in the works of medieval and early modern authors for centuries to come.

The use of Arthur in oral tradition should not be considered as a “lesser” or alternative form of history, but, potentially, the very practice from which his legend sprang. This is apparent not only in romances like *Culhwych and Olwen* but also in histories such as William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (1125), in which the author describes Arthur as the figure “of whom the trifling of the Britons talks such nonsense even to-day; a man clearly worthy not to be dreamed of in fallacious fables, but to be proclaimed in veracious histories, as one who long sustained his tottering country and gave the shattered minds of his fellow-citizens an edge for war.”<sup>5</sup> Although William of Malmesbury paints an unflattering portrait of the Britons’ obsession with a fabulous Arthur, his statement is also an admission of Arthur’s sustained importance as a native hero, an importance that undoubtedly also fed Arthur’s more “legitimate” historical fame. Supporting this assertion, E. K. Chambers explains that notices of Arthur independent of Geoffrey of Monmouth “belong to bardic literature. The Welsh, a people to whom the occupations of pasturage and intermittent warfare left abundant leisure, had developed the arts of song and narrative at an early stage...Nennius, for what he is worth, speaks of men who were famed for song, apparently in North Britain, about the middle of the sixth century.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, there was almost certainly an oral Arthurian tradition, untraceable in extant manuscripts, but

---

<sup>5</sup> Malmesbury continues: “Finally, at the siege of Mount Badon, relying upon the image of the mother of the Lord which he had sewn upon his armour, he made head single-handed against nine hundred of the enemy and routed them with incredible slaughter.” These passages from William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum Anglorum* are translated by E. K. Chambers in *Arthur of Britain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1927), 16-7.

<sup>6</sup> Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, 58. Regarding the absence of Arthurian stories during the eleventh century (dividing the tenth-century *Annales* from the Arthurian flourishing during the twelfth century), Chambers claims, “The eleventh century contributes nothing to our formal chronicle of Arthur, although we may see reason to believe that before its close he had become a notable figure of literary and still more of oral legend”(16).

continually suggested in texts ranging in historical clout from the fabulous *Dream of Rhonabwy* to Geoffrey's pseudo-historical *Historia regum Britanniae* to the much-respected *Gesta Regum Anglorum* of William of Malmesbury. In the face of those who (like Malmesbury perhaps) decry such oral legends' inclusion in the arc of the historical Arthur, J. S. P. Tatlock reminds his reader:

The point to be emphasized is that oral tradition, when it exists, does not always mean a petrified ancient saga, but may mean casual, perhaps soon-forgotten tales formed almost over-night, and that there was very much sheer invention. These two points are the most important to emphasize. All the evidence favors belief in an early personage recorded in writing among a mostly illiterate people, whence he sprang into prominence in the late-eleventh and early-twelfth centuries; a time when Celts needed to look for a messiah as encouragement against conquerors.<sup>7</sup>

Tatlock's point speaks to Arthur's constant connection to his people's desire for him: emerging when looked for and needed, he springs from oral tradition to chronicle, continually evolving as the desires of the Britons dictate.

The British demand for Arthur apparent in chronicle and assumed in oral tradition manifests perhaps most clearly in the Arthurian landscape, which forms a significant companion "text" to both the bardic and Latin historical traditions from which he sprang and/or became a significant part. "Any attempt to fit Arthur into history," E. K. Chambers argues, "must take account both of his chronology and of his locality."<sup>8</sup> As early as the *Historia Brittonum*, one finds references to Arthurian names dotting the Welsh landscape, noting the marvels Carn Cabal

---

<sup>7</sup> J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions* (New York: Gordian Press, 1974), 229. In *The Figure of Arthur* Richard W. Barber agrees with Tatlock: "literary activity is usually found before historical records begin... We shall see that the classic Arthurian source, Nennius's *History of the Britons*, though it may appear a crude and even naively honest work, is motivated by certain political considerations; but above all it depends not on historical but on literary sources. It is nearer to the acknowledged literary efforts of Geoffrey of Monmouth than to the relatively sober histories of Irish or Anglo-Saxon monks"(16-7).

<sup>8</sup> Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, 170.

and Licat Anir—the sties where Arthur’s dog, Cabal, set his footprint in stone; and the burial site of Licat Anir, purportedly Arthur’s son.<sup>9</sup> Such practices of naming places after Arthurian stories suggest a folk tradition that grew alongside—or even occasioned—the historical offerings.

Chambers suggests:

we must...consider the localities traditionally associated with Arthur’s name. What may be roughly called a folk-memory of Arthur is somewhat wide-spread. Occasionally there is a story; more often only the attachment of the hero’s name to one of those *mirabilia*—caverns, fantastically shaped or marked rocks, forts and other relics of forgotten civilizations—upon which the fancy of folk always delights to linger. Here Arthur, as a god-father, has to take his turn with the giants, the devil, and Robin Hood.<sup>10</sup>

As I will consider in the next section, John Leland was particularly interested in the connection between history and topography, and his landscape sensibility would also be taken up by his fellow Arthurian enthusiasts, such as Michael Drayton, and even by those far more skeptical about Arthur, especially William Camden and John Selden.<sup>11</sup> Whatever scholars and “common people,” past and present, believe(d) about Arthur’s relationship to the landscape, the fact that his name is repeatedly linked to natural phenomena suggests that Chambers is correct to argue

---

<sup>9</sup> Translated by Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> In *Arthur of Britain*, Chambers notes the continued interest in Arthurian place names through the Renaissance and beyond: “The records are not as a rule very early. The boundary indications of the mediaeval charters yield a few, and possibly a systematic investigation of such sources might add to their number. Leland and other early antiquarians collected some. The majority date from the nineteenth-century interest in folklore”(183). Chambers particularly mentions Arthur’s Chair and Arthur’s Oven as well as Cadbury Castle, to which Leland referred as “Camlat.”

<sup>11</sup> Given such evidence, it is surprising that both Richard W. Barber and J. S. P. Tatlock argue that Arthurian landscapes are decidedly inferior evidence for the existence of a strong Arthurian folk tradition (they strongly disagree with Chambers and Higham on this issue). While Barber admits that “to the Celtic mind, names of people and places had a strange fascination of their own” and that “place names reflected quite recent and real events, and were likewise a key to the past,” he ultimately comes to the conclusion that Arthur’s name had only been added later to stories originally about other folk heroes; see *The Figure of Arthur*, 54. Although this is a possibility, it is odd that Barber would go against the evidence in taking this view. Scholars do not know whether these places were once named after other heroes; on the other hand, scholars *do* know they were once named for Arthur. Tatlock, similarly skeptical of the power of Arthurian place names, claims, “in local names there is some but very little evidence for a pre-Geoffrey Arthur tradition of any sort”; see *The Legendary History of Britain*, 212. He gives the examples of Arthur’s Chair and Arthur’s Oven, as well as Carn Cabal and Licat Anir, but refuses to count these as convincing.

that “folk belief on the one hand, literary and antiquarian ideas on the other, interpenetrate.” In fact, they often meet in the very landscape from which the narratives of both Arthur the folk hero and Arthur the historical monarch emerge.<sup>12</sup>

Capitalizing on the Welsh traditions—written and oral—Geoffrey of Monmouth’s text was the medieval source on which John Leland would draw most heavily and defend most spiritedly. This text, along with Gerald of Wales’s *Liber de Principis instructione* (c. 1193), would inform Leland’s dual emphases on written sources (Geoffrey’s narrative) and “hard evidence” (Gerald’s account of Arthur’s tomb). Building on the established chronicle tradition while freely adding his inventions, Geoffrey had composed a history of British kings from Brutus to Cadwallader, taking the Arthurian fragments in the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* (and possibly a lost Welsh oral tradition) and spinning them into a fantastic story of King Arthur’s vast conquest abroad, war with the Saxons, and communal tragedy. Geoffrey took the already-popular Brutus story of the *Historia Brittonum* and added to it the heroic Arthurian account for which he would become best known. By departing from the narratives of Gildas and Bede, Geoffrey offered the British a history independent from English conquest. Robert W.

---

<sup>12</sup> See Leslie Alcock’s work on the late-1960s excavation of Cadbury Castle: *Was This Camelot? Excavations at Cadbury Castle 1966-70* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972). The Cadbury excavation is further proof that the landscape continues to represent the shadowy oral tradition tied to those who lived on and named the land, as well as the promise for more concrete evidence: scholars figuratively and literally excavated this site, hoping for convincing material proof. This project, in part attributed to the work of John Leland, illustrates both how far Arthurian evidence has come, and how little it has changed. Alcock explains, “It is difficult for us now to imagine what Cadbury looked like [in Leland’s day], but in 1967 an attempt was made to capture the visual effect by means of a model of the hill-top and its defenses. The majesty of the original was inevitably lost in a model. Nevertheless, it was obvious that beneath its tree-cover, Cadbury Castle has few equals among British hillforts. . .”(20). Leland’s description, as one now sees, was by no means over-dramatic. As Alcock’s comments—and the larger excavation project—illustrate, the current Arthurian historical debate still owes much to medieval and early modern emphases on topography. The spirit of chasing shadowy traditions and finding (or creating) evidence for them, however, is particularly potent in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia*—a text that built on the *Historia Brittonum* and presumably on the folk tradition—without which neither Leland’s nor Alcock’s projects would ever have been undertaken let alone fulfilled.

Hanning explains the importance of this gesture: “The traditional interpretations of Bede and Gildas exercised an honorable tyranny over the end of British history and the beginnings and early maturity of English history, from which no later writer could hope to escape. By leaping backward beyond the fall of Britain, Geoffrey partially avoided the Gildas tradition and landed in *terra incognita* with only the origin stories of the *Historia Brittonum* to guide him.”<sup>13</sup> However, Geoffrey’s project was not only one of avoidance and reconfiguration; on the contrary, it was one of vast invention. In the first place, he anchors his text in an invented “certain very ancient” Welsh book that he claims was given to him by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford. In claiming to have translated his *Historia* out of this Welsh book into Latin, Geoffrey both invents a source that no one could “fact check” and distances himself from the monastic tradition that had exercised such “honorable tyranny” over history in the Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, he prioritizes the importance of a native language to its people, a theme that Leland and his contemporaries would also find useful in their national projects. As a result, Geoffrey is free to invent as he sees fit: only *he* has access to (and is able to read) this ancient Welsh book that he claims to be translating, and thus his account can be neither proven nor disproven. In this context, Geoffrey’s Arthurian section takes on the dual identity of a legitimate ancient history and the product of sheer invention.

By far the longest section in Geoffrey’s book, the highly stylized Arthurian episode establishes its king as an incredibly important icon of British sovereignty. Not only does

---

<sup>13</sup> Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 139.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin, 1977), 51. Although Geoffrey claims to be translating from a “certain very ancient” Welsh source given to him by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, it is clear that the text is largely Geoffrey’s invention.

Geoffrey recount Arthur's wars with the Saxons, his vast conquests abroad, and his challenge of Lucius's demand for a tribute to Rome, Geoffrey also describes in detail Arthur's court, which "reached such a standard of sophistication that it excelled all other kingdoms in its general affluence, the richness of its decorations, and the courteous behavior of its inhabitants."<sup>15</sup> Such descriptions—including the tournaments and banquets that attended such splendor—are Geoffrey's invention. Even more fantastic are Merlin's prophecies of the British fall and resurrection, an elaborate series of images and their explanations. Originally written as a text unto itself, Geoffrey's *Prophecies of Merlin* offers exciting but historically suspect accounts of Arthurian history. Thus, in his depiction of Arthur's Britain as a land which "excelled all other kingdoms" not only in martial prowess but also sophistication, along with his emphasis on the prophetic evidence of conquest (British and Saxon), Geoffrey takes his Welsh source material and embellishes it to create a detailed portrait of a superhuman warrior and courteous king—an exemplar whose line will (so says the prophecy) eventually resurface even after the Britons' eventual defeat by the Saxons. Most importantly for the Tudor antiquaries to come, Geoffrey's history reiterates Britain's Trojan foundations and prophecies future greatness: like the Welsh *Historia Brittonum*, Geoffrey's *Historia regum Britanniae* claims that Brutus was the great-grandson of Aeneas, and it follows that both Arthurian Britain and sixteenth-century England must also be kingdoms/nations with a glorious history and their own set of heroes, completely independent from Rome. Such a narrative gave England enviable sovereignty, and writers like

---

<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, 229.

Leland believed that this was worth defending, even in the face of some of the more unbelievable elements contained in Geoffrey's exciting but factually dubious Arthurian section.<sup>16</sup>

### **John Leland: Arthurian Humanist**

In 1534 the Italian historian Polydore Vergil saw the first printed version of his *Anglica Historia*—a project he had begun under the direction of Henry VII—and subsequently incurred a flurry of patriotic vitriol from English humanists. In his account of English history, Polydore questions Geoffrey of Monmouth's assertions about King Arthur, allowing only that Arthur might have reunited Britain if he had lived longer. Polydore argues that Gildas never mentioned Arthur as Geoffrey presented him, and that the idea that Arthur is buried at Glastonbury is impossible, since Glastonbury was founded after Arthur's death.<sup>17</sup> Appearing as it did in the midst of a surge of patriotism amongst English historians, Polydore's text earned its author immediate derision: in fact, English writers such as John Foxe and John Dee even went so far as to accuse Polydore of burning important English/Arthurian documents in order to validate his anti-Galfridian position.<sup>18</sup> John Leland, however, took a far more sober approach. As James P. Carley has persuasively shown, Leland met Vergil on his own ground, armed with a continental

---

<sup>16</sup> In *Myth-Making and History*, Higham notes the politically useful nature of Geoffrey's text, right from the start: "Arthur was taken up in many different parts of Europe, in many instances in contested or border situations. However, Geoffrey's *Historia* offered the twelfth-century monarchy in England both a foreshortened Anglo-Saxon domination in Britain, which barely begins therein before Aethelstan's reign in the tenth century, and powerful precedents for a British *imperium* capable of exploitation in both an insular or a continental context...[Geoffrey's] Arthur was, therefore, the quintessential twelfth-century ruler writ improbably large, and a highly desirable role model for any insular king with extensive ambitions to overlordship in Britain and territory in France"(226).

<sup>17</sup> *The Anglica historia of Polydore Vergil, A.D. 1485-1537*, ed. Denys Hays (London: Office of the Royal Historical Society, 1950).

<sup>18</sup> John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (London: John Day, 1563). John Dee, *The Limits of the British Empire* (1577-78), ed. Ken MacMillan and Jennifer Abeles (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004). Until the publication of MacMillan and Abeles's edition, Dee's text was available only in manuscript form.

humanist education that included a privileging of facts and evidence over what Leland called “old wives’ tales,” as well as an abiding love of country that prompted him to come to its history’s defense in the first place.<sup>19</sup> In short, Leland sought to refute Vergil’s two-pronged attack on Arthurian books and bones and to destroy the Italian’s credibility as a legitimate historian of England, reinstating Arthur as England’s quintessential national hero.<sup>20</sup>

In order to outmatch his foe in a scholarly fashion, Leland had to refute Polydore’s two most damaging claims: that Gildas never mentioned Arthur, and that Glastonbury could not possibly be the famous king’s place of burial. To counter Polydore’s reliance on Gildas’s authority, Leland accuses his adversary of blind devotion to a source whose author would have been a mere infant when Arthur was fighting his battles: “Behold, the slaunderer is now present, and as one cruell of eye sight, requyreth a reason of me, why Gildas remembreth not Arthure, if he were then liuing [...] the aduersarie calleth to minde, that Gildas when the battaile was fought at Bathe, was but an Infant: By reason whereof euen his Actes done or not done of him, somewhat slenderly are vnderstood by the aduersarie.”<sup>21</sup> By taking a strong stand against Polydore’s “Gildas argument,” Leland engages in a debate conducted since the Middle Ages, most notably undertaken by medieval historian William of Newburgh, who also had found Geoffrey’s history extremely suspect. Offering for the first time a logical reason for Gildas’s

---

<sup>19</sup> James P. Carley, “Polydore Vergil and John Leland on King Arthur: The Battle of the Books” in *King Arthur: A Casebook*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 1995), 185-204.

<sup>20</sup> Almost immediately after the publication of Polydore’s text, Leland wrote a ten-page pamphlet defending Arthur against Polydore Vergil: *Codrús, sive Laus et Defensio Gallofridi Arturii Monumentensis contra Polydorom Vergilium* (1536). He later expanded this into the *Assertio* (1544).

<sup>21</sup> John Leland, *A Learned and True Assertion of the original, life, actes, and death of the most noble valiant, and renowned Prince Arthure, king of Great Britaine*, trans. Richard Robinson (London, John Wolfe, 1582), 4r-4v. For my Leland quotations, I use Richard Robinson’s 1582 translation. As James P. Carley points out, this translation has its problems, but it is the version that early modern vernacular readers would have read, and so I use it throughout the chapter. Leland’s Latin original was printed as *Assertio inclytissimi Artuij* (London: Reginald Wolfe, 1544).

having excluded Arthur, Leland takes a critical step towards refuting a long-standing argument against the ancient king. Polydore's other claim, that Arthur pre-dated Glastonbury and therefore could not have been buried there, Leland counters by attacking Polydore's inadequate research:

Polidorus...declareth there was no Monasterie at Glastenbury, in Arthures time: So exquisite a iudge is he of Antiquitie and specially concerning Brittain. He also contendeth that euen all the whole worlde by this rule (but in deede a most vniust rule) is constrayned to embrace, maintaine, and beleue that which is spoken of him touching Antiquitie, as that which is pronounced for an Oracle...But what he falsly or vntruly declareth, (which thing he doth somewhat oftener through all partes of his History) I may not beare with all. I can not abide it, neyther will I suffer it, but the truth, (so much as it shall stand me vpon) will I restore to her comelynesse, fame, and glory...<sup>22</sup>

In questioning both Gildas's and Polydore's authority on Arthurian sources, Leland raises doubts as to the veracity of Polydore's attacks. To fully refute Polydore's two major claims, however, Leland does more than attack his opponent's credibility: he presents his own positive arguments, based on the material evidence—books and bones—with which he has come into contact during his own extensive research. His project to restore England's Arthurian history via primary research is one that marked the antiquarian movement with which Leland's name would become synonymous.<sup>23</sup>

In the very first passage of his text, Leland asserts his desire to defend Arthur at least in part by defending Geoffrey's *Historia*, a gesture that links him to the medieval historians and

---

<sup>22</sup> Leland, *True and Learned Assertion*, 12r.

<sup>23</sup> This movement was far from unilateral: although Leland was the quintessential sixteenth-century antiquary, not every antiquary sought to glorify British origins through Galfridian precedent. See T. D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London: Methuen, 1950). Kendrick notes that Polydore was part of a larger movement away from such material: "The persistent devotion to the confused, fabulous nonsense that could be found in, or added to, the British History was a complex matter involving real learning, ingenious argument, and an intense and emotional patriotism; in contrast, the story of the cooler and quieter currents of thought that purged our early history of these obviously preposterous legends is relatively simple. It is a tale of a few scholars who could look at the British History objectively, and there is less and less to say about their comments on the Brut as they became more and more silent about it; for it was eventually seen that one of the best ways of getting rid of this embarrassing material was to ignore it"(78).

sets the precedent for future dealings with the historical Arthur. Leland begins by comparing Arthur's origins in adultery (as Geoffrey describes them) to those of other national heroes like the Greeks' Hercules:

Evident it is, by the speciall agreement of Greeke and Latine writers, that Hercules was borne of Alcmena, by the adultery of Iupiter... And very many others there were borne in adultery... whose prowess in warres, notably excelled. Amongst whome also our Arthure, the chiefest ornament of Brittain, and the onely myracle of his time, florished famously. May I therefore bee so bolde by good leaue of Guilemus Paruus, yea and so of his most myghtie successour in place, Polidorus, euen with condigne praises to commend my countryman Arthure: and with the same dilligence to leane vnto the Brittain history interpreted by Geoffrey of Munmouth a man not altogether vnlearned (what soeuer otherwise perso-s ignorant of antiquitie, which think themselues to haue knowledge, shall say) as vnto a firme defence, rather then vnto the fond fables or base stuffe of forraine writers.<sup>24</sup>

In order to defend Arthur's relevance as a hero on the level of Hercules, Leland had to (at least partially) defend Geoffrey's depiction of him. Such a defense was no easy task. Almost immediately after he had written his *Historia*, Geoffrey himself became the subject of much skepticism. Perhaps most famous was the criticism of William of Newburgh, who claimed that Geoffrey's Arthurian account was highly questionable if not laughable. Written in 1196, William of Newburgh's *Historia Regum Anglicarum* makes the point that Arthur does not appear in the chronicles of other historians, and that there can be no place for him in the historical framework as related by Bede.<sup>25</sup> While some medieval historians favored such outright dismissal, others valued a more complicated criticism like that professed in Ranulph Hidgen's *Polychronicon* (c.

---

<sup>24</sup> Leland, *True and Learned Assertion*, C1. "Guilemus Parrus" is Leland's nickname for another Arthur-skeptic, the medieval historian William of Newburgh, whose *Historia Regum Anglicarum* of 1196 was highly critical of Geoffrey's *Historia*. Throughout his text, Leland frequently refers to Polydore Vergil as William of Newburgh's pupil.

<sup>25</sup> It is clear why Leland accuses Polydore of being merely William of Newburgh's slavish pupil: both Polydore Vergil and William of Newburgh base their anti-Galfridian statements on the fact that noted historians Gildas and Bede had made no mention of Arthur.

1340s). In an approach that would later become very popular with Leland's circle of sixteenth-century antiquaries, Higden declines to reject Geoffrey outright, choosing instead to edit and explain Geoffrey's text according to what he sees as the limits of historical possibility.<sup>26</sup> Higden cuts from his own historical account Geoffrey's information on Merlin's magic, Arthur's continental empire, and the Welsh hope of Arthur's second coming.<sup>27</sup> In his commentary, he plays to both sides: in Book V of the *Polychronicon*, Higden explains, "This is the Arthur of whome [the] Brytons that goon oute of the waye tellen many ydle tales He that praiseth soth stories and not fals is worthy to be praysed."<sup>28</sup> He goes on to recount that many Britons believe Gerald of Wales's story about Arthur being buried at Glastonbury and Geoffrey's tales of Arthur's conquests, revealing that Higden is unconvinced on both counts. On these issues, he sides with William of Newburgh and other skeptics. However, unwilling to completely discard Geoffrey's text, Higden also rationalizes: "I holde more wonder why Gaufredus prayseth so moche one that all the olde famous and soth wryters of storyes make of it well nygh noo mencyon. But soth it is that the maner of euery nacyon is to ouerpraysse some one of [that] same nacyon. As the Grekes prayse theyr Alyzaunder and the Romayns theyr Octauianus and the englysshe men theyr Rycharde and [the] frensshe men theyr Charles and the brytons theyr

---

<sup>26</sup> This fourteenth-century text was translated in the fifteenth century by John Trevisa and another anonymous translator. This translation was subsequently printed by Caxton (1480), Wynkyn de Worde (1485, 1489), and Peter Reueris (1527), suggesting a popularity continuing right up to the "battle of the books" between Polydore Vergil and John Leland.

<sup>27</sup> See Christopher Dean, *Arthur of England: Attitudes to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1987). Dean argues, "On the whole, Higden seems to regard Geoffrey's *Historia* highly, questioning it only when it disagrees with the writings of other historians of high repute. Even then he does not always prefer authors such as Bede or William of Malmesbury over Geoffrey" (19). Although Dean makes an excellent point about Higden's positive treatment of Arthurian materials, he somewhat neglects Higden's critical attitude toward Geoffrey's text. Higden does, after all, cut large sections of Geoffrey's text when applying the information to his own project.

<sup>28</sup> Higden, *Polychronicon*, 178.

Arthur.”<sup>29</sup> Sifting through over two centuries of “mixed reviews” of Geoffrey’s text, Higden critiques its probable falsehoods but reveals the patriotic bias inherent in all national history, setting a strong example for Leland and the other humanists to come.

While he takes a strong stand in defense of historical Arthurian accounts, Leland, like Higden, does not uncritically embrace Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia*. Leland belonged to a group of humanist scholars who strove to separate what they believed was historical truth from the sometimes fabulous accounts of medieval historians.<sup>30</sup> Although medieval historiography is in many ways strikingly similar to that of the early modern period, and neither the Middle Ages nor the Renaissance was actually able to fully separate fact from fiction, Renaissance humanism—especially the antiquarian movement under the larger humanist umbrella—was dependent on the belief that contemporary practices were discernibly different from, and superior to, medieval methods of representing the past. After all, in order to reach into the past and bring pertinent books and artifacts to light, one had to discern the difference between “now” and “then.” Joseph M. Levine explains the difference humanism made in England by comparing the more medieval sensibility of Caxton with that of early modern antiquaries like Leland:

For Caxton... ancient history was derived entirely at second hand from romance and chronicle, where it had long before been transformed into the familiar terms of medieval chivalry. The stories of Brutus and Arthur or Hercules and the Trojan heroes was all as plausible in this setting as those of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. For the humanists who read the ancient authors directly in the ancient languages and who were laying the foundations of modern critical scholarship, it was different. They began with the notion that ancient and medieval culture could be sharply differentiated and as a result they developed a keen sense of anachronism. As we shall see, the new historiographical

---

<sup>29</sup> Higden, *Polychronicon*, 178.

<sup>30</sup> See F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1967). Levy describes humanism in three phases: the stylistic, the constructive, and the antiquarian. Although Leland was certainly a sound representative of all three (for instance, his endorsement of the classics and his proficiency with Latin certainly support Levy’s first phase), in this chapter I am most concerned with Leland’s role as an antiquary—the third phase of humanism, dedicated to the selective preservation of the past (37).

sciences that they invented under the name of philology and antiquities were all predicated on the conviction that truth could be winnowed from error and that the effort was worth making.<sup>31</sup>

The ability to discern truth from fiction—and present from past—was integral to sixteenth-century historiography. Given the long-standing grudge against Geoffrey made famous by William of Newburgh, and the new methodological context of separating “stories” of Brutus from “histories” of Caesar, it is not surprising that Polydore Vergil expressed skepticism of Arthurian significance.<sup>32</sup> What is surprising—both in its boldness and its success—is Leland’s ability to redeem Arthur not by trying to justify Geoffrey’s techniques, but by editing the latter’s text to conform with sixteenth-century humanist standards.

Leland does not compromise his methodology in order to feign belief in incredible reports; on the contrary, he takes Geoffrey to task for his pollution of Arthurian truths with fables and falsehoods. Acknowledging that there are indeed some sensational incidents in Geoffrey’s text, Leland uses his vast knowledge of Arthurian scholarship and his presumed ability to separate fact from fiction in order to sift through the complicated evidence that Polydore had simply written off as incredible. Citing Nennius, “the Brittainer writer of good and ancient credit,” Leland claims that many other authors also make mention of Arthur, and that he will take the pains to illustrate them. “Nennius...amongst many others maketh the most lightsome

---

<sup>31</sup> Joseph M. Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 48-9.

<sup>32</sup> In *Tudor Historical Thought*, Levy actually credits Polydore Vergil with inciting such emphases: “It may be said that the two principal lessons learned by the historians of the sixteenth century concerned sources and selection. Beginning with Polydore Vergil, men began to look at where their information about the past came from”(293). In a similar vein, in *British Antiquity* Kendrick reminds his readers that Polydore’s “attack” was hardly that: “Yet what Polydore said was neither unpleasantly sarcastic nor conclusively destructive. To him, a foreigner, the question of the origin of the British presented no difficulties at all. Man had arrived here as the result of normal post-Diluvian expansion, finally crossing from the Continent as the adjacent lands became more and more fully occupied...Gildas, he pointed out, was on his side here”(84).

mention of [Arthur's] battels: whose wordes although by the negligence of Printers and iniurie of time, they be somewhat displaced, yet notwithstanding because they make much for our present matter, and bring with them a certaine reuerent antiquitie, I will here set them downe, and in their order."<sup>33</sup> Joining Nennius in the ranks of Leland's favored authors are William of Malmesbury, Gerald of Wales, and Geoffrey himself—all of whom have evidence to contribute—although Leland is careful to use only that evidence that serves a sober humanist defense.<sup>34</sup>

Some man would peraduenture heere looke for, that I shoulde also with a mightie praise blaze on the victoryes of Arthure, touching which the historie of Brittainie reporteth... But I will declare nothing rashly: For so much as it appeareth most evidently, that both obscure and absurde reportes haue crept into the historie of Arthure: which thing is of the curious sorte, and easily found faulte with. But this in deede is not a case sufficient iust, why any man should neglect, abiect, or deface the Historie otherwise of it selfe, lightsome and true. Howe much better is it (casting away trifles, cutting off olde wifes tales, and superfluous fables, in deede of stately porte in outwarde shew but nothing auayleable vnto credite, being taken away) to reade, scanne vpon, and preserue in memorie those thinges which are consonant by Authoritye.<sup>35</sup>

This passage is a representative example of Leland's use of sources throughout his *Assertio*. His stated unwillingness to let patriotism bend his methodology preserves his credibility as a historian able to examine evidence in an (rhetorically) impartial manner.<sup>36</sup> Systematically “scanning upon” his sources and distinguishing the true from the counterfeit, Leland

---

<sup>33</sup> Leland, *True and Learned Assertion*, 3r.

<sup>34</sup> See Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England, 1530-1580* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004). Shrank argues, “Leland's account of ancient and contemporary history may be skewed, but it is thick with evidence of the conscious manipulation and construction of a national identity worthy of a country that had, only ten years previously, quite arbitrarily been declared ‘an empire’. Leland ‘paynted’ England in what would become its ‘natyue colours’. The Elizabethans, with their iconography of a godly island empire, had much for which to thank him”(103). I agree with Shrank, but would extend Elizabethan England's debts to the medieval authors whose proto-national patriotism informed Leland's own zeal, couched though it was in sober humanist methodology.

<sup>35</sup> Leland, *True and Learned Assertion*, 6r-6v. There are quite a few passages in which Leland makes a similar point, disparaging the “fond fables” and “trifling toyes” that have become intermixed with “true things.”

<sup>36</sup> This is, of course, impossible—especially in a defense so caught up in patriotic significance—but the persuasiveness of the rhetoric of impartiality is independent of its truth.

simultaneously exalts and edits his medieval sources. His departure from Polydore comes from his willingness to sort through the evidence and “cut away” the sensational falsehoods and preserve in memory the true accounts of Arthur.<sup>37</sup>

Much of the written material Leland keeps as Arthurian support pertains to his emphasis on “hard evidence” throughout the *Assertio*, an emphasis that contributes directly to Leland’s refutation of Polydore’s attack on the Glastonbury evidence. This evidence comes from the land(scape) itself: whether it be a piece of earth (Leland refers to the remains of Cadbury Castle as “Camlat”) or the Arthurian objects excavated in the twelfth century (seal and cross), Leland’s argument for the validity of Arthur’s historicity rests on his own personal research in various regions of England. His research travels and close attention to the Arthurian landscape recall the “topo-chronographical” mode of Gerald of Wales’s *Description of Wales* and *Journey Through Wales* and anticipate Michael Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion*. Of particular interest are Westminster and Glastonbury, the sites where Leland encountered Arthur’s seal, and studied Arthur’s tomb and leaden cross, respectively. It is clear from his references that Leland benefited greatly from Caxton’s preface to Malory’s *Morte* (1485), which mentions the wax seal at Westminster; as well as Gerald of Wales’s *Liber de Principis instructione* (c. 1193), which gives Gerald’s detailed account of having seen Arthur’s tomb at Glastonbury.<sup>38</sup> Like Caxton and Gerald, Leland

---

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Leland’s method of meeting Polydore on his own ground is perhaps most evident when he admits their mutual disgust with “fond fables” but then claims a superior ability to see through those fables to the “things which are consonant by Authoritye”: “Truly, in fables which haue crept into the history of Arthure, I doe not more delite than Polidorus, the Judge. But to bee afraide of any man by reason of his greate age, or eloquence, or authoritie, finally as like a foolish forsaker of the truth, I shoulde so leaue her partes vndefended: that certainly will I neuer doe...”(C1).

<sup>38</sup> Gerald of Wales, *Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin, 1978). Gerald describes the tomb: “In our own lifetime Arthur’s body was discovered at Glastonbury, although the legends had always encouraged us to believe that there was something otherworldly about his ending, that he had resisted death and had been spirited away to some far-distant spot. The body was hidden deep in the

places enormous evidentiary weight on the material objects he personally encounters, moving deftly between the reading of ancient or medieval texts and the study of objects; in fact, he claims to have been spurred to visit Winchester after reading about Arthur's seal in Caxton's preface to his edition of Malory:

And because I haue againe entred into the Misteries of sacred Antiquitie and am descended a curious searcher into the bowles thereof, it liketh me to bring forth to light an other matter, namely Arthures Seale, a monume-t most cunningly engrauen, auncient, and reuerent. Concerninge which, Caxodunus maketh mention, yet briefly and sclenderly in his preface to the history of Arthure: which the common people readeth printed in the English tongue. Being moued with the testimony of Caxodunus whatsoeuer it were, I went vnto Westminster, to the end that what so as an eare witness I had heard, I might at length also as an eye witness beholde the same.<sup>39</sup>

Motivated by books, Leland seeks out the objects that will ratify the claims made by Arthurian enthusiasts. He visits Westminster and obtains ocular proof of Arthur's seal, and studies Arthur's tomb and leaden cross at Glastonbury. These objects as Leland describes them are Arthurian evidence of the most convincing kind: for example, Arthur's red-wax seal actually features a likeness of the king himself, and the cross bears the now well-known inscription: "HIC IACET SEPVLTVS INCLITVS REX ARTHVRIVS, IN INSVLA AVALONIAE."<sup>40</sup> In other words,

---

earth in a hollowed-out oak-bole and between two stone pyramids which had been set up long ago in the churchyard there. They carried it into the church with every mark of honour and buried it decently there in a marble tomb. It had been provided with most unusual indications which were, indeed, little short of miraculous, for beneath it—and not on top, as would be the custom nowadays—there was a stone slab, with a leaden cross attached to its under side. I have seen this cross myself and I have traced the lettering which was cut into it on the side turned towards the stone, instead of being on the outer side and immediately visible"(282).

<sup>39</sup> Leland, *True and Learned Assertion*, 12v. It is somewhat curious that Leland credits Caxton specifically, while his debts to Gerald are far more obvious. Throughout the text, Leland does make reference to Gerald, whom he calls *Siluester Giraldus*: "There hath been scene latelie at Glastenburie a little Booke of matters touching Antiquitie, gathered by a certaine most studious Monke of [that] same Cloyster: who by exercise of Rethoricall colour as it were handling an other matter, doth famously me(n)tio(n) of Arthur..."(18v).

<sup>40</sup> Leland describes the seal, in which "the figure of Arthur, crowned and in royal robes, was seated upon a half-circle, 'such one as we see the raine boe is.' In his right hand he held a scepter topped with a fleur-de-lis, in the left a globe surmounted by a cross. His beard was 'comely, large and at length.' Around the edge of the seal was engraved: PATRICIUS ARTURIUS BRITANNIAE, GALLIAE, GERMANIAE, DAVIE IMPERATOR"(12r).

both of these objects are obviously Arthurian and, Leland guarantees, both are still materially extant (if crumbling). It is particularly in Leland's description of the cross that his reverence for evidence of England's glory is most manifest: "It was made of a leaden plate, one foote long more or lesse, which I haue beholden with most curiouse eyes, and handled with feareful ioyntes in each part, being moued both with the Antiquitie and worthinesse of the thing."<sup>41</sup> If the written evidence of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Nennius are not enough to convince readers of the verity of Leland's *Assertio*, Leland's curious, careful handling of the seal and cross provides just the kind of eye-witness evidence needed to vouch for the accounts found in Leland's source books. Such "hands on" research acts as a serious challenge to Polydore's dismissal of the Glastonbury argument.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, Leland's endorsement of the narrative built around Arthur's tomb unites oral tradition, written sources, and "hard evidence"—both in these elements' interconnected nature and in their common fragility. According to reports by Gerald of Wales and Adam of Domerham (and repeated by Leland), Henry II had allegedly heard about Arthur's tomb from a Welsh *bard*, and, intrigued by this and the manuscript evidence surrounding Arthur,

---

See also E. M. R. Ditmas, "The Cult of Arthurian Relics" in *Folklore* 75, no. 1 (1964), 19-33; 30. Ditmas reminds readers that this seal's authenticity had been doubted by John Rastell in his chronicle, *The Pastime of People* (1529).

<sup>41</sup> Leland, *True and Learned Assertion*, 12v; 23v. Gerald of Wales, as Leland points out, had also noted the inscribed cross in his own account of Glastonbury.

<sup>42</sup> Leland was careful to attend to any potential doubts regarding the validity of even this physical evidence. Noting the discrepancy between his own account and that of William of Malmesbury, Leland claims, "No one man more curiously searched forth, at any time all the treasures of the library at Glastenbury [than did William of Malmesbury]. This onely was here wanting in him towards knowledge, that he dying about the first yeare of the Raigne of Henry (the) second King of England, knew nothing of Arthurs tombe"(8r). It is interesting to note that in an age desperate to distinguish itself from the Middle Ages, a quintessential antiquarian like Leland was much indebted to scholars like Gerald of Wales, who also emphasized personal witness as an important part of valid research.

ordered the excavation of Glastonbury.<sup>43</sup> Modern scholars have been quick to point out the almost certainly fraudulent nature of this evidence; however, the trajectory from bard to books to bones lends support to Leland's methodology and his use of the full range of evidence on Arthur's historicity. The fragile nature of this evidence is made most explicit in Leland's account of a story originally told by Gerald of Wales.<sup>44</sup> According to this story, during the Glastonbury excavation, Arthur's tomb was opened to reveal both Arthur and his wife Guenevere. Amazingly, the golden hair of Guenevere had been perfectly preserved; however, when an overzealous monk reached into the tomb to touch it, the beautiful hair turned to dust in his hand. Although Leland simply repeats this story as part of his evidence of the Glastonbury site's authenticity, the fragility of Guenevere's hair might also apply to the delicate balancing act undertaken by all who sought (and seek) to verify Arthur's historicity through an irrecoverable oral tradition, chronicles polluted with fables, and material evidence that turns to dust in the seeker's hand. The story of an excavation prompted by a Welsh song and ending with the discovery of Britain's greatest king is an alluring tale, but the signifiers of its veracity continually disappear as a result of either neglect or handling. In short, there is no easy solution to the problem of Arthurian evidence.

Guenevere's dissolving tresses are representative of a constant obstacle to Leland's emphasis on material evidence—both books and bones—that was either decaying or had already been lost. Leland and his fellow antiquarians were acutely aware that the documents needed to

---

<sup>43</sup> Published in 1217 but probably composed between 1193 and 1199, Gerald of Wales's *Liber de Principis instructione* is the fullest account of Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury. Though not utilized by Leland as consistently as Gerald's text, Adam of Domesday's thirteenth-century account of Glastonbury, *Historia de Rebus gestis Glastoniensibus* also notes Arthurian evidence at the site and was thus another useful source for Leland.

<sup>44</sup> Gerald's story flies in the face of William of Malmesbury's statement that "the tomb of Arthur is nowhere beheld, whence ancient ditties fable that he is yet to come"; see E. K. Chambers's translation in *Arthur of Britain*, 17.

fortify their nation's claim to legitimacy and territory were in danger of disappearing forever, if they hadn't already done so. When describing Arthur's seal, Leland makes mention of its crumbling edges, illustrating that the very "hard evidence" needed to prove Arthur's existence on humanist terms may not be so very permanent after all. With Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries came the plundering and destruction of libraries and religious houses, and as a result antiquarians were left with the task of digging through the rubble to uncover and preserve the documents and objects denoting England's national history. Leland is the ultimate example of such an antiquary—indeed, in many ways he is the first antiquary—as he is veritably obsessed with preserving the evidence of the past. As Andrew Escobedo's work demonstrates, Leland was highly aware of the possible disappearance of documents and objects needed to substantiate England's claims of legitimacy as a nation. To combat the decay and loss of evidence, and to advance the argument that Geoffrey's text represents the truth polluted with "old wives' tales," Leland and a few of his fellow Arthur defenders (notably, John Dee) decided to shift the evidentiary import from Geoffrey's text to Geoffrey's certainly fictional ancient Welsh source.<sup>45</sup>

Escobedo ponders their decision:

Would not the lack of supporting physical evidence dog this text as well? Would not this text, predating Geoffrey by at least several centuries, be in worse physical shape than the manuscripts of the *Historia* that antiquarians possessed? The answer is that they did not

---

<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey claims that his *Historia* is a translation (into Latin) of an original Welsh source given to him by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford (51). No evidence of such a book has ever been found, suggesting that Geoffrey's "source" is an invention meant to lend credibility and antiquity to his own account. Leland and his fellow antiquarians capitalize on this absent source text: while they cannot use it for material proof (as they could with seals and crosses), neither could their claims be disproved using an absent book. See Andrew Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foxe, Dee, Spenser, Milton* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). Escobedo argues that the fictional book "transcends" the duties owed to a material text. John Dee is perhaps the most interesting figure with respect to this lost book: in his manuscript *The Limits of the British Empire* (1577-8), he actually claims to have *seen* this book himself, combining the credibility-creating methods of personal witness and fabricated evidence. In short, Dee personally vouches for his own fictions. I do not discuss Dee at length in this chapter, as his document was never *printed* in the Renaissance, but he serves as an important example of inventive antiquarian methods as they were applied to Arthur.

really expect the ancient Welsh book to materially resolve the problem of monumental history; the absent book transcended the problem, shifting the register of historical knowledge to a nonmaterial entity.<sup>46</sup>

By arguing that *if only* he had access to Geoffrey's source, he would undoubtedly know the true, unembellished account of Arthur, Leland points to the futility of relying on material monuments as well as the importance of the belief that they can indeed transport truth through time. The absent Welsh book is a symbol of the futility of the antiquarian movement and of its dearest wish—to find, preserve, and spread the knowledge contained in England's ancient books and artifacts.

The instability caused by the combination of lost books and national need drove Leland to adopt a Galfridian tactic by concentrating on a lost book for proof of national legitimacy. Although Leland eloquently expresses his refusal to let his love of country cause him to err as a historian, the fact is that England's history was lacking the documents needed to validate its claims to legitimacy, and therefore historians had to resurrect, edit, and cling to the crumbling (or absent) scraps that would lend England the kind of illustrious foundations enjoyed by nations on the continent.<sup>47</sup> Escobedo observes, "The sixteenth-century advances of humanist and antiquarian research on national history, while shedding new light on the English medieval past, also awkwardly revealed England's isolation from classical civilization. Lacking a connection to the Greek and Roman heroic dispensation, many writers concluded that England had simply not

---

<sup>46</sup> Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss*, 57.

<sup>47</sup> In *Writing the Nation in Reformation England*, Cathy Shrank explains, "Leland's historical agendum is threefold: it is phrased as rediscovery; it is seen as a means of dignifying his native land; and it is aimed at a European, as well as domestic audience. He seeks recognition of his country's worth in its most precise etymological terms as recognition, to know again"(70).

taken sufficient care of the historical records that might have established this connection.”<sup>48</sup> In order to confront and combat these embarrassing gaps in the material documents of English history, antiquarians like Leland had to renovate the documents they did have—and, in no small part, those documents were Arthurian. In the story of Brutus’s founding, Geoffrey’s *Historia* gives England claim to Trojan origins and therefore to a valid ancient history. In its Arthurian narrative, Geoffrey’s *Historia* gives England claim to foreign territory and independence from Rome—as well as a hero fit to stand with continental worthies such as Charlemagne. Despite its being plagued with “old wives tales,” Geoffrey’s text was incredibly important to scholars like Leland, who, in defending it using humanist methods, firmly wedded English nationalism to Arthur under the rigorous criteria of the sixteenth century.<sup>49</sup> In a particularly strong statement illustrating the marriage of Leland’s humanism and his patriotism, Leland strikes at Polydore:

He handleth Arthures cause in deed, but by the way, he yet is so fainte harted, luke warme & so negligent y<sup>^</sup> he makes me not onely to laugh, but also to be angry... Though Polidore hold his peace it is not needfull by and by for the whole world to be mute: And although Italy in times past so esteemed of Arthure, and yet still doth, when bookes printed both of his prowesse, & victories (as I haue learned) are ready in the Italian tongue yea in y<sup>^</sup> Spanish, and also in the French tongue: whereupon also the English collection of Thomas Mailerius his trauaile, is published abroad. The aduersarie I know will say, that many lyes haue crept into those bookes. Wherefore this is nothing else, but to Teach him which is fully taught. As I conteme fables, so I reuerence & imbrace y<sup>^</sup> truth of the history: neyther will I suffer this to be taken away from mee at any time, but with losse of life. Unthankfull persons I vtterly eschew and I betake me vnto those Rockes & monume-ts, the true witnesses of Arthures renoume and maiestie.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss*, 46.

<sup>49</sup> Shrank observes, “Deploying his humanist learning for national aggrandisement... Leland was more aligned with forms of what Sam Sheelis calls ‘patriotic humanism’ already practised in France and Germany, than with his immediate English forebears. For these ‘patriotic humanists’, learning was a means of asserting and acquiring national pride”(77).

<sup>50</sup> Leland, *True and Learned Assertion*, 19v-20r.

Polydore's refusal to acknowledge the national importance of Arthur—aside from the fables that both scholars agree pollute such significance—moves Leland to defend an England that is apparently being read about at home and abroad via printed “histories” of Arthur.<sup>51</sup> The fact that in 1544 it bordered on scandal to be even “lukewarm” about Arthur suggests the extent of his importance to rulers and writers eager to establish British origins. The fact that Malory's text is a source of importance comparable with Geoffrey's, both as factually questionable but ultimately “true,” melds national legitimacy with the activities of writers and readers of the most important king in British—and later English—history.

Leland's *Assertio inelytissimi Arturii* was printed in 1544 by Reginald Wolfe. Presented elegantly in a combination of roman and italic fonts, with printed block letters beginning each section, Leland's is unquestionably a humanist's book: he is writing for a contemporary audience of scholars who would have been able to appreciate his use of Latin and his particular scholarly approach. Anticipating a reader with shared national concerns, Leland explains, “Truly, I hope (most friendly Readers) it will fall out (the equitie of the cause being knowne) and also ye truth, I shall haue you my friendly healpes herein: and that (such is your good will, humanitie, and integritie) you will also willingly render me thankses for my duety towards the commen weale.”<sup>52</sup>

And although he is hoping to appeal to a common love of “commen weale” in the reader and

---

<sup>51</sup> See Martin B. Shictman and Laurie A. Finke, “Profiting from the Past: History as Symbolic Capital in The *Historia Regum Britanniae*” in *Arthurian Literature* 12 (1982), 1-36. Shictman and Finke comment on the continued usefulness of Geoffrey's *Historia* for English monarchs and writers throughout the Renaissance: “Until the end of the seventeenth century the *Historia* (along with its many redactions) provided a readily available account of British origins which did not represent the British simply as barbarians colonized first by the Romans, then the Saxons and Normans. Furthermore, it provided legitimation for and mystification of monarchical rule. Henry VII and James I, for instance, to buttress their claims to the throne, commissioned genealogies linking them to the kings of Geoffrey's *Historia*. Geoffrey's history seems to have lost its appeal as an appropriable source of information only after the divine right of kings has been thoroughly discredited by two decades of civil war”(8).

<sup>52</sup> Leland, *True and Learned Assertion*, 32v-33r.

thereby gain his support, Leland also cautions against the dangers of blindly following the works of one's predecessors. For example, he accuses Polydore of slavishly repeating the skepticism of William of Newburgh: "May not then *William Paruus* the Schoolmaster be ashamed to haue inculcate into the eares of Polidorus his scholler farre better Learned then himselfe such vaine tales... Surely I wish all thinges prosperous vnto my Schoolemasters. But when the matter is in handling concerning truth and credite of the cause, doubtlesse I beare no partiall affection towards any of them."<sup>53</sup> Leland wants his reader to evaluate his text—not to blindly accept or reject it. In this recommendation, Leland displays an understanding of his audience as an educated group of men dedicated to defending their country's sovereignty—but not through blind zeal or mere conformity. In his final section, the *Peratorio*, Leland addresses the reader directly, noting that in this treatise he has attempted to "helpe the history languishing" and to "aduance the glory of [his] country" and hopes that his combination of sober evaluation and patriotism will also aid the reader in his digestion of this text.

Surely my muse (such as it is) altogether is yours: neyther tendeth he to any other purpose at any time, but vnto your behoofe, and the co-moditie of all men... And at lengthe (those same most thicke mistie cloudes in deede of ignorance beeing shaken off, & vtterly dashed aside) the light of Brittish Antiquitie with displayed beames farre and wide shall shine forth. God giue you long life and wellfare, most sincere fauorers of vertue and good learning.<sup>54</sup>

Leland assumes that his audience shares his affection for England and its antiquities, elements that all men can come to possess—as long as they can read Latin. Dedicated to Henry VIII by John Leland, "Antiquario/ autore," and written for an educated audience, Leland's text would have reached a very select group of readers. Printer Reginald Wolfe marks the final section of

---

<sup>53</sup> Leland, *True and Learned Assertion*, 38r-38v.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 38v-39r.

the text with a woodcut-illumination of a man trampling on a dog. Perhaps Wolfe believed that the antiquarian/author Leland and his reader-supporters had had the last word in the Arthur debate.

### **Richard Robinson: Arthurian Hack**

Although Polydore Vergil never responded to Leland's *Assertio*, Leland's text was certainly not the last iteration of the Arthurian debate at large. On the contrary, Leland's text served as an impetus for further discussion throughout the sixteenth century and, in turn, influenced writers such as Raphael Holinshed, William Camden, Michael Drayton, and John Selden—who all cite the *Assertio* as a critical source for discussions of Arthur's historicity. Leland's legacy in these scholars' works will be evident in a subsequent section of this chapter, but in order to fully appreciate Leland's text's importance to the spectrum of English *readers*, it is essential to consider Richard Robinson's 1582 translation of Leland's text: *A True and Learned Assertion of the original Life, Actes, and death of the most Noble, Valiant, and Renoumed Prince Arthure, King of great Britaine*.<sup>55</sup> The distinction between the two texts is apparent right from the start: while Reginald Wolfe's title page had denoted Leland as "Antiquario, autore," John Wolfe describes Robinson as "Citizen of London," suggesting a more modest origin and, perhaps by extension, a wider audience. John Wolfe's (son of Leland's printer, Reginald Wolfe) book made Leland's text available to a completely new audience, one

---

<sup>55</sup> The title page continues: "Who succeeding his father Vther Pendragon, and right noble gouerning this Land sixe and twentie yeares, then dyed of a mortall wounde receyued in battell, together with victory ouer his enemies. As appeareth Cap. 9 And was buried in Glastenbury. Cap. 12. Collected and written of late yeares in lattin, by the learned English Antiquarie of worthy memory Iohn Leyland. Newly translated by Richard Robinson. Citizen of London. *Anno Domini* 1582. Imprinted by Iohn Wolfe, dwelling in Distaffe Lane, ouer against the Signe of the Castell. 1582." In my discussion of Robinson's prose, I use his name instead of Leland's, although both come from the same translated volume.

that either preferred—or was only able to understand—its nation’s history in the vernacular.<sup>56</sup>

The demand for history books in English increased in the late sixteenth century, perhaps illustrating the developing understanding of English nationhood amongst citizens.<sup>57</sup> Robinson’s translation offered any patriotic readers of the vernacular a chance to participate in an Arthurian debate that had hitherto been conducted only in Latin. In an intriguing twist on chronology, John Wolfe and Richard Robinson eschewed the 1544 version’s large-print, elegant roman and italic fonts and instead used a small black-letter type.<sup>58</sup> Although using black letter for vernacular documents was not uncommon, it was rather unusual to transition from a roman original that suggested contemporary relevance to a black-letter version that invoked the power of the past. Robinson’s black-letter translation ironically pays homage to the medieval manuscript tradition from which Leland distanced himself, but it also transfers Leland’s favored emphases on “ancient” and/or “credible” sources to contemporary readers of the vernacular. Just as important, the quality of the paper in the 1582 version is far inferior to that used in the Latin original,

---

<sup>56</sup> Wolfe also printed Robinson’s translation of *The Auncient Order, Societie, and Unitie Laudable, of Prince Arthure, and his knightly Armory of the Round Table* in 1583, Spenser’s *Shepheardes Calendar* in 1586, and Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* in 1589. Despite his printings for Robinson, apparently Wolfe was not known as a particularly patriotic printer. As Clifford Chalmers Huffman points out, “Wolfe’s conformity to the conventional patterns of Elizabethan printing remains consistently clear as one reads on through his printing: popular science, natural history, domestic counsel, sensational news reports of monstrous births and devil-possession, and so on”; see *Elizabethan Impressions: John Wolfe and his Press* (New York: AMS Press, 1988), vii. Huffman does not make a single mention of Richard Robinson, even though Wolfe does print two of his patriotic, Arthur-centric translations.

<sup>57</sup> In *Tudor Historical Thought*, F. J. Levy explains: “Gradually, the universal history of the Middle Ages died out. The decline was aided by an increase in patriotism. Just as the interest in history revived, as it did more or less contemporaneously with the Tudors, the divisions of the Wars of the Roses ended, and men no longer felt that their loyalty belonged to one or the other of the warring factions but to England. The Reformation, by cutting some of the ties binding England to the common body of Catholic Christendom and by raising up new enemies to force English men into a common purpose, served to increase the power of the new national feeling. And the emphasis on English as a language equal in its potentialities to any other—a legacy of the very early Renaissance by way of Chaucer, and of the Reformation with its insistence on the vernacular—operated in the same way. Men wanted to read English history first”(8).

<sup>58</sup> This is consistent except when using proper names or quoting sources, in which cases the text is printed in roman and italic fonts, respectively.

suggesting that John Wolfe's was a less expensive book that more people not only would have been able to read—but would also have been able to buy.<sup>59</sup> Thus, in its 1582 form, the text is starkly materially different: Leland-the-antiquary's original Latin, printed in roman and italic type by Reginald Wolfe, has been turned into Robinson-the-citizen's translation of cramped black letter, cheaply printed on flimsy paper by John Wolfe—a strange line of succession through which the text became more materially fragile and more “antiquated” yet perhaps reached more readers and was therefore better preserved in the collective memory of England as it was realizing its identity as a nation.<sup>60</sup>

The use of black-letter type in particular may signify more than just “antiquity” or the text's being accessible by a wider audience. In his study of the signification of typefaces used in printing drama, Zachary Lesser makes observations that apply remarkably well to histories like Robinson and Wolfe's version of Leland's text—and indeed to all black-letter Arthurian books. Lesser expands the generally accepted attitude of Charles C. Mish (who had argued that typeface serves as an index to popular culture), explaining that “black letter is in fact not an index but a signifier, a sliding signifier of the ‘low’ that depends on how the critic defines the total spectrum

---

<sup>59</sup> By translating and changing the font, Robinson is reversing some of the characteristic elements of a humanist text. Shrank points out that “Leland's choice of Latin as the medium in which to write... works in three ways: in contrast to the barbarism of ages past, it records the attributes of his compatriots for the benefit of an international, Latin-reading audience whilst simultaneously demonstrating the eloquent standards he himself attains as a representative of contemporary English learning. Further to that, it enables him to transform his native country into a classical literary landscape;” see *Writing the Nation in Reformation England*, 81-2. I argue that Robinson takes Leland's newly classical English history and returns it to a more native aesthetics.

<sup>60</sup> See Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham, “Introduction: Script, Print, and History” in *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300-1700*, ed. Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge University Press, 2004). Crick and Walsham's assertions are pertinent to this concept: “Printed books need to be seen as the outcome of a complex negotiation between the commercial instincts of the businessmen who produced them and the priorities of those who had initially written and composed them”(6). In this case, one must also attend to translator Robinson, whose attested patriotic servitude intersects with Leland's original project but also clearly serves Robinson's ambitions.

of readers.”<sup>61</sup> Lesser points out that black letter was also often used for lawbooks and therefore should not be so simply described as signifying “low” readers. Instead of arguing that black letter was the “popular” type in a hierarchical sense, Lesser claims that black letter was the *English* type in a national sense.

We must resist the reductionism that would see only a single meaning to the typeface, which was used in a wide variety of contexts, or that would see no meanings at all in it, only an index to ‘popular culture.’ But one of the dominant meanings of black letter in this period, I am suggesting, was the powerful combination of Englishness (the ‘English letter’) and past-ness (the ‘antiquated’ appearance of black letter by the seventeenth century) that I call typographic nostalgia. It is this combination that allows black letter to evoke the traditional English community, and a large part of what scholars are really discovering when they perceive ‘popular culture’ in black letter is the construction of this nostalgia in the very texts they are reading.<sup>62</sup>

Lesser’s use of “typographic nostalgia” is especially useful in considering an Arthurian text, as the national/communal implications of the content perfectly complement a form defined by the unrecoverable past. What makes Robinson’s text so intriguing is that, instead of participating in what would become a more common pattern of publishing an early version of a sixteenth-century text in black letter and later versions in roman type, John Wolfe reverses the trend, changing his father Reginald Wolfe’s roman-type, Latin Leland to black-letter, vernacular Robinson. As a material object proclaiming the past-ness on which its content relies, Robinson and Wolfe’s text fully performs the nostalgia that Leland’s proclaims.

Not only was John Wolfe’s material object different from his father’s original, but Robinson also (inevitably) put his personal stamp on Leland’s text. Unlike Leland’s simple, brief

---

<sup>61</sup> Zachary Lesser, “Typographic Nostalgia: Play-Reading, Popularity, and the Meanings of Black Letter” in *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Marta Straznicky (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 99-126; 103. See also Charles C. Mish, “Black Letter as a Social Discriminant in the Seventeenth Century” in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 68 (1953), 627-30.

<sup>62</sup> Lesser, “Typographic Nostalgia,” 107.

dedication to Henry VIII, Robinson includes an elaborate dedication to multiple patrons, a set of notes regarding his translation, and brief annotations throughout. Presumably, the intended effect of these additions is to illustrate the relevance of Leland's text in the 1580s, as well as to facilitate its introduction to new readers. In many ways, Robinson seems to understand Leland's original project. In fact, in his dedicatory epistle to Lord Arthur Gray (Edmund Spenser's patron), Sir Henry Sidney (Sir Philip Sidney's father), and Thomas Smith (the head of the Society of Archers), he often echoes the tone—if not the content—of the *Assertio* itself. First of all, by dedicating the translation to these men, Robinson exhibits an interest in the patronage of three persons with strong ties to the courtly chivalry Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthurian history helped to establish. As he continues, Robinson contextualizes his own bias with respect to his subject, relaying the fact that nations often copiously praise their best heroes. For example, Robinson claims, the Hebrews praised Iudas Maccabeus; the Greeks Hector, Achilles, and Alexander; the Romans Caesar, and so on. "And as euery one of those are commended with due desert: so in like man-er there were neuer Brittaines wanting of excellent learning and exquisite knowledge to leaue with carefull diligence and credible commendation, the progenie, life, prowess, prosperitie, and triumphant victories of our said auncient Arthure worthily published vnto the worlde."<sup>63</sup> This kind of "patriotic logic" is precisely what Ranulph Higden had noted about Geoffrey and what John Leland endorsed in his speeches about his love of country's motivating him to refute Polydore Vergil. Also like Leland, in this dedication Robinson exhibits a solid knowledge of his sources, suggesting that patriotism will not override an emphasis on good scholarship: "So where in not three, but many Artizans as learned Gildas, William of

---

<sup>63</sup> Robinson, *True and Learned Assertion*, A3.

Malmesbury, Nennius, Diuionenses, Graius, performed their worthie workmanshipes in our Arthure Maur (to vse the Brittain phrase:) euen one English Leyland for his learned labour e laudable, hath perfectly polished him in all poyntes.”<sup>64</sup> This much, at least, seems to echo (if less eloquently) Leland’s own emphases.

It is after Robinson launches into a discussion of the Society of Archers, its founding, and its importance to Arthurian and English history (a subject he will take up in his 1583 pamphlet, discussed below) that he begins to reveal the liberties he takes with Leland’s text. Robinson closes his dedication with his reasons for translating, all of which betray the distance between Leland’s sober defense and Robinson’s impassioned plea: “That Christ our King of the vniuersall Church...with the shaftes of his mouth or worde and gospel of peace may pearce throughout the worlde to the aduancement of his glory which shal sit on the raineboe in his maiestie to iudge all Nations...I haue traueled in the translation of this booke out of Latin into English, with all humble & true harted reuerence, beseeching God to assist you right and honourable Lord Deputie...”<sup>65</sup> While Leland was surely not ignorant of the fact that his text might gain him political favor, he ostensibly prioritizes the elevation of king and country over personal advancement. Robinson, on the other hand, seems to be using his translation far more obviously for the latter purpose, and in a grandiose style Leland would never have endorsed. Robinson’s zealous pandering contributes to his reputation amongst current scholars, which James P. Carley describes as that of a hack in the shadow of the greater minds whose works he (sometimes poorly) translates. Carley explains, “Robinson himself is a deservedly obscure figure, a poor

---

<sup>64</sup> Robinson, *True and Learned Assertion*, A4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, B1-B2.

hack known almost exclusively for his translations and compilations. Even taking into account the constraints imposed by pecuniary exigencies and the need to please patrons, Robinson's writings suggest a strong Protestant bias, combined with a pronounced nationalism." In light of Robinson's pronounced nationalism, Carley also notes that Robinson could get carried away with his translations. "The tone in the greater part of the actual *Assertio Arturii* is...relatively restrained. Robinson is considerably more volatile; his prose is at times downright scurrilous."<sup>66</sup> In other words, even in a context wherein pleasing patrons and expressing patriotism were standard procedure, Robinson goes overboard in his zeal, exposing himself for the "deservedly obscure" figure he remains in English literary history.

Although Carley is no doubt correct in all of his observations about Robinson as a poor imitator of Leland's patriotic humanism, in the context of print culture and readership, Robinson becomes a much more interesting and important figure. His zeal—regardless of whether feigned or truly felt, patriotic or self-promoting—for bringing Leland's text to English-speaking readers belies the fact that Arthurian history must have been in enough demand in the late sixteenth century to warrant a translation of a text that had theretofore circulated only amongst scholars. As with Caxton's, the veracity of Robinson's patriotism is not as important as his belief that he could sell it to readers. Thus, not unlike a stationer/publisher, Robinson elects himself an Arthur-promoting "middle man" between the humanist author Leland and the English reader/consumer.

His notes to his translation make this position perfectly clear: he thanks Stephen Batman in

---

<sup>66</sup> Carley, "The Battle of the Books," 194; 196. Carley is one of the few scholars to spend any time discussing Richard Robinson, probably due to the latter's very reputation as an insignificant "hack." Robinson's title might be at least partially extended to printer John Wolfe when, as Leland describes the impact of Caxton's printed version of Sir Thomas Malory's book on the "common people's" knowledge of Arthur, Wolfe annotates, "He meanest Robert Caxton who translated the history of K. Arthure"(12v). In this comical error, Wolfe further reveals his text's difference from his father's. Wolfe does, however, recognize the importance of Malory's book, even if he lacks knowledge of its print history.

particular for showing him “auncient records” of Arthur, as well as “Master Iohn Stow and Master Camde(n) dilige-t searchers in antiquities for the interpretation of those hard brittish and Welch Townes or names of places, which neither Master Leyland and the Collector of this Assertion had expounded perfectlie, neither I my selfe the translator could otherwise of my selfe haue perfourmed.”<sup>67</sup> Giving credit where it is due, Robinson brings the expertise of celebrated antiquaries to the English reader. He also seems to want to make sure that his readers “get it”—he wants to make sure that they are not confused by Leland’s style, with which some readers would have been unfamiliar.<sup>68</sup> By crafting a text through which a new group of readers could experience the humanists’ Arthurian debate, Robinson brings the antiquaries—and their practices—to his audience by explaining his process and theirs.

Facilitating Robinson’s larger goal of advancing readers’ understanding of Leland’s content and practices, printer John Wolfe adds a set of marginal annotations that, in a few critical moments, shed light on Leland’s project, Robinson’s translation agenda, and Arthurian history in general.<sup>69</sup> For instance, in the section in which Leland describes Arthur’s grave, the author mentions the two pyramids—one bearing the likeness of a bishop, one the likeness of a king—said to mark Arthur’s tomb at Avalon. Although Leland makes no judgment on these likenesses in the Latin original, Wolfe adds an annotation: “Note the blindnesse of that time in preferring a

---

<sup>67</sup> Robinson, *True and Learned Assertion*, B5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 38v. For example, at the beginning of Leland’s final section, the *Peratorio*, Robinson translates, “A Peroration or briefe Conclusion to the Readers.”

<sup>69</sup> Especially ironic is the fact that Leland had taken Polydore Vergil to task for what he considered a poor translation of Gildas. Robinson translates Leland’s statement: “it is lame, out of order, and maimed, so farre forth, as if [Gildas] were now againe restored to life, the father would scarce knowe his chylde”(33v). One might certainly say the same about Leland’s “chylde” in Robinson’s hands.

Bishop before a king.”<sup>70</sup> “Updating” the information for the now decidedly Protestant England, Wolfe partially redirects the significance of Leland’s text. Perhaps even more notable is another of these annotations for the same pyramid episode, in which Leland expresses skepticism about the words purportedly engraved on the pyramids. Leland suggests that Gerald of Wales made his initial claim that the inscription was worn away because Gerald himself did not know what—if anything—was engraved on the pyramids. Beside this passage Wolfe simply annotates: “A doubt.”<sup>71</sup> In this tiny, seemingly insignificant annotation, Wolfe becomes a representative spokesman for the uncertainty and doubt that always plague even the most thoroughly researched, thoughtfully written accounts of Arthurian history. As a vehicle for Robinson-the-hack, Wolfe’s text may indeed be a poor substitute for his father’s edition of Leland, but in the context of Arthurian authorship, Robinson and the younger Wolfe are in good company. In their cheaply printed, sporadically annotated, heavily pandering translation, Robinson and Wolfe give voice to the fierce patriotism and lurking doubts that always serve as the very hallmarks of Arthurian assertions, and bring their accompanying debate to a new group of English readers who may chose or refuse to vouch for Arthur.

### **Robinson and Wolfe: Reading the Symbols of Arthurian History**

A year after their translation of Leland’s text appeared, Robinson and Wolfe contributed another book to Arthur’s historical legacy. This book, a companion or “sequel” of sorts to Robinson’s translation of Leland’s text, is a pamphlet entitled *The Auncient Order, Societie, and Unitie Laudable, of Prince Arthure, and his knightly Armory of the Round Table. With a*

---

<sup>70</sup> Robinson, *True and Learned Assertion*, 23v.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 30v.

*Threefold Assertion frendly in fauour and furtherance of English Archery at this day.*<sup>72</sup> This text, also printed by John Wolfe and dedicated to Thomas Smith (one of the three dedicatees of the *Assertion*), has many similarities to Robinson's *Assertion* of 1582, chief among which is its use of Arthurian themes as a way to endorse English nationalism.<sup>73</sup> The text is a hodge-podge of praise for the Society of Archers, a lesson in the Society's history, and, perhaps most importantly for readers, an interactive experience with printed Arthurian heraldry. Robinson begins with his "Epistle Dedicatory" to Thomas Smith, the head of the Society of Archers. Although this represents a more limited plea for patronage and contemplates a different subject than does his translation of Leland's text, in the *Order*, Robinson again betrays his particular affinity for Arthurian and national concerns.<sup>74</sup>

Our ancient Arthures noble ordinance order and famous memory like as your worships do yearely with worthy solemnity celebrate as the Isrealites did their dates of gladness in their pease time. So if I were worthy with Cicero to exhort you, to prefer al duty available to maintaine Neighborhood and fellowship of men aboue that duty which consisteth in knowledge & science. I would herein encourage your worthy good wils to way and consider what our most noble and famous Kings of England in that your famous accustomed exercise of shooting, haue most renownedly enterprised & eftsoones renewed.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> *The Auncient Order* is translated from "the French Author" for whom Robinson gives no other information.

<sup>73</sup> In "The Battle of the Books," Carley explains: "The London 'fellowship of Prince Arthurs knights' described by Robinson enjoyed a continuous existence from the time of Henry VIII through the reign of Elizabeth (except for a brief period under Mary) and seems to have made some sort of occult link between Arthur, archery, the Protestant religion, and the rainbow as Ark of the Covenant. A number of influential figures—including Richard Mulcaster—were active members. The allusion to Prince Arthur provides both a tribute to the Tudor dynasty...and a perpetuation of the noble fellowship of the Round Table. As in the nineteenth-century return to Camelot, there is a link between military prowess and religious devotion. The Arthurian theme suggests, of course, that there might be some sort of general connection between Robinson's translation of *Assertio Arturii* and his book on the Society of Archers"(194).

<sup>74</sup> In *Arthur of England*, Christopher Dean suggests, "It is ironic that to find an English society devoted to preserving Arthur's name we have to turn to a pamphlet published in 1583 by Richard Robinson"(72).

<sup>75</sup> Robinson, *Auncient Order*, 2r-2v.

Having established the Arthurian foundation of the society he praises, Robinson goes on to praise the Tudor tradition of archery tournaments, the Order of the Garter, and especially King Henry VIII, who founded the Society. He chooses to translate and present this text in print for reasons that link it solidly with his translation of Leland's text, suggesting a continually active Arthurian society at court and a continually demanding readership for short vernacular books. "And as an addition vnto my last yeares translation of the assertion of Prince Arthure incident in purpose and conuenient in order. I dedicate this ancient order, societie & vntie of Prince Arthur & his knightly armorie, vnto you the famous & worshipful president & to you the knights of English Archery in the same order with a condigne commendation and encouragement vnto my natiue countrie vniuersallie thereunto."<sup>76</sup> While in many ways this echoes the pandering also evident in Robinson's *Assertion*, Robinson's awareness that this cheaply printed, vernacular text may have relevance for his "natiue countrie vniuersallie" extends the tired tropes of patronage to a new audience. Further supporting the expectation of a varied readership, what follows in this strange text is no less than an interactive lesson in Arthurian heraldry between an unnamed French author, the anticipated reader, and quintessential Arthurian "middle man" Richard Robinson.

Robinson's source (what he had called a "certain French book" in his notes to his translation of Leland's text) was surely some version of *La devise des arms des chevaliers de la Table Ronde*, a French book of armory originally published in Paris in the early sixteenth century and reprinted throughout that century, culminating in a 1590 Lyon edition which featured seventy-eight woodcuts depicting the arms of Arthur's knights. Robinson claims to simply be translating from a "small French book" printed in 1546, but his preface's similarity to that of the

---

<sup>76</sup> Robinson, *Auncient Order*, A1r.

