"Good stuff for wise men to laugh at or honest men to take pleasure at": The Arthurian tradition during the Renaissance

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University of Northern Iowa

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“GOOD STUFF FOR WISE MEN TO LAUGH AT
OR HONEST MEN TO TAKE PLEASURE AT”:
THE ARTHURIAN TRADITION DURING THE RENAISSANCE

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Crystal Stallman
University of Northern Iowa
August 2002
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ABSTRACT

Contrary to the commonly held view that the English Renaissance abandoned the realm of Arthuriana as an inspiration for literary and other cultural texts, I demonstrate in my thesis that Arthurian texts from this period took on new forms and shifted their focus. Although a decline in the overall amount of Arthuriana produced during the Renaissance occurred, as opposed to the Middle Ages, interest in Arthur certainly did not die out. When comparing the amount of Arthuriana of the Middle Ages to that of the Renaissance, it is necessary to remember that the Middle Ages covered nearly a millennium, whereas the Renaissance barely lasted two hundred years. Writers of the Renaissance were still interested in both the literary and the historical Arthur, but they chose to define and present Arthur and the Arthurian legend through the framework of the social, cultural, political, and religious ideologies of their own lifetimes. To provide a better understanding of Arthurian Renaissance texts, I shall first explore the context in which they were written. Whether Arthur is portrayed in historical, political, fictional, dramatic, poetic, or religious texts, each text is directly related to various cultural contexts of this period.

The first text I will examine is Edmund Spenser's famous Faerie Queene, an unfinished epic-length poem written to glorify Queen Elizabeth and first published in part in 1590. I will read The Faerie Queene as an example of poetic Arthuriana calling upon components of the traditional Arthurian legend while at the same time creating a new Arthurian legend. The second text I have chosen is Michael Drayton's Poly-Olbion. Published in 1613, the Poly-Olbion combines poetry, history, and topography into a unique patriotic epic. I will analyze this text as an example of an historiographical text with Arthurian inclusions. Finally, I will explore the recently discovered anonymous
Jacobean play *Tom a Lincoln*, (written between 1611 and 1619), an Arthurian Renaissance text that reinterprets the traditional Arthurian legend through its negative critical commentary on the aristocracy of Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

My analysis of these three texts will be conducted in four stages. First, I will explore how these texts are situated within English literary history, particularly within Arthurian literary history. Secondly, I will examine those social, cultural, political, and religious aspects of the Renaissance which influenced the texts, specifically in their portrayal of Arthur and other major elements of the Arthurian legend. In addition, I shall examine these texts in light of the still-raging controversy over the historicity of Arthur, noting how this controversy affected each author's choice and manner of portraying Arthur in his text. Finally I will suggest how Spenser, Drayton, and the author of *Tom a Lincoln* accepted or rejected the social, cultural, political, and religious institutions of the Renaissance through *The Faerie Queene*, the *Poly-Olbion*, and *Tom a Lincoln*, respectively.

By exploring these three texts, I not only wish to explore, to as great a degree as possible, what the authors' intentions were as they wrote their texts, but also to suggest how social, cultural, political, and religious facets of the Renaissance influenced and were reflected in Arthurian literature.
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This study by: CRYSTAL STALLMAN

Entitled: "GOOD STUFF FOR WISE MEN TO LAUGH AT OR HONEST MEN TO TAKE PLEASURE AT": THE ARTHURIAN TRADITION DURING THE RENAISSANCE

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John W. Somervill, Graduate College Dean
For Delayne, who never gave up on me.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION: ARTHUR THROUGH THE AGES</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: ARTHUR ROMANTICIZED: EDMUND SPENSER'S <em>FAERIE QUEENE</em></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: ARTHUR GLORIFIED: MICHAEL DRAYTON'S <em>POLY-OBLION</em></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: ARTHUR SUBVERTED: THE ANONYMOUS <em>TOM A LINCOLN</em></td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION: ARTHUR: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

ARTHUR THROUGH THE AGES

The legend of King Arthur is an ancient one. For more than 1500 years royalty and peasantry, rich and poor, literate and illiterate alike have been fascinated by the personage of Arthur. Few people in history or legend have caused as much debate, confusion, and turbulence as the figure known as King Arthur. Surrounding this recognized founder of the Round Table, ruler of Camelot, slayer of dragons, and venerated model for succeeding English kings is a confusion of history, myth, legend, fantasy, and romance. From the earliest oral histories and legends, to the great romances of the Middle Ages, to the modern works of T. H. White and Marion Zimmer Bradley, King Arthur has inspired more works of fiction than almost any other figure. The legend of Arthur has also been retold in diverse genres, including poetry, romance, history, drama, opera, ballad, and film. It has been embraced by literature, art, and politics.

In past centuries considerable controversy has arisen over whether or not a King Arthur really existed. Archaeological discoveries and numerous Arthurian place names give some evidence of the importance of a person named Arthur, but whether this Arthur is a figure of history, myth, or legend remains a mystery. While today it is generally accepted that an Arthur of some sort did exist, little else is agreed upon. One fact generally consented to is that if an Arthur did indeed exist, he flourished sometime between 450 A.D. and 650 A.D. Aside from this there seem to be more questions than

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1 The terms myth and legend are sometimes used interchangeably, but technically they are not the same thing. A myth, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is a “purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions, or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena” (177). A legend, on the other hand, is a story from the past about a subject that was, or is believed to have been, historical. Legends concern people, places, and events. Usually, the subject is a saint, a king, a hero, a famous person, or a war” (Rosenberg xxvi). King Arthur embodies characteristics of both myth and legend, therefore I will use both terms in my thesis in reference to Arthur.

answers when it comes to the historical Arthur. But whether or not Arthur existed as a king, a warlord, a battle leader, a military leader, or merely a character of legend, the stories surrounding Arthur took on a life of their own, stories that continue to flourish fifteen centuries after their conception.

However, many scholars such as Richard Barber, James Douglas Merriman, and Elise Van Der Ven-Ten Bensel claim Arthur was not always a popular figure of history or literature. They claim that during the Renaissance both historical and literary interest in Arthur waned, and he became “dead” to the world. However, much evidence can be presented that proves just the opposite to be true. Although a decline in the overall amount of Arthuriana produced during the Renaissance is evident as opposed to the Middle Ages, interest in Arthur certainly did not die. When comparing the amount of Arthuriana of the Middle Ages to that of the Renaissance, it is essential to remember that the Middle Ages covered nearly a millennium, whereas the Renaissance barely lasted two hundred years.

To understand the role Arthur played in the Renaissance, why the intellectual elite rejected him, and why the Renaissance has been called the Arthurian “Dark Ages,” knowledge of the Arthurian tradition prior to the Renaissance and an historical look at the British monarchy is necessary. In the following pages I will trace the Arthurian tradition from its inception in the fifth or sixth century through the Renaissance, give an overview of the British monarchy beginning in the twelfth century, and show how the monarchy appropriated Arthur to its own advantage. In doing this, I will examine three diverse texts—The Faerie Queene, The Poly-Olbion, and Tom a Lincoln—in order to demonstrate

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7 When I refer to the *Arthurian tradition* or *Arthurian legend*, I am not referring to one singular tradition or legend; rather, as David Summers points out, the Arthurian tradition “is actually a plurality of strains of Arthurian lore and ideas” (7), and is not limited to one any one genre or art form.
the wide range of genres that employed the Arthurian tradition during the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries.⁴

The Arthur of the Welsh Tradition

To look for the Arthur of popular tradition in fifth and sixth century histories will
yield nothing but disappointment, for there he does not exist. To begin the search for
King Arthur—knight of the Round Table, husband of Guenevere, friend of Merlin, and
companion to Sir Lancelot—one must look to legend, beginning with early Welsh
literature. The first probable written reference to Arthur occurs in the Welsh poem “Y
Gododdin,” preserved in a thirteenth-century manuscript known as the Book of Aneirin.
Composed in the kingdom of the Gododdin, the region of today’s Edinburgh, Scotland, by
the Welsh bard Aneirin around 600 A.D., the poem is a series of elegies for members of
the tribe of Gododdin who fell at the battle of Catraeth (Catterick, North Yorkshire)
which took place around 590 A. D. in an attempt to stave off the invading Saxons. While
nearly 600 years separate the date of the composition of “Y Gododdin” and the earliest
surviving copy of the text,⁵ many scholars accept the poem as the authentic work of
Aneirin from the seventh century. The poem, while specifically speaking of the soldier
Gawrddur, alludes in line six to Arthur’s prowess as a great and mighty warrior:

He [Gawrddur] charged before three hundred of the finest,
He cut down both centre and wing,
He excelled in the forefront of the noblest host,
He gave gifts of horses from the herd in winter.
He fed black ravens on the rampart of a fortress
Though he was no Arthur.

⁴ For the following summary I am relying heavily on these helpful and authoritative studies and surveys:
Snyder, Christopher. The World of King Arthur. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000; Chambers, E. K.
New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967; and Loomis, Roger Sherman. Arthurian Literature in the
⁵ This text endured either through oral tradition or partially written copies no longer in existence. It is
possible the section speaking of Arthur could have been a later interpolation.
Among the powerful ones in battle,
In the front rank, Gwawrddur was a palisade. (Jarman 64, 967-974)

This brief mention of Arthur shows that he was already popular by 600 A.D., and that his bravery and strength were widely known and recognized. According to Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson in his essay “The ‘Gododdin’ of Aneirin,” this reference to Arthur “is perhaps the most valuable evidence yet found for the historicity of Arthur; here we have him spoken of as a famous warrior within living memory of the (supposed) date of his (supposed) death” (29). But other scholars are less enthusiastic, as well they should be, of gleaning solid proof of Arthur’s existence from this one brief salute to his prowess in battle.

Arthur is also mentioned in other Welsh works such as the ninth century Historia Brittonum, traditionally attributed to a Welsh monk known as Nennius, although his authorship of the Historia has been seriously questioned in the past century. This manuscript tells of Arthur’s twelve battles with the Anglo-Saxons and his victories in each of these battles. According to Nennius, Arthur was not a king but rather a leader in battles, a dux bellorum. Along with these seemingly “historical” reports of Arthur’s exploits, Nennius also includes marvels and exaggerations associated with Arthur. Nennius no doubt is exaggerating when he claims that Arthur single-handedly killed 960 enemy in one battle. Nennius also makes reference to a pile of stones called Carn Cabal, where Arthur’s dog, Cabal, supposedly left a paw print. Yet a third marvel is the burial mound of Arthur’s son, Anir. According to Nennius, the grave, when measured, never yielded the same length twice to those conducting the measurements. These hyperbolic interpolations suggest that by the ninth century Arthur had already become the subject of legend and myth.
Another early Welsh text with Arthurian inclusions is the anonymous Latin chronicle *Annales Cambriae* (*Annals of Wales*), a list of important dates composed around 955 and covering 533 years. Scholars believe that the entry marked “Year 1” corresponds to the year 477 A.D. Two entries, Year 72 and Year 93, make mention of Arthur. Year 72, which would be 519 A.D., refers to the Battle of Badon and Arthur’s victory there, and Year 93, 540 A.D., talks of the Battle of Camlann in which Arthur and Medraut (Mordred) perish. Early on, these entries were taken as proof positive of Arthur’s existence, primarily because they were believed to have been taken from contemporary records. While this belief has been dismissed in recent centuries, it is interesting to note that all other persons mentioned in this text have been verified as historical figures.

Two Welsh works that provided a different view of Arthur were the Saint’s *Lives*—particularly the *Life of St. Carannog*, the *Life of St. Cadoc*, and the *Life of St. Padarn*—and the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (*The Triads of the Island of Britain*), commonly known as the Welsh Triads. A striking aspect of the *Lives* and the Welsh Triads is the various ways in which Arthur is depicted. The majority of the time he is portrayed as a powerful king and defender of Britain, but he is also shown as proud, destructive, and deceitful. In the *Life of St. Cadoc*, written by Lifris of Llancarfan in the late eleventh century, Arthur is portrayed as Petty and debaucherous, as only a hero because of his physical prowess, not because of his honorable and selfless deeds. In both the *Life of St. Padarn* and the *Life of St. Carannog*, both composed in the early twelfth century, Arthur learns God’s power is greater than his own when he fails in his attempts at trickery and deception.

The *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, a collection of anonymous thirteenth-century Welsh triadic sayings recounting personages, events, or places in Welsh history makes reference
to the Arthurian legend more than two dozen times. In the triad "Three Powerful Swineherds of the Island of Britain," Arthur attempts unsuccessfully to obtain a pig from the swineherds by both deceit and force. While all references to Arthur in these Welsh works have been questioned in terms of their historical significance and reliability, each has contributed to the legendary and mythical aspects of Arthur, has helped create the Arthurian tradition, and has helped to develop further what is called the "Matter of Britain."

Histories and Chronicles of the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages (c.476-1450) pseudo-chronicles and other "historys" were also being written about Arthur. Three twelfth-century contemporaries, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, all had different visions and ideas of what a "history" should be. Benedictine monk William of Malmesbury (1093?-1143?), called an "elegant, learned, and faithful historian" (Malmesbury iv), composed his De Gestiis Regum (The History of the Kings of England) around 1120 A.D. In the preface to his history William of Malmesbury claims that since Bede's 731 A.D. Ecclesiastical History of the English People, no one had composed the history of England in Latin. While he admits that some histories had been attempted in the vernacular, he found them unsatisfactory, leading him "to fill up the chasm, and to season the crude materials with Roman art" (4).

The Triad form "has been popular as a literary device among the Celtic peoples since the early Middle Ages, if not longer. It was used commonly as a means of codifying moral aphorisms, general gnomic and antiquarian matter, and the technicalities of poetic composition and of the law. How ancient may be this addiction to the triple form must remain a matter of doubt; there are triads in the early poetry attributed to Aneirin and Taliesin; and one is tempted to connect the medieval predilection for the triad with the recurrent triple grouping of Celtic deities in Gaul and Ireland" (Bromwich 44).

According to Laura Keeeler, during the Middle Ages "history and story had not yet made their declaration of mutual independence; and in the majority of medieval minds poetic faith, and admiration whether for the author or for his subject, especially when these ministered to national pride, were stronger than a sense of obligation to examine the authority of records of the remote past" (2).
Unlike other historians who accepted past "historical" accounts as undeniable truth, William of Malmesbury, in his own search for the truth, claims in his *Gesta regum Anglorum (Chronicle of the Kings of England)* that what he has written of the present he has either seen himself or heard from "credible authority," but as for "past transactions," he "vouch[es] nothing for the truth" (4). William of Malmesbury refers to Arthur twice, calling Arthur "a man worthy to be celebrated, not by idle fictions, but by authentic history" (11). But then he seems to contradict this statement when he acknowledges that Arthur's tomb had not been found, causing "ancient ballads [to] fable that he is still to come" (315), this last phrase perpetuating the myth that Arthur would return to rule England.

Like William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon (1080?-1135) was also convinced of the importance, and almost sacredness of history when he compiled his *Historia Anglorum (History of the English)* nine years later in 1129. In his preface, Henry of Huntingdon claims "there is nothing in this world more excellent than accurately to investigate and trace the course of worldly affairs" (xxvi). At the beginning of Book VII, Huntingdon states that "thus far I have treated of matters which I have either found recorded by old writers, or have gathered from common report" (222), but unlike Malmesbury, he does not question the reliability of these early sources, and simply accepts them as truth. While obviously concerned with historical accuracy, Huntingdon proves himself to be unreliable in his presentation of historical matter. Although he considers literature "profane," he presents his history as literature, including in it conversations, rhetoric, and poetry. Henry makes only one mention of Arthur in his history when he gives an account of the twelve battles and twelve victories of Arthur, calling him a "mighty warrior, general of the armies and chief of the kings of Britain" (48).
Welsh bishop and “pseudo-historian” Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100?-1154) borrowed from earlier Welsh works such as Nennius’ *Historia Brittonum* as he compiled historical material ranging from the conception of Christ through the reign of Arthur in his *Historia Regum Britannia* (*History of the Kings of Britain*, 1136). Not only did Geoffrey make use of early sources, he also borrowed from his contemporaries William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon. However, while he had no reservations about borrowing from these two historians, it is clear from the epilogue to his *Historia* that Geoffrey of Monmouth was not happy with how they had treated Briton’s kings, for he bids them to “say nothing at all about the kings of the Britons” (284). Although largely fantastical, many scholars agree that Geoffrey’s *Historia* was perhaps the most influential book written in the Middle Ages.⁹ Although its reliability as a “history” gradually faded as the centuries and historiography progressed, Geoffrey’s portrayal of an heroic and glorious King Arthur and his world had an immense impact on emerging medieval romance writers. In fact, some scholars believe that the publication of the *Historia* is what gave the Arthurian tradition international circulation and renown.

**From History to Romance: Arthur in the Late Middle Ages**

Fascination with Arthur as a legend and a literary figure continued even after attacks on Geoffrey’s “history” began. As the Middle Ages wore on and the focus on an historical Arthur shifted to emphasis on a legendary Arthur, the Arthurian tales evolved from purely military adventures to romantic and chivalric episodes of love, magic, and

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⁹ To scholars of the Renaissance such as Polydore Vergil, André Duchesne, John Selden, and William Winstanley, and nearly all modern scholars, Geoffrey is considered a pseudo-historian because of his failure to adhere to solid truth. But during his own age and the centuries immediately following, he was considered a true historian and his work became the basis for many other historians. For further information on Geoffrey’s reception as an historian see Jones, Ernest. *Geoffrey of Monmouth 1640-1800*. Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions, 1974.

⁹ Geoffrey Ashe (16), Richard Barber (*The Figure of Arthur* 124), and Jennifer Goodman (14) all make this claim.
manner familiar to many readers today. One of the most famous authors of these "new" Arthurian legends was Marie de France, thought by some historians to be the half-sister of Henry II, who wrote in the style of Breton lays. A lay\textsuperscript{10} was a brief emotional song or verse sung in the Breton language and played on a harp or rote (a medieval stringed instrument similar to a lyre, lute, or harp). A lay often commemorated an heroic adventure or an important event and often served to entertain nobles at court. Two of Marie's lays composed around 1170, Chevrefueil and Lanval, were distinctly Arthurian. Chevrefueil tells the story of the ill-fated love of Tristram, one of Arthur's knights, and Isolde, while Lanval recounts Guenevere's futile attempts to seduce young Lanval.

The Arthurian romances, many of them by French writers, that emerged in the second half of the twelfth century were similar to the Breton lays, albeit they provided longer and more developed tales on the themes of romance and love. It was also during this time that romantic elements of the Arthurian tradition were introduced, such as Camelot, the Round Table, Lancelot du Lac, and his affair with Guenevere.

