

Memory, Monarchy, and Identity on the “Scepter’d Isle”: Constructing Identity  
Through Historical Fiction in Renaissance England and France

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## **Dedication**

To my husband, Jay, and Milou and Annie, whom I dearly miss.

## Abstract

This dissertation examines the ways in which early modern English and French fiction writers revise history by writing new, imaginative texts that allow them to recover events and figures that are at times poorly documented in historical record. These writers use fiction's forms and conventions to present rivaling images of nationhood to those of the historical sources they are drawn from. By moving away from historical sources, such as chronicle histories, these fictional texts also move away from the moralizing purposes of Renaissance histories, which are supposed to offer ideal, patriotic models, usually in the great kings and queens of the past. Instead these texts destabilize historical kings and queens as didactic models, figuratively dethroning them. For they elevate different heroes and different voices, often individuals of little or dubious importance, men and women from all ranks who would be forgotten or denied in historical genres. In so doing, they allow new voices and figures to emerge to play a role in constructing national identity through literature. This project contrasts the aristocratic images of French identity proposed by the sixteenth-century French Queen, Marguerite de Navarre, and the seventeenth-century French aristocrat, Mme de Lafayette, to the bourgeois models of English identity depicted in late Elizabethan literature by Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Thomas Nashe, and Thomas Deloney. In analyzing these fictions, this dissertation reveals fiction's important role in revising and challenging written history as well as the possibilities and constraints that fiction writers imagine for themselves and their countrywomen and countrymen in shaping themselves and their emerging nations, past, present, and future.

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## Chapter 1:

### Memory, Monarchy and Identity in Renaissance England and France

Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, two of the most influential writers and theorists of Elizabethan literature, famously attempt to distinguish between history and fiction, two species of writing that overlap considerably during the Renaissance. First in Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, widely circulated in manuscript in the late 1570s and published in 1595, and later in Spenser's "Letter to the Authors," appended to the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, they both claim that history and fiction differ in their relationship to factual truth. Their distinction between the two types of discourse seems straightforward enough. Spenser, presumably paraphrasing Sidney, emphasizes the restraints placed on a Renaissance Historiographer, claiming he is bound to narrate "affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions" (716). The Poet, the producer of fiction, on the other hand, finds greater liberty to "thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recouring to the thinges forepaste, and diuining of things to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all" (716). History is concerned with verifiable facts, and documentable and documented events; fiction, by contrast, may draw from history for events, settings, and even figures to populate its stories, but it is free to explore the past through the lens of the imagination. When fiction writers visit the past, they venture into the realm of historic possibility, imagining new understandings of and lending new voices to history. They are free to recover lost histories, or even to imagine new images of the past, as it could, or perhaps, should be. As Sidney asserts in his *Defence of Poesy*, the world that the historian documents is the world as Nature created it, with all of its faults and flaws: history's

world “is brazen,” while “the poets only deliver a golden” (805).<sup>1</sup> When fiction writers use historical matter for their works of art, Sidney and Spenser imply that they can invent the past anew.

### **“Literary Nationhood”**

In works of historical fiction, Renaissance writers re-imagine the stories that shape their countries and themselves. Investigating examples of English historical fiction written by middle ranked writers reveals that England’s national identity is highly contested; these writers are urgent to lend their voices to writing their national histories, and in stories from history, they write English identity. Yet the way England writes its history cannot be understood fully on its own, and previous studies that attempt to understand the ways that England writes national identity in the Renaissance tend to neglect the greater European political context in which “England” emerges. As England’s traditional enemy and a country that profoundly shapes England’s history (and vice versa), France, with its own body of historical fiction, provides an illuminating contrast.

Similar to England, France’s national literary tradition also has its roots in the Renaissance. In the sixteenth century, the word *patrie* enters the language “as a regular

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney follows Aristotle who “distinguishes sharply between history and poetry, saying that history records what has happened, while poetry tells us the kinds of things that might happen (*Poetics* 1415b5-6)” (S.K. Heninger, Jr., et al. “The Interface Between Poetry and History: Gascoigne, Spenser, Drayton.” *Proceeds of the Renaissance Discussion Circle, South Atlantic Modern Language Association, 1988*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of NC P, 1990. 109). In the description of the world as either brazen or golden, he alludes to the classical belief in the “Four Ages of Man,” an idea that came to English Renaissance writers and readers through Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*.

element of discourse” (Greenfield 103). The notion of *patrie*, with its “classical connotations” as “the supreme object of loyalty and pride of the citizens” (Greenfield 103), equally enters the minds and hearts of French writers, who themselves seek to define France’s past. England’s historical identity is open to interpretation by middling writers, who imagine a larger role for themselves in writing their national history; by contrast, French royals and aristocrats revise France’s history to articulate an elite French identity.

Renaissance historical fiction participates in creating the ideological foundations for the modern nation states that England and France eventually become, as scholars such as Richard Helgerson, Timothy Hampton, Philip Schwyzer, Andrew Hadfield, Joan DeJean, and Wily Maley analyze. Hadfield postulates that sixteenth-century literature is particularly preoccupied with questions of national identity because “The problem of national identity required urgent attention . . . principally owing to the Reformation and the consequent stress placed on the need to establish vernacular languages and cultures in each respective European country” (9).

The ideas of “nation” and “national identity,” however, remain difficult concepts to reconcile with the historical period. Many scholars claim the related ideas of nation and nationalism are “product[s] of the second half of the eighteenth century,” ideas that emerge from the Enlightenment and are fully embodied in the great social Revolutions of France and the United States (Schwyzer 8). Still others “believe that nations and nationalists have existed much longer than that, if not forever,” and see in examples such as Shakespeare’s *Henry V* a fully articulated concept of nation (Schwyzer 8-9). However, Anthony D. Smith’s definition that a nation is “*a named human population*

*sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members*"

(Smith's emphasis) suggests that Renaissance England and France cannot be perceived as nations (*National Identity* 14). Renaissance systems of social ranks did not allow for "all members" to share "common legal rights and duties" and dynastic politics continued to determine the shape of Renaissance states.

Because a sense of nationalism requires a people to imagine social and political ties to others with whom they have very little in common, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community" (6).<sup>2</sup> Building on Anderson's definition of "nation," Timothy Hampton posits that, while nations in the modern sense of the term, do not exist in Renaissance England or France, a "sense of literary 'nationhood'" does circulate in French and English literature from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hampton therefore argues that Renaissance literature plays a vital part in establishing the necessary ideological preconditions on which modern "nationalism" could flourish.

In the introduction to *Nationalism*, Anthony D. Smith and John Hutchinson similarly locate not the nation, but the origins of nationalist sentiment in England in the

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson theorizes that the concept of "nation" rests on "three paradoxes": "(1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists. (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept—in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender—vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, 'Greek' nationality is sui generis. (3) The 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence" (5). He goes on to point out that nationalism has never "produced its own grand thinkers" (5) and therefore concludes that the nation "is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). Anderson argues that nationalism has its roots in Enlightenment thought.

sixteenth century. They suggest that nationalism begins with the bourgeoisie, and argue further that “the parallel” that

the middle strata . . . drew between the election and persecution of the children of Israel and their own lot, their Old Testament interpretation of their sufferings at the hands of hostile state authorities, gave a powerful impetus to the growth of national sentiment among the middle strata in England . . . in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. (*Nationalism* Introduction 6)

For Smith and Hutchinson, the middling ranks’ very ability to conceive of themselves as a collectivity whose fortunes and fates are bound together against opposing forces allows for a sense of nationalism to begin.

This sense of nationalism began to assume tangible form in historical fiction. Literature contributed to and reflected what Liah Greenfield describes as “a fundamental change” that “the political discourse underwent” in England under Elizabeth I (37). She notes that the terms “nation,” “state,” “commonwealth,” and “country,” though widespread in all sorts of writings, were used ambiguously, but “the concepts and ideas with which these terms came to be associated denoted a position in the contest over sovereignty within a polity” (38). Nationalism was not a fully articulated concept in Elizabethan England, but nationalistic conceptions of England were beginning to circulate.

Conceptualizing nationhood in sixteenth-century France was more difficult; France lacked a defined territory with clear borders and a national language. For unlike England, which was relatively easy to conceive of as an autonomous country with a

defined territory because of its location on an island,<sup>3</sup> Renaissance France remained divided in smaller kingdoms and territories, entangled in religious wars and border disputes with Spain, and its national boundaries were undefined until the seventeenth century. Yet a united France was beginning to emerge under the reigns of the Valois monarchs in the mid-sixteenth century. Furthermore, the first two Angoulême monarchs, François I and Henri II, created a “professional bureaucracy” and “centralization increased dramatically” under them (Greenfield 104). The increased power of the crown and its administration dramatically decreased “the extent to which previously powerful aristocratic families could influence the formation of royal policies” (Greenfield 104). A French proto-nation emerged from this restructuring, but it awarded a significantly reduced political role to the formerly powerful aristocracy. Writing France’s history to recuperate a significant social place for themselves must have felt urgent to aristocrats who were watching their privilege and influence diminish.

Despite their differences, both English and French literary culture in the Renaissance is shaped by social groups who claim a stake in writing their national histories. In this way, they attempt to define their past, present, and national future. They sometimes locate images of national identity in literary representations of historical monarchs (however positive or negative these images may be), but just as often they locate national identity in other figures or institutions, and especially in characters whose concerns and interests resemble their own.

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that many English in the Renaissance tend to ignore the reality that England is not as Shakespeare’s John of Gaunt proclaims, a “scepter’d isle” (*Richard II* 2.1.40), a self-contained kingdom, as Willy Maley, Andrew Hadfield, and Philip Schwyzer, point out.

## **History, Fiction, and their Forms**

In my opening remarks about the differences between Renaissance fiction and history, I show that Spenser and Sidney both attempt to establish definitive boundaries between these historical and fictional writings. Nevertheless, their distinctions are not as decisive as they might appear. For one thing, Sidney and Spenser go on to argue, as other Renaissance writers and humanist scholars in England and France do, that history and fiction serve similar social purposes and are judged according to the same standard of moral truth. Fiction, like history, is supposed to “be didactic, and [teach] ... the lessons ... of personal morality and the workings of Providence” (Levy ix). Ideally, they both teach “moral lessons” (Matchinske 176). For Spenser and Sidney, history and fiction are both supposed to speak “of verities, reflecting the totality of God’s universal plan” (Matchinske 176).

In formal considerations as well, it is difficult to delineate between many Renaissance historical and fictional writings. Certainly the chronicle form was still the most influential genre of historical writing with the most clearly defined generic conventions in Europe in the Renaissance. Yet by the late sixteenth century, active chronicle writing in England was beginning to decline, even if the genre still remained an important and highly influential form among the reading and writing public. In sixteenth-century France, too, “history” was told in forms that rivaled the chronicles, such as pamphlets, Huguenot publications, and fictional texts (Bell 99). While French chronicles continued to be produced on behalf of early modern French monarchs, they also began to be viewed as “the State’s historical discourse, since it was commonly

accepted to be the product of a particular interest,” the crown (Apostolides 68). The historical past, the stories from chronicle history, provided the substance for diverse and wide-ranging forms of writing, some that were perceived as historical genres, and others that may not have been interpreted as historical. D.R. Woolf argues that Renaissance historical texts include many “complementary forms” that emerge “from the carcass of the chronicle” (*Reading History* 8). Among them are genres of writing that would today be considered specifically fictional; Woolf claims that “poems, plays, antiquarian tracts, humanist ‘politic histories,’ and via a slightly different route connected more directly with religious concerns, biographies of humbler sorts of folk” are all inheritors of chronicle history (8). Megan Matchinske follows Woolf, F.J. Levy, Arthur B. Ferguson, Barbara Shapiro, and others, in asserting that “in early modern England, ‘history’ was something of a catchall—an eclectic mix of forms and functions” (176).

If what precisely constituted written history was difficult to define, the matter of history, the very substance of the stories about the past, was wildly popular. The stories told in chronicle histories became the subjects—revisited, retold, repackaged, and recycled time and again—of literary works and newly emerging historical genres. Nevertheless, while the substance of history was being rehashed in generic forms other than the chronicles, the chronicle remained the “Ur-genre” of Renaissance written history (Helgerson 11), and it carried with it the authority as well as the problems and constraints of its universalizing trajectory. Indeed, the chronicle form demanded a great deal of its writers: it required the chronicler to tell a complete history (from pre-historical origins up to the present), full of moral instruction, while also discovering in the past a sense of providence at work for the nation. Bart van Es explains that “while

on close inspection the absence of evidence on which to base the early history is regularly acknowledged, the template set up by Geoffrey of Monmouth and other authorities remains: the chronicle structure, with its reliance on a series of famous incidents and supposedly ancient literary ‘moniments,’ soon reins in any attempt by the chronicler to take a different course” (9).

D.R. Woolf, Levy, and others have shown that the chronicle was in decline in England, yet they also assert that it still remained the central historiographical form, providing both content and narrative techniques for conceptualizing the past. Levy, Woolf, and Annabel Patterson illustrate that the chronicle continued to shape most individuals’ understanding of the past in profound and far-reaching ways, and chronicle texts remained primary sources for the diverse alternate forms of historical writings. Scholarship on early modern history has in fact begun to challenge perceptions of who was reading Elizabethan chronicles and in what contexts they were read.

Patterson, for example, convincingly argues that the reading public for Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, the most influential Elizabethan chronicle history, was composed largely of individuals from the middle ranks. Furthermore, the readers were slow to tire of the text, for they continued to read it for many years after its final publication. She illustrates that the monumental work remained as influential as it did for these readers because it was crafted by people who shared many of their concerns. The work itself was

conceived and executed by an alliance of middle-class entrepreneurs,  
bookmen and bookish persons, reform-minded clergymen and . . .  
parliamentarians . . . And if there were no physical or institutional spaces

that were, by their very nature, democratic and egalitarian in late Elizabethan England, where in the 1570s educational seminars on scriptural exegesis were banned just because they were public and well attended, one may imagine that civic-minded people (though they might have disagreed on many other matters) could have agreed to construct a *textual* space—the huge space of the *Chronicles*—in which the public’s right to information could to some extent be satisfied. (20-21)

Patterson’s work challenges us to reconsider who produced this text and for whom, and to interrogate the social and cultural role it played for a wide readership of middle ranked people well after the work was out of print.

While the chronicles maintained an important place in shaping late Tudor historical thought, the chronicle was challenged by other forms (such as biographies, politic histories, city annals, and Antiquarian discourse). These texts performed some of the same functions in narrating the past as the chronicles, but they also offered the flexibility of briefer, and more narrowly focused formats that allowed writers to scrutinize specific figures, events, or historical mysteries. They equally offered space for writers to question historical evidence without burdening them to account for the whole history of the country. These new approaches to historical research provoked shifts in ideas about historical truth as well. For this reason, scholars have pointed to the late Elizabethan and early Stuart eras as a period of change in perceptions of history and historical writing in England. F. Smith Fussner, for example, claims that a veritable “historical revolution” took place in Tudor England, while D.R. Woolf, on the other

hand, tempers the claim. Woolf asserts that this period's most profound contribution to changing notions of history

lay in the much longer-lasting change in sensibility, taste, and manners that turned history first from the minor pastime of a small number of monastic chroniclers and civic officials into a major area of study and leisurely pursuit of university students, lawyers, aspiring courtiers, and ordinary readers, and thence into a much more broadly appealing genre that straddles the worlds of scholarship and literary culture. (7)

In fact, the widespread and continued appeal of the chronicles did as much to lay the groundwork for changing perceptions of history as humanist scholarship. The

Renaissance may never have produced a true historical manifesto that overhauled historical methodology or historiography, yet preoccupation with the past allowed historical discourse to flourish in wide ranging, and only quasi-historical forms.

Chronicle history, which in the medieval past was written and read by elite groups of monastic chroniclers, passed into the hands of a much larger reading public composed of a more diverse segment of the population in Renaissance England. A broader reading and writing public could access history and rewrite it; although control of history was lost, its didactic and patriotic influence on readers and writers was not.

Although the reading public for the French chronicles remained elite and elitist as Jean-Marie Apostolidès, Orest Ranum, Peter Burke, and others argue, at the same time, the tales and morals of French history became the subjects of literary writings as well. While many of these writers continued to produce written histories as panegyrics to Renaissance French monarchs, others sought to produce rival histories that

recuperated the silenced voices of groups who were otherwise written out of the chronicles, the official histories of the French absolutist regimes. For example, Jean-Marie Apostolidès indicates that “the conquered Protestants and the dispossessed feudal nobility were to engage in increased historical research in order to oppose the reigning ideology. Boulainvilliers, for example, would attempt to restore to the nobility the memory of its past grandeur in order to reverse the course of its present abasement” (68).

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the chronicle form to Renaissance historiography, for once we step outside of the chronicle genre, it becomes difficult to identify and categorize other Renaissance historiographical forms. Indeed numerous scholars have pointed to fictional texts—plays, romances, poems, ballads, and the like—as kinds of historical writing. In this dissertation, I draw on this foundation of scholarship to examine how fiction from the period rewrites, revises, and reshapes tales of the past. I show that writers of fictional literature draw on fiction’s forms and functions to write new kinds of histories. They exploit the very literary conventions of their forms in order to call attention to their status as fiction, even as they recount “true” historical tales. In recasting history within fiction, they escape the transcendent and universalizing trajectory of the chronicle form (while also gaining creative flexibility that fictional forms offer, with their more flexible relationship to factual truth). But they equally claim fictional writing as proper forms in which to investigate the past. Levy argues that “playwrights (together with the poets...)” altered the form of their histories to fit their mediums: they “learned how to sort out the essential from the irrelevant. The radical condensation [that they carried out] was based, however, on a

method of selection which was literary rather than historical” (xi). I will show that in interweaving historical tales into fictional stories and in radically condensing and selectively choosing specific aspects of the histories they draw from, writers of historical fiction use fiction’s forms and conventions to present rivaling images of “national” identity to those inscribed in more traditional historical sources.

Historical fiction is particularly suitable for exploring cultural perspectives toward history and identity, for such texts are cultural documents and “social texts” engaged in exploring questions of identity (Porter 256). They offer unique perspectives on political questions that are often not voiced or documented elsewhere, for, as Andrew Hadfield argues,

in the sixteenth century it was not obvious to many writers of “literature” what it was they were attempting to achieve. “Literature” was not a clear and distinctly identifiable category of writing which would be employed to deal with certain themes in a particular way. Obviously, certain modes, or types, of writing (for example, ballad, epic, romance, satire, comedy, tragedy) existed and were frequently reproduced; but it was not clear exactly how they related to each other, how they related to other forms of writing, and, most importantly, what was the point of writing or reading such works. (1)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1976), Richard Helgerson also comments on the ambiguous status of fiction in the Renaissance: “where critics have tried to keep artworks in one pile and historical documents in another, Renaissance writers liked to mix the piles, to hint that the ostensible work of fiction might conceal a reality too private or controversial to be openly uttered. In part they hoped no doubt to titillate and amuse, but they had as well the more serious object of

Despite the fact, or perhaps because, literature's status was ambiguous, it could engage in serious dialogue that was more clearly off limits in other forms of discourse, for "on the one hand, literature affirmed a free space outside the constraints of a consciously politicised vocabulary and mode of writing; on the other, as a key component of national culture, it played a specifically political role" (Hadfield 9).<sup>5</sup> I do not wish to suggest that literature was not scrutinized, for literature, like other forms of discourse, was closely monitored, censored, and used for explicitly political purposes to bolster monarchical control and power. Nevertheless, its privileged ambiguity also allowed it to speak to political questions and address different social groups. In works of fiction that consciously interpolated historical matter into fictional genres, writers used fiction's ambiguous status to their advantage to offer different perceptions of the past.

Writers of historical fiction claim their images of the past as forms of collective cultural memory<sup>6</sup>—their texts exploit generic conventions to write anew the relationships between the past and the present. I view the writers of historical fiction from the period in particular as attempting, as Richard Helgerson boldly puts it, to

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maintaining literature's claim on truth. And though the truths that interested them were perhaps more often moral or aesthetic, the contingent truths of historical personality and event had their place as well" (10).

<sup>5</sup> In his discussion of sixteenth-century French literature, Terence Cave also finds that literature's purpose is poorly defined. Cave therefore labels literary texts "textes troublés" (troubled texts) because, as he explains, "au seizième siècle . . . un soupçon plane sur ces objets; ils s'entourent de précautions apologétiques ou de gloses rectificatrices" (in the sixteenth century . . . suspicion hovers over these objects; they are framed by apologetic warnings or corrective glosses) (*Pré-histoires : textes troublés au seuil de la modernité*. Geneva: Droz, 1999. 15).

<sup>6</sup> The concept of cultural memory is particularly useful for analyzing historical fiction in particular, for it allows us to focus on "representations of the past (the past as it was once imagined)" instead of focusing on "its events (the past as it actually transpired)," as Patrick H. Hutton terms it *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover: UP of New England, 1993).

“govern . . . the whole cultural system . . . by which their own identity and their own consciousness were constituted,” if not in fact, at least in fiction (*Forms of Nationhood* 3). By moving away from historical sources such as chronicles and state papers, these fictional texts also move away from some of the moralizing purposes of Renaissance histories, which are supposed to offer models of national identity, usually in the great kings and queens of the past. Instead they claim a stake for themselves in writing “literary nationhood” (Hampton *Literature and Nation* 1), but they also acknowledge some of the constraints that they face in shaping history past and history present, and imagining a better future.

### **Monarchs as Didactic Models**

Renaissance historical and fictional texts convey moral truths by offering models of right behavior and conduct. Heavily influenced by what Stephen Greenblatt terms as “the Christian humanists’ preoccupation with *right living*” (109-10), fictional and historical writing fulfill their didactic purpose by depicting positive examples in the characters, whether real or fictional, inscribed in their texts. In the “Letter to the Authors” appended to *The Faerie Queene*, for example, Spenser claims his work as a didactic text by suggesting that the poem offers examples of virtuous, heroic action, from which a reader can learn to “fashion [himself] a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline” (176).

Theories about the didactic function of historical and literary writing are heavily influenced by humanist educational thought. Humanist notions of learning, centered on the principle of *imitatio*, certainly shapes Sidney, Spenser, and other writers’ notions of

the didactic potential of these writings. The idea of teaching through *exempla* has implications for the individual *and* society<sup>7</sup>: Spenser's proclamation that *The Faerie Queene*'s purpose is "fashion a gentleman" demonstrates both the benefit to the individual, and a greater civilizing impulse for shaping society as a whole.<sup>8</sup> It fashions individual gentlemen so that they can then serve a greater collectivity. Helgerson asserts that "humanism of this sort ... strives to fashion competent governors and obedient, productive citizens" (*Forms of Nationhood* 43).<sup>9</sup>

If the didacticism of Renaissance historical writing sought to shape wider society as much as the individual, it turned to monolithic symbols of the society found in history to accomplish this. Furthermore, monarchs in particular served an important symbolic function. F.J. Levy explains that "because society was important, and because society was identified with the state, history writing was centered on the personality of the monarch" (ix). Richard Helgerson accounts for the attention to individual kings and queens in political terms as reflecting the changing face of the early modern monarchical state in England; he maintains that

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<sup>7</sup> See for example, Timothy Hampton's *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) or John D. Lyons's Lyons, John D. *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> I conceive of Renaissance historical fiction as generally contributing to the *civilizing process*, the gradual process by which individual and collective "behavior moves very perceptibly toward the standard" of *civilité*, as Norbert Elias argues in his seminal work *The Civilizing Process* (trans. Edmund Jephcott, New York: Urizen, 1978, from the original *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, Basel: Haus zum Falken, 1939).

<sup>9</sup> Helgerson draws on Arthur B. Ferguson's *The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1965), in his analysis of humanism's educational goals.

Chronicle history got more sharply focused because the state was more sharply focused. Where before, a chronicler had indiscriminately accumulated a record of everything that had happened in some vaguely defined region, he now had a quite specific story to tell, the story of the improvement of the state, and its “improvement [in] sovereignty.”

*(Forms of Nationhood 12)*<sup>10</sup>

Monarchs become the embodying symbols of the state, and therefore the focus of chronicle histories; at the same time they also evoke a complex array of sometimes competing, and often conflicting ideologies. In turning to monarchical history and replicating tales of famous monarchs of the past, Renaissance writers also expose these ideological tensions in relation to monarchs and monarchical authority.

Indeed, the ideological underpinnings of Renaissance monarchy are highly paradoxical.<sup>11</sup> Renaissance monarchs are recognized as human beings, yet they also transcend their individual selves to mystically embody the State. Their power is granted by divine right, yet they often appear to be God’s scourge.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, dynastic

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<sup>10</sup> In this citation, Helgerson cites Samuel Daniel, *The Collection of the History of England* (reprinted in *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose*, Alexander B. Grossart, ed. London: Spenser Society, 1885-96).

<sup>11</sup> For more information on Renaissance monarchical images and political theory, see for example Guy John’s “Monarchy and Counsel: Models of the State” (in *The Sixteenth Century*, Patrick Collinson, ed. 2002), or J. Russel Major’s *From Renaissance Monarchy to Absolute Monarchy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994). Dale Hoak’s *Tudor Political Culture* is a useful collection of essays on Tudor monarchical culture and ideology.

<sup>12</sup> On Renaissance ideas about sacred monarchy in England, see Robert Zallar’s “Breaking the Vessels: The Desacralization of Monarchy in Early Modern England” (*Sixteenth Century Journal* 29:3 (Autumn 1998) 757-88) and John N. King’s *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989).

politics repeatedly fails to produce heirs and provide smooth transitions of power from one reign to the next. Although they are the subjects of history, none of their individual histories ever seem to tell the whole story.

As fiction writers take up the task of writing historical monarchs, they evoke many of these paradoxes, and they often move away from monarchs as positive, didactic models. Richard Helgerson highlights the fact that younger Elizabethans developed an intense national awareness in response to Tudor absolutism. For this reason, kings and queens figure so prominently in almost all of their writings. Yet their writing does not limit itself to examining monarchy alone. Many texts include other important figures or cultural markers, such as the nobility, the economy, the common people, the land, the church, or perhaps combinations of these, which posit alternative foundational sources of national identity outside of the monarch. In so doing, Elizabethan writers established new authority (their own individual authority, as well as the collective authority of the groups with which they identified), and their writings therefore serve to undermine the absolute power held by the crown (*Forms of Nationhood* 9-10). French writers also challenge the stranglehold of the crown on French identity, as Colette Beaune and David Bell reveal, by depicting “France as an entity distinct from its ruler” (Bell 101).

Although Renaissance historical fiction does not entirely do away with idealizing discourse about the monarchy, writers do figuratively dethrone their monarch-subjects by locating ideal models in other individuals or social groups. By shifting their focus to other models, writers of historical fiction claim tremendous narrative power, for they script monarchs as their “subjects,” and they depict them

creatively, sometimes allowing them to be manipulated or overshadowed by lower ranking or lowly characters. I agree with Helgerson that these writings depict monarchy as rivaling other groups or interests, yet at the same time, I would revise his assertion: historical fiction from the period does not merely set up simple contrasts between the crown and others. These texts engage in proposing new relationships between various interests and monarchs, and often new images of monarchy emerge in the process. Their texts can be seen as part of a greater project of “societal fashioning” that allows for other voices to compete in shaping the State, its members, and the social and political relationships between them.

In isolating texts by English writers of the middling ranks—Edmund Spenser, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Deloney, and William Shakespeare—all writers whose fortunes as a collective social group were generally on the rise, I chronicle some of the ways that we can see literary nationhood articulated in the 1590s Elizabethan England. In the literature of this tumultuous decade, as Elizabeth’s reign was nearing its end and the fate of England as a Protestant nation separate from Catholic Europe appeared to hang in the balance, questions of national identity were particularly pressing. It was indeed unclear that England would remain a Protestant and independent nation after Elizabeth’s death. I echo scholars before me who stress the necessary role of establishing a collective past in being able to articulate a collective sense of nationhood in the Elizabethan present. I claim that these writers elevate new heroes and new voices, individuals of little or dubious importance, men and women of the lower or middling ranks who have been forgotten or denied in historical writings. They also award a special prominence to fictional literature in giving voice to positive images of

the “nation,” and to critiquing monarchs as national symbols. These individuals sometimes stand in contrast to, but often work together with their monarchs to shape the direction of the early modern English State. In so doing, new figures and new kinds of texts emerge to play a role in constructing English identity through literature.

I also explore two examples of historical fiction from Renaissance France: Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron* (ca. 1549) and Mme de Lafayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves* (1674), works by privileged women from royal and aristocratic families. In response to the consolidation of kings’ territories in Renaissance France, the *Heptaméron* reveals aristocratic nostalgia for an empowered nobility of the feudal past, but it also rescripts a morally superior aristocracy as a proper model for French identity. Lafayette’s seventeenth-century novel finds a model of absolute monarchy in Tudor England’s Elizabeth I, and it paints a dark picture of absolutist regimes. Absolute monarchs, Lafayette suggests, are all too prone to become despots. Both texts claim absolutist regimes as threatening aristocratic social identity and power. They also assert a role in shaping France—an emerging nation—by charting amore active role for high-ranking women in defining French identity. Literature by these French writers attempts to locate French identity in idealized noble women, defined in contrast to historical monarchs.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond simply recording some of the textual strategies by which these authors attempt to forge a “sense of literary nationhood,” I show how integral the monarchy

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) Liah Greenfield explains that “France as a nation owes its birth to the nobility” (154), for “by letting the nobility be and preserving its privileged social position, they [the kings and ministers of seventeenth-century France] made certain that it [absolutism] would never be accepted willingly” (133).

figures in these texts. Yet, I also reveal how problematic monarchal figures are to a concept of nationhood—they are both the means by which a sense of the nation can emerge, but they represent the very social structures that most limit, challenge, and threaten ideas of nationhood. I draw on new historicist and cultural materialist scholarship, for as Steven N. Zwicker has stated, it allows for “the recovery of the civic from within the imaginative texts of Renaissance literature and the negotiation of social, political, and economic issues within Renaissance imaginative literature” (205, n. 2). Additionally, I also rely on scholarship that challenges and revises new historicist scholarship such as the work of scholars of the British Problem, as well as feminist scholarship, as these approaches allow us to understand the limits of new historicist and cultural materialist approaches to literary analysis.<sup>14</sup>

I frame my project by beginning in France; in chapter two, I analyze Marguerite de Navarre and Lafayette’s French fictional histories. Within their explorations of France, they view absolutist regimes, the political mechanism through which the nation emerges, as threatening their traditional social roles and identities. They portray monarchal authority as disrupting the historical narratives by which they have

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<sup>14</sup> See for example, Stephen Greenblatt’s *Representing the English Renaissance* (Stephen Greenblatt, ed., Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), Jean Howard’s “The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies,” (*English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 13-43), as well as Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More and Shakespeare* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1980). See also Andrew Hadfield’s *Literature, Politics and National Identity: Reformation to Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), Philip Schwyzer’s *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), Willy Maley’s *Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton* (Chippenham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and Joan DeJean’s *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991).

traditionally defined themselves. I show that they reconfigure the aristocracy as embodying an idealized elite French identity superior to France's monarchs.