Lyon edition of *La devise des armes* from 1590 suggests that this is indeed his source, and that it had remained largely unchanged from 1546-90. The prefatory matter to *La devise des armes* explains how to read the colors and symbols of armory in a general sense—and then more particularly, the arms of Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table. In bringing this text to readers of English, Robinson hopes to flatter the Society of Archers, but he also (perhaps unwittingly) opens the door for teaching a more general reading public about the symbols and significance of Arthurian arms. For example, he reproduces his source’s “French Preface, thus Englished,” explaining: “Willing I am to set down... a briefe declaration and aduertisement vnto the READERS, for their more easy vnderstanding of the state and Condition of ARMORY: And to knowe howe one ought to Blason the sayd ARMORIES Escuchons and Enseignes, and such other things of Semblable state and manner.”<sup>77</sup> The book goes into a lengthy description of what different symbols and colors mean on various arms, “To the end, that in Remembering the foresaide valiancies, [readers] should be the more enclined, and encouraged to ensew and Imitate the Noble exploites of their Auncestors, which haue gone before them.”<sup>78</sup> Like most books of its kind, the French original was ostensibly created in order to teach highborn young men to read armory. In order to provide practice after the preface’s tutorial, there follows a set of printed shields with accompanying descriptions, illustrating the particular arms (visually) and exploits (textually) of a given knight.<sup>79</sup> Overall, the French original represents a tutorial both in armorial basics and the particular significance of the Arthurian tradition.

---

<sup>77</sup> Robinson, *Auncient Order*, A1v.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, A1v.

<sup>79</sup> It is not yet clear how many woodcuts were printed in the French edition Robinson used as his source, nor whether they were blank or contained actual depictions of the arms. The point to remember is that, by 1583, there

Robinson translates and, for the most part, reproduces the goals of the original: his text translates the lesson on reading armory and contains a set of shields that could be used for practice by readers. However, in Wolfe's text, the shields are mere outlines, presenting an opportunity for the reader to "fill in the blanks" and create the arms himself. On each page there is one set of blank arms with an accompanying description of what *should* (but does not, as printed) appear, according to that particular knight's reputation. On either side of each shield are the initials of the member of the Society of Archers who would be "playing" that particular knight in the 1583 tournament (illustrating, once again, Robinson's penchant for pandering). Although all are presented as knights of Arthur's train, the three most interesting—and perhaps most famous—are Sir Lancelot de Lac, Messyr Tristan de Lyonis, and Perceual of Galles. These are the three knights whose exploits Robinson translates/describes as being available for perusal in *books*—a cross-referencing gesture that reiterates Arthurian historical significance's inseparability from printed chivalric romance.<sup>80</sup> Sir Lancelot's arms offer a representative example:

In Siluer Shield, Three Bandes of Blew  
 Here hare, full valyant hee,  
 And ventrous was, one of the Cheefest  
 Approued in Cheualry:

Of knights which did the Table Round  
 Adorne with condigne prayse:  
 His fates and fame in bookes compilde  
 Are founde in these our dayes.<sup>81</sup>

---

were other books of armory circulating in England that contained detailed woodcut versions of each set of arms, signifying that Wolfe and Robinson must have been aware of their edition's difference.

<sup>80</sup> And, as a companion text to Robinson's *Assertion*, it ties Arthurian histories to Arthurian romances through the lens of print culture's response to reader demand. See Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>81</sup> Robinson, *Auncient Order*, B1v. Tristan is described: "For hee so vertuously behaved. . . that/A Booke his fame displays" (B3r); and Perceual: "Of whome a Booke compilde there is/ With fame and dew Honour"(G3v).

In other words, readers should know Lancelot (and Tristan and Perceval) by the appearance of his *arms* and by his reputations in *books*. Such a lesson is important on its own, but takes on even more import given the context of the blank shields. Although one might presume that the cost was the prohibitive element in the decision not to print the actual arms of each knight, the presence of John Bossewell's *Workes of Armorie*, an elaborately woodcut-illuminated book of arms and heraldry originally printed 1576 and reprinted as a second edition in 1597 suggests that such books were possible and even popular enough to support multiple printings.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the woodcut-illuminated French version would be printed twice in the late sixteenth century, suggesting even a continental demand to read about Arthurian armory. This means that the decision to leave the shields blank in Wolfe's text truly may have been an encouragement to the reader to take an active role in co-creating the text—of filling in the details the accompanying verses recommend.<sup>83</sup> And although Robinson, according to the customary use of books of heraldry, may have intended an aristocratic reader, he could not have completely controlled who came into contact with his text: the invitation for gentlemen to create Arthurian evidence might very well have been accepted by other kinds of readers.

---

<sup>82</sup> Bossewell's text is an impressive compendium of arms and their significance—an elaborate reference text with a particularly important section on Arthur's arms (portraying, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth's description, the Virgin Mary). Although Bossewell's inclusion of the pertinent images is not necessary indicative that Robinson's text's exclusion of such images was a purposeful invitation to the reader to co-create, it is entirely possible that readers would have considered the format of Robinson's text—the significance of, directions about, and practice of creating arms—as an exercise in active reading.

<sup>83</sup> For more on the ways in which early modern readers customized their books, see William H. Sherman, "An Uncommon Book of Common Prayer" in *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 87-112.

Robinson's *Order* is, admittedly, not a history "vouching for Arthur" in the medieval debate Leland helped to reignite in Renaissance England. However, in the context of print history, it bears a close affinity with Robinson's *Assertion* in that both texts build on Arthurian books and objects—be they humanist treatises or romantic "histories" of Lancelot, ornate leaden crosses or blank paper shields—to spark patriotism amongst readers. Most importantly, Robinson's *Order* teaches readers to read such symbols in the context of English nationalism. Ever conscious of his responsibilities as translator/transmitter, Robinson concludes his *Order* with "A Breefe Repetition of the table Round," which is meant to be a kind of "reader's guide" for those just getting started with Arthurian significance. "Because peradventure many which haue seene those Armories, may yet bee ignorant what thing (that) Round Table was. I say therefore (that) the Round Table was one ordenance and institution which King Arthure of great Britayne made and ordained...And it was on this maner made to defend the I[ ]land of Malogres within the said kingdome of Great Britaine..."<sup>84</sup> As much as one might persuasively argue that this text, dedicated to the Society of Archers and dripping with praise for well-positioned knights and Queen Elizabeth, is just another product of an advancement-hungry hack, there are other possible views. In Robinson's inclusion of the background of the Round Table, it is clear that while he certainly aims as high as he can in terms of patronage, he would not be opposed to gaining notoriety from more than one audience.<sup>85</sup> Of course, one should not give Robinson

---

<sup>84</sup> Robinson, *Auncient Order*, I2v-I3r.

<sup>85</sup> In his broad scope and his self-aware social climbing, Robinson is not unlike Geoffrey of Monmouth himself. In "Profiting From the Past," Shictman and Finke describe Geoffrey as a man trying to use his writing to gain "symbolic capital." Such capital was bestowed upon deserving writers by the influential patrons they praised in their works: "In praising Robert and Waleran both for strength and wisdom, Geoffrey hopes to receive not only wealth or economic gain, but more intangible, symbolic capital like power, influence, or prestige"(20). Robinson, on a less original level, might be said to be attempting a similar play for influence and prestige through his translations; furthermore, like Geoffrey, he had no control over his text's reception (neither who received it nor how they read it).

undue credit for patriotic benevolence toward the larger reading public: much of Robinson's text follows the guidelines of his source and other printed books of arms, which characteristically address themselves to a very specific group. However, very few (if any) sixteenth-century English gentlemen would need a brief history of the Round Table—or a translation of a French book. Robinson's inclusion of such information in *English* illustrates his text's usefulness to the expansion of patriotism amongst varied social groups within his "native country universall": it opens the tutorial in reading Arthurian symbols to audiences outside the court. James Douglas Merriman provides context in support of such a possibility:

Among the folk, Arthurian tales must still have been widely told, judging from the large number of topographical features traditionally associated with Arthur and his men. Solid middle-class citizens of London proudly supported the Fellowship of Prince Arthur's Knights, an archery society whose members assumed the names of Arthur's various knights, and whose annual shoots apparently commemorated Arthur and the Round Table.<sup>86</sup>

Seen in this light, it is not inconceivable that "Citizen of London" Robinson's text would gain popularity among the middle class—or even among the "folk" who were still telling Arthurian tales and might have welcomed the chance to make a mark on an Arthurian *book*. Under Robinson and Wolfe, then, seals and shields are not so much the hard (but disappearing) evidence upon which Leland relied to substantiate his sources' claims; on the contrary, the already-blank shields of *The Auncient Order* suggest that it may be up to new groups of English readers to "fill in" and sustain Arthur's historical significance in the face of material and memorial decay.

---

<sup>86</sup> James Douglas Merriman, *The Flower of Kings: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in England Between 1485 and 1835* (Wichita: University Press of Kansas, 1972), 34.

### **Leland's Legacy: Subsequent Approaches to Arthurian Books and Bones**

While Leland's text (and its translation) remains the most significant instance of "vouching for Arthur" printed in early modern England, subsequent volumes by Raphael Holinshed (et al), William Camden, and perhaps especially Michael Drayton illustrate the extent of Leland's impact on Arthurian history. In writing their own narratives of Britain, it is not surprising that these authors felt obliged to comment on the Geoffrey's Arthurian story, but the extent to which they did so through the lens of Leland's *Assertio* is striking. All three engage with the Arthurian "evidence" of texts and relics, books and bones, as they form their opinions of Arthur's historical veracity. This shared reliance on tangible evidence also reflects the authors' deep suspicions of the "fables" Leland had so distrusted. In this way, they echo Leland's methods—if not his resounding assertion—and illustrate their debt to this most famous of the Arthur-defenders.

Like all good humanist texts—and like Leland's in particular—Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577; revised 1587) distrusts fables, acknowledges that the Arthurian story has been polluted with them, and therefore turns to the "hard evidence" of Arthur's existence to separate fact from fiction in the written accounts. The authors of the *Chronicles* share with Leland a sense of what credibility Arthur might have enjoyed if such fables had never been inserted into Arthur's history. In contributor William Harrison's *Historical description of the Iland of Britaine*, the author asserts that "Arthur the sonne of this Uter, begotten before the marriage, but lawfullie borne in matrimonie, succeeded next to the crowne of great Britaine; whose noble acts, though

manie vulgar fables haue rather stained than commended.”<sup>87</sup> Such vulgar fables are a real problem for the authors: they repeatedly lament the “contaminated” nature of the evidence and the doubts it fosters in what otherwise might have been a credible Arthurian account. In the *History of England*, contributor/author Raphael Holinshed echoes Leland by asserting that there is a core of historical truth in the much-embellished account:

This is the same Arthur, of whom the trifling tales of the Britains euen to this day fantasticallie doo descant and report woonders: but worthie was he doubtlesse, of whom feigned fables should not haue so dreamed, but rather that true histories might haue set fourth his woorthie praises, as he that did for a long season susteine and hold vp his countrie that was readie to go to vtter ruine and decaie, encouraging the bold harts of the Britains vnto the warre, and finallie in the siege of Badon hill, he set vpon nine hundred of the enimies, and with incredible slaughter did put them all to flight.<sup>88</sup>

Because of the long-standing problem of contaminated accounts, Holinshed’s *History of England* turns to the hard evidence, which the authors specifically note as important to Leland, who “takes the monuments of [Arthurian] memories for vndoubted verities.”<sup>89</sup> The *Chronicles* also pay homage to these monuments, describing in detail and noting the importance of the Glastonbury site—and its leaden cross—as convincing Arthurian proof.<sup>90</sup> Instead of providing a

---

<sup>87</sup> William Harrison, “Historical description of the Island of Britaine” in *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, ed. Raphael Holinshed et al (London, Henry Denham, 1587), 120. I have worked with the (more expansive) second edition.

<sup>88</sup> Raphael Holinshed, “History of England” in *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, ed. Raphael Holinshed et al (London, Henry Denham, 1587), 92-3. Such assertions feed an oft-repeated lament in Holinshed’s text: “And pitie it is, that [heroes like Arthur]’s fame should be brought by such meanes out of credit, by the incredible and fond fables which haue beene deuised of their acts so vnlike to be true, as the tales of Robin Hood, or the gests written by Ariosto the Italian in his booke intituled *Orlando furioso*, sith the same writers had otherwise true matter inough to write of concerning the worthie feats by their cuntrymen...”(69).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>90</sup> Referencing Leland’s visit to the Glastonbury site and the account written by its most prolific medieval visitor Gerald of Wales, in “Description of Britaine” Harrison writes: “I read that the bodie of king Arthur being found in the yeare 1189 was two foot higher than anie man that came to behold the same...[such testimonies] proceed from Christian writers, from whome nothing should be farther or more distant, than of set purpose to lie, and feed the world with fables”(10).

Leland-like “eye witness” to explain such evidence, however, the *Chronicles* leave the conclusions to the reader: Annabel Patterson argues that the *Chronicles* display a “hands-off historiography designed to encourage independent judgment in the reader.”<sup>91</sup> And while some critics such as F. J. Levy have decried the *Chronicles*’ disorganization and lack of a coherent “lesson” for readers, Patterson maintains that the lack of concrete meaning is the genius of Holinshed’s text: she claims that it leaves the conclusions to the citizen. As a true descendent of Leland’s *Assertio*, Holinshed’s *Chronicles* illustrates the same reliance on Arthurian objects to separate what they believe are the true events that inform Arthur’s “woorthie praises” from the Galfridian episodes that Leland had called “old wives tales.” Yet as a text with a methodology of its own, the *Chronicles* put Leland’s evidence before the reader and implies that he or she should be the judge of Arthur’s historical legitimacy.<sup>92</sup>

Making the reliance on the reader even more explicit, Camden’s *Britannia* (1586, translated to English by Philemon Holland in 1610) reflects Leland’s and Holinshed’s anti-fable, evidence-reliant position but also introduces new measures to deal with polluted Arthurian accounts.<sup>93</sup> Camden makes his methodology clear when he assures his reader, “As for obscuritie, fables, extravagant digressions I trust there is no cause to sue out my pardon... upon fables I have

---

<sup>91</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 15; 24.

<sup>92</sup> It is not surprising that the *Chronicles* pay homage to John Leland. The project itself was begun by Reginald Wolfe, who had printed Leland’s *Assertio inelytissimi Arturii* in 1544. Using much of Leland’s research in his preliminary studies, Wolfe began the project, hired Holinshed for help, and died in 1573 before the project was complete (Holinshed compiled the remainder of the team, who would finish the book). In light of the fact that Reginald Wolfe was an admirer of the most notable Arthur defender of the sixteenth century, it is somewhat surprising that the *Chronicles* do not take a more patriotic stand in vouching for the famous king’s legacy.

<sup>93</sup> References to William Camden’s *Britannia* are taken from Philemon Holland’s 1610 translation. I have worked with a 1638 edition of this translation, printed by F.K.R.Y. and I.L. for William Aspley.

no waies relied, and that I might not digresse extravagantly.”<sup>94</sup> In light of such suspicions regarding fables, it is not surprising that Camden also notes the questionable nature of Arthurian sources. Unlike his predecessors, however, Camden longs not for the complete separation of fact from fiction (Who could truly accomplish such a feat?), but instead for his readers’ critical evaluation of the evidence.<sup>95</sup> Truth, Camden explains, is not an easily discernible entity, and therefore demands an engaged, active reader to sort things out for himself.

Forasmuch then, as all writers are not of one and the same mind, as touching the very name and the first inhabitants of Britaine, and I feare me greatly, that no man is able to fetch out the truth, so deeply plunged within the winding revolutions of so many ages, let the Reader of his candor and humanitie, pardon mee also among others, if modestly and without the prejudice of any man, I likewise interpose my conjecture; not upon any mind I have contentiously to wrangle...but in my desire to search out the truth.<sup>96</sup>

In order to ascertain such truth, Camden’s *Britannia* also relies on the material and textual monuments Leland considered hard evidence, even to the point of including a printed image of the leaden cross. Camden distinguishes his own methods, however, in his analysis of the cross and its inscription. In a representative model of his approach to Arthurian evidence, Camden describes an object, offers his own judgment of its importance (or lack thereof), and closes by urging the reader to take part in the analysis:

---

<sup>94</sup> Camden, *Britannia*, vii.

<sup>95</sup> As John Selden’s notes on *Poly-Olbion* (deeply indebted to Camden’s approach to history) would show, Camden’s critical methodology was in some sense a death-knell for the arguments of sixteenth-century Arthur defenders. In *British Antiquity* T. D. Kendrick describes the 1586 first edition of the *Britannia* in terms that suggest that Polydore Vergil might have the last word after all: “this modest little octavo volume announced to intelligent readers that the astonishingly learned young author, soon to be regarded as the foremost antiquary of the age, was prepared to admit that Polydore Vergil had, after all, been right”(108).

<sup>96</sup> Such modesty and reliance on a critical reader is clear from the beginning of the *Britannia*, when Camden assures his reader, “I have impaired no mans reputation, I have impeached no mans credit, no not Geoffrey of Monmouth whose historie (which I would gladly support) is held suspected amongst the judicious. Neither have I assumed upon my self any perswasion of knowledge, but only that I have been desirous to know much. And so I right willingly acknowledge that I may erre much, neither will I sooth and smooth my errors. Who shooting all day doth always hit the mark?”(vii).

The letters [on the cross] being made after a barbarous maner, & resembling the Gothish Character, bewray plainly the barbarisme of that age, when ignorance (as it were) by fatall destinie bare such sway, that there was none to be found, by whose writings the renowwne of Arthur might be blazed, and commended to posteritie. A matter and argument doubtlesse, meet to have been handled by the skill and eloquence of some right learned man, who in celebrating the praises of so great a prince, might have wonne due commendation also for his owne wit. For, the most valiant Champion of the British Empire, seemeth even in this behalfe onely, most unfortunate, that hee never met with such a trumpetter, as might worthily have sounded out the praise of his valour. But behold the said Crosse and Epitaph therein.<sup>97</sup>

In a gesture echoing Gerald, Geoffrey, Leland, and Holinshed—and then departing from them—Camden laments the fact that such hard evidence was not given a more eloquent companion text at the time of Arthur’s burial. What the reader does have, however, is the cross and its epitaph, and Camden soberly puts them forward for the reader’s perusal. The printed image of the cross serves as an interesting companion to Robinson and Wolfe’s printed shields. Unlike Robinson’s, Camden’s image does not solicit the reader’s contribution in a material sense, but it does ask the reader to “behold” the cross (as a sort of Leland-like “eye witness”) and draw his or her own conclusions. Camden laments loss and fabrication, but in solving these problems he does not gesture towards absent evidence—instead, he provides it (in print).<sup>98</sup>

Holinshed (et al) and Camden had definitely read and benefitted from the work of John Leland, but in many ways they lack Leland’s patriotic passion. Both are willing to concede Arthur’s existence and to admit some merit in Geoffrey’s account, but neither makes the strong

---

<sup>97</sup> Camden, *Britannia*, 227-8.

<sup>98</sup> In *Tudor Historical Thought*, Levy explicitly connects Leland and Camden: “The *Britannia* is the book that Leland might have written. . . The British History of Geoffrey of Monmouth was relegated to its proper place, for while Camden avoided the controversy that a direct attack on Geoffrey would have brought on, the emphasis on the Roman and post-Roman past meant that Geoffrey’s worst excesses could be reduced to relative unimportance. Bringing the scholarship of the past into focus was but one achievement, for Camden also supplied the future with questions and, most important, with a method for answering them. The careful checking of interpretations by using several lines of reasoning bearing on the same point, the insistence on observation, and in the end, the use of references—these were to be the way in which antiquaries in the next generation worked”(158-9).

link between *Arthurian* history and British history to the extent Leland had. This may not be surprising, since Leland's text was not a history of Britain but an answer to another historian's "misuse" of Arthurian sources. However, when comparing their otherwise similar discussions of Geoffrey of Monmouth's text, the wax seal, the leaden cross, and the tomb, Leland's text distinguishes itself as a call to national pride dependent on Arthur, while those of Holinshed and Camden present the supposed hero only as a partial, continually disputed contributor to national legitimacy.<sup>99</sup> Given this seeming trend of historians' increasingly ambivalent attitude towards Arthurian evidence, it is significant that 1612 saw the reappearance of impassioned Arthurian assertions in Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*. Published in two parts, in 1612 and 1622, Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* is a lengthy poem gorgeously decorated with engravings by William Hole and thoughtfully annotated by John Selden. It traverses the island of Britain by means of its waterways, noting the history and importance of each particular area by means of discussions between deities and nymphs.<sup>100</sup> Like all of its Arthurian predecessors, Drayton's lengthy poem attends to the written and physical evidence of a nationally significant Arthur, but like Leland's tract in particular, it also urges readers to remember and to restore Arthur's integral place in national identity (which both Drayton and Leland consider to be endangered). Evidently aware of the enormous nature of his task in light of Holinshed and Camden's new emphasis on the discerning reader as impartial "eye witness," Drayton's patriotic, backward-glancing style

---

<sup>99</sup> As Levy argues in *Tudor Historical Thought*, Camden's text was certainly patriotic (his very project would assert England's importance apart from and in relation to the continent), but it lacked passion: "But Camden, in an age when passion was still fashionable in writing history, was too little impassioned for great popularity"(293).

<sup>100</sup> See Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Warren reminds readers that such a structure was inherent in histories of Britain: "From the earliest versions, histories of Britain begin with a physical description of the island and its natural resources. Usually aestheticized, the topographic *descriptio* identifies the land as worthy of possession. Landscape description thus works as one of the defining tropes of border writing: the *descriptio* conquers land symbolically, making the landscape metaphor an agent of history"(3).

promotes a national moment that is already past but worth resurrecting. Drayton's decision to have John Selden write accompanying "Illustrations" that often qualify or even counter Drayton's own Arthurian assertions suggests that Drayton saw the writing on the wall but refused to fully accept it: historians' methods had changed and now privileged a skeptical voice, but Drayton's poem carries his plea that such new methods not be allowed to silence a tradition so tightly intertwined with England's sense of nationhood.

*Poly-Olbion*'s most striking aspect in an Arthurian context is its sense of loss and the desperate attempt to recover what is disappearing or already gone. In this way, Drayton illustrates a set of concerns in line with Leland's anxious relationship to disappearing Arthurian evidence seventy years earlier. Drayton dedicates the first part of the poem to noted Arthurian enthusiast Prince Henry, an eerily prophetic gesture, given that the prince would die later that year (in November, 1612). Even though he would have been unable to predict that particular loss, in his preface to the "Generall Reader" Drayton suggests that many other things he loves about England had either passed away, or were about to do so. "In publishing this Essay of my Poeme, there is this great disadvantage against me; that it commeth out at this time, when Verses are wholly deduc't to Chambers, and nothing esteem'd in this lunatique Age, but what is kept in Cabinets, and must only passe by Transcription."<sup>101</sup> Lamenting the contemporary disrespect for the kind of antiquarian research he admires (and Leland practiced), Drayton illustrates his poem's belatedness, even at its birth. At times almost overcome with this sense of artistic anachronism, Drayton links the current trends in scholarship with the decline of national pride—specifically, the decline of the kind of patriotism evident in Leland's Arthurian history. In the

---

<sup>101</sup> Drayton, *Poly-Olbion*, (London: Matthew Lowne, John Browne, John Helme, 1612), A1r.

sixth song of his poem, Drayton claims to regret the Arthurian evidence lost to decay, but it is clear that time is not the only culprit in the disappearance of Arthur. Like Malory before him, Drayton takes his fellow Englishmen to task for becoming distracted from the essential importance of the Arthurian legend.

Musician, Heralde, Bard, thrice maist thou be renown'd,  
 And with three seuerall wreathes immortallie be crown'd;  
 Who, when Penbrooke call'd before the English King,  
 And to thy powerfull Harpe commaunded there to sing,  
 Of famous *Arthur* told'st, and where hee was interr'd;  
 In which, those retchlesse times had long and blindlie err'd,  
 And Ignorance had brought the world to such a pass  
 As now, which scarce beleuees that *Arthur* euer was.  
 But when King *Henry* sent th'reported place to view,  
 He found that man of men: and what thou said'st was true.  
 Heere then I cannot chuse but bitterlie exlame  
 Against those fooles that all Antiquitie defame,  
 Because they haue found out, some credulous Ages layd  
 Slight fictions with the truth, whilst truth on rumor stayd.<sup>102</sup>

This passage—about Henry II's being prompted by the bard's song to excavate Glastonbury—is representative of the tone of Drayton's entire poem: throughout, he shows himself to be incredibly learned, fiercely supportive of Arthurian evidence, and hostile to those who disregard such an integral part of England's history. Drayton's ferociousness towards his unnamed peers in many ways mirrors Leland's specific attack on Polydore Vergil, but Drayton has to contend with

---

<sup>102</sup> Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (1612), 93-4. See also Drayton's similar lamentation, with which he opens his poem:  
 Time cannot make such waste, but something wil appeare,  
 To shewe some little tract of delicacie there.  
 Or some religious worke, in building manie a day,  
 That this penurious age hath suffred to decay,  
 Some lim or model, dragd out of the ruinous mass,  
 The richness wil declare in glorie whilst it was:  
 But time vpon my waste committed hath such theft,  
 That it of *Arthur* heere scarce memorie hath left. (pages 5-6)

the added burden that a lot has changed in the seventy years since Leland's *Assertion*, and that Drayton's brand of patriotism is already outdated if not irrelevant.<sup>103</sup>

In 1622, with Prince Henry already dead a full ten years, Drayton dedicated the second part of *Poly-Olbion* to Henry's brother Prince Charles, a symbolic gesture underscoring the fact that Drayton's initial dreams had been dashed. Drayton's professed disappointment in his 1612 address to the reader that this "lunatique age" did not appreciate his methodology had escalated into a feeling of all-out defeat by 1622. After his dedication to Charles, Drayton includes a section entitled "To any who will read it," in which he explains,

When I first vndertooke this Poeme...I was by some vertuous friends perswaded, that I should receiue much comfort and encouragement there; and for these Reasons: First, that it was a new, cleere way, neuer before gone by any; then, that it was contained all the Delicacies, Delights, and Rarities of this renowned Isle, interwouen with the Histories of the Britaines, Saxons, Normans, and the later English: and further that there is scarcely any of the Nobilitie, or Gentry of this land, but that he is some way or other, by his Blood interested therein. But it hath fallen out otherwise.<sup>104</sup>

As in his first part of the poem when he laments current trends in historiography, here Drayton wears his disappointment on his sleeve: what he had feared but hoped to avoid in 1612 has come

---

<sup>103</sup> Drayton's lamentations are not uncritically nostalgic, however. In *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1580-1612* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Claire McEachern convincingly argues that, far from being a tribute to wholeness, *Poly-Olbion* offers "nothing if not a picture of disintegration" (167). According to McEachern, "Drayton's catalogue of English kings, sung by the monarch of rivers the Thames, has a certain what-goes-up-must-come-down quality, and owes far less to nostalgia than to a wry and unforgiving sense of fortune's spinning wheel" (172). While it is clear that Drayton laments the preferences of "this lunatique age," he is not unable to see the changes clearly for what they are. After all, he chooses to have Selden qualify his work with "Illustrations" that challenge any indulgent nostalgia to which readers might otherwise be prone. For more on Arthur's place on the wheel of fortune, see Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>104</sup> Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (London: Humphrey Lownes, 1622), A2r-A2v. In the beginning of the second part of the poem Drayton includes "A TABLE TO THE CHIEFEST PASSAGES"—an index of sorts encompassing both parts of the poem (the 1612 and 1622 versions). The entry for Arthur is one of the longest, cataloguing: "Arthur, begotten, and how: 16. his Camelot, and other places for Rendezvous of his Knights: 54, & 70. his Shield: 69. Conquests and Seale: ibid. his Tomb, and forme of it. 53, and 54." This list of Arthurian elements could be in almost any early modern history mentioning Arthur, suggesting that Drayton's text is the product of a writer well read in Arthuriana. To such evidence Drayton adds his nostalgic, elegiac tone—something his sources (except perhaps Leland) largely lack.

true by 1622: Prince Henry is dead, Arthurian legitimacy is waning if not lost, and Drayton finds his poem in the hands of those who have no use for it. Drayton still looks back hopefully, but seems to know that things have already, irrevocably “fallen out otherwise.”

Despite Drayton’s poem’s belatedness in terms of seventeenth-century scholarly trends, it would be irresponsible to discount its contribution to Arthurian history—in particular, its poetic attempt to wed the new methods of scholars like Camden with the antiquarian passion of Leland. To accomplish this, Drayton continually notes the Arthurian associations with each area of Britain he “visits” in his poem, for which he relies on the scholarship of the usual suspects: Gerald of Wales, Geoffrey of Monmouth, John Leland, William Camden, et al. Even more importantly, Drayton’s (1612) text includes “Illustrations” by John Selden, a set of notes that lends a critical voice to and grounds the assertions made in Drayton’s sometimes-hyperbolic style.<sup>105</sup> For example, when Drayton writes of Glastonbury in his third song, he betrays his marked enthusiasm for Arthurian evidence:

O three times famous Ile, where is that place that might  
 Be with thy selfe compar’d for glorie and delight,  
 Whilst Glastenbury stood? exalted to that pride,  
 Whose Monasterie seem’d all other to deride?  
 O who thy ruine sees, whom wonder doth not fill  
 With our great fathers pompe, deuotion, and their skill?  
 [...]  
 On whom for this sad waste, should Iustice lay the crime?

---

<sup>105</sup> Selden describes his methods in his preface, “From the Author of the Illustrations”: “What the Verse oft, with allusion, as supposing a full knowing Reader, lets slip; or in winding steps of Personating Fictions (as some times) so infolds, that suddaine conceipt cannot abstract a Forme of the clothed Truth, I haue, as I might, *Illustrated*. *Breuity*, and *Plainenes* (as the one endur’d the Other) I haue ioyned... The Author, in Passages of *first Inhabitants*, *Name*, *State*, and *Monarchique succession* in this Isle, followes *Geffrey ap Arthur*, *Polychronicon*, *Matthew of Westminster*, and such more. Of their Traditions, for that one so much controuerted, and by *Cambro-Britons* still maintained, touching the *Troian Brute*, I haue (but as an Aduocat for the Muse) argued; disclaiming in it, if alledg’d for my own Opinion. In most of the rest, vpon weighing the Reporters credit, Comparition with more perswading authority, and *Synchronisme* (the best Touch-stone in this kind of Triall) I leaue note of Suspicion, or adde coniecturall Amendment”(A2r).

Is there a power in Fate, or doth it yeeld to Time?  
 Or was their error such, that thou could'st not protect  
 Those buildings which thy hand did with their zeale erect?  
 To whom didst thou commit that monument, to keepe,  
 That suffreth with the dead their memory to sleepe?  
 When not great Arthurs Tombe, not holy Iosephs Graue,  
 From sacriledge had power their sacred bones to saue;<sup>106</sup>

Drayton's characteristic zeal calls out the culprit who dares to undervalue national, Arthurian evidence. Selden gives this zeal a qualifying check in his annotations:

*Henry the second*...heard it affirmed that in *Glastenbury* (made almost an Ile by the Riuer embracements) *Arthur* was buried twixt two pillars, gaue commandement to *Henry of Blois* then Abbot to make search for the corps: which was found in a wooden coffin (*Girald* saith [ ], *Leland* thinks Alder) some sixteene foote deepe; but after they had digged nine foot, they found a stone on whose lower side was fixt a leaden crosse (Crosses fixt vpon Tombs of old Christians were in all places ordinary) with his name inscribed, and the letter side of it turn'd to the stone. He was then honored with a sumptuous monement, and afterward the skulls of him and his wife *Guineuer* were taken out (to remaine as separat reliques and spectacles) by *Edward Longshanks* and *Elianor*. Of this, *Girald*, *Leland*, *Prise*, diuers others (although *Polydore* make slight of it) haue more copious testimony. The *Bards* Songs suppose, that after the battell of *Camlan* in *Cornwall*, where trayterous *Mordred* was slaine, and *Arthur*, wounded, *Morgain le Fay* a great *Elfin* Lady (supposed his neere kinswoman) conueyed the body hither to cure it: which done, *Arthur* is to returne (yet expected) to the rule of his country.<sup>107</sup>

This lengthy passage is representative of Selden's treatment of Drayton's verse throughout the text. Selden continually presents the evidence for (and sometimes against) what Drayton has asserted poetically, lending a critical edge to the poem that Drayton's impassioned rhetoric often lacks. By noting the Arthurian discussions conducted in the sixteenth century, as well as the oral tradition from which Arthurian history was never separate, Selden illustrates the spectrum of

---

<sup>106</sup> Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (1612), 46.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

Arthurian evidence and helps the reader to evaluate it. Like Camden, Selden does not tell the reader what to make of the evidence—he simply presents it for perusal.<sup>108</sup>

This does not mean that the effect of Selden’s “Illustrations” is wholly neutral. Indeed, Selden’s sobriety, juxtaposed with Drayton’s passion, sometimes comes across more as criticism than qualification. At times he just distances himself from Drayton; for example, when Drayton depicts Arthur as the Britons’ “most renowned Knight” and describes his sword (Escalaboure), his spear (Rone), and his shield (Pridwin), Selden soberly lists the references by which Drayton acquired such information, but he also cautions the reader that some sources are “too hyperbolique” to be believed. “Such indulgence to fals report hath wrong’d many Worthies...But for Arthur, you shall best know him in his elogie. This is that Arthur of whom the Brittons euen to this day speake so idly: a man right worthy to haue been celebrated by true storie, not false tales, seeing it was he that long time vpheld his declining country and euen inspired martiall courage into his country men; as the Monke of Malmesbury, of him.”<sup>109</sup> Selden echoes William of Malmesbury’s and Leland’s shared lament about “fond fables” that plague Arthurian accounts and their regrets that such an apparently worthy king’s legacy is tainted by them. This information, in turn, casts doubt on the very material Drayton is presenting: Drayton could be said to be paying homage to the man who inspired martial courage in his men, *or* he could be the

---

<sup>108</sup> In a passage remarkably like Camden’s discussion of the leaden cross found at Glastonbury, Selden laments: “it is wished that the poeticall Monkes in celebration of [Beuis], Arthur, and other such Worthies had containd themselves within bounds of likelihood; or else that some iudges, proportionat to those of the Graecian Games...had giuen such exorbitant fictions their desert. The sweet grace of an enchanting Poem...often compels beliefe; but so farre haue the indigested reports of barren and Monkish inuention expatiated out of the lists of Truth, that from their intermixed and absurd fauxeties hath proceeded doubt; and, in some, euen denial of what was truth. His sword is kept as a relique in Arundell Castle, not equaling in length (as it is now worne) that of Edward the thirds at Westminster”(37). Selden presents his disappointment with contaminated evidence, as well as his concern that the power of poetry might overcome sound scholarship, but he finishes it up with the hard evidence—the sword—about which the reader may draw his own conclusions.

<sup>109</sup> Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (1612), 69-70.

gullible victim of “fals report” Selden cites so often. Perhaps the most skeptical account of Arthur follows Drayton’s description of the Round Table at Camelot, where “[Arthur] first ordain’d the Circled-board,/The Knights whose martiall deeds farre fam’d that Table-round.” In his description, Drayton notes the feasts that were held at Camelot and the battles Arthur and his knights undertook, before concluding with allusions to the magical personalities of the Lady of the Lake and Merlin, who were known to frequent the site.<sup>110</sup> In Selden’s notes to this passage, he is at his most skeptical and perhaps even sarcastic:

Of the *Arthurian* our Histories haue scarce mention. But *Hauillan’s Architreneus*, *Robert of Glocester*, *John Lidgat Monke of Bury*, and English rimes in diuers hands sing it. It is remembred by *Leland*, *Camden*, *Volateran*, *Philip of Brgomo*, *Lily*, *Aubert Miree*, others, but very diuersly...Some Catalogues of armes haue the coats of the Knights, blazoned; but I thinke with as good warrant as *Rablais* can iustifie, that Sir *Lancelot du Lac* roasts horses in hell...Of [the knights], their number, exploits, and prodigious performances you may read *Caxtons* published volume, digested by him into XXI. Bookes, out of diuers French and Italian fables, From such I abstaine, as I may.<sup>111</sup>

Selden lays his cards on the table in his passage, making it clear that he does not “buy” the evidence that earlier historians might have allowed. For books of arms like Robinson’s *Auncient Order* Selden has little patience, and from the book to which Leland had earnestly suggested readers look for Arthurian evidence, Caxton’s edition of Malory, Selden “abstaines.” Selden’s notes give the impression that it is really only Drayton’s passion that could allow for evidence as questionable as that Selden presents to the reader.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (1612), 62-3.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>112</sup> Selden is equally critical of the passage in which Drayton mentions Merlin’s prophecies: Selden includes a long recapitulation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s story of the dragons under Vortigern’s tower, and cautions the reader against believing it. “I should abuse you, if I endeoured to perswade your beliefe to a conceit of a true foreknowledge in [Merlin]”(165).

Given the structure of Drayton's poem, followed up as it is with Selden's annotations, it sometimes gives readers the impression that Selden gets the last word and illustrates Arthur's mounting irrelevance in seventeenth-century England. However, one might just as easily argue that the fact that Drayton felt compelled to reassert Arthur at this time suggests a following outside of the humanist scholars who were moving in another direction. In *Tudor Historical Thought*, F. J. Levy categorizes Drayton's poem's audience as "courtly." "A scholar would have his Camden, a courtier his Daniel or Drayton; a merchant had his choice among historians, including Stow and Holinshed, while his apprentice could enjoy the ditties of Deloney."<sup>113</sup> Although in a hierarchy of historical writing, Levy is surely right to separate Camden from both Holinshed and Drayton, in an Arthurian context Drayton's text emerges as a hybrid novelty with a unique contribution to make. *Poly-Olbion* attends to seventeenth-century scholarship via Selden's Illustrations, but it also resurrects Leland's vehemence and even Malory's romance-entertainment value.<sup>114</sup> The fact that Selden's notes are necessary at all suggests that the material Drayton discusses is by nature historically questionable—something both Holinshed and Camden also show but do not embrace. Drayton's text, on the other hand, acknowledges the problems with Arthurian evidence but celebrates that evidence's importance in defining the very

---

<sup>113</sup> Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, 234.

<sup>114</sup> It is interesting that James Douglas Merriman claims that both Malory and Drayton are "belated": "At the very moment when Arthurian legend had received its first great comprehensive treatment in English [Malory], the conditions for its proper understanding and artistic use were in fact fading away to be replaced by attitudes and necessities fundamentally antipathetic to its essential shape and spirit"; see *The Flower of Kings*, 31. The fact that there is a full 130 years between their printed texts in England—years filled with Arthurian romance, history and pageantry—suggests that belatedness may not be Arthur's "Achilles's Heel" so much as his calling card. The similarity of this passage to Merriman's later claim about Drayton's poem merits further consideration: "Like its author, *Poly-Olbion* was in many ways a holdover from the more spacious days of Elizabeth. Begun as early as 1598 and added to fitfully until the publication of the first eighteen Songs in 1612, it came to the market too late"(53). If Malory is also belated, one must wonder just when Merriman believes Arthur was really "current." As I suggest in my "Introduction," given the famous king's strong ties to myths of origin, a fully "contemporary" Arthur may in fact be unfathomable.

terrain of the nation. In his notes, Selden acknowledges the power of a poem to run away with its reader: “The sweet grace of an enchanting Poem...often compels beliefe.” Selden means it as a warning, but in many ways it is the very source of the *Poly-Olbion*’s power: the acknowledgement that Arthurian fact and fiction are inextricably linked, that romance and history go hand-in-hand, and that although historical methods may change, Arthurian assertions will continue to spring up and “compel belief” in all kinds of readerly circles.

### **Robinson’s Legacy: Printed Evidence for Reality Fictions**

Illustrating what was becoming increasingly evident as print culture expanded, Camden’s address to his reader ends with the phrase: “Bookes receive their doome according to the Readers capacitie.”<sup>115</sup> Although Camden’s original audience would have been readers of Latin, that audience would presumably have changed and grown with the burst of translation, of which many subsequent vernacular editions of the *Britannia* were a part.<sup>116</sup> It is the “capacitie” of *these* readers that most concerns the translators of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. While Leland’s 1544 *Assertio* waited nearly forty years for an English translation, Camden’s 1586 *Britannia* waited just over twenty, reflecting the steadily increasing number of citizens who wanted to read their country’s history in its native language. Despite their debts to the humanist tradition, Holinshed and Drayton actually composed their texts in English. The point, more generally speaking, is that any early modern author dealing with Arthurian topics—even one working within the humanist circles—would have had to acknowledge a much broader audience,

---

<sup>115</sup> Camden, *Britannia*, vii.

<sup>116</sup> For more on this “burst of translation, see Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, 77.

one that spoke English and identified community and even landscape by Arthurian narrative. This is evident in the fact that even the texts that Levy claims would have been primarily purchased and read by scholars, gentlemen and courtiers—such as Drayton’s and Camden’s—show traces of their being shaped and/or received by more “common” readers than they perhaps anticipated as customers. Holinshed’s in particular must have been popular enough to reach many listeners (if not readers): it was printed copiously in the late sixteenth century and, Annabel Patterson suggests, probably read well into the seventeenth. Shakespeare’s plays must also have brought Holinshed’s stories to even more audiences.<sup>117</sup> For his part, Camden quite often notes Arthurian landmarks that are identified by what the common people call them. In fact, when describing the ruins of the Norman Castle Rous, Camden illustrates the strong bond between the people, the land, and Arthur. “The neighbor Inhabitants used to call [the castle] Bery, as one would say Burgh, and they report that it was a most famous place in King Arthurs daies, as the common sort ascribe whatsoever is ancient and strange to King Arthurs glory.”<sup>118</sup> This somewhat dismissive assessment of the common people’s relationship with Arthur is a repeating thread in Camden’s text. At other times he notes the round trench of earth “which the countrey people tearme Arthurs Table”; and, in Scotland, an ancient round building which “Some call...TERMINUS, others *Arthurs-Oven*, who father everie stately and sumptuous thing upon

---

<sup>117</sup> Patterson, *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles*, 265. Patterson also notes that Holinshed’s *Chronicles* offers a particularly illuminative window on the lives of a broad range of people: “Many of the episodes or details to which Sir Henry Savile and Edmund Bolton would have objected as ‘vulgar’ or ‘trivial’ have the effect both of thickening the description of the events under inspection with a rich brew of mundane detail, and of showing that popular culture was the medium through which the completely disadvantaged taught each other the techniques of survival. These included a sense of justice as fairness; a larger, more theoretical concept of social and economic egalitarianism; a skeptical penetration of official ideology; local solidarities; literacy when they could get it or, when they could not, the oral transmission of stories that carried popular resistance from one generation to the next; and, most extraordinarily, a kind of black humor”(188). See also Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>118</sup> Camden, *Britannia*, 594.

Arthur.”<sup>119</sup> The “common sort”—the citizens of the emerging (and/or waning) English nation—have an evident stake in Arthur, which influences every historian from the enthusiastic Leland to the skeptical Camden to the pandering Robinson.

And it is Robinson who (somewhat surprisingly) may have the strongest ties to Geoffrey of Monmouth: like Geoffrey, Robinson was, above all, a recycler of others’ works. In fact, his text reminds his readers that Arthurian history has always been based in borrowing—perhaps especially for those that claim to (or actually do) translate the works of others for new audiences.<sup>120</sup> And even as historical writers in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries seemed to vouch for Arthur less and less frequently, such a phenomenon need not indicate a decrease in Arthurian enthusiasm amongst readers. After all, even Camden’s and Selden’s patronizing acknowledgments of the ties between citizens and Arthurian landscape suggest that what presumably started in oral culture was not so easily suppressed by changes in techniques amongst elite writers of British history. In fact, I argue that Arthur’s survival in the face of growing suspicion of “hyperbolique” historical accounts stemmed from an (often unacknowledged) understanding of the inseparable nature of fact and fiction—and perhaps of written and oral tradition—in accounts of Arthur. Leland’s project of “cutting away trifles” from Geoffrey’s account is a clever way to sell Arthurian history to his fellow humanists, but the practicality (as even Camden suggests) of recognizing truth in a sea of falsehoods is often impossible. It is no wonder, then, that even as history revealed its interconnectedness with fables,

---

<sup>119</sup> Camden, *Britannia*, 776; Camden, “Scotland” in *Britannia*, 28.

<sup>120</sup> Two other critical figures in translating Arthurian history—John Trevisa (Higden’s *Polychronicon*) and Philemon Holland (Camden’s *Britannia*)—arguably “outrank” Robinson in importance as translator; however, like Robinson’s, their projects both end up bringing Arthurian significance to new audiences and even, in Trevisa’s case, inserting an Arthurian endorsement of his own.

so romance increasingly took on the name of “history” in early modern printed books. Joseph M. Levine believes that such conflation stemmed from the fact that fifteenth-century historians did not know how to separate reality from fiction, and that only with the humanists did the effort seem worth making.<sup>121</sup> Such stark boundaries between centuries fall apart, however, in light of the oral storytelling culture from which this sober “history” supposedly sprang: the origins were already riddled with fictions, and it would be impossible—and even undesirable—to try to separate the two. In this light, assertions like George Puttenham’s become essential for understanding Arthurian history’s longevity: in his *Art of English Poesie* (1589), Puttenham specifically notes the value of historical-romantic hybrids: these historical poems, which he calls “not very histories but a maner of historicall reportes” do not damage history but extend its reach.

We our selues who compild this treatise haue written for pleasure a litle brief *Romance* or historical ditty in the English tong of the Isle of great Britaine in short and long meetres, [to be sung] where the company shalbe desires to heare of old aduentures & valiaunces of noble knights in times past as are those of king *Arthur* and his knights of the round table, *Sir Beuys of Southampton*, *Guy of Warvvicke* and others like. Such as haue not premonition hereof, and consideration of the causes alledged, would peradventure reprove and disgrace euery *Romance*, or short historical ditty for that they be not written in long meetres or verses *Alexandrins*, according to the nature & stile of large histories, wherin they should do wrong for they be sundry formes of poems and not all one.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> See *Humanism and History*, in which Levine claims, “Caxton, like [Ranulph] Higden, understood that a true story was not an invention, that history was not fiction, but neither they nor any of their contemporaries seem to have had any idea how practically to distinguish between the two—nor, when all is said and done, any strong motive to do so” (39). Levine makes an interesting point here, but he conflates an inability to separate the two with indifference about their possible separation. He never truly attends to the *power* of conflating the two. In fact, he jokingly raises the idea of Caxton’s completely inventing the “demand” for his edition of Malory. I argue that it does not matter whether Caxton was in earnest: he was a businessman selling a product, and fictions have always sold Arthur.

<sup>122</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: Richard Field, 1589), 33-4. D. R. Woolf notes the importance of Puttenham’s assertions in light of the fact that people often listened to their history (instead of reading it). “Puttenham, discussing historical poesy, felt that the past was lost to the senses, partly because ‘historical reportes’ were not sung as often as they had been in ancient times.”; see D. R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 85. Woolf argues that “Puttenham aims to bring the oral tradition back with his ‘historical ditty.’”

Puttenham's comments betray the fact that, even if there was a new acknowledgment that medieval histories had been "polluted" with fables, not every reader looked at the conflation of fact and fiction as something to be avoided. Indeed, some even craved—as Henry II himself reportedly had—to hear their country's history "sung" in the romantic verse that characterized stories of Arthurian origins.

By validating the credibility of a romance-history hybrid, Arthurian history takes on new legitimacy. The early modern historical Arthur, for better or for worse, was the descendent of the Galfridian Arthur—created and "translated" from a hodgepodge of pseudo-historical material—and therefore he never lost his tie to romance. Despite Leland's proposed "cutting away of trifles," romantic elements may actually have been what saved Arthur from obscurity as historical methods changed. In his book *Reality Fictions*, Robert M. Stein talks about Geoffrey's particular brand of historiography, allowing for a more productive relationship between the two sides of that title. Stein claims that "romance emerges from the desire to seize directly and with the same narrative techniques the kind of truth that seems always just outside the historian's knowledge, but above all to seize this kind of truth for historical understanding."<sup>123</sup> Techniques like Geoffrey's, Stein argues, use romance in order to create historical understanding; with such a mission, it is not so important that Geoffrey tells the truth as that he sparks contemplation of the "alternative world" that

---

<sup>123</sup> Robert M. Stein, *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1025-1180* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 8. Stein also claims that "Historical writing is thoroughly dependent on the techniques of fiction to represent the reality of the past; epic and romance imagine worlds that never were in order to make the world their readers inhabit available for practical knowledge"(10).

is at once an escape from history (for it has no existence other than as narrative, no reality other than as effect) and an attempt to see into history's secret causes and most intimate truth (for the aim of Geoffrey's fiction is to find an adequate representation of the way the world goes 'in reality'). There is no possible resolution between the two impulses, and the result, it seems to me, is profoundly unsettling. In its light it is no wonder that Geoffrey's work immediately inspired so much new writing and rewriting, especially writing in the vernacular that elaborates the very material that we have been looking at.<sup>124</sup>

Stein's theory about Geoffrey's writing has enormous consequences for the ways in which historians and readers might have received Arthurian assertions in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. D. R. Woolf allows for an acceptance of "reality fictions" in early modern England, suggesting that the line between the two periods with respect to fact and fiction was not a stark one in practice. "History, it seems, could free the mind to wander as much as fixing it upon important tasks; and the factual past, as much as the fictions and romances decried by moralists as frivolous time-wasters, could transport the reader of Foxe, Livy, or Froissart into an imaginative landscape where his or her imagination could perambulate freely."<sup>125</sup> If Stein and Woolf are correct, then perhaps the apologies made for Geoffrey and the attempts to edit his more fantastic elements were only rhetorical apologies for what scholars really knew was the heart of the story.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, if one moves from manuscript culture to print, the reader's role becomes a more obvious influence on whether these "reality fictions" starring Arthur were replicated or rejected.<sup>127</sup> An understanding of history as an "alternate world" certainly opens up

---

<sup>124</sup> Stein, *Reality Fictions*, 124-5.

<sup>125</sup> Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England*, 113. This acceptance of historical romance did not end in the seventeenth century, despite Drayton's laments.

<sup>126</sup> After all, Leland and Dee actually endorsed Geoffrey's "certain very ancient" Welsh book as a legitimate source. There seems to be an understanding of Arthur's essential "reality fiction" underlying attempts to separate the two.

<sup>127</sup> Although print culture enlisted the approval or rejection of a more diverse number of readers, even Stein notes the importance of the role of the contemporary reader of Geoffrey's (Latin) manuscript: "It is clear, too, that medieval historians' claim to a truth-telling invention, even when their canons of truth had more to do with probable

the door to Arthurian “hacks” like Robinson to generate new meaning by creatively translating the works of the past, and begs the question regarding whether Arthur was actually in need of defense for readers outside the scholarly circles.

Leland and Drayton certainly shared the sense that Arthur was an endangered national hero, and both sought to save him from irrelevance and mockery. The restoration metaphors both writers employ illustrate their texts’ goals to keep Arthur’s memory alive. But was this really as necessary as they felt compelled to assert? Certainly amongst those charged with providing England a legitimate set of origins, the situation seemed dire and the Arthurian evidence as it descended from Geoffrey of Monmouth appeared questionable at best. All the while, however, the “common sort” were naming landmarks after Arthurian stories and creating demand for translations like Robinson’s. Robinson’s current reputation as a sub-humanist “hack” suggests that scholars are still wary of “reality fiction”—of the productive marriage of historical and romance tropes—that Leland sought to separate and Drayton moaned had already been forever divorced. However, Robinson remains the one translator to bring the most important Arthurian history text of the Renaissance to English readers. His text translates the books and bones by which Leland set such store into a printed document vouching for Arthur amongst readers who may never visit Glastonbury or read Geoffrey’s account. The fact that Robinson zealously took liberties with Leland’s sober account links him with other translators (Geoffrey himself in particular) whose desire to endorse a particular version of Arthur prompted them to take liberties with their sources. As the methods of Camden and Selden eclipsed those of Leland, Arthur seemed to be in danger of fading into the romantic past; however, the fact that history continued

---

argument and pedagogical efficacy than with narrating the past ‘as it truly was,’ required the reader’s assent to the mimetic truth value of their narrative”; see *Reality Fictions*, 8.

to be translated into English and that even these more sober histories acknowledged a vast public bond with Arthur suggests that Arthur was always lurking in the shadows of history, waiting for his next iteration. Over the course of a century, evidence for Arthur transitioned from stone tombs and wax seals to flimsy crosses and shields printed on paper. New readers' "discoveries" of such Arthurian evidence in print must have already been familiar to some, who had heard stories and seen landscapes that had informed the medieval scholars who began the whole conversation. By bringing Leland's text—the antiquarian exemplar—to readers of English in a cramped, black-letter format, Robinson creates his own Arthurian evidence that is at once archaic *and* familiar to those who already knew and/or craved an Arthurian account of their nation's significance.

The growing use of the term "history" to denote heroic stories throughout the sixteenth century is inseparable from the transition of Latin manuscript history to vernacular print versions. Scholars have often read the interchangeable titles of "history" and "romance" (or "story") in certain early modern printed books as an attempt by romance writers to be taken seriously. Indeed, as the acknowledgement of Britain's reality fictions—its pseudo-historical origin stories—increased, romance writers might have attempted to gain importance by associating their works with the more respected genre. However, as D. R. Woolf explains,

In the seventeenth century, especially after 1640, the types of history broadened considerably, with the most dignified translation of Thucydides and the most light-hearted romance or chapbook equally laying claim to the title of 'history.' This has often been seen as simple generic confusion, or as an instance of the determination of fiction writers to have their works treated with the same gravity as the historians, a trend that continued with the novel in the eighteenth century. But perhaps the distinction between fiction and history, between entertainment and 'serious' writing is itself a false polarity.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England*, 131.

The audience for these broadsides and pamphlets would have been the same group who “father every sumptuous thing upon Arthur” and held him for a worthy not in spite of his “fond fables” but in large part because of them. This is not the naivety of ignorant commoners so much as an understanding (anticipating Stein) that fables are sometimes the most effective means of contemplating how things go “in reality.” And contemplating how things go in reality is another way of describing the goal of any historian. A key example of the “historical” chapbooks Woolf mentions, Martin Parker’s *The most admirable historie of that most renowned Christian worthy Arthvr, King of the Britaines* (1660), is a heavily abridged version of the events depicted by Geoffrey and Malory.<sup>129</sup> Parker’s romance illustrates that even though Drayton believed there

---

<sup>129</sup> Another important example, Robert Chester’s *Loves Martyr: Or, Rosalins Complaint* (London: Edward Blount, 1601), is a text that “interrupts” romance with history. Inserted into the middle of Chester’s longer poem is the “Birth, Life, and Death of honorable Arthur, King of Brittainie,” the preface to which emphasizes the books and bones that were such important elements of Arthur’s historicity: “Courteous Reader...I thought good ...to write not according to ages obliuio(n) but directed only by our late Historiographers of England, who have no doubt taken great paines in the searching forth of the truth of that first Christian worthie: and whereas (I know not directed by what blindness) there have been some Writers (as I thinke enemies to truth) that in their erroneus censures have thought no such ma(n) euer to be liuing; How fabulous that should seeme to be, I leaue to the judgment of the best readers, who know for certaine, that that neuer dead Prince of memory, is more beholding to the French, the Roman, the Scot, the Italian, yea to the Greeks themselues, then to his own Country-men, who haue fully and wholly set forth his fame and liuelyhood; then how shamelesse it is for some of us, to let slip the truth of this Monarch? And for one confirmation of the truth looke but in the Abbey of Westminster at Saint Edwards shrine, there shalt thou see the print of his royal Seale of red wax closed in Berrill, with this inscription, Patricius Arthurus Gallie, Germaniae, Daciae Imperator. At Douer likewise you may see Sir Gawins skull and Cradocks mantle: At Winchester, a Citie well knowne in England, his famous round Table, with many other notable monuments too long to rehearse: Besides I my selfe haue seen imprinted, a french Pamphlet of the armes of king Arthur, and his renowned valiant Knights, set in colours by the Heraulds of France: which charge of impression would haue been too great, otherwise I had inserted them orderly in his Life and Actions: but (gentle Reader) take this my paines gratefully, and I shal hereafter more willingly striue to employ my simple wit to thy better gratulation; I haue here set downe (turned from French prose into English meter) the words of the Herald under the arms of that worthy Brittainie.

King Arthur in his warlike Shield did beare,  
Thirteen riche Crowns of purified gold;  
He was a valiant noble Conqueror,  
As ancient Memorie hath truly told:

His great Round-table was in Britanie,  
Where chosen Knights did do their homage yearly. (F1v-F2r)

Chester’s text is interesting because it “interrupts” romance with chronicle—a chronicle supplemented by the physical artifacts that were the hallmarks of humanist historians’ arguments. Lurking in Chester’s romance,

was no space left for an Arthurian offering in the courtly circles of 1612, there was apparently still a strong demand for Arthurian “history” among readers (courtly or otherwise) fifty years later. Parker’s preface to his text illustrates (like Puttenham had argued and Geoffrey had exemplified) the fruitful combination of truth and fable, of antiquity and invention.

Worthy Country men or women, by what name, age title or quality soever you are distinguished, I present you here with a piece of that huge volume of antiquity; wherewith our ancestors were (for the most part contentedly) furnished. Love to the party oftentimes causeth partiality in publishing of praise-worthy deeds; this was the notion that the Zealots (of that age so far superabounded in their historical relations of this (indeed) matchless mirror of Monarcks, and example of heroical actors; insomuch, that proposing improbabilities they have (in some sort) drowned realities: to be brief (where brevity is aimed at) Geofrey of Monmouth (and other Clarke of that time) have so fabulously written of King Arthur (and his Knights of the Round Table) that divers by these Hyperbolical discourses, have been pusselled with ambiguity whether any such story were essential or no, which to doubt were no less the [ ] question, whether Wil. (the son of Robert) Duke of Normandy was ever King of England. King Arthur is (and hath been ever since his life and death) accounted for one of the 3. Christian Worthies, whereof not only our own Countrymen, but also others of forraign Nations have (interchangeably) written: This have the French in as glorious a stile, as they have done of their own Charls Maine, or Godfrey of Bullaine: therefore to explode one is to hiss all the rest from the stage of Christianity; which I being confident you will not refer to what follows truly collected by a lover of truth.<sup>130</sup>

Repeating scraps of the methodologies favored by Higden, Leland, Camden, and Selden, yet equally indebted to the practices and patriotism of Robinson and Drayton, Parker cleverly weds the antiquarian past (love of truth over fables) to the present (a group of readers creating demand for Arthurian fictions), which, he explains, has no need to redeem a king whose status as a worthy has been stable “ever since his life and death.” In other words, under the umbrella of humanism, Leland, Holinshed, Camden and Drayton, and Selden were not wrong to lament the

---

therefore, is the Arthurian evidence on which English national import is based. And Chester claims to have seen this evidence—and therefore can vouch for it—himself.

<sup>130</sup> Martin Parker, *The most admirable historie of that most renowned Christina worthy Arthvr, King of the Britaines* (London: Francis Coles, 1660).

pollution of fact with fiction and/or to worry over Arthur's endangerment; however, Parker's "history's" very appearance in print in 1660—and its presentation as the product of both historians and poets—illustrates that, among "Worthy Country men or women, by what name, age title, or quality soever ... distinguished," there had never been a shortage of readers willing to validate the products of humanists and hacks alike—by vouching for Arthur.

## Chapter 2

### Pushing the Limits of Arthur: National Icons in *The Faerie Queene* and Popular Romance

Although the line between history and romance would remain as flimsy as it had been in the Middle Ages, the genre of “romance” in particular is important to the early modern Arthurian tradition, as this is the genre in which Arthur’s influence never wanes. Beginning with Caxton’s edition of Malory’s *Morte Darthur* in 1485, reaching its early modern high point in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* in 1590(6), and continuing well into the eighteenth century in the form of cheap-print chapbooks such as *Brittain’s Glory* (1684), Arthurian romance enjoyed a continual presence in English print culture. Complementing the historians’ emphasis on Arthur’s national importance for readers of the vernacular, writers and publishers of printed romance also stressed the implications of Arthur’s adventures in illustrating the significance of the English nation. Of course, romance had a more difficult task in this respect: as a genre rooted in fiction, medieval romance had often been viewed as either frivolous or, worse, indicative of moral weakness.<sup>1</sup> Given this legacy, the national importance of early modern romance (as had been true with respect to the truth value of Arthurian legend with respect to history) needed constant reiteration. Writers like George Puttenham and Sir Philip Sidney offered theories of fiction and poetry reading as valid means of self-edification, suggesting that not every educated man of letters was as uncomfortable with the juxtaposition of fact and “fond fable” as historians such as Leland and Selden had been.

---

<sup>1</sup> This reputation extended into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In *The Scholemaster*, Roger Ascham famously attacks Malory’s text in particular for promoting “bold bawdry.” He does, however, praise it for being a vernacular English text (London: John Daye, 1570).

In discussing “romance,” however, one must be careful not to lump every example together: the genre was coherent, but varied widely as to content and material form. Broadly speaking, “romance” signifies a quest—a fictional story that wanders from adventure to adventure as seekers (in an Arthurian context, usually knights) pursue their goal. As Patricia A. Parker notes, romances suspend meaning and postpone fulfillment: romance is about a quest whose importance as a process often supersedes that of the acquisition of its object.<sup>2</sup> The most famous example of national Arthurian romance in the Renaissance, and a notable example of an “unfulfilled”—indeed unfinished—narrative, Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* deftly weds causal Galfridian history with the “wandering” Arthurian romance tradition of Welsh and French medieval sources (not to mention the classical journey narratives of Vergil and Heliodorus). Spenser’s verse romance clearly illustrates the inextricable nature of Arthurian history and fiction; instead of attempting to rid his text of the latter, Spenser builds upon both to create a political allegory with national implications.<sup>3</sup> This grand poem is certainly (and deservedly) the most famous Arthurian offering of the Renaissance, but just as important to an understanding of Arthurian romances are the “lesser” texts—both medieval and early modern, printed in quarto and octavo throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—which either influenced Spenser

---

<sup>2</sup> Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 4.

<sup>3</sup> See James Douglas Merriman, *The Flower of Kings: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in England Between 1485 and 1835* (Wichita: University Press of Kansas, 1972). Merriman asserts, “The fact that historians had denuded Arthur of his romance characteristics was far from daunting Spenser. Only the contrary, only through taking Arthur’s historicity seriously (within his poem, of course) could he serve both his political purpose of complimenting the Virgin Queen and his literary intention of creating an epic poem”(41). Merriman makes a valid point about Spenser’s attitude towards blending Arthur’s historicity and romance characteristics, but he is incorrect when he argues, “only when...men had ceased wholly to believe in the historical Arthur, could they believe once more in the real Arthur, the king of romance”(38). Such a polarization of history and romance ignores their essentially interrelated status in Arthurian contexts. In the cases both of Renaissance and twenty-first century scholars, those who can conceptually balance the historical and the romance Arthur have a fuller sense of his implications—national and otherwise—than scholars who seek to favor one over the other as the “real” Arthurian context.

or which drew from Spenser's text for their own content. Not only histories like Geoffrey of Monmouth's, but also medieval romances like *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick* are critical sources for Spenser's Arthurian poem. Building on Spenser's legacy, John Bouchier's *Arthur of Little Britain*, Richard Johnson's *Tom a Lincoln*, and John Shurley's *Brittain's Glory* all emphasize Arthurian history and legend as indispensable in illustrating the famous king's continued relevance to an early modern English nation. These Spenserian "sources and spin-offs" are all printed in different formats, but most commonly as "cheap quartos" that were known best, in the seventeenth century, as chapbooks.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in order to fully appreciate the Arthurian implications of *The Faerie Queene*, one must also look to the print history of its "flimsier" predecessors and successors.

The entire Arthurian romance canon, from the supremely learned *Faerie Queene* to the hastily compiled *Brittain's Glory*, raises the question of Arthurian revision. While historians had sought to either cut or "bracket" the fabulous elements of the Arthurian tradition, romance writers and publishers built upon them. As romance writers drew upon these elements, however, they also continually revised them to fit their purposes. This is certainly not surprising, since such alteration is an inevitable result of repeating any legend, even when attempting to replicate it verbatim. But there is a noticeable difference in Arthur as he variously appears as relentless warrior in Malory, good Protestant knight (and as *Prince Arthur*, a change in and of itself) in Spenser, and philanthropist in Shurley. As the Arthurian romance tradition changes, the famous

---

<sup>4</sup> The term "cheap quarto" has come under critical suspicion recently, but I use it here to indicate that these romances are far shorter and therefore less expensive to print than Spenser's text—regardless of whether the latter is presented in quarto or folio. The chapbook tradition is representative of the kind of chivalric romances that Spenser used as sources and that continued to grow out of the tradition Spenser helped to cultivate. See Joseph A. Dane and Alexandra Gillespie, "The myth of the cheap quarto" in *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, ed. John N. King (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 25-45.

king is pushed past what may be the limits of his medieval significance. Comparison of Arthur with perhaps his most similarly famous literary figure, Guy of Warwick, suggests that there may be some elements of a given character's legacy that cannot be sacrificed or changed without losing the essential significance of that character. Guy's essential characteristic is his eventual repentance of his former sins and his conversion to a holy life: without these, his legend would be indistinguishable from that of another brave knight. In Arthur's case, given his many different appearances throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the "essential element" is less obvious, but is almost certainly tied to his life of conquest and tragic death at the hands of his kinsman. In an attempt to keep history and romance alive together, and to make them serve a nation that was itself constantly changing, authors and publishers put forth versions of the Arthurian legend that pushed the very limits of Arthur's identity. By the end of the seventeenth century, chapbooks present an Arthur who dies peacefully of old age, securely succeeded by a son. One might argue that this is revising the Arthurian icon past recognition; but on the other hand, it may be indicative of something more deeply significant: the fact that Arthur survived the Civil Wars in any form at all.

This chapter explores *The Faerie Queene* as a seminal text in Arthurian literature and narratives of the English nation. As a new source of Arthurian adventures, and in its many material iterations as printed book, Spenser's romance illustrates at the deepest level the interconnections between England's national history, Arthurian legend, and the demands of sixteenth and seventeenth-century readers. Spenser's portrayal of Arthur is both recognizable as the medieval chivalric warrior king and revised as "Prince Arthur" to allow for his new role as rational Protestant reader. Around Spenser's revised Arthur is a constellation of "lesser"

romances that either informed Spenser's poem or took their genesis from it. I argue that these less grand portrayals of Arthur are no less important on a "national" scale, especially given the fact that these would more likely have been available to more readers, published as they were in shorter, cheaper book form. The clearly related yet obviously revised editions of Arthurian significance explore the question of what Arthur meant to the national consciousness of the English reader. Did English readers connect to their nation in earnest through heroes like Arthur and Guy? Did their interests tend instead to satirical versions like Richard Johnson's? Or were readers weary of chivalric models, as certain chapbooks—and even Spenser's text to an extent—indicate? In short, this chapter interrogates the "limits" of Arthurian significance with respect to readers' conception of their nation and their place within it. It explores the ways in which these limits changed—in both content and printed form—as the nation itself transitioned through two dynasties and the ideological damage of civil war.

### **The Arthurian Icon: Recognizing and Revising the Arthur of Romance**

A text filled with signs and the interpretation thereof, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* illustrates the recognizability—and perhaps the limits—of the significance of a given literary figure. A suggestive example occurs in Book IV, in which Prince Arthur must fight Corflambo, the menacing, fiery-eyed pagan giant who was known "By power of his infectious sight" to "kill all, that came within his might"(IV.viii.47.9, 8).<sup>5</sup> Specifically, Corflambo attacks his victims "By casting secret flakes of lustfull fire/ From his false eyes, into their harts and parts

---

<sup>5</sup> Parenthetical references to *The Faerie Queene* are organized as follows: (Book. Canto. Stanza. Line(s).) Line numbers are taken from Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Longman, 2006).

entire”(IV.viii.48.8-9). Arthur defeats this villain by striking off his head, removing the source of his enemy’s power. After this violent encounter, the giant’s companion-dwarf laments the loss of identity Corflambo’s decapitation has occasioned. Relating the giant’s history to Arthur, the dwarf describes the corpse: “Therefore *Corflambo* was he cald aright,/ Though nameless there his bodie now doth lie”(IV.viii.49.1-2). Editor A. C. Hamilton suggests that this may be a reference to “the anonymity of death,” but such an explanation does not fully account for the particularly iconic nature of Spenser’s text, which begs questions regarding what each representation of a given character must retain in order to hold its value as a signifier. Indeed, when Corflambo loses his head—his eyes—he is no longer able to fulfill the promises of his fiery gloss and therefore is left “nameless” in death.

The headless Corflambo’s loss of his name is a revealing example of the iconic function of much of Spenser’s text: characters’ names, appearance (as described), and actions (as narrated) combine to create portrayals of various virtues and vices that the reader must learn to interpret over the course of the romance. Most important to my study—in terms of both Spenser’s text and the Arthurian tradition in general—are the ways in which Arthur is created an icon: more particularly, just what that portrait entails and how far it can be pushed while still retaining recognizable Arthurian significance. Corflambo cannot lose his head and keep his name, his fiery gloss; what must Arthur retain in order to avoid Corflambo’s fate? This issue will be important throughout this chapter, since romance is the one genre in which Arthur steadily appears from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, but also one in which his particular portrayal varies greatly and may even exceed the limits of recognizable Arthurian significance. From the tutorials in Arthurian heraldry discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation to the highly

descriptive portraits in Spenser's text to the performances of royal, national iconography later discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, Arthur as a cultural figure consistently carries visual and narrative elements that define him—that make him recognizable. Given this genre-transcending phenomenon, I use the word “icon” to refer to the essential recognizability of Arthur in a variety of contexts and to theorize the limits of such recognizability under revision.<sup>6</sup> My definition of “icon” in particular might be best summed up by David A. Summers in what he more particularly calls a “cultural icon”:

As valued possessions of their culture...[cultural icons] and their correlative meanings are continually undergoing revision, sometimes in an effort to protect the values they represent, sometimes in a program driven to reconsider those values, but always at stake in any reevaluation are the components of meaning encoded in those symbols and their contingent values for the identity of the culture. New components of meaning are sometimes added, but old components rarely disappear entirely.<sup>7</sup>

Summers's definition is especially important to my study because it suggests that cultural signifiers die hard: new components can be added, but once a Corflambo loses his *head*, his identity is no longer readable. Summers extends his analysis to Arthur's particular role as a cultural icon, suggesting that Spenser's *Faerie Queene* constructs its reader “both intellectually through its allegory and affectively by evoking visceral responses to Arthur as icon.”<sup>8</sup> As this chapter will illustrate on a scale that exceeds Summers's concerns with Spenser in particular, these “visceral” responses to Arthur—comprising the network of acknowledged iconic

---

<sup>6</sup> “Icon” in my study does not denote a specifically religious element—instead, it refers to a readable cultural significance, one learned through the repetition of similar descriptions and narratives within and across genres. This term will be very important in this and the following two chapters (on pageantry and drama), which explore texts that alternately refer to Arthur as foundational to Tudor and Stuart political iconography and readable signifier of the English nation as it is depicted on stage.