The French poet Robert Wace (1100-1174) was the first to introduce the Round Table in his Roman de Brut (Romance of Brutus) in 1155. This work was a translation and paraphrase of Geoffrey's Historia in French verse, and was also one of the earliest works to integrate Celtic myths and themes into French literature. Yet all of Wace's Brut was not inspired by Geoffrey; much of his material came from Breton and Welsh storytellers which helped expand Geoffrey's Historia of 6000 lines into Wace's French verse of 15,000 (Barber, King Arthur 38). Of these other sources, Wace says:

I know not if you have heard tell the marvellous gestes and errant deeds related so often of King Arthur. They have been noised about this mighty realm for so great a space that the truth has turned to fable and an idle song. Such rhymes are

\textsuperscript{10}The word lay derived from the Celtic word lai, the Old Irish word laid meaning song, and the Gaelic laoidh meaning hymn (Le Mée 12).
neither sheer bare lies, nor gospel truths. They should not be considered either an idiot's tale, or given by inspiration. The minstrel has sung his ballad, the storyteller told over his story so frequently, little by little he has decked and painted, till by reason of his embellishment the truth stands hid in the trappings of a tale. Thus to make a delectable tune to your ear, history goes masking as fable. (Mason 56)

Thus, Wace was well aware of the problem of distinguishing between an historical Arthur and a legendary Arthur. Yet he made no effort to separate the two, and moved the Arthurian tradition closer to the romance by deliberately adding fabled material to his work, turning it from a "history" to a work of poetic literature.

Perhaps the most important author of this genre was the French court poet Chrétien de Troyes. From the years 1170 to 1191 he composed five Arthurian romances, each written in octosyllabic lines of rhymed verse. Chrétien has been mistakenly credited with inventing the Arthurian romance; while this is not true, it is true that he was one of the first to combine Arthurian material with the existing French romance narrative. Although each of Chrétien's five romances includes either King Arthur or some other figure from the legend, they are not the model characters one would expect to find in Arthurian romance. However, while not portraying Arthur in a typical way, Chrétien does introduce in these poems two of the most important elements of the later Arthurian tradition: the adulterous affair between Guenevere and Lancelot, and the fabled kingdom of Camelot.

In *Le Chevalier au Lion* (The Knight with the Lion), or Yvaine, for example, Arthur acts rudely to his guests when he deserts them at the dinner table to join his queen, Guenevere, in the bedroom, where he eventually falls asleep. In *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (The Knight of the Cart), also simply known as Lancelot, Arthur is shown rashly giving Guenevere away, thereby instigating the events that lead to her rescue by
her lover, Sir Lancelot. In *Perceval, or Le Conte del Graal (The Story of the Grail)*, King Arthur and his retinue are very much detached from the action of the work; rather than being the center of the romance, the focus has shifted to the Grail Castle and the mystery surrounding it. While this poem was left unfinished, perhaps due to Chrétien’s death, it did supply the primary mold for later Grail stories. Likewise, in *Erec et Enide* and *Cligès*, the Arthurian tradition merely serves as background for the main action taking place. Although Chrétien took liberties in portraying Arthur and his court, it is with these poems that Arthurian French romances reached their peak during the Middle Ages.

Many more French Arthurian romances emerged in prose after Chrétien set the standard in verse in the late twelfth century. Perhaps the most ambitious, and certainly the most influential group of these Arthurian prose romances appeared in the early thirteenth century as the French Vulgate cycle, also known as the prose *Lancelot*. The Vulgate, most likely composed from 1215-1235 by one or two authors, was comprised of five extensive romances written in Old French prose: *L'Estoire del Saint Graal (The History of the Holy Grail)*, *Merlin*, *Lancelot*, *La Queste del Sant Graal (The Quest of the Holy Grail)*, and *La Mort Artu (The Death of Arthur)*. In these romances were combined military themes popular in the early Arthurian tradition, and courtly romance and love motifs that emerged during the twelfth century. The Vulgate, like its predecessors, also introduced new elements to the tradition, most notably the figure of Sir Galahad in *La Queste del Sant Graal*. Hailed by Eugene Vinaver as a “singularly perfect example of thirteenth-century narrative art” (vii), the Vulgate had a profound affect on subsequent Arthurian works produced in the Middle Ages, and even later. The Vulgate cycle was the main source for Malory’s *Le Morte d'Arthur* in the late fifteenth century, and both Dante and Chaucer make allusions to it in their works.
The International Arthurian Legend

Not only was the Arthurian legend a popular topic for writers in Wales, England, and France during the Middle Ages, but it also caught the attention of other European, Middle Eastern, and African authors. Two Old Norse translations of Geoffrey of Monmouth's works are found in the manuscript known as the Hauksbok dated around the thirteenth century. Authors at the Norwegian thirteenth-century court of King Haakon IV (r. 1217-1263) also translated several Arthurian tales into Old Norse. In Germany, the poet Hartmann von Aue composed two Arthurian romances, Erec and Iwein, around the early thirteenth century. About the same time Swiss author Ulrich von Zatzikhoven wrote a romance entitled Lanzelet. A century later, the earliest recorded Arthurian work from Greece, a poem entitled Ho Presbys Hippotes, was composed; it alludes to Gawain, Lancelot, and Tristram. The great Italian writers Dante (1265-1321) and Boccaccio (1313-1375) also make references to characters of the Arthurian legends in their works. These diverse European Arthurian texts are proof that Arthur and his legends were important not only to the British, but that they were also well-known throughout much of the Western medieval world and were worthy literary subjects.

The popularity of the Arthurian legend manifested itself in ways other than literature. Arthurian knights appeared in paintings, architecture, and sculptures, and Arthurian tournaments and jousts were held throughout Europe. The first recorded Arthurian tournament reportedly took place in 1223 on the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean. In 1281 an Arthurian competition was held in Magdeburg, Germany for German merchants. Likewise, when Henry II of Cyprus was crowned King of Jerusalem in 1286, an Arthurian pageant was held which included jousting and imitation "round tables." Arthurian pageants and tournaments were also widespread throughout Spain and
Portugal, with Arthurian celebrations on record in 1269, 1286, 1290, and 1291. The widespread fascination with Arthur is demonstrated in this quote sometimes credited to Geoffrey of Monmouth and sometimes to Alanus de Insulis:

> What place is there within the bounds of the empire of Christendom to which the winged praise of Arthur the Briton has not extended? Who is there, I ask, who does not speak of Arthur the Briton, since he is but little less known to the peoples of Asia than to the Bretons? ... The Eastern peoples speak of him as do the Western, though separated by the breadth of the whole earth. Egypt speaks of him, and the Bosphorus is not silent. Rome, queen of cities, sings his deeds, and his wars are not unknown to her formal rival Carthage. Antioch, Armenia, and Palestine celebrate his feats. (Snyder 118)

**Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur***

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, writers were beginning to create compilations of Arthurian material, ranging from stories of Merlin to the legends of the Holy Grail and the Round Table, in order to tell the entire history of King Arthur and his knights. *Le Morte d'Arthur*, written by “Syr Thomas Maleore, Knyght” (1410?-1471) and printed by William Caxton on July 31, 1485, on his press at Westminster, is the most ambitious of these attempts and is considered the definitive Arthurian work produced closest to the Renaissance. Many scholars deem it to be the last great Arthurian work. *Le Morte d'Arthur* gave new life to the Arthurian legends and created the fascination that Arthur and his knights have held for many Renaissance, modern, and post-modern writers.

*Le Morte d'Arthur* not only combined various Arthurian legends, it also incorporated diverse genres in which the tales of Arthur, his knights, and their adventures had previously been told. While little is known about who Sir Thomas Malory was, it is evident that he was skilled in reworking and even improving his Arthurian sources to fit his vision of the Arthurian text. What makes his work particularly remarkable is that
Malory did not own the books from which he drew his sources; he had little access to libraries, and he composed the bulk of his *Le Morte d'Arthur* while in prison. Some of the sources Malory used included the Vulgate Cycle, the prose *Lancelot*, the prose *Tristram*, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, and the *Stanzaic Le Morte Arthur*. Malory employed some episodes in these works and discarded others, but all in all he created one Arthurian legend beginning with Arthur's mysterious conception at Tintagel and ending with Lancelot's death at Glastonbury.

Although some scholars, such as Sir Walter Scott, have criticized Malory's creation as a "bundle of extracts [...] from the French romances of the Table Round [and] an awkward abridgment of prose romances" (Grierson 211), others have defended it, including George Saintsbury, who believed *Le Morte d'Arthur* to be the first English novel and claimed Malory alone, "in any language, had made of this vast assemblage of stories one story, and one book" (24). As in the French romances he borrowed from, Malory presents Arthur's adventures and achievements early on, then eases him into the background as the great knights of the Round Table are brought forward.

*Le Morte d'Arthur* has been called a bridge between medieval romance and modern fiction. According to Eugene Vinaver in his introduction to the 1971 edition of *Malory: Complete Works*, what is "surprising is a fifteenth-century author's instinctive understanding of the principle of 'singleness' which underlies the normal structure of a modern work of fiction" (viii). Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* appeared during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, and it helped enhance and transform interest, not only in Arthur and the tales of his knights, but also the interest in English chivalry--and the ideal of a perfect monarchy as well.
The Renaissance Arthur

As noted earlier, although some scholars claim the Arthurian legend underwent an “artistic eclipse” (Barber, *The Arthurian Legends* 156), “ceased to be important” (Dean 107) and was dead during the Renaissance (1485-1642), the greatest literary period in British history, it is hard to accept this claim knowing the importance the legend previously held for the British people. Some scholars assert that the literary fashion of Arthuriana simply went out of style due to the historical claims placed upon Arthur by the Tudors (Merriman 34, Dean 107). One modern scholar, however, claims that the connection between the Tudors and their use of Arthur is overemphasized and the theory of “an Early Tudor cult of King Arthur […] is stretching the evidence to the point of absurdity” (Anglo, *Spectacle* 55). Others give more specific reasons for Arthur’s so-called “demise” such as the growing recognition of the unreliability of medieval chronicles and histories and the mythical elements rejected by scholars and authors of the New Learning (Van Der Ven-Ten Bensel, 155). Still other scholars assert that the invention of new weapons made the spear, sword, and other trappings of medieval chivalry quaint utensils of the past, thus reducing the importance of knightly jousts and battles (Loomis 562). The discovery of America and its promise of an El Dorado took the place of the mystical Avalon, pushing Arthurian tradition to the background (Van Der Ven-Ten Bensel 155).

With the rise of Protestantism in Renaissance England, some scholars believe that the Grail legends, so intertwined with the Arthurian legends, came under scrutiny as lacking scriptural authority and reflecting “relic-mongering” and the “hocus-pocus of the

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Mass" (Loomis 562). Likewise, Christopher Dean asserts that during the Renaissance Arthurian romances "were condemned for being propagators of false popish doctrine" (109). Finally, other scholars assert Arthur's nonexistence during the Renaissance by simply omitting him from this period of literature between Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485) and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859).

However, the error many of these scholars have made in prematurely declaring Arthur's eclipse is where they are looking for Arthur. While humanism, the New Learning, and the Reformation became enemies of the Arthurian legends, and while many Renaissance scholars and clergy looked upon them with hostility, the Arthurian romances remained extremely popular among the common people. Howard Maynadier is correct when he declares "the Elizabethan age could keep the old romances alive," but errs when he continues on to claim the age "could not give them the nourishment requisite for further growth" (272). The new printing presses made possible the printing of numerous editions of the Arthurian romances, making them more available throughout Britain and Europe during the Renaissance than they had ever been previously. Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* was immensely popular during the Renaissance and went through five editions from 1485 to 1634. Roger Ascham, Queen Elizabeth's tutor, complains about this wide

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12 Humanism, an intellectual movement which developed in fourteenth-century Italy, emphasized the dignity of man and his perfectibility, placed reason above revelation, and stressed education as the avenue for self-development.
13 There is no simple definition for what was termed the "New Learning" of the Renaissance. It encompassed the invention of the printing press, the rise in literacy, the search for truth among medieval "histories," and the revival of classicism. "The New Learning spread among a daily increasing class the thirst for knowledge and the critical spirit of inquiry, which insensibly undermined the traditional claims of the Church on the veneration and obedience of mankind" (Lea, 647).
14 For further information on medieval romances during the Renaissance see Crane, Robert S. *The Vogue of Medieval Chivalric Romance During the English Renaissance*. Menasha: Collegiate, George Banta Publishing, 1919.
15 Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in the mid fifteenth century, and Caxton set up the first printing press in England in 1476. According to Richard Barber, "the new printing presses poured out endless copies of these once rare works, and Arthur and his court were more popular than they had ever been. Popular, that is, in terms of being more widely read" (Barber, *The Arthurian Legends* 152).
spread popularity of the romances in his most famous work, *The Schoolmaster*,
published in 1570:

[.. .] *Morte Darthur*, the whole pleasure of which book standeth in two special
points—in open manslaughter and bold bawdry; in which book those be counted
the noblest knights that do kill most men without any quarrel and commit foulest
adulteries by subtlest shifts: as Sir Lancelot with the wife of King Arthur his
master, Sir Tristram with the wife of King Mark his uncle, Sir Lamorak with the
wife of King Lot that was his own aunt. This is good stuff for wise men to laugh
at or honest men to take pleasure at. Yet I know when God’s Bible was banished
the court and *Morte Darthur* received into the prince’s chamber. (68-69)

Ascham’s comment reflects the fear and distaste of many Renaissance literati who now
preferred classical literature to the romances, and who believed the romances had a
negative effect on those who read them.

The histories and chronicles of the Middle Ages included Arthur and his
entourage, and these genres also gained in popularity during the Renaissance with the
newly-emphasized importance of early British history. The Renaissance was a time
when British citizens made the “strongest attempt to realize the impact of a national past
upon their own life and thought” (Millican, *Spenser* 5). Because of this, a surge of
patriotism swept over England during the Renaissance, and Arthur and his knights began
emerging in genres other than those intended purely for entertainment. King Arthur was
now being included in new histories, chronicles, and topographies by William Warner,
William Camden, John Stow, Raphael Holinshed, and many others with just as much
enthusiasm as the late medieval authors showed in their inclusion of Arthur in their
poetry and prose. Historians and chroniclers began taking the old histories of the Middle
Ages and reinterpreting them to fit the contemporary needs of the British empire, and
Arthur was the hub of these new interpretations. Not only was Arthur important in
these genres, but he was also employed by the British monarchy to support its claim to the throne.

The British monarchy's use of Arthur was not new to the Renaissance, but it did take on a new dimension and renewed importance for the Tudor dynasty. Arthurian works relied on the support of royalty, and Tudor royalty showed much enthusiasm for Arthur, not only in entertainment, but also politically as well. As early as the reign of Henry II (r. 1154-1189) in the mid-twelfth century, monarchs began appropriating Arthur for their own purposes. Shortly before his death in 1189, Henry claimed that a Breton bard told him the location of Arthur's grave. Henry encouraged the monks of Glastonbury Abbey to search for the grave, and an excavation took place in 1190 or 1191. Henry's successor, Richard I (r. 1189-1199), supported this excavation and two bodies, presumed to be those of Arthur and Guenevere, were discovered, along with an inscribed leaden cross claiming the grave was indeed Arthur's. While the discovery of the graves has been considered a hoax by many historians, and although both the cross and the bones have been missing since the sixteenth century, in recent years archaeologists have proven that an excavation did indeed take place and that Glastonbury was inhabited in the fifth and sixth centuries.

The discovery of Arthur's grave was of utmost importance to the monarchs, who hoped to refute the myth-based belief, often referred to as the "Breton hope," that Arthur had never died, but would one day return to rule England. At the same time, hope of an Arthur II on the throne was encouraged by the birth of a son to Geoffrey Plantagenet, Richard I's brother, christened Arthur in 1187. However, not all royalty shared in this hope, and Arthur was murdered by his uncle, Henry II's youngest son John, at the age of sixteen.
The Plantagenets renewed the interest in Arthur in 1278 when Edward I (r. 1272-1307) and his queen visited Glastonbury Abbey and put Arthur’s remains on display for a time before having them interred in a stately marble tomb at the front of the Glastonbury high alter. When Edward III (r. 1327-1377) took the throne in 1327, he continued the dynastic appropriation of Arthur by visiting Glastonbury, collecting Arthurian manuscripts, and proposing a revival of the Order of the Round Table. Even though he actually founded the Order of the Garter, Edward encouraged the pageants called “round tables” and is thought to have been responsible for the construction of the Winchester Round Table. The Arthurian myth was so powerful that it was used even by usurpers to legitimize their illicit schemes. For example, in 1321 Thomas of Lancaster used the pseudonym “King Arthur” in his attempt to overthrow King Edward II.

When the Tudors came to the throne in 1485 with Henry Tudor’s defeat of England’s King Richard III (r. 1483-1485) in the Battle of Bosworth, Arthur was not only viewed as a symbol of the monarchy, but was treated as a venerated ancestor. Henry VII (r. 1485-1509) claimed his right to the throne not only by putting an end to the War of the Roses in uniting the houses of York and Lancaster, but also in being a descendent of Cadwallader, who, according to Geoffrey’s Historia, was a descendent of Arthur. Such a claim made it more important than ever that Arthur be viewed as a historical king rather than as merely a literary figure.

Henry VII also had hopes of a reigning King Arthur II when he named his first son Arthur, known as “Arthur reborn,” (Snyder 133) but history repeated itself when this Prince Arthur died in 1502 at the age of fifteen. Henry’s hope then shifted to his second son, Prince Henry, who was viewed as “Arthur magnified” (Snyder 133). When Prince Henry took the throne in 1509 as Henry VIII (r. 1509-1547), he not only viewed Arthur
as a predecessor, but attempted to revive the Arthurian pageants and tournaments that had fallen out of fashion. He also named his first born son Arthur, but again the hopes of a King Arthur II died with the child--only fifty-two days after he was born.

Despite the Tudors’ appropriation of Arthur, not all Renaissance authors accepted the myth the monarchs were promoting. However, when attacks were made on the historicity of Arthur and on medieval chronicles such as Geoffrey’s *Historia*, many Protestant nationalists fought back with a multitude of mid-sixteenth-century chronicles of early British history proclaiming the historicity and deeds of Arthur. Perhaps the most influential of these chroniclers was the antiquarian John Leland. In his *Learned and True Assertion* he provided both archaeological and documentary evidence of Arthur’s existence, and claimed that while fictitious material had been added to the Arthurian legend, this was no reason to dismiss completely the historicity of Arthur.

In addition to these chronicles, many of the other Arthurian works produced during the Renaissance were written in response, either positively or negatively, to the British monarchs’ use of the legend in their political agendas. Edmund Spenser, perhaps influenced by the attacks aimed at Polydore Vergil, dedicated his great allegorical epic *The Faerie Queene* (1590) to Queen Elizabeth (r. 1558-1603) who, like her father, Henry VIII, was inclined toward Arthurian pageantry, chivalry, and ceremony. In his epic, Spenser unabashedly glorifies the queen and the monarchy in general by making Prince Arthur the representation of Magnificence. The Arthurian elements of Spenser’s famous work will be treated more fully in Chapter 1.