Chapter three examines the chronicle history interpolated in Books II and III of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* to analyze the creative potential that Spenser awards chronicle history in constructing his national epic. At the same time, however, Spenser highlights the problems and dangers that chronicle history poses, both to conceiving the nation and to writing a positive image of England. I assert that Spenser repeatedly highlights the fictionality of his chronicle, yet he also reveals chronicle history as a fundamental story to a perception of the nation and the self.

In the fourth chapter I investigate two prose narratives set in the Henrican past: Thomas Deloney's *Jack of Newbury* and Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*. These writers imagine their heroes of the middle and lower ranks enjoying close proximity to the king, which is facilitated through their picaresque adventures. By analyzing the depictions of their heroes and Henry VIII to whom they are explicitly compared, I propose that these writers grant their heroes nearly as much authority as the king. Deloney claims the middle ranks as a foundational model for the moral and economic health of the realm, while Nashe locates an English literary identity in bourgeois prose fiction.

Finally, in the fifth chapter I examine three Shakespearean history plays, spanning the decade of the 1590s—*Richard III*, *1 Henry IV*, and *Henry V*. I assert that Shakespeare's depictions of English history acknowledge the profound divisions of nationality and rank that plague the realm and inhibit a sense of nationhood to emerge. Though Shakespeare highlights the threats to nationhood, he also transforms his best

kings into national symbols for people of all ranks, for he suggests that England can only emerge in moments when these groups, whose daily ambitions, desires, and concerns divide them, can find reason to forge a collective purpose. In this way, he reveals monarchal history as a form of collective history.

## Chapter 2:

### **National Borders and Monarchal Boundaries in Renaissance France**

Elizabethan England's national boundaries were established and well-defined. This was in part because of England's geographical situation as an island nation, but at the same time other factors contributed to give it a distinct identity. The Tudor monarchs' centralized monarchies and England's Protestant religious identity delineated the State in ways that reinforced its geographical distinctiveness. Though England's national identity was contested, its distinctiveness from Catholic Europe made it more well defined than other states in the minds of many English men and women.

In contrast to Elizabethan England, sixteenth-century France was embroiled in religious wars and territorial disputes that kept the geographical identity of the realm in flux compared to England. Yet by the 1540s, France too had begun to emerge from this confusion into an early modern absolutist state. This process began as Marguerite de Navarre's brother, François I conquered a large French territory and consolidated his power. But for France to truly emerged as a unified realm, it would take the royal accession of Louis XIV in 1643, and his ensuing rigidly hierarchical absolutist regime that he established.

The French aristocracy feared what Louis XIV's absolutism might mean for their ideal of a universal, international aristocracy delineated not by national boundaries, but established through aristocratic bloodlines and their claims to social superiority and political influence. Such aristocratic perspectives toward absolutist politics in the midst of an emerging absolutist realm can be understood through the literature of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France. In this chapter, I isolate two

French texts to reveal aristocratic perspectives toward French identity. The *Heptaméron* by Marguerite de Navarre, predates the English texts studied in subsequent chapters of this dissertation by approximately 40 years. The seventeenth-century French novel, the *Princesse de Clèves* looks back to Elizabethan England to come to terms with Louis XIV's France. These authors and their texts reveal aristocratic communities coming to terms with the changing face of the nation. They attempt to define France as comprised of privileged elite whose identity is threatened both on two fronts: both within the realm and beyond it. The internal threat in these texts comes primarily from kings and queens seeking to undermine aristocratic autonomy.

Though they both depict monarchical authority as menacing an international aristocracy, they represent the threat in more local terms—their stories repeatedly show sovereign authority encroaching on the autonomy of individual aristocrats. By depicting the idealized aristocratic figures as embodiments of French identity, they show monarchical authority threatens both individual aristocrats and a collective aristocracy. While monarchs menace the aristocracy within the plots of the texts, the generic forms by which the French aristocracy defines itself, the romance and the *nouvelle*, equally come under scrutiny by Marguerite de Navarre and Lafayette. By revising and challenging the generic conventions of the forms, these writers reveal absolutist politics and the national communities they help to produce as threats to aristocratic identity.

### **Power, Monarchy, and Nationalism in the *Heptaméron***

The setting of the frame narrative of the *Heptaméron* represents in concrete, physical terms the contested national borders over which early modern European monarchs waged wars. Within many of the quasi-historical tales, Marguerite de Navarre's narrators equally represent the unfolding contest between the state, the church, and the individual. In this section, I analyze the physical and temporal setting of Marguerite's frame narrative, a framing space that can be viewed as a microcosm of an emerging French nation, as well as the twenty-first tale in the collection, a story that critiques monarchical authority and social hierarchies, even as it replicates a positive French ideal in its heroine, Rolandine.

In both the frame narrative and the twenty-first story, Marguerite de Navarre critiques absolutist politics by pointing out the diminution of aristocratic privilege and power. For in the collective group established in the frame narrative and in stories of individual aristocratic women she depicts the nation as an emerging reality that diminishes aristocratic autonomy, making aristocrats ever more dependent on the whims and caprices of their monarchs. Blood, rank, and monarchical authority are overturned momentarily in a number of the stories in this text, destabilizing the very foundations of identity by which a prominent woman with royal blood, like Marguerite de Navarre, would define herself. The text marks the destabilizing effect that absolutist regimes had on the aristocracy in Renaissance France, and it echoes aristocratic concerns about their social status while chronicling the devolution of their power. However, in the twenty-first tale, which I summarize later, Marguerite complicates her critique of monarchical power by illustrating the equally problematic behavior of a degenerate aristocracy.

In the *Heptaméron*, the greater setting of the frame narrative depicts a common historical practice: French and Spanish aristocrats journeying to the baths at Cauterets in the Pyrenees to revive and recuperate. The setting transcends the common and historical, however, for it is also described in miraculous terms. Factually speaking, every first day of September many travelers flock to the spa, but the space holds transforming powers, for no matter how the travelers spend their time there—whether in drinking the waters, bathing in them, or even in taking mud baths (39)—the space works miracles on them. The waters are “si merveilleuses que les malades abandonnés des médecins s’en retournent tout guéris” (so miraculous that the sick deserted by their doctors come back from them completely healed) (39). Timothy Hampton points out that this setting evokes both a real historical context *and* highlights the privileged position that Marguerite gives to the baths. On the one hand, the setting calls attention to “the vexed question of the political and geographical identity of France itself; for Navarre was one of the several spots on the edge of ‘France’ that seemed unable to stay ‘French.’ The small multilingual kingdom was a major pawn in the territorial disputes between Charles and Francis” (130). On the other hand, “into this unstable background Marguerite inserts an irenic scene, as she depicts a group of international aristocrats . . . who have come to bathe in peace. The book opens by setting a scene of international harmony into a contested area” (130). Just as the waters heal individual travelers, the space effects geopolitical healing, albeit temporarily, between the two distinct cultural groups. Within this privileged territory, the fantasy of aristocratic universalism momentarily triumphs over national disputes that would otherwise divide the travelers.

The storytelling contest that comprises the rest of the narrative, however, unfolds after the peaceful harmony facilitated at the baths is disrupted, immediately after the travelers undertake their journeys home. The disruption is explained in equally miraculous terms as the baths: “sur le temps de ce retour vinrent les pluies si merveilleuses et si grandes qu’il semblait que Dieu eût oublié la promesse qu’il avait faite a Noé de ne détruire plus le monde par eau” (at the very moment of return came rains so miraculous and so great that it seemed as if God had forgotten his promise to Noah never again to destroy the world by water) (39). The powerful and deadly flood separates the two distinct national groups, cutting off the French travelers from the Spanish. It creates an untraversable boundary between them, creating a physical border to separate them from each other even within the liminal, disputed region. God intervenes to establish the national boundaries that European monarchs have been unable to divide once and for all through their wars.

The religious language used to describe the flood has several telling negative implications. For one thing, by alluding to the biblical story of Noah, Marguerite de Navarre depicts the disruption following the peaceful harmony experienced at the baths as providential, seemingly divinely sanctioned. The resulting separating and isolating of the two groups along national lines imply that national distinctions are themselves acts of God, part of an inevitable providential and historical development. What is more, national divisions appear to have become as rigid as the water is impassable: they are reinforced through divine intervention into human affairs and are beyond human control. The allusion to Noah evokes a biblical example of divine wrath at its most destructive, for Noah’s story is the strongest instance of the nearly complete destruction

of humanity recounted in the Old Testament. If Marguerite de Navarre depicts national distinctions as acts of providence, by associating them with the story of Noah she equally portrays them as divine punishments sent by God to humanity. Through the allusion, Marguerite de Navarre yokes emerging national divisions between European countries to the destruction of an international aristocracy.

Nevertheless, as the social groups become realigned along national distinctions in the immediate aftermath of the flood, a new collectivity comes together: when the French travelers take refuge in a nearby monastery, a microcosm of a unified French realm emerges. The group is comprised of all social ranks, from prominent aristocrats to their attendant servants. Within the space, however, the group separates along lines of social rank: aristocratic characters propose a story-telling game to pass the time, while the servant characters build the bridges that will eventually allow them to cross the waters and continue on their journeys home. The cloistered confines offer another kind of healing for the group, for the act of storytelling promotes mutual understanding among the interlocutors. In fact, Hircan (commonly interpreted to be a disguised portrait of Marguerite's husband, Henri d'Albret, King of Navarre), one of the most outspoken aristocrats of the group, insists on the social equality of the story tellers: "au jeu nous sommes tous égaux" (while playing the game, we are all equal) (49).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Putting these words in Hircan's mouth is an interesting move by Marguerite. It makes the leveling of gender hierarchies sanctioned by a male character who is tied to extratextual political power and authority. As Margaret Ferguson points out, however, "the game generates desires for yet more equality, or indeed dominance, among many of the characters" (*Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003. 254). She comments that the game may be "utopian" in its initial construction (254), yet Parlemeute, the "natural" leader" of the group (254) and considered by most scholars to be a disguised portrait of

Though the French travelers remain stranded in the contested geographical space, a new harmony nonetheless flourishes between the elite group in the monastery.

While Marguerite de Navarre privileges this moment of equal exchange among the travelers, she does not suggest that social hierarchies can be erased. The servant characters are excluded from the storytelling game (for they must carry out their servant lots in life by building and repairing the bridges that will allow the aristocratic characters to return home). Moreover, though many of the tales offer idealized and idealizing images of the lower classes, they in fact serve paradoxically to reinforce social inequalities. For example, after the second story of the collection—a story about the wife of a mule driver who becomes a “martyre de chasteté” (chaste martyr) (59)—Oisile, the elderly matron and spiritual leader of the group, draws a moral that clearly reinforces distinctions of rank: God, she explains, “souvent élit les choses basses pour confondre celles que le monde estime hautes and honorables” (often elects lowly things to confound those which the world holds as distinguished and honorable) (59). The lesson drawn from this example reinforces the woman’s lowly status—such idealizing discourse allows for the woman to remain lowly, for her lowliness itself becomes a virtue. This example among others allows for a powerful argument to maintain social distinctions.

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Marguerite herself, must from time to time “restrai[n] others from becoming absolutist monarchs over the new society constituted in the book” (255). Liz Guild and Nancy Frelick argue that Parlement “still defers to her husband” in the game—an “image of spousal compliance” that “seems to be in perfect accord with the dominant ideology” (Frelick, “Female Infidelity: Ideology, Subversion, and Feminist Practice in Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron*.” *Le mariage sous l’Ancienne Régime*. Ed. Claire Carlin. *Dalhousie French Studies*, Special Issue 56 (Fall 2001).18).

Moreover, however positive an image of French unity Marguerite de Navarre offers within the privileged, cloistered space, she also underscores the temporary nature of it. Time limits and encroaches upon the game. In other words, the text's design will not allow for the social harmony and equality experienced in the monastery to last beyond the temporal parameters of the frame narrative.<sup>16</sup> The temporal strictures in fact determine the text's structure, for the narrator tells us that the travelers will only be stranded for ten days, the amount of time it will take to rebuild the bridges that will allow the travelers finally to cross the waters and resume their individual journeys back to France. The frame narrative implies that the storytelling game will not last beyond that time, as it indicates the group will disperse once the bridges are repaired. The *Heptaméron* does not suggest that social equality established among the French storytellers can flourish outside of the monastery in the Pyrenees. In fact, by journeying home, these travelers will be returning "to various homes linked by their owners' ties to the monarchical court" (Ferguson 232)—once the bridges are built, the "utopian" equality experienced in the monastery will be placed under a monarchical authority that challenges their social independence, equality, and power.

Marguerite's perspective toward absolutist politics is complex, and cannot be easily summarized. Though Hampton claims that "As sister to the king [François I, a martial king and shrewd politician who managed through war and marriage alliances to piece together a larger French kingdom out of smaller regional French territories],

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<sup>16</sup> I believe it is important to qualify this assertion, for since *Heptaméron* was never finished before Marguerite de Navarre's death in 1549, it is difficult to say with certainty how the text will or should end. All indications from the beginning of the work, however, place boundaries on the length of the story-telling game, and seem to indicate that the equality the travelers experience there is temporary.

Marguerite would have looked with favor on the processes of political centralization that . . . [is] an essential, if muted, force in her text” (132), I see the text as offering a much more ambivalent, and even at times quite negative, comment on absolutist politics. Both within many of the individual tales and within the greater frame narrative, Marguerite’s text appears divided between reinforcing monarchical authority and lamenting the loss of aristocratic autonomy.

The tales can be read as reflecting Marguerite’s multi-faceted and ambiguous political position within France, a position that is sometimes at odds with itself. On the one hand, she was sister to the French king and actively worked to promote his political ends, even successfully negotiating his release from the Spanish when he was taken hostage by Charles V in 1525. On the other hand, as the Queen of Navarre, she reigned with her husband over a less powerful kingdom and a disputed territory of southern France, and was therefore attune to the diminishing influence, authority, and power of the lesser monarchs, aristocratic families, and smaller kingdoms that still dotted the Hexagon. Margaret Ferguson explains: “Stories of erotic conflict, in de Navarre’s book, often comment on contemporary political conflicts that she viewed both from the perspective afforded by her status as sister of the monarch and from the still socially privileged but geographically marginal perspective afforded by her status as wife of the King of Navarre” (233). Carol Thysell goes even further to suggest that *Heptaméron* must be read keeping in mind Marguerite de Navarre’s diminishing political influence at the time that she wrote the text: she explains that “by the time she wrote the *Hepatmeron* her influence with her brother had declined radically, and many of her friends had been killed as heretics because of their reformist beliefs” (17). Within her

explorations of aristocratic and monarchical power, Marguerite de Navarre's text reflects her dual concerns as a member of François I's royal family and as a lesser queen of a disputed territory whose autonomy and property is threatened by international disputes between absolute monarchs. I would like to examine the twenty-first tale in the collection as a counter response to Timothy Hampton's persuasive argument on the significance of the tenth story (which I describe briefly below), for the twenty-first story complicates the perspective towards absolutist politics that Hampton isolates in Marguerite's tenth tale.

This story, the third told by Parlement, a character who is assumed to be a disguised portrait of Marguerite de Navarre herself, follows its aristocratic heroine, the exemplary Rolandine, through many years of suffering at the hands of her father and the queen, a close blood relative whose court she serves. Though Rolandine is honest, virtuous, wise beyond her years, and sought in marriage by many eligible French aristocrats, her father refuses to consent to her marriage because he wants to keep her dowry for himself. The queen too actively works to prevent Rolandine's marriage and social advancement. Left with little choice but a life of religious devotion and semi-retirement, Rolandine spends most of her time in prayer and solitude until she meets another high-ranking social outcast, an impoverished but gentlemanly bastard son of a powerful noble family. They fall in love and conduct their love affair in secret for many years; they eventually exchange marital vows, but they never consummate their relationship. Although they overcome many obstacles to their love, including the tireless interference of the queen and later the king, their plot comes to a crisis when the king tries to have the bastard-hero arrested. The bastard flees to Germany and pursues a

marriage to a wealthier German aristocrat. His infidelity to Rolandine nearly destroys her, but she refuses to be unfaithful to the bastard despite his cruel abandonment. The exposure of his treachery facilitates a reconciliation between Rolandine and her father, and when the bastard meets with an accidental death, Rolandine considers herself free to pursue a marriage to another man with her father's consent. Ultimately, her story ends with a happy marriage to a prominent French aristocrat of her own family.

The tale echoes many of the themes established in Parlement's first tale, story number ten (the tale of Floride and Amadour's extramarital love, which is Lafayette's source for *La Princesse de Clèves*): both tales explore aristocratic privilege and identity, women's chastity and social reputation, as well as male heroism and military service to war-waging monarchs. This tale is unique, however, in its rejection of an extramarital love plot as well as its negative depictions of both the aristocracy and the monarchy. Specifically, I will show that Marguerite's tale is highly ambivalent toward both absolutist politics that threaten aristocratic autonomy *and* a degenerate international aristocracy that equally menaces the health of the realm. The tale thereby reflects Marguerite's paradoxical concerns as sister to François I and as the queen of one of the many lesser kingdoms dividing southern France in the Renaissance.

The twenty-first story of *Heptaméron* echoes the tension established in the frame narrative between the supposed equality experienced in the storytelling game and the reality of monarchical authority and social hierarchies that diminish collective aristocratic power outside of the cloistered space. In terms of form, the tale also blends the conventions of two genres: the romance, the genre in which aristocratic universalism is most clearly expressed through tales of knights who wander across

national borders (Hampton 116-7); and the *nouvelle*, a genre that is more national in scope, for it revises the traditional romance marriage plot by placing it within the context of national politics (*Tender Geographies* 107). By exploring and rejecting conventions associated with both, the tale makes an ambiguous statement about monarchical authority and aristocratic power. I analyze the characterizations of the story's major characters as well as its plot to interpret Marguerite de Navarre's complex critique of monarchical politics and a degenerate aristocracy.

The characterization and name of the tale's heroine Rolandine establish the geographical scope of the story, for this is a tale about a French aristocrat whose social and national identity is threatened. Rolandine, an impoverished lady in waiting to the queen, is described in idealizing terms: she is "tant sage et vertueuse que plusieurs grands personnages la demandaient en mariage" (so wise and virtuous that many great noblemen asked for her hand in marriage) (206). In the lavish praise the narrator gives her, Rolandine is clearly marked as a typical fictional heroine; the description implies in fact that she could function within both *nouvelle* plots and romance narratives, for she resembles the perfect heroines we expect to find in both genres. Her name, however, depicts her as a character of specifically French significance: Rolandine is the feminine equivalent of Roland, the hero from the medieval French epic, the *Chanson de Roland*. In associating her with the national hero from a nation-building genre, Marguerite de Navarre also establishes her heroine's tale as a national narrative, thereby diminishing the international scope of the romance plot and calling in mind *nouvelle* conventions.

Rolandine's social identity establishes the national parameters of the tale and provides the plot's crisis. Rolandine is defined through her name, social rank, and

hereditary position within the text: in addition to being named after a legendary national hero, she is an aristocrat with hereditary ties to the queen. The social prominence of her family, too, underscores her privileged social position. It would seem that Rolandine is destined to be the perfect *nouvelle* heroine. Ironically, however, the very sources of her social prominence threaten her well being: though a blood relative of the queen and the daughter of a wealthy aristocrat, she suffers for her ties to these characters. Her father neglects her, withholding permission for her to marry and refusing her dowry. The queen, for reasons poorly explained in the tale, holds so strong a personal grudge against her father that she makes it her personal mission to destroy Rolandine's chances for a successful marriage.

The tale's central conflict reveals both monarchal and aristocratic power as corrupt and corrupting, threatening the well being and good fortune of Rolandine, and by extension, France. Rolandine becomes the victim of both the spiteful queen whom she serves and her father's miserliness. The queen's actions are below the dignity of her social position: she actively works to keep Rolandine poor and dependent, all "pour quelque intimité qu'elle portait à son père [le père de Rolandine]" (for some private grudge she held against her [Rolandine's] father) (206). Her father, too, selfishly hoards the family fortune, refusing to permit her to marry and withholding her dowry. Though not explicitly acknowledged in the text, it might be deduced that he has resorted to such pettiness because of the diminished power of the nobility in early modern France.<sup>17</sup> He views marrying his daughter and parting with a dowry not as a means to

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<sup>17</sup> Benedict Anderson refutes the idea that the French aristocracy under the *ancien régime* would have distinguished itself as a class in *Imagined Communities*

align himself with another powerful French family; rather, he only regards it as a threat to his personal fortune.

By failing to fulfill their social obligations to Rolandine, both the queen and the father threaten the marriage plot of the romance. The fictional status of romance is thus blurred through their negative portraits and the extratextual implications of their depictions. Romance ideals are untenable in this tale because of the negative depiction of Rolandine's aristocratic father, whose selfishness and pettiness can be seen as a reflection of the extratextual reality of the early modern French aristocracy, whose reduced fortunes threaten their social standing. The queen too is jealous and malicious, but her depiction disrupts the world of romance even further because of the history lurking beneath the surface of her character's portrait: she has been identified as a disguised depiction of Anne of Bretagne.<sup>18</sup> Both monarchical authority and a degenerate aristocracy intervene in this tale to destroy the possibility of a romance narrative.

Rolandine's love interest himself epitomizes another set of generic concerns that destroy the possibility of the romance plot. His characterization is multi-faceted, and it

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(Revised ed. London: Verso, 1992. 20-2); he claims that the aristocracy did not view itself as a collectivity, but instead as individuals defined through titles and estates.

<sup>18</sup> A note on this story indicates that the queen is Anne de Bretagne (508); it explains further that the Anne de Bretagne famously disputed with the Count of Rohan (Rolandine's father in the story) over national versus local interests: "La reine en voulait aux Rohan de servir les interest du royaume avant ceux de son duché de Bretagne" (The queen wanted the Rohans to put the interests of the kingdom before those of his own duchy of Bretagne) (508). For further information on the historical identities of the storytellers and the characters within their tales, see Nicole Cazauran, *Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre* (Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1976); Betty Davis, "Storytellers in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*" (Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1978); and Carla Freccero, "Patriarchy and the Maternal Text" (*Renaissance Women Writers: French Texts/American Contexts*. Ed. Anne R. Larson and Colette H. Winn. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1994. 130-40.)

complicates debates over blood, rank, and morality, in determining individual worth within the tale. Parlement, the narrator of the story, describes him as both “un gentilhomme” (a gentleman) and a “bâtard d’une grande et bonne maison” (bastard of a prominent and noble family) (206). The greatness of his family awards him social distinction from which his illegitimacy would otherwise bar him. His physical depiction also undermines the idealizing tendencies of both the romance and *nouvelle*: he has “si peu de beauté qu’une dame . . . ne l’eût pour son plaisir choisi” (so little beauty that a woman would not choose him for her pleasure) (206).

Both his illegitimacy and his plain appearance make the bastard an atypical hero; indeed, for the majority of the tale, his actions too contribute to his unique characterization. He appears for most of the tale destined to challenge the conventions of the romance and *nouvelle* plots through his seemingly honorable behavior. Rolandine and the bastard-hero’s love for each other is defined, for nine-tenths of the story, upon mutual esteem, unwavering loyalty, and sincere affection. He remains faithful to Rolandine through many trials and tribulations, and appears to have only the most honorable of intentions toward her—he even agrees not to consummate their secret marriage until it is sanctioned by the queen and Rolandine’s father. Throughout the majority of the tale, Marguerite de Navarre makes a powerful and persuasive anti-hierarchical statement through her depiction of Rolandine’s love interest. His characterization appears to challenge superficial courtly values, redefining worth through one’s actions, and not one’s blood, fortune, or social position.

For the majority of the tale’s plot, both Rolandine and the bastard-hero both thus appear to exemplify a threatened aristocracy that has become diminished by an

expanding monarchical authority. While their great worth is revealed, the queen and her husband the king are shown to be viciously diabolical. The pairs of characters are defined against each other, underscoring the monarchs' political advantage and Rolandine's true and the bastard-hero's apparent moral superiority. Rolandine's response to the queen's capricious fit of rage serves illustrates the point. When the queen discovers Rolandine's secret but unconsummated marriage to the bastard, she tries to publicly disgrace Rolandine. Unlike the queen, Rolandine's deportment is characterized by her demonstrations of extraordinary self control that a model courtier should have, which the text elevates as a sound example. By contrast, the text suggests that the queen, who cannot control her anger and passion, would do well to learn from Rolandine's example. As the queen rages against her, Rolandine "lui répondit d'un visage aussi joyeux et assuré que la Reine montrait le sien troublé et courroucé" (responded to her with a face as joyous and assured as the Queen's was flustered and enraged) (216). Despite her tremendous self control, Rolandine has no recourse against the political authority of the queen and the State. Though she eloquently pleads on her own behalf—"puisque je n'ai avocat qui parle pour moi, sinon la vérité, laquelle moi seule je sais, je suis tenue de la déclarer sans crainte" (since I have no lawyer to speak for me, I will hold onto the truth, at least the truth as I know it, declaring it without fear) (218)—her words are to little avail. The queen's power triumphs over Rolandine's truth. Within the courtly setting of this *nouvelle*, the queen's petty and irrational jealousy nearly ruin Rolandine, who is at this point in the tale impoverished and powerless.

The bastard-hero is equally powerless in relation to the king, and his example too serves to underscore the aristocracy's political impotence. When the bastard seeks aid from the king to intervene on his and Rolandine's behalf, the king proves himself as petty and dishonorable as his wife. The bastard, who has worked to advance the consolidation of the monarch's authority by serving him in foreign wars, reminds the king of "les services qu'il avait faits au Roi" (the services he had rendered the king) (219). In return for his faithfulness, he asks only that the monarch aid him in publicly honoring his secret marriage to Rolandine. However, the King, like his wife, refuses to acknowledge the bastard's request and instead gives the order to have the bastard arrested. The bastard's loyal service is worth nothing, and he falls victim to the king's caprice. Monarchal authority threatens, even tyrannizes Rolandine and the bastard.

Although the bastard seems an ideal hero for much of the story, he is ultimately revealed as a philandering scoundrel near the tale's conclusion. His downfall comes as a shock, but it is foreshadowed by the narrator's refusal to name him in the story. Never linked to a family or heritage, the bastard-hero is in fact most often referred to by his marginal social position: he is called "le bâtard" throughout the tale (207). The text's refusal to legitimize the character with a name has important generic implications. Within the tale's setting, romance conventions have become bastardized, just as the love interest in the story is himself a bastard. The marriage to which the romance plot generally builds is forestalled when the bastard-hero's infidelity to Rolandine is revealed. When it becomes clear that Rolandine will not be awarded a dowry, he flees to Germany, where prominent German aristocrats to whom his family is aligned offer him protection and promote his marriage to a German noblewoman. Though he acts the

romance hero by freely crossing national borders and establishing international aristocratic ties to counterbalance his powerlessness at the French court, his actions dramatically undermine his romance hero status through such dishonorable actions. For the bastard-hero uses his social links to a network of international aristocratic families to betray Rolandine and pursue a greater fortune through marriage to a prominent German aristocrat.

Rolandine's plot is only saved when a French nobleman who belongs to her family steps in to marry her at the tale's conclusion. Her tale is resolved in a union that that is beneficial to herself, her family, and France.<sup>19</sup> The story's end would therefore appear to be the perfect *nouvelle* conclusion—for we learn that Rolandine's story ends well: she is married to a worthy aristocrat, and they have two sons together. Yet, at the same time, Marguerite denounces the conventions commonly associated with the *nouvelle* by underscoring the failure of the French court to promote Rolandine's well being, and by extension, the prominence and political power of the French aristocracy. Rolandine's happy ending is put off until the end of the final paragraph of the story. It is as if Marguerite hopes to highlight Rolandine's precarious position for as long as possible. She reveals the utter corruption of everyone associated with the queen's court: they nearly destroy Rolandine's chances for a happy union. Equally important to Rolandine's characterization as an ideal aristocratic character, the deplorable actions of

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<sup>19</sup> Joan DeJean problematizes this conventional ending in her reading of Lafayette's conclusion to *La Princesse de Clèves* in *Tender Geographies* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991). There she asserts that Lafayette departs "from previous novelistic convention" in "the role she assigns marriage" (106). "Unlike contemporary novelists, who follow romance technique and make marriage the goal of the plot's unfolding, Lafayette dispenses with the union between protagonists" (106), allowing her to illustrate "the shifting politics of marriage" (107).

everyone at this court menace her ability to continue the family's bloodline, for she is well over thirty years old by the tale's conclusion, and nearing the end of her childbearing years. Marguerite de Navarre thus depicts the conventional *nouvelle* conclusion as equally threatened within this text, for both an international aristocracy and powerful monarchs nearly intervene to destroy the possibility of the heroine's marriage plot, which within the *nouvelle* genre is a plot of national scope and consequence. Monarchal supremacy threatens the aristocratic collectivity in this tale, but the aristocracy equally appears to menace itself because individual characters work against collective French aristocratic interests.