<sup>7</sup> David A. Summers, *Spenser's Arthur: The British Arthurian Tradition and the Faerie Queene* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

significance he possesses in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—indicate whether and in what ways readers of many different levels of education, literacy, and class shared an understanding of an iconic Arthur.

The Arthurian icon is a particularly apt concept with which to think about romance as a genre—not just because Arthur is so often present in medieval and early modern romance—but because romance itself is a genre of recurring tropes that may be altered and reworked, but must ultimately retain their significance as critical elements of the genre. In *The English Romance in Time*, Helen Cooper calls these romance tropes “memes,” granting them the particular capacity to replicate almost of their own volition, as would genes. She calls the meme

a unit within literature that proves so useful, so infectious, that it begins to take on a life of its own...an idea that behaves like a gene in its ability to replicate faithfully and abundantly, but also on occasion to adapt, mutate, and therefore survive in different forms and cultures. These motifs and conventions grew up with the genre of which they formed a part and which they helped to define.<sup>9</sup>

The similarities between Summers’s description of Arthurian “cultural icons” and Cooper’s of romance “memes” is perhaps unsurprising, given the fact that a figure’s continued presence in romance and that figure’s iconic status presumably perpetuated one another. Romances catered to and created a sense of familiarity with stories and heroes their audience already knew. The desires for such familiarity, in turn, kept the old heroes coming back in new (or old) romance adventures. Cooper explains, “The abiding appeal of romance resulted partly from its familiarity and its infinite adaptability; partly also (despite the Catholic associations of the form) from its usefulness in the various nationalist agendas for the ‘writing of England’, since many of the romances were native stories that asserted the value and vitality of English originary legends and

---

<sup>9</sup> Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

narrative traditions.”<sup>10</sup> As Cooper explains, romances and their memes (such as Arthur) reasserted a sense of familiarity and communal belonging that makes their continued success in print hardly surprising. Indeed, although Spenser is the enormously important exception to two centuries without a large-scale Arthurian romance, both Malory’s late-medieval text as well as a variety of “lesser” Arthurian romances remained readily available in print.

So what is Arthur’s nature in these various printed romances? Is he the active, giant-killing hero? The figurehead and founder of the Round Table? The imperial conqueror who withstands the Saxons? The seeker after Faery land? A reckless adulterer? A founder of monasteries? In fact, he plays all of these roles in the wide variety of romances printed between the inception of the Tudor dynasty and the aftermath of the English Civil Wars. In six editions of Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, Arthur remains present as national hero: militant conqueror, founder of the Round Table, and ultimately tragic victim of family betrayal.<sup>11</sup> In three printings of John Bouchier’s translated *Arthur of Little Britain*, Arthur seeks a faery queen whose face he has never seen.<sup>12</sup> In five editions of Richard Johnson’s satiric *Tom a Lincoln*, Arthur craftily seduces another woman while married to his queen.<sup>13</sup> In four editions of John Shurley’s *Brittain’s Glory*, Arthur conquers pagans, founds monasteries, and dies peacefully, succeeded by his son (born in wedlock), Constantine.<sup>14</sup> Finally, in four major editions of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, Arthur is magnificence itself: dedicated lover, healer, arbiter of chivalric

---

<sup>10</sup> Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Printed: 1485, 1498, 1502, 1557, 1582 (folios); 1634 (quarto)

<sup>12</sup> Printed: 1560, 1580, 1582 (all quarto)

<sup>13</sup> Printed: 1631, 1635, 1655, 1668, 1682 (all quarto)

<sup>14</sup> Printed: 1684, 1697, and two others c. 1700 (all quarto)

justice and ideal Protestant reader, Arthur is enormously important in what is arguably his most notable Renaissance manifestation in any genre.<sup>15</sup> As the list above suggests, however, not every text that kept Arthur “alive” during this period portrayed him flatteringly or traditionally.

Although the central text for this chapter will be Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, under continual consideration will be the question of how all of these romances fed into or resulted from the traditions that prompted Spenser to portray Arthur as he did. For example, in the brief period between 1634-1635, a version of Malory’s flattering portrayal of the warrior king *and* Johnson’s satiric adultery tale made it into print, prompting the question: What kind of reading public would simultaneously create demand for these seemingly contradictory versions of the Arthurian icon?

The answer to this question will inevitably necessitate asking what readers desired to see in iterations of Arthur and in romance itself. Both Summers and Cooper claim that, with regard to both Arthurian icons and romance as a genre, there is no need for explanation: the reader will instantly (and sometimes viscerally) understand Arthur and romance when he or she encounters either. “The point of the cultural icon is that it does not require a gloss,” Summers explains.<sup>16</sup> While this view is very useful when considering Spenser (as Summers does), it does not take into consideration the question of whether it was possible to push Arthurian significance too far. Much criticism has emphasized the vast *possibilities* for Arthurian significance: as a figure with centuries of appearances in vastly different contexts, his role could indeed vary widely, from the

---

<sup>15</sup> Printed: 1590, 1596 (quartos); 1609, 1611 (folio of *The Faerie Queene* and folio of Spenser’s *Works*, respectively)

<sup>16</sup> Summers, *Spenser’s Arthur*, 17. This element in particular supports the suggestion of an Arthurian icon, in the function of which the reader is integral. Textual depictions of Arthur—whether in decorative woodcuts or narrative/description—occasion a gloss that “goes without saying”: in other words, even if Arthur’s historical legitimacy was constantly in danger, his recognizability was not.

savage boar-killer in the Welsh *Culhwych and Olwen* to the “mere” figurehead in Chrétien de Troye’s *Eric and Enide* to Spenser’s magnificent exemplar. However, this chapter suggests that while Arthurian national significance was plural, it may not have been infinite. Arthur might conceivably make a smooth transition from the hero of catholic medieval society to champion of the Tudor/Protestant nation in his role as the figure of magnificence, but he could not necessarily become a crafty seducer of virgins, or die peacefully in his bed without compromising essential elements of his iconic nature—without requiring a new gloss. This chapter asks when, if at all, revision compromises a cultural icon, and what may be such a compromise’s implications for English nationhood. Cooper explains that when there is a departure from a well-known convention, it is all the more shocking. Denied expectations highlight what is familiar and important to those who expect something else. “The shock may come from upset expectations, but it may also come from the recognition of something long known but in circumstances that defamiliarize it, that can make you recognize it as if for the first time.”<sup>17</sup> In describing genre as “a family of texts” and not a “single Platonic idea,” Cooper emphasizes that although there is no one way to craft a romance, iterations can lose their “family resemblance” with romance when too many genre-specific elements “are missing—or, alternatively, as an atypical element is given prominence.”<sup>18</sup> It is this chapter’s project to test the limits of Arthur’s “family resemblance” to *himself* in his romantic iterations as they compare to their early modern centerpiece, Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. Within the genre of printed Arthurian romance, the revised text *does* require a gloss; indeed, it requires the reader to think even more deeply about conventions he or she may

---

<sup>17</sup> Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 21-2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

have taken for granted, and whether a given new iteration deserves to be glossed as a reaffirmation of the meme/trope, or as a counterfeit—a headless Corflambo.

The limits of Arthurian romance are incredibly consequential, not for their own sake but for what they can tell us about their readers' emerging conceptions of themselves as citizens of an English nation. Like Arthur, the concept of nation underwent continual revision: both were far from stable concepts, and both required a communal “gloss of assent” as to whether a given rendering was suggestive of English collective identity. As Claire McEachern explains in *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, “The point is not whether everybody really believed in a nation; rather, the nation is the idea, hope and fear that everybody does so believe.”<sup>19</sup> The work of both Claire McEachern and Richard Helgerson continues to be important in this chapter, as both writers discuss national instability, and both suggest Spenser had a hand in writing an idea of nation that, like the romance genre and Arthur himself, fostered a sense of familiarity between English subjects and their language, sovereign, and land.<sup>20</sup> As in the works of McEachern and Helgerson, the “national” import of Spenser's Arthurian project will thus be a large part of this chapter's focus. Departing from McEachern and Helgerson, however, I will extend my reading to the print history of Spenser's text and how it illuminates Arthur's possible national implications when considered in the context of the other, “lesser” Arthurian romances mentioned above. As Robinson's translation of Leland's text did for histories, the network of cheaply printed Arthurian romances springing up around Spenser's gives a clearer indication of the reader's role

---

<sup>19</sup> Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17.

<sup>20</sup> I will turn to Richard Helgerson for his helpful analysis of the Tudor nation and Spenser's critical role in writing its foundational texts. See *Forms of Nationhood: the Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

in connecting with his nation through Arthur. Thus, while the discussion of Spenser's project will remain the central focus, the print history of these "humbler" Arthurian texts (more accessible to a variety of readers) and the limits of their iconic revisions will serve to challenge the idea of an author writing a nation that the people merely receive. Arthur, nation, and printed romance were all entities familiar enough to be recognized and yet constantly in need of further glossing. In Spenser's *Faerie Queene* national concepts are on full display; in the accompanying constellation of popular romances they appear to be even more urgent for a wider spectrum of English reading subjects.

### ***The Faerie Queene: Arthurian Significance in an Early Modern Context***

Although Geoffrey of Monmouth and Sir Thomas Malory had certainly made proto-national statements in their Arthurian texts, when one thinks of Arthur as a national icon, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* comes immediately to mind as the text that most obviously and most impressively demonstrates that particular "meme." First printed in two three-book installments in 1590 and 1596, respectively, Spenser's text was well situated to participate in conversations about the historical foundation of the Tudor dynasty, the question of female sovereignty, and the primacy of the English church and language: to put it broadly, the question of England nationhood itself. Richard Helgerson sheds light on Spenser's particular place in a group of other late-sixteenth-century writers conversing about the concept of English nationhood: he presents Spenser's famous question to Gabriel Harvey in the 1570s regarding why Englishmen cannot have "the kingdom of [their] own language" as a clear indication that Spenser yearned for a clear sense of what it was to be—and write as—an English subject.

“Instead of an ideal representation, Spenser’s sentence provides a dramatic expression of ambition, cultural envy, and frustration. The Greeks had the kingdom of their own language. Why, Spenser asks, can’t we? Why must we be consigned to perpetual subjection and inferiority?”<sup>21</sup> The English nation as Spenser desired it would be identifiable as an insular, positive entity separate from other lands and languages—and inferior in neither category. Given the constantly changing definition of the English nation during this time, such desires were met with as much frustration as success. As Leland and his fellow historians had also found, the nation was far from clearly defined in terms of land, language, or history/lineage, and attempts to write it into existence were fraught with obstacles. The fact that Spenser chose to explore the unstable concept of nation with the equally unstable genre of Arthurian romance suggests that he understood the tenuous yet potentially fruitful connections between the two.

Spenser’s desire to have the kingdom of English participated in a frustrating cycle of making and destroying, of unearthing and burying that had really begun with the antiquarians in the early sixteenth century.<sup>22</sup> In agreement with Helgerson’s observations on the frustrated ambition inherent in early modern nation-making, Claire McEachern offers a description of the English nation that sounds strikingly Arthurian:

[Spenser’s archaisms, Shakespeare’s elegies, and Drayton’s and Selden’s obsession with the origins of custom] all demonstrate a fascination with the historical location of England. All three...imagine an England in motion either yet to be or just past, with anticipation or nostalgia, her forms either comedy or tragedy. This motion enacts on a diachronic scale—once and future England—the fluidity engendered by the female figure with respect to foreign polities. [...] the force of the nation lies in its fleetingness. It is either always about to be or on the wane, nascent or ancient.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> These antiquarians were often engaged in discussions of Arthur. See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>23</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, 33.

McEachern's statement about the fluidity and fleetingness of this "once and future England" is illustrative of the anxiety about creating and/or uncovering the English nation Helgerson sees in Spenser. The marked (though unacknowledged as such) Arthurian rhetoric of McEachern's description in particular sheds even more light on Spenser's decision to write about Arthur. In choosing Arthur, Spenser was participating in a tradition already centuries old: the connection between Arthurian fictions and united communities had been evident since the Middle Ages—well before the term "nation" was in use. In *Sovereign Fantasies*, Patricia Clare Ingham argues, "Fantasies of national identity teach peoples to desire union. . . . Yet in order to promote desires for national unity, the nation, its core identity, must appear to have always already been there, poised to fascinate its people, and ready to be desired. And this too. . . . is one of the riches of Arthurian romance."<sup>24</sup> When Spenser began his work on *The Faerie Queene*, "England" already had an allegiance to Arthur and a proto-national community; what Spenser had to do was to combine both to fit the demands of the post-Reformation, Tudor, vernacular models this new England demanded. In his "letter" to Sir Walter Raleigh (first published as back matter with the 1590 edition), Spenser demonstrates just what Ingham describes: alluding to a tradition already firmly in place, he claims that he chose Arthur to represent magnificence because that particular figure was already well known for the "excellency of his person" and because he was "furthest from the daunger of enuy, and suspition of present time."<sup>25</sup> As with William Caxton's Arthurian endorsement one hundred years earlier, the important point with Spenser's assertion is not

---

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>25</sup> Spenser's "Letter of the Author" in *Spenser: The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 715.

actually whether Arthur really was “furthest from suspicion” at that very moment, but that Spenser recognized in Arthur a figure whose very nature was like the English nation in 1590: recognizable in memories, desirable in the present, and continually in “daunger”—not of suspicion, but of disappearing forever.<sup>26</sup>

In order to harness the full potential of Arthur as a Tudor, national figure with a centuries-old legacy, Spenser casts him in such a way that Arthur is recognizable as a chivalric (medieval) icon, but also expands his role to demonstrate ideals of Protestant Christianity and the grandeur of classical myth. Arthur’s iconic function as incorporating all of these categories is immediately recognizable in his first appearance in the romance. Una and the reader know instantly that they are in the presence of a chivalric warrior:

At last she chaunced by good hap to meet  
 A goodly knight, faire marching by the way  
 Together with his Sqyure, arayed meet:  
 His glitterand armour shined far away,  
 Like glauncing light of *Phoebus* brightest ray;  
 From top to toe no place appeared bare,  
 That deadly dint of steele endanger may:  
 Athwart his brest a bauldrick braue he ware,  
 That shind, like twinkling stars, with stones must pretious rare.  
 (I.vii.29)

In this first introduction to Prince Arthur, one notes a well-appointed knight complete with an especially unique set of armor, forged, as the reader discovers in stanza thirty-six, by Merlin.

This is an outfit one might expect to find Arthur wearing in medieval romance. In stanza thirty-one, the reader learns that the crest of Arthur’s “haughtie Helmet” “a Dragon did enfold/ With

---

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, there is reason to doubt Spenser’s sincerity: His “E. K.” in the *Shepherdess Calendar* (1579) had glossed “Ladies of the Lake” as “certain fine fablers or lewd lyers, such as were the Authors of King Arthure the great, and such like, who tell many an unlawfull leasing of the Ladies of the Lake, that is the Nymphes.” For further discussion, see Ronald S. Crane, *The Vogue of Medieval Chivalric Romance During the English Renaissance* (Menasha, WI: George Ranta Publishing, 1919), 19. This does not “prove” that Spenser did not actually consider Arthur’s reputation to be sound in 1590, but it raises suspicions on the assertion. The more important point, however—as it was with Caxton—is not Spenser’s sincerity but his assumption of his audience’s reaction.

greedie pawes, and ouer all did spredd/ His golden winges”(I.vii.31.1, 3-5). Spenser’s readers would no doubt recognize the association of Arthur with the red dragon of Cadwallader, a connection Henry Tudor himself had made on his banner at Bosworth field. Thus, Arthur is recognizable as a chivalric champion in a style not unlike Malory’s depiction in the *Morte Darthur* and as a Tudor icon. Building on these well-known associations, Spenser’s expands the icon to include biblical and classical significance alongside chivalric splendor. In an illustrative set of remarks about the sundry possible readings of Arthur’s portrait in this scene, Merritt Y.

Hughes explains:

a modern reader needs to share the Elizabethan taste for emblematic armorial splendor...[The reader] accepted Arthur as a synthetic symbol and found pleasure in responding to components that he would expect to total up to super-human magnificence. In the diamond shield he would recognize a symbol of humility and repentance as well as a match for the aegis of Homer’s *Athene* or Ariosto’s *Ruggiero*. In the lady’s head on the baldric he might conflate the faces of the Fairy Queen and the Virgin Mary... Behind the sword and spear he might recollect Arthur’s fabulous accoutrements in *Kilwck and Olven*: Caledvwelch, his sword; Rhongomyant, his lance, etc., which stemmed from unfathomed depths of Celtic faith, playful or half-serious, in mighty men of old.<sup>27</sup>

Hughes’s description is especially helpful because it performs the large network of associations that cannot help but be in play in a text about a figure with such a long history in medieval and Tudor England, transposed into a cultural context which also valued Homer and Ariosto.<sup>28</sup> More importantly, Hughes’s remark about conflation highlights the fact that Spenser’s Arthur might

---

<sup>27</sup> Merritt Y. Hughes, “The Arthurs of the Faerie Queene” in *King Arthur: A Casebook*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 2001), 216. Hughes denotes Arthur’s “emblematic” function in this passage. While he makes an important point with respect to Spenser and emblems, in this study I concentrate on the larger function of the “cultural icon” which speaks to connections between Spenser’s version of Arthur and that presented in less overtly “emblematic” texts.

<sup>28</sup> Scholars have conducted many helpful studies on Spenser’s intersections with Ariosto and Tasso. In this project, however, I will concentrate on the insular, English popular romances that inform and generate from Spenser’s poem. For intersections between the Spenser and the Italians, see especially Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode*.

remind a reader of *many different* past versions. Indeed, a reader might well recognize either Hercules or the Welsh Arthur—or both—in Spenser’s first, icon-establishing description of the famous figure. David A. Summers explains:

If we appreciate the ideological issues inherent in the figure of Arthur, at least for the informed medieval or Elizabethan reader, and how the presence of Arthur in Spenser’s text would inevitably evoke a matrix of more or less roughly outlined but underdetermined cultural values, mythic insinuations, and academic controversies, we might find Spenser’s Arthur both a more traditional and a more radical presence in Faerie than has been our custom.<sup>29</sup>

Such a portrait reinforces Summers’s definition of cultural icons as acquiring new elements without sacrificing those that have defined them in the past. As Hughes and Summers agree, in his portrayal of the famous king as an icon evocative of an entire “cultural matrix” of associations, Spenser enables his text to capitalize on recognizable Arthurian significance and to channel it into new directions for his princely version: namely, enforcer of proper conduct in a Protestant, Tudor-chivalric context.<sup>30</sup>

Arthur’s actions both reinforce his “visual,” iconic status as magnificence and redirect it for his active roles as healer, counselor, and protector. Hughes calls this Arthur a “minister of grace,” demonstrating Arthur’s affiliation with Protestant ideals: “In his first adventure, his rescue of Redcross from Orgoglio, Arthur is magnificence, of literally the great-doing of the

---

<sup>29</sup> Summers, *Spenser’s Arthur*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Spenser’s creation of “Prince Arthur” is a clever pathway to revision in itself. By setting his romance in the period before Arthur becomes king, Spenser frees himself from the obligation to reference the medieval and early Tudor iterations of Arthurian legend (although he clearly does build on these traditions). In *The Flower of Kings*, James Douglas Merriman notes: “Piecing together Arthur’s history from its scattered appearances in *The Faerie Queene*, we learn that Arthur, child of Igrayne and Uther, had been spirited away to be raised by one Timon and educated by Merlin. He dreams one day of the Faerie Queene, and sets out in search of her, bearing arms of magical properties made for him by Merlin. In the course of his search he vanquishes such enemies as Orgoglio, Malegar, Corflambo, and Disdain. None of these adventures belongs to the Arthurian tradition, although some of the older motifs are to be seen in the adventures of the subordinate heroes”(40). In other words, it is the tradition in general—not to any version in particular—from which Spenser’s princely figure springs and to which he is obligated.

Kingdom of England against Rome, but he is also Christian magnanimity defeating pride. In defending Guyon against Pyrochles and Cymochles he is again a minister of grace, and here no worldly shadow seems to fall across his spiritual symbolism.”<sup>31</sup> Examples of Arthur’s ability to counsel, comfort, and even heal are frequent, and the sources of Arthur’s gifts in these areas vary from magical to rational to martial. Sometimes a magical potion is all Arthur needs to fix things: he easily heals Amoret’s wounds and “vnto strength restor’d her soone anew” with the “pretious liquour” he had also used to help Redcrosse (IV.viii.20.6, 9). When the threat is more emotional than physical, Arthur administers his grace through his convincing, rational rhetoric. For example, after meeting Una and desiring to know what troubles her, he argues:

But woefull Lady, let me you intrete,  
 For to vnfold the anguish of your hart:  
 Mishaps are maistred by aduice discrete,  
 And counsel mitigates the greatest smart;  
 Found never help, who neuer would his hurts impart.  
 (I.vii.40.5-9)

Thus, when comforting Una, “his goodle reason, and well guided speech/ So deepe did settle in her gracious thought,/ That her perswaded to disclose the breach...”(I.viii.40.1-3). Finally, when the threat involves a foe, Arthur offers help in the form of martial prowess. When Alma’s castle is threatened by Malegar, Arthur is quick to offer to defend his hostess and friend:

Till that Prince seeing her wofull plight,  
 Gan her recomfort from so sad affright,  
 Offring his seruice, and his dearest life  
 For her defence, against that Carle to fight,  
 Which was their chiefe and th’authour of that strife:  
 She him remerciad as the Patrone of her life.  
 (II.ix.16.4-9)

---

<sup>31</sup> Hughes, “The Arthurs of the Faerie Queene,” 211.

Arthur observes distress, locates the source, and “recomforts” as the situation requires. As healer in three major contexts, Arthur permeates the text as a source of succor and defender against threats both physical and emotional. Perhaps his greatest help to the reader, however, is his role as ethical compass for the events of the text. He is indeed a minister of heavenly grace, but he is also—and markedly—the chivalric ideal in the medieval tradition of knights errant, policing the actions of others through verbal and martial means.

Arthur’s role as chivalric mouthpiece shows the reader how to interpret the actions of characters both good and evil. When he comes upon Cymochles and Pyrochles as they are about to despoil the apparently dead Guyon of his armor, Arthur intervenes because, as the Palmer reminds the reader, despoiling the dead would constitute “vnworthy usage of redoubted knight”(II.viii.25.4).<sup>32</sup> Although the Palmer alerts the reader to the problem, it is Arthur’s words that pronounce most definitively on the outrage about to be perpetrated:

Palmer, (said he) no knight so rude, I weene,  
 As to doen outrage to a sleeping ghost:  
 Ne was there euer a noble corage seene,  
 That in aduauntage would his puissance bost:  
 Honour is least, where oddes appeareth most.  
 May bee, that better reason will aswage,  
 The rash reuengers heat. Words well dispost  
 Haue secret power, t’appease inflamed rage:  
 If not, leaue vnto me thy knights last patronage.  
 (II.viii.26)

Arthur displays his knowledge of proper conduct—both what should be done, and what should first be attempted by words. His trust in the power of convincing speech is characteristic of his dealings with almost everyone in Spenser’s poem, but he also recognizes when words have failed and action is required. As Arthur chides Pyrochles and Cymochles, instead of debating the matter

---

<sup>32</sup> Guyon is not really dead, of course, but the two pagan knights assume he is, and although the act would not technically be a crime, it would be a sin.

further, Pyrochles attacks Arthur without issuing a formal challenge. Such a crime Arthur immediately acknowledges and remedies. He shouts:

False traitor miscreant, thou broken hast  
 The law of armes, to strike foe vndefide.  
 But thou thy treasons fruit, I hope, shalt taste,  
 Right sowre, and feele the law, the which thou hast defast.  
 (II.viii.31.6-9)

The “law of armes” is a code recognizable from chivalric literature, and this episode with the two pagan knights illustrates that Spenser’s Arthur is still very much a part of that tradition. Guyon thanks Arthur for his help, and Arthur responds, “Are not all knightes by oath bound, to withstond./ Oppressours power by armes and puissant hond?/ Sufffise, that I haue done my dew in place...”(II.viii.56.4-6). Coupled with the portrait in Book I, the healing and martial actions Arthur undertakes make him recognizable in the context of chivalric literature, and alert the reader that there are codes in place by which actions must be evaluated. This does not mean that Spenser’s text does not test Arthur’s limits; on the contrary, subtle surprises in the way Arthur’s worldview deploys with respect to certain events in the text alert the reader that chivalry, although still a legitimate part of “magnificence” embodied, is no longer the stable code it was in the literature of the Middle Ages. In *The Faerie Queene*, misreadings can happen—and they have considerable consequences for the reputation of the chivalric ideal.

Arthur is the superhuman icon of magnificence, and he operates almost flawlessly in a world of giants, magic, and other typical romance elements. He knows the proper codes of conduct, when to lend aid, and when to listen and wait for the right moment to intervene. The problem for Arthur is that the world does not always respond in kind to his chivalric perfection. The troubles with chivalry are evident from the very first canto of the poem, even before Arthur

appears. Against Una's warning, Redcrosse rushes into Error's den. He is later tricked by Archimago and imprisoned by Orgoglio, a fate from which Arthur saves him. Redcrosse is Holiness itself, and therefore one rightly reads him as a virtuous character; however, his rash actions as a *knight* prove ineffective in a world where reading correctly is more important than fighting valiantly. Though Redcrosse eventually "gets it right," his early error makes him an obvious foil to Arthur: the former's reckless rush into danger highlights Arthur's patient, calculated readings of the situation at hand. The fact that Redcrosse is the first knight the reader meets in the text means that by the time the reader encounters Arthur, the chivalric portrait has already been dealt a blow. Arthur's own experiences are far less obviously flawed, but there are moments when the attentive reader is forced to wonder whether the "law of armes" is really still in place, or whether Arthur's code is a relic of sorts. For example, Arthur graciously offers Pyrochles mercy:

But full of princely bounty and great mind,  
 The Conqueror nought cared him to slay,  
 But casting wronges and all reuenge behind,  
 More glory thought to giue life, then decay.  
 (II.viii.51.1-4)

Unfortunately, after such a sensitive portrait of the merciful knight, the pagan Pyrochles refuses it, rendering Arthur's statement impotent if not foolish. Arthur also momentarily falters when Duessa stands trial for her crimes: "The Briton Prince was sore empasseionate,/ And woxe inclined much vnto her part"(V.ix.46.2-3). As Artegall's dispassionate (correct) reading of the situation proves, Arthur is wrong to feel this way, and the latter later reconsiders: "All which when as the Prince had heard and seene,/ His former fancies he gan repent"(V.ix.49.1-2). Misreadings happen even for Arthur; thus, he is linked to (though not equated with) Redcrosse

and the kind of chivalric ethos that can lead to error. Arthur's privileged role as magnificence means that such error reflects back on the entire system of which he is a part, raising doubts as to how highly Spenser wished his reader to esteem such a context. Helgerson notes that writing in a genre associated with the Middle Ages—and therefore barbarism—was an obvious gamble in a culture rejecting that very form (or at least relegating it to the “lower” classes in the genre of romance). “The canons of honor and the canons of romance were rapidly succumbing...to a new, more powerfully statist conception of moral obligation, a conception that found support in the unity and verisimilitude of classical literary form.”<sup>33</sup> Arthur's final adventure in the poem (which is, of course, unfinished) leaves the reader contemplating such questions of Arthurian relevance and moral obligation: Arthur succeeds in subduing Disdain, but Mirabella begs Arthur to spare him, as she prefers to fulfill the “penance, which enjoyned is to me,/ Least vnto me betide a greater ill; / Yet no lesse thankes to you for your good will”(VI.viii.30.3-5). Arthur has served a lady and vanquished a foe, but Mirabella's response may be the answer of a new culture—one that acknowledges that the consequences of error are real and must be endured, and cannot, or perhaps should not, be annihilated by the sword. Although Spenser's poem is unfinished, it is haunting that Arthur's final appearance in the extant text is one in which his deeds are emptied of their usual glory. Arthur's misadventures are not of the same category as Redcrosse's initial errors, but at times his actions have just as little—or as misappropriated—an effect. Unlike Corflambo, Arthur never loses an essential element of his identity—but he may have lost the cultural context from which he derived his most influential meaning as icon.

---

<sup>33</sup> Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 52.

### The Chivalric Reader

In Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Arthur's saving grace is ultimately not his sword, shield, or chivalry, but his ability to read well. This is no easy task, a fact to which the romance's pageantry of errors testifies. Throughout the text, Arthur displays the knowledge that there is meaning below the surface of events, characters, images, and speech. His lament against Night in Book III is a reversal of the usual trope of a lover's complaint against dawn, and for good reason: in the world of *The Faerie Queene*, the darkness of night hides truth and can lead to error, while

day discouers all dishonest wayes,  
and sheweth each thing, as it is in deed:  
The praises of high God he faire displayes,  
And his large bountie rightly doth areed [...]  
Our life is day, but death with darknesse doth begin.  
(III.iv.59.1-4, 9)

In his reversal of the trope, Arthur illustrates that he understands the world in which he functions—it often hides the truth and necessitates a thoughtful reader. Indeed, Arthur owes a great part of his success to his patience and his thoughtful consideration of events before he acts. Even in the reader's first introduction to Arthur, the prince demonstrates his knowledge of the difficulties in reading Spenser's world: Una presses him to tell her how he arrived in his current location, to which he responds:

Full hard it is (quoth he) to read aright  
The course of heauenly cause, or vnderstand  
The secret meaning of th'eternall might,  
That rules mens waies, and rules the thoughts of liuing wight.  
(I.ix.6.6-9)

As the reader already knows from Redcrosse's misadventures, Duessa's duality, and Fradubio's mistakes, it is indeed "full hard" to interpret the "secret meaning" of events that seem the affairs of mere mortals but have a heavenly second sense. After Arthur aids Belge by defeating her

enemy Gerioneo (not coincidentally, by watching and waiting for the proper moment to attack), Belge asks how she can repay her hero, and in return receives a lesson in interpretation: “Dear Lady, deedes ought not be scand/ By th’authors manhood, nor the doers might,/ But by their trueth and by the causes right”(V.xi.17.3-5). Arthur encourages Belge to look beneath the surface of chivalric splendor to the greater, moral implications of the deed. Allegory is a genre that demands the audience “read aright,” and Arthur’s words and actions give his interlocutors and the reader a tutorial of sorts.<sup>34</sup> Although he does indeed discuss proper chivalric conduct according to the “law of armes,” the “spiritual sense” of such lessons is how to be a good reader and therefore a good Protestant, English subject. Readers must see through the disguises of dissemblers and (Catholic) images, and attempt to peer into the (Protestant) sentence of the sacred mysteries. As readers familiar with medieval literature surrounding the Grail would understand, attempts to penetrate the carnal sense and reach a spiritual understanding had often been cast as quests.<sup>35</sup> Transposing the medieval spiritual quest into Protestant hermeneutics reveals the assumed differences between medieval images and post-Reformation truths, but also the ways in which their goals and methods are contiguous.<sup>36</sup> In both cases, the success of a questor is dependent on his ability to penetrate “secret meaning.”<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> In this way, Arthur *performs* what Spenser himself *explains* in his letter to Raleigh. It also illustrates *The Faerie Queene*’s connections to books of heraldry like Robinson’s *Auncient Order* (see Chapter 1 of this dissertation).

<sup>35</sup> Readers of the medieval Grail tradition would possibly make the connection to quests for spiritual understanding. Spenser’s ideas are not all new concepts, but are transposed to a new context.

<sup>36</sup> See Linda Gregerson, *The reformation of the subject: Spenser, Milton, and the English Protestant epic* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Gregerson asserts: “In Reformation England, the verbal image was often thought to be as dangerous in its potential as was the visual. Words, like pictures or statuary, were suspect for the very reason that they were powerful, capable of shaping and thus waylaying the human imagination. . . . Spenser and Milton seek to remedy idolatry by preserving and reforming the impulse they conceive to be idolatrous, not by fruitlessly seeking to eradicate it. They combat the idolatrous potential of words not by seeking to divest themselves of figurative resources but by constructing a dialectical function for their readership, a function that we have since assimilated under the general rubric of interpretation”(3, 5).

With such a strong emphasis on the virtues of reading situations correctly, of sorting through what things seem to be versus what they are, it is significant that Spenser includes a scene revolving around material texts that gives Arthur, Guyon, and Spenser's reader a deeper understanding of the Arthurian icon. Illustrating the historic legacy of his central character, Spenser addresses chronicle history—a timely decision, given the flurry of activity surrounding it during the dissolution of the monasteries and beyond. Antiquarians like John Bale and John Leland spent considerable effort preserving the texts they believed would fortify the history of the new Tudor, Protestant England. In light of this tradition, Book II is incredibly important to the national implications of Spenser's text, as it participates in the antiquarian fascination with monuments that translate Britain's Trojan (and Arthurian) origins into historical support for England's supremacy. The vague associations inherent in this lineage, generating as they do from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (1138), allow Spenser to evoke many layers of meaning in the genealogy set forth by his own chronicle creations, *Briton Moniments* and *Antiquitie of Faerie lond*. Like Merritt Y. Hughes, Patricia Clare Ingham is interested in the vast network of associations inherent in Arthurian appearances in romance, and although she works mainly with medieval romance, she lingers over Spenser on the question of Arthurian genealogy: "Early modern Arthurian editors (as in William Caxton's edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur*) or authors (as in Edmund Spenser's epic *The Faerie Queene*) view Arthur as the genealogy necessary for imagining a British national future; those imaginings depend upon the

---

<sup>37</sup> In the thirteenth-century French *Queste del saint graal*, knights are sorted by their readings of dreams and visions. Those who are too worldly always fail to penetrate the carnal sense, but those who learn to reach the spiritual sense in their quests are rewarded with understanding of divine mysteries. The intersections between this text and Spenser's are important in illustrating the assumed—yet perhaps overstated—difference between medieval and post-Reformation hermeneutics.

losses and antagonisms crucial to this earlier romance tradition.”<sup>38</sup> Spenser’s poem—and any text invoking Arthur—inevitably drags the medieval Arthurian romance and historical traditions behind it.<sup>39</sup> Instead of being “dead weight” or a liability, these are essential elements in *The Faerie Queene*: the texts that Spenser puts forth as monuments offer a way to read the history that Arthur always pulls along with him. This is a history indivisible from medieval chivalric romance, but also one with contemporary political consequences. By turning to invented history, Spenser, like the Geoffrey and his successors, grounds Arthur in a network of vague yet fruitful associations that are at home in fiction but have the gravity granted to history.

Spenser illustrates his debts to the chronicle tradition when he brings Arthur and Guyon to the library of Eumnestes, a man of “infinite remembrance,” where they apply their interpretive skills to material texts (II.ix.56.1). As is often the case with the fabulous work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Spenser’s invented texts evoke as much delight as they do knowledge. When the reader first encounters him in Book I, Prince Arthur does not know his lineage—only that he is a changeling, “delivered to a Fary knight”; therefore, when he is invited to peruse Eumnestes’s library, it is fitting that he “chaunced” upon a book that could show him—and the reader—the extensive legacy of which he is so great a part. His desire to know his origins seems to prompt their telling to come directly to him:

Then as they gan his Library to vew,  
And antique Regesters for to auise,  
There chaunced to the Princes hand to rize,  
an auncient booke, hight *Briton moniments*,

---

<sup>38</sup> Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> As Robert M. Stein points out, histories like Geoffrey of Monmouth’s cannot really be separated from romance, but the idea that they could be was crucial to the Tudor antiquarian—or poet—looking to prove Arthur’s historical validity apart from the medieval romance tradition; see *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1025-1180* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

That of this lands first conquest did devise,  
 And old diuision into Regiments,  
 Till it reduced was to one mans gouernements.  
 (II.ix.59.3-9)

The content of this “auncient booke” Spenser derives in large part from Geoffrey of Monmouth, as well as a handful of sixteenth-century authors such as John Hardyng, John Stow, and Raphael Holinshed (et al). Although all of these influences are important, it is especially crucial that Spenser draws upon Geoffrey’s text, which was itself presented by its author as the translation of “a certain very ancient book” given to him by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Spenser’s poem and Geoffrey’s history both base their British “moniments” on fictional ancient texts—texts that perhaps “chaunced” to come to them when they had a reason for writing history a certain way. Importantly, this does not negate the historical value of either text. Spenser’s desire to forge a kingdom of English could not be accomplished without invention, as there was, as Andrew Escobedo points out, an “embarrassing” shortage of documents positing England’s Trojan origins.<sup>41</sup> Invention was therefore a critical facet of the Tudor antiquarian movement, and it is one in which Spenser heartily participates: *Briton Moniments* is a mixture of research, conjecture, and invention and, as such, serves its purposes by showing Arthur—and the English reader—his roots. Arthur takes great pleasure in the reading, and when the text ends “abruptly” (a space his life as king will fill with new material), Spenser describes the prince as caught up in “wonder of antiquity” and “rauisht with delight, to heare/ The royall Ofspring of his natiue land (II.ix.68.9; 69.1). History, while certainly informing and edifying, also drenches the reader with

---

<sup>40</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin, 1977), 51.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foxe, Dee, Spenser, Milton* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004).

*delight*, drawing a parallel between the history text Arthur reads and the romance “chaunst” upon by Guyon.<sup>42</sup>

Guyon reads the story of the unbroken Elfin dynasty from which his lineage derives, a narrative that, while quite different in name and genre than *Briton Moniments*, turns out to be its companion in almost every way. After reading the history of his own people, *Antiquitie of Faerie lond*, Guyon, like Arthur, is completely rapt with pleasure:

Beguyld thus with delight of nouelties,  
And naturall desire of contries state,  
So long they redd in those antiquities,  
That how the time was fled, they quite forgate.  
(II.ix.77.1-4)

“Beguyld” with new knowledge about their respective histories, and reluctant to cease their studies, Arthur and Guyon leave Eumnestes’s library filled with wonder. Jennifer Summit finds this scene critical to her discussion of how antiquarian practices intersected with Spenser’s project, and, by extension, how history and fiction are related to one another. In her book, itself titled *Memory’s Library*, she persuasively argues that *Briton Moniments* and *Antiquitie of Faerie lond* are not history and fiction, respectively; instead, they should be considered two sides of a Spenserian category of memory. “Together, [the two texts] produce a species of memory that, like wonder, springs up in the gaps of knowledge. Whereas Arthur’s monumental work produces ‘wonder’ at the point of the historical record’s rupture, Guyon’s book of antiquity takes up where it leaves off by producing a seemingly inexhaustible, wonder-filled legendary narrative which,

---

<sup>42</sup> D. R. Woolf discusses the coexistence of these two elements in *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

like the antiquities of the proem, ‘no body can know’.”<sup>43</sup> Summit’s desire to join what would often be called “history” with “fiction” is well suited to Spenser’s project: the decision to write verse romance instead of chronicle or treatise or even a prose epic illustrates that the ability to evoke wonder may indeed be as much a part of the selection process for what gets stored in “memory’s library,” and what is relegated to oblivion. Most importantly, Arthur and Guyon’s reading experience reminds Spenser’s reader of the historical extent of Arthur’s implications for England. In the world of the poem, Arthur reads situations and characters, showing Spenser’s own reader how to look past the surface and uncover the truth; in Eumnestes’s library, Arthur reads himself, and the results of such reading reinforce both the (historical) quest for answers and the (romantic) perpetuation of wonder.

By repositioning Arthurian chivalric romance as a lesson in proper Protestant conduct and good reading practices, and by connecting this “rehabilitated” Arthur to the chronicle tradition so closely associated with Arthur’s medieval genesis, Spenser successfully captures Arthur’s medieval appeal and historical import and uses it to fortify his own national romance. In *The Faerie Queene*, the iconic Arthur is recognizable by the symbols in his portrait as magnificence, by his knowledge of the “law of armes,” and by his desire to aid those in trouble. He is also recognizable as the historical figure closely associated with the Trojan origins of Britain, illustrated in antiquarians’ renewed interest in the chronicle tradition generating from Geoffrey of Monmouth. Arthur’s role as reader links both his chivalric self (he avoids defeat by correct interpretation) and his new role as Protestant champion (he penetrates what “seems” from what “is”). It also fortifies the credibility of an invented Tudor history founded on quasi-

---

<sup>43</sup> Jennifer Summit, *Memory’s Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 128.

historical medieval texts by allowing wonder to fortify knowledge. Thus, Spenser creates a unique, post-Reformation portrait of Arthur, but one so immersed in medieval associations that any reader familiar with the Arthurian tradition would recognize the medieval king in the Protestant prince. It remains to consider, however, *which* readers would be given the chance to recognize this new Arthur, and what they might read in him. Spenser's text is dedicated to Elizabeth, and was printed with a large number of sonnets praising powerful courtiers of Spenser's day. As such, it is not necessarily an Arthurian text composed with the larger reading public in mind. However, by 1590, Arthur may have been so ingrained in English national rhetoric that he defied attempts to co-opt him for the social elite. Spenser updated the Arthurian icon to include a role as a great reader—a decision compatible with the increasingly literate English nation he was helping to forge—but could that role supersede the collective memory of those various groups of subjects already reading him?

### ***The Faerie Queene: Building a Nation on Popular Romance***

*The Faerie Queene's* national import raises questions regarding just who comprises such a nation. According to Richard Helgerson, "Though the forms of nationhood imagined by these various [texts, including Spenser's] are many, the political issues that engage them can, in a gross and not quite exclusive way, be reduced to just two. One concerns the monarch and monarchic power. The other involves the inclusion or exclusion of various social groups from privileged participation in the national community and its representations."<sup>44</sup> The question, "Who counts as a member of the national community?" is incredibly important, given Spenser's

---

<sup>44</sup> Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 9.

project of adapting Arthur's national role—to the potential exclusion of those citizens who were not privy to court or wealthy enough to have the education and/or funds required to “access” a copy of Spenser's text.<sup>45</sup> Arthur had indeed been a favorite of courtly audiences, but he was also a folk hero with a dynamic manuscript and oral history; therefore, Spenser's decision to direct his national romance to courtly audiences in particular, at a time when literacy was expanding among other classes, sheds light on the question of “whose nation” he was defining. It may seem curious that Spenser would create a text so focused on individual (aristocratic) knights in a context in which the communal ideal was steadily taking over, but, as McEachern posits, “The whole is always spoken by a part...A fiction of social unity can exist without social unity, and it may well thrive on its absence.”<sup>46</sup> According to this line of thinking, those worthy or capable of setting the standard do so, and everyone else is assumed—or imagined—to be a part of the new community the makers create. Spenser's text thus participates in the formation of community by fostering national sentiment and shared history, but it also perpetuates the concept of individual glory in its portraits of knightly virtue and in Spenser's own elite status as author of the nation he desires. The important question in this study is whether those readers who were not part of Spenser's intended audience found his version of Arthur palatable (or found it at all). While acknowledging that the whole is spoken by a part, McEachern does not discount the power of “common” subject's preference for particular images, texts, and ideas. “For unlike the polity described by contractual regulation of individual wills on behalf of the whole, the nation implies

---

<sup>45</sup> Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> McEachern, *Poetics of English Nationhood*, 19-20.

not just law, but love, as a constituent. It is the place where duty becomes desire.”<sup>47</sup> Determining the extent to which *The Faerie Queene* kindled desire for—or in David A. Summers’s terms, evoked a visceral reaction to—the English nation in a wide variety of reading subjects is essential for understanding the full spectrum of its Arthurian implications.

In order to move away from Spenser’s intended audience and towards some conception of his actual audience, one must consider the print history of *The Faerie Queene*. There are four main editions of the text: the first, publisher Ponsonbie’s 1590 quarto (containing the first three books of the poem and Spenser’s letter to Raleigh, printed by John Wolfe); Ponsonbie’s 1596 quarto (containing all six books of the poem, lacking Spenser’s letter to Raleigh, printed by Richard Field); Matthew Lownes’s 1609 folio (a folio version of Ponsonbie’s 1596 quarto, with the addition of the “Cantos of Mutabilitie,” printed by Humphrey Lownes), and Matthew Lownes’s 1611 edition of Spenser’s *Works* (including, among other works, *The Faerie Queene*, *The Shepherds Calendar*, and Spenser’s letter to Raleigh).<sup>48</sup> Ponsonbie’s quarto is a handsome book containing a decorated title page along with small woodcut embellishments at the beginning of each book and canto. Furthermore, its stanzas are printed in single columns with plenty of white space surrounding them. And while Ponsonbie’s quartos were nowhere near as elaborate as Caxton’s heavily illustrated first edition of Malory (Ponsonbie’s text contains only one full-page woodcut of a knight fighting a dragon—a clear departure from the “cheap print” romance tradition that often showcased multiple woodcut illustrations), they did present themselves as containing a major work by a great author—a work that merited careful page layout and dedicatory sonnets. Neither of these quartos would have been considered “cheap”—as

---

<sup>47</sup> McEachern, *Poetics of English Nationhood*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Hills also printed Spenser’s entire *Works* in 1679 for Jonathan Edwin.

quartos are sometimes assumed to be. On the contrary, the first appearance of *The Faerie Queene*, while fairly modest if compared to texts like Sidney's *Arcadia*, would by no means have been lumped with pamphlets and chapbooks. And although a middle class reader could conceivably have purchased Spenser's text, much of the general public would probably have found the cost of Ponsonbie's book prohibitive.

In fact, the first folio edition was arguably the more affordable (though still expensive) book, reversing the often-accepted theory that folios were always the grander, more costly editions. Steven K. Galbraith calls the 1609 edition of *The Faerie Queene* "a folio of utter frugality" and argues that

By shifting from quarto to folio Lownes greatly reduced his production costs, as confirmed by a bibliographic comparison of the two books. Ponsonby's 1596 edition of both parts of *The Faerie Queene* is a quarto in eights, printed in single columns of English roman type. In this format, the book required 139 sheets of pot paper per book. The 1609 *Faerie Queene* printed by Humphrey Lownes on pot paper for his brother Matthew took full advantage of the folio page. Lownes set Spenser's verse in double columns of the small long primer roman type, allowing for 12 nine-line Spenserian stanzas per page or 48 stanzas per sheet. All told, the folio *Faerie Queene* required only 92 sheets per book, a saving of 47 sheets.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, Lownes takes Spenser's text and crams it onto the page, saving paper and therefore money. Further changes include the kinds of embellishment (limited though it may have been) in Jacobean editions of *The Faerie Queene*: such changes reflect a shift in emphasis from archaism to classicism. For example, Lownes's 1609 and 1611 editions exclude Ponsonbie's full-page

---

<sup>49</sup> Steven K. Galbraith, "English literary folios 1593-1623: studying shifts in format" in *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, ed. John N. King (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 46-67; 57-8. Galbraith also notes that the 1611 edition of Spenser's *Works* was comprised of text crammed onto the pages—a clear departure from the luxurious white spaces of Ponsonbie's editions. While economics were always important to publishers hoping to make money on printing, Galbraith points out that printing Spenser's complete works in folio was a *necessity*: "Spenser's first folio *Works* was clearly a folio of economy, but it should also be considered a folio of necessity. At 139 sheets (556 leaves), the 1596 *Faerie Queene* was a thick quarto, so thick that many of the surviving copies are bound as two volumes" (58).

image of a knight in Book II, replacing it with generic classical woodcuts beginning every canto and every book. Unlike the figure of the knight in the Ponsonbie editions, the illustrations in Lownes's text are not obviously connected to the chivalric subject matter of *The Faerie Queene*. Instead, Lownes's edition gives an ornate but generic sense of classicism, with cherubim, columns, and hanging vines throughout. Importantly, the 1611 collection reprints the "letter of the Authors intention" as back matter, and includes headings on each page of the letter, labeling that section "The Authors Intention." Proudly declaring its author's goals as an essential key to the reading the poem (despite the "Authors Intention" not being printed in the 1596 edition), this subtle change in the 1611 folio edition registers authorial importance.<sup>50</sup> The comparative luxury of the quarto and the classical posturing of the folios suggest a text that, even if it was produced with "utter frugality," claims to be aware of its own importance. The question of whether the text was inaccessible to less affluent readers can only be answered by turning from authors' and publishers' intentions to the practices and reactions beyond their control.

As a group of printed texts, Ponsonbie's quartos and Lownes's folios present a portrait of Spenser and his text that is generically grand but far from coherent. This is particularly important because it suggests that, even above the "Authors Intention" or the publisher's direction is the instability of the printer's execution and the audience's reception. In "The Materialist History of the Publication of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*," Jean R. Brink argues that the number of

---

<sup>50</sup> In "English Literary Folios 1593-1623" Galbraith argues, "Unlike... Ponsonby before him, Lownes appears to have made no effort to use the folio in a manner that would enhance Spenser's literary reputation"(59). But it seems that the emphasis on the author in the *Works* suggests that "Spenser" was indeed an important selling feature of the text. Even if the reason for publishing was not to glorify an author but to sell books, this does not mean that Lownes's continual emphasis on the author was not *also* a gesture toward enhancing Spenser literary reputation.

dedicatory sonnets in the 1590 edition is excessive and perhaps even an embarrassment to

Spenser:

The 1590 *Faerie Queene* was not a printing success; the printer and binder bungled the handling of the dedications. In most of the surviving copies the original set of dedications was not cancelled, but appeared with a second set of dedications that repeated the first. The results were offensive because the [partial duplications] made every one of the new dedicatees appear to be an afterthought...Most copies appeared with a dignified dedication to Elizabeth at the front of the volume, but the dedication was undercut by the twenty-five dedicatory sonnets appearing at the conclusion of Book III.<sup>51</sup>

The realization that an author's and even publisher's control lessened drastically as the book went to print is essential for considering the unpredictable readership of *The Faerie Queene*. The fact that Spenser's sonnets were so bungled by John Wolfe in this first printing is a reminder that the early modern text, like the early modern nation and the figure of Arthur himself, was an unstable entity and could reach people in different forms. While bungled dedications do not prove wide readership, they do illustrate the (surprisingly) close relationship between a "grand" book like Spenser's and cheaply printed "popular" romance, allowing scholars to question whether Spenser's romance belongs on the shelf with *The Aeneid* or with *Bevis of Hampton*. After all, John Wolfe had also printed Richard Robinson's translation of John Leland's Arthurian tract, a Latin text with classical humanist origins, transposed into Robinson and Wolfe's cheaply printed, cramped, black-letter vernacular.<sup>52</sup> In form and content, Spenser's text also displays its debts to classical models, but in Wolfe's and Field's printed forms, opens the possibility that readers would have connected it with the "lower" vernacular texts to which it is also indebted. For example, when readers came upon the woodcut image of the dragon-slaying knight

---

<sup>51</sup> Jean R. Brink, "Materialist History of the Publication of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*," *Review of English Studies* 54, no. 213 (2003): 1-26; 15.

<sup>52</sup> For the implications of black letter type, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

appearing at the beginning of Book II, they might have recollected Redcrosse of Book I or Guyon of Book II—or, perhaps just as easily, they might have recalled Guyon’s medieval predecessor and continued star of popular romance, famed dragon-slayer Sir Guy of Warwick.<sup>53</sup> Like Arthur himself, the generic image of a dragon-killer pulls a net of associations behind it, and ultimately invites a reader to connect Guyon and Sir Guy, Spenser and popular romance, the court and the “lower classes,” all under the banner of a “fiction of wholeness” called England.

### **Printing Popular Romance: Spenser’s Influences and Descendants—and their Readers**

While there is no way to ascertain with certainty the spectrum of Spenser’s early modern readership, the fact that his text is so closely connected with romances often described as “popular” or widely produced (and assumedly widely read) opens possibilities for conversation between the elite courtly audience that may be “speaking for the whole” and its many “outsiders”—readers investing in Arthur via humbler methods. Instead of speaking generically of “popular” texts, it is essential to consider what exactly would have been included under this heading, and what the implications of such a readership might have been. In *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England*, Lori Humphrey Newcomb is concerned with these very questions. Her study of the intersections between Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* and the popular romance *Pandosto* explains the division between “elite” and “popular” literature in terms very similar to Helgerson’s depiction of “who counts” in a national context:

Popular literature was both a richly various field of practices of production and consumption and an ideological category enabling the privileged to justify the social stratification of culture. Its audience was a heterogeneous and contingent grouping,

---

<sup>53</sup> Most scholars posit this knight as St. George. However, there are other possible readings, given the particularities of the image and the fact that it opens Book II: one might reasonably think of Sir Guy(on), especially since the woodcut figure rides a horse while Redcrosse fights his dragon on foot.

socially inclusive yet formed by acts of exclusion. By attributing such social dynamism to popular literature, I hope to strengthen the sense of continuity between elite and popular [uses of print] that is now emerging in book history.<sup>54</sup>

Like Newcomb, this chapter aims to illustrate *continuity* between an “elite” text and a constellation of “popular” texts whose readership might have intersected with it. The emphasis on continuity does not ignore the fact that exclusion was a significant part of an early modern culture that sustained “popular” and “elite” boundaries in many contexts; however, by looking for continuity, one discovers that such boundaries are constructed and policed—often by modern scholars—and not organic to the particular texts or the groups who read them.<sup>55</sup> Under investigation are Arthurian romances whose content, context and/or printed form elicits a comparison between them and Spenser’s lengthy poem. Intersections in print history highlight *The Faerie Queene*’s popular debts to, as well as the quasi-elite status of, the widely accessible romance texts from and around which it generated. That there were sundry classes of readership for these Arthurian texts does not erase hierarchy, but it does test its limits, reminding scholars that such boundaries are not as static as they first appear.

The important point to remember with respect to Spenser and his sources is that no printed book is the exclusive property of a given group of readers. Volumes like Spenser’s would have been too expensive for the average laborer to afford, but the “lower” classes would certainly have had access to the romances that informed the traditions on which *The Faerie Queene* is built. Ronald S. Crane defines two distinct groups of readers in the first century after

---

<sup>54</sup> Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 10-11.

<sup>55</sup> In this way such boundaries are much like those between medieval/early modern and fact/fiction: unstable, and therefore continually policed.

the introduction of printing—a small aristocratic one and a larger group of humbler means—each of which had its own set of texts:

Assuredly few outside the wealthier classes could afford to buy sumptuous and expensive folios in which romances like *Le Morte Darthur*...appeared throughout the period...On the other hand, the small rudely printed quartos in which appeared such romances as *Sir Bevis*, *Sir Guy*...were undoubtedly meant to sell cheaply and to circulate widely among a somewhat humbler public. Many of them were probably sold to country readers; peddled about by traveling booksellers, they were the true precursors of the chapbooks of the seventeenth century.<sup>56</sup>

Crane makes the important claim that there was indeed widespread demand for texts that were related in their shared subject matter, even if they were made distinct by their disparate costs. But even beyond the initial barrier of affordability or “intended audience,” a book could certainly not be guaranteed to remain within the group for which it had been intended. Steve Mentz makes the point that authors’ inability to know whom they were addressing distinguished romance from other genres that were performed for immediately discernable audiences: “Writers of printed books hoped to reach the unsounded but potentially broad readership made available by print technologies as well as the dwindling supply of literary patrons, but they had few explicit models for appealing to this diverse audience.”<sup>57</sup> As Margaret Spufford has shown, the steady increase in literacy between 1500 and 1700 meant that more and more readers were qualifying as part of the potential audience for printed romance.<sup>58</sup> Tessa Watt, building on Spufford’s work, notes that this continually increasing audience became more and more difficult to predict, especially as it

---

<sup>56</sup> Ronald S. Crane, *The Vogue of Medieval Chivalric Romance*, 9-10.

<sup>57</sup> Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 19. Mentz’s book focuses mainly on prose fiction, and is therefore not applicable to Spenser, but his observations on the impossibility of knowing one’s audience are worth acknowledging on a larger level with respect to the much-varied genre of romance.

<sup>58</sup> Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Methuen, 1981), 19.

prompted more inexpensive books that were perhaps marketed to “lower” classes but were purchased by the full spectrum of book buyers: “But this idea that the broadsides and chapbooks were aimed at and consumed by a definable social group may be a myth...As literacy increased, the market for cheap print expanded, and there may sometimes have been gaps between authorial intention and audience consumption. But the buyers remained socially variegated.”<sup>59</sup> Both Watt and Spufford suggest that a shared love of popular romance in print was not a divisive but a unifying force amongst the many “levels” of society. According to such an unpredictable yet cohesive understanding of popular romance readership, the potential implications for imagining unstable English nationhood through widely varying versions of Arthurian romance become abundantly clear.

The particular popular romances in print that surround *The Faerie Queene* comprise two main categories in this study: first, those romances that Spenser would have known and would have contributed to his poem; second, those romances printed in the seventeenth century that owe a debt to Spenser and thus connect to him as a source of material. To the first category belong John Bouchier’s (a.k.a. Lord Berners’s) *Arthur of Little Britain*, translated from the original French, as well as the two most popular “matter of England” romances, *Bevis of Hampton* and *Sir Guy of Warwick*. The second set includes Richard Johnson’s *Tom a Lincoln*, Martin Parker’s *The most admirable historie of...Arthvr*, and John Shurley’s *Brittain’s Glory*, a satiric romance, an abridged version of Malory, and a drastically revised version of Arthur’s life,

---

<sup>59</sup> Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.

respectively.<sup>60</sup> The second set of romances will feature in a subsequent section of this chapter.

For now, the contributions of the first category—those romances Spenser would have known and on which he apparently drew for his material—take precedence.

*Arthur of Little Britain* contains a premise with clear parallels to Spenser. Printed in 1560 by William Copland for Robert Redberne and in 1582 by and for Thomas East, these quarto texts would have been known by Spenser's generation. In this romance, Arthur, son of the Duke of Brittany, falls in love with a woman he has never seen as a result of a vision arranged for him by Proserpine, the faery queen. The story concerns Arthur's search for this woman—Florence—during which he fights a dragon, incurs various trials at the enchanted castle of Porte Noyre, restores the land of Toure Tenebrous from disease, and undertakes sundry other typical chivalric adventures. Sarah Michie claims that *Arthur of Little Britain* is the romance on which Spenser draws most heavily: "Arthur [of Little Britain] is as completely 'the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues' as Spenser could have found, and the tone of the entire narrative, particularly in its continual emphasis upon chastity, its leisurely, rambling style, its use of allegory, and its rich descriptive passages, is noticeably akin to that of *The Faerie Queene*."<sup>61</sup> Just as important as these plot-based and moral parallels within the tale itself is

---

<sup>60</sup> Two other notable Arthurian romances are Christopher Middleton's *The famous historie of Chinon of England* (London: Cuthbert Burbie, 1595) and Richard Johnson's *The History of Tom Thumb* (1621, later adapted as *Thumb his life and death* (printed for John Wright, 1630)). Both are "Arthurian" stories that use the Round Table society as their background, but in neither text is Arthur a major character. For this reason, this chapter does not discuss them at length. *Tom Thumb* is of particular interest, however, in terms of figuring readership of Arthurian stories. Tom is the son of a ploughman and a milkmaid, his conception (like Arthur's) aided by Merlin himself. He undertakes three main adventures, wins fame at Arthur's court, and is eventually given a monument by Arthur himself. This final scene's reference to Tom's fame "amongst the Countrey sort" is a telling reference to a possible set of consumers for this semi-Arthurian tale.

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Michie, "The *Faerie Queene* and *Arthur of Little Britain*" in *Studies in Philology* 36, no. 2 (1939): 105-123; 123. Michie's point is important, but Spenser's debts to Geoffrey of Monmouth and Malory seem far greater when one considers the national import with which Spenser infuses his poem.

translator John Bouchier's prologue to his text—in which he sounds very much like Leland, Caxton, and Spenser in his professed desire to perpetuate Arthurian literature for the good of England. Although, like Leland, he is worried that he will be blamed for producing a text “wherein semeth to be so many vnpossybyltees,” he ultimately sides with Caxton in illustrating that the (national) gains outweigh the potential costs. “For as moche as it is delectable to all humayne nature to rede and to here these auncient noble Hystories of the chyualrous Feates and marcyall Prowesses of the vycoryous Knyghtes of tymes paste whose tryumphaunt dedes yf wrytynge were not sholde be had clene oute of remembraunce.”<sup>62</sup> In an interesting departure from both Caxton's and Spenser's prologues, however, and more akin to Arthur and Guyon's experience in Eumnestes's library, Bouchier expects his reader to find these tales “delectable.” Although he is worried about—or at least paying lip service to—the *survival* of such tales, his equal emphasis on *pleasure* firmly ties his text to both the tastes of “elite” readers and to the popular romance tradition.

Perhaps one of the most pleasurable (denoted by its extensive print history) and widely known popular texts in the sixteenth century, *Bevis of Hampton* is another source on which Spenser clearly drew. Helen Cooper devotes substantial attention to both *Bevis* and *Guy of Warwick*, two romances that she groups together under the heading, “the matter of England”—romances carrying a national significance that crossed class lines, so deeply were they ingrained in the memory of the English reader:

Both the popularity and longevity of metrical romance are exemplified by two ‘matter of England’ romances that were universally known throughout the sixteenth century: *Bevis of Hamtoun*; and *Guy of Warwick*... They were first translated [from Anglo-Norman] into English around 1300, and in various versions enjoyed a wide popularity, massively

---

<sup>62</sup> John Bouchier, [Lord Berners], *Arthur of Little Britain* (London: Thomas East, 1582), iii.

increased when they were put into print by Wynkyn de Worde and a succession of later publishers.<sup>63</sup>

*Bevis* was an incredibly popular text: first printed in 1502 by Wynkyn de Worde, it enjoyed a rich life in print throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>64</sup> Although this romance does not feature Arthur as a character, its context invites a direct association, as Bevis's dragon fight is said to parallel Lancelot's (and Sir Guy's): "For when Lancelot du Lake fought with a burning Drake/ Guy of Warwick I understand slewe a Dragon in Coleyne land/ But such a Dragon was never seen, as Sir Bevis slew at Coleyne."<sup>65</sup> Bevis's fights with a wild boar, a dragon, and pagans intersect with much Arthurian literature, including Spenser's text. *Redcrosse*, *Guyon*, *Britomart* and *Arthur* all have a part in such adventures, but it is Bevis's dragon fight in particular that invites close comparison with Spenser's text. And although many medieval stories contain dragons, Bevis and *Redcrosse* in particular draw healing strength from a well during their respective battles, suggesting that Spenser derived his details directly from *Bevis*. Given the contributions of *Arthur of Little Britain* and *Bevis of Hampton* to *The Faerie Queene*, and the continual reprinting and therefore availability of these romances in print throughout the sixteenth century, it is conceivable that Spenser's reader would be made to recall a "popular" Arthurian romance while reading *The Faerie Queene*, and to make connections between the two. In this sense, the collective memory of England has a claim to Spenser's poem. *Bevis of Hampton*'s steady popularity in print attests to the fact that, although chivalric romance was losing its status

---

<sup>63</sup> Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> This long list of printers includes William Copland and Thomas East, who also printed *Arthur of Little Britain*. Their contributions are discussed below.

<sup>65</sup> *Syr Bevis of Hampton* (London: William Stansby, 1630). Although I refer to Stansby's 1630 edition, the text was printed continually from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries.

as an elite art form, it continued to thrive in the printing houses and, in turn, continued to inform the English nation at all “levels” of society.

William Copland and Thomas East are two publishers whose careers highlight the importance of the “popular” Arthurian romances that influenced *The Faerie Queene*. A. S. G. Edwards characterizes Copland as the heir of Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde, so dedicated was the former to continuing the printed romance tradition.<sup>66</sup> Edwards explains, “During a period from 1553 to 1565 Copland published or occasionally printed twenty-two separate surviving editions of thirteen romances, the majority of them in verse, but also a number of substantial prose ones”: these included Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, Caxton’s *Recuyell*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and *Arthur of Little Britain*.<sup>67</sup> It is critical that these Arthurian texts were among those Copland felt the need to sustain in the sixteenth century—and in editions that were increasingly affordable. Edwards claims that Copland’s “activities suggest a cautious re-establishing of earlier markets which he felt could retain or regain their popularity in the cheap, fairly standardized forms which he established.”<sup>68</sup> An heir to Copland’s “cheap, fairly standardized forms,” Thomas East continued the tradition by reprinting *Arthur of Little Britain* and *Bevis of Hampton* as part of his larger pattern of Arthurian print projects in the late sixteenth century. Of the over 300 surviving

---

<sup>66</sup> Ronald S. Crane sees Copland in a somewhat less favorable light than A. S. G. Edwards (see note 67) does. In *The Vogue of Medieval Chivalric Romance* Crane argues, “A simple reproducer of the texts of his predecessors, Copland played a far less important role in the history of medieval romance than that of Caxton or Wynkyn de Worde. Yet he did good service in keeping alive so many of the older favorites for the public of the second half of the century”(6). I argue that the survival of old texts is arguably just as important in establishing reader demand as is the publication of new texts. While Crane makes a valid point, the objective of publishing is to make a profit, and therefore Copland’s “derivative” status as reproducer of established stories lends important insight into the English reader’s preferences that Edwards appears to understand more clearly.

<sup>67</sup> A. S. G. Edwards, “William Copland and the Identity of Printed Middle English Romance” in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 139-147; 139.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

books printed by East, only three are romances—but all three are related to the Arthurian tradition: *Bevis of Hampton* (1585), Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1582), and *Arthur of Little Britain* (1582).<sup>69</sup> Linked by their decisions to print Bouchier's *Arthur of Little Britain*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and Malory's *Morte*, Copland and East illustrate the continued strength of the Arthurian legend in printed romance in the Elizabethan period. Thus, though historians' debates were becoming increasingly divided on the subject of Arthur, it is clear that readers never ceased to create demand for Arthur's legend in new, increasingly accessible editions. It is not surprising that the continually reprinted *Arthur of Little Britain* and *Bevis of Hampton* made an impact on Spenser's poem.

### **The Matter of England: Guy of Warwick as “England's Other Arthur”**

While *Arthur of Little Britain* and *Bevis of Hampton* both offer significant parallels to *The Faerie Queene*, it is *Guy of Warwick* that most clearly illustrates Spenser's debts to popular romance, and reintroduces the question of the limits of Arthurian significance. Called “England's other Arthur” by Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field in their editorial introduction to *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, Guy's status as English hero was well established by the time Spenser wrote his poem. Wiggins and Field consider the Guy tradition “the quintessential popular romance of England, and one that demonstrates the reception of romance working in and beyond medieval culture to a unique degree.”<sup>70</sup> By modeling the character of Guyon on the Guy tradition, Spenser makes a direct reference to this popular romance and the associations readers

---

<sup>69</sup> East's reprinting of Lord Berners' text coincided with his edition of Malory and with Wolfe and Robinson's translation of Leland's text, making 1582 a particularly strong year in Arthurian print history.

<sup>70</sup> Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field, eds. *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2007), xv.

would draw from it. As already illustrated with respect to Arthur, these associations were presumably many, but in the context of Spenser's poem the most important are Guy's roles as repentant chivalric champion and native Englishman.

The Guy legend appeared in many different versions between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century, but all versions of the romance tell a similar conversion story of a chivalric hero who comes to repent his former deeds. Infatuated with the beautiful Phelice, Guy undertakes years of tournaments, battles, and quests in order to win her love. When Guy has become an international chivalric celebrity, Phelice consents to marry him, and they have a son. Soon afterward, however, Guy begins to reconsider his former martial lifestyle, and ultimately decides to devote his life to God. Incognito, he travels abroad and spends his final years helping others and pursuing a spiritual life. Considering the chivalric ambivalence in the world of *The Faerie Queene* with respect to Arthur, it is unsurprising that Spenser would draw upon the Guy legend: the association with a knight who ultimately forsakes chivalric glory for a more contemplative life would have been a fruitful way to question the limits of chivalric usefulness in Elizabethan England. Whereas *Bevis* and *Arthur of Little Britain* almost universally celebrate martial pursuits, *Guy* takes a more critical view of chivalry. Andrew King explains the ways in which Spenser adapted the medieval Guy story for his knight of temperance:

The original narrative has been profoundly shifted and reconceived. The medieval story involves a physical and spiritual pilgrimage from imperfect worldly models, which are at best signs, to true heavenly ideals. This narrative becomes in Spenser's text a humanist and loosely Aristotelian and Protestant account of controlling appetites... Yet the texts are united in sharing a critical and interrogative attitude towards chivalry, and the context for chivalry in both texts is the notion of life as a pilgrimage.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Andrew King, "Guy of Warwick and *The Faerie Queene*, Book II: Chivalry Through the Ages" in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 169-184; 175.

There are marked differences between Guy and Guyon, but both ultimately learn to forsake worldly pleasures for service to God and countryman. Although the Protestant Guyon would never withdraw from the world as had the Catholic Guy (Spenser's Guyon does not run from, but instead destroys, the Bower of Bliss), Guyon's lessons in temperance might fruitfully be considered the fulfillment of the Guy legacy in a new context. As he also did with Arthur, Spenser bases a new, Protestant Guyon on the recognizable medieval Guy figure held in the collective memory of English readers.

The most important aspect of the *Guy* tradition besides his conversion narrative is his Englishness, which was not just incidental, but a major part of his appeal. Although the Welsh Arthur had been steadily co-opted by the English, he still retained his British origins, as Spenser's own text makes clear. Guy, on the other hand, was wholly native to a post-Anglo-Saxon world. In "Guy as Early Modern Hero," Helen Cooper explains:

[Guy's] Englishness was a major advantage. England was short of legendary heroes. There was King Arthur, but he was British rather than English, quite apart from his increasingly equivocal historical status...Guy was accordingly recruited into the ranks of the Nine Worthies as an English member, sometimes as an extra, sometimes to replace the French Godfrey of Bulloigne as the third of the Christian Worthies.<sup>72</sup>

The idea of Guy as comparable to—and even more native to England than—Arthur raises questions about the uses and limits of both: where does Arthur's legacy end and "England's other Arthur's" begin? What are the essential characteristics of both that define them and separate them from one another? What are the implications of Spenser's choosing the British Arthur over the English Guy as the figure of magnificence in a kingdom of English?