Topographical works also took on importance during the Renaissance, and Michael Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* published in 1613 is perhaps the most inclusive and

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16 Full title: *A Learned and True Assertion of the Original, Life, Acts, and Death of the Most Noble, Valiant, and Renowned Prince Arthur, King of Great Britain.*
ambitious of this genre. Drayton blended poetic, historic, and topographic elements into a unique patriotic epic intended to glorify all aspects of Britain and to unite Wales, England, and Scotland. While Drayton, like Spenser, left his *magnum opus* unfinished, it is obvious from what he did accomplish that his intention to establish an all-inclusive early history of Britain which every Briton could be proud of was at least partially realized. Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* will be the subject of Chapter 2.

As suggested above, not all portrayals of Arthur during the Renaissance were positive. Negative depictions of Arthur usually revealed the author's opinions of the monarchy. One play in particular that provided extensive negative commentary was the anonymous *Tom a Lincoln* written between 1611 and 1619. This play, likely written by students at Gray's Inn, through its negative portrayal of Arthur, not only commented on the behavior of the monarch but also served as a warning and offered instruction to King James I. The Arthurian elements of *Tom a Lincoln* will be treated fully in Chapter 3.

No matter how Arthur was presented in the Renaissance, whether as entertainment, as political propaganda, or as commentary on the British monarchy, the authors of these Arthurian works were, either consciously or subconsciously, reinterpreting Arthur as a British hero. While the Arthurian legends had enjoyed international popularity in the Middle Ages, by the time of the Renaissance the British people, particularly the nobility, were ready to reclaim Arthur as their own and acknowledge him as a part of their diverse history.
CHAPTER 1

ARTHUR ROMANTICIZED: EDMUND SPENSER’S FAERIE QUEENE

Edmund Spenser, known variously as the “poet’s poet,” the “scholar’s poet” (Meyer 15), and the “master of Elizabethan poetry” (Bradner 47), was, like his Faerie Queene, a product of the age in which he lived, wrote, and died. While both Spenser’s Faerie Queene and Drayton’s Poly-Olbion are characteristic of the Renaissance in that the authors combined all their knowledge, material, and effort into one comprehensive plan or work, of the two, Spenser’s Faerie Queene is more wholly a product of the age that created it. In this allegorical romance epic, Spenser confronts, praises, and challenges various aspects of Renaissance society, including the Protestant/Catholic controversies, political issues, and monarchical debates—even the questionable Tudor claims of their link to Arthur.

Although Spenser was born into a poor London family presumably in 1552, he was able to attend Merchant Taylor’s School run by humanist and pedagogical writer Richard Mulcaster, one of the “great English educationalists of the sixteenth century” (Heale 1). The curriculum of the school appears to have followed the typical humanist course of the age: students were instructed on the works of Cato, Caesar, Horace, Homer, Cicero, and Erasmus, and were trained in Latin language and composition. Through charitable contributions supplied by Robert Nowell, who also partially funded Spenser’s education at Merchant Taylor’s, Spenser was able to enter Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, in 1569, where he graduated Bachelor of Arts in 1573 and Master of Arts in 1576. Spenser showed interest in poetry at a young age, and, after serving as a secretary for Dr. John Young, the former Master of Pembroke Hall and Bishop of Rochester, Spenser entered into service for the Earl of Leicester, Robert Dudley, the patron of many Renaissance
reformist writers and preachers. Through Dudley he became acquainted with Sir Philip Sidney, who most likely was a member of the society of archers, or Prince Arthur's London Round Table.  

According to correspondence between Spenser and Gabriel Harvey, a Fellow of Pembroke Hall, Spenser had begun work on his *Faerie Queene* by 1580. As a Renaissance courtier and avid patriot, Spenser was more than likely aware of the "imperialist ambitions and nationalist historical primitivism" (Merriman 38) that pervaded beliefs regarding Arthur in Elizabethan Britain. However, Spenser had his own distinct conception of Arthur and his legends that seemed both to encompass and to transcend the debate on Arthur's historicity. Spenser wished to use the figure of Arthur as the hero in his epic poem, but there were obstacles to tackle before he could effectively employ the Arthurian legend.

By Spenser's time Arthur was an extremely complex cultural and literary figure, and Spenser was well aware that Arthur would evoke in his readers certain responses and images--there was no way Spenser could get around this fact. But instead of abandoning Arthur as his epic hero, Spenser used these responses and images to his advantage. As a humanist and scholar of the New Learning, Spenser probably disagreed with the historic claims of antiquarians such as Leland and Camden that Arthur was an early British king, but as a poet he was well aware of the value of the mythical and legendary elements of the Arthurian tradition.

Uniting incredible ambition to skill, Spenser managed to combine both history and legend, fact and fiction, New Learning and age-old tradition into one grand poem. By The society, also known as The Ancient Order, Society, and Unity Laudable, of Prince Arthur, and his knightly Armory of the Round Table, and the Fellowship of Prince Arthur's Knights, was supported by middle class citizens of London. The members assumed the names of Arthur's knights and their annual tournament commemorated Arthur and the Round Table. For further information on this society, see Millican, Charles Bowie. "Spenser and the Arthurian Legend." *Review of English Studies* 6 (1930): 1-8.
using Arthur as his hero, Spenser encouraged his Tudor audience to contemplate on such issues as national identity, national destiny, the relationship between the community and the individual, and Tudor imperialism. As John Killham points out, Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* is a “work which typically sought to conflate in a timeless setting the imperial preoccupation of the present, Puritan moral ardor (masquerading as Aristotelian ethics) and, beneath the ever-changing surface of revived Arthurian romance, a sensuous depth of feeling which occasionally bring the breath and stir of myth” (178). As a result, ever since the publication of the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* in 1590, scholars have argued over the character of Prince Arthur and his role within the poem.

Readers and critics debated, and continue to debate, the reasons for Spenser’s use of Arthur, whether or not Arthur is the hero and unifying force of the poem, and whether Arthur was in Spenser’s original design for the poem or if he was added in hindsight. Other scholars such as Humphrey Tonkin18 acknowledge Spenser’s use of Arthur in *The Faerie Queene* but criticize Spenser for failing to create a more notable and distinguished hero from such a well-known and revered British historical and literary figure. The concern shown by Spenser’s contemporaries with the character of Arthur demonstrates that interest in Arthur was prominent during the Renaissance, contrary to the too-widely accepted opinion that there was little interest in Arthur during this era. Had this latter view been true, readers and scholars might well have questioned and criticized Spenser even for including Arthur, rather than for not adequately developing him as a character or hero. In fact, to date the majority of criticism of *The Faerie Queene* centers on the figure of Prince Arthur.

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18 Tonkin asserts that supposedly connecting the twelve virtues in Spenser’s poem “is the figure of Arthur himself, ‘before he was king,’ the hero and founder of Tudor Englishness, the very measure and example of Elizabethan loyalty [but Arthur’s] role hardly seems to merit the terms in which it is described in the letter” (2).
Spenser's Plan

Many scholars view Spenser's inclusion and use of Arthur in a negative light in respect to literary artistry. The famous seventeenth-century English poet and dramatist John Dryden claimed “there is no uniformity in the design of Spencer” (Malone 91). John Hughes takes this comment a step further and says that although Arthur appears in each book, “his Part is not considerable enough in any of them [...] and we lose sight of him too soon to consider him as the hero of the poem” (315). Another early critic was Richard Hurd, Bishop of Lichfield and Worcester. While defending other areas of The Faerie Queene against his contemporaries in his 1762 book Letters on Chivalry and Romance, Hurd was nonetheless critical of Spenser’s Prince Arthur, claiming he was “but an afterthought” (75) and not in Spenser’s original plan. But Spenser, like many authors of the Renaissance, had specific reasons for employing Arthur and the various versions of the Arthurian legend in his poem. Spenser clearly informs his reader in his “Letter to Raleigh” why he chose to use the historical and literary figure of Arthur as the hero and unifying element in his national epic:

The general end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: Which for that I conceived should be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historica] fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter, then for profit of the ensample: I chose the historye of king Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person, being made famous by many mens former worikes, and also furthest from the daunger of enuy, and suspition of present time. (15)

However, Thomas Warton, 1785 poet laureate, professor of poetry at Oxford University, and author of the first history of English poetry, was skeptical of the Letter and criticized Spenser’s Arthur, arguing that he “is only a subordinate, or rather acceffory character,” whose “magnanimity [...] burfts forth but feldom, in obscure and interrupted flashes”
(7). In his *Observations on The Fairy Queen of Spenser* Warton asserts that what Spenser proposed in his *Letter to Raleigh* and what he actually wrote are two completely different things. Spenser, however, goes on to explain that in fashioning his poem, he followed the examples of other "antique poets historicall" who had also written national epics:

In which I haue followed all the antique Poets historicall, first Homere, who in the Persons of Agamemnon and Vlysses hath ensampled a good gouernour and a vertuous man, the one in his Ilias, the other in his Odysseis: then Virgil, whose like intention was to doe in the person of Aeneas: after him Ariosto comprised them both in his Orlando: and lately Tasso disseuered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons, namely that part which they in Philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a priuate man, coloured in his Rinaldo: The other named Politice in his Godfredo. (15)

By imitating the works of these "excellent Poets," Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, called the "greatest glory of Elizabethan non-dramatic poetry" (Merriman 38), reflects the Renaissance interest in the classics and classical myths. But Warton again argues that while Spenser was aware of the works of "antique poets historicall" and the necessity of unity in a work, he did not follow their examples in creating one unifying hero, as he claims to have done:

It is evident that our author in estabishing one hero, who seeking and attaining one grand end, which is GLORIANA, fhould exemplify one grand character, or a brave Knight perfected in the twelve private moral virtues, copied the caft and construction of the antient Epic. But fenfible as he was of the importance and expediency of the unity of the hero and of his design, he does not, in the mean time, feem convinced of the neceffity of that unity of action, by the means of which such a design fhould be properly accomplifhed. At leaft, he has not followed the method practifed by Homer and Virgil, in conducting their respective heroes to the propofed end. (5-6)

Warton believes that Spenser was unable to mold Arthur into the hero he intended because the other heroic knights in the epic interfere too often and do too much for Prince
Arthur to accomplish great deeds himself and be recognized and honored for them (9-10).

In addition to his criticism of Spenser, Warton offers suggestions as to how Spenser could have created a more prominent and heroic Arthur:

> The poet ought to have made this “brave Knight” the leading adventurer. ARTHUR should have been the principal agent in vindicating the cause of Holiness, Temperance, and the rest. If our hero had thus, in his own person, exerted himself in the protection of the twelve virtues, he might have been devotedly styled the perfect Pattern of all, and consequently would have succeeded in the task assigned, the attainment of Glory. At present he is only a subordinate or accessory character. (6-7)

However, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, Spenser did indeed follow the examples set forth by Homer and Virgil, and, as he claims, labored “to portrait in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised, the which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes” (15).

If these “first twelve bookes” were well-received, Spenser planned “to frame the other part of politicke vertues in [Arthur’s] person, after that hee came to be king” (15-16). Yet Spenser never had the opportunity to fashion this second poem of twelve “politicke vertues,” nor did he even complete his first poem. In 1590 the first three books of the *Faerie Queene* were published together with the *Letter to Raleigh*, and in 1596, three more books of the epic were published. Three years later Spenser received a pension of fifty pounds from Queen Elizabeth. In 1596, three fragments *Cantos of Mutabilitie* added to his poem. However, it is not necessary to have

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19 Many scholars have pointed out the discrepancies between Aristotle’s virtues and the virtues presented by Spenser. For further information on Aristotle’s virtues, see Jusserand, J. J. “Spenser’s ‘Twelve Morall Vertues as Aristotle hath Devised.’” *Modern Philology* 3 (1906): 373-83.

20 The fact that Spenser’s poem was left unfinished has also been the cause of much debate over the centuries. C. S. Lewis claims that because the poem is unfinished, the Arthur cannot be interpreted or understood at all. Josephine Waters Bennett says that other scholars believe that since the work was left unfinished, Spenser, in the remaining books, would have, “by some kind of retroactive magic, [. . .] made Arthur his chief hero” (26), but it is quite clear she does not accept this suggestion.
all twelve books of *The Faerie Queene* to see how and why Spenser employed Arthur in his poem.

Spenser's "Letter to Raleigh" and the claims Spenser makes in it have been topics of controversy, particularly in terms of the Letter's relationship to the poem. The "Letter" is dated January 1589, but from the errors in it regarding the poem, it is possible that it was written earlier, or perhaps, as some scholars claim, even written for some other work Spenser was planning (Meyer 25). One of the most noteworthy Spenserian scholars of the twentieth century, Josephine Waters Bennett, calls upon the early critics such as Hughes, Hurd, and Warton when she criticizes Spenser's "Letter to Raleigh," pointing out two major discrepancies between the letter and the poem. Bennett asserts that "the part of Arthur which [Spenser] was describing did not fit the poem as he was publishing it" (26). She claims that the letter "describes two distinct sets of plot ideas imperfectly joined together, neither of which faithfully represents the actual structure of the existing poem" (26). While there are obvious discrepancies between the poem and the letter, and while readers should not take all points of the letter literally, it does provide important reasons for Spenser's "darke conceit" (Spenser 15) and the motives he had for choosing Arthur as his epic hero.

Spenser chose Arthur for his representation as the perfect gentlemen, but he also chose him because of the political and social conditions of the Renaissance. Because the Renaissance had transplanted the medieval ideals of chivalry and the perfect knight into the Renaissance code of a perfect gentleman, it is obvious why Spenser chose Arthur. As Merriman has stated, "The most eminent representation of medieval chivalry and at the same time a ruler, seemed an obvious choice for the model of a perfected Elizabethan gentleman and governor" (39). In particular, Spenser was influenced in his choice of
Arthur by the political importance of the British ancestry of the Tudors through which they claimed ties to Arthur. The Tudor myth was taken quite seriously, at least by the Tudors themselves and by those who promoted a British national identity based on early histories, and was used extensively as part of the Tudor propaganda.

One of Spenser’s major intentions with his poem was to praise Queen Elizabeth, and this can be seen both in his “Letter to Raleigh” and in his dedication of the poem. In the “Letter,” Spenser states:

In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphæbe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent concept of Cynthia, (Phæbe and Cynthia being both names of Diana.). (16).

Spenser’s dedication of *The Faerie Queene* much resembles the tone of this statement of purpose:

TO
THE MOST HIGH,
MIGHTIE
And
MAGNIFICENT
EMPRESSE RENOVV-
MED FOR PIETIE, VER-
TVE, AND ALL GRATIOVS
GOVERNMENT ELIZABETH BY
THE GRACE OF GOD QVEENE
OF ENGLAND FRAVNCE AND
IRELAND AND OF VIRGI-

While Spenser does indeed praise Queen Elizabeth through his poem, he also had a hidden agenda in representing Queen Elizabeth as Gloriana and other female characters in the poem. Through his use of allegory and carefully placed satirical comments and allusions, Spenser is able to address the questions and concerns he had about the British monarchy and the political situations of the day. Spenser broaches such sensitive and troubling subjects as violence, communism, unjust disposition of the world’s goods, the position of women, Elizabeth as a female monarch, and the trial of Mary Queen of Scots,
Elizabeth’s right to the throne as a woman and a Protestant depended upon the Tudor ancestral heritage, and Spenser reflects, supports, and pays homage to this belief by including a history of the rulers of Britain in Book II. Spenser begins the Canto by stating:

More ample spirit, then hitherto was wont,
Here needes me, whiles the famous auncestries
Of my most dreaded Soueraigne I recount,
By which all earthly Princes she doth farre surmount. (II.X.1)

While this extended history may seem long and tedious to today’s readers, this was a topic of utmost importance for many of Spenser’s contemporary readers. The long line of descent down to the ruling monarch not only legitimized the Tudor’s claim to the throne, it also gave to the British nation a sense of continuity, unity, and antiquity (Heale 64-65). In Stanza 4 Spenser verifies once again Elizabeth’s descent from Arthur,

Thy name ò soueraine Queene, thy realme and race,
From this renowned Prince deriued arre,
Who mightily vpheled that royall mace,
Which now thou bearst, to thee descended farre
From mightie kings and conquerours in warre,
Thy fathers and great Grandfathers of old,
Whose noble deedes aboue the Northerne starre
Immortall fame for euer hath enrold;
As in that old mans [Geoffrey of Monmouth] booke they were in order told. (II.x.4)

Spenser then goes on to recount the names and adventures of the British rulers who preceded Arthur in the "Briton moniments" (II.ix.59) found in Alma's house, relating "A chronicle of Briton kings,/from Brute to Vthers rayne" (Spenser 328). Because Prince Arthur is the one who has been reading the "moniments," Spenser breaks off the genealogy when he comes to "Uther" because of his plan to keep Arthur ignorant of his birth and parentage:

After him Vther, which Pendragon hight,
Succeeding There abruptly it did end,
Without full point, or other Cesure right,
As if the rest some wicked hand did rend.
Or th'Authour selfe could not at least attend
To finish it. (II.x.68)

Yet, Spenser finds another opportunity to continue the genealogy in Book III when Merlin relates to Britomart her destiny to marry Artegaill and prophecies about their descendants. In this retelling, however, Spenser deviates from Geoffrey's account of the kings and makes Artegaill, a character of Spenser's own invention, the son of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, thus making him a half-brother to Arthur. Spenser is also able to add four hundred years of history to Geoffrey's account, and fulfills the prophecy that the British race will come to rule again by linking Geoffrey's kings with Elizabeth, a Queen of the Welsh house of Tudor:

Thenceforth eternall vnion shall be made
Betweene the nations different afore,
And sacred Peace shall louingly perswade
The warlike minds, to learne her goodly lore,
And ciuile armes to exercise no more:
Then shall a royall virgin raine, which shall
Stretch her white rod ouer the Belgicke shore,
And the great Castle smite so sore with all,
That it shall make him shake, and shortly learne to fall. (III.iii.49)

Spenser’s ability to provide an extensive and “historically accurate” account of the British monarchs shows his familiarity with and knowledge of the medieval chronicles. In compiling this list, Spenser likely gleaned information from several other chronicles and histories including Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, William Camden’s *Britanniae*, William Warner’s *Albion’s England*, and John Stow’s *Chronicles.*

**The Creation of Prince Arthur**

Spenser’s decision to portray an Arthur not represented in the chronicles, romances, and histories of his own time and earlier also reflects the mood of the Renaissance. Spenser desired to use a figure grounded in history, but he also wanted the freedom to cultivate his imagination in the poem, perhaps with the hope of it taking its own place in the extended family of Arthurian texts. The dehistoricization of much of the Arthurian legend brought on by the Battle of the Books provided Spenser room for the narrative innovations he wished to explore. Thus, he chose a prominent British historical figure and hero, but chose a time in the hero’s life that had not previously been recorded: Arthur as a prince. The sixteenth-century Italian poet Torquato Tasso, in his *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* states:

> On some grounds the story of an extremely remote century or nation seems a subject highly appropriate to the heroic poem, because, since such things are so nearly buried in antiquity that the feeblest, dimmest memory of them scarcely remains, the poet can change them over and over again and narrate them as he pleases. (40)

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Thus, for Tasso, the obscure areas of history offered excellent opportunities for poets because their emptiness allowed the poet great literary freedom.