In contrast to the frame narrative, the twenty-first tale from *Heptaméron* reveals aristocratic depravity as well as monarchal absolutism as threatening social structures, social hierarchies, and the literary forms by which the aristocracy defines itself. The *Heptaméron*'s comment on absolutist politics, however, is not as decisively negative as Lafayette's depiction of monarchal tyranny in *La Princesse de Clèves*, a historical novel that offers a complex depiction of absolutist politics of the late 1500s in order to comment on Lafayette's historical context, Louis XIV's France.

### **History, Power, and the Representation of Elizabeth I in *La Princesse de Clèves***

In *La Princesse de Clèves*, Mme de Lafayette inscribes her heroine's story in a greater political and historic context, the court of Henri II of France. Although her heroine, Mme de Clèves, is fictional, Lafayette portrays the princess's love affair with the Duc de Nemours as part of a private and personal reality that falls into the realm of historical possibility: she suggests that a relationship such as theirs might have

occurred, but it also would have gone unnoticed in traditional historic accounts.

Lafayette thus privileges personal and private love relationships, amorous intrigues, rivalries, and quarrels, showing that they are often responsible for events that take place in the public realm.<sup>20</sup> In other words, treaties, alliances, wars, and allegiances, whose motivations remain only superficially or inadequately explained in the official historical record, become comprehensible when the interpersonal relationships between members of this court, as well as those with other European rulers and aristocrats, are revealed. In commingling fiction with history, Lafayette underscores women's roles, which have traditionally been neglected, in shaping a particular historical moment.

Hovering at the margins of Lafayette's reconstruction of history is Elizabeth I of England. Though she does not figure as a character in the text, she nevertheless maintains an implicitly central position. She plays a significant role in both Mme de Clèves's love relationships with the Duc de Nemours and the political intrigues taking place at Henri II's French court, and her portrait and the story of her past are circulated there. Lafayette not only explicitly links the English queen to Mme de Clèves, she also

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<sup>20</sup> The events that take place in the novel are determined to a large extent by the courtly context. Henri II's court, like Versailles, is the center of the social and political world. The court's harmonious appearance disguises its underlying social tensions: "l'ambition et la galanterie étaient l'âme de cette court . . . les dames y avaient tant de part que l'amour était toujours mêlé aux affaires et les affaires à l'amour. Personne n'était tranquille, ni indifférent . . . on était toujours occupé des plaisirs ou des intrigues" (ambition and gallantry were the soul of this court . . . women had such a part there that love was always mixed with politics and politics with love. No one was tranquil or indifferent . . . everyone was always preoccupied with personal pleasures and political plots). With ambition and love affairs being the preoccupation of every person, the demarcation between the public and private disappears. Love is politicized and politics are eroticized, so that it becomes impossible to distinguish between "des plaisirs [et] des intrigues" (Marie Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, Comtesse de Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves*, in *Romans et nouvelles*, ed. Émile Magne. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1965. 252).

accounts for Elizabeth's famous reign as the virgin queen who never married as a multilayered love story, creating an ambivalent and, at times, conflicting image of Europe's most famous and most powerful monarch. The specific details of Elizabeth's past that Lafayette incorporates into the narrative are quite sparse; nevertheless, although little is said, much is implied (especially when the facts of Elizabeth's well-known reign and other literary representations of her are taken into account). It is therefore necessary to read between the gaps in Lafayette's telling of Elizabeth's story to understand the greater implications about her representation and about the working of history in general in this novel.<sup>21</sup> Through Elizabeth's inscription, Lafayette privileges the relationship between the *vie privée* and history while critiquing autonomous monarchal power.

In this portion of this chapter, I explore the way in which Lafayette links Elizabeth's decision not to marry to the princess's renunciation of marriage to the Duc de Nemours at the novel's conclusion. The feminist readings that examine this text have proven insightful, but they fail to account fully for the representation of Elizabeth. It is perhaps therefore more fruitful to investigate how the resulting image of the English queen changes when the implications surrounding her later history are taken into account. Finally, I explore the extratextual implications of Elizabeth to the historic context in which the novel was published, Louis XIV's reign. Ultimately, I argue that

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<sup>21</sup> I borrow the notion of reading into "the unsaid" (that is to say, reading into what is omitted from the narrative) from Joan DeJean, who insists that we must read through the silence that characterizes so many of the protagonist's responses, for it is in the unsaid and "unsayable" that Lafayette rescripts her heroine's story; see "Lafayette's Ellipses: The Privileges of Anonymity" (*PMLA* 99, no. 5 (1984): 884–902).

Lafayette creates an ambivalent portrait of Elizabeth, which can be read as a commentary on and warning about the dangers of absolute monarchy.

The novel's narrator implicates Elizabeth in the princess's love relationship with M. de Nemours before it even begins to unfold, and the heroine is closely linked to Elizabeth throughout the first half of the novel, but the similarities between them are nuanced. Because Lafayette is clearly preoccupied with representing courtly politics in *La Princesse de Clèves*, Elizabeth's representation must be read in different terms than that of the novel's heroine: as a monarch, Elizabeth's motivations, actions, and choices have much more profound political and public consequences than do those of the princess, a relatively minor courtier and subject to the French king. Though the two figures are clearly linked, their differences are important and the text resists allowing readers to view them as foils. It is therefore useful to examine both how they are linked and differentiated from each other in order to appreciate what Lafayette suggests about Elizabeth, monarchical power, and history.

The first mention of Elizabeth ties her to Mme de Clèves and the goings-on in the French court, for both women share a fascination with the Duc de Nemours based on his reputation alone. Mme de Clèves's "curiosité, et même l'impatience de le voir" (curiosity and even impatience to see him) bears a striking resemblance to the fascination that the French Ambassador Radan attributes to Elizabeth (261). Lafayette further underscores Elizabeth's connection to Mme de Clèves through her role in the princess's love affair with the Duc de Nemours: the text presents a marital alliance between Elizabeth and the duc as a viable possibility, but Nemours abandons his plans to go to England, despite his ambition and Henri's clear urging him to pursue the

English crown, after he meets and falls in love with Mme de Clèves. The heroine's love affair determines Elizabeth and England's fates.

Lafayette, however, links Elizabeth to the novel's heroine most clearly through their similar decisions to renounce marriage. Although the Princesse de Clèves rejects marriage to the man she loves out of loyalty to her dead husband (whom she does not love, but greatly esteems), it is suggested that Elizabeth refuses marriage altogether out of loyalty to a man she once loved, Courtenay. Just as Mme de Clèves attains a certain amount of independence by rejecting marriage, Elizabeth achieves autonomy by remaining faithful to Courtenay. Although the princess's decision gives her very limited control over her fate, and as Nancy Miller and Joan DeJean suggest, allows her to preserve her love relationship as fantasy while she distances herself from the public realm, Elizabeth's autonomy has greater and farther-reaching political and historical implications, for it allows her to rule as a single monarch and grants her complete control over her kingdom. Lafayette establishes Elizabeth's autonomous power most particularly by invoking the Courtenay story.

The Courtenay love story is the only episode concerning Elizabeth that is described in detail in *La Princesse de Clèves*, and while its historical accuracy is doubtful, it nevertheless plays an important role in the text.<sup>22</sup> This story certainly

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<sup>22</sup> Though it has been documented that the rebels responsible for Wyatt's Revolt in 1554 had a marriage between Elizabeth and Courtenay in mind if they were to succeed in overthrowing Mary Tudor's regime, there is apparently very little, if any, evidence to suggest that a love affair of the nature that Lafayette describes in *La Princesse de Clèves* ever existed between them. See, for example, David Starkey, *Elizabeth: Apprenticeship* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000) and Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (London: Routledge, 1996). Starkey asserts that the rebellion "led to the most dangerous and difficult time of

reinforces the prominent position that Lafayette gives to amorous relationships in political decision making at court and the shaping of history. Its inclusion, however, has even greater implications: through it Lafayette most closely aligns Elizabeth with the Princesse de Clèves. She also uses it to establish the autonomy of Elizabeth's rule, and when coupled with the narrator's implicit allusion to Elizabeth's future execution of Mary Stuart later in the novel, the flattering portrait of the English queen becomes metaphorically stained with the blood of her beautiful, young cousin. As the novel progresses, the narrator associates Elizabeth ever more closely with her murdering father and implicitly with Louis XIV, and she is ultimately established as a monarch whose autonomous, unchallenged, and unchecked power poses even more of a danger than that of Diane de Poitiers, the usurping mistress of Henri II at the French court.<sup>23</sup>

This opens up a space for Lafayette to comment on the dangers of absolute monarchy.

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[Elizabeth's] life when she often feared imminent execution or murder" (129). He concludes that Wyatt's Revolt, which "threatened both Mary's throne and her life," provoked a "rage against Elizabeth [that] was . . . deep and long-lasting" (129). Interestingly, Lafayette ignores Elizabeth's many subsequent courtships as well as her well-known and well-documented relationship with Robert Dudley.

<sup>23</sup> Lafayette also levels a disguised critique of absolute monarchy in her representation of Henri II's mistress Diane de Poitiers. At the French court, King Henri II is weak, effeminate, and ineffectual, while Diane wields his political power for him and controls the realm: Diane in fact "est maîtresse absolue de toutes choses" (is absolute mistress of everything) (268). Lafayette's representation of the unchecked nature of Diane's power suggests that the king is conversely powerless, and her description of Diane and the king's relationship is couched in misogynistic discourse. For instance, when Henri learns of her infidelities, his reaction is weak and effeminate: it is "douce et modérée . . . par l'extrême respect qu'il a pour sa maîtresse" (soft and moderated . . . by the extreme respect he had for his mistress) (268). In Diane, we see how Lafayette masks her commentary beneath the glittering façade of the court and further embeds it in the kind of misogynistic discourse that Barbara Weissberger identifies and discusses in "¡A tierra, puto!": Alfonso de Palencia's Discourse of Effeminacy," in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson (Durham,

Rumor of Elizabeth's supposed love affair with Courtenay is narrated by the Duc de Nemours, who manipulates the tale as an excuse to forego his plan to travel to England to woo Elizabeth and pursue the English crown. When pressed by the French king to make a decision once and for all, the Duc de Nemours claims that Elizabeth certainly would not marry a stranger like himself when she could pursue a life with the man she loves:

Il y a apparence qu'elle voudra se rendre heureuse par l'amour. Elle a aimé le milord Courtenay, il y a déjà quelques années; il était aussi aimé de la reine Marie, que l'aurait épousé, du consentement de toute l'Angleterre, sans qu'elle connût que la jeunesse et la beauté de sa soeur Elisabeth le touchaient davantage que l'espérance de régner . . . les violentes jalousies qu'elle en eut la portèrent à les mettre l'un et l'autre en prison, à exiler ensuite le milord Courtenay, et la déterminèrent enfin à épouser le roi d'Espagne. Je crois qu'Elisabeth qui est présentement sur le trône, rapellera beintôt ce milord, et qu'elle choisira un homme qu'elle a aimé, qui est fort aimable, qui a tant souffert pour elle, plutôt qu'un autre qu'elle n'a jamais vu. (290–91)

[It seems that she would like to please herself in love. She did love milord Courtenay years ago now; he was also loved by Queen Mary, who would have married him with the consent of all of England, without

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N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 291–324. It is not, however, Diane's gender that is at issue, but rather, the nearly monolithic nature of her power, for she is a despot who ruins everyone who crosses her. I suggest that the use of misogynistic discourse can be explained by Lafayette's desire to disguise her criticism of the monarchy from Louis XIV's scrutinizing gaze.

knowing that the youth and beauty of her sister Elizabeth already touched him more than the desire to rule. The violent jealousy that she bore toward them led her to throw them both in prison, and later send Courtenay into exile, and finally caused her to marry the king of Spain. I believe that Elizabeth who presently sits on the throne, will soon recall this milord, and that she will choose a man she loves, who is truly lovable, and who has suffered so much for her, rather than another whom she has never seen.]

All of the details about Elizabeth in this passage result in a rather sympathetic portrait of the young queen. Elizabeth is a woman, like Mme de Clèves, for whom a man would give up the English throne. It is further implied that only the appealing beauty and youth of women as incomparable and singular as Princess Elizabeth and Mme de Clèves could inspire such a sacrifice on the part of their lovers. In this description, moreover, Lafayette removes agency from Elizabeth, as she appears to have been more acted upon than active. It is well documented that Elizabeth's sister Mary Tudor, the Bloody Mary whose reputation for merciless violence is so well known, accused Elizabeth of plotting to marry Courtenay. Lafayette, however, suggests that the young Princess Elizabeth was innocent in the whole affair and unwittingly became embroiled in one of the many amorous intrigues at court: according to the rumor that Nemours reports, Elizabeth did not choose to antagonize her sister Mary, and she was powerless to escape imprisonment after Mary decreed it. The young Princess Elizabeth appears the victim of Mary's caprice and jealousy.

In light of the sympathetic portrait offered in the interpolated story of Elizabeth's past and the ways that she is linked to Mme de Clèves, it may superficially appear that Lafayette offers a wholly positive view of Elizabeth as a powerful female monarch and historic figure. This reading is particularly tempting in light of Lafayette's desire to recuperate women's roles in shaping history in the text. Her representation is far more complex, however, and it cannot be so easily summarized. Can the feminist reading suggested by Nancy Miller and Joan DeJean, which posit that Lafayette challenges conventional roles available to women in fiction also be applied to Elizabeth's depiction in *La Princesse de Clèves*? Miller and DeJean argue that Lafayette revises traditional plot conventions open to the heroines of novels in Mme de Clèves's decision to reject the Duc de Nemour's marriage proposal and to leave the court, dividing her time between her country estate and the convent. This decision gives the princess limited control over her fate, but it also makes her story unnarratable, for the range of options available to women in novel plots is limited and her choice does not conform neatly to the accepted available story lines.<sup>24</sup> DeJean further identifies the princess's renunciation of love as part of a political and historical subtext in the novel that has traditionally gone ignored in literary scholarship. She asserts that through the depiction of marriage, Lafayette explores "an issue that was perhaps the final political fallout of the Fronde: the public confrontation between Church and State, doubled by

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<sup>24</sup> I am referring specifically to the analysis that Joan DeJean presents in her article "Lafayette's Ellipses: The Privileges of Anonymity," cited above, as well as her book *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), and the argument presented by Nancy Miller in her article "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," in *An Inimitable Example: The Case for the Princesse de Clèves* (Henry, Patrick, ed. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 1992. 15–38).

the more private struggle between husband-family and wife, for control over marriage, and therefore over property”(*Tender Geographies* 109–10). The princess “recreates herself as the owner of a family plot, in the double sense of an ancestral estate and of a family romance” by refusing to marry Nemours (*Tender Geographies* 123). These readings are compelling in that they are some of the first to account for the princess’s dual residence at the novel’s end. Furthermore, they effectively place the work in a greater context of women’s writing in seventeenth-century France and reevaluate the historico-political content of the work by locating a form of resistance to traditional novel plots in the princess’s refusal to be possessed by a husband in marriage.

Miller and DeJean’s readings, however, fail to account for the profound ambivalence surrounding Lafayette’s depiction of Elizabeth and do not fully explain the scope and breadth of Lafayette’s exploration of politics and power in *La Princesse de Clèves*. The brief details offered in Elizabeth’s representation paint a contradictory and dark image of her. Although Elizabeth’s inscription, similar to the Princesse de Cleves’s representation, is clouded by silence and gaps, it is equally important to read into what is implied about Elizabeth to understand how Lafayette is rescripting her history. Elizabeth achieves autonomy in refusing marriage after Nemours gives up his ambition for the English throne, but the control that she wields has significantly different implications for her, a monarch, whose power is nearly absolute, than they do for Mme de Clèves, a naive, young aristocrat, whose options are quite restricted.

When some of the darker and more ominous aspects of Elizabeth’s future decisions that Lafayette evokes in the novel, as well as the extratextual implications that the representation of Elizabeth’s power might have are considered, Lafayette’s

seemingly sympathetic portrait of Elizabeth shifts even in the same passage in which she generates sympathy for her. At the end of the Duc de Nemours's narration, he calls attention to Elizabeth's recent ascension and the relative autonomy that she has as the head of the English state, mentioning both her position as monarch and her freedom to recall Courtenay at will. Her autonomy, moreover, is further underscored by Henri II when he informs the Duc de Nemours that Courtenay is dead, thus leaving her single and marriageable. When Lafayette maintains that Elizabeth decides to renounce marriage and with it all other love relationships after Courtenay dies and Nemours decides to remain in France, she also removes Elizabeth from love's influence, and the English queen is established as an autonomous ruler whose judgment is unclouded by passion. Lafayette represents both Mme de Clèves and Elizabeth as singular, "fully conscious of the fact that [they] are not like other women . . . ruled by passions instead of being mistress[es] of [themselves]" (Sweester 217).

Nonetheless, if Elizabeth's refusal of marriage aligns her with Mme de Clèves because of her similar rejection of the Duc de Nemours's proposal, her position of authority distances her from Lafayette's heroine. Mme de Clèves withdraws from the court and lives out her final days in solitude, exercising only limited control over her fate, but Elizabeth contrastingly stays at court so that she may rule England alone. Her power and authority remains unchecked by king, lover, court, or courtiers, in contrast to Mme de Clèves who is continually constrained by social roles and expectations. In a text that so clearly underscores the drastic difference between the social rules and expectations for rulers and those of the other members of the court, it becomes clear that

Elizabeth's position allows her much more autonomy and control than that of the novel's heroine.

The ambivalence surrounding Elizabeth is established even more firmly in the inscription of the historical future in the novel. Lafayette, for instance, depicts the unfolding of history in the prediction and fruition of Henri II's death. As this event precipitates Diane de Poitiers's fall from influence and authority, resulting from Catherine de' Medici's vengeful animosity, it is perhaps the best example of the way in which Lafayette illustrates the power of interpersonal relationships to shape and determine political decisions and history. It also helps to place all of the action represented in the novel in a clearer relationship to future historical events, for the fortune-telling scene dramatically foreshadows the king's death at the tournament and catapults Lafayette's readers into a heightened awareness of the way in which the events of the narrative's present shape the extratextual historical future. An awareness of the historical future in a novel in which the French Dauphine Mary Stuart, Elizabeth's cousin and future rival to the throne, figures so prominently cannot but recall Elizabeth's future imprisonment of her. Although the official historical record clears Elizabeth of any wrongdoing in her cousin's death, Lafayette links her to this event.

Lafayette marks her narrative with a specific consciousness about the execution of Elizabeth's cousin Mary Stuart when it is subtly, but ominously evoked in the dauphine's articulation of her "fears of a sad fate" (Letts 14). The passage in which Mary tells the young Mlle de Chartres about her worries over her future is important in establishing the complex interplay of the historical past to the narrative's present and

the narrative's present to the historical future, for in it Lafayette connects hereditary relationships, past animosities, and love relationships with the shaping of history in far-reaching and profound ways. The dauphine begins her narration by first explaining why she has such limited influence at the French court: "Vous voyez que . . . j'ai un médiocre pouvoir; je suis si haïe de la reine et de la duchesse de Valentinois qu'il est difficile que, par elles ou par ceux qui sont dans leurs dépendance, elles ne traversent toujours toutes les choses que je désire" (You can see . . . that my power here is modest; I am so hated by the queen and the Duchesse de Valentinois that they cross me in everything, either by themselves or through those who depend on their favor) (255). Yet, she insists that the present can only be understood with knowledge of the past: the dauphine exclaims, "elles ne me haïssent qu'à cause de la reine ma mère, qui leur a donné autrefois de l'inquiétude et de la jalousie" (they hate me only because the queen my mother once caused them such uneasiness and jealousy) (255–56). Her mother, she explains, was equally loved by Henri II, the king of Scotland, and Henry VIII, and they all once vied for her hand. Temporal distance does not diminish the role of the past in shaping the present, for Mary Stuart's position at court is completely determined by not only her own, but also her mother's, history. She concludes her history by further linking herself and her fate to that of mother: "On dit que je lui ressemble; je crains de lui ressembler aussi par sa malheureuse destinée, et quelque bonheur qui semble se préparer pour moi, je ne saurais croire que j'en jouisse" (They say that I resemble [my mother]; I fear that I resemble her, too, in her unfortunate destiny, and whatever happiness seems designed for me, I cannot believe I shall ever enjoy it) (256). Though the dauphine has no concrete reason to believe that she will share her mother's fate, her

prediction, as the extratextual historical record informs us, holds true. Lafayette's speculation that Elizabeth played a much more active role in Mary Stuart's execution than the historical record allows anticipates the more explicit explorations of Elizabeth as a figure of tyranny in the French secret histories, such as *The Secret History of Alancon and Queen Elizabeth*, that postdate the novel's publication.<sup>25</sup>

The dauphine does not name Elizabeth as the guarantor of her tragic destiny, but the mention of Henry VIII, Elizabeth's tyrannical father, evokes her prolonged imprisonment of her cousin and clearly links her to the dauphine's destruction. Henry VIII's name can scarce be mentioned without evoking the slaying of his wives, and the yoking of Elizabeth to her father is thus quite significant. Hereditary ties appear to determine the fates of both Mary Stuart and Elizabeth, and it thus becomes impossible to overlook Elizabeth's cruelty to her cousin in spite of the sympathetic portrait offered in Nemours's narration. Lafayette goes to great lengths to account for Elizabeth's monarchical autonomy and control, and she links her in subtle, yet precise ways to both a violent heritage and future atrocities; when the future is taken into account and in light

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<sup>25</sup> In *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), John Watkins explores seventeenth-century French images of Elizabeth's private life, focusing on both Lafayette's image of Elizabeth and later French literary representations from secret history novels. He shows the continuity between Lafayette's image of Elizabeth I and the tyrannical and blood-thirsty images of Elizabeth that are so much a part of the French secret histories that her novel anticipates. In some of the secret histories, the image of Elizabeth shifts dramatically: writers revise the historical record, sometimes arguing for Elizabeth's full responsibility for Mary Stuart's death. Watkins points out that *The Secret History of Alancon and Queen Elizabeth*, an English translation of the original French text, features perhaps the most exaggerated negative image of Elizabeth, for there she "becomes a solitary agent of evil" (167).

of certain French perceptions of the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth's image resembles that of an absolute monarch whose reign borders on tyranny.

Lafayette embeds a disguised critique of the kind of absolute power that Louis XIV wielded throughout her novel, and the portrait of Elizabeth is a significant part of her discourse on the threat posed by royal absolutism to the aristocracy. Louis XIV's close scrutiny of all writings published during his reign makes Lafayette's avoidance of transparent commentary understandable. In disguising her critique of absolute monarchy by locating it in the historical past, in a different country, and in a female ruler, Lafayette masks criticism of her king. Nonetheless, while she displaces her commentary on Louis XIV in the representation of an English queen, she also continually links Elizabeth to the French court. Moreover, she reveals the real and serious threats to the autonomy and power of the nobility that accompany the kinds of absolute authority that Elizabeth wields: those members of the aristocracy who threaten her authority are banished, imprisoned, or even put to death. The drastic measures that Elizabeth takes to preserve her power resemble the tight control that Louis XIV exerted over the remaining members of the aristocracy. In the aftermath of the Fronde uprisings that took place between 1648 and 1653, DeJean explains, Louis XIV sent "its leaders . . . into exile" and set the "royal propaganda machine . . . into motion to stamp out any trace of the recent events" (*Tender Geographies* 41). He then moved to Versailles, where he kept the remaining members of the aristocracy in lockdown: the palace in fact was "designed to keep the French aristocracy together in one community and under one roof, and to keep its principal members permanently under the king's surveillance" (*Tender Geographies* 63). While Lafayette appears to lament a past in which she and

the other members of the aristocracy had significantly more control in *La Princesse de Clèves*, as certain critics suggest, she also documents the kind of violence, tyranny, and tight control that characterized Louis XIV's absolutist rule in her representation of Elizabeth I.<sup>26</sup>

Continued critical interest in *La Princesse de Clèves* can be attributed perhaps to its mystifying complexity, for it is a difficult novel to pin down. In temporally distancing the events described in the novel to the historical past and in implying that she is telling the private story of her heroine, Mme de Lafayette creates the illusion that the novel is distanced from any extratextual political commentary about her own time. This has allowed critics and scholars to label the work as a bildungsroman that details the psychological journey of a solitary, fictional character and ignore the novel's political subtext. The novel, however, continually resists this kind of reading, for, ultimately, it is as much about history and politics as it is about the education and evolution of its heroine, and the centrality given to courtly politics in the first half of the novel cannot be ignored. Although feminist critics have begun to reevaluate the extent of Lafayette's commentary, they have not yet fully explored the critique of absolute monarchy that she embeds in her representation of courtly politics and historic events and figures. The implicitly central position given to Elizabeth in the text is one of the ways that Lafayette opens a space in which to comment on monarchical absolutism and the diminishing power of the nobility in Louis XIV's France.

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Ralph Albanese, Jr., "Aristocratic Ethos and Ideological Codes in *La Princesse de Clèves*," in *An Inimitable Example: The Case for the Princesse de Clèves* (Henry, Patrick, ed. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 1992. 87-103).

## **Conclusions**

Marguerite de Navarre and Lafayette write from privileged social positions. They nevertheless respond to monarchical authority within their fictional forms with a high degree of ambivalence, much like the middle ranked English writers whose texts I explore in the following chapters. Unlike the male, English, middle-ranked writers of the chapters that follow they do not portray historical kings and queens as symbolic embodiments of the realm, nor do they suggest that monarchs act with the best interests of the realm in mind. In fact, they more often display historical kings and queens acting below their rank and menacing aristocratic characters. Their perspectives as high ranking women in early modern France certainly plays a large role in the difference: they clearly perceive absolute monarchy as threatening the historical position of the aristocracy. As they explore France as an emerging nation, they view absolutist regimes, the political mechanism through which the nation emerges, as threatening their social and historical identities. In other words, they portray monarchical authority as disrupting the historical narratives by which they have traditionally defined themselves.

### Chapter 3:

#### Spenser's Selective Historical Memory in *The Faerie Queene*

In contrast to elite women of letters producing prose fiction in France, Edmund Spenser is a more humble figure: his “father was a journeyman clothmaker” and he “attended Merchant-Tailors school as a ‘poor boy’ and Pembroke Hall, Cambridge as a ‘sizar’ (another name for poor boy)” (*Forms of Nationhood* 13). Though he subsequently went on to serve the English crown as an administrator in Ireland where he became employed, advanced himself, and gained land—“that indispensable marker of gentility” (Highly 14), Spenser remained keenly aware of the social and physical distance between himself and the court, the cultural and political center of the realm (Marotti 209). His personal social agenda, which was, as Stephen Greenblatt demonstrates, to be “fashioned a gentleman” (185), was also reflected in the social project of his epic poem: he sought to fashion himself England’s national poet and the nation’s identity through his poetry. Spenser authorizes his project through the use of the epic genre in *The Faerie Queene*. In Book II, he absorbs chronicle history within epic fiction by interpolating a mock chronicle as a narrative digression within the poem. By depicting Arthur, the poem’s hero, reading the text of the chronicle, Spenser prescribes chronicle reading as foundational to patriotism and national identity.

Spenser’s chronicle history in Book II can be compared to the unauthorized “readings” depicted in Book I, canto i, of *The Faerie Queene*. In this example, the Redcrosse Knight defeats the hideous monster, Error, but not before she spews “out of her filthie maw / A flood of poyson horrible and blacke” (I i 20.1-2). In addition to causing a horrific stench, her vomit is “full of bookes and papers” (I i 20.6). Although

Spenser does not expound upon the contents of the writings, their mention is clearly significant in an age that witnessed an explosion of printed materials. Their appearance might, as Lawrence Rhu suggests, reflect Spenser's general concern over the accessibility of information made possible by new print technology (101-109). But when we take the Christian allegory of Book I into account, the content of the "bookes and papers" appears much more specific, and Spenser's meaning may in fact be rather pointed. As the monster Error causes men to wander from their true Christian faith, so might the writing she spews forth be connected to the "Catholic writings rolling secretively from mobile, hastily erected presses or smuggled from continental sources," which threaten both the sanctity of the English church and Elizabeth's claim to the throne (Jensen 333). Spenser condemns the writing and, as Phebe Jensen argues, even prescribes the appropriate emotional response to them: he "clearly means his audience to react" to the monster Error and these papers alike "with instinctive loathing and disgust" (Jensen 333). The vivid sensory imagery in the description certainly accomplishes this.

On the other hand, the chronicle history interpolated into the very next book of *The Faerie Queene*, titled the *Briton moniments*, offers a clear antithesis to Book I's condemned writings for Spenser marks the *Moniments* as integral to his celebration of Queen Elizabeth, and England's Protestant identity. The interpolated chronicle forms part of his greater epic project to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" ("Letter" 176): it models temperate, wise, and virtuous behavior in some of Britain's past monarchs and critiques the immoral and intemperate examples of its bad historical kings and queens. It also replicates a version of providential British

history that justifies and legitimizes Elizabeth Tudor's reign by providing her a medieval royal lineage and by conceiving of a long history of proto-Protestantism in Britain. The retelling of chronicle history gives Britain a past that, Spenser implies, can be shaped into a positive foundation for British identity in the present.

In blending chronicle history into the greater epic, Spenser's text combines the heroic ideals of the epic form with the providential trajectory of chronicle history.<sup>27</sup> By parodying the chronicle within the greater poem, Spenser plants chronicle history firmly inside a significant poetic genre, allowing him to claim chronicle history as the purview of "poetry," which transcends fact and instead enters "into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (Sidney 807).<sup>28</sup> In this chapter, I will show that Spenser calls into question the accuracy of chronicle history, instead claiming it is factually dubious. But he also reinforces chronicle history as having a unique and positive use in shaping British identity in within his verse epic.