---

<sup>72</sup> Helen Cooper, "Guy as Early Modern Hero" in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, ed. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 185-200; 186.

To better think through the specifics of Spenser's decision to elevate Arthur over Guy, it is worth considering the other (besides Spenser's) significant attempt to raise the Guy legend to elite status in the seventeenth century. In 1609 Samuel Rowlands penned what would become the most successful "Guy" text of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: *The Famous Historie of Guy of Warwick*.<sup>73</sup> Rowlands betrays obvious debts to Spenser, and his choice to focus on Sir Guy is illustrative of the strong English emphasis on that figure during the same year that Lownes's folio text of *The Faerie Queene* was published. Rowlands's poem is written in twelve cantos, and Cooper argues that this structure invites a direct comparison between Rowlands's poem and Book II of *The Faerie Queene*: "The format thus implicitly invites a reading of Guy as in effect a further defender of England to set alongside the Redcross Knight or Artegall."<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Rowlands leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that his Guy is an English knight worthy of comparison with the highest-ranking knights of note. In his prefatory dedication "to the Noble English Nation," Rowlands puts forth the well-known trope (often used in Arthurian literature) of lamenting a lack of adequate knowledge and praise for Guy:

Most strange in this same poet-plentie age  
Where Epigrams and Satyrs biting rage:  
Where paper is imploy'd eu'ry daye,  
To carry verse about the towne for pay,  
That stories should entomb'd with worthies lye,  
And fame, through age extinct, obscurely dye.  
Daine to accept what recreations howres  
Hath spent upon this Country-man of ours:  
It seems to far unkinde, that in these daies,

---

<sup>73</sup> There were other, less ambitious new iterations of the Guy legend in the seventeenth century, all of which followed the same basic narrative arc as Rowlands's text. Most prominently: Martin Parker's version of *Sir Guy of Warwick* (1640, no longer extant); Humphrey Crouch's *The Heroick History of Guy Earl of Warwick* (1655, printed repeatedly); and John Shurley's prose *Guy of Warwick* (1684, printed repeatedly). Note that Parker and Shurley also penned chapbook-length Arthur stories, both of which survive, and are discussed below.

<sup>74</sup> Cooper, "Guy as Early Modern Hero," 193.

We toile so much in other Nations praise,  
 That we neglect the famousing of our owne,  
 Which ouer matchfull vnto them were knowne:  
 England hath bred such men for valour tride,  
 Could mate all kingdoms of the world beside.<sup>75</sup>

Creating and fulfilling a desire for a “kingdom of its own *heroes*,” Rowlands redirects the focus of England’s nation-building project toward his “other Arthur.” Regardless of whether Rowlands is serious in his assertion that England’s “worthies” are “entomb’d” in obscurity, it is significant that he claims that England spends too much energy praising other nations’ worthies—in print, no less!—and not enough adulating its own heroes. Guy himself travels to many foreign “nations” but, as he grows old, returns home to die: “by natiue loue, his minde was led,/ To come and lay his bones, where he was bred.” Rowlands does not mention Arthur in his text, but his clear debts to Spenser text beg questions regarding whether Rowlands actually intended Guy to trump Arthur as a national hero, given the former’s “natiue loue to the country” from which his legend “was bred.”

As Rowlands’s text suggests, Guy had the potential to become England’s cultural icon on a national scale. Like Arthur’s, Guy’s tradition had the “books and bones” in which such national heroes’ legitimacy was founded: a literary tradition reaching from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance, and physical artifacts validating the hero’s existence.<sup>76</sup> As the quintessential insular hero, Guy truly gave Arthur a run for his money. As it turns out, however, the essential aspect of

---

<sup>75</sup> Samuel Rowlands, *The Famous Historie of Guy of Warwick* (London, E. A[l]lde] for W. Ferbrand, 1609), A3r.

<sup>76</sup> In *The Vogue of Medieval Chivalric Romance* Ronald S. Crane explains that by 1575: “general familiarly with certain medieval legends, notably those of Arthur and of Guy of Warwick, was promoted by the summaries given in early sixteenth century chronicles... There were ‘relics’ of Arthur still preserved at Winchester; Southampton cherished the memory of Sir Bevis; at Warwick, Guy’s sword was preserved in the castle in the charge of a custodian appointed by royal patent, a chapel and status marked his hermitage at Guyscliff, and a legend, not yet given literary form, of his combat with a Dun Cow, was familiar to the populace”(8).

Guy's story—the limits of his character's significance—is also the reason he cannot take Arthur's place as national magnificence: Guy repents his chivalric lifestyle. After withdrawing from public life and living as a religious recluse, he returns to England when it needs his help. When he meets with Terry, an old acquaintance, Guy refuses to name himself to his old friend because, as Rowlands writes the encounter:

Pardon (quoth he) that were against a Vow.  
To no man liuing, Ild reueale the same,  
For I have changed Name and Nature now,  
Natures corruptions, I doe strue to leaue:  
A new Regeneration to receiue.<sup>77</sup>

Although he has changed both name and nature, both sign and signified, Guy does eventually come home to England, where he defeats the giant Colbrond and saves the day, coming home to “lay his bones, where he was bred.” His sword is placed in the castle as a monument to his bravery and he is hailed as one of the best knights ever to fight for England. Though the memory of Guy's martial valor is preserved in the sword and the story, it is through his conversion that the reader recognizes Guy. His story is one of revising both name and nature, so that when he dies, it is neither tragic nor glorious. Guy's very essence as representing the “gray area” of chivalric ethos makes him unfit to represent a nation in need of a glorious past. Guy's repentance sets limits on his chivalric significance that starkly separate it from Arthur's.

Further supporting this reading of Guy's “limits,” it appears that for Spenser, “England's other Arthur” is clearly not Arthur—no more than Rowlands ever became “England's other Spenser.” Although in many ways Guy might seem the more relevant figure in a text interrogating chivalry so thoroughly, Spenser's project is not the rejection of chivalry but the redeployment of its most famous symbols to new Protestant, Tudor ends. In such a context no

---

<sup>77</sup> Rowlands, *Guy of Warwick*, O2v.

symbol could be stronger than Arthur, and “England’s other Arthur” might therefore be more aptly titled England’s lesser Arthur. Lacking in Guy are the unrepentant warrior ethos, the tragic civil conflict, and the promised second coming that make Arthur’s legend so fruitful. It is fitting that Spenser would use Sir Guy’s legend in his character Guyon, as Guy’s medieval and early modern legacy of military success and subsequent conversion make for an excellent model to redeploy in the name of “temperance,” but temperance is not what conquered most of Europe and established Britain’s sovereignty apart from Rome.<sup>78</sup> Most importantly, Guy lacks the historical weight with which Geoffrey of Monmouth (and, in defending Geoffrey, John Leland) had imbued Arthur. Therefore, while Arthur reads what is essentially a reworking of the chronicle tradition, Guyon reads a history of Faery—a world which, though essential in the context of Spenser’s allegory and evocative of what Summit argues is an essential element of collective English memory, did not serve as a key text for antiquarians hoping to validate England’s claim to Trojan origins. It is important that Spenser gives the scene in Eumnestes’s library to both Arthur *and* Guyon—arguably the two worthies most beloved in English collective memory—but there is never a question about which of the two should portray magnificence, even in a fallen (or at least *falling*) chivalric world. Although Rowlands’s Guy might be comparable to Spenser’s Redcrosse or Artegall, he will never achieve Arthur’s historical legacy, if for no other reason than that he shuns it. This ultimate rejection of conquest is the limit of *Guy of Warwick* in a national context—and the reason Arthur’s icon must retain its embrace of chivalric militarism in order to continue to qualify as England’s national icon.

---

<sup>78</sup> This may be why John Milton—a writer who abandoned plans to write about Arthur—admired Spenser’s Guyon: Guyon’s virtue was tested, but remained intact because of his own decisions, made with the necessary knowledge to either choose or reject the virtuous path. See this dissertation’s “Epilogue.”

### **The Limits of Arthurian Romance: Satire and Iconic Revision**

The Arthur of early modern English romance serves as a particularly useful national icon in that he carries with him the dual weight of romantic “delight” and historical gravity—and never repents of either role. *The Faerie Queene*’s influence was definitive for the Elizabethan nation and for Arthur’s status as one of its most potent icons; however, the seventeenth century’s Arthurian offerings demand that one think carefully about how—or if—the reading public actually imagined *its* nation through Arthur. After all, it was *Guy and Bevis* who enjoyed the most circulation in print, and even though these heroes lived in an Arthurian context, their texts glorified the titular heroes over the legendary king. Moreover, the appearance of dramatically revised versions of Arthur may actually signify that he had reached the limits of his appeal for the larger reading public. The 1611 folio printing of *The Faerie Queene* was its last appearance until 1679, when the poem was published as part of Spenser’s collected *Works*. In the seventeenth century, only three new Arthurian romances were produced, and two of these put forth strange if not shocking Arthurian narratives. While Martin Parker’s *The most admirable historie of...Arthvr* recounts a brief but mostly familiar Arthurian narrative in twenty pages, Richard Johnson’s *Tom a Lincoln* satirically portrays Arthur as a foolish adulterer, and John Shurley’s *Brittain’s Glory* rewrites Arthur’s role to allow him a peaceful death and the smooth succession of his son, Constantine, to the throne. Johnson’s is perhaps the most substantial post-Spenserian “new” Arthurian text of the seventeenth century and the one that is most damning to the famous king’s reputation; and Shurley’s pushes the limits of Arthur’s reputation to prompt questions about his ability to represent national desires in a post-Cromwellian England. Whether readers felt that versions like Johnson’s and Shurley’s trumped or replaced the magnificent

portrait granted to Arthur in Spenser's poem one can only determine by considering the content and print history of Arthurian texts during a time when satire and drastic revision threatened the very idea of an English nation represented by Arthur.

In 1631, Robert Byrde and Francis Coles published Richard Johnson's *The most pleasant History of Tom a Lincoln, the Red Rose Knight*, a popular romance that tells the story of Tom, illegitimate son of King Arthur. Tom's story is important to this study for its satiric portrayal of King Arthur, its intersections with *The Faerie Queene*, and its emphasis on the glory of the English nation. Perhaps the most damning portrayal of Arthur in any early modern text, *Tom a Lincoln* posits Arthur as a lovesick fool who coerces the virginal object of his affection into an affair, impregnates her, and eventually installs her in a nunnery so that he can visit her secretly whenever he likes. In a disturbing portrait of the roles of sovereign and subject, Arthur woos a reluctant Angellica by insisting that submitting to his desires is her patriotic duty: "yet take pity on thy Countrey, that through thy cruelty, she loose not her wanton glory, and be made unhappy, by the losse of her Soueraigne: thou seest...how I, that haue made Princes stoope, and kings to humble when I haue frownde, doe now submissiue[y] yeeld my high honour to they feete."<sup>79</sup> Arthur tells Angellica that if she does not give in, he will surely die, and England's ensuing fate will be on her conscience. In the end, she "could not choose but relent and requite his curtesies" and so becomes pregnant.<sup>80</sup> To hide this from Arthur's subjects—and to allow them to continue their affair—the two conspire to have Angellica installed at a nunnery. Their liason continues even after the birth of their son, Tom, whom Arthur sends away so that "Angellica's dishonour

---

<sup>79</sup> Richard Johnson, *The most pleasant history of Tom a Lincolne, that ever renowned soldier, the Red Rose knight* (London: Aug. Matthews for Robert Byrde and Francis Coles, 1631), B1r.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, B1v.

might be kept secret from the world, and his owne disgrace from the murmuring reports of the vulgar people.”<sup>81</sup> Angellica spends the rest of her life receiving visits from Arthur and longing for her son, while the narrative moves on to the life and adventures of that son, a few of which have obvious debts to Spenser’s poem. By this early point in the romance, it is already apparent that Arthur is a seducer of virgins, a conniving adulterer, and ultimately, the source of many characters’ unhappiness. Arthur’s awareness of “his owne disgrace” acknowledges his decidedly un-magnificent status in Johnson’s romance. In light of this moral failure, Johnson may seem to have exceeded Arthur’s iconic limits and created another character entirely.

Preventing the reader’s outright dismissal of this compromised icon, however, is Johnson’s traditional Arthurian romance prologue. In his opening lines, Johnson sets his reader up to expect the Arthur he knows from Malory and Spenser, operating under the chivalric code he knows from *Bevis* and *Sir Guy*: “Whereas King ARTHVR wore the Emperiall Diadem of England, and by his chiuallrie had purchased many famous Victories, to the great renowne of this mayden Land, hee ordained the order of the round Table, and selected many worthy Knights to attend his Maiestie: of whose glittering renowne many auncient Histories doe record, and witness all insuing ages.”<sup>82</sup> Lest there be any doubt that Johnson means the King Arthur of Geoffrey, Malory, and Spenser, he forces the reader to connect a foolish adulterer with the wearer of the “Emperiall Diadem of England.” The reader is therefore unable to dismiss Johnson’s Arthur as a complete misreading of the cultural icon, and must confront the fact that Johnson is putting forth an updated (and downgraded) version. Such a revision raises the question of whether, in Caroline England, Arthurian “renowne” had become the product of bankrupt rhetoric.

---

<sup>81</sup> Johnson, *Tom a Lincoln*, B2r.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, A3r.

Reminding the reader of former Arthurian legitimacy before ultimately crushing it, Johnson incorporates a “Fayrie” realm in his poem that strongly recalls *The Faerie Queene*. Arthur and Angellica’s son Tom grows up a shepherd but becomes a knight by Arthur’s hand (while remaining ignorant as to his parentage in order to protect the reputations of his parents) and serves at the Round Table, eventually sailing off in search of adventure and landing in the island of “Fayrie-land.” Johnson’s Fayrie-land is populated entirely by women who, having been denied their request of their husbands’ return, have killed all males on the island and currently live under a queen named Caelia. Caelia falls in love with Tom at first sight and begs him to marry her and convince his men to repopulate the island with her subjects. Despite some initial resistance, Tom consents, and the son born of their union becomes the character known later in the romance as the “Fairy Knight.” Tom eventually sails away looking for more adventures, prompting Caelia to kill herself and lending the entire “fayrie” element a tragic air. This episode reminds the reader of *The Faerie Queene* both in its female ruler of an island kingdom and that queen’s eschewal—until Tom comes along—of marriage. The speed with which Caelia changes from autonomous warrior queen to a woman begging Tom for his “seed” casts a cynical light on the Elizabethan kingdom. The irony that Caelia’s kingdom will ultimately be more secure than Elizabeth’s because Caelia married and produced a son is an apparent critique of the society Spenser represented in his own poem. Of course, Spenser himself subtly criticized Elizabeth’s lack of an heir throughout his romance, but never in such bold, crude terms. By the time Johnson’s romance appeared in print, Charles I was on the throne, so there was little need to criticize Elizabeth herself, but Johnson’s critique could be said to transcend the Elizabethan context, satirizing as it does the larger romance tradition out of which Spenser’s poem sprang.

The land of Fayrie or the “otherworld” is very much a part of the romance tradition at large; in that context, its queen’s desperate edge, coupled with Arthur’s wheedling and adulterous exploits, seem to tell the reader: “This *is* the England you remember from Elizabethan romance, but it is no longer relevant in Caroline Britain.”

Printed in 1631, 1635, 1655, 1668, and 1682 (and repeatedly throughout the eighteenth century), *Tom a Lincoln* appears to have been quite popular with English readers. Understanding the reasons for this popularity is especially difficult, however, because Johnson’s romance contains contradictory elements: the mockery of Arthurian romance outlined above is offset by the ultimate triumph of English heroes—the Black Knight and the Fairy Knight—both of whom are Arthur’s descendents through Tom. After being away from Caelia for a few years, Tom marries Anglitora, and the son born of their marriage becomes the “Blacke Knight.” Years later, Arthur dies and reveals that Tom is his son with Angellica, who is still living at the nunnery. Arthur’s announcement sets into motion two terrible events: first, Arthur’s queen is furious and tries to have Angellica killed; second, Tom’s wife Anglitora is appalled to find herself married to a bastard, “the common shame of the dead King,” and takes their son (the Black Knight) to another land in which she begins an affair with an unnamed knight. To avenge his father, the Black Knight kills his mother and her lover and eventually meets up with his half-brother, the Fairy Knight (son of Tom and Caelia). The importance of all of these unfortunate happenings (originally set into motion by the adulterous exploits of King Arthur) is that they create the Black Knight and the Fairy Knight, “two halves of one soul,” whose ultimate destiny is to return to England and perform chivalric deeds of service to their nation.

Overturning the air of mockery that presides over the Arthurian sections, the two knights arrive in England and demonstrate the intense love of country with which Arthur had previously been associated. The Black Knight and the Fairy Knight reach English soil,

vpon which they had no sooner set footing, but with their warme lippes they gently kissed the cold earth. This is the Land of promised glory (said the Fayerie Knight) to finde this Land I haue indured many miseries: to find this Land I haue passed many countries, and in this Land, must I seale vp the last quittance of my life, here shal my bones rest, for I am lawfully descended from the loynes of an English Knight: peace bee in my ende, for all my dayes haue beene spent in much trouble.<sup>83</sup>

Together, the Black Knight and the Fairy Knight look very much like Arthur and Guy(on), realizing their place in a nation from which they are “lawfully descended.” This patriotic ending to a romance that began as satire makes *Tom a Lincoln*’s popularity particularly intriguing. Perhaps certain readers were tired of Arthurian romance and enjoyed seeing old heroes topple, as long as England and Englishness retained their praiseworthy attributes. Or perhaps they looked past the conniving figure of Arthur in order to enjoy yet another popular chivalric romance featuring his presumed descendents—a genre that had never fallen out of print in the previous 150 years. It is impossible to know exactly why the text had such popularity, but its duality raises questions about the implications of satire on romance in general and Arthurian literature in particular in the seventeenth century. Helen Cooper argues, “It was not humanism nor Protestantism that finally drove [romances] out of high cultural visibility, but satire.”<sup>84</sup> Johnson’s portrayal of Arthur in *Tom a Lincoln* certainly paints a bleak picture for the legend’s continued relevance, but before applying Cooper’s statement absolutely, one should also consider that the 1630s (the decade in which Johnson’s romance was first printed) saw “both sides” of this

---

<sup>83</sup> Johnson, *Tom a Lincoln*, N1v.

<sup>84</sup> Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 39.

argument—satire and earnest praise—which complicates a reading one way or the other. In 1637 in particular, Charles I enjoyed a court masque containing a “mock romanza,” mocking the exploits of dwarves, giants, and knights like those in Spenser’s text; on the other hand, three years earlier, Malory’s *Morte* had appeared in its sixth printed edition.<sup>85</sup> Arthur looks truly ridiculous in Johnson’s text, but this romance’s dual vision of chivalry is indicative of the debated—but not nonexistent—value of Arthurian themes in Stuart England.<sup>86</sup> Reprehensible though Arthur may be, when the Black Knight and the Fairy Knight—Arthur’s descendants—kiss their native soil, the gesture is not satirical in the least. Though chivalry was under examination, it had not yet been driven out by humanism, Protestantism, or by any other early modern context.

Despite Johnson’s popular villainous version, the Arthurs of Geoffrey, Malory, and Spenser constitute a figure so strongly ingrained in the English national imagination that it survives as a recognizable cultural icon in the face of both satire and drastic revision. This does not mean that Arthur did not change as a result of Johnson’s satire; on the contrary, succeeding Arthurian alterations are precisely what allow us to gauge the changes in the English nation as Arthur adapts from medieval champion to Protestant reader to foolish adulterer and—finally—back to national champion in the late seventeenth century. This transformation is one undertaken most obviously within the pages of short, cheaply printed texts that, by the late seventeenth centuries, constituted the chapbook tradition that would continue throughout the eighteenth century. Building on the popular romance tradition that had sparked the many “affordable”

---

<sup>85</sup> The “mock romanza” is part of William Davenant’s masque *Britannia Triumphans* (London: John Haviland and Thomas Walkley, 1637). The edition of Malory’s text is William Stansby’s quarto (1634).

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for discussion of the Stuarts’ use of Arthurian themes.

editions of *Bevis*, *Guy*, *Tom*, and *Arthur*, the chapbook trade perpetuated the interest in Arthur's importance to the English nation, illustrating its debts to texts like Malory's and Spenser's while clearly making other versions of the legend available to a wider audience. Martin Parker's *The most admirable historie of...Arthvr* (1660) and John Shurley's *Brittain's Glory* (1684) both undertake dramatic changes to the legend in order to make Arthur accessible to an England struggling with the effects and aftermath of civil war—and neither reverts to satire. It is in Shurley's text in particular that the legend receives its most shocking treatment: Shurley's Arthur undertakes abbreviated versions of his famous conquests before dying a peaceful death, smoothly succeeded by his son, Constantine. Consideration of Shurley's text is particularly important because this romance performs the national rhetoric and antiquarian concerns of Malory, Caxton, Spenser, and Leland, while making a change in plot that, far from suggesting that the medieval Arthur had lost his value (an idea that Johnson's text had, at the very least, raised), ultimately illustrates that Arthur was one of the cultural icons worth salvaging after the nation had endured civil war.

If Spenser's text was the most expensive of the Arthurian offerings, the chapbooks would have been the least. Books such as *Arthur of Little Britain* and *Tom a Lincoln* would fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum: they were not printed in lavish editions, but are of considerable length. When considering the impact of Spenser's romance epic on the continued relevance of a "magnificent" Arthur among the full spectrum of English readers, it is to "cheap" popular romances like *Bevis*, *Guy*, and Parker's and Shurley's Arthurian "histories" that one must turn, as these would have been the most affordable books to any group of readers. The chapbook, as John Simons points out, was most commonly printed as a book of twelve leaves or

twenty-four pages. “Whatever the number of pages, chapbooks have the following features in common: they were sold unopened...they often include one or more woodcuts or wood engravings, and they are usually fragile and printed on poor quality paper.”<sup>87</sup> Sold in print shops or carried by chapmen for sale to readers all over England, these cheap books, Simons argues, connected English citizens on both a local and national level: “Thus the regions could be served with a range of chapbooks which not only linked them to national culture...but also satisfied local tastes...In this way, chapbooks provide one of the links which enabled national consciousness to grow within a culture which was still tolerant of regional difference.”<sup>88</sup> Not only the geographical but also the financial availability made chapbooks important to building national consciousness in the sixteenth and (especially) seventeenth centuries. Tessa Watt’s research has shown that “it was the late Jacobean and early Carolinian period which first saw the development of a specialist trade in books which were purposefully small, in order to reach a market of potential readers who had been hitherto unlikely to purchase the printed word, except in the form of a broadside ballad.”<sup>89</sup> Watt’s data is particularly intriguing on Arthurian texts, as she suggests that the 1634 Stansby edition of Malory’s text would have cost approximately 9s, while a contemporaneous edition of *Guy of Warwick* cost 12d. Spufford’s data illustrates that the disparity remained as the seventeenth century wore on: an edition of Parker’s Arthurian chapbook (1660) sold for between 3d-6d, a cost that, while not prohibitive for chapbook

---

<sup>87</sup> John Simons, ed. *Guy of Warwick and Other Chapbook Romances: Six Tales from the Popular Literature of Pre-industrial England* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>89</sup> Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, 278. Watt distinguishes between pamphlets and chapbooks: “Without collections to guide us, the pre-1640 chapbook has tended to be defined by a certain kind of subject matter. If pamphlets were topical, chapbooks were timeless: chivalric romances and favourite jests”(268).

audiences all over the country, was certainly above the one- and two-penny octavos and duodecimos. Spufford claims that these 1*d*-2*d* books were burlesques and bawdy stories or stories about “heroes” drawn from the urban and rural poor, while the other group was “the cut-down chivalric romances of the middle ages, which were more commonly printed as quartos, and as a rule cost at least 1*d* more.”<sup>90</sup> This data alone does not suggest that Arthurian texts were always less accessible than others, but it does offer an intriguing look at perceived “value” of the chivalric tradition, even during a period (post-Civil War England) when Arthur and his chivalric code of honor were outdated if not unwelcome. The truth, it seems, is that authors, printers, and readers found a way to re-value the Arthurian tradition—even if that meant pushing it to the limits of its significance.

As if to counter Johnson’s satire, Martin Parker’s Arthurian offering illustrates the power of a more flattering Arthurian text—and reiterates the importance of the ballad tradition and oral culture in Arthurian print history.<sup>91</sup> In her discussion of the interrelated nature of the ballad and the chapbook, Watt offers a verse from 1615, in which Henry Parrot describes the various types of customers who would peruse his new work at the bookstall. The titles are familiar:

Next after him, your Countrey-Farmer views it,  
It may be good (saith hee) for those can use it.  
Shewe mee King Arthur, Bevis, or Syr Guye,

---

<sup>90</sup> Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, 50.

<sup>91</sup> In *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* Watt explains, “Martin Parker, who apparently made a living as an alehouse-keeper, was well placed to pick up stories and songs, to try out his own on the clientele, and to judge what would be popular in cheap form. His ‘penny-sized’ books of the 1620s and 30s seem to address a new kind of reader: the ‘honest folks that have no lands’, the young maids feeling in their bosoms for twopence ‘wrapt in clouts.’”(324). Watt quotes from Susan Aileen Newman, “The broadside ballads of Martin Parker: a bibliographical and critical study” (Birmingham PhD, 1975), I, p. 2.

Those are the Bookes he onely loves to buye.<sup>92</sup>

This ballad offers convincing evidence that the Arthurian tradition was in demand among “countrey-farmers” even as early as 1615, and it links the adventures of Bevis, Guy, and Arthur together in the popular memory just as clearly as Spenser linked their influences in his far more lofty text. Though they are named together in this verse, there is a difference between purchasing Bevis and purchasing Arthur. Watt explains, “Some of the medium-sized works like Guy and Bevis were moving down-market as they were reprinted. But Parrot’s ‘country farmer’ who bought King Arthur would have to be at least a prosperous yeoman to afford the price of roughly 9s. There is no evidence before 1640 of an Arthur in 24-page quarto, like the edition published by Francis Coles in 1660, although we must keep in mind the possibility of abridged versions which have not survived.”<sup>93</sup> While it seems very likely that there were indeed cheap Arthurian abridgments before 1660, the point is that, by that time, Arthur was indeed for sale in the 24-page chapbook form—no longer did one need 9s to read about the famous king. The text to which Watt refers above is that of Martin Parker, *The most admirable historie of...Arthvr*, printed by Francis Coles in 1660. This text, along with Shurley’s *Great Britain’s Glory* (1680), is not as clearly linked to Spenser’s as are *Bevis*, *Guy*, *Arthur of Little Britain*, and *Tom a Lincoln*; however, it greatly helps to illustrate the legacy of the romance tradition as England reevaluated its national limits during and after the Civil Wars.

---

<sup>92</sup> Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, 257. Watt cites Henry Parrot, “The mastive, or young-whelp of the olde-dogge” in *Epigrams and satires* (1615); quoted in Natascha Wurzbach, *Die englische straßenballade 1550-1650* (Munich, 1981).

<sup>93</sup> Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, 268-9.

Parker's text truly masquerades as a "history," in that it begins with Vortiger's dealings with the Saxons, before moving on to a discussion of Uther and Igrayne's conception of Arthur. Parker claims that this background is necessary for understanding and appreciating the historical import of what will follow. In this, Parker seems to channel Geoffrey, Leland, and Spenser: he understands that it is Arthur's historical legacy that allows for his early modern national role. In other ways, however, Parker takes over the text: first of all, he removes the supernatural elements by which Arthur was usually conceived; in Parker's text, Arthur is conceived after the Duke of Cornwall is dead and Uther has a clear, legal path to Igrayne. In fact, Merlin's magic has no place in the romance: Merlin is in charge of Arthur's education, but not of his conception. In line with the antiquarian-inspired prologue to his text (discussed at the end of Chapter 1 of this dissertation), Parker replaces magic with decency and common sense. For example, so good a teacher is Merlin, in fact, that the "common people" admire Arthur for his character and education and "with a unanimous consent they chose Prince *Arthur* for their Sovereign."<sup>94</sup> Elected by the people, Arthur then undertakes the usual conquering of Denmark, Norway, and Gothland, the subduing of the Picts, Scots, Irish, Saxons, and Palastinans, the founding of the Round Table, and the challenging of Rome before returning home to face Mordred, his usurping kinsman. He is eventually killed—but not by Mordred!—and dies, buried at Glastonbury and succeeded by his nephew Constantine.

Parker's choice to make (legitimately conceived) Arthur the elect of the people, his decision to remove the mutual slaughter of Mordred and Arthur, and his emphasis on the finality of Arthur's death are all indications of an attempt to "update" the Arthurian icon for an England

---

<sup>94</sup> Martin Parker, *The most admirable historie of that most renowned Christina worthy Arthvr, King of the Britaines* (London: Francis Coles, 1660), 5.

reeling from civil war and the reinstatement of the monarchy. By removing the absolutist element of Arthur's kingship and the mutual killing of two kinsmen, Parker makes Arthur's legacy more palatable to a country that had just committed regicide (the death of a royal kinsman) in order to secure a voice in how they were to be ruled. And although Arthur does die at the end of the text, it is significant that at a crucial moment in the final battle, a Pictish soldier inaccurately declares to the Britons that their king is dead and that they should give in. In what amounts to a "second coming" of sorts, Arthur makes himself visible and declares: "Fight on (fellows in armes) I am (I praise heaven for it) neither dead nor wounded, but in perfect health (and strength) and that these vallanous rebels and traytors (who speak what they wish) shall soon find these words kindle fresh fire of valour in the breasts of all true Britaines."<sup>95</sup> This additional scene allows for an Arthurian "return" that sparks the patriotism required to keep fighting, even though it eschews the supernatural element required for rebirth. The lack of magic throughout the text (no Merlin-aided conception, no promise of Arthurian return) allows Arthur to be a fully human warrior whose life is dedicated to the best interest of the nation he is elected to serve. All other elements, Parker himself admits, are superfluous. Indeed, Parker makes the rhetorical move throughout his text to comment on the fact that if he narrated every detail of the Arthurian story, it would prove "tedious," both to himself and to the reader. So he presents his "highlights reel" of an abridged, altered Arthurian history, giving chapbook readers an account of Arthur's martial glory free of the suspect "magic" and degree of civil strife that had "polluted" the texts that Parker (like the historians) seems to find so distasteful in 1660s England.

---

<sup>95</sup> Parker, *The most admirable historie of...Arthvr*, 19.

Illustrating that Parker's was not the only gesture towards keeping Arthurian romance in print after the Civil Wars, John Shurley's chapbook-length *Brittain's Glory: OR, the history of the life and death of K. Arthur, and the Adventures of the Knights of the Round Table* goes even further in its revision of the famous legend, completely removing the tragic elements of Arthur's death.<sup>96</sup> In the preface to this twenty-page Arthurian "history," Shurley makes a familiar gesture, recalling the rhetoric of Malory, Caxton, Spenser, Rowlands, Johnson, and Parker in his assertion of the importance of textual monuments to the national icons that matter most to England:

During the Revolutions of this Kingdom such have been the Valerous Exploits of the Princes, and other Renowned Warriours, Natives, not only in this our Land and neighbouring Countries, but throughout the known World, that all Nations have stood amazed, and trembled at their Prowess: And amongst other, well may the Famous Arthur, that renowned British King take place; though (to lessen the Credit of his great Exploits) some envious Aliens have endeavoured to prove there was never such a Man; but since it is evident by Chronologers of the most Antiquity and Integrity, that he was the Son of Vter Pendragon, of the Ancient British Royal Blood, I shall not more Arguments to manifest it to the World to the Matter of History, as I sign it layed down for the Instruction of future Ages.<sup>97</sup>

Two hundred years after Caxton called Arthur "moost to be remembred amongst us Englishmen," one hundred fifty years after Leland fought rhetorical battles against "envious Alien" Polydore Vergil, and one hundred years after Spenser claimed to put forth an Arthurian romance for the instruction of an English gentleman, Shurley echoes all of their themes in a grand preface to a cheaply printed, heavily abridged, markedly altered version of Arthur's life. In doing so, Shurley sets the reader up (as Johnson and Parker also had) to expect the Arthur he or she knows from the texts whose rhetoric Shurley echoes in his prologue. And indeed, Arthur

---

<sup>96</sup> Slight variations of this title appear in the four extant copies of this text. This one is taken from the copy in the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. Alternative versions are titled *Great Britain's Glory*.

<sup>97</sup> John Shurley, *Brittain's Glory: OR, the history of the life and death of K. Arthur, and the Adventures of the Knights of the Round Table* (London: H.B. for J. Wright, J. Clark, and T. Passinger, 1684), A1v.

does fulfill many of his expected roles: born of Uther Pendragon by the magical intervention of Merlin, Arthur spends his life expanding his empire, fighting pagans, marrying “Guenora” and founding the Round Table. While Shurley retains the magical element of the romance tradition, he also alters that tradition substantially: first of all, Arthur is said to conquer the “Holy-Land” in this version—a unique gesture in early modern Arthurian history or romance. Even more surprising is Shurley’s revision of post-Arthurian succession: no longer Arthur’s nephew but a son born to Arthur and Guenora in wedlock, Constantine steers the Arthurian trajectory away from uncertainty and tragedy. Not only does Arthur manage to father a son, he is also allowed to enjoy a quiet set of twilight years, during which he founds monasteries, builds schools, and devotes himself to piety, eventually dying a peaceful death and ensuring the bloodless transfer of rule to his son. The coupling of Shurley’s promise to present the story the reader expects with Shurley’s drastic changes to that story’s events (especially its ending) functions much like Johnson’s preface and plot in that it sets up—and subsequently defies—the reader’s expectations. In the revised plot of Shurley’s text, however, one does indeed find the Arthur of Geoffrey and Spenser; even though his end is not what the reader expects, Arthur is no villain. In fact, he seems to have turned into Guy of Warwick.

Arthur’s drastic change at the end of Shurley’s text draws parallels to the story of “England’s other Arthur” in its portrayal of a chivalric champion who ends his days in holy pursuits:

King *Arthur* now having to repose in Peace, and think on his many wonderful Deliverances, resolved to apply his mind to deeds of Piety, and thereupon caused many Monastries and Religious houses be built giving yearly maintenance to divers poor People, but espersally to such as had lived in splendor, and were fallen to decay: And daily he visited the Sick, giving them Christian Comfort: and using his utmost endeavour to cherish Learning and Arts, which ended his proper charge he built likewise many

Schools and Colledges giving himself wholly up to the study of the seven Liberall Arts; and so well profited he therein, that he became the greatest therein of his Age: But most of all, he fixed his mind upon his latter end, and with *Solomon* was frequently heard to say, *All Worldly things were but Vanity and Vexation of Spirit; and that on Earth no real nor substantial joys were to be found.* When in the sixtieth Year of his Age, and the forty ninth Year of his Reign, falling sick, and by the opinions of his Physicians not likely to recover, he sent for all his Nobles, and the Knights of the Order, and he caused them to swear fealty to his Son in the wise and thereupon, finding pious Expressions, and Prayers, his Nobles to be careful of securing his Son in his Throne, and having great respect to his Queen, he gave up the Ghost, to the great grief of his Subjects, but more of his fair Queen, who took it so grievously, that soon after fading into a Feaver, she died, and was buried with him in a Monastery, built by him at *Monmouth*, whose tomb (richly adorned) continued visible till the Dissolution of the Fabrick in the time of *Henry* the Eight.<sup>98</sup>

Arthur meets an end that echoes saints' lives (a genre often connected with romance), Spenser's Arthur's role as "minister of grace," and perhaps most closely, the conclusion of *Guy of Warwick*. The unexpected (in the Arthurian genre) twist of allowing Arthur some peaceful twilight years during which he turns from worldly vanity and dedicates himself to God would have certainly reminded readers of romance's most popular converted knight. The question as to whether Arthur had to become Sir Guy in order to remain relevant in a post-Cromwellian context has enormous implications for the continued relevance of Arthur to the nation. It is possible that, by becoming like Guy, Arthur could avoid the civil conflicts and fraught succession that usually accompanied his legend—two topics that would have opened wounds not yet healed by the 1680s. In avoiding tragedy and becoming Guy, Arthur may be said to exceed the limits of his own character and signify something entirely different than Spenser's still-chivalric champion.

I argue, however, that in his lack of retreat from the world Arthur is still recognizable as England's chivalric champion: although he has the ability to put his "worldly" pursuits into perspective, Arthur does not regret the glory he has won for England—no more than English readers may have ever really found Arthur irrelevant, despite their enthusiasm for satiric portraits

---

<sup>98</sup> Shurley, *Brittain's Glory*, C4v.

of him. Even when he subscribes to the idea that “worldly things were but vanity,” Shurley’s Arthur seems far more like Spenser’s Protestant ideal, who, in coupling in the library with Guyon, illustrates the necessary companionship of temperance and magnificence, than the medieval Sir Guy, who deeply regrets his former martial life and distances himself from it in every conceivable way. Shurley’s drastic revision ultimately shows that Arthur is an icon of such power that he can undergo heavy alteration and still retain his ability to carry recognizable national significance. He can almost blend into his “worthy” companion Guy, but his unrepentant glorification of England’s imperial pursuits make Arthur a “Renowned Warrior” worth updating instead of discarding or replacing.<sup>99</sup> Going beyond even Parker’s revision, in *Brittain’s Glory* the idea of civil war occasioned by Mordred’s disobedience completely disappears, and instead Arthur is allowed both his legacy and his life; consequently, the English subject is allowed to keep Arthur alive without raising the painful issues of a kingdom without an heir or one caught up in civil war.

Although there is only one known edition of Parker’s Arthurian romance (1660), Shurley’s *Brittain’s Glory* was printed in at least four editions (1684, 1697, two others c. 1700, and probably more) in the late seventeenth century and the first few years of the eighteenth

---

<sup>99</sup> Further strengthening the connection between the two heroes at the close of the seventeenth century, Shurley penned a heavily abridged version of *Guy of Warwick* the same year he wrote his Arthurian chapbook. Unlike Arthur’s, Guy’s story retains all of its recognizable plot elements, which is understandable, given that Guy never experiences the kind of tragic loss so inherent to Arthuriana and so unwelcome to a nation that had recently suffered civil violence. Shurley includes an even longer preface to this text, emphasizing the “War-like and Pious Actions” of “the far-Famed and most Renowned *English* Champion.” Set against Shurley’s pronouncement that Arthur takes his place amongst other worthies, Guy may enjoy the more flattering portrait in Shurley’s sales pitches. One might argue, therefore, that Guy is the stronger, more relevant cultural icon, in that his essential elements never change, even over two centuries of political, religious, and dynastic change—two centuries punctuated by civil war. While this is an important point, I argue instead that the fact of Arthurian revision actually highlights the king’s unique importance to the English reading nation. In a late seventeenth-century context in which Malory’s civil tragedy would presumably open fresh wounds, it would be easier to forsake Arthur entirely (and perhaps transfer all allegiance to Sir Guy). But it seems that, even in the context of popular romance, Guy is not quite Arthur.

century, almost always as a cheaply-produced quarto with a single, Round-Table woodcut on its title page and final page. Beyond this, there is variation in the presentation of this text. The best-preserved (and longest) of the known copies is housed in the library of Samuel Pepys at Magdalene College, Cambridge. Spufford refers to this as one of the “early medieval romances in the collection made by Samuel Pepys, shamelessly adapted,” in this case “the twenty-four page version of King Arthur selling at 3d.”<sup>100</sup> This cheaply printed Arthurian text is bound in Pepys’s collection with other “popular romances” such as *Robin Hood*, *Tom’ o Lincoln*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and other similar titles, all printed in black letter (except for *The Arraignment of Women*). The most complete and best preserved of all extant versions, the Pepys copy was printed by H.B. for J. Wright, J. Clark, and T. Passinger in 1684. The woodcut that graces the cover of this and all other editions (except one, discussed below) is that of a round table at which sit king Arthur and seven knights. In the middle of the table are a book and a quill pen, suggesting the literary legacy of the Arthurian tradition. Being the longest version, the title page of this edition gives a preview of Arthur’s exploits, including the (ludicrous) conquering of Saracens in the holy land. On the final page is the verse:

And thus (kind Reader) I’ve reviv’d the fame  
Of him who well deserves a glorious Name;  
Hoping that time henceforth shall not destroy  
What here I build to Arthur’s Memory<sup>101</sup>

The idea that Arthur’s fame needed to be “reviv’d” in 1684 is an interesting rhetorical move, and alerts scholars to the fact that in the two decades between Parker’s and Shurley’s editions,

---

<sup>100</sup> Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, 227.

<sup>101</sup> Shurley, *Brittain’s Glory*, 24.

Arthurian romance may have fallen out of circulation.<sup>102</sup> In every other edition (all slightly shorter than this of the Pepys' collection), another closing verse appears. In 1697 and 1700, W. O. and C. Brown, respectively, print *Great Britain's Glory* with the same Round-Table woodcut, but with this concluding verse:

Thus Friendly Reader, I've abstracted here,  
King Arthur's Noble Acts; which doth appear  
More fully in the larger ten Sheet Book  
If thou therein, will cast a friendly Look.<sup>103</sup>

Missing from this version are about 4 pages of text, but this shorter account contains all of the same adventures. Despite their small variances, all editions of this text are presented on flimsy paper, and none of the editions exceeds chapbook length. All are relatively affordable representations (3*d*) of a heavily revised (or reviv'd) Arthur, with parallels to the antiquarian tradition but solidly the products of post-Civil War England.

As if to prove that by the late seventeenth century Arthur was also the property of a new class of reader (though certainly not absent from the shelves of aristocratic readers, who never ceased reading romances themselves), printer John White put forth an edition of *Great Britain's Glory* that would lend new significance to the idea of abridgement and the compromising of icons. This roman-type edition (c. 1700) is in content identical to W. O.'s and C. Brown's "short" versions, but White does not use the same woodcut as is found on every other copy. Not listed by the ESTC, White's copy, housed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, contains a woodcut of a (incidentally round?) table overrun by rodents. At this table sit two men in turbans,

---

<sup>102</sup> Given the fact that this period (1660-84) was when *Paradise Lost* appeared, Milton's decision not to write an Arthurian epic might in fact have been reflected even in the print history of such cheap romances. See this dissertation's "Epilogue."

<sup>103</sup> W. O.'s 1697 edition is printed in black letter; C. Brown's c. 1700 edition is printed in roman type. This does not seem to denote any kind of specific progress or regression, however, since John White's version would go back to using black letter.

welcoming a standing figure on the left. This decidedly un-Arthurian woodcut seems a strange choice for White, especially because White did have access to other “characteristic” woodcuts (his *Dr. Faustus* contains the easily identifiable woodcut of the famous character). In this case, it seems that any round table will signify Arthur, as long as it is accompanied by the powerful Arthurian gloss. The book’s title proclaims this is *Great Britain’s Glory*, a fact that the errant woodcut is powerless to override. The interesting thing about this text is that Arthur must have still been considered a “best seller” even after all of the turmoil of the seventeenth century: White’s text, with its flimsy paper and mismatched woodcut, has the appearance of a hastily-prepared edition. Bound as it is in the University of Wisconsin’s collection with others of White’s printings: *Dr. Faustus*, *Mother Shipton*, and the *History of Thomas of Reading* (among others), *Great Britain’s Glory’s* place in this collection, like its place in Pepys’s, illustrates that Arthurian books were worth producing and collecting even in their most compromised material and content-based forms.<sup>104</sup> Over the period graced by Caxton’s edition of Malory’s *Morte Darthur* (1485), Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590), and Shurley’s *Great Britain’s Glory* (1684), the Arthurian icon in printed romance changed significantly—and even flirted with exceeding its limits among competitive icons, foolish adulterers, peaceful deaths, and tables overrun with rodents—but it ultimately reached the end of the seventeenth century still potent as a national vehicle, even on the other side of regicide and civil war.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> It is also worth noting Arthur’s new place alongside stories of the working “heroes,” as in *Thomas of Reading*. This genre “set out to give the humbler, and perhaps newly literate, reader a means of identifying himself with the heroes even of the genuine medieval chivalric aristocratic romances”; see Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, 244.

<sup>105</sup> This Arthurian sentiment is true, for Watt, in a more general sense: “We need to recognize how the culture could absorb new beliefs while retaining old ones, could modify doctrines, could accommodate words and icons, ambiguities and contradictions. There may have been Reformation and Civil War, riot and rebellion, but the basic mental décor did not change as suddenly or completely as historians would sometimes lead us to believe”; see

### The Endurance of the Arthurian Icon

*The Faerie Queene* and the popular romance tradition illustrate the wide variety in depictions of the Arthurian icon in early modern England. Spenser's contribution is particularly important, as he suggests that Arthur—and the romance tradition itself—could be usefully employed as a national vehicle at the end of the sixteenth century. *The Faerie Queene*'s singular status as the only early modern epic to feature the Arthurian legend has led many scholars to believe that interest in Arthur declined in the seventeenth century. While this may be true with respect to writers, it does not necessarily mean that the reading public felt the same way. The fact that publishers continued to print Arthurian romance testifies to the figure's continued relevance for a wide variety of readers. These romances, connected to Spenser's great text as sources or descendents, sometimes push the Arthurian icon to extremes: in Johnson's *Tom a Lincoln* and Shurley's *Great Brittain's Glory*, the use of satire and alternate endings, respectively, threaten to compromise Arthur's national import. However, while authors such as Johnson and Shurley do indeed test the icon's limits, like their predecessor Spenser they include enough of the medieval champion's history, imagery, and rhetoric to make Arthur recognizable in his new contexts. Thus, while perhaps not infinite, Arthur's limits are vast: as long as he retains his significance as unrepentant conqueror, he can survive even the occasional harsh satire, expanding his role to embody Spenser's ideal reader, Johnson's reckless adulterer, and Shurley's founder of monasteries.

The romance Arthur's ability to adapt to such an extent illustrates the importance of cultural icons to nation building—and, after the Civil Wars, rebuilding. John White's edition of

---

*Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, 332. This position on cultural change intersects helpfully with David A. Summers's claim that cultural icons can accrue new meanings, but they do not easily relinquish their extant significance.

Shurley's story, "imperfect" as it is in its strange alternate woodcut and odd as it is given the drastic changes in Shurley's narrative, is still able to conjure a version of Arthur who is recognizable as an important national hero. Both Tessa Watt and Margaret Spufford make points about the romance tradition's unique stability throughout the volatile sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Spufford goes so far as to argue, "The chapbook world is one in which the Restoration and Civil War might never have happened... There is no kind of folk memory of the Wars of the Roses. The Reformation might never have happened either."<sup>106</sup> This is not entirely true with respect to the Arthurian icon, for Arthur did change: Spenser's Protestant revision, Johnson's satiric portrayal, Parker's self-consciousness about "tedious" history, and Shurley's removal of civil conflict suggest that the Arthurian legend's adaptations reflect contemporary political concerns. Spufford's point is helpful, however, for considering the rather striking fact that Arthurian romance survived the Civil War at all. So often associated with the identity of Tudor and Stuart monarchs, Arthur might have reasonably been dropped as a useful national symbol in a country still reeling from the execution of Charles I. But Arthur endured in a form that, while certainly novel, was not beyond recognition. Arthur's inherent "instability" means that he can adapt to serve the ideological needs of a nation that is also constantly changing. In light of its print history, I argue that Arthurian romance is the genre most illustrative of that ability to adapt. Romance is also the genre that illustrates most clearly the fact that Arthur was not the sole property of rulers and writers: although no Spenserian successor stepped up to write an Arthurian epic for the Stuarts, the continual appearance of chapbook-length Arthurian texts throughout the seventeenth century means that the nation—comprised of a great variety of readerships—consistently created demand for an Arthurian England.

---

<sup>106</sup> Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, 219.

## Chapter 3

### **Inventing with Arthur: Heavenly Fathers and Earthly Obligations in Stuart Pageantry**

So strong was the Arthurian tradition established by the Tudors—reflected and encouraged by over a century of Arthurian historical debate and romance in print—that the comparatively compromised portrayal of Arthur under the Stuarts may suggest not Arthur’s declining relevance as a national icon but instead the inability or unwillingness of writers and monarchs of the Stuart dynasty to take Arthur seriously. The Arthurian icon, embraced by Henry VII in his own imagery, became firmly tied to conceptions of the English nation, even at the very beginning of the Tudor dynasty. As subsequent Tudors like Henry VIII and Elizabeth I continued this tradition, Arthur only gained strength as a national signifier. Given this precedent, it is not surprising that James I, Prince Henry, and Charles I and the writers of their pageantry all made attempts to incorporate Arthurian signifiers into Stuart iconography: masque and pageant writers like Ben Jonson, Thomas Carew, Anthony Munday, and John Webster used Galfridian themes to represent these monarchs’ agendas in a way that suggested continuity and stability over periods of transition. However, the fact that such performances were often strained (or, in Prince Henry’s case, short-lived) suggests that the Stuart dynasty was far less compatible with the Arthurian icon than its Tudor predecessor had been. Furthermore, the appearance of pageant and masque texts in print during the Stuarts’ reign meant that such performances’ influence extended far beyond that of those written for the Tudors. Taking into account the sustained interest in printed Arthurian romance throughout and after the Stuart dynasty, the compromised portrayal of Arthur in printed masques and pageants may have done as much or more to injure the reputation of the given monarch in his subjects’ eyes as it did to degrade the Arthurian legend. As a powerful cultural

icon, Arthur could be adapted as the country's needs demanded, successfully providing stability during periods of volatility. But writers and rulers who hoped to use that power also had to take into account Arthur's reputation outside the court—the famous king's recognizability in contexts ranging from the court to the “common sort” solidified the significance of the Arthurian icon and granted it the ability to *compromise* the ideologies of those monarchs whose pageant writers degraded or neglected it.

The Arthurian icon's presence in Tudor pageants was well established even by the early sixteenth century, and, since it only increased in circulation due to Leland's historical debate and the appearance of national romances like Spenser's, it is not surprising that writers of Stuart pageants felt the possibilities and obligations inherent in following suit. In 1501, the (anonymous) writer for Prince Arthur and Katharine of Aragon's wedding pageantry had chosen the medieval legacy of King Arthur and his association with the bright star Arcturus as key elements in his figuration of Prince Arthur.<sup>1</sup> Building on this tradition over a century later, Ben Jonson's *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610) and Thomas Carew's *Coelum Britannicum* (1633) also portray their respective patrons as King Arthur's heirs with stellar avatars, suggesting a link between the Stuarts and the Tudors in their appropriation of British myth. The cultural cache Arthur gained and sustained between the early sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—and presumably the reason Jonson and Carew chose to reprise Arthur's celestial role—is an example of what William Hunt has called “mythic capital”—as he puts it, “the reservoir of legitimacy available to a regime.” The potency of this “legitimacy reservoir” is directly related to the

---

<sup>1</sup> I use the spelling “Katharine” based on the spelling in Gordon Kipling's EETS edition of the wedding pageants. “Arcturus” is a bright star in the constellation Boötes (the Herdsman).

capacity of a given regime to occupy the symbolic centre of the integrating collective myth.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I more particularly suggest that early modern England's mythic capital was often constituted by associating a monarch with the collective myth of King Arthur: or to put it simply, that English mythic capital was often specifically *Arthurian* capital. Consequently, a pageant writer's particular portrait of his king as Arthur's heir reflected the extent to which that monarch perpetuated the myths so ingrained in the kingdom he inherited or overtook. In light of the fact that Jonson and Carew present increasingly ambivalent re-imaginings of the celestial Arthurian pageant, it is tempting to conclude that Arthur simply became less relevant under the Stuarts. However, when examined in light of the Arthurian myth's capacity to weather centuries of drastic cultural change and reappear in new but recognizable strains, Jonson's and Carew's pageants suggest that it was perhaps the Stuarts themselves—and not Arthur—who became mythically bankrupt.

James I, Prince Henry, and Charles I reaped benefits and suffered derogation from the variety of associations between their own royal bodies and the Arthurian icon in masque and civic pageant, in performance and in such entertainments' lives in print. As Claire McEachern argues, the sovereign “embodied, becomes familiar” to his or her nation's subjects, thereby creating a bond between monarch and public.<sup>3</sup> Although Arthur's body rarely appeared in Stuart pageantry or masque, rhetoric and images equating the monarch to Arthur or Arthur's heir were especially prevalent during the first half of the seventeenth century. The fact that James's and

---

<sup>2</sup> William Hunt, “The Spectral Origins of the English Civil War” in *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill*, ed. Geoff Ely and William Hunt (New York: Verso Books, 1988), 305-29; 313.

<sup>3</sup> Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Charles's respective policies conflicted with Arthurian iconography portrayed in these masques highlights the brief but significant campaign of the young Prince Henry. Like the Tudors, Henry seems to have understood that the figure of Arthur traditionally became the (powerful) property of the person who retold his story most compellingly—and Henry yearned to act out that story himself. The question of whether Henry's version of Arthurian display would have been compelling to his subjects-to-be (compared with James's and Charles's deployments of the myth)—whether Arthur's "embodiment" via the Stuart monarchs actually cultivated an intimate familiarity with their subjects—scholars can only begin to approach through print, the medium that unites masque and civic pageant in its ability to bring the Stuarts' performances into the public eye. By examining the civic pageants and court masques most closely indebted to Galfridian myth performed and printed during the reigns (or investiture) of James I, Prince Henry, and Charles I, I argue that a monarch may most effectively accrue "mythic capital" with his nation by acknowledging the historical obligation that he play its attendant heroes to advantage.

I have chosen the "celestial" masque as the guiding thread for the masque sections of this chapter for two reasons: the first and most evident is that Jonson and Jones's *Barriers* for Prince Henry is the most thoroughly Arthurian masque or pageant of the early modern period, and it features a stellified Arthur. Second, this genre is one that the Tudors had used many times in representing both King Arthur and their monarchs—most notably, in the wedding pageantry for Prince Arthur and Katharine of Aragon. By illustrating that the Arthur of Renaissance pageantry reached its peak in Jonson's nod to a tradition already well-established by the early seventeenth century, I suggest that Arthurian iconography was not only a means of inventing an effective

image for a ruler, but also a source of obligation and anxiety with respect to the Stuarts' predecessors. Given the extent to which Arthur and the Tudors had become linked, the Stuarts "inherited" a tradition of Arthurian representation—which was not always compatible with their very different ideals. James's emphasis on peaceful unification and Charles's focus on his own singularity threatened the militant, chivalric community signified by Arthurian icons. Jonson's and Carew's celestial masques illustrate James's, Henry's, and Charles's differences from one another—and from the Tudors—as they "pass down" the burden of an Arthurian performance. Because these two masques alone do not illustrate the wider spectrum of attempts to ally the Stuarts with Galfridian (if not Arthurian) history, I also briefly consider the more "earthly" icons of Stuart civic pageantry. Anthony Munday's *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* (1605) and John Webster's *Monuments of Honour* (1624) offer another glimpse of James, Henry, and Charles, in more "earthly" roles they might have pulled off effectively had they made different decisions or, in Henry's case, lived longer. Munday's civic pageant depicts James as the land-unifying Brutus; Webster's implies Charles's struggles in the decaying Henry's shadow. Providing valuable context to the celestial masques' portrayals of Arthur, these pageants indicate that accepting or rejecting an Arthurian role was not an easy decision.

I also discuss these civic pageants because, before either text becomes a printed book, they function so very differently than masques and therefore offer another means of considering royal iconography as it intersects with citizen desire. While masques were entertainments directed at monarchs and their courts, civic pageants more obviously alluded to the public. Therefore, the image of a ruler in his own court could be very different than that projected in the streets of London. The disparate portraits of Stuart kings are brought together in the medium that

had its genesis in their troubled dynasty: the printed masque and pageant. In print, spectacles that were more often experienced at court or glimpsed briefly through a crowd were available for more leisurely and thorough perusal in pamphlet-length books. Usually printed with economy (not luxury) in mind, printed masque and pageant texts brought royal spectacle to the people. Given the continued demand for Arthurian books, especially romances, throughout the Stuart period, the English public must have had an understanding of what it believed Arthur signified and how he functioned as a national icon. If a printed masque or pageant implied that a monarch was ill suited for Arthurian icons, it may have compromised the very “mythic capital” that it was royal pageantry’s mission to accrue. Understanding the obligations the Stuarts inherited from the Tudors (whose celestial Arthur the Stuarts had co-opted for themselves) and the debts they owed to the English subject (whose conceptions of Arthur had kept the king alive in print for over a century) is essential to comprehending the power of the cultural icon’s status as writers used him to represent the agendas of kings who were becoming increasingly ambivalent about a nation represented by Arthur.

### **Tudor Capital: Prince Arthur as a Celestial King Arthur**

In 1501 Tudor England celebrated the marriage of Katharine of Aragon to Prince Arthur with an elaborate series of six pageants emphasizing the dynasty’s desire for both glory and stability at the dawn of the sixteenth century. Capitalizing on the prince’s mythic namesake and England’s corresponding hopes that its “second Arthur” would be able to unite a kingdom still smarting from the Wars of the Roses, the pageant writer imbues his entertainment with nostalgic and anticipatory Arthurian implications. As Katharine traveled through London and toward St.

Paul's, she was greeted with eloquent poetry and intricate kinetic sculpture that narrated and served as a backdrop to the journey towards her betrothed.<sup>4</sup> The references to Arthurian myth and its anticipated reprisal in the sixteenth century must have been striking both for Katharine herself and for the many onlookers who, together, experienced the princess's incorporation into English culture. The first (decidedly Arthurian) pageant—the one that begins Katharine's journey—features St. Katherine, who promises to aid her namesake in her passage towards the Throne of Honour where Katharine will join Prince Arthur; it also features St. Ursula, who assures Katharine of the glory that will proceed from her impending union. Such glory, Ursula tells Katharine, derives at least partially from King Arthur's mythic legacy as it manifests in Katharine's intended spouse:

Trouthe it is that owt of myn lynage came  
 Arthure the wise, noble, and valliaunt kyng,  
 That in this region was furst of his name,  
 And for his strength, honour, and all thing  
 Mete for his estate, he was resembling  
 Arthure, the noble signe in heven,  
 Beautee of the northe, with bright sterres sevene.  
 [...]  
 As Arthure, your spouse, than the secunde nowe  
 Succedith the furst Arthure in dignitie,  
 So in like wise, Madame Kateryn, yow  
 As secunde Ursula shall succede me...  
 (Book II. lines 99-105; 113-116).<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> See Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Policy* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1969). Anglo sums up the progression of six pageants: “The first pageant serves to introduce both the main theme and the personalities of the bride and bridegroom. The second is more particularly concerned with the bride, showing that she must proceed through Policy, Noblesse, and Virtue, to ultimate Honour in the company of her husband. The third pageant consists of favourable prognostications for the future of the young couple, but the fourth counterbalances the second by being especially concerned with the bridegroom alone. The last two pageants relate to both Katharine and Arthur—the fifth alluding to the sacred character of matrimony, and the sixth stressing that virtue must lead the couple to the throne of Honour”(59).

<sup>5</sup> All excerpts from this pageant come from *The Recept of the Ladie Kateryne*, ed. Gordon Kipling, 1 vol., EETS OS 296 (London, 1996).

Thus, at the very beginning of Katharine's journey, she learns that in marrying Prince Arthur she is also allying herself with "the wise, noble, and vailaunt king" so important (if disputed) for centuries of English history, and a figure with a celestial counterpart—Arcturus. Furthermore, Prince Arthur is destined to succeed King Arthur "in dignitie," a hopeful promise that this second Arthur will reprise the characteristics that made the figure who was "furst of his name" so essential to England's mythic capital. During the five ensuing pageants, which build upon and complicate this Arthurian apotheosis by broadening Prince/King Arthur's "vallaunt" portrait to include emphases on virtue and justice, Katharine could not have failed to remember that the writer had chosen to open his pageant with specific reference to Arthurian legend. Furthermore, just as he reminds the princess, the pageant writer also reminds Tudor subjects that the Arthurian tradition is an essential context for the optimistic promise of Prince Arthur's reign.

The Arthurian implications of the wedding pageantry reflect the Tudor hope that Prince Arthur would unite a still-conflicted kingdom, strengthening the dynasty Henry VII had established and stabilizing the Tudors' claim to the English throne. Capitalizing on the proto-national Arthurian emphasis of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (1138), Henry VII named his son Arthur, and from the prince's birth in 1486 until his death in 1502, poets and pageant devisers followed Henry's example, repeatedly establishing links between the ancient Arthur and his supposed second coming.<sup>6</sup> However, the emphases of the wedding

---

<sup>6</sup> See Steven Gunn and Linda Monckton, "Arthur Tudor, the Forgotten Prince" in *Arthur Tudor Prince of Wales: Life, Death and Commemoration*, ed. Steven Gunn and Linda Monckton (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2009). Gunn and Mockton explain: "The prince was born and christened at Winchester, surely by design, since his parents had left London and settled down at Winchester three weeks before his premature arrival. Winchester was linked to King Arthur, as the city where he held court and proclaimed tournaments in the thirteenth-century romances of Chrétien de Troyes and other authors...As the prince grew up the two Arthurs would continue to be linked, whether by Welsh poets predicting as great a career for the new Arthur as for the old, or by heralds tracing

pageants suggest that the twelfth-century Arthur warranted some revision in order to fit the needs of sixteenth-century England: the warlike Arthur who starred in Geoffrey's history apparently proved insufficient in promoting Prince Arthur as a monarch who not only wins glory for—but also heals and stabilizes—his country in the aftermath of the Wars of the Roses. Reflecting these concerns, the pageant writer crafts an Arthurian avatar that is recognizable as a conqueror but also presumably more palatable to a kingdom still reeling from conflict. Such revision is most evident in the fourth pageant of the six-part series, which depicts Prince Arthur as a godlike figure in a sun-chariot, wearing the Armour of Justice and surrounded by spinning stars and armed knights. As Katharine gazes at this magnificent spectacle, Fronesis (Understanding) welcomes Katharine

into Brytayne,  
 The land of Arthure, your spouse most bounteous,  
 Whoes expresse ymage and fygure certayne  
 Ye may behold, all armyd not in vayne  
 With corporall armour oonly, but in like wise  
 With the sperituall Armour of Justice.

Which Armour of Justice, as the prophete seith,  
 Is of everych realme the peasible conservature.  
 Wherefor as ye se here this chare on hight  
 Stondith in his compas alwey ferme and sure,  
 Lykewise the realme of your worthy spouse, Arthure,  
 Shynyng in Vertu, shall stond perpetually  
 Within the compas of his noble progeny.  
 (II. 519-532)

Like his ancestor King Arthur, Prince Arthur is figured with the “corporall armour” required for success on the battlefield; however, in light of the instability attending a kingdom only recently free from civil war, this new Arthur also embodies “peasible conservature” denoted by the

---

the prince's pedigree back, through his mother's Mortimer ancestors with their Welsh princely blood, to the era—though not, admittedly, the blood line—of the greatest British hero of them all”(1-2).

Armour of Justice. This hybrid figure is especially promising because it employs enough of the Galfridian Arthur's characteristics to be recognizable as a legitimizing link to the past, while also introducing new Arthurian attributes that will aid the prince in the sixteenth century. If he can be both chivalric hero and just ruler, as Fronesis suggests, Prince Arthur's seat amongst his "noble progeny" is assured, suggesting his place in long line of kings who have merited a monument in the heavens.<sup>7</sup> In these pageants, then, Prince Arthur appears as a revised—but still recognizable—iteration of the most famous king in British history, and in turn establishes the Tudors as "merely" the newest installment of a long line of kings promoting England's renown in Arthur's name.

Although Prince Arthur himself died shortly after his marriage to Katharine, the literary progeny of their wedding pageantry was to prove as enduring as the political fallout of the marriage in Tudor England. The pageant writer had posited Prince Arthur as the second coming

---

<sup>7</sup> The Arthurian is not the only—or even the most prevalent—emphasis in the six-pageant series. In fact, in *Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Policy*, Sydney Anglo argues that readers of this pageant have continuously overemphasized the importance of its Arthurian associations as elements that denote the Tudors' claim to a British ancestry through Arthur. However, in his book *The Triumph of Honour*, Gordon Kipling explains that the source the pageant writer used most heavily in structuring the pageant, Jean Molinet's *Le Trosne d'honneur* (a Burgundian elegy written on the death of Philip the Good), suggests that the pageant writer's astrological emphasis was indeed intended to be Arthurian in the British, Galfridian tradition: "Katharine's journey to the Throne of Honour occurs... under the most favourable of astrological omens (Arcturus), yet the pageant-master was to find the mythological and literary significance of Arcturus even more important than the merely astrological. As it happens, Prince Arthur was actually born under the star Arcturus, and by combining that coincidence with Duke Philip's encounter with King Arthur upon one of the spheres of Molinet's cosmos, the pageant-master brilliantly develops Katharine's Triumph of Honour into an Arthurian romance fit to stand beside those of Malory and Spenser"; see *The Triumph of Honour: Burgundian Origins of the Elizabethan Renaissance* (Leiden, Neth.: Leiden University Press, 1977), 83. Kipling's scholarship on the sources of the pageant has done a great deal to bring its variety of allusions to light. I would argue that although the pageant writer's references to Molinet's Arthurian elements offer excellent support for connections between King Arthur/Arcturus/Prince Arthur, the speeches in the first pageant, even in and of themselves, would have invoked a tradition so palpable in the early sixteenth century that it could not have failed to conjure King Arthur for its audience. The subsequent Arcturus allusions—perhaps especially, the impressive image of an armored prince in his sun-chariot—would all be tinged with this initial Arthurian association. After all, one did not need to be well read in Burgundian elegy or the scholastic tradition in order to recognize whom Ursula references in her description of "Arthure, the wise, noble, and valliaunt kyng." Arthur's is a mythic tradition so deeply embedded in English culture that even a passing allusion to his evokes associations in readers/listeners/viewers, and such traditions are not easily excised from English memory. The Arthurian tradition ultimately overwhelms both attempts to deny its presence and attempts to pinpoint its influences exactly. Those who inherit it must continually attend to its extensive, unwieldy significance.

of King Arthur, and intimated that the Tudor prince would serve to unite and heal a kingdom as a martial, just ruler in the tradition of his mythic namesake. In a cruel twist, Prince Arthur's death, and the result that Katharine subsequently married his brother Henry, actually meant that England would trade its hopes for a peaceful kingdom under a stable King Arthur for the tumultuous reign of King Henry VIII. Despite—or perhaps became of—England's dashed hopes for a second King Arthur, the figure of Arthur in Tudor pageantry endured well past 1502, serving to color the royal iconography of Tudor monarchs Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth I. Because the Tudor masques and pageants featuring Arthur did not appear in print, I do not treat them extensively in this chapter, but their importance as the legacy inherited by the Stuarts makes them essential context for the analysis that follows. Particularly important performances include a pageant at Coventry in 1498 in which Prince Arthur is welcomed by King Arthur; Henry VIII's chivalric tournaments, as well as his gestures of naming his son Arthur (who died in infancy) and having its own portrait painted on the Winchester Round Table; and the Earl of Leicester's entertainment for Elizabeth at Kenilworth in 1575, which featured the Lady of the Lake and King Arthur.<sup>8</sup> As the monarch whose self-presentation was perhaps most fully realized, Elizabeth I is an especially fruitful subject for consideration. Though her sex kept Elizabeth from adopting the Arthurian performances of Prince Arthur and Henry VIII, writers still staged

---

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, although Elizabeth did not “dress herself” as Arthur, she supposedly jealously guarded the icon. According to Gordon Kipling, when Leicester was hailed in the Netherlands as “a second Arthur” (in this pageant, Arthur was also figured as a star), Elizabeth was furious. See Kipling, *The Triumph of Honor*, 85. See also R. C. Strong and J. A. van Dorsten, *Leicester's Triumph* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1964). Strong and van Dorsten explain that during his procession into the Hague, Leicester was greeted thus by the Dutch: “Mighty Arthur, ruling Britain, drove out those who persecuted the people, with an honour which does not fade, and protected the orthodox of his time, for which he is remembered as a glorious prince: we hope that you will be a second Arthur”(47-8). Elizabeth's displeasure with Leicester as a presumptuous “second Arthur” reflects the royal perception of the Arthurian icon as the symbolic property of the monarchy. See also Elizabeth Michelsson, *Appropriating Arthur: The Arthurian Legend in English Drama and Entertainments 1485-1625* (Uppsala, Swed.: Uppsala University Press, 1999).

Arthurian pageants for her entertainment, and repeatedly linked her with the celestial icon of judgment, Astraea.<sup>9</sup> Entertained by Arthurian spectacle and herself figured as a heavenly signifier of wisdom, Elizabeth's reign illustrates that even at the end of the Tudor dynasty, the prominence of the celestial and/or Arthurian pageant had not faded.

Arthur's perceived usefulness as a Tudor avatar with the capacity to smooth transitions and knit up conflict meant that poets who inherited the task of smoothing England's transition to the Stuart dynasty invoked him with new vigor. In the most potent reprisals of the celestial Arthurian motif since the early sixteenth century, masque writers Ben Jonson and Thomas Carew (both working with Inigo Jones) attempted to reconcile James I and Prince Henry, and then Charles I, respectively, to the England they had inherited from the Tudors. As with the Tudor pageant writer's translation of Prince Arthur into King Arthur as Arcturus in 1501, so Ben Jonson's *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610) and Thomas Carew's *Coelum Britannicum* (1633) supply their respective kings and princes with celestial Arthurian avatars and reprise the question: what is at stake in equating a monarch with Arthur via spectacle, and (for the Stuarts) what obligations come with capitalizing on these well-established poetic and political legacies? In order to make Arthur's image fit James, Jonson devised an Arthur far more dedicated to peace than martial glory, but continually compromised that figure in the same masque in order to reflect the very different—and even competitive—martial interests of James's eldest son Prince Henry. Carew, on the other hand, declined to reprise Jonson's balancing act, declaring instead that Charles's fame surpassed Arthur's and that the king had no need for an Arthurian avatar. As

---

<sup>9</sup> Importantly, Thomas Dekker's Astraea attends James I in Dekker's contributions to the royal entry pageants of 1604. Though they were both given this association with "judgment," Elizabeth and James were very different with respect to the iconography that co-exists with Astraea. James's was far more pacific.

Jonson and Carew compromise the Arthurian stellar tradition for the sake of their monarchs' seventeenth-century political goals, the Stuarts' distance from English myth comes sharply into focus. In their reprisals of Tudor celestial themes, both *Prince Henry's Barriers* and *Coelum Britannicum* illustrate the ways in which Stuart royals might have hoped to capitalize on or supersede the representative possibilities of the mythic Arthurian past, and the ways in which those hopes were qualified by a failure to attend to the obligations inherent in deploying Arthurian capital in the seventeenth century.