Spenser, however, did not just find a story that had been forgotten, he found the blank space where a story had never been written: the time between Arthur’s birth and his coronation as King of England. Not only was Spenser’s choice a personal one, but it also demonstrated the respect he had for the legends and for those who regarded them as truth. Perhaps it even reveals his fear of offending those who held these beliefs. As Howard Maynadier points out, “the usual attitude of the reading public was to regard the old stories as so largely historical that authors dared not change the main incidents of them” (275).

Beyond this, however, there were elements of the traditional Arthurian legend that were simply not suitable or appropriate for Spenser’s purpose: the question of illegitimacy in Arthur’s conception and birth, his own illegitimate and traitorous son Mordred, and his destructive marriage to unfaithful Guenevere. Spenser certainly did not want to remind Elizabeth of illegitimacy questions when her own father had declared her illegitimate, nor of treacherous family relations when she had her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, beheaded in 1587 for her part in a plot to murder Elizabeth.

Spenser nicely skirted these issue by creating a new Arthur. In doing so, Spenser could still maintain Tudor claims of their descent from Arthur, could reinforce the Tudor myth of returning Arthur’s line to the throne, could praise and glorify Queen Elizabeth as a woman and as a Protestant by linking her with Arthur, and could praise Elizabeth’s courtiers. Had Spenser chosen to use the Arthur of the legends, the Arthur after he had become king, he would have faced many more obstacles, not the least of these the

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23 In the 1590 edition of his Faerie Queene Spenser had included seventeen sonnets dedicated to members of Elizabeth’s court.
possibility of offending either the scholars of the New Learning or the monarchy, and subsequently falling out of favor with the queen.

Spenser created in his Prince Arthur a figure derived from the historical perceptions of Arthur but who was clearly from the realm of Faery. Spenser's descriptions of the young Arthur bear much resemblance to the "old" Arthur of legend. As Merritt Hughes points out in his essay "The Arthur's of The Faerie Queene," several different Arthurs can be found in the poem such as the imperial Arthur, the minister of grace, and the Herculean Arthur, but they all exhibit characteristics of the traditional Arthur. Spenser created new adventures and quests, created a new and young Arthur, but allowed the young Arthur to complete those quests and adventures in the same way as the Arthur of tradition.

Prince Arthur is first introduced to the reader in Canto vii of Book I where five stanzas are dedicated to describing Arthur, his armor, and his weapons. Spenser description of Arthur far outshines any others thus far in the poem, and he is shown in greater stature than any other figure. Like many of the heroic knights of the romantic legend, Arthur is armed at all points and is exceptionally skilled in the use of his weapons. Arthur's helmet and sword hilt are "horrid all with gold" (I.vii.31), the sword's sheath is made of ivory and "ycaru'd ith curious slights" (I.vii.30), his armor is adorned with "stons most pretious rare" (I.vii.29), and his shield is "all closely couer'd [. . .] of Diamond[s] perfect pure and cleene" (I.vii.32). Thus, Spenser creates an aura of splendor that gives "the goodly knight" (I.vii.29) immediate prominence and recognition and places him in the ranks of the traditional King Arthur.

Not only is Arthur’s outwardly appearance illuminating and powerful, so is his inward character. In Prince Arthur, the knight destined to become the great King Arthur,
Spenser embodies the characteristics needed for him to become that king and hero. Prince Arthur can be seen as a hero in several ways, but again, each is based on Arthur as hero in the traditional legend. As the romantic hero, Arthur:

appears like the supernatural hero of [Arthurian] romance: he always arrives upon the scene at the moment of crisis; his interference always saves the [subordinate] hero or heroine. He is always sure of victory because his magic weapons have the virtue of working only good to the owner, but utter confusion and destruction to his enemy. (Frazier 4)

Arthur’s role as the ideal romantic hero is quite apparent in Book I. In the Legend of Holiness Prince Arthur enters at the moment of greatest crisis: the hero of the Book, Red Crosse Knight, has fallen, he’s deserted his Lady Una under false pretenses and is being held prisoner in a dungeon by the evil giant, Orgoglio. Arthur then proves himself worthy of great honor and merit by his complete victory over Orgoglio, by slaying the seven-headed beast, and by rescuing Red Crosse from the dungeon and restoring him to his Lady. In this scene, Arthur proves himself to be brave and dauntless. Just as the King Arthur of Malory and the French romances did, Prince Arthur in every way performs a service necessary, great, distinguished, and complete (Frazier 2).

Like a true romantic hero, Prince Arthur also needs no urging in the battle against evil. The episodes in Spenser’s epic reveal Prince Arthur as a man who feels a sincere longing to help his fellow humans in time of need. His heroism and courage are the “revelation of that nobility in human nature which exerts itself, completely forgetful of his own safety in the face of imminent danger to another” (Frazier 4). As an exceptionally skillful knight, Prince Arthur plunges into the heat of battle, fights the most powerful and dangerous foes, and always returns the victor. Arthur does not fight simply for the love of conquest, to demonstrate his superiority, or to gain material reward.
Rather, he pursues dangerous quests for honor and glory in heroic service to his Faerie Queene and to all virtuous knights and ladies.

In Book V, The Legend of Justice, Arthur’s natural heroism once again calls upon him to provide help to Queen Belge when her kingdom is being oppressed by the evil giant Geryoneo. When two of Belge’s sons come begging for assistance, Arthur steps forward when no other knight volunteers for the adventure:

Amongst the which then fortuned to bee
The noble Briton Prince, with his braue Peare;
Who when he none of all those knights did see
Hastily bent, that enterprise to heare,
Nor vndertake the same, for cowheard feare,
He stepped forth with courage bold and great,
Admyr’d of all the rest in presence there,
And humbly gan that mightie Queene entreat,
To graunt him that aduenture for his former feat. (V.x.15)

When Arthur arrives at Belge’s castle he is once again neglectful of his own life and gives himself wholeheartedly to the task of ridding Belge’s land of the oppressor and restoring her to her rightful place. Neither does Arthur heed Belge’s warnings for his safety, but plunges on ahead to the “strong garrisone”:

[Where] set a Seneschall of dreaded might,
That by his powre oppressed euery one,
And vanquished all ventrous knights in fight; [. . .]
The Ladie counseld him the place to shonne,
Whereas so many knights had fouly bene fordonne.
Her fearefull speaches nought he did regard,
But ryding streight vnder the Castle wall,
Called aloud vnto the watchfull ward,
[. . .] willing them forth to call
Into the field their Tyrants Seneschall. (V.x.30-31)

Prince Arthur quickly and easily overcomes the “Seneschal of dreaded might” who was guarding the castle. Without hesitation, Arthur “thence unto the castle marched right,”
(V.x.33) defeats three knights, takes the castle single-handedly, kills the giant Geryoneo, and finally fights against the most fearful bloodthirsty dragon, destroying it completely. Just as King Arthur would have done in any of the earlier Arthurian texts, Prince Arthur exhibits his bravery, strength, noble courage, and fearlessness against all forms of evil.

**Spenser's Sources**

As previously noted in this chapter, when Spenser fashioned his epic he looked to the classics for inspiration and for examples of epics; he looked to the Italians for models of romance, and to ancient and contemporary historical books of his own country for Arthurian inspiration. According to Maynadier:

[Spenser] regarded [the old stories] merely as a rich storehouse from which he might select at will ornaments for his new poem, the magnificent Renaissance palace which he, Prince of Poets, was building, whose wide taste and great wealth rendered accessible to him all the artistic material--Gothic, Renaissance Italian, Moorish, Hebraic, Roman, Greek--known to European civilisation. (275)

Indeed, Spenser's poem reflects the many and varied sources he drew from to create his epic.

From Virgil and Homer Spenser adopted the epic tradition. He drew from them an ideal for heroic strength, ambition, toil, and self-sacrifice. According to Alan Sinfield, for Renaissance authors and scholars, the epic was the “most prestigious genre because it presents the most noble characters and actions” (37). Epic poetry was supposed to accomplish several tasks in the Renaissance. As Elizabeth Heale claims, epic poetry not only provided “England and its vernacular with an example of ‘the most accomplished kind of Poetry,’ it was also expected to celebrate the Nation” (Heale 12). Spenser's opening lines of the *Faerie Queene* echo the heightened style of the introduction to Virgil's *Aeneid*, and moves from simple pastoral tradition to the lofty pursuit of an epic
saga in which the figure of Arthur would combine the myths of past, present, and future glory of the British nation.

Virgil opens Book I of his *Aeneid* by sympathetically introducing his hero, Aeneas, to his readers:

Arms I sing and the man who first from the coasts of Troy, exiled by fate, came to Italy and Lavinian shores; much buffeted on the sea and land by violence from above, through cruel Juno’s unforgiving wrath, and much enduring in war also, till he should build a city and bring his gods to Latium; whence came the Latin race, the lords of Alba, and the walls of lofty Rome. (Fairclough 241, 1-7)

In a similar tone, Spenser opens the Proem of Book I of his *Faerie Queene*:

Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,  
As time her taught in lowly Shepheards weeds,  
Am now enforst a far vnfitter taske,  
For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds,  
And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds;  
Whose prayses hauing slept in silence long,  
Me, all too meane, the sacred Muse areeds  
To blazon broad emongst her learned throng:  
Fierce warres and faithfull loues shall moralize my song. (I.Pr.1)

From the Italian poets Ariosto and Tasso, Spenser gleaned the conventions of romances. Graham Hough in his study *A Preface to The Faerie Queene* claims that Spenser’s “debt to the modern Italians [. . . ] is specific and pervading. *The Faerie Queene* simply could not have the structure and atmosphere that it has without the *Orlando Furioso*” (12). While this might give too much credit to these poets and slight Spenser’s own poetic abilities, Spenser did indeed borrow liberally from them, not only specific elements and episodes, but tone and style as well. Similarities in both tone and content

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24 For further information on similarities between Spenser and Virgil, see Hughes, Merritt Y. *Virgil and Spenser*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1929.

25 “Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris/Italiam fato profugus Laviniaque venit/litora--multum ille et terris iactatus et alto/vi superum, saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram/multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem/inferretque deos Latio;/genus unde Latinum/Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae” (Fairclough 240, 1-7).
can also be found between the opening of *The Faerie Queene* and the first stanza of Canto I of *Orlando Furioso*:

Of loves and ladies, knights and arms, I sing,
Of courtesies, and many a daring feat;
And from those ancient days my story bring,
When Moors from Afric passed in hostile fleet,
And ravaged France, with Agramant their king,
Flushed with his youthful rage and furious heat,
Who on King Charles the Roman emperor's head
Had vowed due vengeance for Troyano dead. (Ariosto 1, I.1)

Spenser's "Letter to Raleigh" suggests his familiarity with the legends of Charlemagne.

Indeed the similarity of Arthur's twelve knights to Charlemagne's twelve peers is another link to Ariosto's romance.

Spenser also owes a great deal to his Arthurian predecessor Malory, although several prominent scholars such as Josephine Waters Bennett, Lilian Winstanley, Charles Bowie Millican, and Graham Hough claim Malory had little influence on Spenser. Winstanley claims that Ascham's denunciation of *Le Morte d'Arthur* persuaded Spenser to avoid using Malory (lxviii), yet a more accurate view might be that medieval romance as a whole was objected to by scholars during the Renaissance. However, Spenser apparently paid little attention to this as is seen by his generous use of the Italian romances.

There are elements in Spenser's poem that do indeed seem to come directly from Malory. For example, Spenser's Castle Joyous (III.i.31) is reminiscent of Malory's Joyous Gard (XX.viii), and Spenser's Blatant Beast (III.i.7; VI.i.7-8) seems to come from Malory's Questing Beast (I.xix). An episode that also appears to be borrowed from Malory takes place in Book VI when Lady Birana wishes to have a mantle made from
“beards of Knights and locks of Ladies lynd” (VI.i.15). A similar situation occurs when Malory’s King Ryence of North Wales demands King Arthur’s beard for his own mantle made of the beards of kings (I.xxvi).

The appearance of Tristram as a young man of seventeen also reflects Malory; however, this particular character could have come from numerous other sources. As Maynadier suggests, Spenser could have included Tristram “to add to the general interest of his poem by bringing into it one of the best known heroes of old romance” (271-72). Maynadier also suggests a connection between Prince Arthur’s acquaintance with the Faerie Queene and King Arthur’s association with the Lady of the Lake in Malory.

On a metaphoric level, the Arthur of The Faerie Queene parallels the Arthur of Le Morte d’Arthur and other romances of the Arthurian tradition in that, though still heroes of their respective texts, they are not always at the center of the action. As Rosemond Tuve demonstrates in her book Allegorical Imagery, “the royal person, who looks passive to our eyes, most certainly acts, but does so through his fellowship as through an extended self” (348). Just as the traditional Arthur of the romances is not physically involved with much of the action of his story, neither is Spenser’s Arthur continually present. In Malory, the knights of the Round Table act under the ideal of “granted and assumed loyalties” (Tuve 348), where they owe to the king as fealty their adventures. Similarly, Spenser’s Arthur, symbolic of the all-encompassing virtue magnanimity, is not dominant, but is fundamental to the success or failure of his knights.26

Spenser’s Faerie Queene also contains allusions to the works of Chaucer,27 again demonstrating Spenser’s vast knowledge of literature of the British isles. Much of

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26 For further comparisons between Spenser and Malory see Rovang, Paul R. Refashioning “Knights and Ladies Gentle Deeds”: The Intertextuality of Spenser’s Faerie Queene and Malory’s Morte Darthur. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1996.
27 For further connections between Spenser and Chaucer see Anderson, Judith H. “A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plain’: The Chaucerian Connection.” English Literary Renaissance 15 (1985): 166-74.
Spenser’s archaic language is modeled after Chaucer. In Book I Spenser also closely replicates one of Chaucer’s tree-lists from *Parlement of Fowles*: Chaucer’s tree list is as follows:

The byldere ok, and ek the hardy asshe;  
The piler elm, the cofre unto carayne;  
The boxtre pipere, holme to whippes lashe;  
The saylynge fyr; the cipresse, deth to playne,  
The shetere ew; the asp for shaftes pleyne;  
The olyve of pes, and eke the dronke vyne;  
The victor palm, the laurer to devyne. (Benson 387, 176-182)

Spenser provides a similar list of trees:

The sayline Pine, the Cedar proud and tall,  
The vine-prop Elme, the Poplar neuer dry,  
The builder Oake, sole king of forrests all,  
The Aspine good for staues, the Cypresse funerall.  
The Laurell, meed of mightie Conquerours  
And Poets sage, the Firre that weepeth still, [. . . ]  
The Eugh obedient to the benders will, [. . . ]  
The fruitfull Oliue [. . .]. (l.i.8-9)

It is obvious from the diverse sources Spenser drew upon that the outcome of his labor is a complex yet original combination of history, myth, romance, and legend--and one deeply reflecting the Renaissance in which he lived.

The Result

Despite the many on-going debates that surround *The Faerie Queene* and Arthur’s role within this politically motivated allegory, there is little question it had a profound effect on Spenser’s contemporaries, and continues to influence readers, authors, and scholars of the twenty-first century. Spenser’s greatest influence on later poets was his creation of a new stanza in *The Faerie Queene* which became known as the Spenserian
stanza. Just a few of the more prominent poets to employ this stanza are Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Tennyson. Spenser’s Arthur also influenced Tennyson, who has been considered the initiator of the nineteenth-century Arthurian revival, when he wrote *Idylls of the King*. Spenser’s Arthurian influence was not necessarily in terms of specific elements, but in the way Tennyson used the old stories to create his own new ones. Tennyson also imitated Spenser’s ornate and melodious style as he wrote his *Idylls*. In fact, Tennyson’s *Idylls* have been called “the nineteenth-century counterpart” to Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (Killham 178).

While Spenser’s allegorical romance epic has received much criticism, it has also been extensively praised. Whether or not scholars and poets praise or criticize it, most of them agree that Spenser’s epic was a formidable undertaking and one that is worthy of study and appreciation. Not only did Spenser create a story complete with all the romantic trappings of knights, fair damsels in distress, dwarfs, evil giants, and fierce dragons, he was also able to employ these elements to fit his present Elizabethan world by linking them with a figure common to both--King Arthur. Whether or not Spenser’s readers believed in the historical Arthur the Tudors were promoting, or accepted him as the legendary king of myth and romance, Spenser both reinforced and expanded the Arthurian legacy in his *Faerie Queene* through his creation of a young Prince Arthur, and through his “filling up” of the one blank space in the traditional Arthurian legend.

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28 The Spenserian stanza consists of “nine lines, the first eight in iambic pentameter and the ninth in iambic hexameter. They rhyme scheme is ababbcc.[. . .] The stanza is notable for three qualities: (1) the ‘tying-in’ of the three rhymes promotes unity and tightness, somewhat relieved by the shifting variety of rhyme with the sense so distributed that pentameter couplets containing a complete thought are avoided; (2) the Alexandrine at the close adds dignity; and (3) at the same time, it affords an opportunity for summary and epigrammatic expression” (Holman 452).
CHAPTER 2

ARTHUR GLORIFIED: MICHAEL DRAYTON’S POLY-OLBION

Following in a long line of topographers, chorographers, antiquarians, and historians such as John Leland, William Camden, and William Warner who enjoyed moderate, if not exceptional, success and recognition from their works, Michael Drayton wrote his Poly-Olbion in the first decade of the seventeenth century confident it would be the greatest achievement of his career. By addressing in his poem almost every aspect of British land and life--rivers, hills, valleys, forests, wildlife, cities, wars, warriors, voyagers, saints, sports, religion--Drayton believed he had provided something for every reader. He believed anyone with a drop of British blood flowing in his or her veins would immediately be interested in a work that celebrated Britain’s land and heritage:

When I first undertooke this Poeme [...] this Herculean labour [...] I was by some vertuous friends perswaded, that I should receive such comfort and incouragement therein; and for these Reasons: First, that it was a new, cleere way, never before gone by any; then, that it contained all Delicacies, Delights, and Rarities of this renowned Isle, interwoven with the Histories of the Britanes, 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 interressed therein. (Hebel 391)

The Poly-Olbion was not the first of its kind, as Drayton boasts in this passage, but was actually one of the “last original topographical surveys on a national scale to be attempted in verse or prose” during the Renaissance (Mikalchki 150). However, it certainly was the most comprehensive and ambitious topographical survey of its day.