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<sup>27</sup> The *Briton monuments* is merely one of the diverse forms of historical discourse that Spenser incorporates into *The Faerie Queene*. See Bart van Es' formative study, *Spenser's Forms of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Van Es claims that Spenser plays the role of "poet historical" by drawing on and inscribing many competing forms of historical discourse at play in Renaissance England in *The Faerie Queene* ("Letter" 716). Van Es asserts, "Edmund Spenser's poetic vision was the product of competing historiographic perspectives: as well as a developing enthusiasm for the new knowledge about Britain's past, he also displays an understanding of other older and equally complex histories. His vision was neither fully theorized nor fully consistent, but nevertheless one that expressed and played brilliantly upon the cross-currents of the Elizabethan dialogue with the past" (7-8). In *Spenser's Forms of History*, van Es shows the extent to which Spenser infuses *The Faerie Queene* with the formal elements of a multitude of forms of historiographical discourse, from chronicle histories, to chorography, to antiquarian humanist accounts of the past.

<sup>28</sup> Here I rely primarily on Sidney's idea of "poetry," which it itself something of a catchall; it includes not only all genres of verse, but all moral and moving writing, in prose and verse alike (807).

Though Spenser includes chronicle history in poetry's greater didactic purpose, "to teach and delight" (Sidney 807), I label his *Briton moniments* as a mock chronicle. For throughout the *Moniments*, Spenser reveals the holes, gaps, and problems with chronicle narratives. He consciously models his mock chronicle on Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which itself is a telling choice. Monmouth's text was "greatly cherished" in Elizabethan England because it affirmed the Brutus myth, giving England an Ancient Roman heritage that resonated with the "nationalist enthusiasm prevalent in that age" (Kobayashi 60). Yet Monmouth's version of English history had already been challenged by Polydore Vergil and earlier English humanists (Kendrick 34-5).<sup>29</sup> In addition to his questionable source, Spenser often fills the lapses in the record with invented stories that fit more neatly into Sir Philip Sidney's definition of poetry than they do historical writing. He equally highlights disruptions in the historical account by commenting metatextually on his history's gaps, thereby underscoring the fictional status of his history. Spenser allows his poem to engage in a greater sixteenth-century dialogue about the changing shape of historiography, which debunks chronicle history as a source of historical accuracy.

By interweaving the mock chronicle into his poem, he also ironically salvages the chronicle form by reaffirming the value of chronicle history for producing positive, patriotic sentiment. In *The Faerie Queene's* engagement with chronicle history, Spenser depicts the text as eliciting an emotional, patriotic response in Arthur, the

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<sup>29</sup>In *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), Helen Cooper reveals Monmouth's chronicle as the source for many of the English prose romances from the twelfth century on. Monmouth's chronicle has always had a significant link to what today would be labeled fictional texts.

young knight who reads it. In Arthur's double response of mingled adoration at the wonders of his national history and frustration at the text's incompleteness, however, Spenser ironically exposes the frustrations of idealizing histories. I will show that for the poem's narrator, history is highly ambivalent: it is both poetically enabling, inspiring the poem, and poetically or even politically disabling in other parts of the text, revealing the problems and pitfalls of monarchical history *and* the poet's task of shaping a positive image of British identity.

### **Chronicle History as Collective Memory: Eumenestes's Library**

Spenser situates his chronicle history in the Chamber of Memory inside Alma's castle, itself an allegory of an idealized temperate body; the setting is nearly as important as the content of the chronicle itself. The chamber is a vast library that is guarded by Eumenestes, Spenser's ancient librarian who catalogues the texts he guards in order to ensure that they reside untarnished in human memory. The library in fact purportedly preserves all events from human history. Despite its enormous scope, however, the library only allows for specific types of authorized reading to take place. For just as the perfectly moderated temperate body that houses the Chamber of Memory must be carefully defended from external influences that threaten to disturb its perfect balance, so, the text implies, must its memory be carefully guarded, selectively preserved, and properly interpreted.

Spenser is aware that Elizabethan histories must memorialize only those versions of Britain's ancient and medieval past that justify the separation of the emerging nation from Catholic Christendom. Additionally, as Jennifer Summit points

out, the version of British history that Arthur encounters in Eumenestes' library is the kind of history preserved in the aftermath of Henry VIII's dissolution of England's Catholic monastic libraries and instituted in Elizabeth I's subsequent, selective rebuilding of them (165-78). As I will show, Spenser celebrates the infinite nature of Eumenestes' memory; he also limits the kinds of histories to those that encourage patriotic fervor and allow the British to reclaim a specific version of the past—not all histories qualify and, in fact, many must be excluded.

Even the description of the Chamber in which the *Moniments* is held is riddled with contradictions. For example, although the chamber is described as “ruinous and old,” to allay our fears that record of the past might be lost to oblivion the poem's narrator assures us that the walls in fact are “right firme and strong” (II ix 55.1, 4). The Chamber's guardian Eumenestes also appears, at first glance, hardly up to the task of guarding history in memory, for he is “an old oldman, halfe blind, / And all decrepit in his feeble corse” (II ix 55.5-6). And yet his appearance belies his strength of mind for, the narrator insists:

55

. . . lively vigour rested in his mind,  
 And recompenst him with a better scourse:  
 Weake body well is chang'd for minds redoubled forse.

56

The man of infinite remembrance was,  
 And things foregone through many ages held,  
 Which he recorded still, as they did pas,

Ne suffred them to perish through long eld,  
 As all things els, the which this world doth weld,  
 But laid them up in his immortal scrine,  
 Where they for ever incorrupted dweld. (II ix 55.7-56.7)

Though nearly blind, nothing escapes Eumenestes' notice, for he records all past events.

In this description, Spenser claims human history as not only knowable, but infinitely knowable. Additionally, he implies that so long as it continues well-preserved in temperate minds, it will continue to escape the general fate of everything else in the world—to perish over time. Despite the fact that recorded history is predicated on a linear conception of time since it records events as they unfold, Eumenestes' library ironically transcends temporality. In memorializing the past, the library also makes it immortal, saving it from time's wreckage. The truth of the past, as the description suggests, remains perpetually accessible, forever knowable.

Nevertheless, while Spenser privileges the written records that Eumenestes guards as great preservers of the past, he also reveals that all attempts to immortalize the past are futile in his description of the librarian and his cataloguing methods. Eumenestes' system of organizing the library's holdings equally hints at the merely partial nature of the library's ability to preserve the past. His "antique Regesters" catalogue all of the holdings (II ix 59.4), but we find out that "oft ... things were lost or laid amiss" (II ix 58.6). He relies on his young assistant, Anamnestes, to remind him of records that have gone missing or been forgotten, but the description leaves us in doubt of the efficacy of Eumenestes' ability to preserve all records in memory. In other

words, the poem implies that Eumenestes' disorganization may indicate a tendency to overlook, neglect, or even entirely forget certain events of history.

The physical state of the library's written records similarly highlights the challenges of preserving the past in print. Eumenestes' memory may be robust and even "infinite." The library's holdings, however, are not entirely well-preserved. In fact, some of the "rolls, / And old records from auncient times derivd, / Some...books, and...long parchment scrolls" suffer the same fate as "all things els, the which this world doth weld" (II ix 57.6-8) : they are "all worm-eaten, and full of canker holes" (II ix 57.9). The supposed all-inclusiveness of Eumenestes' memory is thereby shown to be limited.

In fact, the very claim of Eumenestes' memory as infinite underscores the degree to which the library is incomplete. As Jennifer Summit argues, the library "manifests the very incompleteness that is the hallmark of Spenserian allegory" (171): "its very endless quality denies hermeneutic closure" (Goldberg 76 n.1).<sup>30</sup> In pronouncing Eumenestes' library as infinite, Spenser ironically reveals its deficiencies.

Summit further suggests that the incomplete nature of Eumenestes' collection may reflect the destruction and erasure of significant parts of England's textual heritage following Henry VIII's 1535 dissolution of the monasteries. In the aftermath of the dissolution, she points out, John Bale and John Leland combed

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<sup>30</sup> Cited in Jennifer Summit's "Reading Reformed: Spenser and the Problem of the English Library" (*Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe's Legacies*. Eds. Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams. London: Routledge, 2004, 171).

the ruins of the monasteries for medieval books that they could catalogue and preserve. In their footsteps Elizabeth's Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, won a royal commission to compile his own catalogue of surviving books . . . For these post-Reformation book collectors, rebuilding the nation's libraries meant repairing the nation's memory.

(Summit 165)

Despite their efforts to preserve and restore library collection, their work resulted in something of a reformation of English libraries. For they did not simply rescue as many books as possible; rather, they "developed methods of preservation that were selective rather than comprehensive, saving books such as chronicle histories that could be used to uphold Protestant versions of the past, while consigning other works, mostly those of religious genres, to bibliographical oblivion" (Summit 165-66). Through this process, library reformers "reinvented the library from an ecclesiastical receptacle of written tradition to a state-sponsored center of national history" (Summit 166).

Their methods of selection went beyond choosing to save some books at the expense of others; they also destroyed specific passages of manuscripts in order to sanitize and "nationalize" them. The reformers advocated, as Summit illustrates, "the production of historical truth through a process of selection and distinction that "[casts] away trifles, [and cuts] off old wives tales, and superfluous fables" (170). In casting away the parts of medieval manuscripts that they deem unimportant, in labeling as trifles the "old wives tales," prophecies, and fables that were in the middle ages considered legitimate sources of history, they thus determine which versions of the past are legitimate and should therefore be guarded in the nation's memory.

The willingness of Elizabeth's library reformers to destroy England's textual heritage is moreover a source of significant conflict for the "poet historical," for the textual "monuments" are some of the only remains of Britain's past and represent sources of inspiration for his own poem. Spenser's acknowledgement of the incomplete nature of his Chamber of Memory indicate his own discomfort with the prospect of destroying and thus forever losing textual "monuments" that document diverse views of Britain's past. *The Faerie Queene* makes a gesture to repairing this problem by memorializing chronicle history within the poem.

### **Britain's Poetic Pre-history: Departing from Chronicle Sources**

While the poem only vaguely hints that Eumenestes' library is incomplete, the narrator goes so far as to insist explicitly that the *Briton monuments* chronicle is itself incomplete, for the narrator remarks that it contains insupportable historical claims. Bart van Es maintains that other medieval and Renaissance English chronicles acknowledge having no evidence to verify Britain's pre-Roman and Roman history (23). However, Spenser's mock chronicle, just as Monmouth's chronicle after which it is modeled, makes no such admission. The word *moniments*—which can be read either as "monuments" in Chaucerian Middle English, or as "warnings" from the Latin *monere*—is significant in this respect. Van Es explains that

In choosing the word 'moniment' to label the work discovered by his hero, Spenser had lighted upon an evocative but also troubling term . . .

In its myriad of referents the word provides a curious parallel for the form of the chronicle itself—a mode that . . . was already splitting up

into other genres to perform the contradictory tasks that were demanded of it . . . The word ‘moniment’ is torn between two different kinds of truth: that of moral instruction and that of physical evidence. (23)

The very name of the chronicle indicates the chronicle history’s double lacking, both to substantiate its historical accuracy with evidence (“monuments”) and to provide clear, meaningful didactic lessons. Spenser’s narrator invents facts and stories to fill in the gaps in the history, but his inventions also highlight the historian-poet’s inability to recover the past and teach the lessons that Renaissance history should.

The narrator’s account of Britain’s pre-history is one example from the *Moniments* that cannot be supported with real evidence. For example, the narrator admits that the “saluage nation . . . / Of hideous Giants, and halfe beastly men” (II x 7.1-2) who inhabited the island before Brutus’ arrival is both unverifiable (“uneath . . . to assure”) and difficult to trust (“uneath to wene”) (II x 8.2). Yet the narrator goes on to describe in some detail and with relish how the giants lived

. . . like wild beastes lurking in loathsome den,  
 And flying fast as Roebuck through the fen,  
 All naked without shame of care of cold  
 By hunting and by spoiling liveden (II x 7.4-7)

Carrie Anna Harper’s *The Sources of the British Chronicle History in Spenser’s Faerie Queene* remains the definitive study of Spenser’s sources for the *Moniments*. She speculates that Spenser probably elaborated on Holinshed’s depiction of the giants as seeming “little or nothing to differ from brute beastes” in this stanza (44). But his

description of giants as “going naked,” represents Spenser’s own invention and a deliberate departure from his sources (44).

Spenser further indicates in stanza nine that the giants’

. . . filthinesse

Polluted this same gentle soyle long time:

That their owne mother loathd their beastlinesse

And gan abhorre her broods unkindly crime. (II x 9.1-4)

Harper provides evidence of Spenser’s multiple sources for this depiction of the giants’ origins. She shows that in this instance too Spenser departs from his primary source, Holinshed, and further combines his version of the tale with details from previous accounts (Harper 46).

Spenser also takes some poetic license in this stanza, expanding the descriptions of other accounts. By illustrating in detail what he qualifies as an unknowable and untrustworthy originary myth, the narrator of the *Moniments* marks this history as both a version of British prehistory and a work of poetic imagination, which parallels Sir Philip Sidney’s description of the poet’s power in the *Defense of Poesy*. Spenser contradicts himself: on the one hand, he describes the giants’ existence as unknowable and unbelievable; on the other hand, he indulges in descriptive detail to embellish the story. Though he labels this past as unrecoverable, Spenser reinforces the poet’s power to rely on “his own invention,” as Sidney explains, to “grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like” (805). This portion of the history is thus absorbed into poetry.

The narrator accounts for the giants' origins by alluding to a story that he also calls "uneath . . . to assure" and "wene" (II x 8.2). He relates a fable that is recounted in Thomas Cooper's 1565 "Dictionarium Historicum Poeticum": the tale of "Dioclesians fifty daughters" who take refuge in Britain (II x 8.4). The daughters copulate "with feends and filthy Sprights" and "Through vaine illusion of their lust vnclene, / They brought forth Geaunts and such dredful wights, / As far exceeded men in their immeasurd might" (II x 8.4, 6-9). Though the story is told in multiple chronicles, the various chroniclers disagree on the number of Dioclesian's daughters, and Spenser therefore takes the liberty to "choose the classical version, the story of Danao's fifty daughters" (II x 8.4 note). Yamashita and Suzuki also see in the tale an allusion to "Genesis 6.1-7 of the 'gyantes in the earth' whose fathers were 'sonnes of God,' reputed to be fallen angels" (II x 8.6 note). Spenser combines a fable with classical myth and biblical allusion, thus interweaving Christian scriptural truth, pagan myth, and English fable. He authorizes the history, not with fact, but instead with the stories of transcendent, poetic truth. While this portion of the history demonstrates the extent to which certain portions of the past will never be recovered, it equally implies that the historian's only hope to account for Britain's pre-historical origins are to appeal to extratextual, a-historical authorities.

**Britain's Dynastic History: "In the end was left no monument"**

Just as the pre-history is impossible to substantiate, Britain's claim to a noble "antique" heritage beginning with the nation's founding by Brutus is equally impossible to prove. The narrator admits that Brutus's reign cannot be substantiated, for "in the

end was left no monument / Of Brutus, nor of Britons glorie auncient” (II x 36.8-9). In this portion of the *Moniments*, Spenser consciously departs from his chronicle sources, turning instead to a fictional source to complete the history. As Harper points out, in relating the end of Brutus’ line, Spenser veers away from his chronicle sources “in his expansion of this part of the story and his emotional treatment of it, . . . [which] suggests[s] an influence from the lament of Eubulus in the *Tragedy of Gorboduc*. To this lament Spenser’s lines bear a decided resemblance” (91). At a point where the history cannot be proven, Spenser uses a dramatic text to fill in history’s gaps. Spenser again aligns his account more clearly with a genre of poetry—tragedy, which is specifically named by Sidney in the *Defense*—and he also emphasizes the loss of evidence of Britain’s origins with his poetic allusion.

In narrating the end of Brutus’ line, the narrator further attributes the absence of “moniments” which would verify Britain’s ancient heritage to the failure of dynastic politics. In addition to his reference to tragic drama, this portion of the history reveals the instability intrinsic to a monarchical system, for when succession is not secured, the realm becomes vulnerable, weak and potentially fragmented. After seven hundred years of renowned rule by Brutus’ “progeny,” the

noble braunch from th’antique stocke was torne

Through discord, and the roiall throne forlorne:

Thenceforth this Realme was into factions rent,

Whilest each of Brutus boasted to be borne,

That in the end was left no monument

Of *Brutus*, nor of Britons glorious auncient. (II x 36.4-7)

Spenser links the lack of monuments to the discord resulting from dynastic squabbling: the shattering of the realm into fragments equally destroys the very evidence of its existence. In this way, the “poet historical” reveals equally the fictionality of Britain’s ancient Roman origins and the perpetual threat of instability posed when royal families fail to secure clear lines of succession. The *Briton monuments* at this point becomes a kind of “monument,” in the sense of warning, about the instability of dynastic politics.

In fact the clearest lessons that come from the chronicle are the repeated warnings of the inevitable failures of dynastic politics, as shown not just in the example of the splitting of the realm when Brutus’ “branch” is torn from the family tree, but also in the three other examples of failed dynasties inscribed in the *Moniments*. The chronicle is divided into four dynasties, which all end without heirs (II x 5-68 note). While the *Moniments* gives Britain a claim to an ancient foundation, the history testifies to the inability, even within the providential chronicle structure, to establish a clear line of descent from the Roman Brutus to the great British hero Arthur. Though the *Briton monuments* represents Spenser’s attempt to reconcile the “two possible pasts” made available by Renaissance humanism—“antiquity and the middle ages” (Helgerson 5), he cannot seamlessly link the two traditions, even within the chronicle history so carefully crafted from multiple chronicle sources.

Perhaps the widest gap in Spenser’s chronicle is the gaping hole that Arthur should, but does not occupy. There is of course a legitimate and practical reason for his exclusion from the *Briton monuments*: since his destiny has not yet been fulfilled in the textual present, his history cannot yet be recorded in national memory. Arthur’s absence, however, is clearly significant within the greater scheme of the text. In

Merlin's prophecy in Book III, Spenser completes the British chronicle history begun in the *Moniments*, but even in the continuation of chronicle history, Arthur is markedly absent. In the prophecy Spenser opts instead to continue the narrative with Britomart and Arthegal's history, leaving Arthur out. Arthur becomes another stark reminder of the failure of dynastic politics, for he too dies without an heir, and thus the continuation of chronicle history must be rerouted through his cousin's progeny.

The hole that Arthur would occupy may also reflect the cultural shifts taking place in Elizabethan perceptions of history, which were changing and evolving as antiquarians and humanist Protestant historians delved further into the national past. In *Tudor Historical Thought*, F.J. Levy shows that although Renaissance England saw no revolution in or complete overhaul of historical methods, there were significant developments in how the past was analyzed and perceived, for "gradually ... new techniques [of selection and new sources of information] were adopted by chroniclers and antiquaries" to get at "the truth of the past" (Levy 293).

In Arthur's absence, Spenser implicitly acknowledges some of these historical shifts, since, in Elizabethan England, antiquarians had begun to bring Arthurian legend under particular scrutiny, even suggesting that it had no basis in fact. As Arthur is necessary to a history that authorizes the Tudor claim, Spenser suggests that Tudor accession and Elizabeth's reign is also difficult to legitimize through contemporary historical forms, even within the providential framework of chronicle history. Arthurian legend as Summit and Kobayashi illustrate was not accepted as historical truth. Arthur's absence from the *Moniments* suggests that mythic history and historical truth cannot be easily reconciled in a version of the past meant to bolster Elizabeth's

reign. Arthur's absence from the chronicle equally complicates British patriotism and the construction of British identity.

### **Interpreting Chronicle History: Modeling Reading**

Spenser describes Arthur's reaction to the *Briton moniments* in some detail; through it, he models a response to the national history incorporated in his mock chronicle. Arthur's emotional patriotic zeal is puzzling given his problematic relationship to the chronicle. His response, detailed below, reveals the complexities surrounding the uses of history to encourage patriotism in Tudor Britain.

After the *Britain moniments* veritably leaps into his hands, Arthur reads it attentively from the beginning all the way up to its abrupt end in mid-sentence, and despite his initial frustration that the author of the history "could not at least attend / To finish it" (II x 68.5-6), his disappointment is tempered by "secret pleasure" at the "wonder of antiquity" which temporarily renders him silent (II x 68.8, 9). The "wonder" builds to such "delight" that he becomes so "ravisht...to hear [stories of] / The royall Ofspring of his native land" that he finally exclaims,

Deare countrey, O how dearely deare  
Ought thy remembraunce, and perpetual band  
Be to thy foster Childe, that from thy hand  
Did commun breath and nouriture receive? (II x 69.1-6)

Superficially, Arthur's response to the history is an exemplary reaction to his reading about his national past, a model to imitate, for his patriotism is depicted as instinctive, a natural response to the text. Spenser reinforces the patriotic purpose of the

national history by mirroring it in Guyon's similar reading experience of his own national history in the "rolls of Elfin Emperours" (II x proem.3).<sup>31</sup> Both the British and Faerie chronicles are claimed as formative to the characters' minds and memories—they shape their understandings of the national past and themselves. By inscribing Arthur's self-discovery through the process of reading his country's chronicle history, Spenser reveals the status of chronicle history in Renaissance England. As Richard Helgerson claims, "Chronicle was the Ur-genre of national self-representation. More than any other discursive form, chronicle gave Tudor Englishmen a sense of the national identity" (11). Since Spenser interpolates the substance of the British chronicle into *The Faerie Queene* as a narrative digression, he models for his reader chronicle reading and interpretation through Arthur's example.

Interestingly, while Arthur encounters his own genealogical history in the *Moniments*, he nevertheless fails to recognize the extent of its personal connection to him. He instead reads the *Moniments* as a national history, which, judging by his exuberant exclamation, clearly serves as the foundation for his up-swell of patriotic sentiments. Despite the inherent nationalistic, and therefore public, inclination of the narrative, however, Spenser claims patriotism as a private and personal emotion by

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<sup>31</sup> In *The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser's 'Faerie Queene'*, Harry Berger, Jr., distinguishes between Arthur's chronicle history and the Elfin "rolls" containing the history of Faerie Lond, for he notes that in the rolls "all difficulties are left out" (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957. 110). Certainly Faerie Lond's history is more perfect, for there are no dynastic disruptions (II x 70-76). D.L. Miller similarly investigates the difference between the British and Elfin histories in *The Poem's Two Bodies: The Poetics of the 1590 'Faerie Queene'* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988). Elizabeth Mazzola also analyzes the difference between the two histories in her article "Apocryphal Texts and Epic Amnesia: The Ends of History in *The Faerie Queene*" (*Soundings* 78 (1995): 131-42).

depicting Arthur reacting to the book that he reads alone in the Chamber of Memory. Through Arthur's example, Spenser underscores the connections between private and political virtues. While Richard Helgerson argues that Spenser continually puts "the kingly and the politic off to a time that, given the length of the poem, could be never expected to arrive" (49), I suggest that Spenser deliberately blurs the boundaries between public and private virtues in his exploration of patriotism embedded in Book II. He claims patriotism as a personal emotion that, like the other virtues explored in the poem, has the potential to shape individual consciousness and public action.

Considering the content of the chronicle, which often reveals the messiness of dynastic politics and the repeated failure to secure succession, and bearing in mind Book II's exploration of the virtue of Temperance, Arthur's enthusiastic patriotism nevertheless remains puzzling. His reaction to the *Moniments*, described as a "secret pleasure" that he harbors as he contemplates Britain's dynastic history, becomes all the more troublesome when we consider its verbal echo in canto xii: as Guyon travels further into the dangerously seductive Bower of Bliss, he begins to embrace "secret pleasaunce" at the artfully constructed Bower (II xii 65.9). The allure of the Bower causes even the most Temperate soul nearly to fall captive to its sensual pleasures and threatens Guyon's "capacity for heroic effort" as Stephen Greenblatt points out (182). By verbally linking Arthur's patriotic pride to Guyon's nearly complete submission to the Bower's seductive power, Spenser indicts Arthur's exuberance. His patriotism appears far too emotional and somewhat misplaced, and the text hints, it may in fact inhibit proper masculine action, for Arthur's reading so fills him "with delight of novelties / And natural desire of countryes state" (II x 77.1-2) that "So long [he] redd in

those antiquities, / That how the time was fled, he] quite forgate” (II x 77.3-4). The narrator indicates that it requires Alma interrupting his “studies” “perforce” before Arthur is brought back to the present (II x 77.6). Arthur’s contemplative study of Britain’s past distracts him from his quest. By linking his reaction to the chronicle to Guyon’s intemperate response to the Bower’s charms, Spenser turns Arthur’s patriotism into a moment of “bafflement,” an instance in which the text “surprise[s] or puzzle[s] the reader” so as to “resist assimilation to totalizing interpretive strategies” (Strier 1).

In Arthur’s exuberance, Spenser reflects sixteenth-century fears surrounding growing national consciousness in Elizabethan England. In *Patriotism, Power and Print: National Consciousness in Tudor England*, Gillian Brennan indicates, “the Tudors were aware” that “national consciousness could develop into a force which could threaten the monarchy” (15). While they clearly “sought to increase their power by identifying themselves with the nation ... they ... realized that their use of the notion of loyalty to England could be turned against them” (Brennan 15). Spenser echoes Tudor concerns in his depiction of British chronicle history and Arthur’s reaction to it. As Book II celebrates the virtues of temperance, rationality, and balance, Arthur is carried away by his patriotic fervor to such an extent that he neglects heroic action. While Arthur’s response, as I indicate earlier, illustrates acceptable humanist reading and interpretive practices, we are left to wonder whether his extreme patriotism is a warranted or reasonable response to a national history that highlights so clearly the repeated failure of dynastic politics as well as the tenuousness of chronicle history.

Furthermore, his response reveals a significant tension at the heart of humanist interpretations of history. Levy argues that one of Italian humanism’s most important

contributions to shifting perceptions of the past was to introduce the idea of anachronism to Tudor England by demonstrating that the past differed from the present (Levy ix). Ironically, however, humanist historians turned to the past to find acceptable models for action and comportment in the present. Timothy Hampton claims, “humanist writing on exemplarity is seen as caught between a veneration of the timeless value of ancient models as patterns for action and a sharp awareness of the contingency that divides modern readers from ancient exemplars” (x). Ultimately, Arthur’s reaction leaves us questioning the relationship between past examples and present action, for Spenser depicts patriotism as potentially debilitating as it is inspiring.

### **From Temperate to Chaste History: Contextualizing Merlin’s Vision**

The history of the British monarchy begun in the *Moniments* is continued in Book III, canto iii, in Merlin’s prophetic vision of the future. In fact, the prophecy continues where the *Moniments* leaves off, starting with Britomart’s (and Arthur’s) textual present and ending with the prediction of Elizabeth Tudor’s accession. The special prominence given to books in guarding human memory, knowledge and learning in Book II gives way to another form of “history”—prophecy—which allows Spenser to fold his own extratextual historical time and place, Elizabeth’s England, into his chronicle history.

Spenser historicizes Elizabeth both by making her the completion of the prophecy and by inscribing her into official written history, for she is the Virgin Queen praised at the end of the prophecy and Queen Gloriana, celebrated in Guyon’s fictional chronicle *The Antiquities of Faerie lond*. Since she is part of both written and prophetic

history, Elizabeth is equally ordained by Britain's past, sanctioned in Britain's present, and shaping Britain's future. Nevertheless, her mythic role is undermined by the repeated ways in which the prophecy underscores her failure to fulfill the role prescribed to her as queen: to continue Britain's royal bloodline by producing an heir to the throne. What is more, as I indicate above, prophecy bears a tenuous relationship to history, for "visions and miracle," although classified as "potential species of historical writing" in the medieval period, had begun to come under scrutiny by the reformers of the post-dissolutionment libraries and were often cut from historical texts (Summit 169-70). The image of Elizabeth as the fulfillment of prophecy is therefore full of doubt, and the history claiming to praise the monarch's chastity is structured to point out her failings, to highlight the contrast between the positive image of Elizabeth as the fulfillment of apocalyptic promise and the reality of an aging Virgin Queen, and to reveal the threat posed to hereditary monarchy by a virgin, female ruler.<sup>32</sup>

By situating the continuation of the *Moniments* within Book III, Spenser significantly narrows the audience he addresses. While I argue that we can interpret the interpolated chronicle history in its entirety as a type of humanist exemplary history, however ambiguous its meaning and practical application may be, the shifted context of the prophecy from Book II to Book III allows the two parts of the history to provide

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<sup>32</sup> In *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), Susan Frye responds to the greater project of Book III as "Spenser's response to Elizabeth's Chastity": she suggests that Spenser redefines 'it according to the patriarchal definition of chastity as "purity from unlawful intercourse" (OED), which assumes that a "chaste" woman acquiesces to the roles first of virginal daughter and then of wife and mother, as defined by the masculinist codes of English law" (114). She goes on to claim that Book III "unleashes the frustrations and violence that Elizabeth's material and discursive strategies had generated in Spenser and in figures as diverse as Roland Whyte, Philip Sidney, and the Earl of Essex" (114).

different didactic examples for different readers. Arthur's lack of self-awareness as he reads the *Briton monuments* allows his act of textual interpretation to carry broad applications for all of Spenser's readers, the "learned throng" whom his narrator addresses throughout the poem (I Proem 1.8), for he reads the text not as a future king, but as any "learned" British person might. Any British reader might learn from and emulate his example. In the second half of the history, however, Spenser narrows the scope of his audience. He begins Book III by addressing "all Ladies, which have [Chastity] professed" (III Proem 1.7). But in the second half of the history inscribed in canto iii, which predicts Britomart's future in prophecy, he explicitly writes the history for Britomart alone. The prophecy bears even greater personal significance for her than the *Britain monuments* does for Arthur, for it prescribes a precise historical role to her. Merlin spells out her destiny in certain terms—she is to be mother of the next valiant line of British monarchs. Because Spenser ties the representation of Britomart to Elizabeth I both through their ancestry and in his idealized depiction of Britomart as a young virgin, Merlin's prophecy appears destined for his "Souveraine" explicitly (III Proem 1.5). Through the separate encounters with the two halves of the chronicle history, Spenser narrows the scope and focus of the exhortative message.