### **Arthur Revised: Jonson Pacifies English Myth for James I**

Taking the English throne in 1603 after Elizabeth's death, James inherited a difficult situation: he had to retain the support of an England accustomed to Tudor policy and iconography while engaging in his own style of ruling and representation. His writers' attempts to capitalize on Tudor culture while asserting James's difference from his predecessors ultimately made the king appear a somewhat contradictory figure. Early in his reign James was associated rather seamlessly with Arthur. William Camden asserts that James was even known to refer to himself Arthur's heir: "his most Excellent Majestie our dread Sovereigne, was made this declaring his undoubted rightfull claime to the Monarchy of Britain, as the successor of the valourous king Arthur." According to Camden, James also regularly referenced the anagram "Charles James Steuart: Claimes Arthurs Seate."<sup>10</sup> This idea of ascending to Arthur's legacy via

---

<sup>10</sup> William Camden, *Remains Concerning Britain*, ed. R. D. Dunn (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 145. The source of this anagram was a 1595 poem by Walter Quin, tutor to princes Henry and Charles, entitled *Sertvm poeticvm, in honorem Iacobi sexyti*. The timing of this poem—and the location of the terrestrial "Arthur's seat" in Edinburgh, Scotland—makes clear that there was a Scottish Arthurian tradition that preceded James's deployment of the legend as an English king.

claiming his “seate”/land is one that poets and pageant writers reused throughout the Stuart dynasty.<sup>11</sup> James’s own emphasis on an Arthurian legacy suggests that the Stuart dynasty began with at least a rhetorical connection to one of the most potent Tudor myths. In light of such a connection, it may not seem surprising that in 1610, Ben Jonson put forth a masque very much in the tradition of Prince Arthur and Katharine’s 1501 wedding pageants—in which James, via the image of a stellified Arthur, is said to be the famous king’s heir, claiming Arthur’s throne and even outshining his royal predecessor.<sup>12</sup> By 1610, however, James’s royal image as the next British Hope was not as believable as it might have been in 1604—and indeed in Jonson’s masque James appears to be far less suited to an Arthurian role than his early rhetoric had suggested he was. Specifically, the pacific emphasis so prevalent in James’s policy and reflected in Jonson’s masque grinds against the Arthurian icon’s insistence on martial exploits. As a result, instead of reassuring the court that James would make good on his promise to be a second Arthur and smooth the transition between dynasties, Jonson’s pacific masque illustrates just how incompatible James and Arthurian myth already were by 1610.

---

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Thomas Campion’s *Lord Hay’s Masque* (1607) and Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Oberon* (1611, discussed below). Neither is concerned with royal Arthurian constellations, but both make reference to James as the claimant of Arthur’s seat.

<sup>12</sup> In James’s royal entry pageant in 1604, however, Jonson (and Thomas Dekker) had called James “a second Brute,” an allusion with related yet very different implications than those invoked by a second Arthur. Anthony Munday’s *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* (1605) is an even more striking example of James as a second Brute: in this Lord Mayor’s Show, heavily indebted to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1138), there is no mention of Geoffrey’s most famous hero—Arthur—only references to Brutus and the ways in which his actions as founding figure prefigured those of James. In making James *Arthur’s* heir, Jonson channels the militaristic emphasis of the Tudors; however, in styling James a second *Brute*, Jonson and his fellow poets echo James’s own personal policies—an emphasis on his role as unifier of Britain and the peace made possible by such a founding figure. The fact that Jonson represents James as both Arthur and Brutus in different contexts testifies to the strange hybridity inherent in James’s rule—a hybridity that would create difficulties for the two sons who inherited (or presumed to inherit) his kingdom. Reflecting James’s emphasis on judgment over war, Roy Strong calls James “the British Solomon”; see *Henry Prince of Wales and England’s Lost Renaissance* (Thames and Hudson, 1986), 141. See also my discussion of James as Brutus, below.

Jonson wrote *The Speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers* for Prince Henry's investiture on January 6, 1610, but the central celestial comparison in this masque (at least on the surface) is that between James and a much-pacified King Arthur. In revising Arthur as a veritable Solomon, Jonson attempts to remake the martial hero into a compatible avatar for James. By pushing Arthur to the point that he appears as little more than a romance relic, however, Jonson compromises too much of what made Arthur so useful to the Tudors and ultimately illustrates James's *distance* from the king's mythic legacy. The central speaking characters—Merlin, Arthur, the Lady of the Lake, and Chivalry—attest to the fact that Jonson's masque is undeniably Arthurian. The masque's setting, designed by Inigo Jones, emphasizes the historical importance of such Arthuriana: Jones provides a spectacular set of ruins—the House of Chivalry—which has lately fallen into decay. In her opening speech, The Lady of the Lake laments the state of Chivalry:

Onely the house of *Chivalrye* (how ere  
The inner parts and store be full, yet here  
In that which gentry should sustaine) decayed  
Or rather ruin'd seemes; her buildings layd  
Flat with the earth...<sup>13</sup>

The gentry whose responsibility it is to sustain Chivalry has failed in its duties, and, as the Lady will soon reveal, it will be the job of the young knight Meliades (danced by Prince Henry) to restore it.<sup>14</sup> This restoration will only be possible, however, if Meliades/Prince Henry emulates his father James, who is named as Arthur's heir and will be responsible for healing a tradition

---

<sup>13</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers* in *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (London: William Stansby, 1616), 965-6.

<sup>14</sup> Using as a source the medieval *Les Prophecies du Merlin*, Jonson's masque deals with the actions of the thirteenth-century character Meliades, preserved for his seventeenth-century responsibility of repairing the House of Chivalry.

that neglect has compromised. Demonstrating clear parallels to its 1501 source, Jonson's masque figures the Arthurian avatar as "a starre about"; in Jonson's masque, however, Arthur's role is not only that of an evocative celestial image, but also that of a (speaking) advisor to young Meliades. At his first appearance, Arthur commands,

Stand not maz'd  
 Thy eyes haue here on greater glories gaz'd  
 And not beene frighted. I thy ARTHVR am  
 Translated to a starre; and of that frame  
 Or constellation was calld of mee  
 So long before, as showing what I should bee  
 ARCTVRVS, once thy king, and now thy starre.  
 Such the rewards of all good princes are.<sup>15</sup>

In the established tradition of glorifying rulers by representing them as Arcturus/King Arthur, Jonson praises James in the same style the pageant writer had used for Prince Arthur in 1501. In light of such connections between Arthur, Arcturus, and the entire line of "good princes" that have led up to Arthur's own role as heavenly father, the famous king names his successor: now that "MERLIN'S misticke prophesies are absolu'd," Arthur is here to give his blessing to James:

Faire fall his vertue, that doth fill that throne,  
 In which I joy to find my self so out-shone;  
 And for the greater, wish, men should him take  
 As it is nobler to restore then make.<sup>16</sup>

James has indeed "claimed Arthur's seat" as his anagram suggests: Arthur himself makes the comparison between the two of them, and even steps aside to allow his successor to assume prominence. By portraying him as Arthur's heir, Jonson enables James to benefit from an association with hundreds of years of heroism, apparently smoothing the transition from the

---

<sup>15</sup> Jonson, *Barriers*, 966.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 972.

Tudor to the Stuart dynasty. In emphasizing James's particularly potent ability to outshine his famous predecessor, Jonson suggests that chivalry is surely on its way to restoration.

Although an Arthurian association would presumably have called to mind the armor-clad conqueror of the Middle Ages, Jonson heavily revises the Arthurian icon, suggesting that such arms are to be used only for defense. This is perhaps most evident when Merlin, in a shocking conflict of interest, warns Meliades to:

[Imitate] not the deeds  
Of antique knights, to catch their fellows' steeds.  
Or ladies' palfreys, rescue from the force  
Of a fell giant, or some score to unhorse.  
These were bold stories of our Arthur's age;  
But here are other acts; another stage,  
And scene appears; it is not since as then:  
No giants, dwarfs, or monsters here, but men.  
His arts must be to govern, and give laws  
To peace no less than arms. His fate here draws  
An empire with it, and describes each state  
Preceding there, that he should imitate.<sup>17</sup>

This critical speech draws a line between the pleasures of myth and practical lessons in ruling well; in other words, it relegates Arthur to the category of extracurricular romance reading and denies him the heroic role with which he was so often associated in the sixteenth century. The "bold stories of our Arthur's age" are outdated, Merlin claims, and the time has come to turn away from martial, imperial models and to concentrate instead on sound lawmaking and defense, topics James had stressed in his writings for his son Henry, which later passed to Charles.<sup>18</sup> In some sense Merlin's speech reprises the emphasis of the "Armour of Justice" Prince Arthur wore

---

<sup>17</sup> Jonson, *Barriers*, 972.

<sup>18</sup> See especially *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and *Basilicon Doron* (1599) in *James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

in the 1501 pageant: in both cases, martial might is being used to *protect* the glory of the kingdom. However, Jonson's revision goes much further than that of his century-old predecessor. What Merlin prescribes are not simply reiterations of past Arthurian pageants but "other acts" on "another stage" entirely. By 1610 Jacobean England was concerned with the world of men—not of myth—and therefore could only abide a pacific Arthurian avatar. Arthur himself has no quibble with this policy, evidently acquiescing to the revision when he gives Meliades a shield (and not a sword), "To arme his maiden valour and to show/Defensiue armes th'offensive should fore-goe."<sup>19</sup> In presenting the seventeenth century as a time of "another stage" whereupon even Arthur agrees that his old performances should give way to those of lawmaking and peacekeeping, Jonson effectively modifies the Arthurian stellar pageant he inherited in order to conform to James's preferred politics.

The emphasis on inheritance in the masque lends further credit to James's policies in that it encourages young Meliades to emulate the sound decision-making practices of his British predecessors, lending a historical credibility to Jonson's novel Arthurian masque. The concept of using what one inherits from fathers—whether distant or immediate, mythic or material—consumes the rhetoric of Jonson's masque. In perhaps the most obvious example of this, near the

---

<sup>19</sup> Jonson. *Barriers*, 967. Prince Henry's investiture also featured a masque by Samuel Daniel entitled *Tethys' Festival*. Like Jonson's, Daniel's masque includes the character Meliades; however, in this case, the young knight receives a sword from Tethys—and not a shield:

And therewithal she wils him, greeete the Lord  
And Prince of th' Isles (the hope and the delight,  
Of all the Northerne Nations) with this sword  
Which she vnto Astraea sacred found,  
And not to be vnsheath'd but on iust ground.

Daniel's masque is not Arthurian, but is a critical companion to Jonson's in its consideration of Meliades's weapon of choice. The offer of a sword could be said to be more permissive of the pursuit of martial glory; however, the reference to "iust ground" suggests a defensive—not an aggressive—program of intended use. See Daniel's pageant in *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First, vol II*, ed. John Nichols (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1828), 346.

end of the masque, Merlin says that he will set forth a history of British heroes so that Meliades may read about their actions and model his own eventual kingship on them. “These worthiest Prince, are set you neere to reade,/ that ciuill arts the martial must precede,” Merlin explains, before launching into a history of other “worthy princes” from Richard I to James I.<sup>20</sup> In this description, Merlin does not shy away from mentioning martial victories, but he makes sure to emphasize the importance of policy over such conquest. For example, after extensive, exciting descriptions of sundry rulers’ battles on land and sea, Merlin warns Meliades:

So here in *Wales, Low Countreys, France, and Spaine*,  
 You may behold both on the land and mayne  
 The conquest got, the spoiles, the *trophæes* reard  
 By British kings, and such as noblest heard  
 Of all the nation, which may make t’ inuite  
 Your valour vpon need, but not t’ incite  
 Your neighbor Princes, give them all their due  
 And be prepared if they will trouble you.  
 He doth but scourge himselfe, his sword that drawes  
 Without a purse, a counsaile and a cause.<sup>21</sup>

Lest Meliades get carried away with the splendors of battle, Merlin tempers the euphoria of conquest with the practical elements needed for that conquest: money, good counsel, and a legitimate reason to fight. This concluding genealogy is especially important in light of a masque that puts such an emphasis on fathers: Meliades comes from a long line of British heroes, but chief among them is James, whose peaceful example he is urged to follow. As he must do with the Arthurian pageant he inherits from the Tudor writer of 1501, Jonson has to contain and redeploy the whole of English history: he capitalizes upon but continually qualifies the military successes of the Stuarts’ ancestors with emphases on the kinds of counsel and pacifism more

---

<sup>20</sup> Jonson, *Barriers*, 970.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 972.

compatible with James's ideology. Lingering behind Jonson's revision, however, is the figure of the prince himself, whose presence onstage as Meliades continually raises Arthur's military attributes despite Jonson's more obvious pacific emphases. Created for Henry's investiture but rhetorically aligning itself with James's preferences, Jonson's *Barriers* poses the complicated question of whether the wise pacific James or brave martial Henry is the better ideological fit for seventeenth-century England.

### **Arthur Revived: Jonson Reprises English Myth for Prince Henry**

Prince Henry, in preferred iconography and purported policy, was far more suited to Arthurian themes than was his pacific father. Although the central celestial comparison in Jonson's masque is between James and Arthur/Arcturus, Jonson wrote the masque for the occasion of the prince's investiture and, according to Roy Strong, its Arthurian emphasis was a request of the prince himself.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, despite its pacific insistence, there are more than a few glimpses of Henry's own very different preferences—a militaristic foundation that grinds against the peaceful veneer. Prince Henry, in short, was no James: his interest in Arthur's legacy was illustrative of his marked preference for martial, chivalric kingship. Henry's martial iconography was both instrumental to and symptomatic of a larger sense of unrest amongst certain factions in James's court, who longed for foreign aggression against Spain and for a united Protestant church that would spread its religion abroad. Henry became the central figure around whom

---

<sup>22</sup> In *Henry, Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance*, Roy Strong explains that both James I and Jonson were more complicit in than excited about Henry's preferences for an Arthurian show, given the militarism that informed Arthurian iconography. "For [the *Barriers*'] realization in verbal and visual terms the Prince employed Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones. Both obviously worked under specific direction, for the scenario and themes could only have stemmed from the Prince himself. Jonson was not attracted to Arthurian themes and indeed this forms his only use of the material"(142).

gathered those who favored what William Hunt calls “the Protestant vocation,” a position reflecting Henry’s desire to heroically unite Britain under Anglo-Calvinism and spread it abroad according to God’s divine plan for England. Hunt explains, “This was a mode of national consciousness...[that was] based on the belief that the English nation had been called by God to play a pivotal role in the advancing of his kingdom, and that God would reward or punish the English according to their fidelity to this mission.”<sup>23</sup> To those dissatisfied with James, Henry represented the return to the idea of the English nation as a militant instrument of God. Reflecting Henry’s political aims while promoting Jacobean pacifism, Jonson’s *Barriers* betray the tension between the king and his heir, including the latter’s escalating influence just before he died: under the surface of praise for James it acknowledges that the presumed future of the British court—the far more suitable recipient of Arthur’s legacy—was to be the champion of militant, Protestant imperialism.

*Prince Henry’s Barriers*, for all its pacific warnings, decidedly reflects the preferences of the prince for whom it was written. Not only is Meliades the character that ultimately restores Chivalry in the final scene (resulting in another elaborate stage design by Inigo Jones—the House of Chivalry’s renewal), but he will also end the masque in a tournament. In short, the masque begins with a chivalry-related problem, and ends with Meliades/Henry’s solving of that problem through military action. Such a structure tells the audience that, despite the pacifying rhetoric, the old ways of the Tudors have not disappeared entirely and promise to be resurrected fully by Prince Henry.<sup>24</sup> In the *Lady of the Lake*’s opening speech there is a sense both of

---

<sup>23</sup> Hunt, “Spectral Origins of the English Civil War,” 313.

<sup>24</sup> By 1610, England’s “House of Chivalry” was indeed very different if not actually in decay: the martial tournaments so much a part of early Tudor pageantry were not given the same spirited attention by pacific James.

nostalgia and of moving forward into new glories—a suspension between past and future and a promise of rebirth, denoting that the future will reprise and capitalize upon a recognizable past.<sup>25</sup>

The Lady addresses the audience:

A silence, calm as my waters, meet  
Your rais'd attentions, whilst my silver feet  
Touch on richer shore; and to this seat  
Vow my new duties, and mine old repeat.<sup>26</sup>

The Lady's "new duties" denote her assisting Merlin in instructing Meliades to emulate his father James. But by also promising to repeat old duties, the Lady suggests that the new House of Chivalry will still be recognizable as the reiteration of its ruined ancestor. With Meliades as its restorer, it will inevitably contain more than traces of militant chivalry. Just as chivalry will be different yet recognizable as a product of its medieval genesis, so Arthur himself emphasizes the importance of his own enduring tradition in a speech strikingly different than Merlin's emphasis on "other acts" and "another stage." After briefly paying lip service to James as a peaceful restorer, Arthur insinuates that it is actually Meliades/Henry who will *actively* bring about Chivalry's return in a traditional (martial) Arthurian capacity.<sup>27</sup> Arthur commands the Lady and Merlin:

---

See R. Malcolm Smuts, *Culture and Power in England, 1585-1685* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999). See also Martin Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Although Smuts makes the important point that chivalry was still very much part of the sense of honor amongst Stuart aristocrats, Butler asserts that many military-minded courtiers were dissatisfied with James's lack of imperial projects and therefore became devoted instead to Prince Henry, who showed far more interest in military matters.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe assert that "There is no Arthurian 'now'"—only nostalgia and the anticipation of second comings; see *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in Arthurian Tradition* (New York: Garland Press, 1988), xi.

<sup>26</sup> Jonson, *Barriers*, 965.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur briefly praises James by asserting that "it is nobler to restore than make" before moving on to a long speech about Meliades/Henry as Chivalry's champion (967).

Proceed in thy great work bring forth thy knight  
 Perserued for his times, that by the might  
 And magicke of his arme, he may restore  
 These ruin'd seates of vertue, and build more.  
 Let him be famous, as was TRISTRAM, *Tor.*  
 LAVC'LOT, and all our List of knight-hood: or  
 Who were before, or haue beene since. His name  
 Strike vpon heauen, and there sticke his fame.  
 Beyond the paths, and searches of this sunne  
 Let him tempt fate; and when a world is wunne,  
 Submit it duely to this state, and throne  
 Till time, and vtmost stay make that his owne.<sup>28</sup>

By the “might/ And magicke of his arme,” Prince Henry becomes a chivalric champion in the medieval Arthurian tradition of Tristram and Lancelot—a champion whose name will be struck, like Arthur’s, “upon heaven.” In this way Meliades recalls the Tudor pageant writer’s chariot riding, celestial prince dressed in the twin armors of battle and justice. Just as important, as a knight “perserued for his times” he also—like Prince Arthur before him—enacts King Arthur’s second coming. In short, although Jonson’s masque repeatedly praises James as the new exemplar, Henry’s preferences for the “old duties” of the Arthurian tradition consistently lurk behind and contradict the Jacobean emphasis on peace.

Taking a second look at Merlin’s concluding genealogy drives home the prominence of Henry’s preferences, in that Merlin cannot adequately contain centuries of British martial history with a simple reminder to make sure one is provoked before fighting. Like the Arthurian tradition at large, the martial emphasis consistently bleeds through attempts to pacify lengthy descriptions of battle scenes. As if recounting the exciting exploits of kings such as “that MARS of men/ the black Prince EDWARD” were not enough to compromise emphases on purse,

---

<sup>28</sup> Jonson, *Barriers*, 967.

counsel and cause, Merlin goes so far as to make a direct comparison between Prince Henry and famed warrior-king Henry V:

Yet rests the other thunder-bolt of warre  
 HARRY the fift, to whom in face you are  
 So like, as *Fate* would haue you so in worth,  
 Illustrious Prince. This vertue ne'er came forth,  
 But *Fame* flue greater for him, then shee did  
 For other mortalls; *Fate* her selfe did bid  
 To saue his life: The time it reach'd vnto,  
 Warre knew not how to giue him enough to doe.  
 His very name made head against his foes.  
 And here at *Agin-Court* where first it rose,  
 It there hangs still a comet ouer *France*,  
 Striking their malice blind, that dare aduance  
 A thought against it, lightned by your flame  
 That shall succeed him both in deed and name.<sup>29</sup>

This comparison alone has the potential to undo the pacific advice and qualifications on the chivalric tradition offered elsewhere. In a masque asking Meliades to learn good policy and emulate a shield-distributing father, this passage leaps out and reminds Henry and the audience that, although his most immediate father has a certain set of plans for him, there is an entirely different role model that Fate itself seems to have chosen for the young prince. Comparing Prince Henry to the famously martial Henry V both in appearance and in agenda suggests that Prince Henry has another “father” to emulate—and one whose reputation is far more in line with Henry’s interests than with James’s. Further, this passage reiterates the concept of celestial monuments as the “reward of all good princes”: Like Henry V, Prince Henry will seek the kinds of triumphs that will earn him a place in the heavens—not one that comes through mere succession, but one earned through conquest. As heir to both the chivalric tradition of which Arthur was so critical a part, as well as the revised Jacobean Arthur Jonson devises, Prince Henry

---

<sup>29</sup> Jonson, *Barriers*, 971.

must struggle to please James while asserting the preferences he has inherited from established Arthurian/Henrician traditions reaching centuries into the past.

In light of the fact that the Tudor pageant writer also revised Arthur in order to fit the needs of the fledgling dynasty in 1501, it is tempting to argue that what Jonson does is just a reiteration of the sixteenth-century attempt to make Arthur a hybrid warrior/arbiter of justice. However, in Jonson's *Barriers* Arthur is a fundamentally divided figure: at times he distributes shields and recommends pacific James as the behavioral model for kingship. At other times, the exploits of Lancelot and Tristram inform the masque, illustrating that in Jonson's masque Arthur is not so much a hybrid figure as he is alternately one thing or another. Unlike Spenser's Arthurian icon that encompasses many readings in one "image," Jonson's iteration continually changes to reflect conflicting emphases. The similarities between the Tudor pageant of 1501 and Jonson's *Barriers* actually end up illustrating just how contradictory Jonson's Arthurian avatar is. For example, the connection between Prince Arthur, James, and Prince Henry is that all three know when and how to exact justice—in both the wedding pageants and Jonson's *Barriers*, there is a clear emphasis on good decision-making and just rule. The difference between the portrayal of the two princes versus that of James, however, is that the pageant writer and Jonson align their respective *princes* with the *martial origins* of the Arthurian tradition, as well as its revised, justice-promoting version. For Prince Arthur and Prince Henry, an Arthurian avatar can be both martial and just. Gordon Kipling reminds his readers that Prince Arthur's role as the "Sun of Justice" in the fourth pageant of 1501 is heavily indebted to the martial chivalric tradition for which medieval Arthurian myth was fundamental:

By placing King Arthur in Charlemagne's Wain, the pageant-master combines the qualities of chivalry and justice...But as King Arthur, [Prince Arthur] also rides his

triumphal chariot as the paragon of medieval chivalry—‘a prince of all princes, the very flower,’ as Dame Wisdom calls him. In this sense, his armour is not merely symbolic but useful chivalric implement such as Dame Instruction Chevalereuse bestows upon her devotees.<sup>30</sup>

Both the pageant writer’s Sun of Justice/Prince Arthur and Jonson’s Meliades/Prince Henry are connected to the same royal image—Arthur as chivalric champion. For both princes, even when Arthur becomes a ruling figure and takes on the obligatory shields, scepters and scales of justice, he retains his armor, which signifies his ability to be ready for—and even pursue—conflict as the need arises.<sup>31</sup> Meliades’s greater sympathy with Prince Arthur’s avatar (than with James’s) raises questions regarding who is really “Arthur’s heir”—and troubles the usual trajectory of royal inheritance from father to son. Furthermore, as Jonson’s characters alternately insist that Prince Henry emulate James as pacific law-giver and then later imply that Prince Henry should be a second conquering Henry V, the masque exposes its fundamental difference from the Tudor hybrid model established in 1501—Jonson creates not a reassuring hybrid but a deeply conflicted Arthurian tradition. By participating in the genre of celestial Arthurian pageantry in the style of the 1501 celebration, Jonson endorses both James’s emphasis on lawmaking and Henry’s penchant for military force.<sup>32</sup> By shifting so abruptly between the two models, however, Jonson

---

<sup>30</sup> Kipling, *Triumph of Honor*, 88.

<sup>31</sup> See John Bossewell, *Works of Armorie* (London: Richard Totelli, 1572). In this printed compilation of armory, Bossewell describes King Arthur as “that mightie conqueror & worthy, had so greate affection & loue to [the sign of the Virgin Mary and Christ], that he lefte his Armes which he bare before, wherein was figured three dragons, an other of three Crownes...[etc.]. And bearing this signe, he did many marueiles in Armes, as in his Bookes of Actes, and valiant Conquestes are remembered.” Thus, Arthur’s medieval reputation as a “mightie conqueror” hadn’t changed, even if his arms had. Note that Spenser also uses the armes with the “signe” of the Virgin in his magnificent Arthurian blazon.

<sup>32</sup> One can see Prince Henry’s marked preference for such martial kingship in portraits of the young prince. In two of Robert Peake’s portraits of the prince (1603 and 1610) Henry looks seriously at the viewer, drawing his sword (not just carrying it). Such images are notably different than the catalogue of serene images of James as a wise ruler who was prepared for—but not pursuant of—conflict. For the publication of these images and accompanying commentary, see Strong, *Henry, Prince of Wales and England’s Lost Renaissance*, 66.

creates tension in his masque—tension that illustrates the very real friction between a father and his apparently very different heir.

Ultimately, the tension in Jonson's *Barriers* arises not from a formally issued challenge from Henry to James but from the impossibility of revising and/or containing Arthurian chivalric significance to the extent Jonson attempts for James. Jonson simply could not revise Arthur to the extent he proposed without compromising the Arthurian icon's efficacy, and in attempting to revise centuries of mythic tradition, Jonson effectively compromises James's image by allowing Henry's to compete (even if unintentionally) with it. At least since Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* in 1138, the British Arthur was known as the conqueror of much of sixth-century Europe. He is indeed a founding and uniting figure of a sort, in his establishment of a society of knights in service of God and kingdom, but his fame overwhelmingly arises from the martial adventures he undertakes with those knights. Just as the Arthur of romance could not quite become the repentant Sir Guy and retain his national import, so Jonson's Arthur cannot wholly relinquish his reputation as imperial conqueror. Thus, any reference to Arthur in the seventeenth century could not do otherwise than to call up such images of chivalric kingship. The concept of recognizable signifiers is essential to pageantry, as the visual cues are as important as the verbal. The fact that the audience is meant to read recognizable/traditional Arthurian significance in the *Barriers* itself is evident from the Lady's first speech, in which she explains,

Lest any yet should doubt, or might mistake  
 What Nymph I am; behold the ample lake  
 Of which I am stil'd; and neere it MERLINS tombe  
 Graue of his cunning, as of mine the wombe,  
 By this it will not aske me to proclaime  
 More of my selfe, whose actions, and whose name

Were so full fain'd in Brittiſh ARTHVRS court  
No more than it will fit me to report.<sup>33</sup>

The spectator should be able to read Inigo Jones's iconic sets and ascertain from them that Jonson's speakers are well-known figures of the Arthurian tradition, "full fain'd in Brittiſh ARTHVRS court" and highly valued as spokespeople for the foundational myth the Tudor dynasty had found so useful. Jonson's guarantee that his masque is recognizable in light of the tradition he has inherited is intriguing considering the extent to which he alters its icons. When he gives Arthur a shield to pass to Meliades, Jonson attempts a fundamental revision of Arthurian signification, whose meaning, the Lady claims, should need no gloss. As the Lady asserts, there is a centuries-old tradition behind the masque for which she is providing the opening remarks, and such long-standing significance cannot be radically revised without costs. The figures in Jonson's masques would have recalled the militant Arthurian tradition of the Middle Ages as well as the recent national myth of the Tudor dynasty, reminding the audience that there was a prior, and now competitive, set of meanings for Arthurian icons. Arguably, as Meliades takes up arms and fights as Chivalry's champion in the masque's final moments, the novel concept of a shield-wielding Arthur dwindles if not disappears. Arthur's established significance as a martial figure cannot be erased by a few pacific or otherwise dismissive speeches—and certainly not in the context of a kingdom at least a part of whose population vastly preferred Prince Henry's divinely mandated, imperial "Protestant Vocation."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Jonson, *Barriers*, 965.

<sup>34</sup> In *Triumph of Honour* Gordon Kipling explains that the kings portrayed in portraits in Henry VII's great hall at Richmond were "only those kings who have achieved fame as conquerors and warriors, from Brute to Arthur, to Richard the Lionhearted and Edward III...Before they are kings, they are 'bold and valiant knights'. Instead of orbs, scepters, and dynastic symbols—emblems of justice and authority—they hold such chivalric weapons as falchions and swords"(61).

The tension inherent in Jonson's *Barriers* would even more noticeably tilt in Henry's favor only six months later, in Jonson's other Arthurian offering to Prince Henry, *The Masque of Oberon* (1611). Like the *Barriers* of the previous year, *Oberon*'s Arthurian references center on praising the occupant of Arthur's sky-bound throne—yet the pacific rhetoric in this masque is arguably less able to drown out its overwhelmingly neo-medieval, militaristic tone, and by the end of the masque it appears that the only Stuart convincingly able to ascend to Arthur's chair is the young prince who dances the title role. The action of the masque deals with the character Silenus's teaching a group of unruly satyrs that Oberon's arrival will restore peace and prosperity. On their first glimpse of Oberon's palace, Silenus cries:

Look! Does not his palace show  
Like another sky of light?  
Yonder with him live the knights  
Once the noblest of the earth,  
Quickened by a second birth,  
Who for prowess and for truth  
There are crowned with lasting youth,  
And do hold, by Fate's command,  
Seats of bliss in fairyland.<sup>35</sup>

The arrival of the prince quickens famous knights who had, of late, been slumbering; more importantly, it establishes chivalric fairyland as an ideal world that will come to life upon the arrival of Oberon/Henry. Such promises of “a second birth” of a past for which fairyland nostalgically longs is very much in accord with Arthurian promises of resurrection and resurgence and echoes the Lady of the Lake's suspension between old and new duties in Jonson's *Barriers*. In fact, *Oberon* is in some sense a continuation of the House of Chivalry

---

<sup>35</sup> Jonson, *Oberon*, 978. *The Masque of Oberon* was originally published (along with the *Barriers*) in Stansby's edition of Jonson's *Workes* in 1616. See also Ben Jonson, *The Complete Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969).

theme featured in the *Barriers*: in *Oberon* the ruined—or, in this case, sleeping—house is brought back to life in fairyland’s “second birth.” Indeed, soon after Oberon himself comes onto stage in a bear-drawn chariot, the first appearance of explicitly Arthurian material appears:

Melt earth to sea, sea flow to air,  
 And air fly into fire,  
 Whilst we in tunes to Arthur’s chair  
 Bear Oberon’s desire,  
 Than which there nothing can be higher,  
 Save James, to whom it flies:  
 But he the wonder is of tongues, of ears, of eyes.<sup>36</sup>

The placement of James’s power in the stanza as a qualification of his son’s glory—nothing can be higher than Oberon, *save* James—puts the current and future monarchs into tension more than it establishes a clear hierarchy. There are no apologies for or direct warnings against Arthurian material in *Oberon*, and no overt references to the fact that knights and fairies belong in/on “other acts, another stage”; on the contrary, although James is rightly the “wonder of tongues, ears and eyes,” the masque promotes Oberon as an equally important—and even competitive—*Arthurian* figure who awakens kingdoms and spurs them to new glories.

The difference in emphasis between the pacific Arthuriana of the *Barriers* and the less compromised version in *Oberon* reflects Henry’s increasing influence as a force in his own right: Jonson and Jones staged *Oberon* six months after Henry’s investiture (for which the *Barriers* was performed) as a celebration of his financial independence. James still reigned, and his project was still pacific, but Henry was an increasingly popular heir with decidedly different goals than his father. Jonson’s masque reflects not the education of Oberon in changing to be like James, but the legitimization of Oberon’s (and therefore Henry’s) particular brand of politics. Martin Butler explains, “*Oberon* modeled political change as gradualism rather than cataclysm,

---

<sup>36</sup> Jonson, *Oberon*, 980.

and while legitimating James it took its bearings from the rising heir.”<sup>37</sup> James is the subject of the highest praise, but Henry’s agenda and aesthetic are the means to achieving such glory. As the chariot bearing Oberon comes into the scene, the foremost sylvan chides the satyrs:

Give place and silence; you were rude too late.  
 This is a night of greatness and of state,  
 Not to be mixed with light and skipping sport:  
 A night of homage to the British court,  
 And ceremony due to Arthur’s chair,  
 From our bright master, Oberon the fair;  
 Who with these knights, attendants, here preserved  
 Of yond’ high throne, are come of right to pay  
 Their annual vows; and all their glories lay  
 At feet, and tender to this only great  
 True majesty, restored in this seat.<sup>38</sup>

Oberon does homage to James, but this means that James’s glory is in some ways dependent on Oberon and his group of Arthurian followers, the members of which greatly outnumber James in this masque. Oberon may be said to praise the current occupant of Arthur’s chair, but he is also preparing to take it himself and do it justice as only a native of fairyland can.

At heart in my reading of the Jonson’s *Barriers* (and, as an illustrative companion text, his *Masque of Oberon*) is the idea that the Arthurian icon will only abide a limited amount of revision or abridgement—a concept also evident in the romance tradition and other iconic works like Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>39</sup> Arthurian myth carries centuries of history and tradition along with it that dictate the terms for granting a given ruler an Arthurian apotheosis. Thus, Jonson’s radically revised Arthurian masque is unable to completely override the chivalric origins Prince Henry admired. In fact, Jonson’s masque is an illuminating representation of the

---

<sup>37</sup> Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture*, 194.

<sup>38</sup> Jonson, *Oberon*, 980-1.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for a discussion of the limits of Arthurian significance.

tensions surrounding inheritance—both for James and Henry and in the larger Arthurian tradition. Although the pageant writer updates the Arthurian image to emphasize justice, Prince Arthur and Katharine’s wedding pageants in 1501 clearly preserve the chivalric genesis from which they spring. In Jonson’s celestial Arthurian pageant, things are different. When James’s policies conflict with Arthurian iconography, Jonson tries to strike a compromise, but, as it turns out, Arthur’s legacy is far stronger than that of James and continually resurfaces despite attempts to make Arthur a silent relic. In a celestial masque featuring the legendary king himself, a writer could not simply endorse a policy to disregard “the deeds/of antique knights”—the essential elements of the Arthurian mythic past—and still hope to capitalize on Arthur’s image. When reworking a tradition inherited from one’s predecessors, there is an obligation to preserve what is essential about that inheritance, even while updating it for new ends. Jonson inherited the Arthurian apotheosis pageant—a genre that already balanced conquest with justice—and upset that balance in order to fit James. The fact that traditional Arthurian elements surface anyway suggests that dramatically revising Arthur is no easy task. The work of one’s “heavenly fathers”—royal and literary—continually resurfaces to haunt those who intend to radically revise it. In the *Barriers*, it is clear that pacific James is king, but that chivalric enthusiast Henry is Arthur’s true heir. Henry’s death in 1612 meant that the role of a stellified Arthurian king passed to Charles, who turned out to be no better fit for Arthur’s heavenly seat than was his earthly father.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Discussions of who inherits Arthurian tradition and how they proceed to perpetuate it extend to the father/son team of Reginald and John Wolfe, printers of John Leland’s and Richard Robinson’s texts, respectively. See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

### Arthur Rejected: Carew Severs English Myth from Charles I

In another twist that would provide an unanticipated link between the Tudors and the Stuarts, Prince Henry died in 1612, once again shattering the nation's hopes of a "second Arthur" who would glorify that role. After Henry's death, celestial Arthurian pageantry largely disappeared until the reign of Charles I, at which time Thomas Carew did indeed reprise Arthur's role as a stellified British hero—but dismissively so. In Carew's *Coelum Britannicum*, performed at Whitehall on February 18, 1633, Arthur is neither the Tudor hybrid nor the divided Jonsonian figure but an inconsequential relic serving to elevate Charles's own greatness by comparison. Carew's elevation of Charles above all of his ancestors is not surprising, given that Charles's royal prerogatives were qualified by posthumous agendas from the very start: taking the throne in a financially troubled Britain divided on foreign policy and religion, Charles seems to have, at least initially, acknowledged his indebtedness to the deceased James and Henry while attempting to distinguish himself as unique.<sup>41</sup> But Charles did more than just recombine the iconographies of his father and brother: he cultivated a new brand of chivalry that posited the king as the pinnacle of moral virtue and asserted that the courtier's—and, by extension, the subject's—most important role was serving the king.<sup>42</sup> In "Chivalry and Political Culture in Caroline England," J.

---

<sup>41</sup> In Anthony Van Dyck's painting *Charles I on Horseback* (c. 1637-8) Charles wears armor and looks out over the battlefield; similarly, he appears in certain masques as a military hero in the style Henry had cultivated. Despite such similarities to Henry, Martin Butler reads instability in Charles's performance of Henrician chivalry: "the image seems composed, but its contradictory signals mark instabilities in Charles's culture which his festivity inevitably had to manage"; see *The Stuart Masque and Political Culture*, 282. I argue that this is precisely the kind of instability Jonson's *Barriers* reflects with respect to James.

<sup>42</sup> Although my interests lie in the ways in which Charles asserted his new brand of chivalry with respect to Arthur in particular, it is important to understand that Charles reprised many of James's and Henry's images: for example, in 1636, he commissioned a bust of Brutus from Hubert Le Seuer. It is the context of Charles's new chivalry that changes the reading of such images from that of peaceful unifier of kingdoms to moral exemplum deserving of unquestioning loyalty. See John Peacock, "The visual image of Charles I" in *Representations of Charles I*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 176-239; 212.

S. A. Adamson points out that the chivalry Charles cultivated in both image and policy was of a new nature:

To [some], ‘the dignity of chivalry’ lay explicitly in the military advancement of European Protestantism; to Charles I it lay primarily in the religious bonds of loyalty between the sovereign and his knights: a sacralised loyalty within his order of chivalry that was to serve, in microcosm, as the highest example of the loyal service which was every subject’s obligation. To this extent, the public rituals of courtly chivalry were no less didactic in intention than was the masque.<sup>43</sup>

Carew’s *Coelum Britannicum*, as a reflection of the new Caroline chivalry emphasizing loyalty to one’s sovereign above all, offers a clear contrast to the politics of James and Henry in its radically different use of Arthur and other ancient British heroes. The masque builds upon the tradition of pageantry featuring stellified kings, but it mocks the practices and practitioners of the “traditional” Tudor chivalry as a way to distinguish its own praise of Charles’s new version. Problems arise, however, when Carew attempts to recruit a figure like Arthur to speak (or dance) against the chivalric model of which he had been the prime spokesman for centuries. Like Jonson’s *Barriers* with respect to James and Arthur, *Coelum Britannicum* highlights the tension between Charles and Arthur far more convincingly than it suggests the triumph of the former. Ultimately, Carew underestimates an English king’s obligations to the mythic capital inherent in representing Arthur: he fails to understand that Arthur’s legacy was, in the sense of sheer longevity as a cultural icon, much stronger than Charles’s. The fact that *Coelum Britannicum* participates in the established tradition of Arthurian celestial pageantry, yet must go to such lengths to disavow its Arthurian elements, suggests that, by 1633, masque audiences needed convincing that Charles’s transcendence was evident. Arthur had been impossible to

---

<sup>43</sup> J. S. A. Adamson, “Chivalry and Political Culture in Caroline England” in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 161-98; 175.

convincingly recruit to a new Jacobean chivalry, and proved just as impossible to exclude from Caroline chivalry.

*Coelum Britannicum* dramatizes the replacement of all constellations based on impious gods with one honoring Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria, who have set a better example. Like Jonson's *Barriers*, Carew's masque opens with an elaborate set of ruins designed by Inigo Jones. "The Curtaine was watchet and a pale yellow in paines, which flying up on the sudden, discovered the Scaene, representing old Arches, old Palaces, decayed walls, parts of Temples, Theaters, Basilita's and Therme, with confused heaps of broken Columnes, Bases, Coronices and Statues, lying as underground, and altogether resembling the ruines of some great City of the ancient Romans, or civiliz'd Brittaines."<sup>44</sup> Unlike the ruins in the *Barriers*, however, these ancient British monuments will not be restored by chivalry's champion, but will be transcended by the splendors of Charles I. The action of the masque is mostly taken up with Mercury's and Momus's interviews with various celestial hopefuls who apply to fill the place in the sky left by the disgraced gods. Not surprisingly, the only fit replacements Mercury and Momus can find are Charles and Henrietta Maria. After unsuccessfully "auditioning" a variety of hopefuls, Mercury promises Charles and his queen the heavenly monuments, but first asks them to consider the history from which they generate. Following a brief antimasque featuring the "ancient inhabitants of this isle," the court is treated to an elaborate display of three songs danced on

a huge mountaine that covered all the Scaene; the under-part of this was wild and craggy, and above somewhat more pleasant and flourishing: about the middle part of this Mountaine were seated the three kingdomes of *England, Scotland, and Ireland*; all richly attired in regall habits, appropriated to the severall Nations, with Crownes on their heads, and each of them bearing the ancient Armes of the kingdomes they represented: At a

---

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Carew, *Coelum Britannicum A masque at White-Hall in the Banqueting-House, on Shrove-Tuesday-night, the 18. of February, 1633*. (London: Thomas Walkley, 1634), B1v.

distance above these sate a young man in a white embroidered robe, upon his faire haire an Olive garland with wings at his shoulders, and holding in his hand a Cornucopia fill'd with corne and fruits, representing the Genius of these kingdomes.<sup>45</sup>

Echoing the opening set of ancient British ruins, this mountain suggests the origins from which Charles's united kingdom has sprung. Later, the rocks of this elaborate scene would yield dancers dressed like British heroes, before finally giving way to an equally impressive celestial scene: the heavenly representation of Charles and Henrietta Maria, surrounded by lesser stars representing the ancient British heroes that had lately danced upon the stage. Carew's masque is thus an incredibly elaborate set of spectacles, with the ultimate message that Charles surpasses all gods and heroes from whom he has inherited his kingdom. The visual message of *Coelum Britannicum* is not what Charles has inherited but what Charles has exceeded.

Carew's speeches and songs confirm Jones's visual message. Outlining the central problem that the gods have been deemed poor behavioral models, Mercury informs the king and queen that they will serve as the new moral standard: "When in the Chrystall myrrour of your reigne/ [Jove] view'd himselfe, he found his loathsome staines."<sup>46</sup> From the very beginning, Carew's masque sets up a hierarchy in which Charles and Henrietta Maria are higher than the gods themselves; the king and queen represent a new order of power whose "pure refined influence" will replace the old. Mercury's lofty verse is accompanied and sometimes challenged by the direct, often vulgar prose of the god of ridicule, Momus. It is tempting to read Momus's speeches as critiquing Charles and his queen; for example, Momus voices disapproval of the arbitrary use of power, something for which Charles was criticized. However, when one looks

---

<sup>45</sup> Carew, *Coelum Britannicum*, E1v.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, B2r.

more closely at the symbols and speeches surrounding Momus, it is clear that it is not Charles but the tenets of Tudor chivalry that both Momus and Mercury are attacking—indicated by their mockery of notable chivalric poet Sir Philip Sidney. J. S. A. Adamson points out that Momus, when reading Jupiter’s decree that would banish all military trophies from sight (a clear repudiation of the militant chivalry Henry favored), mockingly wears Sir Philip Sidney’s crest—a wreath surrounded by a porcupine.<sup>47</sup> Unlike Jonson with respect to James, Carew does not revise the chivalric tradition to reflect Charles’s agenda—he openly mocks and rejects it. One purpose of Carew’s masque is thus to posit Charles as higher than all such influences: he acknowledges the chivalric past but does not pay it homage. Even more relevant to the concept of Charles’s ancient influences are the songs performed after Mercury and Momus have concluded that no one else is fit to fill the sky but Charles and his queen. These songs and their accompanying dances, even more clearly than the verbose debates of Mercury and Momus, illustrate the extent to which Charles stands alone in glory. Performed on the magnificent rock of three kingdoms, the songs praise Charles by mocking his predecessors.

In *Coelum Britannicum*, Arthur is neither a major character nor the thematic legacy to which the king must aspire, but is instead a heavily compromised, outdated relic. Although Mercury and Momus do not mention Arthur specifically, their emphasis on novelty and mockery of tradition suggests that Arthur is among those mythic figures that are discarded in favor of Charles. As Mercury prepares to reveal the new constellation at the masque’s conclusion, he introduces the historical implications that the succeeding songs will catalogue. Making reference to Inigo Jones’s impressive spectacle of the three kingdoms of Britain, Mercury tells Charles,

Those ancient Worthies of these famous Isles,

---

<sup>47</sup> Adamson, “Chivalry and Political Culture in Caroline England,” 172.

That long have slept, in fresh and lively shapes  
 Shall straight appeare, where you shall see your selfe  
 Circled with moderne Heroes, who shall be  
 In Act, what-ever elder times can boast,  
 Noble, or Great; as they in Prophesie  
 Were all but what you are.

[...]

...but first behold the rude  
 And old Abiders here, and in them view  
 The point from which your full perfections grew.  
 You naked, antient, wild Inhabitants,  
 That breath'd this Ayre, and prest this flowery Earth,  
 Come from those shades where dwells eternall night,  
 And see what wonders Time hath brought to light.<sup>48</sup>

Carew posits the “old Abiders” as “the point from which [Charles] full perfections grew,” but asserts that the king’s power transcends its origins and will surpass even that of the land’s “ancient Worthies.” These ancient inhabitants, Carew assures Charles, are “all but what you are.” Like its predecessors in 1501 and 1610, *Coelum Britannicum* participates in the tradition of ancient British heroes memorialized as stars, but in this case, Carew does not count Charles as their heir so much as he does their superior; he uses these “ancient Worthies” not as a legacy worthy of aspiration, but as a comparison to highlight Charles’s greater, almost godly glory. In fact, in these concluding songs, Carew suggests that such figures—Arthur among them—are merely the inferior celebrities of “elder times.” In the third song, the scene changes to a garden, and the chorus addresses the queen:

We bring Prince Arthur, or the brave  
 St. George himselfe (great Queene) to you,  
 You’ll soone discerne him; and we have  
     A Guy, a Beavis, or some true  
 Round-Table Knight, as ever fought  
 For lady, to each Beauty brought.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Carew, *Coelum Britannicum*, E1r.

Arthur finally gets his due, but it is in such a general, inconsequential manner that it is clear that Arthur's reputation pales in comparison to Charles's. Unlike the *Barriers*'s hope that Henry will be famous "as was Tristram...or Lancelot," in *Coelum Britannicum* Arthur's illustrious "Round-Table Knights" have become interchangeable (note the unspecific "some true...Knight"), presenting a generic, low-stakes depiction of the famous Table.<sup>50</sup> The invocation and subsequent dismissal of ancient British heroes is a pattern in this masque, which posits Charles as the culminating figure in a long line of "worthies" and then undermines those worthies via frivolity or outright critique.<sup>51</sup> In the final scene of the masque, just after the dances have concluded, the heavens reflect the addition of a new, decidedly non-Arthurian constellation. The description reads: "In the firmament about [Eternity], was a troope of fiteene starres, expressing the stellifying of our British Heroes; but one more great and eminent than the rest, which was over his head, figured his Majesty. And in the lower part was seene a farre off the prospect of Windsor Castell, the famous seat of the most honourable Order of the Garter."<sup>52</sup> Although it bears a comparison to both of its predecessors in that it posits a Tudor or Stuart monarch as a heavenly body with connection to the Arthurian legend, Carew's masque unequivocally argues that Charles's glory as a monarch is independent of godly or Arthurian precedent: Charles is the star that outshines every other—and on terms of his own making. Such a sentiment at least

---

<sup>49</sup> Carew, *Coelum Britannicum*, E4r.

<sup>50</sup> "A Guy" and "A Beavis" refer to Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton, two of the most popular heroes of the English romance tradition. See Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>51</sup> In *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture* Butler convincingly argues, "Although heralded by the 'ancient worthies of these famous isles', the masquers were 'modern heroes' unlimited by a historically specific identity, who represented a native culture suddenly at its moment of culmination and justifying itself by deeds...The past from which [such worthies] came was invoked in order to be exceeded, its prophecies fulfilled and heroes surpassed"(317). Butler's more general reading of these "ancient worthies" is helpful in illuminating Carew's use of Arthur in particular as a foil for Charles's new brand of chivalry.

<sup>52</sup> Carew, *Coelum Britannicum*, E4v-F1r.

partially recalls the Arthur of the *Barriers* who “joys to find himself so out-shone [by James],” but, unlike the Tudor pageant writer and Jonson, Carew does not equate his king with an Arthurian star. Instead, he takes Jonson’s assertion that the “bold stories of our Arthur’s age” are outdated to new extremes: whereas Jonson acknowledges and attempts to work around Arthur’s Tudor legacy, Carew raises and dismisses it. In presenting Charles not as the culmination of his ancestors but as a new standard by which all others must be measured, Carew offers the most drastically revised version of the Arthurian celestial pageant: in Carew’s hands, the central figure of England’s mythic capital appears as a generic ancestor who is ill-suited to embody the ideals of the Caroline constellation.

### **Coming Down to Earth: Galfridian Echoes in Civic Pageantry**

In the end, neither James nor Charles seems to have fully embraced an Arthurian role: both struggled to pay homage to the popular chivalric tradition endorsed by the Tudors—and by their own son/brother, Prince Henry—while ruling (very differently) as they saw fit. Arguably, James gave his most “convincing” performance in civic pageantry—not as a celestial Arthur but as an earthly *Brutus*, the founder of Britain whose promise James fulfills by peacefully unifying its three kingdoms. Although Arthur himself never appears in a Stuart civic pageant, the iconography of Brutus features prominently in Jacobean iconography, especially early in James’s reign when writers were first constructing his royal image, illustrating that, in front of his people, James performed best not as a conqueror but a unifier.<sup>53</sup> Charles, on the other hand, had no such

---

<sup>53</sup> While the printed masque makes possible a unique opportunity to consider the implications of royal courtly spectacle—which, while it was accessible to the public for the price of a ticket, reached far more in printed form—civic pageantry allows us to glimpse the ideas and images in entertainments that were planned to be seen by an entire city of spectators. See Robert Withington, *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline, Vol. I* (Cambridge, MA:

compatible earthly avatar in civic pageants; instead, his reign was haunted by a ghostly presence. Charles was plagued by James's contradictory imagery and policy (evidenced by Jonson's *Barriers*) and by Henry's forfeited promise; in James's and Henry's shadow, there was no performance that adequately defined Charles as both a continuation of the Tudors and a monarch with an agenda of his own, distanced from the conflicted and/or tragic performances of his father and brother. While *Coelum Britannicum* suggests that Caroline iconography established a heavenly Charles outshining all precedent, civic pageants suggest that, in the streets of London, Charles's kingly glory was actually overshadowed by memories of his dead ancestors.

James's affiliation with Brutus almost certainly arose from the former's marked preference for the iconography of unification and peacekeeping over that of imperial exploits. James took on the image of Brutus as a figure who founds and domesticates the Isle of Britain, freeing him from the obligations of the Arthurian association with conquering new lands and expanding the empire. Indeed, Geoffrey of Monmouth's depiction of Brutus supports James's image as a founder who brings glory through unity and order: "With the approval of [Brutus] [the Britons] began to cultivate the fields and to build houses, so that in a short time you would have thought that the land had always been inhabited. Brutus then called the island Britain from his own name, and his companions he called Britons. His intention was that his memory should be perpetuated by the derivation of the name."<sup>54</sup> Brutus endows his people with safety, stability, and a *legacy*, all of which were important aspects of the Jacobean dream of unification. With the

---

Harvard University Press, 1920). Withington reminds his reader that "a strict line keeps courtier and folk apart; on the one side is the masque—on the other, the pageant. There were, however, influences which crossed this line in both directions"(137).

<sup>54</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin, 1977), 72.

arrival of Brutus (and, later, James), the very land reorganizes itself to peaceful unity, all the while giving the impression that it had always been that way. By figuring him as Brutus, pageant writers extended to James Brutus's ability to restore the land to its legacy: "you would have thought that the land had always been" unified—and that the Stuarts had always been hailed as the fulfillment of British potential.

James's role as a second Brutus is especially evident in Anthony Munday's *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* (1605). A Lord Mayor's Show performed in honor of Merchant Taylor Sir Leonard Halliday, *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* actually functions as a vehicle for formulating the royal image of the new *king*, establishing his legitimacy by allying it with ancient British history. Ben Jonson and Thomas Dekker had also made reference to James as Brutus in their contributions to James's royal entry pageant in 1604, but their allusions lack explicit connection to Geoffrey of Monmouth's history.<sup>55</sup> Munday, on the other hand, grounds his pageant in connections between James and Brutus via direct references to the Galfridian history itself, suggesting that to identify with Brutus was also to take seriously (or at least acknowledge the potential benefits of) Geoffrey's medieval claims about British origins.<sup>56</sup> In

---

<sup>55</sup> See especially Thomas Dekker's pageants for James's royal entry. Not only does Dekker refer to Brutus as James's "grand grand-sire," he echoes the language of healing divisions:

And then so rich an Empyre, whose fayre brest  
Contaynes four Kingdomes, by your entrance blest:  
By Brute divided, but by you alone  
All are againe united and made one.

Dekker's contribution is printed in Nichols, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First*, 357. Although Dekker's assertions are very similar to those of Munday, Dekker does not give the extensive or even explicit genealogical information that Munday includes, and therefore I give Munday precedence in this study. Jonson and Dekker will be briefly discussed in footnotes (below).

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Munday, *Pageants and entertainments of Anthony Munday: a critical edition*, ed. David M. Bergeron (New York: Garland, 1984). Munday's pageant is the first version of a Lord Mayor's Show to survive in print and, as David M. Bergeron points out, it is "the only full-scale treatment of the popular Brutus-in-Albion myth of English history to be found in civic pageantry down to the closing of the theaters." In the introduction to his critical edition of Munday's works, Bergeron considers the possible reasons for Munday's decision to choose this topic for his

Munday's pageant, three kingdoms figured as "Brytania" chide Brutus for dividing up the land and distributing it between his three sons. Brytania only absolves Brutus now because

that same Albania, where Humber slew [Brutus's] son Albanact, had bred a second Brute, by the blessed marriage of Margaret, eldest daughter to King Henrie the seaventh, to James the fourth king of Scotland, of whom our second Brute (Royall king James) is truly and rightfully descended: by whose happy comming to the Crowne, England, Wales, and Scotland, by the first Brute divided, is in our second Brute reunited, and made one happy Britania again: Peace and quietnesse bringing that to passe, which warre nor any other meanes could attaine unto.<sup>57</sup>

With references to the Galfridian Brutus's initial division of his kingdom amongst his three sons, and James's eventual healing of such division, Munday illustrates the relationship between Brutus and James as one of succession: their relationship is, in terms of legacy, that of father and heir.<sup>58</sup> To make this connection explicit, Munday extends the implications of Galfridian history: although Brutus's son Albanact met his untimely end in the pages of Geoffrey's *Historia*, James will be able to remedy this and other losses that followed the decision to divide the land. As Brutus's heir, James must atone for his "father's" sins while acknowledging and improving upon the glorious foundation legacy Geoffrey attributes to him. By becoming a second Brute, James reanimates his dead ancestors, using Brutus's legacy to establish continuity with Tudor precedent and to lend contour to his own reign.<sup>59</sup>

---

show, and why he decided, in a Lord Mayor's Show, to flatter the *king* so extravagantly. "He is the only pageant dramatist to explore this legend; he cannot on this occasion be accused of being derivative. Why did he do it? Several reasons may have guided Munday's artistic choice: his antiquarian interest in ancient British history, his recognition of a good story when he saw one, and his desire to earn royal favor in flattering James by sounding the increasingly common theme of union."

<sup>57</sup> Munday, *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia*, ed. David M. Bergeron, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Note the very different implications between this James/Brutus pairing (focused on union) and the Prince Henry/Henry V pairing (focused on war) established in Jonson's masque.

<sup>59</sup> As is also clear from Jonson's *Barriers*, the rhetoric and images of lineage are extremely important aspects of Stuart kingship. James consistently emphasized his *family* in visual media, driving home the fact that, unlike Elizabeth's England, he would not leave his Britain without an heir. Charles built on his father's legacy,

Brutus was in many ways the perfect Jacobean avatar, given his fitness as an icon of unification.<sup>60</sup> Under Munday's influence, such unification occurs smoothly and peacefully: James would repair what his predecessor had marred by means of "peace and quietnesse," a gesture subordinating militaristic pursuits to sober domestic government.<sup>61</sup> Configuring Geoffrey's history to Jacobean political aims, the character Brutus himself explains:

And what fierce war by no meanes could effect,  
To re-unite those sundred lands in one,  
The hand of heaven did peacefully elect  
By mildest grace, to seat on Britaines throne  
This second Brute, then whome there else was none.  
Wales, England, Scotland, severd first by me:  
To knit againe in blessed unity.<sup>62</sup>

Brutus "wills" his throne to James, who will knit the severed land together. This is not to be a glorious conquest, in which James must use heavenly-aided martial might to regain lost territory; on the contrary, heaven intervenes by means of "mildest grace." It is in the pacific means of unification that Munday's and James's decision to focus on Brutus—and not the popular

commissioning portraits of his family that emphasized the lasting power of the Stuart dynasty. See Kevin Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603-1660* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Admittedly, the rhetoric of peace and unification were far more prevalent early in James's reign. However, since my focus is the ways in which monarchs styled themselves in attempts to assert their royal bodies in a particular light, such early attempts are most illustrative of the monarch's preferences—before they could be discouraged.

<sup>61</sup> Dekker makes the Jacobean preference for peace evident when, at the triumphal arch at Barnes beyond Bishopsgate, the Genius of the pageant scolds St. George:

And when soft-handed Peace so sweetly thrives,  
That bees in souldiers' helmets build their hives;  
When Joy a tip-toe stands on Fortune's Wheale,  
In silken roabes; how dare you shine in steele?

Dekker's message is striking in its allegiances: the much-revered (and unmistakably English) St. George has no right to disturb the peaceful state of the kingdom under British James. The mere gesture of donning armor is cause enough for rebuke. Even more explicit, perhaps, is Ben Jonson's contribution to this royal entry. In Jonson's Temple-Bar pageant, the spectacle leaves no doubt as to James's preferred signifiers: the arch explicitly depicts the figure of Peace trampling that of Mars underfoot. Like Dekker's, Jonson's contribution is printed in *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First*, ed. John Nichols, 355-60.

<sup>62</sup> Munday, *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia*, ed. David M. Bergeron, lines 277-83.

Galfridian character of Arthur—seems especially wise. As Brutus’s second coming, James’s preference for peaceful domestic governance makes him a “blessed unifier” and seems to free him from the martial imagery Prince Henry so admired. However, the figure of Brutus himself also carries a set of obligations that create friction with some of James’s preferences, even as they reinforce others. References to Brutus as founder and unifier are apt; however, Brutus and his Trojan transplants settled in Britain only after wreaking havoc on surrounding populations. Even more importantly, a reference to Brutus would still likely evoke associations with King Arthur. Thus, although Brutus was a far more pertinent avatar for James, Munday could not avoid associations with the brand martial kingship that always attended Galfridian history—of which Arthur is unquestionably the central figure.<sup>63</sup>

In Jacobean civic pageantry, James donned the robes of peace and appeared as a second Brutus; however, despite such a marked preference for Brutus and peace over Arthur and conquest, avoiding the obligations of an Arthurian association was not easy. The question arising from Arthur’s absence from Jacobean civic pageantry is whether the famous king could ever be omitted from the myth that spawned so many Arthurian works in the Middle Ages and served as a defining image of Tudor iconography.<sup>64</sup> In addition to the importance of England’s Arthurian

---

<sup>63</sup> James was not opposed to chivalry as a concept; on the contrary, he often commissioned representations of himself sporting symbols of both peace and war. James’s militarism, qualified as it was by peace, constituted a chivalry defined as *preparedness for war*, but not one that *sought war*. Differences between James’s and especially Charles’s brands of chivalry from that of Prince Henry are evident in these visual representations.

<sup>64</sup> As the pageant increased in sophistication, it decreased in Arthurian elements. In a comparison between Elizabeth I’s royal entry pageant in 1559 and James I’s of 1604, there are many common elements—triumphal arches, the involvement of guilds, the processional nature, and allegorical, mythical and historical figures—but in James’s pageant the level of sophistication in both poetry and design rises noticeably—while the Arthurian Lady of the Lake who graced Elizabeth’s entry yields to a unifying Brutus. See David M. Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2003). Bergeron asserts, “The simpler, somewhat amateurish drama of Elizabethan civic pageantry gives way to a more sophisticated form. The 1604 royal entry becomes in many respects a turning point, the culmination of what has preceded it and the prototype of what follows” (88).

*past* debated so hotly in the mid-sixteenth century by Polydore Vergil, John Leland and other interested antiquarians, the idea of Arthur's *second coming* to aid Britain in future troubles had been in circulation since the publication of Malory's romance *Morte Darthur* (which had already been printed four times between 1485 and 1605).<sup>65</sup> Those who were waiting for a second Arthur may not have been entirely appeased by the appearance of a second Brute. Given this possibility, it is no surprise that Munday makes a direct connection between the Stuarts and the Tudors near the end of his pageant, connecting James with a dynasty that achieved unification between warring houses by means of military force and was founded on stories of Arthur.<sup>66</sup> In the final scene Neptune and Amphitrita appear, and the latter proclaims:

Our latest Phaenix whose dead cinders shine,  
 In Angels spheres, she, like a mother milde,  
 Yielding to Nature, did her right resigne  
 To times true heyre, her God-son, and lov'de childe,  
 When giddy expectation was beguiled:  
     And Scotland yielded out of Teudors race,  
     A true borne bud, to sit in Teudors place.<sup>67</sup>

The remembrance of and reverence for the “Teudors race”—and the attempt to ally James with the Tudors by endowing him with Elizabeth's “seat”—complicates any argument about Arthur's being written out of English national sensibility simply because he is not present in Stuart civic pageantry. By beginning his pageant with Brutus's lineage and ending with Elizabeth's death,

---

<sup>65</sup> For more about the “historical” import of Arthurian second comings, see James P. Carley, “Polydore Vergil and John Leland on King Arthur: the Battle of the Books” in *King Arthur: A Casebook*, Donald Edward Kennedy, ed. (New York, Garland Press, 1996) and James P. Carley, *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2001).

<sup>66</sup> Of course, the Tudors did not neglect to capitalize on the image of Brutus as well as that of Arthur; my point, however, is that the elimination of one or the other from a text based on Geoffrey of Monmouth is a marked decision to exclude. For the Tudor use of Brutus, see Kevin Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Munday, *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia*, ed. David M. Bergeron, lines 450-6.

Munday likens James to the second coming of his mythic father, *and* “lov’d child” of the dead Elizabeth I. Despite Munday’s complete omission of Arthur himself, the ghostly parents he assigns to James could not escape an association with a king on whose promises of rebirth James’s ancestors had repeatedly capitalized.

In addition to the obligations set up by the Tudors’ Arthurian legacy, the difficulty in keeping Arthurian significance out of Jacobean pageants may be directly related to the impediments to James’s dream of peaceful unification—a dream that was far more complicated than it appears in Munday’s pageant and in James’s iconography more generally. James capitalized on the unifying rhetoric of an incorporated Britain throughout his reign; however, the success of such propaganda was more precarious. James’s attempts to unite the land as “Britain” met with resistance from those who felt national difference would erode—that recasting and renaming these different kingdoms as “Britain” would mean sacrifices not worth the gains.<sup>68</sup> By casting James as Brutus, Munday granted the king the ideal image of unifying monarch, but by refusing to acknowledge Arthur directly, he threatened to alienate James from those who wished to keep English pride (and its laws, stories, history, etc.) intact.<sup>69</sup> The instability of James’s

---

<sup>68</sup> According to Butler’s *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture*, people feared that common law would not be upheld (that the unifying king would overrule the Parliament) and that differences in perspective between England and Scotland would be ignored (98).

<sup>69</sup> This may have been the reason that in 1607 Thomas Campion decided to replace the James-as-Brutus role with James-as-Arthur. A masque celebrating the marriage between English Honoria Denney and Scottish Lord Edward Denney, it was a symbolic merger of English and Scottish identity. Campion prefaces his masque with the following epigram:

Merlin, the great King Arthur being slaine,  
Foretold that he should come to life againe,  
And long time after wield great Brittaines state  
More powerfull ten-fould, and more fortunate.  
Prophet ‘tis true, and well we find the same,  
Save only that thou didst mistake the name.

On Campion’s masque, Martin Butler argues: “At this Anglo-Scottish event, the contest of female and male, Diana and Apollo, would have refracted tensions between Elizabethan and Jacobean, English and British”; see *The Stuart*

image as a unifying neo-Brutus is even more critical in light of the fact that, within a few years, James would also feel pressure from his son Henry's supporters who applauded the prince's desire to cultivate an explicitly Arthurian ideology at court. Thus, what in some of the first civic pageants of James's reign looks to be a fairly straightforward gesture toward the replacement of militant chivalric action with peaceful preparedness, shortly thereafter gives way to more nuanced performances in which the king's fantasy of union can never be absolutely realized. The awareness of such impossibility, coupled with tension arising from Prince Henry's militant Protestant agenda, put James in an uncomfortable position, suspended between memories of an imperial Tudor past and (at least until Henry's death in 1612) the promise of a violent future. James was therefore forced to continually invent or "try on" roles in pageantry that would serve his interests while acknowledging competing symbols and the bodies that wore them; the outcome of such experimenting was not a stable iconic system but a shifting set of signifiers suspended between Brutus's novel unifying import and Arthur's nostalgic, chivalric significance.

Difficult as it was for writers to cast James as a Galfridian hero in light of the tension between Tudor iconography and Jacobean policy, Charles proved even more difficult. Although it might appear from the limited vantage point of Carew's masque that Charles never really tried to align his royal iconography with Arthur, Charles's political moves reflect at least an initial attempt to cultivate the kind of martial kingship that Prince Henry had promised to pursue. R. Malcolm Smuts notes that just after James's death, Charles appeared to be returning to Elizabethan policies: he barred Catholics from James's funeral and made them unwelcome at

---

*Court Masque and Political Culture*, 106. See also the work of Philippa Berry and Jayne Elizabeth Archer, "Reinventing the Matter of Britain: undermining the state in Jacobean masques" in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. David J. Baker and Willy Maley (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Berry and Archer give much more credit to Diana/Elizabeth's powerful *decision to yield* than to Apollo's eventual triumph.

court, and made shows of military prowess.<sup>70</sup> Not coincidentally, just as James had turned to the British heroes to smooth his transition to the throne, so too Charles invoked their continuity-promoting influence at the dawn of his own reign. However, Charles's military failures, his marriage to a Catholic princess, and his eventual rule without Parliament illustrate his evident failure to embody Henry's Protestant Vocation and, by the 1630s, Charles's royal image was just as incompatible with Arthur's as James's had been by 1610. Just as important, I argue, is the fact that Charles, like James, seemed to be trapped in the shadow of an already-established iconic system that created friction with his particular politics.

After Prince Henry's death, there were no Arthurian masques equal to those Jonson had composed in the prince's honor, and the pageant writers continued to neglect the famous king. Such an Arthurian absence did not, however, indicate that Arthur and Henry had lost their influence over Stuart iconography; on the contrary, both figures lingered in an affinity for the chivalric Protestant nation the dead prince had promised to foster. As Roy Strong points out, the sense of lost potential was strong enough to linger far into Charles's reign.<sup>71</sup> In 1624, the year before the transition from James to Charles, John Webster's Lord Mayor's Show *Monuments of Honour* made it clear that there were plenty of subjects who expected Charles to take up the Arthurian agendas of his dead brother, performing a renaissance of Henry's lost potential.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition*, 31.

<sup>71</sup> Roy Strong posits Henry's short life and death as provocative of lingering questions about what might have been: "The writing of history must always take into account lost visions and lost hopes, the world that might have been but never was"; see *Henry, Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance*, 225. Such questions of what might have been were not easily forgotten after Henry's death.

<sup>72</sup> It is not surprising that Prince Henry would still be a prominent figure in the public imagination, given his popularity and the enormous outpouring of grief and literature that accompanied his funerals in 1612. In *Henry, Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance* Roy Strong explains, "The flood of literature that attended his departure far exceeded that for Gloriana in quantity" (220). Complementing Strong's assertion, in *Culture and Power*

*Monuments of Honour* has Arthurian implications in its celebration of Tudor monarchs, and, even more importantly, in its culminating moment of elaborate praise for the deceased Arthur-enthusiast.<sup>73</sup> Webster's pageant opens in the Temple of Honour, over which Troynovant presides. Underneath Troynovant are the cities Antwerp, Paris, Rome, Venice and Constantinople, and beneath this row of cities a line of poets: "*Jeffrey Chaucer*, the learned *Gower*, the excellent *John Lidgate*, the sharpe-witted *Sir Thomas Moore*, and last as worthy both Souldier and Scholler, *Sir Philip Sidney*, these being Celebrators of honor, and the preseruers both of the names of men, and memories of Cities aboue, to posterity."<sup>74</sup> According to Webster's structure, poets preserve the honor of famous cities through their written monuments; much of the pageant's displays and speeches follow this pattern with respect to deceased English monarchs, illustrating the relationship between royal patrons and the poets whose written praise grants them immortality. Webster lauds the set of five poets for their ability to memorialize those royal deeds which otherwise might have been forgotten: "These [poets] beyond death a fame to Monarcke giue,/ And these make Cities and Societies to liue."<sup>75</sup>

Webster goes on to give specific examples of monarchs worth preserving. For the purposes of this particular Lord Mayor's Show, the list includes those kings who were

---

*in England 1585-1685* R. Malcolm Smuts compares the elaborate, heraldic funerals and the elegiac outpourings upon the deaths of Sir Philip Sidney and Prince Henry: "The number of verse elegies commemorating Sidney actually exceeded those published for Elizabeth in 1603. His record remained unbroken until the death in 1612 of a royal paragon of Protestant chivalry: Henry, Prince of Wales"(65).

<sup>73</sup> Like Munday, Webster uses a Lord Mayor's Show as a vehicle for royal praise. Although this is a Lord Mayor's Show presented to celebrate new mayor John Gore of the Merchant Taylors during the reign of James I, the central figure of honor is indisputably Prince Henry and the pageant's implications are unmistakably bound up in nostalgia for medieval and Tudor English monarchy.