The antiquarian, parliamentarian, and lawyer John Selden, who annotated the first part of the Poly-Olbion, agreed with Drayton that the poem would appeal to all readers of British descent:
To *Gentlewomen* and their *Loves* is consecrated all the *wooing Language*,
*Allusions to Love-Passions*, and sweet *Embracements* fain’d by the Muse mongst
*Hils* and *Rivers*; Whatsoever tastes of *Descriptions, Battell, Story, Abstruse
Antiquity*, and [*Law* of the Kingdome, To the more *Severe Reader*. To the
one, Be contenting *Enjoyments* of their *Auspicious Desires*; To the other, Happy
*Attendance* of their chosen *Muses*. (Hebel xiii*-xiv*)

By believing the poem would benefit and appeal to all readers in many different ways,
Drayton and Selden were following the Roman poet Horace’s program of *prodesse et
delectare*, which states that poetry should be both morally educational and entertaining.²⁹

The surge of patriotism that swept across Great Britain following Italian humanist
Polydore Vergil’s attack on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia* in his *Anglicae Historiae
Libri XXVI* in the mid sixteenth century spurred English historians and antiquarians to
investigate Britain’s past in order to create, or recreate, a British history that would give
the nation a legitimate sense of itself—where it came from, what is was, and where it was
going. The first major counterattack, which led to the great Tudor Battle of the Books,
came from Henry VIII’s librarian, John Leland, in his *Assertio inclytissimi Arturii regis
Britanniae* (1544).³⁰ Drayton shared Leland’s nationalistic pride and believed in the
glories of England’s past and felt assured of a large audience for what he called his
“Herculean toyle” (XXX.342), the *Poly-Olbian*.

**Drayton’s Early Years**

Widely considered the chief historical poet of the English Renaissance, Drayton,
also called the “Elizabethan Poet” (Elton 26), was born at Hartshill, near Atherstone,
Warwickshire, in 1563. Born within a year of his literary acquaintance William
Shakespeare—also a native of Warwickshire—into a large well-to-do family, Drayton spent

²⁹ *Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae/aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae* (Horace 333-34).
³⁰ Leland’s work was translated by Richard Robinson in 1582 as *A Learned and True Assertion of the Life
of Prince Arthur*. 


nearly sixty years composing poetry, the majority of it historical and antiquarian in nature. As a small child, Drayton became a page in the house of Henry Goodere of Polesworth, who was largely responsible for his education. Drayton’s first introduction to the history of his country may have been provided by the minister, author, and translator Raphael Holinshed, who lived only a mile from Polesworth during Drayton’s youth. Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* showed a renewed belief in Geoffrey’s *Historia* based on the manuscripts of John Leland, and were immediately popular when they were published in 1577. While it is unlikely Drayton attended Oxford or Cambridge, it is possible he studied at one of the Inns of Court. From an early age Drayton showed an interest in writing poetry, and at the age of 64, he composed a letter in verse to his friend Henry Reynolds Esquire which gives an account of his education at Polesworth and his growing desire to be a poet:

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For from my cradle, (you must know that) I
Was still inclin’d to noble Poesie,
And when that once *Pueriles* I had read,
And newly had my *Cato* construed,
In my small selfe I greatly marveil’d then,
Amongst all other, what strange kinde of men
These Poets were; And pleased with the name,
To my milde Tutor merrily I came,
(For I was then a proper goodly page,
Much like a Pigmy, scarce ten yeares of age)
Clasping my slender armes about his thigh.
O my deare master! cannot you (quoth I)
Make me a Poet; doe it, if you can,
And you shall see, Ile quickly be a man.
Who me thus answered smiling, boy quoth he.
If you’le not play the wag, but I may see
You ply your learning, I will shortly read
Some Poets to you; *Phæbus* be my speed,
Too’t hard went I, when shortly he began,
And first read to me honest *Mantuan*,
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Then Virgils Eglogues; being entred thus,
Me thought I straight had mounted Pegasus,
And in his full Careere could make him stop,
And bound upon Parnassus by-clift top, [. . .]
Then to the matter that we tooke in hand,
Jove and Apollo for the Muses stand. (Hunter 267-268, 17-42)

Drayton was one of the most comprehensive poets of the Renaissance, writing pastorals, sonnets, paraphrases, Ovidian Fables, narratives, chronicles, legends, and panegyrics. At the age of twenty-eight, he published his first work titled Harmonie of the Church (1591). This metrical paraphrasing of nineteen prayers and songs of thanksgiving from the Old Testament and Apocrypha was so disturbing to some that the entire edition was condemned by public order and directed to be destroyed. Drayton chose for his next publication a less controversial work, Idea, The Shepherd's Garland (1593), comprised of nine eclogues, or pastoral verse dialogues.

For the next twenty years Drayton composed and published several historical poems, an epyllion, a legend, a collection of verse letters, and a play. But according to Drayton's friend, churchman Francis Meres, in his Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury (1598), by 1598 Drayton, the "Goldenmouth'd," was "penning in English verse a Poem called Polu-olbion Geographical and Hydrographical of all the forefts, woods, mountaineis, fountaines, riuers, lakes, flouds, bathes and spriings that be in England" (281). Drayton envisioned his poem as a chorography, the genre most appropriate to his design.

According to F. J. Levy, a chorography was a combination of geography and history, but it "involved even more than that. Archaeology, law, custom, observation, geography, history--anything that might serve to illuminate the description of an area--all were brought into play" (140).
Between 1607 and 1612, when the first eighteen songs were entered in the stationer’s record, Drayton published only one new work and reprinted two earlier poetry collections containing slight changes. He was devoting his time to his *magnum opus*, and the necessary leisure he needed was provided in part by a pension of ten pounds a year paid him by Prince Henry, who died November 6, 1612, shortly after *Poly-Olbum*’s first publication. Drayton recognized Prince Henry and his assistance by dedicating the first part of the *Poly-Olbum* to the “High and Mightie, Henrie, Prince of Wales”: “This first part of my intended Poeme I consecrate to your Highnes: in whom (beside my particular zeale) there is a naturall interest in my Worke; as the hopefull Heyre of the kingdoms of this Great Britaine: whose Delicacies, Chorographicall Description, and Historie, be my subject” (Hebel iii*).

Drayton also benefitted from the patronage of Sir Walter Aston of Tixall. On receiving knighthood from James I, Aston made Drayton one of his esquires, an honor which Drayton was careful to claim on the frontispiece of the *Poly-Olbum*. Drayton also recognized and thanked Sir Aston in his preface, “To the General Reader”: “Whatever is herein that tastes of a free spirit I thankfully confess it to proceed from the continual bounty of my truly noble friend Sir Walter Aston; which hath given me the best of those hours whose leisure hath effected this which I now publish” (Hebel 13).

The *Poly-Olbum*, written in rhyming alexandrine couplets or iambic hexameter, should be considered a hybrid. In it there is nothing new; rather it is the combination of poetry, allegory, history, chronicle, topography, and geography that makes it a unique patriotic epic. Structurally, the poem consists of thirty songs and is divided into two parts. The first part, comprised of eighteen songs, was published sometime between May and November of 1612. The second part, comprised of twelve songs, was dedicated
to Prince Henry’s younger brother, the “High and Mightie Charles, Prince Wales” (Hebel 390), and was published ten years later in 1622. However, according to a letter dated April 1619 from Drayton to his friend and fellow poet William Drummond of Hawthornden, the Songs had already been completed by 1619: “I have done Twelve Books more, that is, from the Eighteenth Book, which was Kent, (if you note it) all the East Parts, and North to the River of Tweed; but it lyeth by me; for the Booksellers and I are in Terms: They are a Company of base Knaves, whom I both scorn and kick at” (Newdigate 184).

The Songs survey all thirty counties in England and Wales, describing in detail the topography, local customs, historic events, important figures, and monuments in each. Drayton’s original plan was to write a third part surveying Scotland, but for various reasons his goal was never realized. The highly comprehensive title itself is perhaps the best description of what Drayton ambitiously included in his nearly 15,000 line poem: *Poly-Olbion. Or a chorographicall Description of Tracts, Riuers, Mountaines, Forefts, and other Parts of this renowned Ifle of Great Britaine, With intermixture of the moft Remarquable Stories, Antiquities, Wonders, Rarityes, Pleasures, and Commodities of the fame: Digested in a Poem by Michael Drayton, Efq. With a Table added, for direction to thofe occurrences of Story and Antiquitie whereunto the Courfe of the Volume eafily leades not.*

Each of the thirty Songs is prefaced with a verse argument ranging from six to twenty lines in tetrameter couplets and a map taken from Christopher Saxton’s *Atlas* of 1579. Following each song in the first part of the poem is a section of notes called Illustrations written by the lawyer and antiquarian John Selden (1584-1654), sometimes called “the dictator of learning of the English nation” (Mee 325) because of his vast and
exact knowledge of all things English. In creating his topographical poem, Drayton looked
to numerous and varied sources in order to preserve every possible aspect of his beloved
country's past. Drayton looked to the chroniclers who came before him, to poets, and
to the songs of the harpers and minstrels. It is also possible that Drayton had access to
the collections and libraries of John Stow, William Camden, and John Selden. In finding
sources for the Arthurian elements of his poem, Drayton looked specifically at the songs
of the bards, William Camden's *Britannia*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Brittanum*,
Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

**Drayton's Use of Arthur**

The bulk of Drayton's retelling of the legends associated with King Arthur is
found in Songs I, III, and IV. It is believed by many scholars that Drayton probably took
his material from Holland or Camden, but it is often nearly impossible to discern
positively which source was his main influence. Both Holland and Camden used
Geoffrey of Monmouth as their source, so it is possible that Drayton as well went
straight to Geoffrey for his material. Many scholars believe Drayton first looked to
Holinshed, Camden, and others for material, then moved on to Geoffrey to expand on the
basic framework he gleaned from his near contemporaries.

According to I. Gourvitch, Song IV owes a greater debt to Geoffrey's *Historia*
than the other sections on Arthur. This section seems to be simply a condensed version
of the tale Geoffrey presents. While the section on Arthur in Geoffrey's *Historia* covers
the greater part of books IX, X, and XI, the corresponding section in the *Poly-Olbion* is
only seventy-seven lines. Nevertheless, it is obvious from the specific elements of the
Arthurian legend that Drayton drew his information directly from Geoffrey.

Modern scholars J. William Hebel and Vernam Hull have thoroughly analyzed the *Poly-Olbion* to
determine the many sources Drayton used in composing the individual songs.
There is also evidence Drayton used Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* as a source for some Arthurian elements of his poem. In Song IV, it appears that Drayton scanned the main incidents in Arthur’s life presented by Geoffrey, and then added to them further details possibly acquired from Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (Gourvitch 400). For example, Drayton includes lines concerning the Round Table, not mentioned in Geoffrey but probably borrowed from Malory instead.

Opinions differ widely as to Drayton’s own position on Arthur and the various Arthurian legends, and why he chose to include them in his work. Howard Maynadier and several other scholars assert that Drayton had no more than a simple poetic and antiquarian interest in the tales of Arthur’s achievements (290). Maynadier and these scholars fail to notice, however, Drayton’s complaint in the first Song about the age in which he lived:

That this penurious age hath suffred to decay,
Some lim or modell, dragd out of the ruinous mass,
The richness will declare in glorie whilst it was:
But time upon my waste committed hath such theft,
That if of *Arthur* heere scarce memorie hath left. (I.199-203)

Drayton echoes this complaint in Song 6 when he again laments the age’s lack of belief in Arthur: “And Ignorance had brought the world to such a pass./As now, which scarce beleevs that Arthur ever was” (VI.272). As I noted in the introduction, the Arthurian romances of the Middle Ages were extremely popular during the Renaissance, but Drayton, in these lines, is mourning a fading belief in an historical Arthur brought about by the New Learning and the Battle of the Books, not a fading interest in Arthur as a literary subject. Drayton rejected the age in which he lived and was saddened that his fellow countrymen were skeptical of Arthur’s historical existence.
Although Drayton could not distinguish between the factual and fictitious elements of the Arthurian legend, he believed there was an historical basis to the legend, and therefore included all aspects of the legend in his poem. Drayton longed for a return to the past, and his *Poly-Olbion* demonstrates his love for his country and his reverence for a past he believed was rapidly disappearing. As Harold H. Child claims, the poem’s chief attraction is “the pathetic bravery of the whole scheme--the voice of the dogged old Elizabethan raised amid an alien world, to sing the old song in the old way, to proclaim and preserve the glories of his beloved country in the face of a frivolous, forgetful age” (220-21).

The Battle of the Books nearly half a century earlier had sparked the development of the “sound historical scholarship” which developed during the seventeenth century (Nearing 107). This attitude of critical thought is noticeable in Selden’s Illustrations at the end of each Song. While Selden provided lengthy and meticulous annotations to the historical and antiquarian allusions in each song, his opinion was quite different from Drayton’s. Selden’s scientific, scholarly, and perceptive Illustrations represented the new critical attitude that was developing toward early British history. According to J. William Hebel, editor of the *Poly-Olbion*:

At the preparation of these notes Selden worked with his usual scholarly conscientiousness, comparing sources and emending errors in earlier texts, with shrewd insight exposing the credulity of preceding scholars, yet with gentle and kindly irony approving poetic licence in Drayton’s muse. For learning, accuracy, common sense and tolerance Selden’s annotations rank high in the annals of seventeenth-century scholarship. (ix)

Selden himself described his task as, “to explaine the Author, carrying himselfe in this part, an *Historicall*, as in the other, a *Chorographical* Poet, I insert oft, out of the *British* story, what I importune you not to credit” (Hebel x*). Selden included these mythical
elements not to discredit the entire Arthurian saga, but only the “Monkish invention” that had obscured the real Arthur (Hebel 46-47). Selden claimed that such “invention” had “expatiated out of the lists of Truth, that from their intermixed and absurd fauxeties hath proceeded doubt: and, in some, even denial of what was truth” (Hebel 46-47). Selden then instructs the reader to look to Song IV for the truth of Arthur, “his table, order, Knights, and places of their celebration” (Hebel 47).

But whether or not Drayton and Selden truly believed in an historical Arthur and his exploits, and what specific elements they believed to be fact is not relevant to my thesis. The reasons for Drayton choosing to include Arthur in his poem are more important. According to William Lewis Jones, “Drayton’s Poly-Olbion is a well-intentioned poem, and its sympathetic treatment of the legends entitles it to an honoured place in the Arthurian library” (121). While the Poly-Olbion can not be considered a purely Arthurian work, Drayton certainly made a conscious choice to include Arthur in his poem, a choice that was heavily influenced by the age and society in which he lived. The end of the War of the Roses, the uniting of England under Henry VII, the Reformation, exploration and colonization, and many other historical, societal, and political conditions of the age cultivated the desire for a united British consciousness and ultimately formed the background for Drayton’s Poly-Olbion (Weibly 14).

**Arthur as a Splendor of the Past**

The first and foremost reason Drayton chose to include Arthur in the Poly-Olbion was his own desire to preserve and glorify a past he believed was rapidly being forgotten:

O Time, what earthly thing with thee it selfe can trust,  
When thou in thine owne course, art to thy selfe unjust!  
Dost thou contract with Death, and to oblivion give  
Thy glories, after them, yet shamefully dar’st live? (XXI.5-8)
Aware of time's destructive nature, Drayton mourned for the lost glories of Britain and sought to preserve those that still remained, one of them being the memory of King Arthur and his adventures:

Out of whose ancient race, that warlike *Arthur* sprong:
Whose most renowned Acts shall sounded be as long
As *Britains* name is known: which spred themselves so wide,
As scarcely hath for fame left any roomth beside. (VIII.371-374)

Drayton's attitude reflects the thought of the time. In the last twenty years of Elizabeth's reign, a newly awakened surge of patriotism prevailed in England, turning scholars and authors to the subject of past achievements. An enthusiasm emerged for the glorious present informed by the even more glorious past. Drayton was caught up in the patriotic fervor, and his *Poly-Olbion* became one of the most prominent examples of nationalism in early modern England (Mikalachki 28). Although this seems to contradict the fact that the Renaissance was also a time of New Learning and desire for historical scholarship, these two co-existing conditions constitute a paradox (and tension) that pervaded many areas of Renaissance life, particularly literature. Arthur B. Ferguson points out the Renaissance tendency to question "anything that did not bear the stamp of sacred history, to rationalize where possible, and to historicize" (24). Yet there also was present an inclination to overlook problems of questionable historicity and blur the line dividing history and myth, thereby providing for characters such as Arthur a place within the nation's history.

Thus, in Renaissance England nationalism and patriotic pride trumped the New Learning, and this New Learning was put into service of the national cause. As a result, many Renaissance historians and antiquarians tended to be more patriotic than scholarly when their national pride was put to the test. Drayton strove to rescue from oblivion the
achievements and glories of his country through a means he believed to be secure: poetry. Drayton determined to do poetically what other topographers and antiquarians had only partially achieved through prose: not to uncover the unknown past, but to glorify and immortalize the known past.

Into his masterpiece Drayton poured all his substantial learning, observations, patriotism, and vision of a magnificent past he undoubtedly believed contained Arthur. Scattered throughout the thirty Songs, Drayton sings for “th’ancient Britan’s […] most renowned Knight,” Arthur (IV.245-246). As Drayton’s Muse travels through Wales and England, she comes upon sites such as Caer-leon, Dinas Ermis, Camelot, the River Camel, and other places named for and made famous by King Arthur. These geographical sites lead to the verses recounting the tales of Arthur, Merlin, and the Knights of the Round Table. Each time Drayton makes reference to Arthur and exalts his deeds, he is proclaiming, and reclaiming, the glorious past of Britain. In all accounts Arthur is shown as a hero who stands strong, protects his people and his country, conquers foreign lands, and triumphs over invaders, chasing them from Britain’s shores.