In his characterization of the two women with whom the vision begins and ends, Britomart and Elizabeth I, Spenser's narrator equally underscores the history as a specifically personal message for Elizabeth I. Here, the text forgoes praise and instead critiques the Virgin Queen, underscoring that she has not fulfilled her duty as a female sovereign to produce an heir. In his characterization of Britomart the narrator depicts her as a mother first and foremost, and indeed, her every emotion is described in terms

of her historical role as the future mother of British kings. Spenser compares even her private, sexual desire for Artegall to the maternal love of a mother for her children: on hearing Artegall described, Britomart

. . . woxe inly wondrous glad

To hear on Love so highly magnifyde...

The loving mother, that nine monethes did beare,

In the deare closett of her painefull syde,

Her tender babe, it seeing safe appeare,

Doth not so much reioyce, as [Britomart] reioyced theare. (III ii 11.1-9)

Britomart's sexual desire becomes chaste in an explicit language of motherhood. By linking Britomart's virtuous, chaste love to her reproductive destiny, Spenser underscores the most significant difference between Britomart and Elizabeth—Britomart is the mother of monarchs, while Elizabeth stubbornly remains a Virgin Queen. The associations of history with the female body in this portion of the poem call attention to the failings of dynastic politics when female monarchs do not fulfill their role in producing male heirs to continue royal bloodlines. Through the contrast between Elizabeth and Britomart, Spenser implicitly reveals the Elizabethan present as menacing England's future.

### **Modeling Queenship: Critiquing Elizabeth through Other Exempla**

In other portions of Merlin's prophecy, the subtle yet distinct divide between Britomart's chastity and Elizabeth's virginity comes into even sharper focus. Though Elizabeth is "shadowed" in Britomart and in other depictions of queenship inscribed

throughout the two portions of the chronicle, the differences between Elizabeth and all the other queenly examples becomes clearest when Britomart's nurse explicitly refers to specific depictions of the good queens throughout the *Moniments* and the prophecy. Encouraging Britomart to take the lessons from these examples, the nurse advises that

Bards tell of many wemen valorous,  
Which have full many feats aduenturous,  
Performed, in paragone of proudest men:  
The bold *Bunduca*, whose victorious  
Exploits made Rome to quake, stout *Guendolene*  
Renowned *Martia*, and redoubted *Emmilen*. (III iii 54.4-9)

While the nurse lists the women to inspire Britomart to take up arms and actively pursue her destiny, the proximity of this stanza to Merlin's final prediction of "the royall Virgin" at the end of the prophecy only four stanzas earlier invite comparison between Elizabeth and the other women.

By returning to the *Briton moniments*, we can begin to reconstruct a positive example of queenship in the women that Britomart's nurse names, and their various attributes contribute to a larger image of positive female sovereignty depicted by Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*. The *Moniments'* chronicle narrator praises both Martia and Bunduca as paragons of virtue and exemplary queens. Martia "the fayre" (II x 42.3), the wife of Guitheline, is a "woman worthy of immortal praise" because she established just laws (II x 42.4). Bunduca, as the successor to the first Christian king, most closely resembles Elizabeth, the daughter of the first Protestant English monarch. Spenser celebrates Bunduca's tragic end, to commit suicide in the face of military

defeat, for it spurns a victory for her country; the prophecy informs us that “shee triumphed on death, in enemies despight” for “her reliques . . . / Fought with Seuerus, and him ouerthrew” (II x 56.9-57.2). Despite her similarities to Spenser’s queen, Bunduca differs from her both in leaving a familial legacy and by offering an inspiring “moral” example that allows her subjects to remain united in their struggle to defeat a national enemy.

The contrast between Elizabeth and the positive examples of female sovereignty comes into sharpest focus in a comparison of the representation of the medieval queen Guendolene in the *Moniments* and the description of Elizabeth in Merlin’s prophecy, which underscore fears surrounding succession. Careful examination of these passages reveals a strong critique of Spenser’s queen, for in them the narrator suggests that Elizabeth failed in her duties as female sovereign by choosing to remain unmarried and without heirs.

In the *Moniments*, the narrator presents Gundolene, wife to the fornicator Locrine, as an ideal female ruler.<sup>33</sup> Guendolene, like Elizabeth, becomes a powerful icon of female rule and empowerment, for she seizes power from her husband after he falls “to vaine voluptuous disease” and leads her country well for twelve years (II.x.17).

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<sup>33</sup> Spenser’s moral representation of Guendolene, incidentally, is significantly expanded from the description given by Monmouth, who only explains that she “took the government of the island into her own hands” after Locrinys died (*Historia Regum Britanniae* 256). He does not comment on her character. In fact, Monmouth further indicates that she “reigned twelve years...And when madoc her son came of legal age, he was made king” (257). Harper speculates that Spenser’s treatment “may show the influence of Holinshed and Stow in the statement that Madan [madoc] was too young to rule, although this might be inferred easily enough from Geoffrey’s statement that Guendoline surrendered the scepter when her son reached manhood” (*The Sources of the British Chronicle History in Spenser’s Faerie Queene*. Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1910. 63).

But the narrator insists that her greatness and honor derive not so much from her wise leadership as from her decision voluntarily to step down from rule; she only rules for her son until he reaches maturity. Therefore, any threat to the patriarchal order that she poses is neatly contained:

[she] first taught men a woman to obey:

But when her sonne to mans estate did wex,

She it surrendered, ne her selfe would longer vex. (II.x.20)

In this passage, Merlin implies that Guendolene's reversal of the patriarchal order is justified simply because it is temporary. Though Merlin only implicitly alludes to Elizabeth, the contrast is clear: Guendolene provides her country with a male heir and renounces her leadership both immediately and willingly when the moment presents itself. Elizabeth, on the other hand, neither produced nor named an heir, and she refused to step down from rule throughout her reign. Guendolene thus appears to offer an ideal model of female sovereignty that is limited and checked by Guendolene herself—she fulfills her reproductive duty by producing a male heir, but she also ensures a smooth transition from her rule to her son by stepping down from the throne without struggle.

At the end of Merlin's prophecy, the narrator offers an image of Elizabeth herself, which is presented in even more exalted terms than the description of Guendolene; nevertheless, the glory of the representation is weakened significantly by Merlin's last words, which call attention to the end of Elizabeth's reign. In this portion of the passage, the narrator invites readers to compare Elizabeth to the Virgin Mary,

while also remaining implicitly contrasted to Guendolene. In stanza 49, Elizabeth's accession is described as a religious and historical triumph:

Thenceforth eternall union shall be made  
 Betweene the nations different afore,  
 And sacred Peace shall lovingly persuade  
 The warlike minds, to learne her goodly lore,  
 And civile armes to exercise no more:  
 Then shall a royall Virgin raine, which shall  
 Stretch her whit rod over the Belgicke shore,  
 And the great Castle smite so sore with all,  
 That it shall make him shake, and shortly learn to fall. (III iii 49.1-9)

In this stanza, political and historical allusions are conflated with religious language—Spenser references contemporary historical events, such as the Act of Union of England and Wales as well as Elizabeth's defeat of the Spanish Armada, but he also links Elizabeth to the Virgin Mary by referring to her simply as the "Virgin" (III.iii.49 notes). What is more, he represents her accession as an event that transforms the history of the world, thereby reinforcing the parallels between Mary and Elizabeth.

Through his apocalyptic language, Spenser insists that Elizabeth's historic role is pre-ordained: just as the Virgin mother gives birth to the king of all kings, the Virgin queen apparently reigns as the monarch to end all monarchs. The narrator implies that the women mark the beginning and the end of human history. While Mary is the vessel through which God puts his plan to redeem humankind into action, Elizabeth ends history altogether by bringing the "eternall union" between nations and establishing

“eternal peace.” Her “victory” is to be both “decisive and apocalyptic” (Watkins 154).

In this particular stanza, Spenser presents his own contemporary moment in divine terms.

### **Interpreting Prophecy**

If Spenser posits a divine image of Elizabeth, the very next line of the poem complicates it. Merlin proclaims, “But yet the end is not” (III.iii.50), alluding to Christ’s words to his disciples in Matthew 24.6 where He details the things that must take place before the end of the world can come (III.iii.50 note 1). The biblical allusion could be read as yet another example characterizing Elizabeth’s reign as a moment of divine intervention into human history, but it could equally suggest that Elizabeth’s accession does not in fact mark the end of human history at all. The “union”—which refers to the 1536 Act of Union of England and Wales—may be “eternal,” but the “peace” is not (III.iii.49 note 1).

It is here that the contrast between Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen, and the Virgin Mary and Guendolene comes sharply into focus. Both Mary and Guendolene fulfill their destinies not in ruling, but in bearing children who will one day rule. In the context of both the poem and Spenser’s political reality, Guendolene’s example is particularly important: she knows when to step down as queen. Though men “obay” her while she rules, as soon as her son comes of age, she gives up the throne and restores the “natural” order by surrendering “mans estate” (II.x.20). Elizabeth, on the other hand, clearly cannot do this. The triumph of the description is undermined by Merlin’s last words (“But yet the end is not” III.iii.50), and Spenser’s representation of

Elizabeth is thereby marked with failure, doubt, and fear of what the future might hold. The triumphant “end” of history is deferred indefinitely. And the only thing that can follow Elizabeth’s stable reign is a return to dynastic disorder. She neither produced nor named an heir.

Just as the contrast between Guendolene and Elizabeth reveals the tensions caused by Elizabeth’s rule as the Virgin Queen, Merlin’s reaction to the histories underscore Spenser’s ambivalence toward the uses of chronicle history in shaping national identity. Though Spenser wants to celebrate his nation and queen triumphantly, the poem enters dangerous territory in the content of Merlin’s response to the prophecy. While the passage speaks of Elizabeth as the fulfillment of prophecy, it also depicts her failure to be the queen who will usher in lasting peace. Merlin’s reaction to the prophecy is described in similar terms to Arthur’s (who is “ravisht” on hearing of the glorious history of his country in II x 69), but Merlin’s “ecstasy” more explicitly problematizes Spenser’s attempts to depict Elizabeth and the Tudor myth in positive apocalyptic terms. After Merlin declares that Elizabeth is, in fact, not the end of British history, he:

...stayd,

As overcomen of the spirites powre,

Or other ghastly spectacle dismayd,

That secretly he saw, yet note discovre:

Which suddein fitt, and halfe extatick stoure

When [Britomart and her nurse] saw, they grew

Greatly confused in behaveoure;

At last the fury past, to former hew

Hee turnd againe, and chearfull looks did shew. (III.iii.50)

Spenser allows no definitive interpretation of the passage, for the poem overtly suggests two possible meanings for Merlin's reaction—he is either overcome by the glory of the vision or dismayed by the horrors that follow the peace ushered in by Elizabeth's reign.

In *The Specter of Dido: Spenser and Virgilian Epic*, John Watkins speculates that Merlin's "halfe extaticke stoure" could carry a most ominous meaning. In response to A.C. Hamilton's suggestion that "Merlin's 'ecstatic trance' indicates 'a vision of England's domination over Europe'" (Watkins 155), Watkins suggests that Hamilton's interpretation:

suppresses the darker possibility that "the ghastly spectacle" may be a return to civil strife or some other national disaster...Merlin's dismay...may arise from fears that Elizabeth's barrenness might limit the Golden Age to a single, mortal life. (155)

Whether the "extaticke stoure" results from Merlin's rapture over his glorious vision or from his dismay at the sight of what the future holds, the poem insists that her future is unknowable. But it also shows that "civil strife" is a real possibility. By evoking both as potential conclusions, Spenser renders suspect the positive apocalyptic interpretation of Elizabeth's reign, which is clearly suggested in other parts of the prophecy.

Furthermore, in portraying her shortcomings as a monarch (most particularly her inability to assure a peaceful succession after her reign), he even suggests that this reading is not possible.

## Conclusions

In spite of Spenser's continual references throughout *The Faerie Queene* to an ideal and idyllic past, which he contrasts to the degenerate present, he turns his present historical moment into an historical artifact in Book III and elsewhere. Elizabeth's story becomes the continuation of Arthur's personal history, and Spenser both pictures it in the text as the divinely sanctioned future of Arthur's own story, and also scripts it as the end point of Arthur's history. Although Spenser is not the first to link Elizabeth to Arthur's legendary role in English history, he clearly depicts England's Arthurian past as building to Elizabeth's accession.<sup>34</sup> His prophetic reading of history allows Spenser in moments to interpret Elizabeth as God's representative on earth elected for the English people to usher in prosperity and protect the realm from internal and external threats. By locating a framework for a sense of national identity in monarchical history, Spenser, through his idealized depiction of Elizabeth offers an ideal image of Englishness upon which his readers (like Arthur) might fashion themselves.

And yet throughout his exploration of chronicle history, Spenser reveals his dilemma as the "poet historical," for he is unable to write an Elizabethan royal history without exposing the tenuousness of his project: to read Elizabeth in apocalyptic terms may be attractive, but it is also dangerous, for it masks the dynastic conflicts that history

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<sup>34</sup> Arthur was linked to Elizabeth in the progress entertainments beginning in the 1570s. The most famous of the entertainments, those at Kenilworth in 1575, use Arthurian motifs and tie Elizabeth to the Fairy Queen. Further information on the representation of Elizabeth as the Fairy Queen at the progress entertainments at Kenilworth can be found in Charles Read Baskerville's article "The Genesis of Spenser's *Queene of Faerie*" (*Modern Philology* 18:1 (May 1920): 49-54). Jean Wilson's *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Woodbridge, England: D.S. Brewer, 1980) remains a primary source for an account of Elizabethan entertainments.

seems to promise will follow her reign. Spenser is unable to ignore these conflicts when he rewrites Geoffrey of Monmouth's chronicle because the history of Britain is marked by dynastic dispute.

Furthermore, Spenser himself appears mindful of the distinction between the monarch and the State. Although he integrates Elizabeth into his history as a figure of providential history, English identity, and as part of his Christian allegory, the history into which he incorporates her is consistently marked as doubtful. In making Elizabeth part of such a fiction, however historical this fiction might appear, Spenser also casts doubt on the Tudor myth and his image of Elizabeth. The myth begins to fall apart in the body of the text, as it becomes increasingly evident that the image he offers of Elizabeth is just that—a glorious image that may be enticing, but one that only flimsily disguises the wrinkles, pock-marks, and other signs of Elizabeth's frailty, humanity, and imperfections lurking beneath the surface of her luminous make-up. Beyond Elizabeth, Britain's history is revealed as equally distorted and troublesome. Elizabeth's body is scripted as the physical embodiment of the English State, but in the various ways that Elizabeth is inscribed in the chronicle histories interpolated in Books II and III, Spenser's depiction of Elizabeth and patriotism serves not to mirror reality, but rather the artifice of the Bower of Bliss.

Both the *Briton monuments* and Merlin's prophecy reflect the problematic relationship that *The Faerie Queene* has to the histories inscribed in it. The histories are both a part of Elizabethan propaganda that contributes to the Tudor myth, and critiques of the queen's reign. Interestingly Spenser manipulates historical fact and poetic invention to both the honor and detriment of Elizabeth's royal image and British

patriotism. In presenting his mythic histories as humanist exempla, Spenser subtly questions the relationship between the national past and images of Englishness in his present.

## Chapter 4:

### Shifting Images of Class and Crown in Elizabethan Prose Narrative:

#### Thomas Deloney's *Jack of Newbury* and Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveler*

Unlike Spenser, who uses the authority of the epic genre to re-envision chronicle history's relationship to fiction and English identity, Thomas Deloney and Thomas Nashe revise history by experimenting with the generic flexibility of prose fiction. Unlike verse genres, fictional prose narratives lack what Constance Relihan describes as "a strong generic tradition or well-established readership" with defined generic expectations of these texts (1).<sup>35</sup> Deloney and Nashe use prose to imagine history anew by relating the stories of middle- and lower-ranked heroes, but they also both inscribe the figure of Henry VIII in their tales to draw on the authoritative power of monarchical history. The Henrican past offers a rich context to explore ideas about England and English identity, for it represents a seismic shift in England's history. Henry VIII's reign took the country out from under the Church in Rome, established the monarch as the head of both the Protestant Church and State, and attempted to prove that "England was a sovereign polity separate from the rest of Christendom" (Greenfield 51). Deloney

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<sup>35</sup> English prose fiction masquerades under many different labels: Relihan shows that these texts are called "pamphlets," "histories," "romances," or as in Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*, "poetry" (*Fashioning Authority: The Development of Elizabethan Novelistic Discourse*. Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1994. 3). While scholars today find Sidney's "all-inclusive term appealing" because it resembles our notion of fiction, Relihan asserts that it is not clear that Sidney's view of prose writing was widely accepted by his contemporaries. These texts do follow certain generic patterns that allow us to group them into subcategories (such as the Euphuistic fiction modeled after Lyly's *Euphues*, for instance), but they also all exhibit what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as "the language of the novel": "they are a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other" ("From the *Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse*." *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*. Ed. Michael McKeon. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000. 333).

and Nashe mirror such radical moves within their fictional tales by proposing shifting and transformational ideas about the sources of English national identity.

Like most writers of historical tales in early modern England, Deloney and Nashe respond to the ideas, historical figures, and ways of understanding England's past that are characterized in chronicle histories and official state papers as uncontested. Yet Deloney and Nashe move away from established, authoritative narratives in order to forge new conceptions and constructions of England and English identity. By drawing on fiction's flexibility to imagine stories that are unlikely to make their ways into chronicle histories, they depart from the sources of their stories as well as the moralizing purposes of Renaissance histories. Instead, Deloney's and Nashe's texts destabilize monarchal history by collapsing the distance, both physical and moral, between the monarch and the middling ranks, elevating new, lowly heroes and voices of little importance in other historical sources. Through fiction, they restore these individuals into the stories of English history and thereby claim fictional writing as another kind of historical form that can reveal historical peoples, events, and truths through new stories of the past and transformative ways of telling them.

Deloney and Nashe tie their tales to the Henrican past in order to anchor their texts in monarchal history, thereby legitimizing their fictional constructs. The authority of the monarchal past serves to buttress and authorize their heroes, who offer models of English identity that are strikingly similar to the kingly example. In this chapter, I analyze *Jack of Newbury* and *The Unfortunate Traveller's* relationship to English national identity to illustrate the shifting models that they elevate for an emerging national identity in early modern England. Through studying the characters of Henry

VIII and the heroes of both texts, I will demonstrate that they claim them as figures of Englishness to mirror, rival, and even supplant Henry VIII, despite their undeniable differences of rank and blood. Deloney elevates Jack for he serves as a model for Henry VIII, teaching him how to be an effective steward of the State, and more importantly, how to be a good Englishman. I will analyze Deloney's explicit critiques of the aristocracy and the Catholic Church as threats to the early modern English State, potentially undermining Jack's good example to the monarch, and menacing the positive contributions of the rising merchant classes in this text.

Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* provides an interesting contrast to Deloney's idealizing text, for Nashe's Jack Wilton is a jester-hero and trickster figure. Through the protagonist Jack and the figure of Henry VIII, Nashe exploits a discourse of sovereignty and satirizes the didactic and patriotic character of Renaissance English historical writing. I suggest that Nashe casts doubt on the didactic purpose of historical writing by characterizing both the King and lowly Jack Wilton as dubious moral examples for the English nation. Instead of locating English identity in idealized figures, Nashe positions an ideal of English cultural identity within bourgeois fiction like *The Unfortunate Traveller*. This text ultimately forges a vital role for the cultural production of the servant classes in shaping a new literary tradition upon which England will be formed.

### **Deloney's Bourgeois Kings**

Thomas Deloney's *Jack of Newbury* is the story of the successful entrepreneur and broadcloth weaver Jack Winchcombe. Written in 1597 as Elizabeth I's reign was

nearing its end, the novel<sup>36</sup> details Jack's rise in fortune and social, moral and political influence, and it links Jack's private affairs with specific historical events that shape the early modern English state. Although we can view Deloney as using the Henrican past—which resembles the author's own Elizabethan present—as a means to examine the politics and economics of Elizabethan England, at the same time we can also see Deloney's text as proposing a shift in thinking about English national identity through his revision of England's early Tudor heritage. Deloney depicts key events during Henry VIII's reign as pivotal in shaping England, primarily owing to the interventions of Jack and the merchant bourgeoisie that he represents. Throughout the text Deloney grants his broadcloth merchant significant influence over the realm; Jack's deeds are as important as the king's in protecting the realm's economic and political interests, and Jack offers a better example of stewardship than the king or aristocracy owing to his middling rank values and sensibilities, his Protestant work ethic, and his entrepreneurial success, all of which Deloney idealizes.

As a species of historiography, it is useful to consider *Jack of Newbury* as an alternative to chronicles and other kinds of “public histories,” for it does not focus on the contributions of monarchs and influential people. We can view it as akin to the seventeenth-century French “particular histories” that seek “to reveal the details and

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<sup>36</sup> The text's genre is debated, but I follow Merrit E. Lawlis in labeling the text a novel. In his critical edition of Deloney's longer prose works, *The Novels of Thomas Deloney* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1961), Lawlis suggests that Deloney's prose fiction needs to be evaluated separately from John Lyly's *Euphues* and the number of Euphuistic prose texts modeled on it, for “Deloney's novels contrast so strongly with *Euphues*, and with other Elizabethan novels, that the reader immediately recognizes them as something new, as a different order of fiction. *Jack of Newbury* . . . is the first really dramatic novel in English” (xii). He further claims that “In structure, [*Jack of Newbury* is] similar to jest-biographies” (xvi).

reasoning that underlie public matters of general history, the motives and passions that determine officially recorded events, and it includes...actions that are excluded from the general record” (Beasley 29). Deloney indulges in historical speculation in order to reclaim the role of merchants like Jack in influencing history: within his far-fetched storyline, he asserts that Jack plays a crucial role in shaping public events, and his actions have far-reaching social and historical implications.

Within fiction, Deloney accounts for the past much more fully than royal histories can, for he shows that wars cannot be won and the realm cannot prosper without the participation of middling ranked men. I suggest that we view his fictional narrative as an alternative history, one that recuperates peripheral or neglected figures, offering them a voice in shaping important events and preserving their role in shaping the nation. In fact, in the novel’s dedicatory epistle, Deloney makes clear his intention: he seeks to raise “out of the dust of forgetfulnesse a most famous and worthie man, whose name was *John Winchcombe*, alias *Iacke of Newberie*” for the explicit purpose of commemorating and celebrating an entire group of artisans—he hopes to show laborers of “manuall Arts,” “the great worship and credit which men of this trade have in former time come unto” (3). By restoring Jack’s place in history, Deloney’s novel locates England’s values and identity in folk heroes such as his protagonist, and in so doing, grants societal participation and influence to a broader range of social strata.

While *Jack of Newbury* offers a history that privileges a social group that is excluded from many early modern historical narratives, it nevertheless appears to follow the didactic pattern of early modern histories by offering didactic, moral examples. But by locating his historical ideal in the entrepreneurialism and manners of

Jack, Deloney rejects the continental tastes of aristocratic courtiers and shifts his sustained attention away from the powerful and authoritative English monarchy. Jack becomes a paragon of virtue whose bourgeois manners, mores, and moral courage are held up as a pattern for all readers.<sup>37</sup>

Through the example of a merchant of the middling ranks gaining proximity to and influencing the crown, Deloney's text gives voice to the desire of the rising middling ranks to exercise sway and authority in shaping the early modern English State. In the case of this text, Jack begins as a clothmaker's apprentice, quickly marries his patron's widowed wife, takes over the business, encounters Henry VIII and in turn influences royal decisions. But Deloney's text goes beyond arguing for participation for bourgeois merchants, for Jack very directly shapes public policy by impressing the king with his wisdom and good sense, convincing the king to give generously to a group of poor people. In this way, *Jack of Newbury* can be read as a fictional stand-in for personal interaction between the middle ranks and the crown. It is well known that physical access to the king by the middle and servant classes was much less common

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<sup>37</sup> In the dedication to *Jack of Newbury*, Deloney indicates that he follows the example of "many wise men" in praising the industriousness of "worthy Clothiers" (3). He dedicates the novel to the Clothiers of "this Land," and even explains his stylistic choices as resulting from concern for his intended audience: he writes "in a plain and humble manner, that it may be the better vnderstood of those for whose sake I take paines to compile it, that is, for the well minded Clothiers" (3). In *Fashioning Authority: The Development of Elizabethan Novelistic Discourse* (Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1994), Constance Relihan argues that the proliferation of "different kinds of readers and their increased numbers" speaks to the wider range of fictional styles and narrative strategies in published writings: indeed the "varying kinds of texts" seem "constructed to satisfy different social and economic groups. Novelistic discourse [such as Deloney's], with its non-artistic nature and frequently non-aristocratic subjects and characters, seems designed to appeal to those segments of the reading public who could easily identify with the problems of a struggling apprentice (such as we see during the first section of *Jack of Newbury*)" (13).

than the aristocracy's proximity to the Sovereign. Through Jack's close interactions with the monarch (guiding royal decisions), Deloney transforms the relationship between the middle ranks and the crown, and in so doing, gives narrative the possibility to recast history in any way imaginable.

Because Jack's actions are so closely associated with maintaining the health and well being of the realm, Deloney claims his folk hero not merely as a model Protestant or subject to king, but also as an ideal Englishman. *Jack of Newbury* can therefore be read as participating in early modern debates about English national identity, as it glorifies a rising entrepreneurial class and highlights changing perceptions of wealth, individual prosperity, and power in early modern England. In fact, Deloney implies that the commonwealth very much depends upon the contributions of the entrepreneurs and merchants for its economic and moral health. I equally propose that *Jack of Newbury* contributes to a shift in cultural attitudes toward merchant and bourgeois identities in the final years of Elizabeth I's reign, for it claims entrepreneurial *men*, and not the aristocracy, as the "competent governors and obedient productive citizens" who might one day contribute to the security and prosperity of the realm (Helgerson 43). The novel offers an ideal image of English identity that is established primarily through Jack's masculine authority: Deloney minimizes women's contributions to the State and public life by instead glorifying Jack's management of his personal life and business affairs, and his contribution to the realm during a moment of national crisis when the country is invaded by a foreign army.

Jack's characterization is important to the values that Deloney seeks to idealize, and we can see this most clearly in the trajectory of the plot, which resembles a

*bildungsroman*: the novel narrates Jack's rise from social obscurity and poverty to prominence and fortune, and indeed his is a rags-to-riches story. Though a yeoman in origin, his subservience, obedience, and the "good government and discretion" gains him the trust of his employer, who owns a cloth mill (7). After his employer dies, Jack manages the estate for his patron's wealthy widow, and his "diligent labor and travaile" so impresses her (7), that she rewards his "singular vertue," by marrying him (7). Their fortunate marriage alliance transforms him from an apprentice into a business owner and employer. Interestingly, however, he resists the widow's aggressive advances over the course of many days before he accepts her offer of marriage, for though he recognizes the economic and social advantages of the match, he fears that his "Dame, would (perhaps) disdain to be gouerned by him that had beene her poore servant" (12). His fears are well founded, for he struggles initially to assert control over his new wife and her household. But it is not until her death that Jack finally manages to establish his absolute authority over the household and business. Once his wife dies and he becomes the sole authority over the business and household, the extent of his fortune and its economic impact are described in quantifiable terms to highlight the scope and breadth of Jack's importance: when his wife dies, she leaves him "wondrous wealthie," but more importantly, he employs over one thousand people (25).

Deloney's novel responds in part to growing optimism over the new opportunities for gains in wealth, power, and status that were emerging for the middling ranks in Elizabethan England's changing economy. But unlike the "new men" employed by Tudor monarchs who sought to re-fashion themselves as aristocrats (Wigham 624), Jack does not wish to rise so far up in social rank to become titled. In

fact, once he becomes an employer, he protests, “I am not . . . so much puffed up in pride, that any way I will forget my former estate” (21). Furthermore, when King Henry later offers to knight him in recognition of his service to the commonwealth, he refuses the title and snubs the aristocracy, choosing instead to stay within his God-given lot in life: “I beseech your Grace let me live a poor Clothier among my People, in whose maintenance I take more felicity that in all the vain Titles of Gentility” (49). Jack differs from others seeking to rise in social rank because his ambition is tempered by his strong work ethic, his humility, and his contentment.

The depiction of Jack’s careful management of his business and household underscores the values that Deloney implies are specific to his rank. For example, unlike the aristocracy, who are repeatedly depicted as non-productive parasites to the State, Jack is an effective artisan and entrepreneur. He combines industriousness and skillful management with generosity, kindness, and charity to his family, friends, and many employees. In *Thomas Nashe in Context*, Lorna Hutson asserts that the representation of Jack blends the “old social paradigm of the lord as provider or bread giver” with the emerging social type, the “entrepreneur or projector,” for the novel’s “clothier. . .keeps good house for his servant dependents as well as setting them to work” (96-97). Far from greedy, he does not generate a profit merely for the sake of personal financial gain; rather, he uses his prosperity to contribute to the prosperity of his local community by carefully managing his affairs. His business provides for literally hundreds of local families.

With regard to Jack’s moral character and religious values, he embodies generosity and charity. He refuses, for example, to allow his second wife to skimp in

her feeding of his servants so that she might indulge in foreign luxuries, and when he discovers her stinginess, he scolds her: “I will not have my People thus pinch’t of their Victuals. Empty platters make greedy Stomachs, and where Scarcity is kept, hunger is nourish’d. Wife as you love me, let me have no more of these doings” (73). While he clearly flexes his patriarchal muscles in his stern instruction of his wife, his language reflects an attitude of sovereignty: he refers to his employees as his “People.” His language too resembles a maxim, which authorizes the lesson, giving his words the ring of moral truth.