<sup>74</sup> John Webster, *Monuments of Honour* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1624), B1r.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, B1v.

champions of the Merchant Taylors; however, the visuals marking the scene distinguish Henry VII—the founder of the Tudor line and the final king in the list—as especially important.<sup>76</sup> Henry VII occupies the second-highest position of honor in the show, holding the charter by which the Merchant Taylors’ company was changed from “Linin-Armorers” to “Master and Wardens of Merchant-Taylors of Saint *Iohn Baptist*.”<sup>77</sup> Henry VII is also the only king to be crowned with red *and* white roses (the other kings were garnished with artificial white *or* red roses, according to their affiliation), suggesting his important role as unifier. After praising the Merchant Taylors once more, Edward III offers this advice: “Let all good men this sentence oft repeate./ By unity the smallest things grow great” to which all the kings respond with the second line of this couplet.<sup>78</sup> In his emphasis on unity, Henry VII might be said to echo James’s portrayal of Brutus: he founds the Tudor dynasty and *unifies* all under his reign. However, although Henry VII was indeed a unifier, he was also known for his seizing the throne by military force and employing Arthurian elements during his reign. In these ways, Henry VII shows strongest parallels to the true star of Webster’s pageant—the indisputably militant, Arthurian Prince Henry.

Given the nostalgic emphasis on monuments to Tudor glory in the first part of the pageant, it is fitting that the spectacle culminates in the glorification of Prince Henry, a figure in much need of the preservative benefits of a monument since he was not able to win expected

---

<sup>76</sup> The kings listed include Edward III, Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI, Edward IV, Richard III, and Henry VII.

<sup>77</sup> Webster, *Monuments of Honour*, B2v-B3r.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, B3r.

fame by ruling. The final section of the pageant Webster calls “Monuments of Gratitude,” and in the printed text he describes the Henrician spectacle:

Vppon an Artificiall Rocke...are placed foure curious Paramids charged with the Princes Armes, the three Feathers, which by day yeeld a glorious shew, and by night a more goodly, for they haue lights in them, that at such time as my Lord Maior returns from *Pauls*, shall make certaine ouals and squares, resemble pretious stones, the Rocke expresses the riches of the Kingdome Prince *Henry* was borne Heire to, the Piramids, which are Monuments for the Dead, that hee is deceased: on the top of this rests halfe a Celestiall Globe, in the middest of this hangs the Holy Lambe in the Sun-beames, on either side of these, an Angell, vpon a pedestall of gold stands the figure of Prince *Henry* with his Coronet, George and Garter...<sup>79</sup>

Everything in the pageant has been leading up to this glorious scene of Prince Henry, monumentalized as sheer national, chivalric *potential*: he was heir to a great kingdom, and enthusiastically promised to govern well, but now, in his physical absence, he serves as a symbol of promised returns. Such sentiments have clear parallels to Arthurian second comings, as the speech of Amade le Graude illustrates. Upon viewing the spectacular Henrician tableaux, he states:

Such was the Prince, such are the noble hearts;  
 Who when they dye, yet dye not in all parts:  
 But from the Integrity of a Brave mind,  
 Leave a most Cleere and Eminent Fame behind.  
 Thus hath this Jewell not quite lost his Ray,  
 Only cas'd up 'gainst a more glorious day.  
 And bee't rememberd that our Company  
 Haue not forgot him who ought ner'e to dye:  
 Yet, wherefore should our sorrow giue him dead,  
 When a new Phaenix springs vp in his stead:  
 That as he seconds him in every grace,  
 May second him in *Brother-hood*, and place.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Webster, *Monuments of Honour*, C1v.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, C2v.

The concept of Henry not gone but “cas’d up ‘gainst a more glorious day” suggests the preserved promise so important to the Arthurian tradition, whose hero is always bound in monuments, always in danger of being forgotten (or replaced), yet constantly resurfacing for those who promote his legend and fashion themselves in his image. While I am not suggesting that Webster’s pageant is Arthurian in the same explicit sense as *Prince Henry’s Barriers*, in many ways it is just as connected to Arthurian ideas of absence and promise, and perhaps more consistently grounded in preferences for figures who were known Arthurian enthusiasts, than the contradictory Arthur Jonson had offered fourteen years earlier. Although it may seem a rather obvious choice to use Prince Henry as the culminating spectacle in a pageant about monuments to deceased monarchs, such an emphasis on the Protestant champion and the Tudors within a year of monarchical transition may suggest an uncertainty regarding what was to happen in England when Charles I took over. Webster valorizes Prince Henry’s capacity to *persist*, to *await* a successor like himself in whom the deceased’s ideology can find rebirth; while there may have been hope at this point that his brother Charles would be this “new Phaenix,” such a Henrician revival was not to be.

Ultimately, Charles failed to live up to such splendid promise. William Hunt, whose concept of mythic capital punctuates this chapter, suggests that the Civil War was occasioned in large part by Charles’s inability to inspire support via capitalizing on national myth. He explains that a monarch’s inability to occupy “the symbolic centre of the integrating collective myth”—in the case of my argument, to build upon if not embody the Arthurian myth—had costs when dynastic representation conflicted with established tradition:

I would argue...that regimes are legitimate when they are perceived as the vectors of an effective national myth, one which is generally, though never universally, endorsed by

the dominant social strata, and at least passively acknowledged by the subordinate... When a regime comes into conflict with a strong national myth by disregarding or contravening its central integrative premises, then it is heading for trouble, though the nature and timing of that trouble will vary according to circumstance.<sup>81</sup>

By introducing the concept of nation, Hunt points to the interconnected nature of royal representation and subjects' reception. Although Hunt never mentions Arthur specifically, the national myth to which he refers is precisely what Prince Henry—a noted Arthurian enthusiast—endorsed: a chivalric Protestant ethos. Hunt's emphasis on "national myth" as a cultural solidifier and an essential asset for dynasties hoping to retain support and therefore control, is entirely pertinent to considerations of why masque writers aligned their respective monarchs with the celestial Arthur. The fact that Jonson and Carew invested in Arthur at all to represent the concerns of Stuart monarchs whose royal images were so evidently incompatible with Arthur's legacy suggests that these writers were aware of Arthurian myth's propensity to persist, even in the face of attempts to co-opt or bankrupt it: in short, it had to be dealt with. As a way of explaining Charles's particular failure to adequately embrace England's national myth, Hunt claims that Charles was haunted by his brother Henry's ghost. Although Henry was indeed its most recent proponent, I argue that the ghost that haunted both James and Charles was actually a much more established presence, the central figure of England's most effective national myth—it was actually Arthur's.

### **What the Public Saw: Masque and Pageant in Performance and Print**

The national implications of the Galfridian revisions that played out in court productions like *Prince Henry's Barriers* and *Coelum Britannicum* and in public spectacles like *The*

---

<sup>81</sup> William Hunt, "The Spectral Origins of the English Civil War," 308.

*Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* and *Monuments of Honour* are dependent upon the generic qualities of the masque and civic pageant—both in performance and print. The court masque was a presentation of the monarch’s ideology through the lens of the writer’s creativity: thus, when the monarch’s preferences sustained competitive preferences from a rising heir, tension within the masque resulted. Just as importantly, the masque in print was a critical factor in the success of a monarch’s iconographic agenda: although the performance was more likely to be viewed by the aristocracy, the printed masque gave British subjects the chance to read—and evaluate—Stuart portrayals of power represented by Galfridian characters and themes.<sup>82</sup> Stuart monarchs must have been aware that the roles they played could reach further than the performance via print; such roles, therefore, were informed both by royal prerogatives *and* by British subjects’ expectations regarding national traditions. Although it would be going too far to say that masque writers composed their works according to public tastes, the expectations surrounding a figure as famous as Arthur could hardly have failed to occur to Jonson and Carew as they put forth their various versions of the legend.

Thanks to the patronage of James I, the court masque underwent substantial innovation in the seventeenth century, becoming increasingly complex and, within the medium of print, extending its implications to the public outside the court. It was particularly under the creative force of Jonson and Jones, however, that the court masque developed the elaborate literary and mechanical qualities for which it became famous during the course of the seventeenth century.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Some masques were indeed accessible to more “common” citizens (tickets were sold), but the printed version made “getting access” to the masque easier still. Therefore, while I do not argue that masques were wholly off limits to sub-aristocratic Londoners, I suggest that they became more widely accessible when they went to print.

<sup>83</sup> With its roots in folk traditions such as dumb shows or “mummings,” the masque tradition began in popular entertainments but grew increasingly private and relegated to the socially elite audience. In *English Pageantry*,

Such artistic/monarchical collaboration contributed to an evolving masque form that was, as Stephen Orgel puts it, “as much the creation of the king’s sensibility as of [the writer’s],” reinforcing the decision of a monarch to take on the robes of an iconic predecessor in the cultivation of his or her own image.<sup>84</sup> Orgel goes on to say in *Art and Power* that masques are “the expression of the monarch’s will, the mirrors of his mind.”<sup>85</sup> Such statements are illustrative of the high stakes of the masque genre as a whole: as an “expression of the monarch’s will,” masques depict and transmit the carefully constructed image of royal power (as contracted between monarch and writer/designer). Such high-stakes displays were expensive, but, as Leah S. Marcus explains, “the masque’s elaborateness was justified as a manifestation of the glory of the monarch and therefore of the power and splendor of the nation.”<sup>86</sup> Although scholars often discuss the costs of the masques as a major reason for the public scorn of such spectacle, it is arguably the sense of exclusivity that made just as great an impact on public disgust.<sup>87</sup> Civic pageantry, after all, was also costly, but it was directed at all Englishmen and women; it is the general Stuart preference for expensive, *courtly* entertainments that may have contributed to the

---

Robert Withington argues that it was during the reign of Henry VII that mumming grew into the masque: the addition of singing and dialogue built upon—and eclipsed—the simpler silent show (110).

<sup>84</sup> Stephen Orgel, *The Johnsonian Masque* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>85</sup> Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 42.

<sup>86</sup> Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 26.

<sup>87</sup> See Martin Butler, “Private and occasional drama” in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Butler explains, “Morris dances, mummings, and seasonal feasts reappear in Stuart masques but as rituals which affirm the royal sense of difference from the people”(137).

dissatisfaction with shows which were supposedly “a manifestation of...the splendor of the nation” and yet dedicated mainly to the glorification of the monarch.

The spectacle of the masque was indeed confined to a single, court-centered performance, but readers could “glimpse”—and even contribute to—the splendors of the masque in its printed form. Ranging from small quartos to inclusion in large folio editions, masques in print took a variety of material forms. Most commonly, they were printed as short, pamphlet-length quartos selling for between *2d-4d*, making them relatively affordable (comparable to the chapbook prices for chivalric romances). The printing of masques, on one hand, was a way to facilitate the preservation of an ephemeral genre; after all, although the royal power such masques celebrate was assumed to be eternal, the performance was brief. On the other hand, putting documents bearing the power and splendor of the king into a cheaply printed vehicle had the potential to conflate the “mirror of the monarch’s mind” with ephemeral documents created wholly for sale.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, the affordability and marketing strategies surrounding masques—manifested on title pages declaring the details about the original venues, audience, and performance—suggest a *demand* for such documents not unlike the desire for printed news that was mounting steadily in the seventeenth century. In fact, many masques advertise themselves on their title pages in ways that “take the reader there”: they give the date and location of the original performance, often

---

<sup>88</sup>See Lauren Shohet, “The Masque in/as Print” in *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Marta Straznicky (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006). Shohet explains: “Printed masques were short books, usually small quartos, and many were printed on lower-quality paper (although others were not). Early modern purchasers of small books often left them unbound so that their paper might be recycled for household use, or purchasers might bind them together with other miscellaneous small works...in seventeenth-century libraries, small books generally, but perhaps small dramatic texts in particular, often were considered ephemera and were not catalogued”(185). Shohet suggests that the printed masque text would indeed have reached a wide range of readers—not just audiences sanctioned by authorial and royal power. The low prices of certain printed masques (*2d-4d*) suggest that those who would never actually attend a court masque could certainly acquire—and evaluate—a printed masque.

noting the most prominent attendees.<sup>89</sup> The printed masque thus anticipates the demands of the reader-consumers who wish to get a full picture of how the king styles himself among his court; it does not simply reinforce a top-down model wherein the reader passively receives the author's intended glorification of the monarch. Leah S. Marcus claims that masques in their moment of performance were manifestations of royal power; I would add that in their cheaply printed form they catered to consumers' apparent desires to gain—or reject—familiarity with the sovereign through such manifestations. More than the opportunity to merely “glimpse” the sovereign, the masque reader potentially had a role in reinforcing, rejecting, and even co-creating the sovereign's image. The reader's shaping influence is therefore inextricably linked to the shaping influence of the Galfridian history on the success or failure the Stuarts had in allying themselves with Arthur.<sup>90</sup> In the case of both the *Barriers* and *Coelum Britannicum*, sovereign and pageant writer may seem to be transmitting a royal interpretation of Arthur with directions regarding how such a role should be perceived. In fact, however, the figure of Arthur was already a firmly established part of British history and many spectators/readers must have been informed by their own aural or literary experience of that figure. Consequently, any links between Arthur and monarch had to be made with the expectations of audiences past and present in mind. The printed masque held monarchs and writers accountable for their portrayal of much-revered

---

<sup>89</sup> The masque's connection with news is most evident in masques that were printed individually, with a title page reflecting the name of the member of court for whom it was performed. A comparison between printed masques and tabloids would not be altogether radical.

<sup>90</sup> See Jerzy Limon, *The Masque of Stuart Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990). Limon claims that masques become “literary” when printed, as they become important poetic documents in and of themselves and not mere *records* of past performances. Although I agree that any printed version of a text originally created for performance will have marked differences (and often intriguing additions by the poet) from its original, “live” form, Limon's view is too author-centric for such a complicated document: the printed masque is indeed literature—the work of a poet—but its availability to a wide readership made its ultimate significance far more unpredictable (as Jonson's fears attest).

heroes. The success of a king's self-presentation was therefore at least partially determined by forces outside of his control.

The major Arthurian masques of the Stuart dynasty were undoubtedly shaped by larger cultural expectations generating from past Tudor traditions, as well as the flourishing of printed Arthurian history and romance during the seventeenth century. Although when compared to history and romance, masques appear to have enjoyed a limited life in printed form, their appearance in that medium at all is significant. While Jonson sometimes printed his masques in quarto editions before the publication of his collected works in 1616, *Prince Henry's Barriers* enjoyed no such early circulation; therefore, there are no pamphlet-length, inexpensive versions of this masque. Jonson himself was understandably anxious about the increasing popularity of a medium whose products were ephemeral and motivated by consumer (not poetic) interests, a fact that his mission to present masques as serious literature worth preserving makes evident. In *The Jonsonian Masque*, Stephen Orgel explains, "For the first time, the masque writer is conceiving his function as not merely to celebrate the greatness of his royal spectators, but, like the elegist, to 'redeem them as well from Ignorance, as Envie.'" <sup>91</sup> Jonson is a critical figure for understanding the implications of the printed masque, as he both capitalizes on the idealistic permanence promised by print and scoffs at the consumer-driven reality of the market. The unique combination of praise for poetry and disgust for cheap print is evident in Jonson's masque *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon*. This production, presented for King James at Whitehall in 1620, begins with an antimasque in which the printer emerges as a rascal

---

<sup>91</sup> Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, 64.

in that he is solely out to make money. When accused by the poetry-promoting Heralds of “[thinking] there’s nothing good anywhere but what’s to be sold,” the Printer replies, “Indeed I am all for sale, gentlemen, you say true. I am a printer, and a printer of news, and I do hearken after ‘em wherever they be, at any rates; I’ll give anything for a good copy now, be’t true or false, so’t be news.”<sup>92</sup> While it is not surprising that Jonson felt himself as a poet to be “above” the concerns of the market, the fact is that his masques *were* sometimes cheaply printed and were thus available to an audience he could not control. Jonson was certainly more motivated by thoughts of his own legacy than a desire to “give the people what they wanted”; nevertheless, it is significant that, despite his alleged distaste for Arthuriana, Jonson *did* include the *Barriers* in his collected works of 1616, and in doing so both preserved his Arthurian masque for posterity *and* released it into the unpredictable, profit-driven realm of publishers and customers.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps even more illustrative than that of Jonson’s text, the publication history for *Coelum Britannicum* offers critical insights regarding whether Carew’s revision of Arthur for a courtly audience was a reflection of or a departure from the sentiments of Charles’s subjects. *Coelum Britannicum* enjoyed a particularly rich life in print: during the tumultuous years leading up to and after the English Civil Wars, it was printed no less than four times—more than any other Stuart masque containing Arthurian characters, images, or themes. First printed by itself as

---

<sup>92</sup> Ben Jonson’s masque *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon* (1620) is included in Jonson’s second folio, published by Richard Meighan in 1641.

<sup>93</sup> See Allison V. Scott, “Jonson’s Masque Markets and the Problems of Literary Ownership” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 47, no. 2 (2007), 451-71. Scott argues, “Jonson’s masques are products of Jonson’s labor, printed and sold in the marketplace, and products enabled by, produced within, and reflective of the authority of the king, court, and systems of aristocratic patronage. More than any other genre of text...the masques rely upon being owned in some way by numerous people and upon being valued and exchanged in both existing patronage and developing market economies”(451). No matter when or how printed, the masque is a unique document: created for “higher” audiences by poets who valued their art above commodity, but ultimately available to the beneficiaries of men who were “all for sale.”

a small quarto in 1634 for Thomas Walkley, it was reprinted in 1640, 1651 and then again in 1670 and 1671 as part of the collected verse of Thomas Carew.<sup>94</sup> Such repetition suggests that readers continually wanted to read Carew's text—a fact that raises questions about whether Arthur may have been as out of favor with the people of England as he was in the Caroline court. However, the most critical facet of *Coelum Britannicum*'s print history in an Arthurian context is the fact that 1634 also saw the final, least expensive printed edition of Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* until the nineteenth century. Printed by William Stansby, this edition of Malory's text is the first quarto edition, and the first to be published without illustrations; together, these features meant a less expensive volume, presumably making it possible for more readers to procure a copy. Furthermore, the presence of Malory's book in a new form and format in 1634 suggests that there was renewed demand for the famous story—and perhaps from a new generation of readers (the last edition, Thomas East's, had appeared in 1582). And while Stansby does make clear that he has “updated” the text to reflect the sophistication of seventeenth-century England, the fact that he felt that Malory's text would sell in 1634 leads me to believe that Arthur's compromised role in Carew's text is less illustrative of the Arthurian icon's seventeenth-century irrelevance than it is of Charles's inability to convincingly transcend Arthurian significance. Try as he might to balance the images cultivated by father and brother, Charles found Arthur to be an ill-fitting—if not downright restrictive—avatar. Given the appearance in print of *Coelum*

---

<sup>94</sup> This 1634 printing for Thomas Walkley is a small quarto with no particularly distinguishing embellishment: it is solely a transcript of the masque. In the 1651, 1670, and 1671 versions, however, the masque is included with a number of poems (the same in each edition) yet each has its own “title page” introducing it within the larger volume. Most interestingly, every one of the three editions I examined in detail at The British Library contained readers' marks: on the back of the title page to a copy of the 1651 collection of Carew's verse is written “Wils Stange: His Booke.” Similarly, in the 1670 printing, on page 224 is written “James Walter: His Book. 1732.” The 1671 edition is signed “J. S. Banks 1814” on the title page of the volume, and elsewhere the same hand has constructed a table of contents for the book—a possible sign of regular use and consultation even into the nineteenth century. At the very least, the marks suggest that Carew's works were worth asserting ownership—and perhaps purchasing in continually updated volumes.

*Britannicum* and the most “accessible” *Morte Darthur* in the same year, the English readership apparently had a conflicted reaction to Charles’s redefinition and subsequent rejection of the very chivalric legacy through which subjects had established familiarity with their sovereigns in the past.

As spectacle that was directed toward the public right from the start, civic pageantry was fundamentally different than masque: Given that a performance like Munday’s would have been performed in front of the citizens of London, it is essential to consider just what the portrayal of James as Brutus sought to accomplish in the eyes of James’s new subjects. From the speeches in Munday’s pageant, it is clear that James as a pacific neo-Brutus was a defining image of the performance. However, the printed pageant gave readers a way to experience (or re-experience) spectacle and to draw their own conclusions about such a comparison after further reflection. In printed pageants, a reader could often find speeches he had not originally heard—either because such speeches had been inaudible or because they had been removed from the performance due to time constraints—and he could notice details he had missed on a first viewing.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, authors often included explanatory information about the significance of the speeches and images used in the pageants, something that the original performance could rarely abide.

Because of these additions, the pageant-in-print is an object worth considering in its own right,

---

<sup>95</sup> See Thomas Dekker’s commentary in *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First*, ed. John Nichols, 358. Dekker’s printed contributions to James’s royal entry illustrate the desire of an author to construct an ideal text—that which would have been possible if the performance had not been restricted in time and/or content. He writes: “You must understand that a regard being had that his Majestie should not be wearied with tedious Speeches, a great part of those which are in this booke set downe were left unspeken; so that thou doest here receive them as they should have been delivered, not as they were.” The speeches were not always performed as they were conceived, making the printed text all the more important as a cultural event in itself. Dekker’s explanation is also important because it imagines a reader who may have attended the pageants but has incomplete knowledge or further questions about the images or speeches featured therein. Print therefore allows Dekker, in some ways, to retroactively shape the public reception, to present his speeches “as they should have been delivered.”

not just as a record of performance but an experience in itself. In “Stuart Civic Pageants and Textual Performance,” David M. Bergeron explains, “Playwrights increasingly intend the pageant texts for readers; these texts become commemorative books that both capture the event and add to it. They assume an expository and narrative function that sets them apart from the typical dramatic text...I argue that these publications do not obliterate theatrical performance or displace it so much as they complete it.”<sup>96</sup> Bergeron notes the steady increase in annotations and the escalating sense of the author’s making the pageant text into a new, “improved” vehicle for his work.<sup>97</sup> Today, the printed pageant text allows scholars to ascertain pageant writers’ attempts to assert control over their creations, their varying success in that endeavor, and the ultimate power of the reader to either credit or censure the role played by the monarch (or mayor) in question. The idealization evident in the printed performance text, as it generated from, responded to, or shaped reader desire, tells us much about what pageant writers believed would serve James best in cultivating public support via his association with British history.

Munday’s *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* is an ideal example of the author’s attempt to style the king according to royal iconographic preference while taking into account the consumer’s power; Munday’s pageant in print set a new standard by blurring the line between the text as a “record” of a performance and a text of historical importance in its own right, bearing implications independent of the original spectacle. Munday peppers his text with printed marginal notes illustrating the credibility of his work, which derives largely from the well-

---

<sup>96</sup> David M. Bergeron, “Stuart Civic Pageants and Textual Performance” *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1998), 163-83.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 168. Bergeron notes that in the three extant printed Elizabethan Lord Mayors’ Shows, the descriptions are sparse, and the documents are therefore more like records than books in their own right. This changed dramatically over the course of the Stuarts’ reign.

established tradition of sixteenth-century debates about England's Trojan origins. However, the most striking element of this printed pageant, besides its being the first Lord Mayor's Show to survive in such a form, is the extensive description of Brutus's lineage that Munday provides at the beginning of the book. The historical introduction illustrates Munday's self-proclaimed need to chronicle Britain's origins via Brutus's genealogy:

Because our present conceit reacheth unto the antiquitie of Brytaine, which (in many mindes) hath carried many and variable opinions: I thought it not unnecessary (being thereto earnestly solicited) to speake somewhat concerning the estate of this our Countrey, even from the very first originall, until her honourable attaining the name of *Brytannia*, and then lastlye how she became to be called *England*.<sup>98</sup>

Munday gives his reasons for providing such a lengthy, learned description and, in doing so, sounds very much like William Caxton in his assurance of being “earnestly solicited” to present this British history in print.<sup>99</sup> As with Caxton, whether this solicitation actually took place is not as important as the fact that Munday believed that his printed text would benefit from such an introduction and that perhaps it would sell better if it were more fully annotated with references to Geoffrey of Monmouth's history. Like Caxton's printing of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the publication of Munday's text is founded on the assumption that the English public still desired—and felt it was their patriotic duty—to hear the story of ancient Britain. An important difference from Caxton's is that Munday's text makes absolutely no mention of Arthur—a fact which, in itself, may have provoked remark from those spectators and readers who were more familiar with the concept of Arthur as Brutus's heir than with James's new

---

<sup>98</sup> Munday, *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia*, ed. David M. Bergeron, 3.

<sup>99</sup> In his famous preface to Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1485), Caxton claims to be printing the text in response to demands by gentlemen interested in procuring a copy. Caxton, further, likens reading about King Arthur to taking an important part in patriotism. See Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. Eugène Vinaver (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), xiii. See also this dissertation's “Introduction.”

position in the role.<sup>100</sup> Given the echo of Caxton's rhetoric in a new, Arthur-free context, in some sense Munday's text threatens to write Arthur out of the genre of historical texts for which the public allegedly clamors. Munday's text is thus no mere record of a pageant; on the contrary, it both responds to and attempts to shape readers' ideas about James as the pacific fulfillment of ancient promise.<sup>101</sup> Munday's remarks about being "earnestly solicited" to complete this work both privilege his product and imply that its economic—and perhaps ideological—success will depend on readers' reactions to such ideas.<sup>102</sup>

Webster's pageant, too, boasts awareness of its "other life" as a book. Though initially staged in the streets of London, in print the pageant does even more to become a monument to Henry by preserving Webster's praise: it highlights the importance of Webster's reader, whom

---

<sup>100</sup> Arthur's disappearance had not gone unnoticed: in *Poly-Olbion* (1610) Michael Drayton would lament the English neglect of their famous king, echoing Malory's lament in the *Morte Darthur* itself. See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>101</sup> Munday's show is unique and significant for the extent to which the legend gets "air time" in front of a large, varied crowd, most of the members of which had never read Geoffrey of Monmouth's text (there was no printed English version at the time). The fact that this show might have been the most extensive treatment of Geoffrey's history its audience of Londoners had ever seen or heard—and one which excludes Arthur completely—threatens to preclude from the public understanding of Britain's Trojan origins even the possibility of Arthurian relevance in Jacobean court imagery and/or policy. The battle between pro-Arthur and anti-Arthur historians in the sixteenth century, however, may have meant that some of the crowd had familiarity with Geoffrey's text, albeit in a heavily mediated way. For example, John Leland's *Assertio in clytissimi Arturii* (a defense of Arthur and Geoffrey) had been translated and printed in English in 1582 by Richard Robinson, and may have sparked interest in the Galfridian myth despite the inability of readers to procure a copy of Geoffrey's text. See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>102</sup> See also Ben Jonson's commentary in *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First*, ed. John Nichols, 360. Jonson concludes his depiction of James's 1604 royal entry with the following (printed) pronouncement: "Thus hath both Court, Town, and Country-reader our portion of the Device for this City; neither are we ashamed to profess it, being assured well of the difference between it and Pageantry." Jonson's divide between his poetry and "Pageantry" capitalizes on the merits of the printed text which, although he loathes its ability to turn art into commodities, gives Jonson the opportunity to present his speeches as he devised them *for various readers*. Jonson's reference to "Court, Town, and Country-reader[s]" as equally able to procure a copy of his pamphlet suggests not only that the pageant text would be available in print, but that it would make its way to readers not based in London. Although Jonson's intended readers are elite, educated persons of means, it does not follow that Jonson's actual reader was the only one in town or country able to procure and digest the printed royal entry. Like the performances themselves, printed civic pageants were part of the public domain. A text intended by the author for "Town, Court, and Country Readers" might just make it into more "common" hands when a profit-driven publisher's motives intervened.

the author apparently had in mind while composing the printed text. Like Munday's *Triumphs*, Webster's *Monuments of Honor* illustrates a significant move toward perceptions of the pageant text as a viable book unto itself. By creating a textual monument to Prince Henry, Webster becomes a colleague of the poets he features at the beginning of his pageant: he too is one who "beyond death a fame to Monarcke give[s]," and he seems to be aware that such fame also generates from the reception of the text by seventeenth-century readers. David M. Bergeron notes Webster's repeated use of first-person pronouns and the present tense in the printed pageant text: the author continually draws attention to himself as the creator of both the pageant text and its current book form.<sup>103</sup> Webster's textual monument takes on a life of its own through its author's attempt at direct communication with his present and future audiences. Like Munday, Webster consistently offers commentary and background on his speeches and descriptions. In his preface to the printed pageant, he acknowledges his audience:

I Could in this my Preface...deliuer to You the Original and cause of all Tryumphes, their excessiue cost in the Time of the *Romans*: I could likewise with so Noble Amplification make a suruey of the worth, and glory of the Triumphs of the precedent times in this Honorable City of *London*: That were my work of a bigger bulke, they shold remaine to all Posterity: but both my Pen, and ability this way are confin'd in too narrow a Circle: Nor haue I space enough in this so short a Volume to expresse onely with rough lines, and a faint shadow (as the Painters phrase is).<sup>104</sup>

Webster simultaneously acknowledges the possibility of providing a lengthy companion history to his pageant and the limitations of the genre in which he currently labors: he is "confin'd in too narrow a Circle" to begin such a project as part of his pageant. Although he modestly asserts that

---

<sup>103</sup> Bergeron, "Stuart Civic Pageantry and Textual Performance," 177. Although Bergeron never mentions Arthur, it is critical that his two major examples of the push to make printed pageants books in their own right—often with copious contextual material—both carry significant Arthurian implications.

<sup>104</sup> Webster, *Monuments of Honour*, A3r.

his ability is not equal to his task, he completely “takes over” his text in unprecedented ways, rendering purely rhetorical any claims to be ill equipped for fully annotating his subject. Indeed, there are many judgments throughout the printed pageant that could not have possibly transferred to the public in the actual performance: for example, one can easily see Henry VII’s glory from his prominent placement, his holding the Merchant Taylors’ charter, and his garlands of both red and white roses; however, in the printed pageant, Webster deems Richard III “the bad man, but the good king,” a gloss that offers the reader a glimpse into the author’s personal perception of history. Instead of lengthy historical additions like those Munday includes, Webster chooses to editorialize throughout, commenting on the choices he makes with a marked awareness of his audience. In closing, he echoes his Preface: “I could, in a more curious and Elaborate way haue exprest my selfe in these my endeauors, but to haue bin rather too teadious in my Speeches, or too weighty, might haue troubled my Noble Lord, and pushed the vnderstanding of the Common People; suffice it I hope 'tis well, and if it please his Lordship, and my Worthy Employers, I am amply satisfied.”<sup>105</sup> Webster’s acknowledgment of the “Common People” is critical: in this gesture, he recognizes the shaping influence of those who have seen and/or will be reading his text along with the king, the Lord Mayor, and other learned, high-ranking figures. Webster inserts himself into his pageant text as a creator wholly aware of his (entire) audience. That this audience would have still desired Prince Henry on the eve of Charles I’s rise to the throne suggests a sustained intersection between print history, Arthuriana, and national sentiment.

---

<sup>105</sup> Webster, *Monuments of Honour*, C2v. Like Caxton, Webster “sells” his text—in this case, to the “Common reader”—presenting a marked contrast to Jonson’s benevolent *gift* to “Court, Town and Country Reader.” It is my suggestion, however, that both courtly and “common” readers created the demand for all of these authors’ pageant texts.

The lively, annotated examples of civic pageantry in print may appear to suggest that masques—the genre in which Arthur himself actually appears—were not considered to be as important in book form. However, while Jonson and Carew do far less to shape the reception of their Arthurian masques than do Munday and Webster their historical pageants, the more important pattern to note is the increasing sense amongst seventeenth-century authors of both pageants and masques that performance texts would eventually reach book form. With this in mind, Arthur’s presence in any text escapes the confines of the court, and the reader becomes a far more influential figure in the construction of royal pageantry—and, by extension, of royal identity. Considering the increasing influence of the “Common People” as readers able to glimpse and shape all forms of performance, authors and publishers would continue to become more and more reader-conscious as they packaged the royal body in a textual one. Through the eyes of the English subject, a member of a nation that had created demand for six editions of Malory’s text, purchased copious Spenserian spinoffs, and had named their very landscape after Arthurian episodes, the compromised, half-hearted, neglectful, or ominous Arthurian portraits created by Jonson and Carew, Munday and Webster may not have benefited the reputation of the monarch with which each was linked. While audience reception must remain speculative, it does not necessarily follow that writers’ and rulers’ “tampering” with the England’s Arthurian inheritance went unnoticed by patriotic English readers.

### **Other Acts, Another Stage: Mythic Bankruptcy and Civil War**

Whether pursued for their ability to smooth transitions or rejected as ill-fitting or outdated signifiers, the Arthurian icons so evident in Tudor spectacle evidently influenced Stuart

royals, the writers who represented them, and public who witnessed these performances—whether at court, in the streets of London, or the printed page. From even this small sample of celestial pageants, one can see a dramatic change in the way Arthurian capital was created and promoted over the course of a century and across two dynasties. The celestial Arthur surfaced in 1501 in the hybrid form of an arbiter of justice and skilled fighter; it surfaced again in 1610 as Jonson's shield-distributing pacifist with an identity crisis; and finally in 1633 as Carew's inconsequential relic. Further reflecting the friction between Arthur and the Stuarts in the years surrounding Jonson's and Carew's celestial masques, civic pageantry "comes down to earth," completely neglecting to portray the Arthurian legend and instead pursuing other icons or lamenting lost potential. Considered in the context of cultural capital, these masques and pageants suggest that Stuart writers were increasingly ambivalent about—or even hostile to—associating their rulers with Arthur: in other words, Arthur's literary "backers" seem to be increasingly skeptical of Arthur's relevance to the Stuart dynasty and consequently portray him in ever more compromising ways.

It is not clear, however, that readers shared this mounting ambivalence, especially in light of their seeming enthusiasm for Arthurian texts in print in these and other genres. Even the possibility that readers may have felt more national sentiment for Arthur than for James or Charles is a suggestion of the cultural icon's power: the implications of national myth extend far beyond any singular reign, and thus must be acknowledged, if not embraced, by the sovereign if the subjects' desire for community is the intended outcome. While it would be reckless to argue that a Jacobean or Caroline failure to embrace Tudor Arthurian iconography was a major cause of the Civil Wars, in light of Hunt's theory of mythic capital, it is plausible that Jonson's and

Carew's masques' dilution of Arthurian significance (as well as Munday's and Webster's pageants' failure to directly acknowledge it) reflects their royal patrons' dilution of English national myth—and that such dilution may have damaged these patrons' reputations in the eyes of their subjects. Hunt's concept of "mythic bankruptcy" is especially helpful when considering the choices made by rulers and writers in light of their political and literary predecessors:

Whatever else it may mean, revolution signifies that a regime has lost legitimacy. The government is no longer the centripetal focus of the social order, no longer the symbolic centre of the integrating collective myth. I should like to introduce here the concept of 'mythic capital' to denote the reservoir of legitimacy available to a regime. I would suggest that revolution is history's foreclosure upon a mythically bankrupt regime.<sup>106</sup>

The perpetuation of the Arthurian celestial pageant—the form that had so effectively reflected the hopes and concerns of Tudor monarchs in 1501—in the very different contexts of 1610 and 1633 suggests that Jonson and Carew recognized that English mythic capital was bound up in the signifiers of the Arthurian tradition. Jonson's masque at least partially pays homage to his literary predecessor's emphasis on Arthur as "heavenly father" to his kingly progeny, but by the time Carew writes his celestial masque—after the loss of Prince Henry and the failure of Jacobean dreams of unification—it is evident that Caroline England has moved away from paying homage to the integrating collective myth and will instead perform "other acts" on "another stage"—those of mythic bankruptcy and civil war.

---

<sup>106</sup> Hunt, "Spectral Origins of the English Civil War," 326-7.

## Chapter 4

### Staging Arthur: The “Lurking Carcass” of Arthurian Legend in Early Modern Drama

Although in Ben Jonson’s *Prince Henry’s Barriers* Merlin proposes that English stages be cleared of Arthurian relics, Arthurian plays, in fact, enjoyed a palpable presence in performance and print in the late sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth century. The most notable Arthurian play of this period, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588) was composed by Thomas Hughes and seven other gentlemen of Gray’s Inn and was performed at Greenwich for Queen Elizabeth herself. This play explores the “misfortunes” that inflict a nation lacking a strong ruler or stable succession: Arthur’s ambitions abroad lead to his neglect of his own kingdom, allowing his incestuously-conceived son Mordred to usurp his throne. Throughout this play are lengthy reflections on the divine right of a king to use violence against a threat to his own power, but there is also a heavy emphasis on the king’s obligation to the commonwealth—his obligation to protect his people from the threats of usurpation, uncertain succession, and civil war.<sup>1</sup> After its performance at Greenwich, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* was almost immediately printed, a significant fact given that, in the late 1580s, very few plays of the Inns of Court (which would not have been available to most of the general public) were given such a vote of consumer confidence. Thus, even though *The Misfortunes of Arthur* is the only early modern English play that is wholly dedicated to Arthurian subject matter, it makes a significant and lasting contribution to theories of English nationhood in its emphasis on the rights of the common people and its availability in print.

---

<sup>1</sup> Such themes had special meaning for an aging queen who had recently executed a potential usurper, who lacked an heir, and who was facing an increasingly threatening Spain.

Although there are no other early modern plays so fully dedicated to Arthurian legend, two Galfridian plays—Thomas Middleton’s *Hengist, King of Kent* (c. 1620, later printed in 1661 as *The Mayor of Quinborough*) and William Rowley’s *The Birth of Merlin* (1622)—illustrate a continued fascination with Trojan history, early Britain, and England’s future as a nation. Middleton’s play is especially significant in its portrayal of the “common people” as an agent of change. By the time it reached print, the name of the play had changed from the usurping Saxon king’s (*Hengist*) to the comical *Mayor of Quinborough*—in many ways a foolish “common” character, but also, as the means to Hengist’s takeover, a significant contributor to the making and undoing of kingdoms. Rowley’s play is less concerned with the “common folk” than Middleton’s, but its spectacular staging of the icons of Galfridian prophecy had the potential to teach a new group of English subjects how to read Arthurian icons—perhaps especially, when it appeared in 1662 as a printed text. Together with *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, these two plays constitute convincing evidence of the continued importance of Galfridian material to national concerns as they are reflected in the desires of play-going and play-reading subjects. The growing number of such subjects over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave rise to a significant and heterogeneous “public sphere”—one in which Arthurian plays continually circulated via performance and/or print.

This chapter focuses on the intersections between the content, dates of performance, and especially the print history of Arthurian plays as they relate to subjects’ feelings of belonging to the English nation. Of the four genres constituting this dissertation, drama is the one that has received the most scholarly attention with respect to audience response—both in the theaters and in the bookstalls. I participate in such discussions of the “public sphere’s” impact by using the

plays' content and the decisions of publishers as lenses through which to perceive an "actual imagined reader" for Arthurian drama in print. Given the fact that publishers of English vernacular texts were businessmen, their decision to print a play text suggests that the play in question had either enjoyed significant popularity at the playhouses or that publishers presumed that "new" customers who had not seen it performed would find it worth experiencing in book form. Peter W. M. Blayney's landmark assertion that plays were not a very sound publishing venture has recently been countered by Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, and, while the verdict is still out with respect to just how "popular" printed plays actually were in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is significant that, in such an uncertain environment, three Arthurian plays were considered to be worth printing at all.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the most "Arthurian" of these plays was printed very early and against fairly significant odds. The reasons for such decisions—evident in the plays' content, their print histories, and publishers' prefaces (when available)—will be the focus of this chapter.

Though not the most frequently staged dramatic subject in early modern England, Arthur's influence on national concerns is evident in the work of Hughes, Middleton, and Rowley; given this continual Arthurian output—and the larger Arthurian influence in printed history, romance, and pageantry—it is significant that early modern England's most famous playwright never offered his audiences an Arthurian play. Although William Shakespeare illustrates the power of nostalgic nationhood in plays like *Richard II* (as does Hughes in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*) and channels Trojan history in drama like *King Lear* (as do Middleton in *Hengist* and Rowley in *Merlin*), he declines to extensively explore England's national identity

---

<sup>2</sup> Peter W. M. Blayney, "The Publication of Playbooks" in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 383-422. Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, "The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no. 6 (2005), 1-32.

through Arthurian legend. After illustrating what might be considered the most conspicuous “missed opportunities” to use Arthurian themes in Shakespeare’s texts, I conclude this chapter by asking whether Arthur’s absence from Shakespeare’s canon is merely coincidental—or whether it anticipates John Milton’s own decision to forsake Arthurian themes in the seventeenth century. Milton, a champion of the rights of the reader, is the subject of this study’s epilogue: a champion of the kind of free thinking bolstered by print culture, he was also a writer who considered, but subsequently turned his back on, an early modern England represented by Arthur.

The trajectory of this chapter thus illustrates the importance of the early modern Arthurian play to developing conceptions of the subject’s importance to the English nation—and the fact that this importance is firmly anchored in the print history of these plays. While scholars have traditionally treated Hughes’s play as an inferior copy of Seneca marking the beginning of Arthurian decline or as a mere commentary on topical political concerns, I illustrate that the play’s most important, lasting contribution is actually its presentation of a “contract” theory of government in an Arthurian context—something that had not previously been attempted in an Arthurian text in any genre. Complementing this focus on the rights of the people, the fact that *The Misfortunes of Arthur* was rushed to print—and, as I show in a copy held at the British Library, edited/corrected by the printer to underscore those public rights—illustrates that Hughes’s play as both text and book sheds light on the question of “who counts” as a contributing member of the English nation in 1580, suggesting at the very least that playgoing and playreading audiences had an investment in this question. My subsequent examinations of Middleton’s discussion about whether monarchs or mayors have more influence and Rowley’s public staging of Arthurian icons are similarly enriched by a reading of these texts’ print history,

which in both cases suggests that Arthurian history, as it appeared on stage and page, was increasingly becoming the property of a great variety of readers. Ultimately, I argue that even though Shakespeare declined to follow Hughes's example, the contribution of the latter, along with Middleton's and Rowley's supporting gestures, suggests that Arthur's limited time on stage may in fact have had an impact on theories of the relationship between king and country—and that understanding the stakes of that impact is impossible without a consideration of Arthur's *Misfortunes* in print.

### **The Misfortunes of Arthur**

*The Misfortunes of Arthur* is a play based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (1138) and Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Dathur* (1469). The play begins with the ghost of Gorlois, former duke of Cornwall, who angrily swears revenge on the family of Uther Pendragon, who became Arthur's father by seducing Gorlois's wife with the magical aid of Merlin. Gorlois's speech sets a tone that suggests that this drama will be dedicated to the theme of revenge. In fact, however, much of the drama is concerned with characters' struggles to make the right decision for themselves and for their country's well being. Guenevora, Arthur's wife, Mordred, Arthur's son (the product of incest), and Arthur himself all struggle with the question of what kinds of ends justify violent means. Furious that Arthur's years of absence have pushed her into Mordred's arms, Guenevora contemplates killing Arthur, and then considers killing herself, before finally deciding (following the wise counsel of her ladies) to enter a convent and repent her sins. The action then shifts to Mordred, who has usurped Arthur's throne and faces Arthur's homecoming and expected challenge of the usurpation. He defiantly asks questions

regarding when usurpation is justified, and whether Fortune might now favor *him* instead of Arthur, given the king's long absence. His counselors tell him to reconcile with Arthur, but Mordred refuses, only flagging slightly in his resolve when Arthur approaches the British shore and Mordred's defeat seems likely. Arthur, experiencing his own internal conflict, wrestles with the question of whether it would be better for his kingdom to let Mordred have it and spare the nation the bloodshed, or to challenge the usurper and wreak havoc on the land. His fatherly feelings toward son and country cause the usually warlike king to second-guess himself; he takes action only when counseled to fight back in the name of the divine right of kings.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the drama, after Mordred has died and Arthur been dealt his deadly wound, Arthur reflects on the loss and tragedy of the recent action, but ends the play with a hopeful gesture toward his legacy—one that is indebted to the Arthurian tradition of Geoffrey and Malory but has also been revised to reflect contemporary political concerns.

Thomas Hughes and seven collaborators composed *The Misfortunes of Arthur* to be performed for Queen Elizabeth at Greenwich on February 28, 1588.<sup>4</sup> The contributors to the play, all members of Gray's Inn, were to remain, with the exception of Francis Bacon, largely unknown for the rest of their careers.<sup>5</sup> As the product of multiple authors, the question of

---

<sup>3</sup> This is significant: Arthur never shies away from battle in chronicle or romance.

<sup>4</sup> Although I refer to the play as "Hughes's," there were, in fact, seven other writers collaborating with Hughes on the play. See A. Wigfall Green, *The Inns of Court and Early English Drama* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965). Green offers a concise list of the contributors: "In the composition of *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, therefore, Thomas Hughes was assigned the duty of writing the tragedy proper; thus a unity difficult to obtain in a play divided among several persons was procured. However, to the seven assistants was committed the composition of various dramatic ornamentations: Nicholas Trotte wrote the introduction, marked by legal *jeu d'esprit*; William Fulbecke write two substitutional speeches; Francis Flower wrote the rhymed choruses for the first and second acts; Christopher Yelverton, John Lancaster, and Francis Bacon, then twenty-six and recently admitted to the bench, composed the dumb shows; and Penruddock, aided by Flower and Lancaster [took care of court proceedings]"(151).

<sup>5</sup> See Jacques Ramel, "Biographical Notes on the Authors of 'The Misfortunes of Arthur' (1588)," *Notes and Queries* 212 (December 1967): 461-7. Ramel explains: "The eight men whose names come down to us as having

authorial intention fades into the background and the practices of the Inns of Court come into sharper focus. Written by the gentry and nobility for a courtly audience, the play was in many ways a representative product of the Inns of Court.<sup>6</sup> Such plays were known by their combination of chronicle history with the classical tradition, as well as their Senecan influences. One such play, a product of the Inner Temple entitled *Gorboduc* (1561), preceded Hughes's play and in some sense paved the way for it. As *The Misfortunes of Arthur* would also do several decades later, *Gorboduc* used national history and a classical model to make a contemporary political statement. In this play, a father divides his kingdom amongst his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex, with disastrous, war-producing results. Brian Jay Corrigan, a twentieth-century editor of Hughes's text, notes the influence of *Gorboduc* on Hughes's play but also *The Misfortunes*'s difference from it: "Like *Gorboduc*, [*The Misfortunes*] was written for a coterie audience and reflects the reverence for classical dramatic structure enjoyed among the educated theatre patrons of 1588, a reverence that never really disappeared during the Renaissance. Unlike *Gorboduc*, however, the play is not heavily didactic and the advice to the Queen is toned down."<sup>7</sup> *The*

---

collaborated on *The Misfortunes of Arthur* were widely different in age and position. Fulbeck, Hughes, and Trotte were probably still young, all under forty, and none had ever held a position of responsibility at Gray's Inn... Penruddock and Yelverton, on the other hand, were much older, and were probably influential at Gray's Inn... both had been members of Parliament and held important posts outside the Inns of Court. Lancaster, emerging from a period of obscurity, was also quickly becoming a major figure. Bacon, though the youngest in the group, had progressed as far in his career as many older members of Gray's Inn" (467).

<sup>6</sup> See Charles Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Whitney explains, "In contrast to Oxford and Cambridge, residents at London's four main law schools (Middle Temple, Inner Temple, Gray's Inn, and Lincoln's Inn) received something like a liberal education, having the stimulus and the freedom to read widely, attend plays, and write. In addition to producing lawyers, the Inns of Court were finishing schools for the gentry and nobility, preparing them to manage estates, serve as magistrates, and compete for places at court" (123).

<sup>7</sup> Brian Jay Corrigan, "Introduction" in *The Misfortunes of Arthur: A Critical, Old-Spelling Edition*, ed. Brian Jay Corrigan (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 35-6. Corrigan also compares *The Misfortunes of Arthur* to Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, but says that, unlike that play, "[*Misfortunes*] does not go so far as to allow violence onto the stage, preferring rhetorically complex speeches to action in order to tell its tale."

*Misfortunes of Arthur*, while it is quintessentially a product of the Inns of Court, also blazed some trails of its own, both to avoid royal displeasure (the queen had not appreciated *Gorboduc*'s heavy-handed warnings about the dangers of uncertain succession) and, perhaps, to open new possibilities for performance (and print). Corrigan asserts, “[*The Misfortunes*] play goes as far as an academic drama might toward the ideal of a popular theatre presentation. It is possibly because of...inflexibility in form that the academic drama suffered a decline while the popular drama, unrestrained by allegiances to ideals of structure and decorum, was regarded as vital and dynamic and has survived.”<sup>8</sup> The ways in which Hughes’s play builds on and benefits from models previously established by the Inns of Court *and* the relative flexibility of public drama are essential to understanding its impact in performance and the reasons it was promptly put into print.

Over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the two issues that have most concerned critics of *The Misfortunes of Arthur* are the play’s Senecan borrowings and its topical relevance to England in the late 1580s. Both are essential elements of the play’s importance, but they have often been considered in a way that fixes and makes static the influence of a play that is far more creative than it may first appear. As William A. Armstrong points out, *Misfortunes* does indeed have three major Senecan elements: a royal family doomed to expiate its sins, the use of Senecan precepts concerning good and bad conduct in dialogues between main characters and wise subordinates, and the repetition of Senecan opinions about Fortune, worldly goods, and death.<sup>9</sup> In a critical, early example of such borrowings (to which is

---

<sup>8</sup> Corrigan, “Introduction,” 36.

<sup>9</sup> W. A. Armstrong, “Elizabethan Themes in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*,” *Review of English Studies* n.s. 7 (1956): 238-49; 238. Armstrong notes that the first of these is the most important with respect to Hughes’s play. It should be

added another Senecan element: revenge), Guenevora contemplates methods of getting rid of Arthur, observing that “Wrong cannot be reueng’d, but by excesse” (I.ii.47).<sup>10</sup> Before she can take either Arthur’s life or her own, however, Guenevora’s counselor Fronia dissuades her, arguing, “A Ladies best reuenge is to forgive”(57). Shortly thereafter, Guenevora decides to enter a convent and repent her sins, illustrating all three Senecan borrowings in one brief scene. There are many other examples of these elements throughout the play, but this early occurrence by itself establishes the pattern that will repeat with Mordred and Arthur. In fact, the pattern is potent enough to have prompted many critics to decry what they consider to be Hughes’s heavy borrowings from Seneca. In *The Flower of Kings*, James Douglas Merriman claims that Hughes’s use Senecan devices “frequently makes the play wooden and rhetorical in the bad sense of the word, and the rapid conversion of the characters from one decision to another suggest not the tides of passion, but the jerkings of marionettes.”<sup>11</sup> Though not every critic is as disappointed with the play as is Merriman, there is no denying that *The Misfortunes of Arthur* is indebted to Senecan drama.

Despite its evident borrowings, it is the play’s departures from the typical Senecan framework that illustrate Hughes’s innovation and the play’s importance to early modern English drama. In fact, Hughes borrows from a variety of models, including the medieval tragedy of

---

noted that the play also uses stichomythia, the line-for-line exchanges typical of Senecan style, and has a revenge-themed framework for its central conflict. Although he nicely catalogues the play’s Senecan influences, Armstrong’s larger argument is that the play is much less “servile” with respect to Senecan tradition than critics had previously maintained.

<sup>10</sup> Line numbers are assigned by Corrigan for his edition. I have included them for ease of reference. The original text (London: Robert Robinson, 1587/8), does not include line numbers.

<sup>11</sup> James Douglas Merriman, *The Flower of Kings: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in England Between 1484 and 1835* (Wichita: University Press of Kansas, 1972), 46.

fortune, the morality play, the court masque, and chronicle history.<sup>12</sup> Every character comments on the fact that he or she is a victim of Fortune's wheel, a well-known concept since the Middle Ages. As a supplement to the Chorus's summaries, Hughes et al provide dumb shows at the opening of each act in order to illustrate what is to come. These dumb shows are not Senecan but are tied both to medieval "mummings" and contemporary court pageants and masques—"living icons" that must have been readable by the audience in question.<sup>13</sup> As for the revenge theme so often emphasized in Senecan drama, in Hughes's play it is Arthur's very *indecision* and *hesitation to enact revenge* on Mordred that threatens his kingdom. These elements, in turn, shed light on the fact that *The Misfortunes*'s focus is not so much on Arthur's (the individual's) fall as it is on the fall of the commonwealth: personal vendetta gives way to collective tragedy. Finally, the hopeful look towards the future line of Brute at the end of the play is both quintessentially Arthurian and, as Armstrong puts it, "distinctively anti-Senecan."<sup>14</sup> The emphasis on the wheel of fortune, the iconic dumb shows, the insistence of the importance of the commonwealth over the individual, and the nostalgic hope for the future all combine to illustrate the fact that Hughes was working with many models and had an agenda far more complicated than copying Seneca.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> See Alan Lupack, "The Old Order Changeth: King Arthur in the Modern World" in *The Fortunes Of King Arthur*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 209-23; 210. See also Corrigan, "Introduction," 20-1.

<sup>13</sup> See Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957). Ribner explains that "the dumb show is not a Senecan device; it probably had its origins in the pageantry of the medieval miracle drama, although it may also have been influenced by the *intermetti* traditionally placed between acts of Italian tragedy. The chorus, of course, was Senecan, and it served the didactic functions of Elizabethan drama perhaps more pointedly and effectively than could the cruder devices of the morality play"(39).

<sup>14</sup> Armstrong, "Elizabethan Themes in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*," 248.

<sup>15</sup> In his "Introduction," Corrigan reminds his readers that "Hughes... was both an important early translator and a serious student of Senecan tragedy. The fact that he gave short shrift to such a fundamental Senecan element as revenge indicates that he did not intend a slavish reproduction of Seneca on stage, as commentators have historically held"(22).

The fact that Hughes's drama was written for a performance for the queen herself, coupled with the tendency (perpetuated by the Inner Temple with *Gorboduc*) for an Inns of Court play to offer political advice, has led to copious speculation regarding how to read *The Misfortunes of Arthur* topically. Given that the play was staged just over one year after the death of Mary Stuart, scholars have sought to read the play as a reflection of the events leading up to that tumultuous event. David Bevington explains:

Even after Mary's execution in 1587, great tact was necessary in treating any subject that might allude to her death... The parable of Arthur and Mordred is a mirror for princes, of course, but does not spell out its contemporary application. Only in the handling of their sources do Thomas Hughes and his fellow authors reveal topical intent, and even here any specific allusions to Mary and Scotland are most oblique.<sup>16</sup>

Although such references are indeed "most oblique," the play does offer tempting parallels.

Nicholas Trotte's introduction to the play (spoken before the performance and included in the printed version) addresses Elizabeth directly:

The matter which we purpose to present,  
Since streights of time our liberty controwles  
In tragike note the plagues of vice recounts.  
How sutes a Tragedie for such a time?  
Thus. For that since your sacred Maiestie  
In gracious hands the regall Scepter held  
All Tragedies are fled from State, to stadge.  
(127-33)

Though by no means a clear indication to Elizabeth that "this play is about your recent elimination of the threat of usurpation and civil war," at the very least Trotte's introduction suggests that the possibility for "Tragedie" is always lurking, and that Elizabeth's power (and its

---

<sup>16</sup> See David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). Bevington explains, "Elizabeth had agonized over the decision [to execute Mary] for years, despite the open dangers of excommunication and the Babington conspiracy of 1586; she had even tried to persuade Secretary Davison to have Mary killed privately. Once the deed was done, Elizabeth had little appetite for reminders of her feelings of guilt" (153). Because of this possibly lingering guilt, the gentlemen of Gray's Inn had to be especially careful to veil their message.

attendant decisions) relegate such sorrows to the world of fiction. In light of such a statement and its chronological proximity to Mary's execution, it is no surprise that modern critics have endeavored to attach the play's plot and characters to Elizabethan events.

Over the last century, scholars' topical reading of the play has evolved from a very detailed positing of characters and royals to a more speculative political experiment. Often cited by more recent critics, Evangelina Waller's 1925 argument is still worth exploring: she claims that the fickle Guenevora is Mary, the rightful ruler Arthur is James VI, and Mordred is the traitorous Bothwell, reserving for Elizabeth the figuration of all the characters who give good advice throughout the play.<sup>17</sup> Such a reading is tempting, but it is difficult to believe that the authors would try to "sell" Elizabeth a play that assigns the all-important Arthurian role to anyone but the reigning queen herself.<sup>18</sup> Building on Waller's work, later critics such as Gertrude Reese (in 1945) and Irving Ribner (in 1957) have argued instead that the rightful ruler Arthur must be Elizabeth I and that the usurper Mordred must be Mary. According to their readings, the play suggests that Elizabeth was fully justified in executing her cousin as a threat to the nation, especially in light of the fact that, even after Mary's death, other threats still lingered. "A play that sanctions the execution of Mary Stuart and recognizes the Queen's superiority would be

---

<sup>17</sup> Evangelina H. Waller, "A Possible Interpretation of *The Misfortunes of Arthur*." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 24 (1925): 219-45. Waller uses this reading to explain *Misfortunes*'s Arthur's difference from that Arthur of the chronicles and romance: "The Arthur of the play differs radically in several respects from the British King of the chronicles and romances; and the characteristics wherein he differs from the traditional Arthur are those imputed to James by Elizabeth"(245). It is a tempting reading, but I am not convinced that Elizabeth would have happily accepted the assignment of one of the (if not *the*) Tudors' favorite figureheads to a Scottish monarch.

<sup>18</sup> As Gordon Kipling points out, Leicester had tried to co-opt the Arthurian role for himself in pageants in the Netherlands, a gesture that greatly displeased the Queen; see *The Triumph of Honour: Burgundian Origins of the Elizabethan Renaissance* (Leiden, Neth.: Leiden University Press, 1977), 85.

opportune in the anxious time preceding the coming of the Armada,” Reese explains.<sup>19</sup> Ribner takes it even further, explaining that Mordred

stands for more than the single figure of the Queen of Scotland. *The Misfortunes of Arthur* was written not only with an eye to past events, but also with one to future dangers. Mary was dead, but a Spanish invasion was still in the offing. Mordred is a general symbol of all Catholic Englishmen who might be tempted to join in the attempt to betray Elizabeth. The play is a warning against civil war and the annihilation of England which would inevitably follow the joining of Englishmen with foreign powers against their queen.<sup>20</sup>

This reading seems far more convincing than Waller’s, given the recent threat of usurpation, Elizabeth’s reluctance to kill her kin, the eventual (if tragic) triumph of Arthur over Mordred, and the threats for England that lay ahead.<sup>21</sup> Although each of the topical readings has merit, the most recent and most convincing is that of Brian Jay Corrigan, who sees the play neither as a slavish Senecan copy, nor a one-to-one topical reading of recent political events. Instead, Corrigan argues that the play’s significance lies in its novel approach of hypothetical disaster. “The interpretation that seems...likely is that Hughes and company are portraying a side of the Mary Stuart controversy that no other author attempted. *The Misfortunes of Arthur* would appear to be a depiction of the logical outcome of leaving Mary Stuart alive.”<sup>22</sup> Whatever one thinks of Corrigan’s reading as political allegory, it has critical importance in that it recognizes the play’s emphasis on England’s many possible paths—including its palpable uncertainty about the future. No matter which sixteenth-century figure Arthur “is supposed to be” in this play, he is, more

---

<sup>19</sup> Gertrude Reese, “The Political Import of *The Misfortunes of Arthur*,” *Review of English Studies* 21 (1945): 81-91; 82.

<sup>20</sup> Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, 233-4.

<sup>21</sup> Mary’s execution took place on February 8, 1587. *The Misfortunes of Arthur* was staged on February 28, 1588. The Spanish Armada came to the English Channel in July 1588.

<sup>22</sup> Corrigan, “Introduction,” 48.

importantly, the nostalgic and apocalyptic figure of English national significance. It is on these grounds that the play's import should be explored.

### **The Tragedy of Arthur**

*The Misfortunes of Arthur* is not a “mere” Senecan copy, nor a slavish political allegory, nor—in its clear indebtedness to a tradition already well established by 1588—“just another” Inns of Court production. It makes a unique contribution by *performing* the significance of Arthurian history for the English nation, a subject of critical importance in the late sixteenth century but one that had not previously been explored on early modern stages. Furthermore, it performs such significance as a tragedy; loss is an essential Arthurian element, one that does not preclude a remaining hopefulness, but that soundly pronounces the inevitability of sacrifice.<sup>23</sup> In a departure from its sources, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* actually “shows” Arthur’s death. In the play, he is not spirited away to a place of healing, allowing for the hope of a recovery; instead, the audience watches him die as he speaks of second comings and hope for the future. The king’s trajectory from mighty warrior to neglectful husband/ruler to indecisive philosopher to inspiring corpse is representative of the play’s singular contribution to the Arthurian canon—and, by extension, to theories of English nationhood.

While Arthur does fall into periods of hesitation concerning his feelings for his son and his subjects, during the moments when action is required he is every inch the decisive, warlike Arthur of the chronicles. In the beginning of the second act, the Nuntius delivers a soliloquy describing Arthur’s wars with Rome: “He furious driues the Romaine troupes about:/ He plies

---

<sup>23</sup> A notable exception is John Shurley’s romance *Brittain’s Glory* (c. 1684), which is the sole early modern telling of the Arthurian saga that allows Arthur to avoid the tragedy of civil war. See Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

each place, least Fates mought alter ought,/ Pursuing hap, and vrging each successe” (II.ii.30-2).

Later, Mordred’s counselors caution him against rousing Arthur’s anger, as the latter has a reputation as a fierce warrior. The audience hears proof of this when Mordred, refusing to listen to his advisors, dares Arthur to attack him. Arthur responds:

They shall perceave with sorrow e’r they part,  
When al their toles be tolde, that nothing workes  
So great a wast and ruine in this age,  
As doe my warres.  
(III.ii.29-32)

This is the Arthur England knows: the king who dares others to cross him, who pays tribute to no other, who has proven himself in battle after battle. Even after struggling with his reluctance to attack his own son and soil, this is the Arthur who makes the decision to fight—a decision the audience would expect:

Here I renounce all leagues and treats of truce,  
Thou *Fortune* henceforth art my garde and guide.  
Hence peace, on warres, runne Fates, let Mars be iudge,  
I erst did trust to right, but now to rage.  
(III.ii.57-60)

There is a time for reflection and a time for rage. In the case of the threat of usurpation, Arthur acts with violence.

The problem in this play is that such violence comes too late. Hughes and his collaborators portray the misfortunes of a new kind of Arthur—one with significant faults. This Arthur, impressive conqueror though he is, is also neglectful of his subjects and tragically hesitant to seek vengeance against a usurper. The audience’s awareness of Arthur’s faults begins in Act I with Guenevora’s complaint that it is Arthur’s own fault that he has been away so long, causing her—and the nation—to fall into Mordred’s hands. Arthur’s advisor, Cador, repeats this

criticism in Act III when he asks, “Since *Arthur* thus hath ransackt all abroad,/ What meruaile ist, if *Mordred* raue at home?”(III.i.26-7). Although Arthur’s being away from home is in every version of the legend a catalyst for Mordred’s takeover, in the *Misfortunes*, Arthur is forced to experience and confront the shame that accompanies his realization of such neglect. Once he realizes that he is partially to blame for Guenevora’s and Mordred’s transgressions, Arthur becomes a regretful, indecisive shell of the vengeful warrior who “ransackt all abroad.” When Cador urges him to defend his crown, Arthur balks and asks a question that, in the context of the Arthurian tradition, simply stuns: “What deeme you me? A furie fedde with blood,/Or some Ciclopian borne and bred for braules?...Can Arthure please you no where but in warres?”(III.i.227-30). The audience at Greenwich would not have seen this Arthur before: hesitant to pursue conflict, he contradicts his medieval reputation as relentless warrior.<sup>24</sup> The reason for Arthur’s sudden change is two-fold: his love for his son and his love for his native land. To attack his own kin and country would constitute civil war, something to be avoided at (almost) any cost.

Be witesse Heauens how farre t’is from my minde,  
 Therewith to spoile or sacke my natiue soile:  
 I cannot yeelde, it brookes not in my brest,  
 To seeke her ruine, whom I erst haue rulde.  
 (III.i.231-4)

Of course Arthur does attack his “natiue soile,” and, returning home mortally wounded, he comforts the sorrowful Chorus:

Rue not my *Brytaines* what my rage hath wrought,  
 But blame your King, that thus hath rent your Realme.  
 My meanlesse moodes haue made the *Fates* thus fell,  
 And too much anger wrought in me too much,

---

<sup>24</sup> These are the kinds of passages that make Waller’s connection of Arthur with James convincing. However, her argument weakens significantly when one considers the play as a whole.

For had impatient ire indu'rde abuse,  
 And yeelded where resistance threatned spoyle:  
 I mought haue liu'd in forreine coastes vnfoilde  
 And six score thousand men had bene vnmoande.  
 But wrong incensing wrath to take reuenge  
 Preferred *Chaunce* before a better choyce.  
 (V.i.25-34)

The Chorus, certain that Arthur is not to blame for defending his country, tries to comfort him, but he responds: "I claimd my Crowne, the cause of claime was good,/ The means to clame it in such sorte was bad"(V.i.39-40). The audience would recognize Hughes's Arthur as a king who exacts vengeance and pursues violence; but they would also have to confront a new Arthur who regrets the necessity of such actions and blames himself for harming his country.

Arthur's divided performance illustrates that *The Misfortunes of Arthur* has a strong cautionary aspect with respect to civil war. If this were the whole story, the play would look very much like a rejection of an outdated Arthurian model of victorious conquest abroad and vengeance at home—anticipating versions like Ben Jonson's in his *Barriers* for Prince Henry in 1610. However, there are others factors in the play that complicate the temptation to dismiss Arthurian history as irrelevant. Although Arthur has a lot of great speeches about how much he blames himself for what happened, the play clearly raises other readings in its insistence on the divine right of kings, its reflection on the occasions such rulers should pursue vengeance, and its emphasis on the unpredictable role of Fortune in deciding the fates of kings and the usurpers who threaten them. The play opens with Gorlois's vengeance-based threat to the divine right of kings: "Let sworde and fire still fedde with mutuall strife/ Tourne all the Kings to ghoastes, let ciuill warres/ And discorde swell till all the realme be torne"(I.i.40-1). Seeming to take up Gorlois's advice, Mordred informs Guenevora that he plans to challenge Arthur's claim to the throne.

Having been counseled by her ladies to “temper [her] outrageous moods,” a much calmer and more thoughtful Guenevora tells her lover, “A law for private men bindes not the King.”(I.ii.17; I.iv.39). This statement in Act I sets guidelines for interpreting much of what comes after it: Arthur may struggle with his decision to attack Mordred, but such a decision is his—and only his—to make as rightful king. Guenevora goes on to remind Mordred of what happened to Paris when he tried to take over Troy (and Helen)—“The vice, that threw downe Troy, doth threat thy Throne”—illustrating that those characters who are in control of their senses and understand the law are also those who argue that kings are kings by divine right; therefore, usurpation is a crime against heaven itself (I.iv.66).

Having established in the very first act that the desires of Gorlois and Mordred are dangerous in that they threaten to turn heavenly-sanctioned kings “to Ghoasts,” the play continually counsels rulers who are indeed divinely justified to know when to enact vengeance and when to grant mercy. While Arthur’s regrets at the play’s conclusion might seem to suggest that the play has a pacifist message, in fact, the question of might versus mercy is one wholly dependent on context. For example, even though Cador tells Arthur that he “had it coming” because he was off conquering and neglecting his homeland for so long, this is no reason to allow the divine right of kings to be overturned by a usurper. “No worse a vice than lenitie in Kings,/ Remisse indulgence soone vndoes a Realme,” Cador warns (III.i.62-3). Arthur initially fires back at Cador, arguing that his experience in life has resulted in a wisdom that counsels hesitation:

My youth (I graunt) and prime of budding yeares  
 Puft vp with pride and fond desire of praise,  
 Foreweening nought what perils might ensue,  
 Adventured all, and raught to will the raignes.

But now this age requires a sager course,  
And will aduise by harmes to wisdom yeeldes.  
(III.i.132-7)

Of course Arthur does, eventually, “choose Mars” and attack, and the play—for all its emphasis on “the sager course”—sanctions this decision to pursue violence; there is a clear distinction between “ransacking abroad” and defending one’s divinely sanctioned throne.<sup>25</sup> The play’s raising of this question made it enormously relevant to the concerns of Elizabethan England, especially the role of the subject with respect to the king. Irving Ribner argues that the “dominant political question” of the late sixteenth century, out of which the glut of history plays generated, was “Under what conditions, if ever, was rebellion against a lawful monarch justified?”<sup>26</sup> While the play certainly explores various sides of the question, it lands soundly in favor of the idea that “A law for private men binds not the king” and that it is up to the ruler when he pursues vengeance or grants mercy.<sup>27</sup> That the gentlemen of Gray’s Inn, writing for Queen Elizabeth, would take this position is not surprising. However, to have Arthur himself express hesitation in endorsing such a position is indicative of the power of Hughes’s drama to interrogate even as it reinforces the status quo.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> In other words, despite Arthur’s hesitation, this is no Jonsonian assertion that England needs “other acts, another stage” free from Arthurian nonsense.

<sup>26</sup> Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, 312.

<sup>27</sup> In “Elizabethan Themes in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*” Armstrong suggests, “Few sermons or chronicle plays illustrate Elizabethan doctrines and warnings concerning rebellion and civil war so comprehensively as *The Misfortunes of Arthur*”(246).

<sup>28</sup> David Bevington, in his rejection of a topical reading, argues, “Hughes is not pursuing a one-to-one analogy. Instead, he pairs and contrasts his figures for the purpose of defining tyranny and its opposite”; see *Tudor Drama and Politics*, 154. Guenevere’s argument with Mordred (Is usurpation ever justified?) and Cador’s with Arthur (Is vengeance ever justified?) support Bevington’s assertions with respect to the question of occasions for using/abusing power.