*The Poly-Olbion* covers Arthur’s life from his magical birth to his mysterious death, not necessarily in chronological order, but in topographical order. Drayton begins his topographical survey with the islands south of England, then travels on to Cornwall and Devonshier in the southwestern corner of England. It is on the shores of the River Camel that Drayton first speaks of Arthur, briefly mentioning the twelve battles Arthur fought against the Saxons and describing his death at the hand of his illegitimate son, Mordred:

As frantick, ever since her British *Arthurs* blood,
By *Mordreds* murtherous hand was mingled with her flood.
For, as that River, best might boast that Conquerours breath,
So sadlie shee bemoanes his too untimely death;
Who, after twelve proud fields against the Saxon fought,
Yet back unto her banks by fate was lastly brought:
As though no other place on Britaines spacious earth,
Were worthie of his end, but where he had his birth. (I.183-190)

Following this first Song, in the Illustration Selden describes and expands upon the events surrounding the birth and heritage of Arthur so briefly mentioned by Drayton at the end of the previous passage:

Neere Camel about Camblan, was Arthur slain by Mordred, and on the same shore, East from the rivers mouth, borne in Tintagel castle. Gorlois Prince of Cornewall at Uther-Pendragons coronation, solemnized in London, upon divers too kinde passages and lascivious regards twixt the King and his wife Igerne, grew very jealous, in a rage left the Court, committed his wives chastitie to this Castles safeguard; and to prevent the wasting of his countrey (which upon this discontent was threatened) betooke himselfe in other forts to martaill preparation. Uther (his bloud still boiling in lust) upon advice of Ulfin Rhicaradoch, one of his knights, by Ambrose Merlins magique personated like Gorlois, and Ulfin like one Jordan, servant to Gorlois, made such successfull use of their imposture, that (the Prince in the meane time slaine) Arthur was the same night begotten, and verified that No0m -CE JtOAAOL yvriou.ov aµnvov£~ [Bastards are ofttimes better then legitimates]; although Merlin by the rule of Hermes, or Astrologicall direction, justified, that hee was conceived III. houres after Gorlois death; by this shift answering the dangerous imputation of bastardy to the heire of a crowne. For Uther taking Igerne to wife, left Arthur his successor in the Kingdome. (Hebel 19-20)

While it is clear that Drayton and Selden believed some elements of the legend possessed more historical validity than others, Drayton includes all elements, even those that contradict each other, for the sake of saving a past that might otherwise be lost.

According to Oliver Elton, in "the writer’s own mind the absence of demarcation between fact and legend is complete; is not each matter for the Muse, part of what has to be rescued from oblivion?" (37). That Drayton was not troubled by contradiction can be seen by comparing the Arthurian elements of Song III, which mourns over the destruction
done to Arthur’s grave and remains, with those of Selden’s Illustration to Song III, which exalts the myth that Arthur is not dead but will return again to rule England. In the third Song Drayton’s Muse travels to the Isle of Avalon to visit the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey. Here we see Drayton’s lament for the wrong that was done to the remains interred there of King Arthur and Joseph of Arimathea, the man who, according to tradition, brought the Holy Grail to Britain:

When not great Arthurs Tombe, nor holy Josephs Grave,  
From sacriledge had power their sacred bones to save;  
He who that God in man to his sepulchre brought,  
Or he which for the faith twelve famous battels fought.  
What? Did so many Kings do honor to that place,  
For Avarice at last so vilely to deface? (III.307-312)

In his Illustrations to the third Song, Selden includes both the account of Arthur’s remains discovered by Henry II and the myth that Arthur did not die but recovered from his wounds and would return one day to reign over England.

Henry the second in his expedition towards Ireland entertyned by the way in Wales with Bardish songs, wherein he heard it affirmed that in Glastonbury [...] Arthur was buried twixt two pillars, gave commandement to Henry of Blois then Abbot, to make search for the corps: which was found in a wooden coffin [...] some sixeene foote deepe; but after they had digged nine foot, they found a stone on whose lower side was fixt a leade crosse [...] with his name inscribed, and the letter side of it turn’d to the stone. He was then honored with a sumptuous monument, and afterward the sculs of him and his wife Guinever were taken out (to remaine as separat reliques and spectacles) by Edward Longshanks and Elianor. Of this, Girald, Leland, Prise, divers others (although Polydore make slight of it) have 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) conveyed the body hither to cure it: which done, Arthur is to returne (yet expected) to rule of his country. Read these attributed to the best of the Bards [Taliesin] [...] Englisht in meeter for me thus by the Author:

----------Morgaine with honor took  
And in a chaire of State doth cause him to repose;
Then with a modest hand his wounds she doth unclose:
And having searcht them well, she bad him not to doubt,
He should in time be cur’d, if he would stay it out,
And would the med’cine take that she to him would give. (Hebel 66-67)

In Song IV, Drayton himself takes the opportunity to tell at length some of the more romantic Arthurian elements by inventing a quarrel between the English and Welsh nymphs. The dispute is over whether or not the Isle of Lundy, located at the entrance of the Bristol Channel, belongs to England or to Wales. The disagreement is to be decided by a singing contest on the banks of the Severn Estuary, in which the English nymphs sing the great deeds of the Saxons, while the Welsh nymphs glorify King Arthur:

England and Wales strive, in this Song,
To whether, Lundy doth belong:
When eithers Nymphs, to cleere the doubt,
By Musick meane to try it out.
Of mightie Neptune leave they aske:
Each one betakes her to her taske;
The Britaines, with the Harpe and Crowd:
The English, both with still and loud.
The Britaines chaunt King Arthurs glory:
The English sing their Saxons storie. (Hebel 69)

It is in this fourth Song that Drayton explains in great length many of Arthur’s heroic deeds. Drayton begins with a description of the King and “the richness of [his] Armes their well-made Worthie wore”:

The temper of his sword (the try’d Escalaboure)
The bignes and the length of Rone, his noble Speare;
With Pridwin his great Shield, and what the proofe could beare;
His Baudrick how adorn’d with stones of wondrous price,
The sacred Virgins shape he bore for his device. (IV.248-251)

The nymphs then proudly sing of Arthur’s many triumphant battles, both at home and on the continent. The nymphs end their song with Arthur’s death by “false Mordreds
hand” (IV.321). The dispute between the nymphs does not conclude until Song V, when
the Severn, in a lengthy commentary, declares Londy belongs equally to both sides:

My neere and loved Nymphs, good hap yee both betide:
Well Britans have yee sung; you English, well repli’d:
Which to succeeding times shall memorize your stories
To either Countries praise, as both your endlesse glories. [. . .]
Both gladlie be you pleas’d: for thus the Powers reveale,
That when the Norman Line in strength shall lastlie faile
(Fate limiting the time) th’ancient Britan race
Shall come againe to sit upon the soveraigne place.
A branch sprung out of Brute, th’imperiall top shall get,
Which grafted in the stock of great Plantaginet,
The Stem shall strongly wax, as still the Trunk doth wither:
That power which bare it thence, againe shall bring it thither
By Tudor, with faire winds from little Britaine driven,
To whom the goodlie Bay of Milford shall be given;
As thy wise Prophets, Wales, fore-told his wisht arrive,
And how Lewellins Line in him should doubley thrive.
For from his issue sent to Albany before,
Where his neglected blood, his vertue did restore,
Hee first unto himselfe in faire succession gain’d
The Stewards nobler name; and afterward attain’d
The royall Scottish wreath, upholding it in state.
This Stem, to Tudors joyn’d (which thing all-powerfull Fate
So happily produc’t out of that prosperous Bed,
Whose marriages conjoynd the White-Rose and the Red)
Suppressing every Plant, shall spred it selfe so wide,
As in his armes shall clip the Ile on every side.
By whom three sever’d Realms in one shall firmlie stand,
As Britain-founding Brute first Monarchiz’d the Land:
And Cornwall, for that thou no longer shalt contend,
But to old Cambria cleave, as to thy ancient friend,
Acknowledge thou thy Brood, of Brutes high blood to bee;
And what hath hapt to her, the like t’have chanc’t to thee;
The Britains to receive, when Heaven on them did lowre,
Loegria forc’t to leave; who from the Saxons powre
Themselves in Deserts, Creeks, and Mount’rous wasts bestow’d,
Or where the fruitlesse Rocks could promise them aboad:
Why strive yee then for that, in little time that shall
(As you are all made one) be one unto you all;
Then take my finall doome pronounced lastlie, this;
That Lundy like ally'd to Wales and England is. (V.39-80)

The Severn’s decision that Londy belongs to England and Wales equally reflects not only how the Tudor dynasty restored the ancient British line to the throne of England and joined it with the Saxon-Normans, but also on James I’s union of the three realms, Wales, Scotland, and England, which had not been united since the time of Brutus.

Arthur as Ancestor

Drayton’s reference to the Stuart and Tudor dynasties leads directly into the second reason why Drayton chose to include Arthur in the Poly-Olbion. His inclusion of Arthur and his legends was in direct response to the Renaissance monarchical claim by the Tudors and Stuarts that they descended from or were incarnations of King Arthur. This claim was first conceived by the English baron possessing a Welsh family name, Henry Tudor, in 1485. As noted in the Introduction, Henry Tudor took up the standard of the Red Dragon of Wales and went to battle against the king of England, Richard II, defeating him at the Battle of Bosworth. Henry’s right to the English throne was tenuous, so he claimed it by uniting through marriage the feuding York and Lancaster houses, and by claiming to be a descendant of Cadwallader, King of Gwynedd, who, according to Geoffrey’s Historia, was the last king of the Britons. This ultimately led to his claim of being a descendant of King Arthur.

Henry VII’s interest in Arthur united the political with the personal when he moved his wife and queen, Elizabeth of York, to Winchester, the city identified by Thomas Malory in his Le Morte d’Arthur as Camelot, to give birth to their first son whom he named Arthur. Henry VII hoped his son would one day reign as King Arthur II,
and the young Arthur was looked upon by many as King Arthur “reborn.” However, his premature death at the age of fifteen, after only four months of marriage to Catharine of Aragon, left his younger brother, Henry VIII, to take the throne in 1509 as Arthur “magnified.” Henry VIII then took the widowed Catharine as his wife and named their first born son Arthur as well. However, this Arthur lived only fifty-two days, and never reigned as Arthur II. Arthur’s brother, Henry VIII, was chivalric and athletic, organizing and participating in jousts and tournaments which had been out of style since the reign of Edward III. He repainted the Round Table of Winchester in Tudor green and yellow, put his countenance in the place of Arthur’s, and proudly displayed the table when dignitaries visited Winchester.

But while the Tudors sought to legitimize their right to the throne by claiming to be descendants of King Arthur, not everyone was as credulous regarding the adventures of King Arthur that were widely circulating at the time. British authors Robert Fabyan (14??-1513, The Concordaunce of Hystoryes, or [posthumous title] The New Chronicles of England and of France) and William Rastell (1508-1565, printer, lawyer, and nephew of Sir Thomas More) showed some skepticism regarding Arthur’s exploits as presented by Geoffrey of Monmouth. But when a foreigner dared attack the beloved British king and hero, a fury of defense erupted. The attacks made by Polydore Virgil were seen by some to question the Tudor ancestral claims, and therefore, challenge their very right to the throne. This attack on British history and royalty resulted in a flood of histories and chronicles of early Britain exalting the deeds of Arthur and his knights and linking Arthur with the Tudors. These writings flourished during the mid-sixteenth century and continued through the Renaissance. They represent further evidence that despite the many claims that the Arthurian legend had faded into oblivion during the Renaissance, this
was far from the truth. Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* was one such text that glorified Arthur and his deeds.

It is obvious from the beginning of the poem that Drayton was greatly interested in Welsh history, a convenient coincidence for Henry VII claimed Welsh descent. In Drayton’s dedication “To My Friends, the Cambro-Britans,” he professes his fondness for Wales and explains his manner of including Wales in his chorography:

To have you without difficulty understand, how in this my intended progresse, through these united kingdoms of great Britaine, I have placed your (and I must confesse) my loved Wales, you shall perceive, that after the three first Songs, beginning with our French Ilands, Jernsey, and Jersey, with the rest; and perfecting in those first three the survay of these sixe our most Western Countries, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Hamp, Wilt, and Summerset; I then make over Severne into Wales, not farre from the midst of her Broad side that lieth against England [. . .] Speaking of seaven Books; you shall understand that I continew Wales through so many; beginning in the fourth Song (where the nymphes of England and Wales, contend for the Ile of Lundy) and ending in the tenth; Striving, as my much loved (the learned) Humfrey Floyd, in his description of Cambria to Abraham Ortelius, to uphold her auncient bounds, Severne, and Dee, and therefore have included the parts of those three English Shiers of Gloster, Worster, and Sallop, that lie on the west of Severne, within their ancient mother Wales: In which if I have not done her right, the want is in my ability, not in my love. (Hebel vii*)

By including the tales of Arthur in his poem, Drayton was calling attention not only to Britain’s historical and legendary past, but to contemporary royalty and the history that was being created during his own time. By combining the past with the present, something Drayton was particularly fond of doing, and by hailing the present royalty as a product of past royalty, Drayton was broadening the British national identity that he was working so hard to preserve. In a similar vein, “inspired by James’ accession and the subsequent union of England and Scotland, Drayton may be seen as seeking to expand the established English national consciousness to form a British
national identity—an identity long dreamed of by the proponents of British legend” (Weibly 11).

**Arthur as the Mark of British Superiority**

The third reason Drayton chose to include Arthur in his topographical poem is closely connected to the first two reasons. People of the Renaissance not only looked back to the classical age of the Greeks and Romans for inspiration, they also wanted to outshine that classical age by creating, out of something already excellent, something even greater. In attempting to recreate a British past that all Britons could be proud of, Drayton also wished to prove Britain’s superiority over all other parts of the world, particularly Greece and Rome. Drayton draws upon the classics by incorporating personification, allusions to pagan gods, and Homeric similes into his *Poly-Olbion*, but goes a step further by using these devices to excess in his attempt to surpass the classics. According to Lewis F. Ball, Drayton composed the *Poly-Olbion*, not only out of his own reverence for the past, but in competitive response to “the English desire for a national background no less noble than that of Troy and Rome, and to her conviction that her present rulers incarnated the ancient tradition” (Ball 87). Thus, Drayton’s deep patriotic pride and desire to prove Britain equal to the greatness of classical antiquity drove him to create the most comprehensive of all British historical and topographical works of the time.

Indeed, one of the main frameworks of the *Poly-Olbion* is its repeating pattern of competition and controversy between not only the personified characteristics of the landscape, but also between the “natural and historical wonders of England and those of classical antiquity” (Heffner 219). In his attempt to surpass the classics, Drayton suggests that for every Greek and Roman hero or locality one might cite, an English one
equal to or greater can be offered. This rivalry with the classics was not new with the
Poly-Olbion, for Drayton had followed a similar practice in his Epistles when he
presented English counterparts for Ovid’s heroes. Drayton continues this method in the
Poly-Olbion when, according to Richard Hardin, “the English naval heroes are called
Argonauts (XIX.171), Maid Marian is the Diana of Sherwood Forest (XXVI.357), Guy
of Warwick is the English Hercules (XIII.350), and the ‘most insatiate danes,’ in their
raids on coastal England, are likened to the Greeks invading Troy (XIII.374)” (64).

Despite these parallels, Drayton believed that Arthur was the only British hero
who could come close to truly equaling the heroes of the classics, but he also regretted the
“lack of a national Arthurian epic to surpass Homer’s” (Hardin 64). Drayton’s
disappointment at this absence reveals his lack of faith in Spenser’s Faerie Queene and
Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur as true Arthurian epics. No doubt he hoped the Poly-Olbion
would meet the need, and in writing it he defended the historicity of the personages and
adventures in Geoffrey’s Historia, Arthur included, by claiming they were not “idle
tales/(As he may find, the truth of our descents that seekes)/Nor fabulous, like those
devised by the Greeks” (X.254-256).

Several times throughout his work Drayton casts the shadow of blame on the
bards for the paucity of substantial sources pertaining to King Arthur. In Song III,
Drayton’s chastisement is quite evident:

That justlie I may charge those ancient Bards of wrong,
So idly to neglect his [Arthur’s] glorie in their Song.
For some abundant braine, o there had beene a storie
Beyond the Blind-mans [Homer] to have inhanc’t our glorie. (III.405-408)

Drayton shows his ambivalent feelings towards the Bards in Song VI through a
narrative by the personified Wye valley. The Wye begins by praising the “memorable
Bards” for preserving Britian’s past and national heroes in their songs, particularly when they “Of famous Arthur told’st, and where hee was interr’d” (VI.269). Drayton then reports that although “ignorance” caused men to discredit the tales of Arthur, “when King Henry sent th’reported place to view,/He found that man of men: and what thou said’st was true” (VI.273-274). Again, Drayton wishes these events had been written down more fully, for then the world may not have so easily discredited the tales of Arthur and other British heroes. However, Drayton believes a far worse crime arose from the bard’s neglect. Because the bards failed to record in writing their songs and tales of King Arthur—songs that Drayton and Selden believed to be historically truthful—the “Monkes” filled in the gaps with erroneous and mythical information concerning Arthur.

In Book X Drayton, through a narrative by the River Dee, once again blames the bards and the Druids for not preserving the past in writing, but rather only keeping oral traditions:

But that our idle Bards, as their fond rage did move,
Sang what their fancies pleas’d. Thus doe I answere these;
That th’ancient British priests, the fearlesse Druides,
That ministered the lawes, and were so trulie wise,
That they determin’d states, attending sacrifice,
To letters never would their mysteries commit,
For which the breasts of men they deem’d to be more fit. (X.262-268)

Yet, even in this reprimand of the bards and druids, Drayton demonstrates his anxiety regarding Britain’s known past, his desire to outshine the classics, and his great need to defend British history, when he turns what he had previously termed a weakness—into a strength. Oral traditions, even slight ones, he acknowledges, are more durable than written texts (that can be destroyed) and have, he now claims, been passed down through the centuries with great accuracy:
Which questionlesse should seeme from judgement to proceed.
For, when of Ages past wee looke in bookes to read,
Wee retchlesly discharge our memory of those.
So when injurious Time, such Monuments doth lose
(As what so great a Work, by Time that is not wrackt?)
Wee utterly forgoe that memorable act:
But when we lay it up within the minds of men,
They leave it their next Age; that, leaves it hers agen:
So strongly which (me thinks) doth for Tradition make,
As if you from the world it altogether take,
You utterly subvert Antiquitie thereby. (X.269-279)

Drayton also claims the “ancient British Rimes” that “our noble Bards [ . . . ] so divinely sung” (X.238-239) are older and more factual than any tales of the Greeks. For Drayton, all things British, written or oral, must be the oldest and the best in the world, they must be truthful, and they must have always been accessible (Curran 503).