The primary moral values exemplified in Jack’s response display what Laura Stevenson O’Connell describes as Elizabethan Puritan attitudes toward wealth—on the one hand, “Elizabethan Puritans did not condemn wealth as trenchantly as did fourteenth-century English preachers or even the more conservative of the mid-sixteenth-century commonwealth philosophers” (3), but they also did not believe in amassing massive fortunes merely for their own benefit. O’Connell indicates that “the godly rich man was not a man who was engaged in the pursuit of wealth . . . the rich man’s duty to the commonwealth was fulfilled not by what he got but by what he spent and how he spent it” (8). Although the text seldom explicitly references religious discourse, through the depiction of Jack we are able to locate expressions of the Puritan attitudes that O’Connell describes, for he spends generously, never neglecting his duty to the poor or his employees, as illustrated in this and many other examples of charitable acts that he undertakes at great personal expense. In all of the values that Jack comes to embody, however, Deloney carefully resists painting Jack as explicitly Puritan. Rather, he more clearly aligns Jack with more general Protestant ideals—

generosity, charity, acceptance of one's lot in life, and a strong work ethic. By casting Jack as the epitome of English Protestant patriotism even before Henry VIII broke with the Catholic Church, Deloney suggests that Protestant values are inherent to England's middle ranks—he shapes history by giving England a moral legacy of Protestant values even before Henry VIII's split from the Catholic Church.

Jack uses his wealth to care for both his local community, as seen in the previous example, as well as the larger English State, as illustrated in examples of his service to king and country. Through these actions of both local and national consequence, the novel emblemizes English national identity in Jack. Indeed even the novel's title page underscores the national scope of Jack's deeds: Deloney calls his novel, "The Pleasant History of John Winchcome, in his younger years called Iack of Newberie, the famous and worthy Clothier of England: declaring his life and love, together with his charitable deeds and great hospitality; And how he set continually five hundred poore people at worke, to the great benefit of the Common-wealth Worthy to be read and regarded" (2). Jack's patriotic service to his country is integral to his success and thus the novel ties individual prosperity to national prosperity and security.

Jack's commitment to England is further illustrated in his response to a real historical event. In the crisis of 1513, James IV of Scotland took advantage of King Henry's absence in France to invade England. This event not only provides the backdrop for Jack's valiant effort to support the State, but also allows Deloney to comment on gender's role in politics and military leadership within the narrative. True to historical record, *Jack of Newbury* portrays young Queen Catherine of Aragon as

successfully organizing a defense against the invading Scottish army, a historical moment reminiscent of Elizabeth I's 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada.

Though Queen Catherine is depicted as a competent leader who successfully fills a role of masculine military leadership during her husband's absence, Deloney downplays her positive contribution to the military victory by choosing instead to highlight Jack's actions. In fact, it is Jack's intervention that brings about victory, for instead of merely supplying the six men required of him, the humble broadcloth weaver raises an entire army of 250 men, all magnificently clothed. In this moment of national crisis, it is interesting to note that Jack's mercantilism is enlisted in the service of the State. Furthermore, since Jack's contribution is portrayed as so integral to the queen's success, we can read the text as suggesting that the victory is secured more by the English men who support the queen than by the queen herself. Through the imagined, and crucial, intervention of lowly Jack in this historic episode, Deloney qualifies the historical anomaly—a military victory with a woman at the helm—by demonstrating that female rule is only as strong as the men who support it. Catherine's historical triumph owes itself to patriotic men such as Jack, thereby keeping the patriarchal order firmly intact.

Jack's act of selflessness in contributing to the protection of his country, though judged as entirely positive by the text's narrator, actually produces a somewhat negative social response. Jack's noble actions receive jealous criticism, for certain wealthy gentlemen "envying heerat gaue out words that hee shewed himselfe more prodigall then prudent, and more vaine glorious then well aduised, seeing that the best nobleman in the country would scarce have done so much" (30-31). The queen on the other hand,

after learning of his efforts, publicly praises his contribution, pronouncing him a “gentleman by condition, and a faithful subject in heart” (32). Here we see that Deloney proposes a new definition of gentility, one that aligns it not with social rank, but instead with moral deeds. In this way, the author rejects blood as playing a primary role in personal worth, and instead exposes Jack’s actions as more revealing of his character and value to the realm, thereby depicting his protagonist as the embodiment of an ideal English patriot.

Beyond celebrating Jack as a nearly perfect expression of English masculinity, Deloney further explores the relationships between the middling ranks, the crown, and the commonwealth through a metaphorical rhetoric of sovereignty used to construct his protagonist: Jack is depicted, literally and figuratively, as king of his castle. Although he is neither a ruler nor an aristocrat, he nevertheless reigns over a realm specific to him—his bourgeois household. Through the metaphor equating his home to the realm, Jack’s household becomes a microcosm for the English nation, and lowly Jack provides a prime example of stewardship and rule that Deloney sets forth as a model for all to follow, regardless of their rank.<sup>38</sup> The rhetoric of kingship becomes the foundation on which Deloney constructs his middling ranked hero specifically, and English identity more generally.

If Jack is depicted as a sovereign within the private sphere of his household and the local importance of his business, his metaphorical kingship is contrasted to the

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<sup>38</sup> Deloney justifies his imaginative text as many early modern writers do, by claiming a moral and social purpose for it that allows the work “to make some contribution to the concerted enterprise of producing responsible governors for a more responsible commonweal” (Lorna Hutson, *Thomas Nashe in Context*. New York: Oxford, 1989. 24).

image of an actual sovereign inscribed in the text who wields absolute authority: Henry VIII. The figure of the monarch establishes the historical setting in which Deloney imagines fanciful and unlikely encounters between the monarch and his common subjects. After the Scottish invasion brings Jack in contact with Catherine of Aragon, he encounters Henry VIII during a crisis in the clothier industry that threatens the economic health of the commonwealth. The text's depictions of Henry VIII undermine common assumptions about monarchs as separate and distinct from their subjects, for the king is represented as a jovial monarch whose manners and interests are similar to those of the middle rank protagonist, and he repeatedly comes into close physical proximity with the middling sorts in the text. The bourgeois flavor of the depiction of Henry VIII is particularly surprising given Deloney's imprisonment in 1596, just one year before he wrote *Jack of Newbury*, for publishing a ballad in which Elizabeth I figured.<sup>39</sup> According to a letter that Stephen Slany, the Mayor of London, wrote to William Cecil, the Lord Treasurer, it was Deloney's description of Elizabeth that served as grounds for his arrest. He apparently described the queen "'with her people in dialogue wise in very fond and vndecent sort'" (Lawlis xxxviii). Deloney's crime was to portray an exaggerated equality between the queen and her subjects that Elizabeth found indecent and offensive.

In the figure of Henry VIII, Deloney rescripts the role of the monarchy, suggesting that an effective monarch's primary responsibility is to look out for the economic interests of successful merchants and people of the middling and lower ranks.

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<sup>39</sup> Deloney was imprisoned in July, 1596; the ballad, which is now lost, "complained of the scarcity of grain in England" (Merrit E. Lawlis. *The Novels of Thomas Deloney* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1961. xxviii).

Furthermore, he depicts his protagonist as an alternative model of power and authority to which readers can contrast the monarch. In fact, the implications of the novel are far-reaching, for Deloney suggests that the State might benefit from restructuring the government to provide mechanisms for the middling ranks to exercise more political influence.

While Deloney offers Jack as the pattern from which all Englishmen should be cut, it is possible to read Henry VIII as offering another paragon of Englishness. But it is important to acknowledge that the monarchy is defined and modeled on the behavior of Deloney's bourgeois capitalist, leveling the ground between the middle ranks and the monarch, for Henry VIII's positive comportment is owing to Jack's instruction. The bourgeois Englishman provides a shining example of what the text offers as the heart of English identity, and a wise monarch, according to Deloney, recognizes and follows the example.

This point is best illustrated in Jack and Henry's first meeting. When Jack hears of the king's plans to "[go] a Progress" to Jack's native Berkshire, he assembles thirty of his servants, outfits them and himself in soldiers' uniforms, and with them pretends to stand guard in a field near the king's royal procession (35). When Henry and some of his courtiers see Jack and his men standing guard across the field, the king sends a herald to inquire into Jack's actions. Jack tells him, "it is poor Jack of Newbery, who being scant Marquess of a Mole-hill, is chosen Prince of Ants, and here I stand with my Weapons and Guard about me to defend and keep these my poor and painful Subjects, from the force of idle Butterflies, their sworn enemies, lest they should disturb their quiet Common-wealth" (35). The king, tickled by Jack's display, itself an elaborate

pageant intended for the king's amusement, "heartily laugh[s]" at it, and sends his herald again to fetch Jack to come speak to His Majesty (36). Jack boldly refuses, explaining "his Grace has a Horse, and I am on Foot, therefore will him to come to me: beside that while I am away, our Enemies might come and put my People in hazard, as the Scots did in England, while our King was in France" (36).

While the herald (like so many others) is surprised at Jack's gumption, Jack stands his ground, explaining that the king "might think me a very bad Governour that would walk aside upon pleasure, and leave my people in Peril" (36). Again, and contrary I think to most of our ideas about Henry VIII's renowned temper, the king jovially agrees to comply with Jack's wishes and travels across the field to meet his "something sawcie" subject (21). When Henry arrives, Jack explains that he was elected king of the Ants to protect them against the threat posed by the "ambitious and malapert" butterflies, who, like the selfish and scheming nobles and middle class upstarts of Henry's court, threaten the health of the realm because their actions impede the ants' diligent labor, so emblematic of the Protestant work ethic that Jack and his employees represent.

Jack concludes his elaborate pageant by exclaiming that King Henry's "Royal Presence put [all enemies] to flight," and since Henry's "Majesty hath eclipsed" his "glory," Jack therefore "humbly . . . yield[s] unto his Majesty all [his] Sovereign Rule and Dignity, both Life and Goods, casting [his] weapons at his Feet, to do any Service wherein his Grace shall command" him (37). In declaring himself the king of his humble anthill, Jack exploits the metaphorical language of kingship to depict his own little household. Jack's rhetoric of sovereignty combines pretension with humility—on

the one hand, Jack boldly proclaims to his monarch that he himself is a king; but with the image of the ants, he associates himself with the common masses of the lower and middle ranks. The imagery of ants evokes the large number of members of the working class—each one like all the others, all actively industrious. By tempering his “sawciness” with clear indications that he knows his social rank and place, Jack claims himself as a model of good governance set forth for those both above and below him without offending the king.

In Henry’s reaction to Jack’s pageant, Deloney develops Henry’s character more fully. Jack and Henry are characterized in relation to one another, linked by their affability, good intentions, consideration for others, and concern for the welfare of the State. Additionally, Henry is, like Jack, personable and easily amused. But perhaps the most important aspect of his characterization comes in his relationship of relative subordination to Jack: Henry VIII recognizes that Jack knows best, and he knows how to take Jack’s well-intentioned instruction, and always in the right spirit. Indeed the two of them seem to be cut from the same cloth, so to speak—they are good patriarchs and good governors, and they share the same concerns. In fact, in the happy moment that they share here, both indulging in their amusement at Jack’s display, the text unites them in what seems to be their common bond of friendship and their distinguished examples of authority. In this way, Deloney claims both of them as models of authority—his king, and his middle-ranking merchant.

Henry shows that he has taken Jack’s example to heart when he displays his good management of the commonwealth later in the text; he agrees to intercede on behalf of all clothiers whose industry is threatened by trade embargoes resulting from

continental wars in Denmark. Because of the embargos, cloth mill owners all over England are forced to lay off thousands of their poor employees. In response to what is characterized as a national economic crisis, Jack organizes a gathering of one hundred and twenty representatives of the clothier industry to gather in London to beg for assistance from the State. Upon seeing the protesters, King Henry summons Jack to him personally so he can gather more information. He listens attentively as Jack narrates the clothiers' plight, recognizes once again that Jack's concerns are national concerns. The necessity of the king's support of Jack and his fellow weavers' economic enterprise is emphasized through his compliant response: the king tells Jack, "Give thy attendance at the Council chamber, where thou shalt receive an answer to thy content" (58). Because Henry allows himself to be guided by Jack, he sees the merit in Jack's judgment and responds to it with positive action. As Henry allows himself to learn from Jack's lessons, the episode destabilizes clear and rigid social hierarchies—Jack's, not Henry's, judgment matters most in guarding the realm. Deloney depicts Jack's metaphorical sovereignty ruling the king's decisions to the economic benefit, moral health, and security of the State, illustrating time and again that Jack provides the best historical model of English manners and mores.

Despite Deloney's use of the language of kingship and the positive examples of Jack's influence on the king and the realm, he also delineates the limits of his protagonist's political and social influence in two important episodes near the text's conclusion. While Jack's boldness in voicing his concerns to the king temporarily wins him the upper hand in determining events and influencing politics, in the end, his power is restricted to short-term, specific gains. For Jack's metaphorical "sovereignty" does

not go so far as to threaten the existing social order. Instead Deloney points out the constraints placed on his merchant-hero by rigid social hierarchies that someone like Jack cannot alter in any meaningful way so as to precipitate positive long-term change. The constrictions on the realm are illustrated by two characters who are depicted in direct contrast to Jack. Both of them courtiers, each embodies distinct but very real threats to both the State and the positive image of English national identity expressed through Jack.

The first character who menaces the realm is one of the “new men” at Henry’s court: the scheming, diabolical, Catholic Lord Cardinal Wolsey. Although Cardinal Wolsey is not a nobleman by birth, he has climbed to a position of great social prominence through the ranks of the Catholic Church, which allows him to become one of the king’s closest advisors. As the very opposite of Jack—a socially ambitious, parasitic, Catholic at court—Wolsey embodies everything that Deloney rejects in model English values and morals. But more than merely providing a contrast against which to judge the humble Jack, Wolsey poses a gravely serious threat to national security and economic stability of the realm. For his proximity to the king gives him the potential to corrupt the monarch’s judgment and influence him to make disastrous political decisions.

Wolsey’s actions from a previously cited episode best illuminate the danger he poses. When Henry promises to intercede on behalf of Jack and his fellow cloth merchants to end the trade embargo as I discuss above, the economic crisis is not immediately resolved. In fact, both Jack’s and the king’s ability to solve the problem is nearly stymied by Wolsey’s petty and menacing actions. Despite the king’s promise to

negotiate reopening international trade (58), he leaves it to Wolsey to sort out all of the finer details. Though the king trusts Wolsey to take care of the negotiations, the petty cardinal stalls the talks, letting his personal grudge against Jack win out over the welfare of the State. He still remembers the sting from Henry VIII's visit to Jack's estate in Berkshire: Jack indicated that Wolsey was one of the "ambitious and malapert" butterflies in his allegory of the ants (37). Still stewing from Jack's insult, Wolsey selfishly refuses to intercede on behalf of the clothiers. In order to save face and retaliate against Jack, Wolsey jeopardizes the fiscal health of the nation. The cardinal's actions pose a direct threat to the country and to Deloney's posited model of Englishness. Not only does Wolsey gamble the welfare of the State, but it is his intimate access to the king that risks him winning the monarch over to his thinking. Deloney critiques the court structure, for it allows corrupt courtiers like Wolsey to enjoy the monarch's attention and potentially influence political decisions, while reinforcing the middling ranks' distance from and lack of access to the monarch. Good men such as Jack, who according to *Jack of Newbury* better understand the needs and concerns of the English people and the realm, may not always have the same chance to intervene to set the course for the nation.

Deloney contrasts both the Church *and* the nobility to Jack's bourgeois ideal. The aristocracy is represented, as Wolsey, as morally degenerate, corrupt, and threatening to the moral welfare of the state. We see a clear example of aristocratic abuses in Deloney's representation of Sir George Rigley, a philandering knight, and his actions highlight the dangers that an unchecked nobility pose to the moral health of the realm.

Sir George's abuses are illustrated in his behavior to Jack's servant Joan.

Although the knight repeatedly promises to marry the servant girl so that he might have his way with her, he promptly abandons such plans when he discovers she is pregnant, as he decides to seek a more fortunate marriage alliance (82-83). Sir George menaces the moral health of the kingdom, but Jack tricks him into marrying the servant girl after all. To bring about the marriage, Jack once again intervenes by putting his trade to good use—Jack disguises Joan as a wealthy aristocrat by crafting a fine silk gown and matching veil, and tells Sir George that she stands to inherit a large fortune. With Joan's true identity hidden beneath the folds of the beautiful dress, a product of Jack's expert craftsmanship, Sir George begs for her hand. Jack arranges a very public marriage ceremony soon after. Sir George reacts with anger to having been humiliated in front of his friends: he "fretted and fumed, stamp't, and star'd like a diuell" (86). But Jack's intervention brings Sir George's behavior under control and forces the philandering knight to take responsibility for his actions. To calm the knight's anger, Jack gives Joan a dowry of one hundred pounds. With this unexpected rise in fortune, Sir George is reformed and becomes a good and loving husband: "taking his wife by the hand [he] gaue her a loving kisse" (86). Jack's shrewd thinking once again brings him the attention of the crown, this time to Sir George's benefit. The king, pleased by Jack's actions, rewards the knight with "a living forever" (87).

In both of these examples, Jack responds to bad situations resulting from the corruption of the king's advisors and the nobility with positive, constructive action. But even within the somewhat far-fetched easy access that Jack has to his monarch, Deloney's imagined restructuring of the English state is severely limited—he does not

(perhaps because he cannot) propose a way to get rid of the corrupt noble classes or the new men who have risen to positions of social prominence and modeled themselves on negative examples. Deloney instead envisions the circumstances under which the nobility might be reformed by the examples of their social inferiors and perhaps gradually replaced by better men. On the whole, the patriarchal hierarchy of Henry's monarchical authority is represented as a positive model of social organization, since it allows for Jack's social influence. Deloney's depiction of Henry's authority reveals, as Joan Pong Linton suggests, that Tudor England's "notion of princely sovereignty. . .fell short of absolutism" since the "'internal order' of the state 'depended on a *de facto* concordat or understanding between the monarch and the political nation'" ("Counterfeiting Sovereignty" 131).<sup>40</sup> Yet the text remains ambivalent toward the power structures that allow for such limited access to and influence on the king by respectable citizens such as Jack, for the continued influence of the aristocracy makes the government structurally resistant to change when it is most needed.

### **Nashe's "King of the Pages"**

Thomas Nashe inserts Jack Wilton, the roguish, rascalion protagonist of *The Unfortunate Traveller* into the early part of Henry VIII's reign. Jack Wilton is a jester-hero whose picaresque adventures as a page in the English army take him across Europe. In this portion of the chapter, I wish to examine ways in which Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, through the protagonist Jack and the figure of Henry VIII,

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<sup>40</sup> Joan Pong Linton cites D. Loades, *Tudor Government: Structures of Authority in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell 1997, 6).

exploits a discourse of sovereignty and undermines the didactic character of Renaissance English historical writing. I suggest that Nashe casts doubt on the didactic purpose of historical writing by characterizing both the King and lowly Jack Wilton as dubious moral examples for the English nation. Instead of locating English identity in idealized figures, Nashe positions an ideal of English cultural identity within bourgeois fiction like *The Unfortunate Traveller*.

Nashe also contrasts his protagonist's narrative style to the writings of two real English writers inscribed in the text—Thomas More and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. Nashe characterizes More's writing as too lofty and Surrey's as stylistically unoriginal; in so doing, Nashe claims bourgeois prose fiction as superior to and more "English" than writings by More and Surrey. This text ultimately forges a vital role for the cultural production of the servant classes in shaping a new literary tradition upon which England will be formed.

Though a work of historical fiction, Nashe constructs Wilton's tale by drawing from the conventions of two fictional genres: cony-catching pamphlets and romances, which celebrate "the citizen who rises from humble beginnings to wealth and power through his domestic and self government" ("Counterfeiting Sovereignty" 130). In *The Unfortunate Traveller*, however, Nashe does not replicate either genres' traditional plot trajectory. Though Wilton begins in the "initial posture of a coney-catcher" (Hutson 219), he never completes the coney-catcher's moral reformation or romance hero's social elevation. In fact, Jack never establishes a concrete domestic space over which he can establish patriarchal authority. Instead, Jack exercises his metaphorical kingship through his trickery and marks his text as a space that he can manage and master—

setting his tale in print becomes a source of present and future economic prosperity, and Nashe thereby celebrates the productive potential of imaginative literature. In other words, the space of the text ultimately becomes his “kingdom.” In the self-conscious ways in which the narrator makes his readers aware of fiction as a capitalist enterprise, as I will discuss later, the text becomes similar to John Winchcombe’s household and cloth-factory in that it has productive economic potential.

Although Jack Wilton never rises from his marginal, obscure position as a page and servant and thus never truly completes the plot trajectory that his story at first appears to duplicate, he is nevertheless able successfully to manipulate and influence others. He thereby gains measurable authority, even if it is only short-lived. Moreover, while Jack acknowledges his lowly status, he at the same time employs repeated monarchical metaphors as a way of elevating both himself and the whole of the lower ranks: in the first-person narration of the text, Jack declares himself “king of the drunkards” (228), “sole king of the cans and the blacke jackes, prince of the pigmies . . . Lord high regent of rashers of the coles and red herring cobs” (209), and “king of the Pages” (208). Jack Wilton has a “realm” of his own, but it is one that encompasses the illegal, immoral, and questionable.

Jack’s sovereignty might only be largely metaphorical, but his authority becomes real through his devious manipulation of others. In describing Jack’s power, Joan Pong Linton calls it a kind of “counterfeit sovereignty,” a form of “trickster agency [defined] in counterfeit relation to the king” (“Counterfeiting Sovereignty” 135). While Linton is correct to draw the parallel between Jack’s authority and that of the ultimate locus of authority, King Henry VIII, I find it necessary to point out that Jack

does not simply “counterfeit” his power through artificial means and fake airs—he exercises real control over others, even if only on a small scale. It is true that Jack’s devious and illicit means of gain highlight his marginal position in relation to established forms of power—governmental, social, and economic—but he nevertheless enjoys financial benefit from his exploits (although his financial windfalls never allow him to become titled or propertied). Moreover, in contrast to the King, he acquires his power through his own shrewdness rather than by birthright.

In one of Jack’s adventures that he recounts, his narrative skills are employed in order to convince a cider merchant that King Henry suspects that he is a spy. As a result, roguish Jack dupes the merchant out of his profits, food, and, of course, cider. But Jack is unable to hold onto his gains for he exercises no self-mastery, choosing instead to treat his fellow pages to a drunken party that same night. Through his refusal to master himself, Jack Wilton is revealed as neither the coney-catcher nor the romance hero.

The tale is important however both to the characterization of Jack as a rascalion, and to the development of his innovative prose style. In *Novel and Society in Elizabethan England*, David Margolies asserts that Nashe combines “the sense of spoken performance and the written word . . . the character of the writing is conversational” (100). This is true of Jack Wilton’s story of duping the cider merchant: while the tale is purely of Jack’s invention, he uses his rhetorical skill to craft a tale that the merchant cannot doubt—thereby passing fiction as fact. By building dramatic suspense, Jack feigns a reluctance even to utter the supposed rumor King Henry heard

of the merchant, thereby manipulating the merchant into doing whatever Jack asks of him. He tells the cider merchant that:

It chanced me the other night, amongst the other pages, to attend where the King...sate in counsell...it was privily informed...that you, even you that I nowe speake to, had—(O would I had no tong to tell the rest; by this drinke it grieves me so I am not able to repeat it.) (212)

Just at the point of telling his interlocutor the most important detail, Jack stops, knowing that his power over the merchant lies in how he tells his story. By claiming he cannot bear to repeat what he has heard, Jack increases the cider merchant's anxiety and holds further sway over him.

Jack laughs at the torment of the merchant who is by now so anxious to hear what the King might have been told, that he willfully offers Jack all that he has:

Nowe was my dronken Lord [the cider merchant] readie to hang himselfe for the end of the full point, and over my necke he throwes himself verie lubberly, and lookt for pleasure at his handes, soone to rid him out of this hell of suspence,...then fell he on his knees, wrong his handes,...wepte out all the syder that he had dronke in a weeke before: ..he rose & put his rusty ring on my finger, gave mee his greasie purse with that single mony that was in it, promised to make mee his heire, and a thousand more favours, if I would expire the miserie of his unspeakable tormenting uncertaintie. (212-213)

By manipulating both the truth and the conventions of storytelling, Jack bamboozles the merchant out of his money, jewelry, and property. Only afterward does Jack reveal the

rumor, claiming that the king had been told that the cider merchant was a spy and an enemy to the State:

It is buzzed in the Kings head that you are a secret friend to the Enemy, and under pretence of getting a License to furnish the Campe with syder and such live prouant, you haue furnished the Enemy, & in emptie barrels sent letters of discouerie and come innumerable. (214)

Jack's duping of the cider merchant develops the text's greater discourse on sovereignty, as Nashe demonstrates kingship as integral to the character development of Jack and Henry VIII, and also highlights kingship's own rhetorical power. For one, the simple power of the king's name both legitimizes Jack's story to the cider merchant and is the linchpin of the merchant's fear. The king's name alone authorizes Jack's claims to his victim, making the merchant a kind of subject to Jack's authority, an authority that he usurps from Henry VIII simply by naming him.

In addition to exploiting the king's name, Jack also introduces this episode by contrasting his own trickster sovereignty to Henry VIII's legitimate power. Jack mockingly asserts the superiority of his position, claiming that the "prince could but command men spend their blood in his service, I could make them spend all the money they had for my pleasure" (210). Jack boasts that his authority derives from his power to trick others into spending their money—and conveniently having them spend it on himself—while he mocks the king's even greater power over the bodies and lives of his subjects. The description ironically also aligns Jack with the king—they both, the comment implies, exploit others for their gain, leaving their victims in ruin. Indeed, Lorna Hutson maintains that Jack exposes "the king as a grosser spendthrift than

himself, but more important, reveals the relationship of page and prince to be an emulative, competitive one, dependent for power upon the current, liquid nature of their resources” (218). The narrative elevates Jack in his ability to draw from the king’s power and denigrates Henry’s depiction by temporarily collapsing the distance in rank between them: they are both equally tricksters of questionable morality.

The narrative replaces metaphorical and rhetorical depictions of kingship with a concrete example of monarchical power when Henry intervenes as a character in the narrative to dispense judgment and punishment. Jack uses the example to underscore the magnitude of Henry’s power, which is far greater than his own. Though Henry also profits from Jack’s prank—for the cider merchant pledges his loyalty to the crown and leaves all his property to the king before he goes—he punishes Jack severely for his actions, “whipping” Jack “for [his] holiday lye” (218). Henry’s punishment enacts Jack’s formulation of the difference between his own and the king’s authority, cited above. Just as Jack, the “king of the Pages” spills the cider merchant’s money, the King of England spills Jack’s blood to punish him for his actions.

Both men laugh at and profit from the story, but there is a marked difference in the extent to which they gain from it. Jack’s gains are primarily temporary: he has a drunken party in the aftermath of the episode. His only hope to profit further from his tomfoolery is to inscribe the episode in his narrative—if the story is popular among his readers, presumably he will again benefit from it financially when the text is published. The king however benefits time and again in recounting the tale, telling it both to entertain himself and his court *and* to reinforce his power. The story amuses Henry’s listeners while at the same time warns them of his willingness to dole out severe

corporal punishment. It serves to depict Henry as equally quick to laughter as he is to punish. Though Jack aligns himself with Henry through his rhetoric of kingship, he nevertheless underscores the powerlessness of his words in the face of a capricious ruler who wastes his men's bodies and spills their blood for his benefit.

In the ways he aligns Jack's trickster agency with Henry's legitimate and historical power and authority, Nashe ultimately undermines the text's claims to being a conventional Renaissance history with a didactic and clear moral purpose. Neither Jack nor Henry serves as an exemplary figure from which readers can draw exhortative, practical lessons. In fact, *The Unfortunate Traveller* repeatedly references the didactic discourse found in early modern historical writings, only to corrupt it. For instance, the Induction framing the narrative claims Jack's tale as a "Chronicle"—a serious historical form with a patriotic, moralizing thrust (208). Nashe subverts any claims that the text might make to moral didacticism, however, by imagining various ways his readers using the text. Rather than reminding the reader of all the lessons they might glean from Jack's example, he calls the book "wast paper" and invites the readers he addresses to use its leaves "to drie and kindle Tobacco" (207); to put them "to anie vse about meat & drinke...and spare not, for they cannot doe theyr countrie better service" (207). He even suggests the cover of the book be used as a surface on which "to play with false dice," to cheat others of their money as Jack does (208). Although he invokes patriotic, didactic rhetoric of early modern histories by claiming the text in service to his country, Nashe also highlights his readers' inability to find a moral purpose within the text by refusing to envision any such lesson. The best uses he

imagines for the text are material ones that involve either the physical destruction of the book, or its use as a tool to con others.

Nashe's refusal to allow the reader to draw a clear moral from the figures of the protagonist and the king subverts the patriotic purpose of early modern history. Yet *The Unfortunate Traveller* does in fact offer an ideal image of Englishness in Jack's literary style, which he contrasts to two prominent English writers, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas More. Nashe connects literary production to his representation of England's social, cultural, and national identity. Interestingly, Nashe also joins his depictions of English literature to notions of sovereignty and monarchical power through the examples of Surrey and More and in Jack's return to Henry's English camp in France at the narrative's conclusion, and thereby grants authority to prose fiction in shaping the early modern English state.

The depiction of Surrey plays a vital role in Nashe's depiction of an English literary tradition. Jack Wilton begins his depiction of Surrey by idealizing him as a quasi-divine figure, and by employing monarchical and religious diction to describe him. Jack praises him first as a "Prince in content because a Poet without peere" (242). He continues his flattery of Surrey in a more general tribute to poets: he asserts that "God hath bestowed that his perfectest image on Poets" (242). By employing religious and princely rhetoric to describe Surrey, it would appear that Jack places him in a superior position to the king and Jack. Nashe consistently associates Henry with violent, retributive power, and Jack with trickster agency, but he assigns to Surrey a kind of divinity that the text never grants to the king or the narrator.