Adding to the instability occasioned by Arthur's hesitation to uphold his rights are the unpredictable influences of Fortune, Chance, and Fame, three impactful forces deployed almost interchangeably to challenge characters' ability to direct their own courses. Almost every character grapples with the conflict between his or her respective desires and Fortune's influence. In Act I, when Mordred feels confident that he has the support of foreign friends in his campaign against Arthur, Conan warns him, "Trust to't their faith will faint, where *Fortune* fails (I.iv.83-90). And Fortune always eventually fails. For example, in Act II Mordred assumes that "if that *Chaunce* haue furthered [Arthur's] successe,/ So may she mine: for *Chaunce* hath made me king"(iii.43-4). Gawain's response to such a theory is the response of the play itself: "As Chaunce hath made you King, so Chaunce may change"(45). Capitalizing on the medieval image of the wheel of Fortune, which alternately raises and lowers every kind of man, Hughes illustrates that all characters who currently enjoy "successe" will eventually be brought low. In the most tragic example of this rotation, Arthur himself realizes that divine right does not ensure the enjoyment of an enduringly high position. As he considers whether to go to war with his son, he reflects:

Rare is the *Fame* (marke well all ages gone)  
 Which hath not hurt the house it most enhaun'st.  
     Besides, *Fame's* but a blast that sounds a while,  
 And quickly stings, and then is quite forgot.  
 Looke whatsoe'r our vertues haue atchieu'd,  
 The Chaos vast and greedy time deuours.  
     To day all *Europe* rings of *Arthurs* praise:  
 T'wilbe as husht, as if I ne'r had beene.  
 What bootes it then to venture life or lime,  
 For that, which needes e'r long, we leaue, or loose?  
 (III.i.172-85)

Time, Arthur reminds the audience, has proven that Fortune, Chance, and Fame will eventually “hurt the house [they] most enhaun’st.” The fickle nature of forces beyond a king’s control certainly complicate any notions that Arthur has failed or succeeded, or that justice has been done. In other words, while the play expresses approval for a king’s right to protect his divinely sanctioned throne, it also illustrates the helplessness inherent in being a favorite or a victim of Fortune. Robert W. Hanning considers Arthur an ideal vehicle for representing the dangers of fortune with respect to national leaders—a danger of which Geoffrey of Monmouth himself seems to have been well aware.

For, if the heroic deeds of men emphasize human control of history, the view of history as an endless series of cycles emphasizes the power of history over men. Operating through Fortune, the inexplicable and fickle force which raises man on her wheel and then throws him off, history tyrannizes over man and mocks his efforts to control his fate and that of his nation. Arthur’s career provides the prime instance of Geoffrey’s dual historical vision. His reign illustrates the pinnacle of human greatness and at the same time serves as a mighty exemplum of Fortune’s thrusting greatness down to sudden destruction.<sup>29</sup>

Hughes and company must certainly have shared Hanning’s (and possibly Geoffrey’s) view: their Arthur is a strong king justified by God—as well as a regretful, world-weary victim of Fortune.

The play’s emphasis on the lows that follow the highs sets the play squarely within an Arthurian tradition firmly rooted in uncertainty and tragedy. As the fourth and fifth acts recount and reflect upon the bloodshed, each character laments the fruits of usurpation and civil war. Surveying the extent of the damage, Gildas says to Conan, “These blades haue giuen this *Isle* a greater wound,/ Then tyme can heale. The fruite of ciuill warres:/ A Kingdom’s hand hath gourd a Kingdom’s heart”(IV.ii.23-5). Justified as Arthur was, inevitable as war seemed, the outcome

---

<sup>29</sup> Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain from Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 139-40.

is no less tragic: civil conflict has permanently scarred the land and set into motion the events that will leave Britain open to invasion and takeover. Conan replies, “Whiles yet [Arthur] raigned, no forren foe preuailde” but

Let *Saxons* now, let *Normans*, *Danes*, and *Scottes*,  
 Enioye our medowes, fields, and plesant plaines:  
 Come, let vs flye to Mountaines, Cliffes and Rockes,  
 A Nation hurt, and ne’r in case to heale.  
 (IV.iii.40; 46-9)

The loss of Arthur is the loss of the nation. Henceforth, Britain will be vulnerable to foreign influence and lose its sense of insularity. By fighting “amongst itself” Britain has received a mortal wound not unlike Arthur’s. As he dies and makes peace with the *Fates*, however, Arthur illustrates the fact that Hughes was not ignorant of the hopeful, healing power of the legend, even in the face of civil war, foreign invasion, and complete ideological meltdown:

And though our ends thus hasted through your heasts,  
 Abruptly breake the course of great attempts:  
 Yet goe we not inglorious to the ground:  
 Set wish a part: we haue perfourmd inough.  
 The *Irish* King and Nation wilde we tamed:  
 The *Scots* and *Picts*, and *Orcade* Isles we wane:  
 The *Danes* and *Gothes* and *Friseland* men with all  
 The Isles inserted nere those Seas, And next  
 The *Germaine* King, and *Saxons* we subduede.  
 Not *Fraunce*, that could preuaile against our force,  
 Nor lastly *Rome*, that rues her pride supprest.  
 Ech forreine power is parcel of our praise,  
 No titles want to make our foes affraide.  
 The onely now I craue (O *Fortune* erst  
 My faithfull friend) let it be soone forgot,  
 Nor long in minde, nor mouth, where *Arthur* fell.  
 Yea: though I Conqueror die, and full of Fame:  
 Yet let my death and parture rest obscure.  
 No graue I neede (O *Fates*) nor burial rights,  
 Nor stately hearce, nor tombe with haughty toppe:  
 But let my Carkasse lurke: yea, let my death  
 Be ay unknownen, so that in euery Coast

I still be feard, and lookt for euery houre.  
(V.i.156-78)

In these final moments, even in the midst of devastating loss, the regretful, hesitant Arthur falls away to reveal a king who is proud of his accomplishments and hopeful that the concept of his “lurking carcass” will inspire the kind of respect for Britain that his living body had commanded. With respect to the bodies actually onstage at this moment, it is a powerful gesture toward the immateriality of this fictional king (and the powers inherent in such absence) temporarily housed in the body of an actor, permanently housed the “second body” of the watching queen, and frequent visitor in the hearts of subjects who could not see this play at Greenwich but were essential elements in fulfilling Arthur’s wish to be “lookt for euery houre.”

### **Arthur’s Subjects, Hughes’s Readers**

A complicated reflection on the rights of kings in the face of usurpation and fickle fortune, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* is also a discussion of kings’ responsibilities to protect their subjects. It is not just a question of guarding land but of defending people. Unsurprisingly, Mordred does not take *his* subjects into account, but thinks only of his own power. Conan counsels him to attend to his subjects, but Mordred is not interested.

Mordred: The Fates haue heau’de and raisde my force on high.  
Conan: The gentler shoulde you presse those, that are low.  
Mordred: I would be feard:  
Conan: The cause why Subiects hate.  
Mordred: A Kingdom’s kept by feare.  
Conan: And lost by hate.  
(II.ii.31-4)

Conan accuses Mordred of “destroying the realm he seeks to rule” and suggests that Mordred beg the people’s pardon, making amends for recent wars. Mordred, at this point, is unmoved;

however, as he prepares for battle against Arthur, he feels (too late) that in defending his own right to rule, he did indeed destroy that very kingdom. “A solemne pompe, and fit for Mordreds minde,/ To be a graue and tombe to all his Realme”(II.iv.80-93). Unlike Mordred, Arthur seems to feel his duty to his people very potently. His regrets (discussed above) arise largely because he feels he has betrayed his subjects. However, this is a moment when Arthur has it wrong: he was in fact right to defend his people from Mordred, even if it took some lives along the way. Cador knows this even before the battle and reassures Arthur that going to war with Mordred is actually the correct action to take: “A King ought alwaies to preferre Realme,/ Before the loue he beares to kin or sonne”(III.i.44-5). The survival of the nation, linked firmly to the desires and needs of the many subjects of this “Realme,” is shown to trump any personal preferences of a particular king; it is Arthur’s duty to protect this nation during his tenure so that it may transcend and outlast its current misfortunes. W. A. Armstrong posits this as one of the critical differences between Hughes’s play and those of Seneca: “Though Seneca’s protagonists are royal, his tragedies can be described as domestic, because he is chiefly concerned with the effects of evil passion on families, not the state. Hughes, on the other hand, deliberately links the fate of the British nation to that of the dynasty of Pendragon.”<sup>30</sup> In *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, a nation is its people, and a king’s rights are inseparable from his responsibilities to his subjects. Such a concept would have been very important to Elizabethan subjects increasingly aware of themselves as English citizens.

The fact that such citizens became an audience for *The Misfortunes of Arthur* at all is significant. Composed by gentlemen of Gray’s Inn for Queen Elizabeth, the play certainly was not written for the subjects it so revered in its rhetoric. Only public performances were seen by

---

<sup>30</sup> Armstrong, “Elizabethan Themes in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*,” 239.

the “common people” and, for the most part, Inns of Court plays were far more rarely printed. However, the play’s emphasis on reading—while it admittedly does not make a direct reference to print culture—highlights the fact that national history will be passed down in material form.

Conan reflects:

Or when perhaps our Childrens Children reade,  
Our woefulle warres displaid with skilfull penne: [...]   
Twill mooue their mindes to ruth, and fram a fresh  
New hopes, and feares, and vowes, and many a wish,  
And *Arthurs* cause shall still be fauour’d most.  
(IV.iii.29-30; 33-5)

As Conan suggests, Arthur’s cause will be delivered—and preserved for future generations—by texts, and in the late sixteenth century, the printed book would have been a significant vehicle for transmitting such Arthurian history. Complementing the play’s emphasis on Arthurian documents is publisher Robert Robinson’s decision to print Hughes’s play within a month of its performance. This was apparently a very unusual decision for a play of this sort in the 1580s, suggesting that Arthurian printed texts were good financial investments for publishers. Brian Jay Corrigan explains, “[*The Misfortunes of Arthur*] is among the earliest of the printed plays from the English Renaissance... The fact that this play made it to the press at all is remarkable.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, in a context in which very few plays were printed at all, the fact that Hughes’s play was veritably rushed to print should command attention. Following David R. Carlson’s description of Caxton’s edition of Malory—an example of speculative book printing at a time when printing such relatively “untried” texts was financially risky—I argue that Robinson’s printing of

---

<sup>31</sup> Corrigan, “Introduction,” 4-5. Corrigan describes the book as “rushed to press”: “According to the title page, the performance was on 28 February 1587 (i.e. 1588), which means that the play had to have begun its press run before 25 March, when the new year began, in order for the title page to carry the date 1587.”

Hughes's play was a gesture of confidence in the consumer appeal of the material.<sup>32</sup> Both Caxton and Robinson "bet on" Arthur (against the odds) for his presumed appeal to readers/buyers. Play texts, just like speculative books of many genres, increased in production throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the fact that printing an Arthurian play was a risk worth taking when printing other plays was not is particularly important. Published in the same decade as Richard Robinson's translation of Leland, Robert Robinson's similar black-letter document of "antiquity" seems to reflect a common palpable connection between Arthurian literature and what people considered to be documents associated with their country's origins. The fact that Hughes's play is the only "major" Arthurian offering on the early modern stage is significant, but critics have too often neglected to judge its singularity as a positive attribute. Instead of reading Hughes's play as a failed experiment, scholars should attend to its history in print, one that sheds new light on how Arthur's "realm" might have received him.

In considering the impact of a play like *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, one must also resist the temptation to attempt to turn the printed book back into the performed play—a gesture that privileges the latter over the former. For all its thoughtful research, the problem with Corrigan's edition is that it attempts to "reconstruct" the performance text of the play—a gesture that necessitates turning away from the "printed artifact" (as Corrigan calls it) and attempting to discover what actually happened onstage. Besides supplying stage directions that may not have actually been used in the performance, Corrigan makes the bold decision to replace two of Gorlois's speeches in the printed play (written by Hughes) with two speeches that had been spoken at the performance (written by William Fulbecke and included as an appendix to the

---

<sup>32</sup> David R. Carlson, "A Theory of the Early English Printing Firm: Jobbing, Book Publishing, and the Problem of Productive Capacity in Caxton's Work" in *Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing*, ed. William Kuskin (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 35-68.

1588 printed play). This does little to change the overall message of the play, but it makes a very clear statement about the fact that many scholars still privilege the performance over the printed text. This is a mistake for many reasons, but chief among these is the fact that there is absolutely no way of knowing what stage directions were used or why the speeches were subsequently replaced before printing; furthermore, it is evident that sixteenth-century readers would have considered Hughes's speeches as an essential part of the play. Corrigan wants to present "a critical old-spelling edition not of the printed artifact...but of the play...as it was presented in court."<sup>33</sup> Not only is this impossible, it is contradictory: why use old spelling if the goal is to create a document that goes beyond spelling to performance, to speech?<sup>34</sup> I do not dwell on this merely to detract from Corrigan's excellent scholarship; but it is clear that this kind of gesture is not so very different from John Wolfe's decision to use black-letter type for Robinson's translation of Leland's text. The urge to get back to an original text that never existed is an attractive impulse, but largely unhelpful in theorizing the power of the book as it actually existed.

Keeping the realities of the printed text in mind becomes especially important in light of the fact that Hughes's/Robinson's is a *particularly* unstable printed text.<sup>35</sup> Although the copy

---

<sup>33</sup> Corrigan, "Introduction," 59.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (London: Robert Robinson, 1587), BL C.34.b.3. Following Trotte's introduction, the printed play actually goes so far as to say, "this was not as it was performed": "The misfortunes of Arthur (*Nther Pendragons Sonne*) reduced into *Tragicall notes* by Thomas Hughes *one of the societie of Grayes-Inne. And here set downe as it past from vnder his handes and as it was presented, excepting certaine wordes and lines, where some of the Actors either helped their memories by brief omission: or fitted their acting by some alteration. With a note in the ende, of such speeches as were penned by others in lue of some of these hereafter following.*"

<sup>35</sup> See Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Robinson's publication of *The Misfortunes of Arthur* supports Johns's arguments about the difficulty inherent in positing a stable early modern printed text: the variations and corrections in this edition suggest that the text's meaning was by no means firmly fixed by printing.

housed at the Huntington Library shows no sign of post-print alteration, the copy in the British Library has contemporary (Elizabethan) corrections pasted over two sections of text. These corrections are not merely changes in meter or rhythm—on the contrary, they actually offer insight into the extent to which “the commons” are taken into consideration in this play. On B4v, at the end of Conan’s speech to Mordred, the text reads:

You loose your Countrey whiles you winne it thus:  
 To make it yours, you strive to make it none.  
 Where kings impose to much, the commons grude:  
 Goodwill with drawes, assent becomes but show.

Over the words “commons grude,” the printer has pasted (in black-letter font of the same size on the same paper: “Realme envies.” Thus, while the play never elsewhere explicitly states that the “realm” is constituted not just of gentlemen and courtiers but the “commons,” here in this “imperfect” printed text one can see that that was, at least initially, the intention. In the same act, Mordred laments the fact that he has responsibilities to his people. In both versions (original and “pasted in”) this is the general sense, but when compared side by side, the differences in Mordred’s attitude (and the sense to which that attitude is justified) become noticeable. In the original printed version, the text reads:

Must I to gaine renowne, incurre my plague  
 Or hoping prayse sustaine an exiles life?  
 Must I for Countries ease disease my selfe,  
 Or for their love dispise my owne estate?  
 No.

This is pasted over with the following:

The first Art in a Kingdome is, to scorne  
 The Envie of the Realme. He cannot rule,  
 That feares to be envied. What can divorce  
 Envie from Soveraigntie: Must my deserts?  
 No.

The more philosophical “Art in a Kingdome” speech replaces the personally selfish lamentation. The first passage is more about Mordred’s selfish reluctance to even care about his people, while the second (more flattering) passage indicates pragmatism and theories of kingship. Although the motivations for the changes are irrecoverable, it is clear that the relationship between the monarch and his people was of enough importance that the slightest change in tone was thought to make a difference in the play’s meaning. The fact that these passages in the printed (and corrected) text deal with the “commons” ties the English nation, subject, and reader to an Arthurian play in print—in all the unpredictable, vexed significance of each of these categories.

So, what did these original reader-subjects actually see when they came across the printed book of *The Misfortunes of Arthur*? In the body of the play they would have found Hughes’s longer, less daring opening speech by Gorlois and Hughes’s “extra” speech for Gorlois at Act V, scene ii. At the beginning of every act, they would have read descriptions and glosses of the dumb shows that punctuated the play, and at the end of the play they would have been able to reference an appendix containing the alternate speeches that were spoken at the performance (by William Fulbecke and Francis Flower).<sup>36</sup> The readers did, therefore, have all the same—and indeed more—“information” as did the original audience. In fact, in the printed text they had a unique Arthurian *reading* experience independent of the private performance. What they truly lacked was not an impression of the performance in any abstract, linear sense of “how it actually happened,” but the figuration of Arthur onstage, in front of their eyes. This is the important

---

<sup>36</sup> The dumb shows would have been particularly important to the printed text; as published, the text both describes the action of the dumb show and offers an attendant gloss on its meaning. Readers would have received a lesson in Arthurian signification not unlike that in Richard Robinson’s *Auncient Order* (1583), Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590/6) Ben Jonson’s *Prince Henry’s Barriers* (1610), and William Rowley’s *The Birth of Merlin* (1662, discussed below).

distinction between performance and print that, as David Scott Kastan reminds his readers, sustains each form as a powerful vehicle unto itself.<sup>37</sup> I will further consider this physical/textual embodiment in subsequent sections of this chapter. For now, as the discussion moves to other Galfridian drama, it is important to keep in mind that, at a time when few plays—let alone plays written for the court—were printed, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* was printed immediately after its performance and had content that was considered important enough to warrant corrections that further illuminated the relationship between sovereign and subject. Other plays with similar themes would follow, but they would fail to strike the same eloquent balance between the national/royal import (questions of royal rights and responsibility, presented for the Queen) and national/citizen import (questions of subjects' rights and contributions, rushed into print) as that evidenced by this truly singular early modern entertainment.

### ***Hengist, King of Kent and The Birth of Merlin: Galfridian Drama for the Public***

Although neither play features Arthur as a speaking character, Thomas Middleton's *Hengist, King of Kent* (c. 1620) and William Rowley's *The Birth of Merlin* (1622), offer plenty of Arthurian allusions; also deeply indebted to Galfridian history, these seventeenth-century plays illustrate that, though Arthur never graced the early modern stage as a speaking character after *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, his power as a national icon continued to inform drama on stage and on the printed page. Sharing with Hughes's play the emphasis on national history, Middleton's and Rowley's plays illustrate, perhaps to an even greater extent, an increasing need to consider the desires of various groups of the nation's subjects. Both printed over forty years

---

<sup>37</sup> David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.

after their original performances, these two plays beg questions of demand “after the fact,” a stark contrast to the rushed publication of Hughes’s drama. By using these two plays as seventeenth-century foils to *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, I hope to illustrate not merely the sustained or declining interest in Arthurian/Galfridian themes, but the ways in which the plays and their print history, at three very different times in England’s history (1580s, 1620s, 1660s), illustrate the intersections between British History, the “common people,” the English nation, and printed drama.

*Hengist, King of Kent*, which takes its material from Geoffrey of Monmouth (probably by way of Holinshed), tells the story of Vortigern’s murder of Constantius and his usurpation of the latter’s crown; Vortigern’s subsequent folly in handing over a plot of Britain to the Saxons Hengist and Horsa (who attempt to take over the kingdom); and Vortigern’s eventual downfall at the hands of Constantius’s brothers, Uther Pendragon and Aurelius Ambrosius. Middleton’s use of chronicle history is not only evident in the characters and plot he explores, but the fact that he uses Ranulph Higden himself (author of the oft-reprinted fourteenth-century *Polychronicon*) as a character to introduce the play to the audience:

What *Raynolph* Monck of Chester can  
 Raise from his Polycranicon  
 That raiseth him as works do men  
 To see long parted light agen,  
 That best may please this round fair ring...<sup>38</sup>

In rhetoric very similar to John Webster’s gesture to the author’s restoration of dead princes in *Monuments of Honor* and Leland’s invocation of bringing lost knowledge “to light,” Higden posits the play as a re-animated artifact to be observed by the spectators in the “round fair ring.”

---

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Middleton, *Hengist, King of Kent* (c. 1620). Printed by Henry Herringman in 1661 under the title *The Mayor of Quinborough*. No lines are given, so citations are denoted by Act, scene, and page number. The passage above is taken from Act I, scene i, p. 5.

Importantly, the audience is soon to find out that these men and their “works” are not entirely aristocratic—there is more than one kind of spectator in Middleton’s “round fair ring.”

Juxtaposed with the royal chronicle plot of usurpation and conquest is the story of Simon, a tanner who turns out to be unwittingly responsible for facilitating the Saxons’s “land grab” in Britain. Hengist asks Vortigern for only the amount of land that could be encompassed by a small piece of leather he acquires from Simon; Vortigern foolishly agrees, and Hengist subsequently cuts it into thin strips, constructs a large perimeter, and becomes a powerful landholder. Following an election by the people, Hengist eventually allows this Simon to be mayor, and although Simon proves to be rather ridiculous in his role, his comic value does not negate his importance to the governance of the commonwealth. With its dual emphases on those with the power to rule and on the subjects who facilitate that power, *Hengist, King of Kent* is closely related to *The Misfortunes of Arthur*: the royals play the game of usurpation and succession against the backdrop of responsibility to the people. However, in Middleton’s play the people of “the realm” are not just a concept to which Arthur must attend; they are actually granted new voices and actual bodies on stage. In *Hengist*, the royal scandals and the local government are juxtaposed in ways that do not always illustrate the superiority of one over the other. The “ulcer of Realms,” as Vortigern calls the common people, cannot be ignored.

*Hengist, King of Kent* is invested in exploring the themes of usurpation and overseas invasion, but it offers a sharper lens for considering these themes: the wishes of the nation’s subjects. In fact, the people continually assert themselves even in the midst of the royal dramas that unfold. After making many poor decisions, Vortigern’s unpopularity is an important example of subject influence. Because Vortigern was passed over as King of Britain, he first tries

to rule as a kind of “puppet master” over the insecure, reluctant Constantius; but later, growing weary of such a plan, he kills Constantius and takes the crown. Adding to his list of bad decisions, King Vortigern then falls in love with the Saxon Roxena, with whom Horsa is also carrying on. When Horsa confronts Roxena about her cavorting with British King Vortigern, she wisely replies:

Take reasons advice, and you’l find it impossible  
 For you to lose me in this Kings advancement  
 Who’s an Usurper here, and as the Kingdom  
 So shall he have my love by usurpation...  
 And all Usurpers have the falling-sickness,  
 They cannot keep up long.<sup>39</sup>

Although she fails to see the irony in the fact that the Saxons *also* plan to usurp the British throne, Roxena makes one of the central points of this play. And while she is correct in acknowledging the wheel of Fortune, she is ignorant that there is another catalyst for the fall of false princes: the people themselves, who have been voicing their disgust from the very first of Vortigern’s actions. When Constantius takes over as ruler (after the death of his father Constantine), Vortigern is angry with the *people*, who much preferred Constantius and raised him to the throne.

Will that wide throated Beast, the multitude,  
 Never leave bellowing? Courtiers are ill  
 Advised when they first make such Monsters.  
 How neer was I to a Scepter and a Crown?  
 Fair Power was even upon me, my desires  
 Were casting glory, till this forked Rabble  
 With their infectious Acclamations  
 Poyson’d my Fortunes for Constantines sons.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Middleton, *Hengist, King of Kent*, Act III, scene i, p. 31.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Act I, scene i, pp. 5-6.

The idea that Vortigern might have had the crown if not for the “wide throated Beast” that favored Constantius is telling of the growing power of the subject. Tragically for him, Vortigern fails to respect this power, even after he has gained the crown. When the multitude is angry about Vortigern’s usurpation of the kingdom, he derides them as the “Ulcers of Realms!” shouting that their “ignorant zeal” chose a weak king and that they should be happier now with him. Though Roxena is right to note that usurpers never retain power, Vortigern’s blindness to needs of his subjects is a major contributor for his downfall.

Not every ruler makes Vortigern’s mistake: there are two men in the play who show an awareness of the subjects’ power. Although Constantius and Hengist are weak in other ways, eventually falling either *to* usurpers (in Constantius’s case) or as the result of their *own* usurpation (in Hengist’s), they illustrate the potential benefits in winning the public’s support. Constantius, like Arthur in Hughes’s play, views kingship not only as power but also as responsibility. The people choose him because he shows an awareness of their needs. Unlike Arthur, however, he is a reluctant ruler who believes that hearing and fulfilling the people’s desires “is one of my afflictions/ That with the crown enclos’d me! I must bear it.”<sup>41</sup> While hardly inspirational, Constantius’s attitude does suggest that he acknowledges his responsibilities as ruler. Even savvier is the Saxon Hengist, who gives the people of his newly-acquired kingdom the power to elect a mayor. In this anachronistic but thematically important sub-plot, Simon the tanner runs for mayor against the Puritan Oliver. Simon, like Vortigern and Hengist, has a taste for power and eventually does win the mayoralty. On one hand, this is a victory for Hengist, who, in granting the people semi-autonomy, does so on his own terms and controls it. On the

---

<sup>41</sup> Middleton, *Hengist, King of Kent*, Act I, scene ii, p. 14.

other hand, Hengist's licensing of his subjects to self govern (even to a limited extent) shows the potential power of even a fool such a Simon in a system in which the people have a voice. In a comic but critical scene in Act V, Simon (as mayor) is interviewing a group of traveling players. Putting on what he believes to be the correct airs for one who holds a powerful position, he asks if the players are up to the task of entertaining him:

Symon: What think you of me my Masters?  
 Hum; have you audacity enough  
 To play before so high a person as myself? Wil not  
 My countenance daunt you?...

1 Cheat: Sir, we have plaid before a Lord e're now,  
 Though we be Country Actors.

Symon: A Lord? ha, ha,  
 Thoul't find it a harder thing to please a Mayor.<sup>42</sup>

While clearly a joke at Simon's expense (he goes on to insert himself in the play as the Clown, but gets angry when he elicits laughter), the fact that he is actually a public official of some influence lends an air of uncertainty regarding how to react to his statement about "pleasing a Mayor." Symon is truly a dolt, but the concept of having to consider pleasing an elected official or a multitude of subjects is critical—particularly in a play framed by the chronicle history usually employed in positing the sovereignty of the ruling class.

Thus, it is not just Middleton's use of British history or the discussion of usurpation and succession that makes *Hengist, King of Kent* call out for comparison with *The Misfortunes of Arthur*. Although these are critical connections, the importance of Middleton's play is the addition of "common people" and their governance to Ranulph Higden's chronicle of kings and usurpers. As Simon pesters Hengist to listen to one of his jokes during the British attack against

---

<sup>42</sup> Middleton, *Hengist, King of Kent*, Act V, scene i, p. 62. This clever reference connects intriguingly with Munday's and Webster's Lord Mayors' Shows, which, in fact, glorified the monarchy. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

the Saxons, Hengist, exasperated, shouts, “Unseasonable folly!” This phrase is particularly apt in Act V as Hengist’s plans for usurpation are crumbling and Uther and Aurelius arrive to take back the throne, but it is also pertinent in light of the larger friction between the expected chronicle of rulers and the “unseasonable” addition of the comic mayor.<sup>43</sup> As Hengist, Vortigern, and Uther try to undo one another and play out Geoffrey’s, Hidgen’s, and Holinshed’s chronicle, the middle class continually interrupts them. Simon is the foolish inverse of Vortigern, but even a parody of a king can wield influence, and Middleton’s play asks the audience to consider the extent of this power. “Pleasing a mayor” may turn out to be more than a joke when worthier subjects than Simon become office holders and representatives of the common good.

The question of the importance of Middleton’s drama for early modern readers is a vexed one. The play’s attitude toward print is both typical and telling of Middleton’s sense of humor about his craft in the 1620s. In Act V, Simon’s clerk tells him that the traveling players are taking advantage of his subjects—and that their goal is only

To abuse simple people with a printed play or two,  
which they bought at Canterbury for six pence,  
And what is worse, they speak but  
What they list of it, and fribble out the rest.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> This play is sometimes judged to be imperfect due to its tonally confused dual plot. This does not mean that kings and clowns cannot occupy the same stage (as many other examples of early modern drama illustrate), but that the two roles can only “play” at being interchanged; the combination of a foolish king and a powerful clown results in a play with no clear sense of winners and losers. This may or may not really make the play as imperfect as some have argued, but it is important that no such contradictions arise in its Galfridian cousin, *The Misfortunes of Arthur*. In *The History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* Irving Ribner, argues, “after the first act, Hengist, King of Kent becomes a tragedy of lust, with no political implications whatever”(260). While I disagree with Ribner as to what the play “devolves” into, I agree with his assertion that the play begins as a tragedy of kings, and becomes a tonally confused comic-tragedy of clowns.

<sup>44</sup> Middleton, *Hengist, King of Kent*, Act V, scene i, p. 69.

The idea that anyone can buy a printed play and form a troupe of players for hire comically devalues both the performed and printed versions of Middleton's drama. Curiously, despite this implicit expectation that the text would reach book form, *Hengist, King of Kent* was not printed immediately after its first performance at Blackfriars (probably in 1620). In fact, it was not printed until 1661, under a different title: *The Mayor of Quinborough*. While we cannot know the specific reasons for its delayed printing or its change in title, it is certainly possible that, in 1661, one year after the controversial reinstatement of the Stuart monarchy, tragedies of kings were considered less saleable commodities than comedies of "common" mayors. By extension, although both extant versions were published in 1661 by and for Henry Herringman, one title page reads *The Mayor of Quinborough: A Tragedy* and the other reads *The Mayor of Quinborough: A Comedy*. Both, it seems, had been "often acted by His Majesties Servants," but this distinction in title page may arise from the play's tonal confusion between the tragedy caused by usurpation and war and the comedy of the triumphant mayor. The alternating title pages seem to reflect the cultural uncertainty regarding how to judge the "unseasonable folly" that Hengist himself recognizes in Act V.<sup>45</sup>

It may be that the association of the play with tragedy was an outdated reference to an earlier attitude toward the play, given that the publisher's preface to the printed edition notes only the celebrity of the comic mayor character. In Herringman's preface he discusses the mayor's celebrity, as well as the play's transition from stage to page:

You have the first sight of him I assure you; this Mayor of Quinborough whom you have all heard of, and some of you beheld upon the stage, now begins to walk abroad in print; he has been known sufficiently by the reputation of his Wit, which is enough (by the

---

<sup>45</sup> The copy I examined at the British Library (BL 644 f.10) is a "comedy." Its content is the same as the editions with title pages denoting tragedy.

way) to distinguish him from ordinary Mayors; but Wit you know, has skulk'd in corners for many years past, and he was thought to have most of it that could best hide himself: Now whether this Magistrate fear'd the decimating times, or kept up the state of other Mayors, that are bound not to go out of their Liberties during the time of their Mayoralty, I know not; 'tis enough for me to put him into your hands, under the title of an honest man...<sup>46</sup>

Although it is also an extended joke about Simon's cowardice, the idea that wit had recently been skulking in corners is more generally pertinent, given that by 1661 the politics of closing the playhouses and censoring the printing presses had made a distinct impression on English entertainment. Before he went into hiding, however, this mayor apparently earned quite a reputation: the fact that this play, unlike *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, was acted many times may have meant that no one saw the need for printing it in the first decade of its "life." On the other hand, if one considers David Scott Kastan's statement that a printed play was not "just" a record of performance but an entity unto itself, the concept of novelty (even considering a familiar character) becomes pertinent. Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser argue that, although popular plays were often reprinted in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this was not the case in Caroline England. Instead, the demand was for "new" plays. "The market for first editions seems to have been driven by customers' desire for novelty, for the newest playbook in the stationer's shop from the latest play performed in the theater."<sup>47</sup> This does not, however, explain the *first* printing of an *old* play. The appearance of Middleton's play in 1661 cannot even be explained by Farmer and Lesser's idea of a "classic," a play that was reprinted many times. Taking into account the value of cultural icons—from the centuries-old Arthur to the decades-old

---

<sup>46</sup> This preface goes on to make the joke that although the praise of wit is not unjustified for *The Mayor of Quinborough*, there is some difference between its fictional celebrity and the Mayor of Huntingdon. Huntingdon was the birthplace of Oliver Cromwell.

<sup>47</sup> Farmer and Lesser, "The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited," 20.

Simon the Mayor—I argue that there may have been certain subjects and characters so familiar that even if they appeared in “new” documents years after their first appearance, their presence granted that document “classic” status; in short, the preface of such classics could always reference icons “whom you have all heard of,” wedding the oral and performance manifestations to the printed text as culture-carrying vehicles. This would certainly be true of Arthur in 1588 (Who, by then, had not heard of Arthur before?), and was apparently true of Middleton’s mayor in 1661. Such theories remain speculative, for in the case of Middleton’s *Mayor*, as will also be evident in Rowley’s *Birth of Merlin*, the print history follows no thoroughly convincing model. However, the belated printing of a popular cultural figure weds the focus on the common people in the play with those who apparently wished to buy the story for themselves. The reason this story of kings and mayors, a mix of ancient British tragedy and contemporary English comedy suddenly “began to walk about in print” becomes clearer in light of the final manifestation of early modern “Arthurian” drama, very similar to *Hengist* in performance and (belated) print history.

Like *Hengist*, William Rowley’s *The Birth of Merlin, or The Childe hath found his Father* has origins in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s text. In fact, some consider Rowley’s play to be a sequel to Middleton’s, as it deals with Aurelius’s rule and troubles with the Saxons (including Saxon ally Vortigern in Wales). Just as Vortigern does in Middleton’s play, Rowley’s Aurelius falls in love with a Saxon woman and marries her, an act that outrages his nobles. Alongside the play’s depiction of Aurelius’s troubled kingship and the reaction of his court is the story of the birth of a fully-grown Merlin to a country girl, Joan Go-to’t. Her brother, the Clown, spends much of the play trying to help his poor sister find her child’s father, a man whose identity she

does not know. After several incorrect attempts to locate the father, Joan gives birth to an adult Merlin whose sire, she discovers, is the Devil. The Devil comes on stage and prophesies that his son will lead a monumental life, and Merlin subsequently goes to Vortigern's kingdom and begins to fulfill this prophecy, first answering Vortigern's local questions about building a tower that would not stand, before moving on to national questions about the future of the British people (both of Merlin's "answers" are taken right from Geoffrey of Monmouth). The final act of the play involves spectacular visuals, which Merlin "reads" as prophetic signs: Uther will be the next king (as Aurelius will be assassinated by his Saxon in-laws), Vortigern will fall to the British, Arthur will be the greatest king of Britain, and Britain will eventually succumb to Saxon rule. Continuing the use of British History to comment on usurpation and the responsibilities of kings to their "realms," but adding an emphasis on reading national icons and prophecies, *The Birth of Merlin* makes a unique contribution to the Arthurian tradition: as Middleton raised the stakes of the "common people" with his mayor of Quinborough, Rowley experiments with reading the signs and stories of British history as they pertain to all English citizens.

Evidenced by the Saxons' attempts to take over Britain via Aurelius's infatuation with the Saxon princess Artesia, as well as Vortigern's own attempt to seize the throne, *The Birth of Merlin* is invested in the themes of usurpation and succession. The concept of rightful rule versus the desires of traitors is perhaps most clear in Act IV, when Uther commands the conquered Vortigern:

Give what's thine own: a Traitors heart and head, that's all thou art right Lord of; the Kingdom which thou usurp'st, thou most unhappy Tyrant, is leaving thee, the Saxons which thou broughtst to back thy usurpations, are grown great, and where they seat

themselves, do hourly seek to blot the Records of old Brute and Brittaines...all this by thee, thou base destroyer of thy Native Countrey.<sup>48</sup>

Uther's words make clear that the crime of helping someone to usurp another king's rightful throne is just as serious a crime as taking it for oneself. In helping the Saxons to gain ground in Britain, Vortigern has trespassed against his "Native Countrey." Unlike *The Misfortunes of Arthur* and *Hengist, King of Kent*, in *The Birth of Merlin* the native country is not directly equated with the rights of the "common people"; however, the rhetoric surrounding the dangers of privileging the whims of the monarch over the needs of the realm is very similar. After Aurelius reveals that he has married the Saxon princess, one of his nobles, Edol, Duke of Chester, makes his outrage known: "Sir, I'll leave him, and you, and all of you, the Court and King, and let my Sword, and friends, for *Edol* safety: stay you here, and hug the *Saxons*, till they cut your throats, or bring the Land to servile slavery, such yokes of baseness, Chester must not suffer. Go, and repent [ ] these foul misdeeds,/For in this League, all our whole Kingdom bleeds,/ which Ile prevent, or perish."<sup>49</sup> From Edol's speech it is evident that not only the obvious traitors like Vortigern are on trial, but also—and perhaps especially—the well-meaning but reckless rulers like King Aurelius, who (like Mordred) puts his own desires before the health of his kingdom.

Although Edol's Act II speech is critical for reminding the audience/reader that the king has responsibilities, the play's ruminations on the health of the British kingdom are centered mostly on the last two acts, in which Merlin is actively involved. Much of this involvement is

---

<sup>48</sup> William Rowley, *The Birth of Merlin, or, The Child Hath Found his Father* (1622). Rowley's play was printed by Thomas Johnson for Francis Kirkman and Henry Marsh in 1662. Citations refer to acts and pages. The passage above is taken from Act IV, F4r.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, C2r.

dedicated to reading the celestial signifiers of Britain's future, illustrating a strong connection between this play, books of armory, "iconic" romance, and the genres of pageantry and masque. The association with heraldry begins as a joke in Act II when the Clown, in response to Joan's insistence that the father of her baby was a gentleman, observes, "Nay, I believe that, he gives arms, and legs too, and has made you the Herald to blaze 'em."<sup>50</sup> This gentle joke gets far more serious as Merlin reads prophecies about the national implications of British—and particularly Arthurian—icons. Before the Saxon battle with the Britons, Merlin shows Vortigern a pair of fighting dragons, the white one eventually driving off the red. When Vortigern asks, "What means this stay?" Merlin reads the sign for him, explaining that it foretells that Uther will vanquish Vortigern: "the vanquish Red, is sir, your dreadful Emblem." After having defeated Vortigern and the Saxons, Uther and Edol ask Merlin to tell them the meaning of the sudden appearance of a blazing star in the shape of a dragon head with two "flakes of fire." Merlin tells Uther that "The Dragons head is the Heroglyphick that figures out your Princely self" and the two tongues of flame "emblem" Uther's two children.<sup>51</sup> This language of heralds, "heroglyphicks," and icons is important both for its content—a way for spectators to get a taste of the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophecies of Merlin* (until 1718, there was no English translation of Geoffrey's text)—and also for its emphasis on the signs and symbols so essential to British history and therefore to the English nation. Recalling Richard Robinson's book on Arthurian arms (*The Auncient Order*) as well as Spenser's and Jonson's iconic *Faerie Queene* and *Prince Henry's Barriers*, respectively, *The Birth of Merlin* offers a tutorial in recognizing and reading

---

<sup>50</sup> Rowley, *The Birth of Merlin*, Act II, B3r.

<sup>51</sup> Here Rowley uses "emblem" as a signifier for what I have been referencing as a "cultural icon": in this case, Uther Pendragon is a cultural figure/icon recognizable by his signifier—his "dreadful Emblem"—the red dragon.

the signs of the spectators' "Native Countrey." Although the common people are of little particular consequence in the action of the play, the spectators at Shoreditch—of all "levels" of society—would have been given a lesson in reading the signs of their collective national myth.

And in this final lesson Arthur himself finally takes his place in the play. Arthur's onstage role is relegated to a dumb show, but he is still "physically present," giving a public audience the chance that Hughes' courtly audience had: to see Arthur embodied. Merlin's prophecies are all leading up to this iconic embodiment of Britain's greatest king-to-be. Before Arthur comes onstage, Merlin offers some preamble. "But, of your Son," he tells Uther,

all after times shall fill their Chronicles with fame of his renown, whose warlike sword shall pass through fertile *France* and *Germany*, nor shall his conjuring foot be forc't to stand, till *Romes* Imperial Wreath hath crown'd his Fame with Monarch of the West, from whose seven hills with Conquest, and contributory Kings, he returns to enlarge the *Brittain* bounds, his Heraldry adorn'd with thirteen Crowns.<sup>52</sup>

Then, in the final moments of the play, prompted by Uther's request to know Britain's future, Merlin conjures a prophetic Arthurian vision. After Merlin strikes his wand, the text in the printed version reads, "*Enter a King in Armour, his Shield quarter'd with thirteen Crowns. At the other door enter divers Princes who present their Crowns to him at his feet, and do him homage, then enters Death and strikes him, he growing sick, Crowns Constantine.*"<sup>53</sup> Merlin reads this sign to Uther, who praises him for his vision and loyalty; in fact, this speech of Uther's ends the

---

<sup>52</sup> Rowley, *The Birth of Merlin*, Act IV, G1r-G1v. Elizabeth Michelsson also notes the heraldic import of the play: "The inclusion of thirteen crowns in King Arthur's emblem is a detailed piece of heraldic information which presupposes a familiarity on the part of the audience with the current armorial signs"; see *Appropriating Arthur: The Arthurian Legend in English Drama and Entertainments 1485-1625* (Uppsala, Swed.: Uppsala University Press, 1999), 239. While I agree that heraldry is an important aspect of the play, I do not think that it necessarily presupposes the audience's ability to read it. After all, Merlin glosses every sign he shows Vortigern and Uther. Given the varied audience at Shoreditch, it seems far more likely that for *some* viewers and readers this is a lesson, not a review.

<sup>53</sup> Rowley, *The Birth of Merlin*, Act V, G4r.

play, critically, with a gloss on Merlin's Arthurian image. "All future times shall still record this Story,/ Of Merlin's learned worth, and Arthur's glory."<sup>54</sup> Rowley's play is thus a continuation of the dramatic emphasis on the usurpation and treachery inherent in the British History in general and Hughes's and Middleton's works in particular; it is a reassertion of kings' responsibility to their people; but it is also a unique public lecture in Arthurian iconography.

By ending with a reading of Arthurian signifiers and prophecy (and not the "interruptions" of the Clown or Merlin's devilish father), the play emphasizes the national import of Merlin's visions. Furthermore, Rowley legitimizes Merlin himself as a heroic national figure. When Uther praises Merlin's art, Merlin responds, "My service shall be faithful to your person, and all my studies for my Countries safety." Such patriotism and concern for the stability of the realm put Merlin on a level with the righteous Edol and create distance between Rowley's Merlin and other, derogatory versions of the figure that would be presented at court. Despite the fact that William Davenant and Inigo Jones's 1637 court masque *Britannia Triumphans* paints a pathetic, satirical picture of Merlin, the appearance of Rowley's prophetic hero on stage in the 1620s and in print in the 1660s may suggest that not everyone believed Merlin's historical role to be that of a frivolous court magician. Merlin's capacity as a prophet—one whose words and images connect him with Arthur and the long line of kings bolstering the history of the English nation—lends the character and his Galfridian origins the possibility of legitimacy in a Jacobean/Caroline culture outside the court.<sup>55</sup> Merlin may have been a joke at Whitehall, but his conjurings in Rowley's play suggest that for some English subjects Arthurian characters and the

---

<sup>54</sup> Rowley, *The Birth of Merlin*, Act V, G4r.

<sup>55</sup> William Davenant, *Britannia Triumphans a masque, presented at White Hall, by the Kings Majestie and his lords, on the Sunday after Twelfth-night, 1637. By Inigo Jones surveyor of his Majesties workes, and William Davenant her Majesties servant* (London: John Haviland for Thomas Walkley, 1638).

icons they embodied continued to create (as they had for Spenser) a sense of national pride and one of spectacular wonder.

The performance and print history of Rowley's *Birth of Merlin* is, in many ways, very similar to that of Middleton's *Mayor of Quinborough*. Both plays were written (and conceivably performed for the first time) in the 1620s and not printed until the 1660s. Rowley's play, published under the title *The Birth of Merlin: Or, The Childe hath found his Father*, was printed in 1662 by Thomas Johnson for Francis Kirkman and Henry Marsh, and was originally attributed to "William Shakepear and William Rowley." Although almost no one believes that Shakespeare was actually one of the authors of the play, it is significant that, in the 1660s, the use of Shakespeare's name might have been a savvy advertizing ploy. The title page assures the reader that this is the version of the play "As it hath been several times Acted with great Applause," suggesting that the play had various performances in the forty years between its composition and printing. The text itself is printed in roman type, and is crammed onto the page with no spatial indication of the change in speakers. Although it features Arthur himself walking about onstage, in Rowley's no printed preface explains anything about the play's suddenly "walking about" in a new medium. The text as printed is a fairly nondescript, cheaply printed document that makes no claim about its reception by or cultural relevance to its audience.

One can, however, learn more about *The Birth of Merlin* by comparing it to Rowley's other printed offerings: like Middleton's play, Rowley's contains something of the "unseasonable folly" that smudges the border between the tragedy of British history (Merlin prophesies the Saxon takeover) and the comedy of human—and devilish—folly (the antics of Merlin's promiscuous mother and hellish father). The play's national import makes it somewhat

singular in Rowley's canon. In the British Library's collection, *The Birth of Merlin* is one of six Rowley plays bound together. Alongside titles such as *A new Wonder a Woman never vext*, *A Tragedy called All's Lost by Lust*, and *The Witch of Edmonton*, *The Birth of Merlin* appears as "just another" installment of Rowley's love of the sensational: promiscuity, clowns, and magic. And while these are certainly major elements in the play, the use of Merlin as national servant who shows and decodes the rise and fall of usurpers, rightful kings, and future subjects places this particular play in a category that might just as easily have had—like Middleton's play—a comic *and* a tragic title page. Its appearance in print in the 1660s challenges derogatory portrayals of Merlin (such as Davenant's) that had appeared in the interim between performance and publication, and suggests a continued relevance for Arthurian prophecy—tragic or comic—amongst English readers as they began their own "second act" with the Stuart monarchy.

On the other hand, one need not follow John Leland's example, devaluing the sensational aspects in favor of sober historical precedent—but may instead examine these fabulous additions' contributions to conversations about the English nation. John Okes's 1638 printing (in the same bound volume in the British Library) of Rowley's *A Merrie and Pleasant Comedy: Never before Printed, called A Shoo-maker a Gentleman*, is very similar to Middleton's play's reference to its sudden appearance in print, but even more importantly, Rowley's offers a glimpse of the national implications that publishers saw fit to invoke as an advertising strategy even for "merrie and pleasant comedies." In Okes's preface, "The Printer to the honest and High-spirited Gentlemen of the never decaying Art, called the Gentle Craft" (shoemaking), the publisher sells his text by talking about how popular it had been on the stage and then going on to capitalize on what he believes are its national implications. Rowley's play,

which though written many yeares since, ought not therefore to be slighted...And likewise it hath bin so well approved by you in the acting of it upon the Stage, and that with your loud alarums, (I meane your clapping of hands) that I could not chuse but commend it to you now in Print: for it is a Play that is often Acted; and when others fade and are out of date, yet this doth endure to the Last: I know it may come short of that accureatenes both in plot and style that this witty age doth with greater curiosity acquire, I may thus excuse; that as Plaies were then, some twenty yeares agoe, it was in the fashion. Nor could it have found a fitter or more seasonable publication than at this time; when the glory of our Nation is so much admired, and the valour of our English so much esteemed, that it is sought by forraigne Natives, as you may reade in this Subject we have in hand...<sup>56</sup>

Though this play has no Arthurian associations, it is a Rowley play focused on the middle class and has been bound with *The Birth of Merlin* in a collection. The assertion that plays that had been popular for an extended period of time were only recently being printed is significant (and troubles to some extent Famer and Lesser's assertion that the desire was for the "newest" play on stage). Okes's marketing the play as an outdated but much-loved drama, while it doesn't make the same nostalgic gesture as John Wolfe's black-letter edition of Robinson's Leland, certainly values the history of performance and print as a record of public "clapping of hands"—and opening of purses. Finally, the decision to praise the "glory of the Nation" and the "valour" of the vernacular cements the connection between "common" subjects and national import. Thus, while it would be justifiable to read Rowley's *Birth of Merlin* as tonally confused in the vein of Middleton's *Hengist*, it is important to remember that, with respect to printed drama, "low" did not preclude the presence of national implications.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> William Rowley, *A Shoo-maker a Gentleman* (London: John Okes, 1638). (BL C. 12. f. 1)

<sup>57</sup> See Douglas Bruster, "The Structural Transformation of Print in Late Elizabethan England" in *Print, Manuscript, & Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, ed. Michael D. Bristol and Arthur F. Marotti (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 49-89. In a gesture that takes into account Hughes's Arthur's concern for the "Realme," Middleton's celebrity mayor, and Rowley's elevation of the middle class, Bruster claims that the appearance of the "common" people in printed drama was a major element in giving them a political voice. There was "an unmistakable presence, in print, of individuals from the middle orders of early modern society. Increasingly, the consequential bodies in printed material of this time were from inconsequential

By examining Middleton's and Rowley's plays, one gains a preliminary understanding of how and why Arthurian drama reached print in the seventeenth century. Although it would be irresponsible to reflect these readings back onto Hughes's sixteenth-century *Misfortunes*, the continued popularity of Galfridian themes on the English stage (private and public) suggests that Hughes's play was not a failed experiment in Arthurian drama. On the contrary, the popularity and national import noted by seventeenth-century publishers (regardless of whether it was real or feigned for advertising purposes) lends support to the idea that Robinson's printing of *The Misfortunes of Arthur* at a time when so few private plays were printed at all was not an eccentric experiment but possibly representative of the desires of the reading public—desires that continued into the next century. Just what this public “looked like” is fairly impossible to determine; however, in recent years scholars have conducted significant studies of the “public sphere” and “popular” entertainments—as well as the impact of the printed play in the early modern book trade. Constructing a sense of whom publishers had in mind when they marketed their plays (and whether they did so regularly) provides a glimpse into the possible reasons Hughes's play was “rushed to print” and Middleton's and Rowley's were printed forty years after their first performances. We might also gain a sense of why, if the “national” implications of plays were such good selling features, a national hero like Arthur was not invoked more often on the English stage. The extent of Arthur's relationship with the English audience and reader of plays, whether founded in a performing body onstage or in national icons in a printed dumb show, is the question the remainder of this chapter seeks to answer.

---

origins”(65). In a comic but telling example of this from Rowley's play, Uther asks the (fat) Clown who he and his (pregnant) sister are, to which the Clown responds, “As you see from our bellies/ A Couple of *Great Britains*.” Under the jest is the truth that, in seventeenth-century England, such “lower” individuals were consequential citizens.

### “Popular” Audiences and Readers

In order to examine the extent to which English subjects identified as part of a nation via attending and buying Arthurian drama, one must determine who these English subjects might actually have been. In his discussion of James’s attempts to unify Great Britain and the outpouring of literature it produced, Philip Schwyzer notes the importance of “ordinary people”: “it is one task to persuade a parliament to enact various commercial and legal reforms, and quite another to persuade ordinary people to start thinking and identifying as Britons.”<sup>58</sup> Not only in this particular Jacobean context but also throughout the study of early modern England, scholarly gestures toward a mass of “ordinary people” are abundant; however, they often posit the “common” or “popular” citizen as *persuaded* to be part of a nation but neglect the consideration of the citizen as *co-creator* of that nation. Examining the interaction between “high” and “low” in early modern playhouse audiences, Paul Yachnin argues that the theater actually “retails elements of high culture to the middling sorts,” giving the “middling sorts” a chance to dabble in a gentlemanly delights while also reasserting their essential distance from their social superiors.<sup>59</sup> While the theater certainly did posit social hierarchies even as it experimented with their borders, such “top-down” theories shroud the essential power of the play to capitalize on the agency of the audience. Along with chapbook-length romance, drama is perhaps the genre most able to break down the seemingly teleological chain from king to artist to audience; after all, while history, epic romance, masque, and pageant were certainly directed toward a particular

---

<sup>58</sup> Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 153.

<sup>59</sup> Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare’s England: A Collaborative Debate* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

audience (“ordinary” or otherwise), they often had an agenda that had (at least in stated intention) far higher stakes than public entertainment.<sup>60</sup> In drama, on the other hand, the author begins work with the knowledge that his livelihood is beholden to his audience’s tastes. In Hughes’s case, that audience was Elizabeth. With Middleton and Rowley—and with respect to all three in print—that audience could have been anyone. Illustrating this power of the audience over the performance, Charles Whitney argues, “audience members become agents in the shaping and realizing of meaning, subjectivity, a range of individual and corporate purposes, and ultimately dramatic production and public discourse.”<sup>61</sup> In light of the varied audiences at most performances—coupled with the variety of potential buyers of printed plays—I find Whitney’s assertions most convincing: The early modern audience was an agent of change in its own right, helping to *shape* culture—not just receiving it or becoming “persuaded” to support the will of the king and court.

The makeup and power of the group of ordinary, middling citizens in attendance is a difficult factor to determine, but there certainly are clues worth following. Whitney himself notes that determining audiences has been a matter of longstanding controversy for scholars of Shakespeare’s play-going culture, but the point to remember is that although the group was probably less democratic than some scholars wish to believe, the theatre did indeed offer entertainment to many “levels” of society, and thus had to take the perspectives of those varied

---

<sup>60</sup> The closest companions to printed drama are the ballad, certain masque or pageant texts, and the chapbook-length romance text, all of which were marketed to “ordinary” audiences (as well as those of the upper classes) as commodities (not as masterworks that *happened* to be printed).

<sup>61</sup> Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*, 2.

groups into account.<sup>62</sup> Michael D. Bristol's work on early modern English popular culture is very helpful on the subject, illustrating that while the theater did not erase the distinction between the "gentlefolk and the common people," it definitely reflected and helped to reinforce the power of the latter. This popular element is defined as "the complex ensemble of guilds, corporations, and local communities that carried out the tasks of actual production for the society as a whole. Although it could not accurately be characterized as a dominant culture, the customary practices and forms of expression of the base, common, and popular element of early modern society nevertheless constituted a majority culture."<sup>63</sup> If one accepts Bristol's argument, it is easy to see how such a majority culture ("common" as it was) would have influence over what was put on the early modern stage.<sup>64</sup> And though especially pertinent to discussions of theater, the popular element's influence was not confined there. As part of a more broadly developing trend throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a variety of media made the activities of parliament accessible by the people—which, in turn, duly influenced parliament. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus explain:

---

<sup>62</sup> In *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* Charles Whitney observes: "The proportion of commoners, apprentices, and the meaner sort at amphitheatres in the Shakespearean period is a matter of longstanding controversy for which determinative evidence will probably never exist. But while the early modern theatre audience was less democratic than [some critics] thought, it was more so than in any later period... The amphitheatre audiences, thanks partly to the complement of lower social groups, constituted an important social formation opening a unique space for public life in its aesthetic, moral, economic, and political dimensions"(161). Some of the "lower social groups" Whitney discusses are college students, workers between jobs, and the unemployed—even such vagrants, he argues, were taken into account by the players (192).

<sup>63</sup> Michael D. Bristol, "Theater and Popular Culture" in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 231-48; 232.

<sup>64</sup> As Bristol explains, this was no homogeneous group: "The popular element thus had a distinct and well-ordered social existence, separate from the nobility and gentry who rules over them. At the same time, however, the common people did experience complex forms of social dissonance among themselves, in addition to the chronic friction with hereditary elites"(233).

A variety of media—print, the pulpit, performance, circulating manuscript—was used to address promiscuously uncontrollable, socially heterogeneous, in some sense ‘popular’ audiences. Such activity implied the existence of—indeed, notionally at least called into being—an adjudicating public or publics able to judge or determine the truth of the matter in hand on the basis of the information and argument placed before them.<sup>65</sup>

Able to judge the truth of what was placed before them, these “popular” audiences certainly had an influence on what became English culture. Moreover, the most important indicator of such power is not implied but actual support or rejection: the plays that made it to the stage—especially those that were “acted several times”—were presumably those that companies expected that audiences would pay to see. Considering the play as a commodity and the citizen as consumer reveals the fact that although the social distinction was never erased, at the public playhouse everyone was a customer.<sup>66</sup>

Viewed through the lens of commercial interests, the “popular” influence over the public stage is far more potent than it may appear from vague gestures toward the ideal of social mobility. Bristol illustrates that the public playhouses, in turning plays into merchandise (unlike festival entertainments for which people had to prepare for months)

---

<sup>65</sup> See Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, “Rethinking the public sphere in early modern England” in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007), 1-30. Lake and Pincus claim that from the Elizabethan period onward, the increasing use of various media continued to foster the agendas of these “popular” audiences. By the 1640s and 50s, they argue, many former agricultural workers were working in other jobs—jobs that paid a wage. “These new wage earners were economically able to consume actively the exponentially increasing amounts of broadsides, pamphlets, sermons, and news sheets generated during and after the Civil Wars”(11).

<sup>66</sup> Of course this was not true of the private productions. See Ann Jennalie Cook, “Audiences: Investigation, Interpretation, Invention” in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 305-20. Cook observes: “Despite the wide variety of playing places, from about 1570 onward, a sharp line divided audiences at the theatres, inn yards, or other profit-oriented venues from those at court, noble houses, universities, Inns of Court, and similar private locales. While the doors to private productions firmly shut out the general public, the commercial sites also shut out those in that public who did not pay to get in. At the public places, playgoers were customers; in the private places, they were guests”(308). Cook’s point is important to remember in a general sense. In my study, however, I concentrate only on the media that would have been accessible to the “popular” audience: public performance on stage and public and private performance in print.

made performance available through direct purchase to a new social constituency of cultural consumers. Affiliation and identification with a corporate body gave way to the ‘exchange of equivalents’ as the basic qualification for participation in a cultural event, and this conferred at least a temporary social equality on all consumers of the same product...[consumers] whose only qualification was that they possess the price of admission. In a sense, then, the abstract, socially undifferentiated consumer of cultural services was the most important ‘invention’ of the early modern theater.<sup>67</sup>

While we cannot assume that the “popular” audience was a homogeneous, reactionary body with a subversive cultural influence, it was definitely a force to be reckoned with in its growing purchasing power. Paying (or refusing to pay) the price of admission gave every consumer an equal vote for or against a given performance. A fact that has perhaps been easier to see with respect to print culture, performance was a consumable product—and as such, it needed to take into account the entirety of possible customers in order to sell. While influence over a playing company’s decision is not equivalent to a role in government, it does suggest that, in the public playhouses, it was not just a question of what the queen or king wanted to see, but what Englishmen and women—both genteel and “middling”—wanted to see. Playing companies needed to consider the ways in which varied groups of citizens responded to their plays. By extension, with respect to dramas with national implications, playing companies had to consider how “ordinary” subjects related to their nation and its history. The status of a performance as a commodity is therefore essential to understanding the implications of the “popular” citizen as a shaping influence on English culture and the versions (and heroes) of its history playing companies predict will satisfy this public’s desires.

It is tempting to posit a direct connection between plays that were popular enough to be staged (and restaged) and plays that made it into print, but that was not always necessarily the

---

<sup>67</sup> Bristol, “Theater and Popular Culture,” 248. Bristol makes the convincing point that “commodity really was the bias of the show business world in the sense that theatrical incomes were independent of the social status of the paying customers.”

case. Performance and print, though certainly connected in their statuses as vendible commodities, were entirely different products: as David Scott Kastan has illustrated, the printed play was neither a stable monument to the author's intentions, nor was it a "mere" record of a prior performance—"The printed play is neither a pre-theatrical text nor a post-theatrical one; it is a *non*-theatrical text, even when it claims to offer a version of the play 'as it was played.'"<sup>68</sup> This does not mean that print did not, to some extent, record performances and preserve texts; however, it does demand that scholars treat the implications of the printed play text as separate from those of its performance history.<sup>69</sup> For this reason, although one must certainly acknowledge the fact that, as a privately performed play, Hughes's drama does not allow us the opportunity to speculate about its popular validation, the fact that it was printed (which would have to be independent of its popularity in performance) must have been due to reasons other than a prior public demand. Furthermore, its appearance in print allows it a possible relevance for more than the audience at Gray's Inn. Supporting the theory that play *reading* was an activity

---

<sup>68</sup> Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book*, 8. Elsewhere, Kastan observes: "Although they have often been imagined as two halves of a single reality as the inner and outer aspects of the play, the printed text and the performed play are not related as origin and effect (in whatever order one might conceive it). Indeed, in any precise sense, they do not constitute the same entity. Performance no more animates the text than does the text record the performance. They are dissimilar and discontinuous modes of production"(7).

<sup>69</sup> See David Scott Kastan, "Plays into Print: Shakespeare and His Earliest Readers" in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 23-41. Kastan does not disallow the possibility that print preserved a text; in fact, he argues that "If Shakespeare did not 'live' there quite as animatedly as he does in the theatre, at the very least in print he is preserved"(24). Set against this for comparison is D. F. McKenzie's famous warning: "The obsession with the permanence of print is a powerful element in its mythology as the art that preserves all arts... What needs, I think, to be equally stressed is the ephemerality of print"; see *Making Meaning: "Printers of the Mind" and Other Essays*, ed. Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez, S. J. (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 250. I do not mean to suggest that Kastan and McKenzie are in disagreement about the spectrum of capacities and limitations of print; I wish only to point out that scholars are still highlighting the same paradox that John Leland himself observed: the text as ephemeral and/or decaying monument.

as important as play-going (and sometimes the only way to experience a private performance),

Marta Straznicky explains:

the consumption of playtexts in spaces and institutional contexts (closets, households, academics, etc.) that were construed as private meant that, unlike playgoing, play-reading as a cultural practice could draw on two otherwise disparate sources of authority and legitimation, the elite (private) and the popular (public). It is the fact of a play being a book that enables early modern consumers of printed drama both to be positioned and to position themselves in two overlapping and mutually constitutive public spheres.<sup>70</sup>

The “consumption” of these playtexts is precisely the feature of early modern society that gave readers a chance to experience literature to which they may not otherwise have had access. Like public performances, a printed play was almost always a speculative business venture. As such, it sought any reader with the money to spend. Unlike private performances, however, the printed text had the potential to reach beyond the elite audiences for whom it was performed.

As were public performances, the early modern printed playtext was created with the objective of appealing to buyers. In fact, in his description of the “politics of publication,” Zachary Lesser uses the very same word Michael D. Bristol uses for performances: commodity. “For it is the job of play publishers,” says Lesser, “to take comedies...and change them into commodities, to take their copies of plays and turn them into saleable goods.”<sup>71</sup> In order to be “saleable,” a book had to attract a buyer; thus, it was the publisher’s job to select a play he

---

<sup>70</sup> See Marta Straznicky, “Plays, Books, and the Public Sphere” in *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Marta Straznicky (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 1-22. In line with Kastan, Straznicky believes the performed and printed texts to have a complementary relationship of exchange, not a teleological or competitive one: “From the earliest appearance of printed plays in England, the relationship between text and performances is constructed more often in terms of interchange, complementarity and congruence than of opposition or competition, and readership thereby straddles both the theatrical and the reading publics”(4).

<sup>71</sup> Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2. Lesser claims, “books had much in common with pins, stockings, flowers, and all the other commodities that were at the forefront of the ‘development of a consumer society.’”(27). Here Lesser quotes from quoting from Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1978).

thought could do so. As the “middle man” between the written or performed and the printed text, the publisher had to be a critic in his own right. Lesser explains, “A publisher’s job is not just to read texts but to predict how others will read them... The history of publishing is itself a history of reading, and every play publication is already a piece of literary criticism—if only we can learn to read it.”<sup>72</sup> This is especially evident in a book’s preface to the reader (often presented as the “printer to the reader” but referring to the publisher, who took the financial risk and therefore had a stake in whether the book sold). In these prefaces—as in Herringman’s edition of Middleton’s *Mayor of Quinborough*—the publisher often appeals to the audience in an attempt to match book with customer. In Lesser’s view, this is the publisher’s shaping role: in his preface, the publisher creates the audience he desires, sparking readers to buy the book. This does not mean, Lesser admits, that such an audience actually bought the text (the publisher had no such control), but that the publisher had the role of the first, representative reading of the play.<sup>73</sup> As this “first reader” he has an enormous influence over how the book is received. This is certainly true to an extent; however, it is in the emphasis on shaping that my argument departs slightly from Lesser’s. Why, if the printed play is a commodity for sale, would the publisher try to shape a public to his reading of the play? If the goal is actually to make money, it seems far more prudent to shape the preface to the perceived (already extant) desires of English readers. Advertising does indeed shape a response, but it does so most effectively when it recognizes the

---

<sup>72</sup> Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication*, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Lesser cites the case of scrawled notes in the published version of Walter Burre’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, explaining, “Burre... was unable to control the reading of this customer, who saw the play not as a witty and ironic piece outside the ken of theatrical audiences but as a clear satire of the sort of citizens who... ensured the play’s failure by taking offense at it” (229). Despite this allowance for the unpredictable reader, however, Lesser concludes his book with an emphasis on the power of the publisher: “while Burre can never totally constrain the interpretive freedom all his readers possess, neither is he simply one more reader out of many, for the publisher’s reading is backed by the power of dissemination, the power of print and capital” (230).

potential potency of the product, a potential that must already be anchored in the preferences of the readers it targets. Accordingly, while the preface certainly does tell scholars about the publisher's perceived use of the book, it tells them even more about the English reader.

According to this understanding, even in the cases of the many printed plays without prefatory material, one can still read the anticipation of an audience simply in the publisher's decision to print such subject matter at all. If plays are to be saleable commodities, publishers must work to attract customers who, while certainly influenced by advertising, also harbor their own desires and preferences that exist prior to reading a playtext preface.

The reader/customer's existing preferences are critical in the consideration of printed plays, and one can indeed learn much from the investment interests of publishers as they manifest in prefatory material and the layout of a book.<sup>74</sup> Cyndia Susan Clegg explains that publishers often imagine their readers as the play's judges—which, in both a literary and economic sense, they were.<sup>75</sup> Given this understanding, it is not surprising that publishers increasingly called out to readers in a way they believed would attract the desired buyer. Importantly, these decisions about “packaging” a text often also call to mind the rhetoric and iconography associated with ancient—if not Arthurian—British history. A particularly fruitful example in Shakespeare's first folio combines the language of sale and that of antiquities; the writers of the address “To the great Variety of Readers,” John Heminge and Henrie Condell,

---

<sup>74</sup>In his article on “typographic nostalgia” Zachary Lesser claims, “Examining presentational choices such as typeface, format, and the use of woodcuts or engravings helps us to understand the position of a particular book within the entire marketplace of print”(101); see “Typographic Nostalgia: Play-Reading, Popularity, and the Meanings of Black Letter” in *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Marta Straznicky (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 99-126.

<sup>75</sup> Cyndia Susan Clegg, “Renaissance Play-Readers, Ordinary and Extraordinary” in *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Marta Straznicky (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 23-38; 27.

present the text both as a saleable object and as the purified collection of past (inferior) printed versions. On the subject of sale, they veritably push the text on a heterogeneous group of potential readers:

From the most able, to him that can but spell: There you are numbered. We had rather you were weighed. Especially, when the fate of all Bookes depends vpon your capacities: and not of your heads alone, but of your purses. Well! It is now publike, & you wil stand for your priuiledges wee know: to read, and censure. Do so, but buy it first. That doth best commend a Booke, the Stationer saies. Then, how odde soeuer your braines be, or your wisdomes, make your licence the same, and spare not. Iudge your sixe-pen'orth, your shillings worth, your fiue shillings worth at a time, or higher, so you rise to the iust rates, and welcome. But, what euer you do, Buy.<sup>76</sup>

Condell and Heminge make their agenda known: although they hope for thoughtful readers of taste and judgment, they understand (and hope to profit from) the fact that any man or woman willing to vote with a purse is welcome to judge the text. Buying the book is the first critical step in judgment (and it is not dependent on having previously seen performances of the plays): in a critical validation of Kastan's argument, Heminge and Condell assert that being a theater-goer is not the same as being a reader. And readers have a particularly important role, especially since they are allowed to read the "correct" text—that which has been prepared for print.

The printed version has its own unique value as an object with authenticity: in this folio, Condell and Heminge hope to "clean up" the faulty printed versions that had previously been offered individually.<sup>77</sup> They are presenting their text not as the "new and improved" but the "original, as it was meant to be presented." Their quest for the genesis of Shakespeare's genius is critical for creating their monument to him.

---

<sup>76</sup> From William Shakespeare, *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, 1623).

<sup>77</sup> While the Shakespearean example is perhaps one of the most rich, it was not the first to use such rhetoric. See Douglas A. Brooks, *From Playhouse to Printing House: Drama and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Brooks notes that the language of "curing" a text of its ills also appears in John Daye's reprint of *Gorboduc*, called *Ferrex and Porrex* (1570).

It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to haue bene wished, that the Author himselfe had liu'd to haue set forth, and ouerseen his owne writings; But since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to haue collected & publish'd them; and so to haue publish'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diuerse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of iniurious impostors, that expos'd them: euen those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceiued the~.

The language of taking the author's "papers," purifying them of their recent abuse, and creating a monument to the author's importance thoroughly saturates this passage, establishing the high stakes of this "saleable object." In this gesture, Heminge and Condell echo the rhetoric of such salesmen's unlikely bedfellow—that of John Leland. Just as Leland wished to "clear away" trifles from the Arthurian legend, so Heminge and Condell want to correct the "abus'd," and "stolen" texts and to offer them "cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as [Shakespeare] conceiued them." This is entirely in line with Leland's statement that there must have been an original, true version of the Arthurian legend independent of Geoffrey's fabrications; thus, from two very different agendas comes a shared gesture towards the importance of creating monuments to English heroes (Shakespeare and Arthur) whose importance lies in their origins. Although it is just as impossible to offer a "perfect" printed text—independent of the "surreptitious" traces—as it is to locate and use Geoffrey's mythical Arthurian source, it is critical that in both cases the ends justify the fabricated means. Furthermore, it is critical that, for Heminge and Condell, "selling" a text does not degrade its importance as a monument. On the contrary, print allows readers to judge their national texts for themselves and decide which monuments are worth making (and buying).<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> The yearning for a vendible "cur'd" text of Shakespeare's works is not the only gesture that aligns publishers' interests with national nostalgia. The layout of a play could also supply important information about a national

Although scholars will undoubtedly continue to debate the power of the “popular” element in determining what made it to the early modern stage and printed page, it is clear that there were *varied* audiences and readers, all of whom were targeted and/or taken into account by playing companies and publishers hoping to make money. The Arthurian plays *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, *Hengist*, *King of Kent/Mayor of Quinborough*, and *The Birth of Merlin* have different but intersecting implications for consideration as “popular.” In the case of Hughes’s play, although the “realm” is of particular interest in the play itself, its performance history can tell us nothing about how English citizens connected to an embodied Arthur: the play was staged once, for royalty. However, its emphasis on the “commons” is reflected in the play’s (corrected) printed version, suggesting that an Arthurian play with an emphasis on the “ordinary” people might very well have made it to audiences who had also enjoyed Richard Robinson’s translation of Leland and would soon thereafter encounter Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (or one of its less expensive descendants)—audiences who had an interest in the national implications of Arthurian literature. Middleton’s and Rowley’s plays, on the other hand, were performed at public playhouses *and* were printed; they therefore participate in two kinds of commodification/consumer societies. These plays are especially interesting in that they were printed forty years after their first stage appearances, suggesting a longer “shelf life” for drama—and perhaps specifically Arthurian drama—than Farmer and Lesser’s statement about the Caroline desire for novelty suggests. Such printed plays would have been available to the same generation buying printed Arthurian masques, illustrating the various attitudes towards the relevance of Arthurian history during and after the closing of the theaters and the English Civil

---

ideology believed to be attractive enough to sell books. Zachary Lesser’s theory of “typographic nostalgia” is important here, in illustrating that black letter did not necessarily mean “low”—it simply meant *English*.