Reaction, Reception, and Influence

Regional topographical literature was thriving during the Tudor and Stuart eras, and Drayton’s Poly-Olbion was the most inclusive of this genre. Nevertheless, while the Poly-Olbion is usually considered Drayton’s greatest work, and while many of his contemporaries admired Drayton for his immense undertaking, the first book did not go beyond one printing, and Drayton did not gain the fame and recognition he had anticipated during his lifetime. Drayton was bitter about the general public’s lack of interest in his work, and in the preface to the second section, he vehemently attacks this class of people, a strategy hardly designed to encourage their support:

But it hath fallen out otherwise; for instead of that comfort, which my noble friends [ . . . ] proposed as my due, I have met with barbarous Ignorance, and base Detraction; such a cloud hath the Devil drawne over the Worlds Judgement, whose opinion is in few yeares fallen so farre below all Ballatry, that the Lethargy is incurable. (Hebel 391)
While Renaissance scholars and antiquarians saw the significance of the work, scholar Henry Hallam may have been accurate when he said, “such a poem is essentially designed to instruct, and speaks to the understanding more than to the fancy” (34). Even though the *Poly-Olbion* was, perhaps too weighty to be popular among the general public, many historians, poets, and topographers, both Drayton’s contemporaries and later writers, looked to the *Poly-Olbion* for inspiration and direction in their own works. As early as 1621, William Slatyer (1587-1647) claimed Drayton’s influence on his own *History of Great Britanniae or Palae-Albion*, a chronicle written in both Latin and English (Aubin 21). In 1632, John Taylor (1580-1653), known as the “King’s water-poet” who spent thirty-five years traveling around England writing about the landscape, gave credit to Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* in the foreword to his *Taylor on Thame Isis*:

`Though (for the most part) in the tracts I tread,  
Of learned Camden, Speed, and Hollinshead  
And Drayton’s painful Polyolbyon,  
Whose fame shall live, despight oblivion,  
These are the guides I follow with pretence  
T’abbreviate and extract their Quint-essence. (Aubin 22)`

As Taylor traces the flow of the personified rivers and their tributaries, symbols that were immensely important to him, Taylor does indeed follow the “painful Polyolbyon.”

In his *Memoriall of Monarchs from Brute to King Charles*, Taylor recounts the life of King Arthur in a vein similar to Drayton’s retelling of Arthur:

`In twelve fet Battels he the Saxons beat,  
Great, and to make his Victories more great,  
The Faithleffe Sarazens he overcame,  
And made them honour high lehouah’s Name.  
The Noble order of the Table round,  
At Winchefter, his firft inuention found.  
Whilft he beyond the Sea fought to win Renowne,  
His Nephew Mordred did vfurpe his Crowne,`
But he return'd, and Mordred did confound,
And in the fight great Arthur got a wound,
That prou’d fo mortall, that immortally
It made him liue, although it made him dye.
Full fixteene yeeres the Diadem he wore,
And euery day gaind Honour more and more.
Arthur the great was buried at Glaftenbury. (282)

A century later, Drayton’s Poly-Olbion was still being sought as a guide by eighteenth-century historians. Alexander Pope (1688-1744) in 1713 drew material from Drayton’s “Herculean toyle” as he composed his Windsor Forest, and John Holland’s Tour of the Don provided evidence of the Poly-Olbion’s influence. While the Poly-Olbion gained little attention or appreciation from the general public during Drayton’s lifetime, it most certainly was looked upon by historians, topographers, and other scholars as a great monument to the English nation, one that reinforced regional and national pride. By combining several varied genres, Drayton created a hybrid poem that was acknowledged by historians and scholars to be truly an undertaking worth noting. Slatyer, Taylor, Pope—as well as many others—recognized Drayton’s work as a unique storehouse of information to which they could go to find what they needed to enhance their own works.

Drayton’s decision to include Arthur in his magnum opus was heavily influenced by the age in which he lived and by his own beliefs and opinions on Arthur. Drayton wanted to create an epic that would stand apart from all other works of literature. He also hoped to rescue Arthur from those skeptics who disregarded the historicity of Arthur and considered him only a figure of legend. Because Drayton believed his fellow authors had failed in their own attempts, Drayton wanted to create a national Arthurian epic that would surpass the epics of classical antiquity. Although the reception of the Poly-Olbion did not meet Drayton’s grand expectations, he did take the use of the
Arthurian legend to a new level. If Edmund Spenser expanded the Arthurian legacy by supplying a magnanimous Prince Arthur, Michael Drayton fortified it and glorified it by embedding the beloved Arthurian legends within the equally beloved British landscape.
CHAPTER 3

ARTHUR SUBVERTED: THE ANONYMOUS *TOM A LINCOLN*

While members of the British royal house appropriated Arthur to advance their political agendas, many authors, such as Spenser and Drayton, were similarly appropriating Arthur to glorify the Tudor and Stuart monarchs in order to gain favor or simply to praise and glorify the British nation. However, there were other authors who dared to appropriate Arthur, not for praise and glorification of the monarchy, but to point out problems and inconsistencies within the royal house that they believed needed to be addressed for the welfare of the nation as a whole. One of these was the author of *Tom a Lincoln*.

The English Renaissance, particularly the Jacobean Age, was an era rich with dramatic forms of entertainment. Although perhaps less studied than Renaissance poetry and prose, drama nevertheless played an important role both within and without the royal court. With the renewed interest in the classics, the comedies of Plautus and Terence and the tragedies of Seneca became popular and were studied at the Universities and Inns of Court. These plays influenced the up and coming playwrights of the day such as William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. The years between 1576, when the first permanent theatre in London was opened, and 1642, when the theatres were closed down, were considered the “gold years of drama” (Michelsson 25) in England. British citizens from all ranks and walks of life, from members of the royal court to middle-class merchants to lowly apprentices, all attended and enjoyed the dramas they saw performed on stage.

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32 For further information on courtly Renaissance drama, see Astington, John H. *English Court Theatre 1558-1642*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

33 The Inns of Court were the four legal societies in London having the exclusive right to admit persons to the bar; the four groups of buildings belonging to these societies are Gray’s Inn, Lincoln’s Inn, Inner Temple, and Middle Temple.
The specific subdivision known as Arthurian drama and entertainment, contrary
to general perception, was also quite popular during this time. Among the preferred
types of drama were court masques and civil pageants. Court masques, to which honored
guests were invited, were commonly a feature of some sort of celebration, such as a
wedding, a Christmas feast, or a coronation, and often served as formal entertainment
preceding a court ball. These court masques often included some sort of Arthurian
element or theme. Civic pageantry, outdoor public displays celebrating royal entries and
progresses, often included royal eulogies representing King Arthur as a symbol of
strength and monarchical power (Michelsson 18).

The majority of dramas presented were not only used for entertainment, but were
also meant to instruct the audience. Some plays openly informed the audience of history,
other cultures, or societies, while others more subtly taught the audience about
philosophy, morality, and appropriate behavior. As Elisabeth Michelsson points out,
sometimes an historical background was employed to “conveniently [...] disguise
topical matter which could not be openly discussed on the stage” (Michelsson 26). For
example, in 1581 Queen Elizabeth issued the “Statute of Silence,” making the discussion
of succession a capital offense (Gamble 66). Yet this did not stop authors such as
Thomas Hughes from approaching the subject under the facade of Arthurian historical
tragedy in his play The Misfortunes of Arthur, the first Arthurian drama written in
English (Maynadier 279). Some twenty years later the author or authors of Tom a
Lincoln followed Hughes’ example and used their own play as an opportunity to
comment upon the royal family and court and offer instruction to the ruling monarch of
the day, King James I.
Tom’s Discovery

*Tom a Lincoln*, although written sometime between 1611 and 1619, was lost for more than three hundred years, and was only recently discovered in 1973 among the papers of Sir John Coke (1563-1644), Secretary of State during the reign of Charles I (1625-1649), at his home in Melbourne Hall in Derbyshire. It is believed the play arrived at Coke’s home in 1634 from Gray’s Inn, where Coke’s son, Thomas, was in residence. When the manuscript was put up for sale, P. J. Croft, the Librarian of King’s College, Cambridge, identified the play as the work of dramatist Thomas Heywood because of the similarity between Heywood’s known works and the play (Proudfoot ix). However, since the first few leaves of the manuscript are missing, this claim is only conjecture and cannot be verified. Both G. R. Proudfoot and Muriel Bradbrook offer plausible arguments and evidence that Heywood most likely was not the author.\\(^{34}\)

Since 1973 the play’s author (or authors) have generally been considered unknown, although several other Renaissance figures have been suggested as the author, the most prominent being two men with the common name Morgan Evans. The name “Morganus: Evans:” appears at the end of the play’s epilogue. Croft identified this Evans as the son and heir of “John Evans of Lantwit Major, county Glamorgan, gentleman,” who, in 1607, entered Gray’s Inn as a student (Proudfoot x). However, there was another Morgan Evans whose life also coincides with the manuscript’s known dates and circumstances. This Evans was the son and heir of “John Evans of Llancoyd-vauder, county Glamorgan” who may have been a student at Gray’s Inn in 1605. No other evidence in the manuscript can be used to verify which, if either, of these Evanses is the

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\(^{34}\) See Proudfoot xxviii-xxxiv, and Bradbrook, “A New Jacobean Play,” 3-5. The original title of the play is also missing, but the editors, realizing the similarities between the play and the prose romance, tentatively, yet appropriately, titled it *Tom a Lincoln*. 
author or co-author of the play. However, it has been determined that the principal transcriptionist, of which there were five—indeed the man who copied over half the manuscript—was Morgan Evans.35

A definite connection has been established between the manuscript and Gray’s Inn, not only from the content of the play, but also from other papers found with the manuscript. The legal jokes and Latin legal terms throughout the text have caused critics to believe the play was probably written either by students at Gray’s Inn or by others to be performed at Gray’s Inn. The play also contains elements appropriate for festive entertainment at the Inn, as can be seen most prominently in the play’s epilogue, which refers to a marriage and contains several legal metaphors:

Thus is the mariage finisht & our play
but whether well or ill wee dare not say
selfe Cusinge Consciens, soone would guilty Cry
but thats againstse selfe-lovinge pollicy
first we must be convicted, then Confesse
our skilles arte, our artles guiltines.
the barres the stage, the men arraigned wee
yor Censures are our iudges, oh let them bee
milde, gentle, gracious, not to strict, to sower
to full of percinge gall, oh doe not lower
at these our weake indevors: but let love
go hande in hand wth iudgemt. (3062-3074)

Proudfoot suggests the author could have been a young law student with a passion for literature ranging from “Cicero or Mantuan to Ovid, Terence and jestbooks” (Proudfoot xxxv). However, it is equally possible that a professional dramatist, such as Thomas Heywood, wrote the play as well.36

35 Proudfoot suggests “the alternating stints of the three principal scribes and the presence of the other two may suggest that the copying was done under pressure of time and that continuous transcription was a high priority,” (xv).
36 Proudfoot gives extensive reasons why the play could have been written either by amateurs or a professional. See pages xxiv-xxvii.
**The Sources of *Tom a Lincoln***

Internal evidence suggests that the author of *Tom a Lincoln* was quite familiar with other popular romances and plays of the day, many of which were Arthurian in nature, and that he drew freely from them as he penned his play. The main source for the play is the prose romance *The Pleasant Historie of Tom a Lincolne, the Red-Rose Knight* by Richard Johnson (1573-1659?), the first part being published in 1599 and the second part in 1607. The author of the play borrowed from both parts of the romance, but he did so more extensively from the first part than from the second.

Although the plots of the prose romance and the play are similar, and while both works contain many of the same characters, the tone is quite different, because of the change in genre and because of the addition of the clown Rusticano. While the prose source is tragic in its culmination, the play ends on a comically happy note during the wedding festivities of Tom and Anglitora. Yet a theme carried from the romance to the play is the way in which King Arthur is portrayed. In both the romance and the play Arthur is not the sum of all chivalric virtues, nor is he the "recognizable version of the great Tudor myth [...] as the sum of all chivalric virtues" (Hirsch xi) that was so popularized and propagandized during the Renaissance. Quite the opposite, this Arthur is seen as a manipulating adulterer and a corrupt and sacrilegious ruler bent on achieving his own desires at the expense of others. This fact could explain why there is only one extant copy of the *Tom a Lincoln* manuscript.

The play also demonstrates borrowings from Thomas Hughes’ *The Misfortunes of Arthur*. But while Hughes treats his Arthurian matter with a serious and solemn tone, the 

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 Anthony Munda, author and translator of many of these, alleges: that “a Booke growing too bigge in quantitie, is Profitable neither to the minde nor the purse: for . . . the first Part will entice them to haue the second, [and] . . . a man grutched not so much at a little money, payd at seuerall times, as hee doth at once” (Hirsh xi).
author of *Tom a Lincoln* parodies the Arthurian elements in his play by employing two un-Arthurian characters, the fool Rusticano and Arthur's illegitimate son, Tom.\(^3^8\) Readers can also find links to many of Shakespeare's plays, such as *The Winter's Tale* in the character of Time, to *The Tempest*, and to *Cymbeline*,\(^3^9\) as well as Thomas Heywood's *The Golden Age*. The character of Rusticano quite possibly was borrowed from the character Markasius Rusticanus in *Gesta Grayorum* (1594).\(^4^0\) Borrowings can also be found from Thomas Deloney's ballad "A Mourmfull Dittie, on the death of Rosamond, King *Henry* the seconds Concubine," found in his *Garland of Good Will*.\(^4^1\)

**Arthur as Adulterer**

Because the first few pages of the manuscript are missing, the play begins in the middle of a scene in which Arthur's character is immediately established. Arthur is trying to obtain favors from Angellica, one of "Queen Gwiniuer's" ladies, and she is attempting to resist him by reminding him of his chivalric duties as a king and a knight:

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[... ] kinges are sworne to right
not wronge theyre subiects, knights ought still defend
distressed ladies, not to violate
or offer iniury to any creature
and will yor grace disgrace the name of knighthood [...]
In seekinge thus to wronge my chastity. (7-11, 13)
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But these pleas do not persuade Arthur, and when he threatens to kill himself if she does not give him what he seeks, Angellica yields. Arthur tells her to convince her father to let her enter a monastery "not distaunt many miles from Lincoln" (50) where they "weel

\(^{38}\) The name "Tom a Lincoln" was used extensively before the production of the play, and probably came from the famous bell of the Lincoln Cathedral, which was called "The Great Tom of Lincoln." According to Hirsch, Tom was a favorite English name for bells and foundlings (xiv). For more information on the "Great Tom of Lincoln" see Kendrick, A. F. *The Cathedral Church of Lincoln: A History and Description of its Fabric and a List of the Bishops.* London: G. Bell & Sons, 1928. 61-64.

\(^{39}\) For a list of specific references between *Tom a Lincoln* and Shakespeare's plays, see Proudfoot, xxviii.

\(^{40}\) *Gesta Grayorum, or the History of the high and mighty Prince, Henry, Prince of Purpoole, etc., who reigned and died A.D. 1594.*

\(^{41}\) See Deloney 297-302.
enjoy/Our pleasurable sports without annoy” (52-53). Angellica’s father Androgeo is
easily convinced, and:

[...] for a twelve months space
kinge Arthure did Angellica embrace
within the Cloyster with vnlawfull sports
and wanton dalliance. (136-139)

The affair between Arthur and Angellica results in the birth of a baby boy, Tom, who
Arthur sends away with a bag of coins around his neck to the country to be reared by an
old shepherd named Dorcus. The birth of the boy is recounted by the chorus Time, and
is reminiscent of the language in The Winter’s Tale:

I that have bene ere since the world began
I that was[e] since this orbed balls creation
I that have seen huge kingedomes devastacons
Doe heare prsent my selfe to yor still vivwe
Ould, aunciant, changinge, euer runninge time
first clad in gowld, next silver, next that brasse
And nowe in Iron, Inferiour to the rest
and yet moreheard then all. (123-130)

Angellica, unaware that it is Arthur who has taken the baby, is deceived by him into
believing “that some night trippinge fayry had bereav’d/her infant from her thus in short a
time” (201-202).

These first few pages of the manuscript are filled with elements that would have
angered the monarchy and nation. Because the Tudors and Stuarts upheld their royal
ancestor, Arthur, as a model of the perfect gentleman embodying the highest degree of
chivalry, virtue, and morality, the Arthur presented here would have been seen as an
affront and a challenge to the natural order of the state. It can be argued that the author of
Tom a Lincoln, through this scene, was commenting on the loose morals of the Jacobean
court, which had been heavily criticized. Kevin Sharpe, in his article “Stuart Monarchy
and Political Culture,” precisely conveys the historical context in which the play was written:

The ideals of devotion to the interests of the commonweal, service to the monarch, chivalric conduct and gallantry were compromised at times, especially in James I’s or Charles II’s reign, by factional war, personal vendetta, sexual scandals (like the Overbury affair), and unseemly, even vulgar, behaviour—not least by the king himself. From the last decade of the sixteenth century, we discern a growing disenchantment with the Court in the country. There emerged—not least from within the circles of the Court itself—a body of acerbic critics and satirists who lambasted the corruption and debauchery of the court and courtiers. (241)

The author of Tom a Lincoln fits nicely into the “body of acerbic critics and satirists” who criticized the corrupt and degenerate monarchy.

An inversion of the traditional Arthurian stories is also seen here with Arthur being guilty of adultery rather than Guenevere. This could be seen as an attack on James himself, an attack that could not have been made had Guenevere remained the adulteress and Arthur remained faithful. Although the author of Tom a Lincoln is unknown, if, as is likely, he was a student of the Inns of Court rather than a member of the royal court, the criticisms of the play may be read as illustrative of the criticisms the common people had concerning the scandalous monarchy.

The Illegitimate Son

The play, leaping over a span of sixteen years, shows young a Tom, believing he is “borne to wield the branded sword” (218), falling into the life of a highwayman, and encouraging his friends, Clitophon, Maldo, and Rusticano, to join him in a life disguised with “knightwhoods prowesse” (267). The fool Rusticano spouts off a list of chivalric heroes from past romances, claiming not one could “wthstand the Ambuscado, or bastinado/wherewith I wowld scarre them” (297-298). In naming such heroes as Bevis of
Southampton, Guy of Warwick, Robin Hood, and Amadis of Gaul, and boasting his prowess superior to theirs, Rusticano lampoons the popular romances and ballads of the early seventeenth century. As Margaret Spufford points out, the author may be ridiculing the fact that although the primary adventures of these heroes had long been forgotten, they were constantly being “truncated and rewritten” with new heroic feats and acts, making them popular subjects for new literature and entertainment (232-234).