Nevertheless, while Jack insists that Surrey “exceeded in this supernaturall kinde of wit” and “entertained no grosse earthly spirite of auarice, nor weake womanly spirite of pusillanimitie and airie, and firire spirites, full of freedome, magnanimitie and bountihood” (242), the flattery falls apart in the subsequent depictions of Surrey and his poetry. As G.R. Hibbard points out, although Surrey is “introduced into [the text] as the type of the good poet and lieberal master, he becomes increasingly the target for satirical criticism, which begins as delicate parody, but gradually turns into full-blooded burlesque” (163).

Jack Wilton’s depiction of Surrey becomes rather silly, but his most pointed critique comes in his depiction of Surrey’s poetry, which he represents in three poems he attributes to Surrey that are inscribed in the text of *The Unfortunate Traveller*. In one of the examples, Nashe depicts Surrey composing an “extemporal dity” (254), a lyric poem of supposedly spontaneous composition that bursts forth from him when he sees a painting of his beloved Geraldine. The poem (which Nashe composed) is, as many scholars have pointed out, highly derivative and represents an exaggerated imitation of Surrey’s real poetry.<sup>41</sup>

The most explicit critique of Surrey’s work comes when Jack Wilton triumphs over him when they both attempt to woo the same woman. In this episode, Nashe mocks the elitist pretensions of Surrey’s derivative style by pitting it against Jack Wilton’s prose. Surrey’s flowery language is depicted as frivolous aristocratic literary

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<sup>41</sup> For a more extensive analysis of Nashe’s parodies of Surrey’s poems, see Stephen Guy-Bray’s “How to Turn Prose into Literature” (in Liebler, Naomi Conn, ed. *Early Modern Prose Fiction: The Cultural Politics of Reading*. New York: Routledge, 2007. 33-45); Lorna Hutson’s *Thomas Nashe in Context* (New York: Oxford, 1989), or G.R. Hibbard’s *Thomas Nashe: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1962).

production that is imitative of continental poetry. While the acclaimed Surrey fails to woo the woman with his Italianate poetry, Jack very expediently seduces her with his prose. The judgment is clear: Surrey “beate the bush and kepte a coyle and a pratling,” but Jack brags that he “caught the birde: simplicity and plainnesse shall carrie it away in another world” (263). Nashe grants middle-class English idiom used by the lower ranks triumph over Surrey’s polished poetic language.

In addition to encountering Surrey, Jack also meets Sir Thomas More and Erasmus, two figures whom he claims as contributing to a humanist literary tradition in England. Jack praises both men heartily. He first describes Erasmus as “that abundant and superingenious clarke” (245). But Jack saves his warm, patriotic feelings for More, whom he calls “merrie Sir Thomas More, our Countriman” (245). Jack also summarizes More’s most influential satirical work, *Utopia*. In inscribing More’s text within his own, Nashe can be understood as situating his text within a greater, English satirical tradition where prose writing is innovative, contemporary, and fundamentally concerned with English politics, and not just mere copies of classical texts.

And yet, *Utopia* falls short of Nashe’s ideal—for the reader cannot forget that it is in Latin, not the English vernacular, and it is too influenced by European humanist writings such as those of Erasmus. Stephen Guy-Bray has suggested that Nashe claims both More and Erasmus as English figures in this episode (41). Although I agree that Nashe ties Erasmus and More to a literary tradition in England, I would suggest that Jack reinforces the difference between the two men by making a point to highlight More’s national identity as different from Erasmus. He thereby highlights Erasmus as foreign. Yet through the distinction, he also ironically further aligns More with an

international group of humanist scholars, markedly downplaying him as the founding figure of England's literary tradition.

Furthermore, More's depiction in the text serves to once again evoke royal authority. Henry's execution of More, one of the most notable aspects of his later history, is implicitly alluded to within *The Unfortunate Traveller*. More's role in the text evokes Lorna Hutson to claim that English literature is "not identifiable with the generative imagination itself but rather with the Crown, to which all power and influence must answer" (223). Nashe's use of More's example certainly serves to expose the danger associated with satirical fiction: he depicts such writing as a risky enterprise that is subject to the same scrutiny and violent censorship to which Jack, in his corporal punishment at Henry's command, and More, in his extratextual execution, are subjected. Yet, Nashe does celebrate the generative potential of the imagination throughout *The Unfortunate Traveller*, in the many ways that he links his own fiction writing with the production of wealth (as illustrated in the example of Jack Wilton's duping of the cider merchant as well as the uses to which he imagines readers putting his book), however morally dubious his means of earning wealth might be, *and* with imaginative innovation.

Ultimately Nashe rejects the styles of Surrey *and* More, for although both figures are important in establishing a tradition of English *belles lettres*, they are also guilty of copying stale rhetoric and continental forms rather than forging a new and unique English tradition. They both embody what Neil Rhodes suggests is "the dispiriting side of rhetoric": their writings "may have been copious storehouses of eloquence, but they also encouraged copying, and the endless repetition of prefabricated

linguistic units” (32). In fact Jack Wilton rejects contemporary literary production in imitation of classical precedents and constructed around humanist literary ideals as models for contemporary literary production, and instead idealizes original composition in English.

We see this most clearly in his many references to classical literature. He sprinkles Latin quotations from classical authors throughout the narrative. As Mihoko Suzuki points out, Nashe

evinces his awareness of literary authority by his frequent quotations of Latin authors, such as Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. But the effectiveness of such authority is questioned by bastardization of these new literary precedents, who are often quoted in an inappropriate context where the original meaning is subverted. (349)

Moreover, Nashe further subverts the meaning of the Latin quotations by the mock-translations, which nearly always follow the Latin phrases. On the first page of *The Unfortunate Traveller*, for example, Wilton jests that at the English court, “what my credit was, a number of my creditors that I cosned can testifie: *Coelum petimus stultitia*, which of vs al is not a sinner?” (209). Nashe’s translation, as Guy-Bray illustrates, in fact does not reflect the meaning of the quote at all:

The Latin—a line from Horace’s third ode—is one of the most famous passages from one of the most famous Latin poems by one of the most famous Latin poets, which is to say that even people without much Latin would presumably recognize this quotation . . . the Latin means “we seek the heavens in our stupidity.” Although it will become apparent that both

phrases are applicable to *The Unfortunate Traveller*, their relationship to each other never becomes clear. (37)

By subverting the meaning of the original Latin quotation, Nashe pokes fun at early modern English writers' obsessive use of Latin quotations to authorize their works. Instead he idealizes original composition in English.

Through Jack Wilton's innovative prose style, Nashe instead claims prose fiction as an English tradition *par excellence* and in the text's conclusion, he links Jack's English idiom to English political might. The conclusion of *The Unfortunate Traveller* returns Jack Wilton to Henry's English camp in France, where he witnesses a political ceremony that underscores King Henry's power: we learn that the king "with great triumphs met and entertained the Emperour [of Spain] and the French king, and feasted many days" (328). Guy-Bray suggests that in this description "now we see the English king as the equal—or even, since he is the host, the superior—of the two most powerful continental rulers" (44). Henry's reign, and the text implies, the Tudor dynasty continued by his daughter Elizabeth, match, or perhaps even surpass the political power and sway of England's continental rivals. The image at the novel's conclusion does not erase the earlier violent and morally dubious image of Henry; instead it highlights the ambivalence of Henry's might. Henry may be a capricious monarch, but within the greater context of international politics, his strength is positive. Nashe uses this episode to elevate English cultural identity as rivaling that of continental powers in terms of England's influence and prestige.

At the text's conclusion, Nashe also joins his image of English political superiority to his exploration of English prose fiction and English historical writing. He

once again discusses his own text in its final sentence, which closely follows the description of Henry's triumphant celebration with the Spanish and French monarchs. English fiction is by proximity linked to the power of the English crown. In the concluding sentence, Jack Wilton promises to continue writing, but he also swears on an "English Chronicle" that he will not be an "out-landish Chronicler more" (328)—vowing to focus future efforts on England in England.

### **Conclusions**

Both Deloney and Nashe use the flexibility of prose fiction to write the middle and lower ranks into the history of early Henrican England. By accounting for some of the significant events of the early years of Henry VIII's reign through the lens of Jack Winchcombe's contributions to the realm, Deloney imagines a greater role for the merchant entrepreneurs in shaping the past and the nation. Himself a silk weaver, Deloney was personally invested in writing for his social rank a more important and influential social legacy in early Tudor England. By providing in Jack a positive image of domestic- and self-governance, Deloney exploits the conventions of early modern history, which claim a didactic purpose and moral function for the text, allowing him to recuperate the contributions to the realm of ordinary men like him. But the author does not stop there; in *Jack of Newbury*, Jack's morality is linked to his national identity, and Deloney consciously writes a new image of the nation that scripts a greater social and moral legacy for the middling ranks. Despite the positive image offered by the figure of Jack, the novel also clearly illustrates the constraints to social change integral to early modern monarchical politics. Although the text can be seen as undermining existing

social hierarchies and opening up possibilities for change, it is equally clear that Deloney reveals the real limits placed on his social vision by monarchal politics.

I propose that *Jack of Newbury* contributes to a shift in cultural attitude about merchant and emergent bourgeois identities in the final years of Elizabeth I's reign by giving these groups a higher stake and more pivotal role in making England strong and economically secure. By imagining a fictional revision of the historical record, Deloney's text lends authority to the concerns of venturers, such as Jack, whose success is threatened by courtly power structures. Although Deloney is careful not to depict the English monarchy in an entirely negative light, he illustrates the danger posed by courtly politics, which menaces not only mercantile success, but also England's vitality and security. Yet at the same time, his text allows the lowly man of the middle ranks to rise up and embody all that Deloney identifies as good and just in an emerging national identity for England.

Nashe on the other hand affirms the might of his native country and the writing that comes out of it. Although he depicts the king's authority in a rather troubling light, he also suggests that the king's power allows the realm to prosper internationally. While he does not, as Deloney, allow his protagonist to rise through the social ranks, he does grant his hero a modicum of power through his ability to use rhetoric to his best advantage. Additionally, Nashe imaginatively rewrites literary history by including with and even elevating his lowly Jack Wilton over other figureheads of English literature, Surrey and More. Within the fictional narrative, he thereby revises literary history so that it includes a tradition of middle-class, English prose fiction in Henrican England. Even if he subverts the moral didacticism we expect of Renaissance histories

and literature, he ironically claims his narrative as foundational to England's literary heritage and exemplary in its own way—at least within the fictional framework of the narrative, *The Unfortunate Traveller* becomes a text to which Elizabethan writers can look back as a literary precedent.

## Chapter 5:

### Model Kingship and Symbols of England:

#### Staging England's Past in Three Shakespearean Histories

Though history plays were popular among elite and common audiences alike, Shakespeare's contemporaries Thomas Nashe and Thomas Heywood lauded the plays for their particular social and moral benefits to the uneducated masses: they claimed that the plays offered humanist educations to people who could not otherwise read the patriotic and moralizing histories of England for themselves. In fact, Shakespeare and other London playwrights' history plays reached large, urban, uneducated audiences that even Deloney and Nashe's popular, bourgeois prose fiction could not. On his "unworthy scaffold" (*Hen. V* Prologue.10), Shakespeare brought chronicle history to life, literally resurrecting the great dead of England, lending them the bodies of his actors so that they might "triumph againe on the Stage" (Nashe *Pierce Pennilesse* H2).<sup>42</sup> Despite their didactic potential however, Shakespeare's histories are notoriously difficult to interpret, because they can be read both patriotically as well as ironcially. His shared rhetoric of stagecraft and statecraft, as well as stage props and powerful English cultural symbols, can be understood as underscoring the potentially negative

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<sup>42</sup> Nashe and Heywood's eerie imagery of the stage as a space to raise the corpses of England's most prominent historical figures is creepy, yet evocative when we consider the history play's central role in producing a sense of collective English identity. The ghosts and dead corpses of England's past evoked by Nashe illustrate the relationship between nation, nationalism, and history. Philip Schwyzer, for instance, insists that nationalism relies on "a special understanding of the relationship between the past and present, and a peculiarly intimate communion with the national dead" (*Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004, 2). English history playwrights were certainly aware of their significant role in raising the nation's dead in order to make such a communion possible.

uses of history in constructing national identity and in modeling patriotic behavior.<sup>43</sup>

Within the triumphant and moralizing stories of England's past, Shakespeare reveals that English monarchical history is too flawed to serve as a foundation for conceptualizing the nation. The plays not only illustrate shortcomings of individual monarchs, but they equally showcase bloody histories of dynastic dispute, disruption, and illegitimacy. In *Richard III* (ca. 1590), *1 Henry IV* (ca. 1596), and *Henry V* (1599), Shakespeare diminishes the didactic uses of history to shape English national identity in his kings' struggles to emulate examples from the past, as well as their inability to maintain ideological control over cultural symbols of England's identity and monarchical might.

Shakespeare does, however, offer positive examples of idealized English mores in moments when his characters successfully emulate past examples of English valor and might. He shows that imitating an idealized past can lead to valiant efforts and momentary historical victories, but he does not limit English heroism to great monarchs. Indeed, Shakespeare depicts men of all classes and disparate national origin embodying the values the plays claim as English by emulating the mythical and legendary images of English valor from historical exempla, to the great benefit of the realm. Shakespeare thereby reveals English history and English identity as the purview of both the royal and

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<sup>43</sup> For further information on the History Play's relationship to Renaissance ideas about history's didactic purpose, see for example Brian Walsh's article "'Unkind Division': The Double Absence of Performing History in *1 Henry VI*" (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 55:2 (Summer 2004). 119-47). Walsh emphasizes the stage as both replicating chronicle histories and innovating in representing the past: he claims that the Renaissance stage "emerged as a unique locus of historical work. In a sense, history plays were parasitic on written histories, but they simultaneously broke from those sources to enable new modes of historical presentation, conjecture, and interpretation" (121).

mighty as well as the lowly and humble. Additionally, he depicts national identity and the English past as dynamic ideas that are in flux, requiring regular revision, reworking, and rearticulating.

In this chapter, I analyze Shakespeare's kingly performances in *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*. The three plays can be read as an ensemble, since together they reconstruct the monarchical history of the Wars of the Roses. Ironically, in terms of their order of composition, the plays move backwards through history, inverting the sequence of events. The earliest play of the three, *Richard III*, details the resolution of the decades-long Wars of the Roses that ended with Henry Tudor's triumph over the Yorks. From there, Shakespeare journeys further into England's past, detailing Henry IV's reign, before finally ending his cycle of English history plays by depicting Henry V's defeat of the French at Agincourt. By beginning with the end of the Wars of the Roses and ending with its beginning, Shakespeare moves away from celebrating the Tudor triumph and praising Elizabeth I, as he depicts in the conclusion of *Richard III*, detailing Henry Tudor's triumph over Richard III. He instead works towards an image of the nation that accommodates the British future that must surely await the "scepter'd isle" after Elizabeth's death (*Rich. II* 2.1.40). Despite their ironic and at times negative depictions of England's monarchical history, the plays suggest that English ideals can serve a useful purpose in shaping the realm by inspiring noble action in men of various ranks and varied national origin. The plays propose that a glorified national history may not ever create a fixed national identity, but they equally show that such a history serves a useful purpose in preserving English sovereignty and might.

### **The Bloody Tower of London and the England's Bastard Legacy in *Richard III***

Shakespeare's most influential depiction of the failure of England's dynastic system is found in *Richard III*, which dates to 1590. His portrait of evil tyranny has so colored Ricardian historiography that scholars today remain unable to vanquish the archetypal image of fundamental, calculated evil depicted in the play. In fact, despite the various ways that it calls attention to its own status as art and not true history,<sup>44</sup> Shakespeare's version of the past continues to shape the historical record.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps Shakespeare's historicizing has such a stranglehold over Ricardian historiography because his caricature provides such a clear and straightforward explanation of the otherwise complicated circumstances that lead up to and plague Richard's tumultuous reign. But despite this historical fact, in Shakespeare's version of the past, Richard is solely responsible for all of the bloodshed, loss, and tragedy during years on the throne.

Shakespeare interprets Richard's reign in providential terms: he is England's scourge sent by God for the Tudors to vanquish. Richard thus becomes a necessary agent of evil who must be conquered in order to fulfill God's providential promise to the chosen English people. Shakespeare's villainous Richard III hobbles onto the stage, reveling in his deformity and frankly admitting his intention to mar English history by

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<sup>44</sup> The play is titled *The Tragedy of Richard III*, and the eponymous villain goes on to enumerate at length his role as antagonist and actor throughout the play. See 1.3.337, 3.2.57-59, 3.5.1-12, 3.5.95-97, 3.7.51, and 4.4.82-104, for example.

<sup>45</sup> See for example Norrie Epstein, *The Friendly Shakespeare* (New York: Penguin, 1993). Epstein explains that "In some cases, Shakespeare's fictional accounts of people and events have become more real than actual history. More people know Richard III as the hunchback villain of Shakespeare's play than the real Richard, who by all accounts was a rather nice man" (165).

inscribing his horrific deeds and hideous image into the annals of time. But more than that, Richard represents the failure of England's monarchy to protect the country and to construct an image of English identity that unites the realm. In Richard, Shakespeare emphasizes the problems of the dynastic system, for his villain starkly reminds Elizabethan audiences of the bloody conflict that can result from having a "bloodless remnant of that royal blood" on the English throne (1.2.7), echoing English fears of the uncertain future after Elizabeth's death. Richard equally shows that the dynastic system rests on a precarious foundation: in this play, he need only "infer the bastardy" of the heir apparent in order to swoop in to claim the throne for himself (3.5.75). Through Richard's interventions into English history, the nation risks becoming determined by the meanings that Richard imposes on England's cultural symbols, a situation that leaves the English people powerless to determine who they are and what they stand for.

The first two lines of the play reveal Richard's awareness of his potentially great role in shaping history. Richard summarizes England's current political situation: peace reigns in the kingdom now that the bloody civil wars that so long divided the State appear to be concluded. He includes himself in the collectivity celebrating the York victory that marks an end to the bloody Wars of the Roses when he proclaims triumphantly, "Now is the winter of *our* discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York," Richard's brother Edward IV (1.1.1-2, my emphasis). He acknowledges the ushering in of peacetime after so many years of war, a new beginning for a war-torn State and a new direction for English history.

Richard goes on to contemplate his own relationship to courtly and national politics, and distinguishes himself from the rest of the collectivity celebrating the end of

the war. While the rest of the realm retreat from the public theater of war to enjoy the private pleasures of the bedroom, Richard repeatedly asserts that he is “not shap’d for sportive tricks” (1.1.14). He accentuates the differences between himself and the rest of England by casting himself as a solitary and unique historical player: because he cannot enjoy the pleasures of peacetime, he instead asserts that he is “determined to prove a villain” (1.1.30). Richard is marginalized in this time of peace and prosperity by his physical deformity—he is so misshapen, we are told, that even “dogs bark at” him whenever he “halt[s] by them” (1.1.32). His deformity physically marks him as an outsider to the normal avenues to power at court; therefore, Richard forges a new path to prominence, circumventing courtly politics and staking out a new role for himself, that of historical antagonist. He proclaims, “God take King Edward to his mercy, / And leave the world for me to bustle in!” (1.1.151-52). By intervening to play a role nearly equal to God in shaping history, Richard carves out an important place for himself in England’s monarchal past. He “bustles” in the world seemingly unrestrained by God or humanity (at least for the first four acts of the play) in order to cast his evil and divide England by promoting fear and enmity.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ian Frederick Moulton argues that “Shakespeare’s characterization of Richard III functions as both a critique and an ambivalent celebration of excessive and unruly masculinity and, in so doing, highlights the incoherence of masculinity as a concept in early modern English culture” (“‘A Monster Great Deformed’: The Unruly Masculinity of *Richard III*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.3 (Autumn 1996): 251-68. 255). Investigating Richard’s opening monologue, Moulton further suggests that ‘Richard is consistently characterized in strongly masculine terms, and his hypermasculinity is closely tied to his aggressive pursuit of power over effeminate pleasure. In the great soliloquy in 3 Henry VI in which he first articulates his “soul’s desire” for the crown, Richard firmly rejects the possibility of finding “heaven in a lady’s lap” and decides instead that for him “this earth affords no joy . . . / But to command, to check, to o’erbear” (3HVI, 3.2.128, 148, 165-66). In the famous opening of *Richard III*, Richard

In Richard, Shakespeare creates the worst model of kingship, for he is an evil, manipulating, morally bereft fear-monger, and a usurper who disrupts the continuity of dynastic politics (which, when functioning properly, never leaves the nation without a king). Shakespeare, however, does not allow us to view Richard as an historical anomaly or as singular a figure as his villain would perhaps like us to regard him. Though Richard does not name the historical models after which he himself patterns himself, he is drawn from other historical and literary tyrants and represents a composite of other examples. For instance, Scott Colley asserts that while there are few if any overt rhetorical allusions to Herod in the play, in fact the Biblical and medieval Herod's "presence haunts the shadows of Shakespeare's play" (451). In the Renaissance, Herod was himself associated with physical deformity (456) as well as the "Slaughter of the Innocents" (453), and Medieval and Renaissance literary depictions illustrate him delighting in his own mischief making, much like Shakespeare's Richard. In convincingly demonstrating how Shakespeare draws on literary and historical images of Herod and Pontius Pilate, Colley reveals that Shakespeare's Richard is in fact a surprisingly complex character, "an amalgam of historical figure, Roman despot, tragic villain, and Biblical archetype" (457).

The bone-chilling, comedic undertones of Shakespeare's Richard III in fact make him a more complex a literary figure than he may appear at first glance. Yet they also reveal that Shakespeare views Richard as playing a historical role that is not

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forcefully expresses his disgust with "idle pleasures" in a speech that, in its reiterated movement from "stern alarums" to "merry meetings," from "dreadful marches" to "delightful measures," from violence to pleasure, and from rage to joy, provides an anatomy of effeminization (RIII, 1. 1. 131, 7-8)' (259).

unique, but instead has been repeated throughout history. Although he may be a physical aberration, we cannot view him as a historical one. He is certainly the central antagonist shaping the providential trajectory of the play, but his literary and Biblical inheritance makes him a historically recurring type.

While Shakespeare associates Richard with a literary, Biblical and providential legacy of despotism, he also ties Richard to a specifically English heritage by linking him to the English historical symbol, the Tower of London. The Tower of London is a symbol repeatedly evoked in the play, and it becomes one of Richard's most effective instruments of power and control. He uses it to tyrannize even as he attempts to depict it to others as a symbol of protection and peace. While serving as regent to his young nephew, the Crown Prince, Richard entreats his charge: "repose you at the Tower; / Then where you please, and shall be thought most fit / For your best health and recreation" (3.1.65-67). Richard interprets the cultural significance of the Tower for his nephew, suggesting that he view it as a retreat from danger, a safe-haven that will protect him as he awaits his coronation ceremony. He even goes so far as to paint it as a pleasure resort, a kind of Renaissance health and fitness retreat.<sup>47</sup> And yet the Prince cannot view the Tower in such a light, for Richard has already used it as an instrument of imprisonment, suffering, and death. In the first act of the play, the Tower is a prison and the place of execution for his not his brother and the Prince's uncle, George, the Duke of Clarence. Knowing the hideous uses that the Tower has already served during

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<sup>47</sup> Richard's attempt to revise the cultural implications of the Tower for an Elizabethan audience is particularly ironic, given Elizabeth's early imprisonment in the Tower during her sister Mary Tudor's reign.

his life, even if he is not fully aware of Richard's role in the matter, the Prince rightly hesitates at Richard's offer, responding, "I do not like the Tower, of any place" (3.1.68).

Shakespeare also links the Tower to England's ancient Roman history, thereby providing England an ancient, Roman past of barbarism and bloodshed. The Prince inquires into the Tower's past, asking, "Did Julius Caesar build that place?" (3.1.69). Buckingham confirms that "He did . . . begin that place / Which, since, succeeding ages have re-edified" (3.1.70-71). Shakespeare's use of the verb re-edify evokes both meanings—literal (to re-build or re-construct) and figurative (to re-inform or re-instruct), for here it seems that the building has been physically reconstructed throughout history while its cultural symbolism has been re-informed over time (*OED* "edify" 2.c, 2.e, 3.b).<sup>48</sup> Shakespeare provides the national symbol with a documented history verifying its ancient origins, for Buckingham informs the Prince that the Tower's history is "upon record," and not merely "reported from age to age" (3.1.72-73). Buckingham alludes to its ancient history. And though he does not explicitly detail the Tower's long legacy of associations with bloodshed and oppression, he does in fact imply that the Tower has a long symbolic history that transcends both the play itself as well as Richard's historical moment. In addition, the allusion to the Tower's Roman heritage associates it with a greater legacy of colonial oppression and violence.

Yet within the context of the play, Richard's actions are most responsible for continuing the Tower's negative cultural legacy. He could, the play implies, transform the Tower into a symbol of safety, yet he continues to use it as a place of captivity and

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<sup>48</sup> The *OED* entry for "edify" indicates that its figurative meaning is evoked most often in a satirical context, a fact that seems particularly germane to Buckingham's comment here.

execution. Shakespeare intimately links the Tower to Richard's rise to power and under his hand it becomes an instrument of his bloody, tyrannical reign. The Tower facilitates brutality and oppression and becomes an iconic visual symbol of Richard's wickedness. It is in its potential to hold many meanings at once that the Tower becomes a multivalent marker of England's national identity—as one of the most prominent London landmarks, it is an icon of the monarch's might, an emblem of the oppression of the English, and an historical monument attesting to a long history and legacy of barbarism in England.

Despite his efforts to control the symbolic meaning of the Tower, a symbol that marks England's history and identity alike, Richard fails to depict the Tower in a positive light. He also cannot hush the voices of dissent speaking out against him; though Shakespeare primarily offers a private glimpse into Richard's world in this play, he does in fact lend voices to the English people in several important scenes, and reveals them as a people deeply concerned with the effects of Richard's actions on them personally, as well as their historical implications for England and English identity. The citizens are powerless to respond to Richard's despotism in any meaningful way, but they willingly speak out against it, even if only among themselves. For example, in act two, scene three, some citizens of London discuss the affairs of State: they worry about the precariousness of England's government with a child monarch on the throne, but their worry turns to a more palpable fear when they discuss Richard's regency. One citizen in particular exclaims, "O, full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester" (2.3.27). His fellow citizens go on to interpret Richard's prominent position in providential terms, for they sense an "ensuing danger," and they shudder to think that his regency

may prove to be as “the water” that “swell[s] before a boist’rous storm” erupts upon them (2.3.43, 44). They can only hope that “God” will “sort it” to the advantage, and not the detriment, of England (2.3.36).

Even more explicitly, in a brief scene disrupting two longer exchanges between Richard and Buckingham as they plot together in private, a scrivener runs out into a London street and in soliloquy deplors both Richard’s heinous actions and the English people’s inability to speak out against it. He exclaims:

Who is so gross

That cannot see this palpable device?

Yet who[’s] so bold but says he sees it not?

Bad is the world, and all will come to nought,

When such ill dealing must be seen in thought. (3.6.10-4)

His professional position as a scrivener makes his lament even more moving, for he serves in a formal capacity as a scribe and recorder, responsible for producing an official documentary record of his time. Yet even in his formal capacity, he remains voiceless, for he is merely a recorder, and not an interpreter or judge of transcribed events. As a witness, he clearly recognizes Richard’s treachery; yet he, as all of his fellow citizens, cannot speak out against Richard’s actions or to address them in such a way to bring about change. Through the scrivener’s genuine horror in the face of Richard’s villainy, Shakespeare points out the failure of absolute monarchy to allow any recourse to the English people when their monarch turns tyrant. Moreover, in inscribing common voices of dissent into the play, Shakespeare indicates a desire of the

people to determine their national identity, seeking a different national image than one of violence, tyranny, and oppression.

The play ends triumphantly with Henry Tudor, the Earl of Richmond, vanquishing the tyrant Richard and assuming the English throne. His reign represents a restoration of political order after the upheaval and chaos that Richard imposed on the realm, but more than that, he is equally depicted as an outsider to English courtly and dynastic politics who has come in to reform the institution of the monarchy and the English State, for he remains absent until the play's very end. Though Richmond claims his triumph as repairing dynastic politics—he “will unite the White Rose and the Red” (5.5.19)—Shakespeare does not go to great lengths to provide Richmond with a legitimizing dynastic heritage. Rather, he implies that Richmond's legitimacy is a moot question, almost beside the point. His reign appears sanctioned instead by his actions and, more importantly, his talents, for it is not his bloodline that destines him to be king, but his ability to heal the ailing nation. In this light, Richmond acts on behalf of the scrivener and the other citizens, for he ensures that England's “civil wounds are stopp'd” (5.5.40). His triumph is a victory for the English, restoring the realm to itself and repairing the damage done to England.

### **The Kingdom for a Barstool: Imposter Kingship in *1 Henry IV***

In *1 Henry IV*, Shakespeare is less concerned with the means by which a realm falls prey to a tyrant than he is in *Richard III*, in part because he is also not as interested in rehashing the Tudor triumph. *1 Henry IV* instead investigates a more subtle depiction of disrupted dynastic politics, through the portrait of Henry IV. King Henry IV, though

not the rightful heir and clearly motivated by his own ambitions for the throne, nevertheless takes the responsibilities of kingship seriously and strives to protect the realm. The play offers a psychological portrait of the king, but it also develops his character within the play's complex and overlapping dual structure. For Henry IV's real sovereignty is paralleled by Falstaff's monarchal play acting; Prince Hal's profligacy stands in sharp contrast to the rebel Hotspur's valor, nobility, and chivalry, and Welsh culture and customs provide an opposition to English manners and mores. These dualities allow Shakespeare to illustrate the English monarchy and England in identity crisis on several fronts, but I would like to focus particularly on the comparisons between Falstaff and Henry IV, and Henry IV's attempt to solidify his power and unify the realm by replicating historical exemplum from the medieval crusades, as these portions of the play accent the instability of England's identity.