Wars. The plays and their methods of distribution are all different, but they are all invested in “selling” Arthurian or otherwise Galfridian commodities over the course of the years 1588-1662; in short, British history was apparently a sound basis for creating drama, performed or printed.

This acknowledgment of Arthur’s continued relevance, coupled with the idea that publishing books was akin to constructing monuments to national greatness, merits asking why one of the most monumental figures in history and romance was not taken up by one of the most monumental of dramatic writers. The lack of a Shakespearean Arthur play, on its own, is unremarkable; after all, there are many subjects that Shakespeare did not cover. However, given Shakespeare’s emphasis on good national stewardship in the face of usurpation, his heroic portrait of martial kingship, and his use of British chronicle history in *Richard II*, *Henry V*, and *King Lear*, respectively—as well as the strange inclusion of his name on the 1662 printing of Rowley’s Arthurian play—the fact of Arthur’s absence from Shakespeare’s canon becomes more striking. Were Hughes, Middleton, and Rowley (and their publishers) reaching out to audiences for whom Arthur was in demand—audiences whose desires for Arthur Shakespeare ignored—or were their plays actually successful in spite of Arthur’s presence in them? After all, despite Hughes’s play’s presence in print in the late 1580s, Shakespeare did not follow suit with his own version of Arthurian drama. Similarly, in the 1660s, when Middleton’s and Rowley’s plays reached print, John Milton published not the Arthurian epic he had originally planned but *Paradise Lost*. In short: as this dissertation concludes, I want to briefly raise the question of whether the relationship between Arthurian literature and the early modern English subject was as firmly established as it seems from its ability to persist even after the Civil Wars, or whether

the omission of Arthur by some of England's greatest writers meant that he was only ever a few steps from oblivion.

### **Unmade Monuments: Shakespeare's Arthur-less Nation**

Given the flurry of Arthurian activity in the 1580s, as well as the appearance of Hughes's dramatic offering, where is Shakespeare's Arthurian play? This is a question most recently raised by Arthur Phillips's 2011 novel *The Tragedy of Arthur*, a story about a "lost" Arthurian play by William Shakespeare.<sup>79</sup> As part of the novel, Phillips constructs a "Shakespearean" play entitled *The Tragedy of Arthur*, the authenticity of which (in the plot of the novel and as a document in and of itself) is under constant scrutiny throughout Phillips's story. Though I will not discuss this twenty-first-century play in detail, it is significant that writers are still exploring the unrealized or lost potential of a Shakespeare/Arthur match-up.<sup>80</sup> These two figures, on their own, constitute potent influences on English national literature; therefore, it is not surprising that scholars have questioned Arthur's absence from the canon of a writer who worked with many other heroic and/or legendary kings. Shakespeare does indeed explore themes similar to those of the three Arthurian plays discussed above, and he certainly reflects upon the subject matter of British history—indeed, he is even erroneously listed as one of the authors of *The Birth of Merlin*—but he does so in very different ways than Hughes had or Middleton and Rowley would.

While certain themes, characters, or moments in Shakespeare's plays seem to call out for Arthurian references, a closer look reveals possible reasons for Shakespeare's declining to

---

<sup>79</sup> Arthur Phillips, *The Tragedy of Arthur* (New York: Random House, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Even William Camden's *Britannia* seems to call out for a talent like Shakespeare to take up Arthur's cause: "For, the most valiant Champion of the British Empire, seemeth even in this behalfe onely, most uinfortunate, that hee never met with such a trumpetter, as might worthily have sounded out the praise of his valour"(228).

include such references. In her introduction to *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, Caroline McEachern highlights *Richard II*—particularly the nostalgic speech of John of Gaunt in Act II, scene 1—as exemplifying the concept of England as a nation. Though this seems the perfect place to invoke Arthurian imagery, the legendary king never appears in the passage. Indeed, according to Shakespeare’s character, a “prophet new-inspired” not unlike Merlin himself, England is a “teeming womb of royal kings,” but perhaps the most famous of these kings gets no specific mention (31; 51).<sup>81</sup> One of Britain’s most renowned conquerors, known for “Christian service and true chivalry,” Arthur has no place in this speech—not even as the foil to Richard’s England’s “shameful conquest of itself”(54; 66). However, things are more complicated for Shakespeare’s Richard than they are for Hughes’s Arthur, suggesting that the kind of unqualified splendor Arthur signifies may be irrelevant under the circumstances of Shakespeare’s play. While arguably comparable to Mordred’s attempted takeover of the rightful king’s throne, Bolingbroke’s takeover of Richard’s kingdom is far more controversial. Both plays ask whether rebellion against a rightful king is permissible, but Hughes and company answer the question with a resounding “no” while Shakespeare allows the question to linger. Shakespeare’s plays characteristically raise difficult questions that linger after the drama concludes, an aspect that may be symptomatic of the distance between Arthurian iconography and Shakespeare. As Hughes’s drama makes very clear, the importance of Arthurian chronicle is not to glorify or interrogate Arthur himself but to endorse the legitimacy of the British/English *nation*; as the

---

<sup>81</sup> References to Shakespeare’s plays are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

figurehead for a long line of such kings, Arthur may be ill suited to intense character scrutiny.<sup>82</sup> After all, even Shakespeare's Henry V, the king who seems most likely to receive unqualified praise for his military valor, cannot escape Shakespeare's thoughtful questions about the sometimes unpopular decisions required in going to war. Though he also works from chronicle history, Shakespeare raises questions about his kings as individuals, often in the form of doubts. What lingers in Hughes's play, on the other hand, is not individual doubt but collective hope: declining the finality of burial, Hughes's Arthur and his cause will "still be remembered most" amongst the subjects of the English nation, and Arthur's second coming will not be debated but "look'd for every hour." This is not to argue that Shakespeare did not capitalize on nostalgia—he did so often—but even the intensely nostalgic John of Gaunt seems more resigned to his wishes' futility than expectant of their being fulfilled.

Given its Galdfridian associations, Shakespeare's attitude toward the nation via British history in *King Lear* seems at first to call out for an Arthurian comparison; however, as with *Richard II* and *Henry V*, the play later reveals its possible incompatibility with Arthurian themes. As with many of Shakespeare's plays, the source material comes from Holinshed (but can be traced back to Geoffrey of Monmouth) and the anonymous play *King Leir*, raising the possibility of a reference to the most famous king of British chronicle. However, the hope for any kind of resurrected nation such as might have lingered in John of Gaunt's speech is gone in *Lear*. Philip Schwyzer, writing about Shakespeare's different approaches as he moved from a play like *Henry V* to one like *King Lear*, argues:

---

<sup>82</sup> This is possibly related to the differences between Arthur and Guy of Warwick discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Arthur cannot repent of his conquest and retain his national import; by extension, a truly despondent Arthur who looks back but not forward would greatly compromise Geoffrey's and Malory's foundations of hope.

what makes *King Lear* such a drastically different play from *Henry V* is not the absence of communion so much as the absence of community. This is a play without memories and without children, without a meaningful past or an imaginable future. . . . The move [between plays] is the move from a community united by longing for what has been lost, to a communion confined within the moment of loss itself.<sup>83</sup>

Shakespeare's *Lear* is devastating because not even nostalgia is an option for exploring community. Coming from one of Geoffrey's most famous tales of union/faction, the timely nature of the play with respect to James's project of unification must have set up some expectations in the audience. However, the devastating play defies all such expectations.<sup>84</sup> And it is here that one might indeed argue that there is little room for the Arthurian material in such a form. "Shakespeare surely knew what was called for—the awakening of desire for the restoration of the lost national past. And Shakespeare surely knew better than any how such effects were achieved. Yet...the play defeats all such reasonable expectation, and does so in a highly conscious and chillingly calculated manner," Schwyzer explains.<sup>85</sup> Shakespeare was certainly capable of writing Arthurian history—but declined to do so. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the Fool's prophecy in the folio text of *Lear* is not an homage to Geoffrey but a parody of "Merlin's Prophecy" from *The Arte of English Poesie*. This is not the speech of a "prophet new-inspir'd" but of a tired Fool who looks forward to Merlin with no trace of the hopeful foretelling of greatness in Rowley's *Birth of Merlin*. In the gesture towards Merlin, and

---

<sup>83</sup> Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*, 168; 169.

<sup>84</sup> Ribner suggests that the anonymous *Leir* and Shakespeare's *Lear* illustrate two completely different attitudes/approaches to using the British history as source material: "If we are to see how, on the one hand, the matter of legendary Britain could be exploited for its value as sentimental romance, and on the other how it could be used with full historical implications, we may perhaps best do so by comparing the old *Leir* play with Shakespeare's play on the same subject"; see *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, 247. Of course, as Schwyzer points out, Shakespeare's play does not pay homage to history so much as it troubles history's ability to teach its participants anything useful in a world that has no memory and no hope.

<sup>85</sup> Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*, 159.

in the use of the British material in particular, Shakespeare illustrates that he knows precisely what he is declining to endorse or even closely examine. *Richard II*'s John of Gaunt wishes for death in light of recent events, but he would also prefer to heal with his death—to restore the land to its former glory. In Lear's case, the answer to such naïve hope is clear: “never, never, never”(Scene 24, line 302).

While Arthur's absence from Shakespeare's canon is not, in itself, evidence for or against his continued usefulness in imagining the English nation, I argue that Arthur's absence may be due to the factor that links versions of him across all genres—and makes those versions difficult to radically alter without consequence—Arthur's particular iconic status. As representative of British and/or English community, Arthur's usefulness comes from his ability to knit up history in a way that legitimizes the nation, in a way that produces the “mythic capital” discussed in Chapter 3. This is why everyone from Geoffrey to Leland to Spenser goes to such lengths to erase doubts from Arthur's legend. Arthurian books and bones are used to illustrate the belief that, though individuals may come and go, Arthur—as he represents the nation—will persist in recognizable form.<sup>86</sup> Hughes's Arthur, for all his regrets and hesitation, is, at the last, still Geoffrey and Malory's heroic victim of circumstances/Fortune, offering the hope of a second coming. As an iconic figure, his significance may grind against the kind of psychological depth that Shakespeare lends his characters: as a cultural icon, he must function without a gloss. And

---

<sup>86</sup> This is not to say that playwrights did not experiment with him in novel ways. In fact, in 1973 a seventeenth-century Arthurian play (MS 61745) was discovered among the papers of Sir John Coke, Secretary of State during the reign of Charles I. This play, *Tom a Lincoln*, takes its title and its material from Richard Johnson's romance (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation). Like its source, the play presents Arthur as a foolish adulterer who serves as a mere backdrop for Tom's exploits. There are some critical departures, however: gone are Johnson's references to the dark and bloody aftermath of Tom's discovery of his identity as Arthur's bastard. In their place is the addition of a clown, Rusticano, who delights in mocking the royals as “Mr. kinge Karter, & m(rs) queen Miniver” (line 1098). The “middle classing” of the royals raises interesting questions about the subject's duty to the sovereign. I do not treat this play at length because it was never put into print.

although Shakespeare surely could have molded Arthur into an introspective king, it is worth considering whether Arthur could have endured such revision or would have ended up like Jonson's contradictory figure in the *Barriers*.<sup>87</sup> Irving Ribner explains, "Shakespeare's ideal king is victorious in war, but he fully realizes the horrors of war, and his ultimate goal is always peace."<sup>88</sup> This is not really Arthur's goal even in the case of Hughes's version, which eventually follows tradition even if it initially falters. And while one cannot actually know Shakespeare's attitude towards Arthur, it is clear that, when uplifting or emptying the tropes of national nostalgia with which Arthur was closely associated, this monumental playwright chose to build his histories not on the promise of a glorious rebirth ("no graue I neede...but let my carcass lurke") but more often on the "graves, worms, and epitaphs" reinforcing the lingering doubts in "sad stories of the death of kings."<sup>89</sup>

If playgoers and play readers were imagining their nation through representations of Arthur, it was not via the plays of Shakespeare that they were doing so. However, the actions of Hughes, Middleton and Rowley (and publishers Robinson, Herringman, and Kirkman/Marsh) all attest to the fact that Arthur was a sound choice for dramatic commodities in the 1580s, 1620s and 1660s. Though Arthur's presence on stage never matched the number of his appearances in the pages of romance, even his brief performances in English drama contribute to the impression

---

<sup>87</sup> In *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* Ribner explains, "Shakespeare's histories are not political propaganda; they are the expression of a profoundly moral view of human relationship which does not differ essentially from that which he expressed in his non-historical plays"(158).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>89</sup> *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, Act V, line 178. *Richard II*, Act III, Scene 2, lines 141, 152. One might, of course, argue that *Henry V* troubles such a theory of Shakespeare's experiments with kings. I do not wish to argue that those plays laced with doom and gloom were the only readings of English history Shakespeare entertained; I highlight *Richard II* and *King Lear* as two plays closely related to Arthurian history—in thematic or source material—and therefore notably void of Arthurian influence. See Claire McEachern's chapter on *Henry V* in *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, 1590-1612 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

that there was no major genre that Arthur did not touch. Arthur is one of the figures in English culture that endured, despite fluctuations in the frequency of his appearances within and across genres. Exploring a similar concept in a different context, Charles Whitney points to the character of Falstaff/Sir John Oldcastle as a critical example of a figure's continued potency as an early modern cultural signifier over time. Falstaff is "a dramatic figure who became a public effigy, an embodied, authorizing resource of linguistic expressiveness bound up with a set of shared memories, one whose magic potency could be drawn upon instantly and re-enacted in intimate, casual intercourse that helps shape attitudes, relationships, and identity."<sup>90</sup> Here Whitney is discussing the ways in which various staged versions of Sir John Oldcastle/Falstaff contributed to the cultural comings and goings—the attitudes, language, and identity—of these many Falstaffs' "fellow" Englishmen. Though a very different kind of figure, Arthur may have the same potency—if not on stage, then perhaps in print. In printed history, romance, pageantry and plays, audiences' and readers' "shared memories" of Arthur's association with national glory and the nostalgia that follows means that even when he was not physically on stage, Arthur may have been conjured in the minds of play-going and reading subjects as one of the most famous of the "teeming womb" of English icons.

---

<sup>90</sup> Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*, 10. Whitney makes the important point that audiences came to a figure like Sir John with prior expectations. If the portrayal of Sir John went against their collective understanding, there may very well have been friction in the playhouse. When discussing Jane Owen's recusant tract *An Antidote Against Purgatory* (1634) and its iteration of Oldcastle as the source of an honor catechism helping the audience to "pass through the nightmare of history," Whitney observes, "Some audiences' members could much sooner imagine Sir John in hell than helping anyone stay out of it. . . . For them Sir John's wondrous body is generally an object of revulsion, something alien and monstrous, a figure for moral corruption that must be disciplined or expelled" (100). This seems pertinent not only in view of Arthurian plays but perhaps especially in Jonson's *Prince Henry's Barriers*. One would think that audiences could much sooner imagine Arthur conquering Europe than arguing for pacifism. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

### Evaluating the “Lurking Carcass” of the Arthurian Play

The possibility for scholarly error always arises when considering subjects for which limited, fabricated, or even a *lack* of evidence is a representative factor. Although he never directly comments on his choice of topic in much detail, Arthur Phillips was remarkably astute in choosing to write about a *forged* Shakespearean play about *Arthur*. Since the appearance of Geoffrey’s pseudo-history based on an invented source, forged national monuments have been Arthur’s calling cards, a fact that draws attention to the problem of evidence in theories of nation, Arthur, and print.<sup>91</sup> To avoid the potential pitfalls of blindly crediting limited or faulty evidence as proof of a nation under Arthur, I have focused on plays’ references to the power of subjects to contribute to the formation of the nation, as well as these plays’ printer prefaces and post-print corrections (when available), both of which call out to an imagined subject/reader. By looking at both subject matter and the message of the publisher, one can ascertain, at the very least, the possible preferences of the readers who made up the “popular” as well as the courtly element: performed for different audiences but eventually all offered for sale in print, the three Arthurian dramas under discussion do not discriminate amongst their potential audiences. They can therefore tell scholars much about the desire for Arthurian literature amongst the heterogeneous group of early modern subjects during the volatile period from 1588-1662.

Despite these precautions, there will never be a guarantee that, after all the speculation regarding audience demand for a dramatic Arthur, printed plays in general and Arthurian plays in particular are the indices to public feelings of community that they appear to be. Questions

---

<sup>91</sup> Guenevere’s dissolving tresses (Chapter 1), unfinished national texts (Chapter 2), ancestral ghosts (Chapter 3), and all manner of other insubstantial evidence “haunt” Arthurian legend, reinforcing John Wolfe’s gloss on Richard Robinson’s text—“A doubt” (Chapter 1)—and extending it to the early modern printed play.

surrounding the dangers of “forging” evidence of popular audiences have more generally circulated since the 1969 appearance of D. F. Mackenzie’s “Printers of the Mind,” but reached a fever pitch in the context of printed drama in particular with Peter W. M. Blayney’s landmark essay, “The Publication of Playbooks” in 1997.<sup>92</sup> Blayney argues that, contrary to the beliefs of scholars who posit the popularity of playbooks based on twentieth-century attitudes toward their value, early modern publishers actually did not consider plays a lucrative business venture.<sup>93</sup> Blayney presents persuasive evidence that “printed plays never accounted for a very significant fraction of the trade in English books.”<sup>94</sup> In 2005, Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser qualified Blayney’s assertion in *Shakespeare Quarterly*’s “The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited,” suggesting instead that Blayney should have considered how playbooks compared to other kinds of books—evidence that intimates that plays were reprinted even more often than were sermons.<sup>95</sup> The same issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly* contains Blayney’s assertion that he is not persuaded by Farmer and Lesser’s rebuttal.<sup>96</sup> While scholars continue to debate the evidence in this case, the important point in light of my project is that even when data *does* exist—even when the evidence isn’t based on lack, lost documents, or “missed opportunities” to feature Arthur—arguments still rage regarding how to read such data. Given this widely varying data on play publication, and adding to it Arthur’s basis in loss and absence, it is doubly difficult to judge Arthur’s potency as a desirable national signifier in early modern drama. However, it is also

---

<sup>92</sup> D. F. McKenzie, “Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices,” *Studies in Bibliography* 22 (1969), 1-75. Published by Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia.

<sup>93</sup> Peter W. M. Blayney, “The Publication of Playbooks,” 383.

<sup>94</sup> Blayney, “The Publication of Playbooks,” 385.

<sup>95</sup> Farmer and Lesser, “The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited,” 6.

<sup>96</sup> Peter W. M. Blayney, “The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2005), 33-50.

worth remarking that even the limited evidence suggests that Arthur refused to leave the stage: he remained a continually (if sporadically) resurfacing national signifier, recognizable to writers, audiences, and readers conceptualizing their place in a constantly changing nation. Despite a lack of incontrovertible data on popularity and the conspicuous omissions of monumental playwrights, Arthur's intersections with the power of the "commons" in the rhetoric of early modern plays and publishers' prefaces—as well as the Arthurian play's consistent reappearance in various forms during three very different moments in English/British history—combine to suggest the persistence of Arthur's "lurking carcass" as it manifests in national icons: imagined, forged, performed, and printed.

## Epilogue

### John Milton's Decision: Marking the Debts and Desires of the English Nation

Reversing Caxton's fifteenth-century choice of Trojan history over the Bible, in the mid-seventeenth century John Milton famously abandoned his plans to write a national Arthurian epic in favor of exploring the biblical themes of *Paradise Lost*. Though each chapter of this dissertation has posited the continued relevance of Arthurian literature in print, it is important to note that somewhere between the England of Caxton and that of Milton—or more specifically, between Spenser's England and Milton's—King Arthur lost his appeal to the most talented writers of national epic. Between Caxton and Milton, England had gone from civil war to civil war, enduring the trauma of continual religious upheaval, rule without Parliament, and regicide. Damaging as these experiences were, for Milton it was apparently not only the national tragedy occasioned by kings that proved disappointing, but that the people had not risen to the challenge of taking charge of their own governance. Milton, who had placed so much emphasis on the importance of the autonomy of subjects—and especially readers—to formulate their own ideas about how they should be ruled, saw these English citizens take a large step backward in the reinstatement of the Stuart monarchy. In such an environment, Milton may have believed that the kind of England Arthur represented was irrelevant; there may no longer have been a use for a “fantasy of wholeness” in the sense that McEachern describes as possible in Spenser's England. Though Milton's choice to write *Paradise Lost* instead of Arthurian epic is certainly relevant as a missed opportunity for Arthurian literature, perhaps the most representative example for illustrating Milton's decision to abandon Arthur is his *History of Britain*: a text that casts doubt on Arthurian sources, but also performs the power of imaginative writing and remains—like

Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, its fictional *Briton Moniments*, and the Arthurian tradition at large—tantalizingly unfinished.

Milton's initial plans to write a national epic using Galfridian material are most evident in two works of poetry: Latin verses of praise addressed to Giovanni Battista Manso, who had hosted Milton in Naples in 1638; and "Epitaphium Damonis" (1639), an epitaph on the death of Charles Diodati. Together, they suggest that by the 1630s—also the decade in which were published Carew's *Coelum Britannicum* and Johnson's *Tom a Lincoln*, two texts that, on their own, seem to degrade Arthurian legend—Arthur had actually not yet lost his national appeal. The verses to Manso suggest that Milton was seriously considering writing a national poem using Geoffrey of Monmouth as a source:

If ever I recall in my poetry the kings of my native land, and Arthur, who caused wars even beneath the earth, or the noble-hearted heroes of the Round Table, made invincible by their fellowship. O may the spirit help me, as mighty Britons break Saxon battle formations.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from these verses to Manso that Milton's highest ambitions were at least preliminarily wrapped up in writing an Arthurian epic—one that would be equal to the work of Homer and Vergil and Spenser.<sup>2</sup> Milton revisits this possibility in "Epitaphium Damonis," his poem written on the death of his friend Charles Diodati, in which he again raises the possibility of writing on a British theme:

I myself will sing the ships of Troy through the Rutupian Sea, the old kingdom of Inogene, daughter of Pandrasus, the chieftains Brennus and Arviragus, and old Belinus, and finally the American settlers, under the law of the Britons, next Igraine pregnant with

---

<sup>1</sup> John Milton, "Manso" in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), lines 80-4.

<sup>2</sup> Also important is the fact that Milton's Arthur is the warlike conqueror of the chronicles. Even in his prefatory flattery of his host, Milton praises not only Manso's intellectual merit and devotion to literature, but also his "warlike prowess." Milton's plans were evidently directed toward the warlike, chivalric Arthur of English history—not a pacified or qualified version like Jonson's or even Hughes's.

Arthur by fatal fraud—Gorlois’s counterfeit face and false arms, the fakery of Merlin. Oh if life remains, you my pipe will hang at some distance on an ancient pine tree forgotten by me, or, transformed, you will shriek out harshly a tale of Britain in English. What then? One man can’t do everything, nor can one hope to. I will have enough of a reward, a great glory (even if I remain forever unknown, inglorious to the outside world), if yellow-haired Ouse reads my poetry, and he who drinks from the Alaun, the Humber full of whirlpools, and all the woods of Trent, but before all of them my Thames, and the Orkneys in the distant seas hear me.<sup>3</sup>

Indebted not only to the historical stories of Geoffrey of Monmouth but the topographical emphases of William Camden and Michael Drayton, Milton gestures toward a national saga reaching from Brutus to Arthur, covering the historical battles and the magic of Merlin, firmly situated in the landscape native to both. At this point, at least, Milton could apparently envision in earnest a national Arthurian saga fit to stand with the epics of Vergil and Homer. Over the course of the 1640s, however, Milton’s plans seem to have changed. Although the reasons must ultimately remain unknown, much can be surmised by looking at a few of Milton’s other writings—in particular, those that privilege the reader and cast suspicion upon Arthur. Together, texts such as *Areopagitica* and *The History of Britain* illustrate what “nation” meant to Milton at different points during the highly volatile seventeenth century, and why, by the 1660s, that nation could no longer endorse the writing of an Arthuriad.

Like the definition of early modern nationhood, Milton’s attitude toward the concept is not easy to pinpoint, but does follow some perceivable trends. As David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens have argued, Milton’s nationalism fluctuates between the different “categories” by which the nation is most often defined: ethnic, religious, political and—importantly—literary, “closely connected with his creativity, vocation, and ambitions as a controversial prose writer

---

<sup>3</sup> John Milton, “Epitaph for Damon” in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan, lines 162-78.

and poet.”<sup>4</sup> The fact that Loewenstein and Stevens posit “literary” as perhaps the most important facet of Milton’s nationalism allows for the fluctuation in Milton’s attitude toward both nation and Arthur over the course of the seventeenth century. Even in overtly “political” texts like *Areopagitica* and “ethnic” texts like the *History of Britain*, Milton creatively approaches the concept of nationhood, crafting a sense of community despite the state of turmoil in which England found itself in the mid-seventeenth century. In language that recalls the emphasis Adrian Johns places on creating trust with respect to the printed text, Loewenstein describes Milton’s forging a nation in *Areopagitica*: “Forging a new sense of national community at the moment of great religious ferment, Milton thus strives to balance the tension between unity and difference between the national polity. And his striking definition of the energetic, robust godly nation...is distinctive and powerfully imagined.”<sup>5</sup> Loewenstein’s choice of words is telling: “Forging” a “powerfully imagined” nation is the work of a distinctly literary mind. As it had been in the sixteenth century, “nation” was still a slippery concept, and Milton’s very different versions in his various texts are illustrative of this fact; however, it is this very instability that grants significance to attempts to forge a relationship with nation (as it had with Arthurian legend and the printed text).

---

<sup>4</sup> See David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens, “Introduction: Milton’s Nationalism: Challenges and Questions” in *Early Modern Nationalism and Milton’s England*, ed. David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008). Loewenstein and Stevens define these categories as follows: “At times, Milton’s nationalism is intensely ethnic, rooted most positively in a sense of the native vitality of the English language...At other times, it is intensely religious, not a matter of nature but of divine election that contributes to Milton’s sense of England’s exceptionalism, his vision of her as a Protestant nation set apart and singled out by God with a special role to play in history...At other times, his nationalism is more overtly political, revealing Milton’s sophisticated grasp of the intellectual energy, the combative debate, and the plurality of opinions, including clashing ones, necessary for a civic nation in the making to be truly free”(3-4).

<sup>5</sup> David Loewenstein, “Milton’s Nationalism and the English Revolution: Strains and Contradictions” in *Early Modern Nationalism and Milton’s England*, ed. David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 25-50; 33.

While the definition and categories of “nation” were continually in flux, one emphasis persists through much of Milton’s writing over the years: the importance of the thinking subject—more particularly, the reading subject—to the formation of a national community. Milton’s emphasis on tested virtue, from his masque *Comus* (1634) to his tract *Areopagitica* (1644) to his great epic *Paradise Lost* (1667), consistently suggests that the English citizen’s freedom was bound to his exercising of the right to think for himself, and reading was a critical part of this freedom. Perhaps most famously, in *Areopagitica* Milton claims that books “contain a potencie of life,” indeed, they are “reason itselfe,” and “the pretious life-blood of a master-spirit, imbalm’d and treasur’d up on purpose to a life beyond life.”<sup>6</sup> In a creative combination of lively reason and the “embalmed” monument, Milton suggests that these powerful books can only reach their full potential if they are freely licensed to be read by thoughtful Englishmen. He argues that man himself can judge right and wrong, and therefore does not need strict licensing laws to “protect” him. “Nor is it to the common people lesse than a reproach; for if we be so jealous over them, as that we dare not trust them with an English pamphlet, what doe we but censure them for a giddy, vitious, and ungrounded people... That this is care or love of them, we cannot pretend.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, the licensing laws, Milton argues, are reflecting poorly upon the English nation itself. In one of the passages that illustrates Milton’s particular ability to combine the ethnic, political, and literary elements of his nationhood, he asks, “Lords and Commons of England, consider what Nation it is whereof ye are, and wherof ye are the governours: a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, suttile and sinewy

---

<sup>6</sup> John Milton, *Areopagitica; A Speech of Mr. John Milton For the Liberty of Vnlicens’d Printing, To the Parliament of England* (London: 1644), 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

to discours, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to.”<sup>8</sup> The concept of a “piercing spirit,” “sinewy to discours” soaring to the highest possible point recalls the imagery of the neo-Platonists, channeling it into persuasive discourse about what constitutes national pride—a nation of engaged, fully-“licensed” readers.

This indispensable readership was growing in the mid-seventeenth-century, adding to the urgency of Milton’s commentary on the importance of its correct management. The expanding readership was aided in no small part by the explosion of the pamphlet market, as Joad Raymond observes: “Milton is supremely conscious of books as physical objects, and the experience of writing, handling, reading and smelling them inhabits his argument; his references are specific enough to indicate that the reading matter that he defends is small books, a few sheets long, in English.”<sup>9</sup> Small, short books had, of course, existed much earlier than the 1640s, but they grew greatly in numbers as political discussions became increasingly conducted in pamphlets.<sup>10</sup> The pamphlet became the grounds on which to wage rhetorical battles, opening the discussion of nationhood to even greater audiences than ever before. Raymond calls the pamphlet, “the pre-eminent model of public speech” and credits it in “creating informed debate about news, politics, and culture,” ultimately becoming “a foundation of the influential moral and political

---

<sup>8</sup> Milton, *Areopagitica*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 272. See also Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Like Raymond’s, Achinstein’s study notes the increasing importance of the pamphlet reader to political writers like Milton in the period between 1640-60.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond, who describes the pamphlet as consisting of between one and twelve sheets (between eight and ninety-six pages in quarto), explains, “the rise of the pamphlet reflected a transformation in the circumstances of politics and of reading and writing in Britain. In 1560 printed texts played a marginal role in propaganda exercises and attempts to influence the public. By 1688, the year of the Glorious Revolution, it was self-evident that any attempt to generate public support for a political initiative, party or position, would have to exploit the persuasive power of the press”(25).

communities that constitute a ‘public sphere’ of popular political opinion.”<sup>11</sup> Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that Milton participated in this form of debate: indeed, he endorsed it as integral to the revolution he desired. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker note that, for Milton, “the success of the Good Old Cause, the fortune of the revolution, wholly depended upon right reading. For him, only the education and construction of a nation of revolutionary readers would demystify, deconstruct and ultimately destroy the texts, images and idols of false authority.”<sup>12</sup> Perhaps especially in *Eikonoklastes* (1649) is Milton’s insistence upon right reading most evident. After criticizing Charles I’s poor analytical skills, he calls on English readers to do better. Andrew Hadfield observes, “Milton is claiming another written tradition that constitutes the nation’s heritage as that of a common culture of argument and debate that he articulates for his readers, in direct opposition to the false, iconic use of texts, which reduces them to misleading aphorisms, demonstrated in *Eikon Basilike*.”<sup>13</sup> The explosion of print in the mid-seventeenth-century suggests that English readers were invited—and in Milton’s opinion, obliged—to participate in fashioning their nation. This was not the process of producing some stable status quo; on the contrary, such nationhood would be characterized by continual argument and debate. To help them choose (for themselves) the right path, Milton contributed imaginative literature dedicated to the health of the English nation—as Sharon Achinstein has

---

<sup>11</sup> Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, “Introduction: discovering the Renaissance reader” in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-37; 21.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Hadfield, “Milton and the Struggle for the Representation of the Nation” in *Early Modern Nationalism and Milton’s England*, ed. David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 51-72; 56.

noted, Milton became “a powerful myth-maker for the public sphere.”<sup>14</sup> Achinstein’s point illustrates the spectrum of considerations that the literature of nationhood had to continually take into account. In a world of increasing literacy, print, and participation in government, Milton used every means of persuasion open to him. The fact that he held fast to myth suggests that he understood the power of legend; the fact that he relinquished plans to perpetuate Arthurian myth suggests that he felt it was incompatible with his national vision.

Milton’s ultimate rejection of an Arthurian epic, coupled with what appeared to be a “retreat” from politics to literature, are often cited as signals that Milton had become detached from the more optimistic rhetorical battles he undertook in the 1640s. However, Loewenstein and Stevens remind scholars that even in Milton’s first tract, *Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline* in England (1641), only two years after his stated plans to write a national epic, he was conflicted about whether England truly merited the status to which God had ordained it rise.<sup>15</sup> The doubt that attended even the more optimistic period of Milton’s life once again underlines the constantly changing status of the English nation during times of rapid change. Though scholars have often taken for granted the idea that, by the seventeenth century (in no small part thanks to Camden), historians had completely discounted Geoffrey of Monmouth’s historical integrity, Milton’s *History of Britain* illustrates that one very capable historian was, at

---

<sup>14</sup> In an assertion that recalls David Loewenstein’s *Milton and the Drama of History* (see below), Sharon Achinstein’s *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* puts forth a related argument about Milton’s relationship with myth: “As a full-time member of a revolutionary government, Milton wrote with the needs of that government and the shifting winds of political allegiance always in mind; his political engagement required a rhetorical opportunism at times. Yet from a rhetorical perspective, Milton was surprisingly committed to a single goal, that of making his public fit to achieve self-governance through training in virtue. He persisted in his attempts to formulate an image of the public. Throughout his writing life, Milton had to contend with the actual audiences he hoped to reach in his writing, audiences that were the increasing targets of propaganda. He responded by becoming a powerful myth-maker for the public sphere. I see Milton as a significant case of a revolutionary practice, a writer who shaped his audience not only by his principles and ideas, but by his imaginings”(8).

<sup>15</sup> Loewenstein and Stevens, “Milton’s Nationalism: Challenges and Questions,” 28-9.

best, conflicted about English history—especially as it related to myth. Begun in 1649 but not printed until 1670, the *History of Britain* remains unfinished, a status that strengthens its ties to the work of Leland and Spenser, projects that were also plagued by—or were themselves—incomplete and/or otherwise “unreliable” texts. Loewenstein claims that Milton’s *History* “reads too much like a failed national saga, and [Milton] thus finds himself confronted with the problem of presenting history unworthy of recording.”<sup>16</sup> England’s Trojan foundations and Arthurian legend, as Camden and Selden had suggested, may in fact be “unworthy of recording,” and Milton’s Arthurian treatment suggests that he, too, was skeptical at best—and, at worst, disillusioned.

Milton’s history begins with a reference to the escalating level of fiction in the British history over the centuries. Such fictions, he claims, are not so easily removed: like Summers’s description of the cultural icon, legendary history may accrue additional meanings, but does relinquish them easily:

But now of *Brutus* and his Line, with the whole Progeny of Kings, to the entrance of *Julius Caesar*, we cannot so easily be discharg’d. . . For what though *Brutus*, and the whole *Trojan* pretence were yeilded up, seeing they who first devis’d to bring us from som noble Ancestor were content at first with *Brutus* the Consul; till better invention, although not willing to forgoe the name, taught them to remove it higher into a more fabulous Age, by the same remove lighting on the *Trojan* Tales in affectation to make the *Britan* of one Original with the *Roman*, pitch’d there, yet those old and inborn names of successive Kings, never any to have ben real persons, or don in thir lives at least som part of what so long hath bin remember’d, cannot be thought without too strict an incredulity.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 86. See also Nicholas von Maltzahn’s study, *Milton’s History of Britain: Republican Historiography in the English Revolution* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991). Maltzahn more particularly discusses Arthur’s appearances in Milton’s *History*.

<sup>17</sup> John Milton, *The history of Britain, that part especially now call’d England from the first traditional beginning, continu’d to the Norman conquest* (London: Printed by J. M. for James Allestry, 1670), Book I, p. 6.

The amplification of the “fabulous” past the point of believing them to have been “real persons” must be acknowledged; it does not mean, however, that Milton completely refuses to use this narrative in his own history. Citing Geoffrey of Monmouth and Nennius as authors of tales that have “receav’d approbation from so many,” he does not omit them from his work; instead, he includes them with the qualification that the stars of these legends—Brutus, Vortigern, and Arthur—are “more renown’d in Songs and Romances, then in true stories.”<sup>18</sup> In this way he is much like Camden and Selden, who acknowledge but do not persuade readers to believe the Arthurian stories. Milton acknowledges the tradition of Arthurian skeptics: “But who Arthur was, and whether ever any such reign’d in Britain, hath bin doubted heretofore, and may again with good reason.”<sup>19</sup> Referring to the “British Book” of Geoffrey of Monmouth as particularly suspect, due to the lack of Arthurian references in the work of other historians, Milton rationalizes Arthur’s refusal to disappear. “But he who can accept of Legends for a good story, may quickly swell a volume with trash, and had need be furnish’d with two only necessaries, leasure, and belief, whether it be the writer, or he that shall read.”<sup>20</sup> Milton accepts and even partially rationalizes the Arthurian tradition—but he does not accept its historical veracity. He ultimately defies historians to prove that Arthur was actually at Mount Badon or that he conquered Freesland, suggesting that perhaps the patriotism inherent in his early plans to write a Galfridian epic may have faded or disappeared by the time he wrote a British history of his own.

Published in 1670, *The History of Britain* remains unfinished. While Milton had intended to narrate all the way up to the seventeenth century, his history, in fact, ends with the Norman

---

<sup>18</sup> Milton, *The History of Britain*, Book 3, p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 3, pp. 122-33.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 3, p. 123.

conquest. Somewhere along the way, Milton had given up on Arthur—and perhaps given up on the belief that England would achieve its full potential. In 1649, the same year he began writing his *History*, he also wrote *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* and, in 1651, *Defence of the English People*, two tracts that argue that the public should have power over their own governance. Accompanying this power, however, is the responsibility to exercise it—to think for itself—and to resist being convinced by a controlling government, a point Milton also makes in *Eikonoklastes*. Andrew Hadfield, who reads *Paradise Lost* and *Eikonoklastes* side by side, suggests that, although Milton never gave up on the concept of the subject's role in defining the terms of the English nation, he did qualify his earlier zeal—largely because he felt that the English people had shown that they were not ready to accept the responsibility of constituting a “godly political form.”<sup>21</sup> In light of Hadfield's observation, the skepticism Milton infuses into his *History of Britain* makes sense: the very forms that had sparked the spirited defense of national myth in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are now doubted “with good reason.” While the possibility of a self-governing English nation was still possible, Milton's works remain varied but continually optimistic. With the failure of the revolution, however, Milton clearly withdraws from the option he had expressed in the '30s: “if ever” he were going to write an Arthurian epic, such a time had now passed.<sup>22</sup>

While disillusionment with the people of England does not definitively explain Milton's decision to choose biblical themes over Galfridian ones, it does add another element to the

---

<sup>21</sup> In “Milton and the Struggle for the Representation of the Nation” Hadfield explains, “The early books of *Paradise Lost* provide us with models of the true and false nation... If read in terms of a work such as *Eikonoklastes*, it is clear enough which path England has chosen to follow”(67).

<sup>22</sup> In “Milton's Nationalism and the English Revolution” Loewenstein notes, “In these dark postrevolutionary years, an embattled Milton carried his ideal of England within him; and in this respect, we might say, he became more of a conflicted and dissenting patriot—deeply ambivalent about his own patriotism—than a fervent or consistent nationalist”(43).

picture besides the too easily accepted answer that “Arthur was too fantastic to be believed.”

While this may have dissuaded other authors from writing about the legend, it is hard to believe that Milton’s reasons were wholly related to factual accuracy. No one knew better than Milton the power of language and imagination in constructing national fervor amongst readers—and that fervor was not always the result of facts but of creative words and images. Why else would he have praised Spenser so highly, as “a better teacher than *Scotus* or *Aquinas*” in illustrating the importance of exercised virtue?<sup>23</sup> Reading pamphlets on the current national situation and histories written by the most discerning scholars (like those of Selden, whom Milton also praises) is indeed part of a citizen’s duty, but so too may be the reading of powerful poetic examples that illustrate truth even if they are the stuff of (Arthurian) romances. In *Milton and the Drama of History*, David Loewenstein points out that, though he must claim to seek an impartial record of history, Milton cannot completely abandon the figurative dimension of his discourse: “In practice, Milton writes mythopoetically, even as he appears to eschew the fabulous and imaginary.”<sup>24</sup> What is more, Milton knows this to be the case. In the *History of Britain*, even

---

<sup>23</sup> Milton, *Areopagitica*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History*, 82. Loewenstein’s book is helpful in sorting through the possible reasons Milton may have abandoned Arthurian themes yet demonstrated mastery of the kinds of “reality fiction” that had always characterized Arthurian legend. “The final books of *Paradise Lost* would of course integrate history, epic, and tragedy; but in its own way so does the *History of Britain*, which begins, like an epic story, with the myth of Brutus and then charts a tragic pattern of failed deliverances in national history with numerous references made to the troubles of Milton’s own age” (82). Loewenstein argues that Arthur had become too associated with royalist ideology to be accepted by Milton. This may be true; however, this dissertation raises the possibility that Arthur may actually have been an ill-fitting match with the royalist ideology cultivated by Charles I, and Arthur may still have been in demand (in print) amongst the increasingly literate public—in short, the monarchy may have already abandoned him by the 1630s and the general public may have never done so. The Arthurian chapbooks that would follow the publication of *Paradise Lost* suggest that although Milton may have felt that Arthur was, by the 1660s, no longer worth serious consideration for an epic, he may in fact have retained his usefulness as a symbol for a nation increasingly imagined by its people.

before he casts doubt in Arthur's historical legitimacy, Milton allows that there may be truth at the heart of invention.

Oft-times relations heretofore accounted fabulous have bin after found to contain in them many footsteps, and reliques of something true, as what we read in Poets of the Flood, and Giants little belev'd, till undoubted witnesses taught us, that all was not fain'd' I have therefore determin'd to bestow the telling over ev'n of these reputed Tales; be it for nothing else but in favour of our English Poets, and Rhetoricians, who by thir Art will know, how to use them judiciously.<sup>25</sup>

In the hands of a skilled writer and reader, any subject may be made to convey a useful "truth." Even if such volumes are "swelled with trash," or filled with "fond fables" as Leland lamented, the discerning subject—"whether it be the writer, or he that shall read"—will know how to sort through them for meaningful "reliques." In short, even in Milton's rejection of Arthur he elevates the reader's ability to choose for himself. The "tested virtue" of the reader will only improve as a result of the challenge Milton puts before him. It is no wonder, then, that Milton felt such admiration for Guyon, Spenser's "temperant" knight, whose virtue is most evident when he is tempted, reads the signals, and chooses rightly.<sup>26</sup> This is what Milton wanted for his reader, and while the English population and Arthurian legend ultimately proved disappointing to such

---

<sup>25</sup> Milton, *History of Britain*, Book 1, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> See Maureen Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983). Quilligan reminds her readers that, in an ironic twist, Milton actually misreads Spenser's Book II by equating the two temptation scenes: the Cave of Mammon and the Bower of Bliss. These scenes have different significance, since, in the first case, Guyon is alone and therefore his "right reading" is his alone, but in the second case, at the Bower of Bliss, he needs the restraining aid of the Palmer. Milton's mistake highlights the important role of the reader—not just in Spenser's text, but also in the kind of interpretation that constitutes the active virtue that Milton wanted to cultivate. Quilligan explains, "In the cave, Guyon restrains himself; in the bower, he must be restrained by the Palmer. Milton's rhetorical period in *Areopagitica*, which renders the two episodes so parallel, then seems to overlook this crucial difference—unless, that is, we take into account the presence of the reader. If, in the Cave of Mammon, Guyon is self-sufficient to resist temptation, then there he plays the part played by the Palmer in the Bower of Bliss; the one who is tempted by Mammon then is not Guyon, but the reader. . . For the tempted reader, right reading of the Mammon passage means a self-consciously open-ended interpretiveness. For Guyon it also means abstention. In gaining knowledge by not eating but by seeing, by feeding eyes, not taste, in order to read well hell's images, Guyon's phantom companion becomes the prototype of Milton's reader. Milton's mistake in *Areopagitica* is finally a very significant one. It points to his recognition that there is an extra presence within the text—seeing, knowing, if not always abstaining"(63; 65).

desires, Milton's biblical epic would reprise themes that were not so very different than the work of his beloved Spenser, a poet who had more successfully combined nation and Arthur.

### **The Continual Qualifier: The English Reader**

In so many ways, Milton was the ideal writer to take on an Arthurian epic: not only was he enormously learned in British history, but he also had the sensibility to appreciate Spenser and Drayton in their imaginative and/or nostalgic splendor. This capability, coupled with his emphasis on the importance of the English subject and right reading, make Milton the perfect Arthurian spokesman at a time when the country was in turmoil but citizens were still creating demand for Arthurian books in print.<sup>27</sup> And this continued demand in print is precisely what directs this dissertation away from allowing Milton's Arthurian abandonment to have the last word—to signify a lack of Arthurian relevance in post-Civil War England. While Milton's decision to turn away from Arthurian material is a thought-provoking reversal of Caxton's Arthurian endorsement two centuries earlier, it does little to consider what the English subject desired at the close of the seventeenth century. While Milton and Spenser both emphasize the importance of right reading in the formation of a national community, neither writes for a "common" audience to the extent that writers and publishers of translations, ballads, romance chapbooks, and plays had done. The continued appearance of Arthurian themes in these items well into the eighteenth century casts doubt on the theory that Milton's decision was final for all English citizens. In short, not everyone found Arthur's legend to be polluted with "trash" to the extent that England no longer perceived him as a legitimate cultural icon.

---

<sup>27</sup> In the 1660s Francis Coles published Martin Parker's (romance) *The most admirable historie of...Arthvr*, Henry Herringman published Thomas Middleton's *Mayor of Quinborough*, and Francis Kirkman/Henry Marsh published William Rowley's *Birth of Merlin*.

Milton's decision reflects the as-yet-unremarked line that appears in each of the chapters of this dissertation: on one side of the line are the rulers and writers whose sense of an Arthurian nation is one bound in *debts*: whether owed to ancestors and patrons, praise of this Arthur as a royal figurehead signifies the need to legitimize centuries of English monarchs and neatly "knit up" the gaps in British and English history. On the other side of the line are readers and publishers whose relationship with an Arthurian nation is, instead, one of *desire*: whether based in desire for profit, entertainment, or a common hero, demand for this Arthur is entirely voluntary and therefore a better lens through which to examine the continued relevance not just of a cultural but of a *national* icon. Though we cannot know exactly what readers "saw in Arthur" when England's greatest writers were either mocking or declining to utilize his legend, it seems likely that Arthur—even in his most outlandish iteration, printed in the flimsiest of material forms—offered stability in the form of a recognizable national icon. While the "central" texts in each genre were composed between 1544-1634, the constellation of Malory editions and the output of "lesser" authors continued steadily from civil war to civil war and well into the eighteenth century. Thus, at times when England may have seemed unrecognizable—due to religious upheaval, dynasty change, rule without Parliament, regicide, and the controversial reinstatement of the monarchy—there was always an Arthurian book around the corner. This ready supply of Arthurian or otherwise chivalric literature could not help but inform culture and trouble the idea that such an influence suddenly ceased in the 1640s when Milton's plans changed. In fact, my closing example of the "popular" use of chivalric romance in the nineteenth century may remind scholars that, brilliant as the output of rulers and writers was, their

consideration of Arthur as increasingly politically useless was not the final word on his desirability as a national hero amongst English readers.

Though appearing nearly two centuries after the endpoint of this dissertation, an example of folk culture in the nineteenth century is remarkably applicable to questions raised by the words and actions of three figures who are themselves separated by multiple centuries: Gerald of Wales, William Caxton, and John Milton. A Shropshire folktale from 1871 notes the practice of “The Bible and Key,” which was used to settle a range of disputes, most often to detect dishonesty. To perform this trick, one would open a Bible, cross his or her forefingers over it, and balance a key on those forefingers. One would then either approach a suspect or ask a question. If conducted in the presence of innocent parties, or if the answer to the question was “no,” the key would remain balanced, but if the guilty party were near or the answer was “yes,” the key would turn on its own. This local cultural practice becomes critical to the continued relevance of Arthurian literature in light of an occasion when, lacking a Bible, the trick was conducted with a book of chivalric stories:

On one occasion, a woman whose husband had deserted her went to this man to try and get him back, or at least to find out where he was. The man went through some sort of ceremony or incantation, and had hardly ended, when a great black cat appeared outside on the window-sill, and rubbed itself against the panes. Both the man and woman ran for their lives, making sure it was the *Old Lad* himself, come to ‘fetch’ them! The method of divination which this conjurer used was the favourite old one of the Bible and Key; only instead of a Bible he used an old book of ‘The Life of Guy Earl of Warwick,’ or ‘Wâr-wick’ as it was always pronounced!<sup>28</sup>

Although Milton had indeed abandoned Arthurian legend for the Bible in the seventeenth century, two hundred years later disputes could be resolved using the Bible *or* the “old book” featuring the figure known as “England’s other Arthur.” Again there is a pairing of the Bible and

---

<sup>28</sup> Charlotte Burne, ed. *Shropshire Folk-lore, a sheaf of gleanings. From the collections of Georgina F. Jackson.* 3 vol. (London: Trübner, 1883-1886). This passage is taken from volume 1, pp. 172-3.

the documents of English nationhood, and again—as with Thomas Gray’s dream and Caxton’s choice for the first printed book in English—the latter is of equal importance. Providing a further link between the two books, this instance of “The Bible and Key” enlists *Guy of Warwick* in an act of divination much like Gerald of Wales’s depiction of Meilyr’s interactions with the gospels and with Arthurian history. Though the Galfridian text is the far inferior one in Gerald’s story, the two texts’ pairing constitutes an important pattern in England’s history. When attempting to glean truth or to found nations, one expects to resort to biblical aid; however, the fact that chivalric literature continues to surface as a companion if not a viable alternative to the Bible for these tasks reflects the fact that readers continued to forge relationships between the two. The unstable entities of nation, myth, and printed book continually combine, both in the most crucial national concerns and in the everyday drama of English citizens. Though a Bible was unavailable, a copy of a chivalric romance was ready to hand, suggesting a relationship with such books hundreds of years after writers were said to have abandoned Arthur as a serious subject for national concerns. The printed Arthurian book’s own status as an “old favourite” among the “common sort” may have been the very reason that, in times of trouble—whether petty local disputes or devastating civil war—Arthur and his fellow chivalric icons repeatedly resurfaced to provide the succor of recognizable cultural continuity.

## Bibliography

- Achinstein, Sharon. *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Adamson, J. S. A. "Chivalry and Political Culture in Caroline England." In *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, edited by Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake, 161-98. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Alcock, Leslie. *Was This Camelot? Excavations at Cadbury Castle 1966-70*. New York: Stein and Day, 1972.
- Andersen, Jennifer, and Elizabeth Sauer. "Current Trends in the History of Reading." In *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, edited by Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer, 1-20. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso, 1983.
- Anglo, Sydney. *Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Policy*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1969.
- Armstrong, W. A. "Elizabethan Themes in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*." *Review of English Studies* n.s. 7 (1956): 238-49.
- Ascham, Roger. *The Scholemaster*. London: John Daye, 1570.
- Bale, John. *The New Year's Gift*. In *John Leland's Itinerary*, edited by John Chandler. Dover, NH: Alan Sutton, 1993.
- Barber, Richard W. *The Figure of Arthur*. Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1976.
- Barker, Nicolas, and Thomas Adams. "A New Model for the Study of the Book." In *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, edited by Nicholas Barker and Thomas Adams, 5-43. London: The British Library, 1994.
- Baron, Sabrina Alcorn, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin, eds. *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.
- Baswell, Christopher, and William Sharpe, eds. *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in the Arthurian Tradition*. New York: Garland, 1988.
- Bergeron, David M. *English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642*. Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2003.

- Bergeron, David M. "Stuart Civic Pageants and Textual Performance." *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1998): 63-83.
- Berry, Philippa, and Jayne Elizabeth Archer. "Reinventing the Matter of Britain: Undermining the State in Jacobean Masques." In *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, edited by David J. Baker and Willy Maley. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Bevington, David. *Tudor Drama and Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Bhabha, Homi K., ed. *Nation and Narration*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Blake, N. F. "William Caxton." In *Authors of the Middle Ages (English Writers of the Late Middle Ages)*. vol. 3, no. 7. Edited by M.C. Seymour. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1996.
- Blayney, Peter W. M. "The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2005): 33-50.
- . "The Publication of Playbooks." In *A New History of Early English Drama*, edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, 383-422. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Bossewell, John. *Workes of Armorie*. London: Ricardi Totelli, 1572.
- . *Workes of Armorie*. London: Henrie Ballard, 1597.
- Bourchier, John [Lord Berners]. *Arthur of Little Britain*. London: Thomas East, 1582.
- Brink, Jean R. "Materialist History of the Publication of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*." *Review of English Studies* 54, no. 213 (2003): 1-26.
- Bristol, Michael D. "Theater and Popular Culture." In *A New History of Early English Drama*, edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, 231-48. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Brooks, Douglas A. *From Playhouse to Printing House: Drama and Authorship in Early Modern England*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Bruster, Douglas. "The Structural Transformation of Print in Late Elizabethan England." In *Print, Manuscript, & Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, edited by Michael D. Bristol and Arthur F. Marotti, 49-89. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000.

- Burne, Charlotte, ed. *Shropshire Folk-lore, a sheaf of gleanings. From the collections of Georgina F. Jackson*. Vol. 1. London: Trübner, 1883.
- Bushnell, Rebecca W. *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Butler, Martin. "Private and occasional drama." In *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Drama*, edited by A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- . *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Camden, William. *Britannia*. Translated by Philemon Holland. London: William Aspley, 1638.
- Carew, Thomas. *Coelum Britannicum A masque at White-Hall in the Banqueting-House, on Shrove-Tuesday-night, the 18. of February, 1633*. London: Thomas Walkley, 1634.
- Carley, James P. *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition*. Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2001.
- . "Polydore Vergil and John Leland on King Arthur: The Battle of the Books." In *King Arthur: A Casebook*, edited by Edward Donald Kennedy, 185-204. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Carlson, David. R. "A Theory of the Early English Printing Firm: Jobbing, Book Publishing, and the Problem of Productive Capacity in Caxton's Work." In *Caxton's Trace*, edited by William Kuskin, 35-68. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.
- Caxton, William. *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*. Edited by W. J. B. Crotch. EETS OS, 1 vol. no. 176. London, 1974.
- Chambers, E. K. *Arthur of Britain*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1927.
- Chartier, Roger. *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*. Translated by L. Cochrane. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- . *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Translated by L. Cochrane. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Chester, Robert. *Loves Martyr: Or, Rosalins Complaint*. London: Edward Blount, 1601.
- Clegg, Cyndia Susan. "Renaissance Play-Readers, Ordinary and Extraordinary." In *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, edited by

- Marta Straznicky, 23-38. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.
- Cook, Ann Jennalie. "Audiences: Investigation, Interpretation, Invention." In *A New History of Early English Drama*, edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, 305-20. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Cooper, Helen. *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . "Guy as Early Modern Hero." In *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, edited by Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field, 185-200. Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2007.
- Crane, Ronald S. *The Vogue of Medieval Chivalric Romance During the English Renaissance*. Menasha, WI: George Ranta Publishing, 1919.
- Crick, Julia, and Alexandra Walsham. "Introduction: Script, Print, and History." In *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300-1700*, edited by Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham, 1-28. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Dane, Joseph A., and Alexandra Gillespie. "The myth of the cheap quarto." In *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, edited by John N. King, 25-45. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Daniel, Samuel. *Tethys' Festival*. In *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First, vol. II*, edited by John Nichols. London: Society of Antiquaries, 1828.
- Darnton, Robert. "What is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65-83.
- Davenant, William. *Britannia Triumphans*. London: John Haviland and Thomas Walkley, 1637.
- Dawson, Anthony B., and Paul Yachnin. *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Dean, Christopher. *Arthur of England: English Attitudes to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1987.
- Dee, John. *The Limits of the British Empire*. Edited by Ken MacMillan and Jennifer Abeles. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004.
- Ditmas, E. M. R. "The Cult of Arthurian Relics." *Folklore* 75, no. 1 (1964): 19-33.

- Drayton, Michael. *Poly-Olbion*. London: Matthew Lownes, John Browne, John Helme, and John Busbie, 1612.
- . *The second part, or a continuance of Poly-Olbion*. London: John Marriott, John Grismand, and Thomas Dewe, 1622.
- Edwards, A. S. G. "William Copland and the Identity of Printed Middle English Romance." In *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, edited by Phillipa Hardman, 139-48. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002.
- Febvre, Lucien, and Henri-Jean Martin. *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*. Edited by Geoffrey Nowell Smith and David Wootton. Translated by David Gerard. London: Verso, 1976.
- Galbraith, Steven K. "English literary folios 1593-1623: studying shifts in format." In *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, edited by John N. King, 46-67. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Geoffrey of Monmouth. *History of the Kings of Britain*. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.
- Gerald of Wales. *Journey Through Wales and the Description of Wales*. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. New York: Penguin Books, 1978.
- Gunn, Steven, and Linda Mockton. "Arthur Tudor, the Forgotten Prince." In *Arthur Tudor Prince of Wales: Life, Death and Commemoration*, edited by Steven Gunn and Linda Monckton, 1-2. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2009.
- Eisenstein, Elizabeth L. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Escobedo, Andrew. *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foxe, Dee, Spenser, Milton*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Farmer, Alan B., and Zachary Lesser. "The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no. 6 (2005): 1-32.
- Foxe, John. *Actes and Monuments*. London: John Day, 1563.
- Green, A. Wigfall. *The Inns of Court and Early English Drama*. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965.
- Gregerson, Linda. *The reformation of the subject: Spenser, Milton, and the English Protestant*

- epic*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.
- Hadfield, Andrew. "Milton and the Struggle for the Representation of the Nation." In *Early Modern Nationalism and Milton's England*, edited by David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens, 51-72. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008.
- Hanning, Robert W. *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966.
- Harrison, William. "Historical description of the Island of Britaine." In *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, edited by Raphael Holinshed et al. London: Henry Denham, 1587.
- Helgerson, Richard. *Forms of Nationhood: the Elizabethan Writing of England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Hellinga, Lotte. "Prologue: the first years of the Tudor monarchy and the printing press." In *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, edited by John N. King, 15-22. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Higden, Ranulph. *Polychronicon*. Translated by John Trevisa. London: William Caxton, 1480.
- Higham, N. J. *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Holinshed, Raphael. "History of England." In *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, edited by Raphael Holinshed et al. London: Henry Denham, 1587.
- Huffman, Clifford Chalmers. *Elizabethan Impressions: John Wolfe and his Press*. New York: AMS Press, 1988.
- Hughes, Merritt Y. "The Arthurs of the Faerie Queene." In *King Arthur: A Casebook*, edited by Edward Donald Kennedy, 205-28. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Hughes, Thomas et al. *The Misfortunes of Arthur*. London: Robert Robinson, 1587.
- . *The Misfortunes of Arthur: A Critical, Old-Spelling Edition*, edited by Brian Jay Corrigan. New York: Garland, 1992.
- Hunt, William. "The Spectral Origins of the English Civil War." In *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill*, edited by Geoff Ely and William Hunt, 305-29. New York: Verso Books, 1988.

- Ingham, Patricia Clare. *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Ingledeu, Francis. "The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History." *Speculum* 69, no. 3 (1994): 665-704.
- Johns, Adrian. *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Johnson, Richard. *The History of Tom Thumb*. London, 1621.
- Johnson, Richard. *The most pleasant history of Tom a Lincolne, that ever renowned soldier, the Red Rose knight*. London: Robert Byrde and Francis Coles, 1631.
- Jonson, Ben. *The Speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers*. In *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson*. London: William Stansby, 1616.
- . *The Masque of Oberon*. In *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, edited by Stephen Orgel. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969.
- . *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon*. In *The Works of Benjamin Jonson. The second volume*. London: Richard Meighan, 1640/1.
- Kastan, David Scott. "Plays into Print: Shakespeare and His Earliest Readers." In *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, edited by Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer, 23-41. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- . *Shakespeare and the Book*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- King, Andrew. "Guy of Warwick and *The Faerie Queene*, Book II: Chivalry Through the Ages." In *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, edited by Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field, 169-84. Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2007.
- King, John N. "Introduction." In *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, edited by John N. King, 1-14. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Kipling, Gordon, ed. *The Receyt of the Ladie Kateryne*. EETS OS. 1 vol. no. 296. London, 1991.
- . *The Triumph of Honour: Burgundian Origins of the Elizabethan Renaissance*. Leiden, Neth.: Leiden University Press, 1977.
- Kuskin, William. *Symbolic Caxton: Literary Culture and Print Capitalism*. Notre Dame, IN:

University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

Lake, Peter, and Steven Pincus. "Rethinking the public sphere in early modern England." In *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, edited by Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, 1-30. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007.

Leland, John. *A Learned and True Assertion of the original, life, actes, and death of the most noble valiant, and renowned Prince Arthure, king of Great Britaine*. Translated by Richard Robinson. London: John Wolfe, 1582.

---. *Assertio Inclytissimi Arturii*. London: Reginald Wolfe, 1544.

Lesser, Zachary. *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Lesser, Zachary. "Typographic Nostalgia: Play-Reading, Popularity, and the Meanings of Black Letter." In *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, edited by Marta Straznicky, 99-126. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.

Levine, Joseph M. *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Levy, F. J. *Tudor Historical Thought*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1967.

Limon, Jerzy. *The Masque of Stuart Culture*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990.

Loewenstein, David. *Milton and the Drama of History*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

---. "Milton's Nationalism and the English Revolution: Strains and Contradictions." In *Early Modern Nationalism and Milton's England*, edited by David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens, 25-50. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

Loewenstein, David, and Paul Stevens. "Introduction: Milton's Nationalism: Challenges and Questions." In *Early Modern Nationalism and Milton's England*, edited by David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

Love, Harold. "Early Modern Print Culture: Assessing the Models." *Parergon* 20, no. 1 (2003): 45-64.

Lupack, Alan. "The Old Order Changeth: King Arthur in the Modern World." In *The Fortunes Of King Arthur*, edited by Norris J. Lacy, 209-23. Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2005.

- Malory, Thomas. *Works*. Edited by Eugène Vinaver. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- . *Le morte d'Arthur*. Winchester: Wynkyn de Worde, 1498.
- . *Le Morte Darthur*. London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1529.
- . *The most ancient and famous history of the renowned prince Arthur King of Britaine*. London: William Stansby, 1634.
- . *The story of the moste noble and worthy Kynge Arthur*. London: William Copland, 1557.
- . *The story of the most noble and worthy Kynge Arthur*. London: Thomas East, 1585.
- Marcus, Leah S. *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- McEachern, Claire. *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- McKenzie, D. F. *Making Meaning: "Printers of the Mind" and Other Essays*. Edited by Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez, S. J. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.
- . "Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices." *Studies in Bibliography* 22 (1969): 1-75.
- Mentz, Steve. *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.
- Merriman, James Douglas. *The Flower of Kings: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in England Between 1485 and 1835*. Wichita: University Press of Kansas, 1972.
- Michelsson, Elizabeth. *Appropriating Arthur: The Arthurian Legend in English Drama and Entertainments 1485-1625*. Uppsala, Swed.: Uppsala University Press, 1999.
- Michie, Sarah. "The Faerie Queene and Arthur of Little Britain." *Studies in Philology* 36, no. 2 (1939): 105-123.
- Middleton, Christopher. *The famous historie of Chinon of England*. London: Cuthbert Burbie, 1595.
- Middleton, Thomas. *The Mayor of Quinborough*. London: Henry Herringman, 1661.
- Milton, John. *Areopagitica; A Speech of Mr. John Milton For the Liberty of Vnlicens'd Printing*,

- To the Parliament of England*. London, 1644.
- . *The history of Britain, that part especially now call'd England from the first traditional beginning, continu'd to the Norman conquest*. London: James Allestry, 1670.
- . "Manso" and "Epitaph for Damon." In *The Riverside Milton*, edited by Roy Flannagan. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.
- Mish, Charles C. "Black Letter as a Social Discriminant in the Seventeenth Century." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 68 (1953): 627-30.
- Munday, Anthony. *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia*. In *Pageants and entertainments of Anthony Munday: a critical edition*, edited by David M. Bergeron. New York: Garland, 1984.
- Newcomb, Lori Humphrey. *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Orgel, Stephen. *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.
- . *The Jonsonian Masque*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Otter, Monika. "Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing." In *Writing Medieval History*, edited by Nancy Partner, 109-30. London: Hodder Arnold, 2005.
- Parker, Martin. *The most admirable historie of that most renowned Christina worthy Arthvr, King of the Britaines*. London: Francis Coles, 1660.
- Parker, Patricia A. *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Patterson, Annabel. *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Peacock, John. "The visual image of Charles I." In *Representations of Charles I*, edited by Thomas N. Corns, 176-239. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Puttenham, George. *The Arte of English Poesie*. London: Richard Field, 1589.
- Quilligan, Maureen. *Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.

- Ramel, Jacques. "Biographical Notes on the Authors of 'The Misfortunes of Arthur' (1588)." *Notes and Queries* 212 (December 1967): 461-7.
- Rastell, John. *The pastyme of people The cronycles of dyuers realmys and most specyally of the realme of Englond*. London: John Rastell, 1530.
- Raymond, Joad. *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Reese, Gertrude. "The Political Import of *The Misfortunes of Arthur*," *Review of English Studies* 21 (1945): 81-91.
- Ribner, Irving. *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Robinson, Richard. trans. *The Auncient Order, Societie, and Unitie Laudable, of Prince Arthure, and his knightly Armory of the Round Table*. London: John Wolfe, 1583.
- Rowlands, Samuel. *The Famous Historie of Guy of Warwick*. London, W. Ferbrand, 1609.
- Rowley, William. *The Birth of Merlin, or, The Child Hath Found his Father*. London: Francis Kirkman and Henry Marsh, 1662.
- Schwytzer, Philip. *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Scott, Allison V. "Jonson's Masque Markets and the Problems of Literary Ownership." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 47, no. 2 (2007): 451-71.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et al. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008.
- Sharpe, Kevin. *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603-1660*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011.
- . *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Sharpe, Kevin, and Steven N. Zwicker. "Introduction: discovering the Renaissance Reader." In *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, edited by Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, 1-40. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Sherman, William H. *Used Books: Marking Readers in Early Modern England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

- Shictman, Martin B., and Laurie A. Finke. "Profiting from the Past: History as Symbolic Capital in The *Historia Regum Britanniae*." *Arthurian Literature* 12 (1982): 1-36.
- Shohet, Lauren. "The Masque in/as Print." In *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers and Readers in Early Modern England*, edited by Marta Straznicky, 176-202. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.
- Shrank, Cathy. *Writing the Nation in Reformation England, 1530-1580*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Shurley, John. [J. S.] [John Shirley]. *Brittain's Glory: OR, the history of the life and death of K. Arthur, and the Adventures of the Knights of the Round Table*. London: J. Wright, J. Clark, and T. Passinger, 1684.
- . *Great Britain's Glory being the history of King Arthur with the adventures of the Knights of the Round Table*. London: C. Brown, 1700.
- . *Great Britain's Glory being the history of King Arthur with the adventures of the Knights of the Round Table*. London: John White, c. 1700.
- . *Great Britain's Glory being the history of King Arthur with the adventures of the Knights of the Round Table*. London: W. O., 1697.
- Shurly, John. [J. S.] [John Shirley]. *The renowned history, or the life and death of Guy of Earl of Warwick*. London: P. Brooksby, 1681.
- Simons, John, ed. *Guy of Warwick and Other Chapbook Romances: Six Tales from the Popular Literature of Pre-industrial England*. Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1998.
- Smuts, R. Malcolm. *Culture and Power in England, 1585-1685*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.
- Sommerville, Johann P., ed. *James VI and I: Political Writings*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. Edited by A. C. Hamilton. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Longman, 2006.
- . *The faerie queene. Disposed into twelue bookes, fashioning XII. morall vertues*. London: William Ponsonbie, 1590.
- . *The faerie queene. Disposed into twelue bookes, fashioning XII. morall vertues*. London: William Ponsonbie, 1596.

- . *The faerie queene. Disposed into twelue bookes, fashioning XII. morall vertues.* London: Matthew Lownes, 1609.
- . *The faerie queen: The shepherds calendar: together with the other works of England's arch-poët, Edm. Spenser: collected into one volume, and carefully corrected.* London: Matthew Lownes, 1611.
- . *The works of that famous English poet, Mr. Edmond Spenser. Viz. The faery queen, The shepherds calendar, The history of Ireland, &c. Whereunto is added, an account of his life; with other new additions never before in print.* London: Jonathan Edwin, 1679.
- . *The shepherdes calender conteyning twelue aeglogues proportionable to the twelue monethes.* London: Hugh Singleton, 1579.
- Spufford, Margaret. *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England.* London: Methuen, 1981.
- Stein, Robert M. *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1025-1180.* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.
- Straznicky, Marta. "Plays, Books, and the Public Sphere." In *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, edited by Marta Straznicky, 1-22. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.
- Strong, R. C., and J. A. van Dorsten. *Leicester's Triumph.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Strong, Roy. *Henry Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1986.
- Summers, David A. *Spenser's Arthur: The British Arthurian Tradition and the Faerie Queene.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997.
- Summit, Jennifer. *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Syr Beuis of Hampton.* London: William Stansby, 1630.
- Tatlock, J. S. P. *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions.* New York: Gordian Press, 1974.
- Vergil, Polydore. *The Anglica historia of Polydore Vergil, A.D. 1485-1537.* Edited by Denys Hay. London: Office of the Royal Historical Society, 1950.

- von Maltzahn, Nicholas. *Milton's History of Britain: Republican Historiography in the English Revolution*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Waller, Evangelina H. "A Possible Interpretation of *The Misfortunes of Arthur*." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 24 (1925): 219-45.
- Warren, Michelle R. *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Watt, Tessa. *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Webster, John. *Monuments of Honour*. London: Nicholas Okes, 1624.
- Whitney, Charles. *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Wiggins, Alison, and Rosalind Field. "Editorial Introduction: Namore of this! How to read *Guy of Warwick* and why." In *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, edited by Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field, xv-xxi. Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2007.
- Withington, Robert. *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline, Vol. I*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920.
- Woolf, D. R. *Reading History in Early Modern England*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.