After Tom, now called the Red Rose Knight, and his friends leave their shepherd’s world and become “Robin Hoods” in their own way, Dorcas pursues his adopted son and pleads with him to return home. When Tom refuses, Dorcas reveals to Tom that he is not his real father, and then dies from grief. These two momentous blows, the death of his foster-father and the uncertainty of his parentage, first brings Tom to self-pity, then causes him to embark on a quest to find his biological father:

Oh me most wretched and infortunate
whence is it that I haue deserud these woes
ye gratious heavens, let a poore youth aske
wherein he hath soe farre transgresst yor lawes
that you should heape a moles of such terours
upon mine (as yet) vnexperienct yeares
first that vnhappy I should be the death
of him that causeles hath preserued my life
next that I should be soe involud wih crosses
as not to knowe my byrth nor parentage
whether legittimate or basely borne [. . .]
I knowe I have some father
but whoe, or where is that know I not:
him will I seeke. (563-573, 1075-1077)

Attack on the Crown

At this point Arthur once again enters the action of the play, and is used to comment upon James I’s actions as a monarch. A tilt has just taken place, and Arthur
praises the prowess and chivalry of his knights Gallovine, Launcelott, and Tristram. But then Arthur’s tone changes and he begins to question the purpose of wars and acts of chivalry demonstrated in tournaments and tilts:

Why dare we empty all our vaynes in warrs?
why are we characterd wth wounds and scarrs?
why dare we all things but for honowres name;
and vertues prize o[r?] repetations fame. (631-634)

These pacifist musings from King Arthur, a king known for his mighty prowess, thirst for battle, and grand victories are quite unexpected, but not if viewed as a provocative allusion to the image of James as Rex Pacificus. James was known to hate violence and war, and this pacifism was often viewed unfavorably. Indeed, many critics called James a coward (Smith 3-4).

When James VI of Scotland took the throne as James I of England he united the crowns of Scotland and England. Proclaiming himself the “Prince of Peace, he proposed to unite the laws and customs of the two countries into one kingdom, and make peace with England’s enemies, France and Spain. While James did not succeed at the first task, he did use the title “King of Great Britain” from 1604 onward to signify the unification of the two countries under one monarch, and he inscribed on his coins “Henricu rosas, regna Jacobus,” meaning “Henry united the roses, James the kingdoms” (Bradbrook, “Shakespeare” 92). Concerning the second goal, James did succeed in ending the war with Spain, and he attempted to placate both the Protestants and Catholics. While this peace policy was at first looked on with favor, James’ British subjects soon realized that it was little more than a “dishonourable policy of appeasement towards Spain, made worse by his refusal to give military aid to the Protestant allies in the Thirty Years’ War” (Michelsson 258).
While Arthur is questioning the necessity of war, he is interrupted with disturbing news. Tom is then summoned to King Arthur’s court after Arthur finds out:

there are a route of rebells newly swarmde
at Barnesdales heath wher, as thy robbe & spoyle
All weary Passengers & borderinge townes
Whose the Comaunder of this rascall Crewe
The Redrose knight they stile him. (638-642)

When Tom arrives at court, Arthur pardons him and his followers, and then Tom challenges Arthur to combat. While the combat itself takes place off stage, Lancelot and Gallowine offer a commentary, finally revealing that “the knight/doth plucke the king froms saddle by sterne might” (827-828). The following two pages are missing from the manuscript, and any light on Arthur’s defeat is lost. Yet, the fact that the son of King Arthur, a bastard son no less, defeats his father, the progenitor of the Tudor and Stuart lines, is yet another commentary, and perhaps a warning, of what may occur if the loose morality of the Jacobean court continued.

As the play progresses, Tom goes to France in battle and proves himself worthy of being a knight in the court of King Arthur, who it turns out, has only been unhorsed, not killed. When Tom returns to England with French prisoners, Arthur seeks to award his “Loyall subjects” for their “worthy service done your kinge and Countrey” (1054-1055), and offers to “engrave thy name in Annales pende/vntill æternity shall have an ende” (1064-1065). But Tom refuses any such honor, and only asks for “one boon.” In fact, he begins by listing the favors he does not want:

tis not for wealth the misers sacred god
nor for ambition lofty myndes doe ayme at
Nor yet for lands (the rusticks demy god
neither for livinge of some statefallen men
(as courtiers vse doe sue, beg or crave. (1070-1075)
Tom’s refusal to accept material honors from Arthur is significant, and could be thinly veiled criticism of James’ practice of excessively handing out favors. It was widely known, but not so widely approved, that James was partial to lavishing material rewards such as land and money on his courtiers and royal petitioners. This habit was so frequent and problematic that by 1608 the crown’s debt had risen to almost £600,000 (Smith 148).

Although Arthur realizes the Red Rose knight is his son, he never reveals his parentage throughout the play, and, in fact, encourages Tom on his quest to find his father, again revealing his deceptive and manipulative side:

Tis Booties to dissuade thy firm resolve
Cowld I recall my words thow showldst not goe
but kinges most neuer violat theyr promise
neither will I adewe brave Tom a Lincolne
Let fortune euer lacky by thy side
auspicious vertue euer be thy guide. (1079-1084)

Arthur’s selfishness is also evident in this scene, when Arthur, rather than placing shame upon himself by admitting to be Tom’s father, keeps it a secret, therefore denying Tom any success in his quest.

**Like Father, Like Son**

As Tom sets off with his companions Lancelot, Gallowine, Tristram, and Rusticano, on the quest for his father, Time fills in a span of six years by relating the distant lands the knights and clown have traveled to, including Spain, Italy, Turkey, Africa, and Morocco. Eventually the group ends up in the land of the Amazons, also referred to as the Fairys, where the author takes the opportunity to again comment on the Jacobean court. Including the Amazons in the play could have been the playwright’s reminder to the audience of Queen Elizabeth who was shown as an Amazon after England’s defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. That the characterization of Elizabeth
as an Amazon was widely known is demonstrated in a poem by Anne Bradstreet that refers to Queen Elizabeth as “Our Amazon in th’ Camp of Tilbury” (64). But whereas Elizabeth was also known as the “Virgin Queene,” the Amazons of *Tom a Lincoln* are not hesitant to partake in promiscuous activities with the knights. These Amazons, at the request of Caelia, the Fairy Queen, prepare a sumptuous banquet for the men, and call upon various gods, such as Venus, Bachus, and Cupid, to join the feast, in which they offer themselves to the men:

> with armes enfowldinge hearts embraces  
> Brave Brittaynes Cheare, ye are welcome heare  
> Our virgins treasures open to yow  
> The caske vnlocke, the lids a smocke  
> such sweet, sweet theffe can nere vndo yow. (1407-1411)

The rest of the song contains many sexual innuendoes and jokes that can be interpreted in different ways. First, and most obviously, the sexual encounters, as related by Rusticano who is not taking part, could be again referring to the immorality of the Jacobean court:

> but all the british knights  
> (except my self/), are close in bed wth the ladyes: heere two men and one lady  
> heere 3 men: 12 lasses: heere one & one by eache, in so much that theyr beds make more noise, than any foure creeking wheeles, of any dunkart in  
> Lincolne: they exclude me for a wrangler: I can get noe Roome amongst them. (1659-1665)

The scene could also be making fun of traditional chivalric romance, (de Sousa 326) or could simply be inserted to add to the comedy of the play. Whatever the reason, the audience most likely would have been reminded of the court. The fact that the clown Rusticano is excluded from the orgies could indicate the division between the royalty and courtiers and the lower class of commoners. Although Rusticano mistakenly elevates his
status among his knightly companions, he is not considered by them to be in the same class, but is simply known as the "Captaines jester or his foole" (1766). This division of upper and lower classes, and the knights' exclusion of Rusticano from their activities, could be a subtle reference to James' dislike of being with crowds of his subjects, who, "despised and almost hated" him for his attitude toward them (Smith 4).

Toward the end of the play, Tom's liaison with Caelia comes back to haunt him--and perhaps serves as a warning against such sexual freedom--as he is sailing for England with his bride-to-be, Anglitora, the daughter of Prester John, King of the Indies, and his Queen Bellamy. Caelia, having given birth to Tom's son, known as the Fairy Prince, is still mourning her loss of Tom. When she sees from atop a rock Tom's ship sailing away from her, she writes a letter to Tom and then kills herself:

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this [letter] haue I writte
vnto my lord; my self will carry it
for clos'd within a seare cloth: and kept sure
from tincture of the water: 'bout this necke
fast will I tye it, this done will I throw
my self into the Ocean: twas my vowe
& Ile obserue it. (2756-2762)
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Caelia's body is found floating beside Tom's ship in a scene similar to the Lancelot/Elaine affair where Lancelot finds the body of Elaine, who had given birth to his son Galahad, floating on a barge. When Tom sees the body, realizes it is that of Caelia, and reads the letter which "contained therein her loyall constancy/wch greatly did assault he manlike breast" (2878-2879), Tom's "heart/proued him as guilty of her present death," (2873-2874). Yet Tom's grief and guilt is shortlived, and he shows no further remorse for his behavior and subsequent desertion of Caelia.

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47 As Olive Busby points out, the clown or fool of the later Renaissance drama often had a "mistaken idea of his importance and wisdom" (45).
While in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* Arthur’s magnanimity is constantly visible, there are only a few moments in *Tom a Lincoln* where Arthur’s magnanimity as a knight and a king shines through. The play does not completely demean the Arthur of the traditional legends. However, even Arthur’s magnanimity seems to be for show only in *Tom a Lincoln*, and does not penetrate into the moral or ethical fibers of Arthur’s character. The remainder of the time Arthur is revealed for who he really is—a petty king who abuses his power and uses his privilege of birth to take advantage of others and get what he wants. This is seen particularly when Arthur treats his French prisoners as guests and allows them to participate in courtly events, thus proving to them that “Arthur keepes a princely Corte” (1112).

Arthur is also shown to enjoy praise and glory—even though undeserved—not only from his knights but also from other kings and rulers. Vanity and conceit were also traits of James, who in 1604, boasted:

> Shall it ever be blotted out of my mind how at my first entry into this kingdom, the people of all sorts rid and ran, nay rather flew to meet me; their eyes flaming nothing but sparks of affection, their mouths and tongues uttering nothing but sounds of joy, their hands, feet and all the rest of their members in their gestures discovering a passionate longing and earnestness to meet and embrace their new sovereign. (Smith 4)

Yet even as James spoke these words, he had already lost favor with his subjects and was looked upon with suspicion. Although Arthur’s knights and subjects can not see these flaws in their king, the audience immediately would have recognized Arthur as a deceitful and abusive king, and would have connected him to James.

Besides being a critique of the Jacobean court and King James himself, *Tom a Lincoln* includes other scenes and elements that could be taken as satirizing the ideals of chivalry and knighthood, lampooning the Catholic church, and attacking church and state.
Throughout the play the ideals of chivalry and knighthood are all brought into question, first as having degenerated through King Arthur and then through the comic exaggeration of Tom’s excessive bravado. The techniques employed by the author move the play into the genre of burlesque comedy in which serious subjects, such as knighthood, are treated carelessly. Much of the attack on authority, be it church or state, is hidden behind the comic actions and insults of the fool Rusticano. This in itself foregrounds the burlesque qualities of the play. But the play advances even beyond the burlesque and the critique of royal society and passes into the realm of satire. By employing the burlesque comic techniques, the playwright, through laughter, encourages a remodeling of court society. The play criticizes the vice and folly of King Arthur in order to call back James and his court to the responsibilities and expectations they must uphold as the ruling force of Britain.

While *Tom a Lincoln* was not the only play to be used as a critique of the behavior of the royal court with its hollow claims of integrity, artificial honor, “elaborate mottoes, and long-winded symbolism” (Barber, *King Arthur* 144), the fact that the play was most likely written by amateurs, students of Gray’s Inn, yet embodies characteristics of a professional playwright, makes the play all the more intriguing. It shows that the author, probably himself a commoner, was well aware of the general public’s disapproval of the monarchy and court.

The fact that there is only one extant copy of *Tom a Lincoln* may say something about how it was received by the Gray’s Inn audience, or at court, if it was indeed performed there. It is also easy to assume that the missing pages in the middle of the manuscript, ones that would have probably recounted the “unhorsing of King Arthur by the Red Rose Knight at a tournament and the Knight’s invasion of France” (Proudfoot
xii), may be due to the unpopular reception of their contents. However, as Michelsson points out, "since the publication of a literary work produced at the Inns of Court was rare" (284), this may also account for the lack of copies, and why the manuscript never made it to the printer.

Whatever the circumstances behind this situation, *Tom a Lincoln* reveals that Arthuriana was employed during the Renaissance in subversive texts as well as texts for the glorification of England and the monarchy. Even a fallen and debased Arthur could be useful if it reflected the problems of the age and called for positive changes within the monarchy.
CONCLUSION

ARTHUR: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Literary texts created in the Renaissance were rarely isolated from the social, political, religious, and cultural currents of the age, and *The Faerie Queene*, the *Poly-Olbion*, and *Tom a Lincoln* are no exceptions. How and why these texts were written were influenced, not only by the authors' own beliefs and opinions on the world around him, but also by audience demand. Just as the Arthurian legend underwent changes and shifts as it was carried through the Middle Ages--from Welsh poems, to chronicles, to romances--the legends, rather than dying or falling into an "artistic limbo" (Merriman 34), simply underwent another shift during the Renaissance, one that relied heavily on the political elements of the day. Compared to the extensive number of brilliant Arthurian texts produced during the Middle Ages, it is easy to mistake the two centuries that followed in the shadow of such a creative era as an Arthurian Dark Age. But it is perhaps only due to the nearly eight hundred year advantage of the Middle Ages over the Renaissance, and the exceptionally powerful influence of the Victorian reinterpretation of Arthur, that the Renaissance has been labeled as such.

To better understand the *Poly-Olbion, The Faerie Queene*, and *Tom a Lincoln*, it is essential to understand the Renaissance and the changes that were taking place. The Renaissance was a time of change and, as the word itself suggests, rebirth. The Britons were emerging from the Middle Ages into a new and expanding world of education and enlightenment. The Battle of the Books initiated by Polydore Vergil and John Leland created a wave of skepticism over the truthfulness and accuracy of Middle Age chronicles and histories. Many scholars believe the people of the Renaissance were eager to leave
behind the primitive elements of the Middle Ages and embrace the new elements of the enlightened world. Included in these discarded elements, according to these scholars, were the Arthurian legends.

Yet this is not so. During the Renaissance, the Arthurian romances of the Middle Ages were more popular and more widely read than ever before. Scholars and other historians denounced the romances for their immortality, their crude form, and their popularity with uncultured readers. However, according to Merriman, the large number of chivalric romances published in “expensive folios--such as all the Tudor editions of Malory--indicates that the audience for these works was still extensive in aristocratic or moneyed circles” (Merriman 33). Authors in the Renaissance who chose to employ the Arthurian legend, rather than repeating the often-told Arthurian romances, struck out on new literary roads and took the Arthurian legend in new directions.

In The Faerie Queene Spenser not only created a new romanticized Arthur based on the old Arthurian tradition, but created a new poetic stanza in which to tell his new story. In his treatment of Arthur he combined the past glory of a great and noble hero with the present glory of the Virgin Queen to create one epic tale celebrating his nation’s heritage. Even though the action of the poem takes place in a romantic and mythical land, Spenser intended it to relate to Renaissance England. Spenser accomplished this by creating an epic poem used to glorify the past of Arthur and the present of Queen Elizabeth.

The patriotic fervor that swept across Britain during the Renaissance developed a new breed of writers bent on glorifying their country. Drayton in his Poly-Olbion brings According to the Arthurian Handbook, “Medieval storytellers seldom strove to be original. Originality was not favored as highly as it came to be in later times. Medieval minds valued authority and tradition; medieval authors often claimed to be drawing on previous authors, adapting or translating, even when they were not. Storytellers tended to work with recognized bodies of material. And the Arthurian legend in its great medieval development was one such body [...] referred to as the Matter of Britain” (Lacy 2).
up the rear of a long line of patriotic British topographers, antiquarians, historians, and poets such as John Leland, Humphrey Llyud, John Dee, William Warner, Raphael Holinshed, John Stow, William Camden, and Samuel Daniel, who desired to exalt and honor their homeland through their writing. Drayton, in his own attempt at British glorification, combined several genres--poetry, allegory, history, chronicle, topography, and geography--and surveyed all thirty counties in England and Wales. In his ambitious desire to retain the past, Drayton included all elements of the Arthurian legend in the hopes of saving for posterity the extant stories of Arthur. Drayton believed, correctly, that the people of his age no longer believed that an historical Arthur ever existed, and Drayton, not being able to distinguish the truly historic elements from the mythical, sought to preserve as much of the legend as he could. Although Drayton’s poem was not the success he hoped it would be, and although it cannot be considered a purely Arthurian work, it does demonstrate Drayton’s affection for the Arthurian tradition, and reflects the popularity of Arthur through the numerous Arthurian places and adventures Drayton wrote about.

The anonymous author of *Tom a Lincoln* took a very different route and used the Arthurian legend to draw attention to the faults of the monarchy. The author created a subverted Arthur that stands in sharp contrast to the traditional Arthur. The Arthur of *Tom a Lincoln* is an unfaithful, deceptive, vain, conceited, and petty king who takes advantage of his position and power to exact what he wants from others. By molding Arthur into a satiric figure, the author hoped to draw attention to the less favorable actions of King James and his courtiers and spur change within royal society. Although the author of *Tom a Lincoln* is unknown, the play shows that the author, most likely a commoner, was knowledgeable of the general public’s disapproval of the monarchy and
court. Although the play never made it to publication and there is only one known surviving copy, Tom a Lincoln is just one example of the ways in which Arthur was subverted in order to stimulate recognition and resolution of wrong-doing.

While these three texts are unique in their handling of the legend, they certainly were not the only Arthurian texts produced during the Renaissance. Although none of these texts has come down to twenty-first century readers in its entirety--both The Faerie Queene and the Poly-Olbion were left unfinished, and Tom a Lincoln has missing pages--the importance of the Arthurian legend is clearly visible in each one. These works are exemplary of the wide range of forms employing Arthur in this era. Many more works were produced that promoted both Arthur's historicity and his status as a literary figure, and this trend continued through the seventeenth century and into the Victorian and Romantic Ages.

Today Arthur and his knights of the Round Table are more popular than ever. Archeologists and historians are working together in search of some piece of concrete evidence to prove that an Arthur did exist. These searches demonstrate that there are still people who want to believe that the thousands of legends created in the last fifteen hundred years were built around an historical figure. Representations of Arthur and his knights can be found on the stage, in the movie theatre, in video games, and on television. In the local grocery store King Arthur's Flour can be purchased and a weekend getaway can be experienced at the Excalibur Hotel in Las Vegas, complete with medieval castle, moat, and fire-breathing dragon. Just as the Elizabethans reinterpreted the Arthurian legends to fit the changing times in which they lived, Arthur and all aspects of the legend are being appropriated to fit into today's post-modern society. The legend has been retold as a science fiction tale set a thousand years in the future in Camelot 3000, and has
been reinterpreted from a feminist point of view in the *Mists of Avalon*. Just as Arthur was held in fascination for 1500 years by people of all ages, places, and walks of life, Arthur continues to hold the twenty-first century in almost unexplainable fascination. Considering the expansive amount of Arthuriana found around the world today, there is no danger that the legends of Arthur will ever be forgotten.
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