Henry IV's reign bears some of the hallmarks of Falstaff's mock-sovereignty, and they both pose challenges to England's ability to define the nation through its historical past. Whereas Falstaff's reign is limited and circumscribed within the protected, carnivalesque space of the tavern and represents a fictional representation of English kingship,<sup>49</sup> Henry's rule is instead drawn from chronicle history and rings with

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<sup>49</sup> In the original name of the Falstaff character, Oldcastle, Shakespeare intentionally evokes the history of a real historical Lollard, Sir John Oldcastle. He thus further problematizes the relationship between history and fiction. Phyllis Rackin claims that Shakespeare "severs the connection between his disreputable theatrical creation and its original historical namesake in order to evade censorship and prosecution. Named for the real historical Oldcastle, the character would have had real historical consequences for the players in the enmity of Oldcastle's present descendants. Dehistoricized by the name of Falstaff, he acquires the impotence (fall-staff) of fiction, but he also acquires its license" (*Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990. 240). Though I agree that Shakespeare's decision to rename

historical truth. While Falstaff's acting the part of king serves as one example among many of "the mingling of low and high, kings and clowns, that characterizes [Shakespeare's] entire Lancastrian series," I would suggest that his mock rule also complicates the "historical model of humanist *imitatio*," for Falstaff inverts the Renaissance ideal of modeling oneself on brave and noble past examples (Parker 87, 89). By patterning his behavior on his own degraded sovereign and another historical tyrant from ancient history, Falstaff mocks the English monarchy by linking his king to a corrupt ruler, and he distorts England's monarchical symbols.

An example of Falstaff's kingly impersonation is found in *I Henry IV*, act two, scene four, when Prince Hal, Falstaff's drinking partner, asks him to act the part of King Henry IV. Like Thomas Nashe's trickster-hero Jack Wilton, Falstaff undertakes his monarchical performance in an elaborate, exaggerated, yet highly ironic show of pomp and circumstance. The use of monarchical rhetoric and props bolsters his performance: he "assume[s] the port of" King Henry IV, claiming his "kingdom for" the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap and calling to his fellow drunkards "to behold [his] swelling scene," transforming a glorious image of kingly power into an utter sham (*Henry V* Prologue.3, 4). He ironically insists that his kingly performance must appear authentic

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Falstaff removes the allegorical implications from the character, I am not entirely convinced that Falstaff is "dehistoricized," as I argue below. For more information on the origins of the Falstaff character as well as his history in Shakespeare's *I and 2 Henry IV*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, see Douglas A. Brooks' "Sir John Oldcastle and the Construction of Shakespeare's Authorship" (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38.2 (Spring 1998): 333-61) For more information about the complicated historiographical depiction of Oldcastle, see Annabel Patterson's *Reading Holinshed's Chronicle* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994).

even when it is most counterfeited,<sup>50</sup> and Shakespeare depicts the comic buffoon fashioning monarchical symbols out of cheap tavern wares, commanding only mock reverence from those around him and momentarily distorting the rhetoric and symbols of kingship.

Falstaff seizes the opportunity to play king primarily for his own and others' amusement, but his satire of kingship has troubling implications in a play in which the English dynastic system is so precarious. He authenticates his performance by surrounding himself with ordinary props to "stand for" the accoutrements of power, enlisting a stool, knife, and pillow to represent his "state, . . . scepter, and . . . crown" (2.4.378-79). In particular, Falstaff diminishes the symbolic power and signifying potential of the seat of monarchical power—the throne—not only by substituting a commonplace barstool for it, but also by using the word "state" to describe it. Though "state" was used as a synonym for throne in Renaissance England, it was also equally employed to represent a country's form of government or the people of the realm (*OED* "state" 20a, 28a, 30a). Although from the context it is readily apparent that Falstaff alludes to the "state" as a physical object (literally the monarch's seat), the potential for verbal slippage remains significant.<sup>51</sup> Just as Falstaff usurps the position of father to the prince from Henry IV, he also seizes the throne to bestow the king's power upon

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<sup>50</sup> In *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), Charles Nicholl links Falstaff to Nashe's pamphlets, claiming that "Shakespeare's work from the mid-1590s is shot through with echoes and borrowings" from them. He indicates further that "characters from Petruchio to Falstaff contain refractions of Nashe the satirist and Nashe the man" (1).

<sup>51</sup> The throne is contested rhetorically throughout the play, as Hotspur also claims his "roan shall be my throne" (2.3.70), a line that certainly prefigures Richard III's lament, "A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!" (*Richard III* 5.4.7).

himself, an action that duplicates Henry IV's extratextual usurpation of the English throne (documented by Shakespeare in *Richard II*). Within the circumscribed space of the tavern, the throne has been transformed into a symbol of Falstaff's mischief making—it belongs to the hooligan who rules the space. Here, Prince Hal does not command; rather he stoops to cavort with the thieving drunkard Falstaff on his turf.

Falstaff equally insists that his kingly performance be modeled on kingly examples. He does not merely imitate his own English King Henry IV, but he also patterns himself on another historical king, King Cambises of Persia: he asserts that he “must speak in passion,” and he promises, “I will do in King Cambyses' vein” (2.4.386, 387). The reference is most likely an allusion to Thomas Preston's 1569 *The Life of Cambyses*,<sup>52</sup> itself an important play in establishing the genre of historical drama in England and in modeling humanist historical and literary traditions.<sup>53</sup> By patterning his enactment on a despot-drunkard of a king, he ironically both justifies his behavior and asserts the illegitimacy of his performance. Although his “reign” is imaginary, his performance menaces the health of the kingdom in two ways: first, even if his acting the

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<sup>52</sup> The full title of Preston's play, *A lamentable tragedy mixed full of pleasant mirth, containing the life of Cambyses King of Persia, from the beginning of his kingdom unto his death, his one good deed of execution, after that many wicked deeds and tyrannous murders, committed by and through him, and last of all, his odious death by God's Justice appointed*, gives a good indication of the nature of the depiction, as in the Renaissance Cambises was believed to be a drunkard and a despot. See note 3 below for further information about Preston's sources.

<sup>53</sup> Émile Legouis finds that Preston's “play shows signs of having been written by a humanist, for Herodotus is followed step by step, and there are many mythological reminiscences” (*A History of English Literature, Vol. 1*. London: Dent, 1926. 156). In “A Source for Cambises,” Don Cameron Allen demonstrates that Preston may have additionally drawn on more recent chronicle sources such as Johann Carion's *Chronica*, as he notes several of Preston's notable departures from Herodotus, most notably that Cambesis was depicted as a drunkard in Renaissance texts (“A Source for Cambises,” *Modern Language Notes* 49.6 (June, 1934): 384-385).

part of king is understood to be a comic lark, his influence over the prince is potentially dangerous—it is not clear that Prince Hal will be fit to rule the kingdom after his father's death should Falstaff continue to enjoy such a privileged proximity to Hal. Secondly, the scene serves to link the English monarchy to a history of tyranny and depravity. In replicating an ideal response to history by imitating the examples of notable kings—the moral basis on which other writers defend the genre of the chronicle play—Falstaff reveals the ambiguities of the didactic purposes of history. History provides equally positive and negative examples.

Literary scholars and historians have examined Falstaff from a variety of perspectives, often concentrating on his literary heritage and the metatheatrical comment Shakespeare makes through him. Some scholars note that he bears a resemblance to the Lord of Misrule, the Vice figure from the medieval morality plays (Weimann 189). Others have argued that he stands for the clown of English Renaissance theatre companies, a fictional Will Kemp, and hence an *Elizabethan* character inserted by Shakespeare into England's medieval past (Wiles 99). He and his fellows have additionally been described as “cony-catchers and masterless men,” figures from well-known genres of prose fiction (Harris 9). He equally provides a contrast to the chivalric ideals embodied in Hotspur that Prince Hal so admires; Sir John Falstaff represents the profligacy, degradation, and abuses of the English aristocracy.

Matthew Greenfield, however, explores Falstaff's relationship to the history play genre. He claims that “Falstaff's metatheatricality . . . constitutes a form of resistance to the master plot of history and the play” (76). Indeed Falstaff is an interloper into history, for he is a socially and politically unimportant character, in part

because he is drawn not from fact, but from fiction. In fact, Norman Rabkin argues that Falstaff exists outside of history and the history play genre; he argues that Falstaff eludes time because he in fact derives from a different generic world than Henry IV and Prince Hal, both of them real historical characters. Rabkin explains that

For Falstaff, time is . . . irrelevant. Like the Forest of Arden he needs no clock, since he has nowhere to go. He lives cyclically, recurring always to the same satisfactions of the same appetites, playing holiday every day, denying the scars of age and the imminence of death. . . Falstaff . . . rise[s] emblematically from his own death and shamelessly asserts once again his will to live. (281)

In this context, Falstaff's satirizing of the rhetoric of service (so much a part of the medieval romance) tradition is equally outside of time. His refusal to worship Phoebus, "that wand'ring night so fair" (1.2.15-6), and his subsequent oath of loyalty only to his own selfish interests, make him the comic intruder into history, perverting both the literary conventions of the history play and romance literature.

Yet within the ironic chivalric rhetoric, Shakespeare exposes the ways that chronicle history, chronicle plays, and literature are used to support monarchical power in the extratextual present. For Falstaff's pledge to serve Diana alludes to Shakespeare's own monarch, Elizabeth Tudor. His language puts the play and the past in service of Shakespeare's Queen, as Renaissance audiences would surely recognize the allusion to Diana as an overt reference to Elizabeth's iconography. Through Falstaff's rhetoric of loyalty, which becomes displaced to the Elizabethan present, Shakespeare uncovers the

way that Elizabeth and the Tudor monarchs employ history in constructing their own image.

Additionally, in perverting the rhetoric of loyalty, Shakespeare stresses Falstaff's potential to shape English history. Falstaff's exaggeratedly fictional status once again becomes important, for as Derek Cohen suggests, in the epilogue of *2 Henry IV* Shakespeare reinscribes Falstaff into history. Though in this epilogue Shakespeare denies that Falstaff is drawn from the historical figure Oldcastle, Cohen argues that "Shakespeare, in a way, subverts his own denial" by reinscribing Falstaff's original name into the play (313). In *1 Henry IV* Falstaff has little ambition to shape chronicle history (after all, he appears primarily preoccupied with satisfying his own gluttonous and selfish desires).<sup>54</sup> He nevertheless becomes a troubling potential historical player, for he is positioned to influence the monarch, despite his slovenly and ineffective Machiavellianism.<sup>55</sup>

Shakespeare paints Henry IV's sovereignty in more serious and somber tones, and yet his monarchical performance resembles Falstaff's mock sovereignty in several important ways. Though Henry IV suffers from psychological torment over whether he

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<sup>54</sup> This is in direct contrast to Hotspur, who obsessively wonders how his history will be told; he worries for example that Henry's action will be spoken "for shame. . . / Or fill up chronicles in time to come" (1.3.170-1).

<sup>55</sup> Richard Helgerson examines Falstaff's relationship to history from another angle in *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000): he investigates the relationship of Shakespeare's domestic comedy, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in which Falstaff appears as the butt of the Wives' joke, to the history plays that made him famous. Helgerson argues that "When he comes to Windsor, history comes with him" (61), for the play stages the "local and domestic. . . for the entertainment of a national audience" and the characters are "engaged in a series of actions that involve a much broader national and even international community" (62).

should be king, for he circumvented dynastic succession to gain the throne, his monarchy is characterized primarily by his own selfish intentions in taking the crown. King Henry, having failed to attain the throne through proper dynastic succession, has instead usurped the crown (as Shakespeare chronicles in *Richard II*). But now that he has in fact seized power, he, similar to Falstaff, merely acts the part of king, as his reign is ineffective.

His political impotence now that he is on the throne is ironic given his previous history. His depiction presented in *Richard II* would lead many to doubt that King Henry IV is the same character, for at the end of that play, Henry successfully intervenes with decisive action to rescue the failing English monarchy from ruin. Yet in the plays devoted to telling his history, Shakespeare's depiction of the king is dramatically altered. Despite "his history as a man who takes control and makes things happen" in *Richard II*, in *1* and *2 Henry IV*, Henry is a very different man (Fitzpatrick 121). "Having achieved kingship," Fitzpatrick suggests, Henry "has little control over the course of future events" (121). His every decision is colored by the weighing doubts that trouble his mind, and he is no longer capable of decisive leadership or effective action.

In his first appearance in *1 Henry IV*, King Henry IV reveals his plan to wage a foreign crusade in order to divert the focus of his domestic enemies—both English and Welsh—away from him and the English throne, hoping this might unite the divided realm. Fitzpatrick argues that "Henry's aim is to shift future violence outward, away from English soil and no longer between English men, to 'be no more opposed / Against acquaintance, kindred, and allies' (1.1.15-16)" (121). Henry anticipates using "the

common enemy” in order to forge a sense of collective purpose between the disparate factions, regions, and groups in England (Fitzpatrick 121). He seeks to replicate English history by reenacting earlier medieval crusades to do this, for he feels that foreign campaigns would distract his subjects from internal strife by drawing their attention to a shared, foreign enemy.

Hoping to draw on the State religion as a means to do this, Henry insists that the common identity of all of his subjects reside in their shared Christian beliefs. But he further infers that English identity is grounded in his subjects’ blood heritage. He describes them as warriors who are naturally formed to fight against non-Christians, claiming that their “arms were moulded in their mother's womb” for the very purpose “to chase these pagans in those holy fields” (1.1.23, 24). Combining the rhetoric of national and religious identity with biological diction, Henry naturalizes English national and religious identities as biological in origin; they are born for this. But more than that, Henry glosses over the varied cultural and regional identities that contribute to the fractured factioning of his kingdom.

Despite Henry's desires to unite his kingdom against a common non-English, non-Christian enemy, the harsh reality of an internal enemy, whose distinct cultural “otherness” threatens to destroy England and Henry’s sovereignty, grows and prospers within the very confines of the realm. Indeed Shakespeare depicts the Welsh in *1 Henry IV* as equally savage as the “pagans in those holy fields” against whom King Henry hopes to lead his foreign crusade (1.1.24). The Welsh threat is detailed in the first scene, for Westmorland brings a report to the king of Welsh brutality. He claims that the leader of the Welsh rebels Glendower “butchered” a thousand English troops

(1.1.42), leaving the corpses to be mutilated and disgraced so abhorrently by his Welsh kinswomen, that the crimes are too horrible to put into words:

Upon [the] dead corpse there was such misuse,  
Such beastly shameless transformation,  
By those Welshwomen done as may not be  
Without much shame retold or spoken of. (1.1.42-46)

The Welsh are as barbaric as the pagan “others,” but they flourish within the realm and not outside of it. Though they are peripheral to Henry’s court and the center of the kingdom, they nevertheless menace the center and heart of the realm, embodied in the king.

Legally subject to the English crown, the Welsh nonetheless refuse to assimilate to English culture and identity.<sup>56</sup> Their cultural differences—of custom, language, heritage, and even implicitly of *nature* (as Glendower is associated with magic and

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<sup>56</sup> The Welsh “problem” that Shakespeare depicts in *1 Henry IV* points to the greater problem of English cultural identity in Renaissance England, for the realm is neither entirely English, nor fully assimilated. In fact, forging a British identity itself is a historical process that never quite fully came to fruition: as Fitzpatrick indicates “Wales, effectively subjugated by Edward I in the late thirteenth century, was formally joined with England by the 1536 act of union. The union of the crown of England and Scotland under James I in 1603, began a process which resulted in the abolition of Scotland’s parliament with the 1707 act of union. Although Ireland was first colonized in the twelfth century, the process of ‘Making Ireland British’ (as Nicholas Canny recently called it) did not get fully under way until the establishment of the early modern plantations. The Welsh assembly, the Scottish parliament, and the Northern Ireland assembly, all of which were established in 1988, suggest the unraveling of the forcibly yoked-together fiction which is the ‘United Kingdom’” (*Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Contours of Britain: Reshaping the Atlantic Archipelago*. Hertfordshire: U of Hertfordshire P, 2004. 1).

supernatural power)<sup>57</sup>—demonstrate their role as the unconquered foreigners within the kingdom. Indeed, the shared culture, customs and language of the Welsh characters effectively unites them in a common sense of shared identity that allows them to conceive of the English as an equally significant enemy as the foreign pagans.

In fact, their national identity is much more clearly defined than any of the English characters' collective conception of English identity, for the English royals and nobles bicker and plot among themselves with little concern for the detriment their actions might bring to England. Commenting on the play as a whole, Matthew Greenfield argues that “Almost all of the play’s characters . . . engage in the demarcation or the erasure of boundaries; and all, even the king and his loyal vassals, are rebels . . . the plot-magic connects the characters as the dream of nationhood might, but it makes them rebels rather than citizens” (74). While I agree with Greenfield’s analysis generally, I see the Welsh characters as providing an opposing model of nationhood to the English, for unlike the English, they are united around a shared language, history, culture, and a commonly held sense of national identity.

In contrast to the coherent and more stable idea of Welsh identity, in this play England is impossible ideal, in part because of Wales’ position in the realm. The subtext of Westmorland’s report reveals English identity as untenable, for it is founded on historical myths that have proven false. Although the Welsh are supposed to have

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<sup>57</sup> The notes to the *Riverside* edition indicate that Shakespeare is not the first to associate Glendower with magic. In fact, Holinshed reports that Glendower had magical powers (see 1.3.83 note).

been conquered, subjugated, and assimilated for several hundred years,<sup>58</sup> Shakespeare draws on chronicle history to render them as still unconquered, unassimilated, and most importantly, un-English. Their geographically peripheral position in the realm is also noteworthy. The Welsh violence and foreignness illustrates a common assumption running throughout English history: “When activated, the implicit assumption made by the dominant political and social groups in southern England was that they were the only civilised people in Britain, and that the savagery became more prevalent the further one travelled away from the center” (Hadfield *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain* 13).

Henry sees his crusades as a possible solution to the divisions plaguing the kingdom, but even he has to admit that domestic political strife is far too rampant to risk undertaking a foreign war. Though by the play’s conclusion Henry and his forces have brought the rebels under his control, the triumph represents only a temporary respite from certain future strife, which is documented in 2 *Henry IV*. In fact, Henry’s final speech evokes images of incompleteness and division, rather than national unity: Henry doles out orders to his remaining loyal servants to face the armed rebels on the various fronts of the kingdom (his son John and Westmorland are commanded to Northumberland, while he and Harry “will towards Wales,” 5.5.39), as he hopes that “Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway” (5.5.41). His last words call attention to the plot’s lack of resolution, for he reminds audiences that his “business” is not yet “won”

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<sup>58</sup> Shakespeare explicitly reveals that Edward I’s supposed victory over the Welsh remains incomplete. Joan Fitzpatrick reminds us that though he supposedly “subjugated” the Welsh in the thirteenth century, they remain outsiders within the realm (*Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Contours of Britain: Reshaping the Atlantic Archipelago*. Hertfordshire: U of Hertfordshire P, 2004. 1).

(5.5.43, 44). Shakespeare presents England's historical identity, rooted in its monarchical history as having been disrupted at all social levels, for the models from history fail to unite the realm. Ideas about the shape and direction for an English future appear so disparate that the notion of England divides more than it unites.

### **Henry V's English Identity: Symbolic Incoherence and English Identity**

Shakespeare's most triumphant depiction of idealized English identity can be seen in his final history play, in which the failures of Henry IV's reign are resolved and more than compensated for by his son, a model king whose patriotic rhetoric reverberates throughout the play. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare obsessively investigates English national identity, as evinced by his use of the words "English" and "England" more than one-hundred times in the text, as Philip Schwyzer shows (126). In this play, similar to *1 Henry IV*, England becomes an uncertain and unstable concept for Shakespeare offers a number of contradictory images of English identity (locating the nation variously in blood heritage, shared history, a common religion, as well as a shared language, among others). Yet he depicts England as emerging out of a shared belief in a common past that unites people of disparate rank, region, and even national identities in important historical moments.<sup>59</sup> Shakespeare's protagonist Henry V offers several glorifying ideas about what it means to be English, precisely by invoking powerful cultural concepts such as heredity, nostalgia for a glorified past, and heroic historical figures drawn out of English history. Shakespeare summons the nation "out

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<sup>59</sup> Andrew Hadfield claims that "England was often carelessly equated with Britain" (*Shakespeare, Spenser and the Matter of Britain*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 6).

of the distant past through the power of bloodlines, the manipulation of nostalgic memory, and, above all, the invocation of ghosts” of England’s glorious past (128-9).

For Shakespeare, however, the English nation is not merely summoned forth from these ideas by an act of the imagination. In order for Henry’s soldiers to unite around their shared loyalty to the “nation,” a powerful rhetorician must intervene to define and interpret the shared cultural heritage, to give a coherent shape and meaning to the past. Only through Henry’s impressive orations to his troops on the battlefields in France—speeches in which the king explains to his subjects how they are bound together and why their loyalties should be to country and king—can his subjects begin to imagine themselves as a united community.<sup>60</sup> Although Henry’s rhetoric is effective in inspiring his troops to join forces against a common enemy, Shakespeare underscores that Henry’s rhetorical effectiveness is ephemeral, as his language only momentarily erases the differences that divide his subjects.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Benedict Anderson’s concept of the nation as an “imagined community” is useful for this discussion. Anderson further reveals the “nation” as predicated on a belief in a shared past, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each” (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised ed. London: Verso, 1992. 7). He goes on to claim that “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible” (7).

<sup>61</sup> The very structure of the play highlights Henry’s victory as short-lived, as the regular interventions of the Chorus remind audiences of Henry’s failure to forge and preserve an enduring united English nation. The Chorus’s complex interpretive role is beyond the scope of this study. It is, however, intimately tied to Shakespeare’s greater analysis of nation, monarchy, and identity in that it reinforces the difficulty of interpretation in the play. In examining the role of the Chorus, for example, Peter B. Erickson has suggested that “Shakespeare presents the Chorus as a figure who poses, and fails to solve, the conflict of modes entailed by the idea of an ‘epic-drama.’ Torn between celebration of Henry V as an idealized, larger-than-life hero and commitment to a more subtle vision, the Chorus opts for the former. . . . The case has been made that the Choruses ‘secure unity of action.’ In my view, the Chorus disrupts as much as it

Henry forges a sense of national identity in part through the various symbols of English identity evoked throughout the play (such as the soldiers' loyal "hearts" that remain in England while their bodies fight in France, 1.2.128-9; and his image of the English as noble "greyhounds," 3.1.31). I would argue, however, that Henry himself stands as the most profound symbol of England in this play. Henry is a pastiche; we see him in a variety of roles, but Shakespeare never gives us the same Henry twice. His characterization is multifaceted and shifting, defined mostly by his varied circumstances. Yet despite the changing nature of his depiction, he always rises to meet the demands of the occasion. It is in his ability to adapt himself to circumstances' necessities that he offers the most insight into Shakespeare's ideas about England's national identity, as I explore below.

I will also show that Shakespeare ultimately depicts England as a nation that lacks a stable, coherent definition. Every ideal associated with England is a notion that subjects of the English monarch cling to in moments of crisis or danger. However unstable Shakespeare's various images of English identity may be, they nevertheless succeed by providing the cohesive glue needed to unite a divided nation in a common cause when necessary. Shakespeare does not glorify one single image of England; instead, he reveals England's strength to be its flexibility. The country is made stronger by being loosely defined as to accommodate many different cultural groups and many different ideas about the nation.

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unifies. The appearances of the Chorus have the effect of periodically interrupting our complex experience of the direct dramatic presentation. Regular alternation between the Chorus and the dramatic action formalizes the discrepancy between their perspectives" ("The Fault / My Father Made': The Anxious Pursuit of Heroic Fame in Shakespeare's *Henry V*." *Modern Language Studies* 10.1 (Winter, 1979-1980): 12).

One of the most investigated images of English identity articulated in *Henry V* comes in a scene of international political crisis, when it appears as though the king's army faces disastrous defeat at the hands of the French. In act 3, scene 1, Henry articulates a new way of envisioning national identity that eliminates divisive differences between the three kingdoms that comprise Britain (England, Wales and Ireland). Henry asserts that all social groups subject to the English monarch are, in their hearts, minds, and even blood, ultimately the same. Henry momentarily eliminates the cultural barriers that divide his Welsh, Irish, and English in a convenient rhetorical move: he addresses them all as "friends," uniting the three distinct groups by referring to them all as "you English" (3.1.1, 17).

Henry mirrors his erasure of the historical, cultural, and political differences dividing his troops in his discussion of their "noble blood" later in the passage. He eliminates social rank as a divisive category altogether by revising the definition of nobility. Although his new definition depends on blood relationships that link his subjects to a glorious past, he argues that nobility is no longer a marker of social rank. Instead, he claims it as a determinant of nationality and suggests that the geographical origin of his soldiers' blood makes them superior to any aristocrat. Their blood is

fet from fathers of war-proof!

Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,

Have in these parts from morn till even fought,

And sheath'd their swords for lack of argument. (3.1. 18-21)

He calls on his troops further to "dishonor not [their] mothers; now attest / That those whom [they] call'd fathers did beget [them]" (3.1.22-23) and urges them to "Be copy

now to men of grosser blood” (3.1.24). Their blood, by virtue of its being historically “English” according to Henry’s new formula, makes these men nobler than Europeans of higher rank. English history here validates the present; the men’s blood ties to Englishmen from the past marks them as worthy of playing a part in shaping the present moment—at this specific time and place, they prove themselves honorable sons of English blood and participate in a transformative moment in English history.

Furthermore, by concluding the speech with an invocation of God (“God for Harry, England and Saint George!”), Henry further implies that the valiant English race is chosen by God to defeat His enemies (3.1. 34). Their nobility is less a question of rank than it is an indication that the English are God’s elect. In his discussion of blood and religion, what were previously significant differences between the soldiers—differences of class, ethnicity and culture—are now momentarily eliminated, for Henry claims that they do not matter nearly as much as the stark contrast between his troops and their real enemy, France. Shakespeare’s dramatization of Henry’s historical victory over France illustrates the temporary effectiveness of Henry’s rhetoric—by uniting the three kingdoms, his words encourage his soldiers to work together to defeat a common enemy. Indeed, Henry’s patriotic and religious image of Englishness suggests that the various kingdoms that comprise Britain are all really just parts of a larger, hegemonic England. By substituting the term English for what is more commonly understood as British, Henry contributes to the mythology of England as the cultural center of Britain and British identity. Moreover, Henry insists that geographic and historic origins play a larger role in shaping one’s identity than any other factor, for his troops all share a common link to the same mythic and “Godly” British past.

Henry's inspiring rhetoric works to unite his troops in their common purpose, but Shakespeare acknowledges both the temporary nature of its effectiveness, as well as the more permanent reality that Henry's realm is more divided than united. In the scenes both before and after the dramatic victory, Shakespeare depicts the reality of England as multi-national, made up of four distinct cultural groups. Commenting on this scene's relationship to the rest of the play, Alison Thorne claims that "in the scene (3.3) bringing together the four captains from each of the constituent countries of the British Isles" the Irish, Welsh, and even some of the Scots "are figured as loyal servants of the Lancastrian crown" (166). However, at other points in the play they are "stigmatized" as "inveterate enemies of the English state to be kept at a distance (1.2.166-73, 5.0.30-4)" (186).

In fact, the play repeatedly evokes images of England as impossibly divided. The factioning of the army into the Welsh, Irish, English, and Scot contingents echoes Canterbury's image of disunion and discord in the realm in the second scene of the play. Throughout the scene, Canterbury attempts to present the realm's division as positive, for he wants Henry to invade France. The lasting image however is one of a fragmented nation, stretched to its limit, unlikely to be held together. Canterbury begins by proclaiming that

many things, having full reference

To one consent, may work contrarily,

As many arrows loosed several ways

Come to one mark. (1.2.205-8)

Canterbury's metaphor—multiple arrows shot from many different points all flying toward the same bull's-eye—serves as the foundation for his advice that Henry should invade France. A few lines later, he extends the metaphor to include not merely “things,” but “actions” as well (“So may a thousand actions, once afoot / [End] in one purpose, and be all well borne / Without defeat,” 1.2.211-13), all to bolster his argument that the French campaign will not divide and weaken, but will instead serve to strengthen and secure the realm. Despite his metaphor whose purpose is to unite the realm, in reality we find the opposite to be the case. Canterbury's conclusion presents an image of disjuncture instead of unification, for though he heartily urges, “Therefore to France, my liege!” (1.2.213), he ends the speech with the realm split into fourths:

Divide your happy England into four,  
Whereof take you one quarter into France,  
And you withal shall make all Gallia shake.  
If we, with thrice such powers left at home,  
Cannot defend our own doors from the dog [the Scots]  
Let us be worried, and our nation lose  
The name of hardiness and policy. (1.2.214-20)

The quartering of the realm prefigures the army's division into the distinct cultural groups ruled by the king within the play. And yet it equally points to the extratextual English future, which brings Scotland under the rule of king James I, who also rules England, Wales and Ireland. Canterbury's imagery equally reveals Henry's “England” as a nation internally at odds with itself. Though Canterbury intends to mollify Henry that the realm will be safe while the king is abroad, the speech's conclusion leaves

audiences with a lingering image of breached security instead of Sovereign strength.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, by putting these words in the mouth of a corrupt Catholic official (a character who embodies a threat to the Protestant England of Shakespeare and his audiences), Shakespeare equally calls attention to the realm's divisions and uncertain future.

Even within the play's bald exposure of the divisions plaguing Henry's (and Elizabeth I's) realm, however, Shakespeare does not suggest that England's identity should necessarily be stable, pinned down, and fixed. Shakespeare's multi-faceted (and even contradictory) depiction of Henry V embodies the playwright's views of England's nationhood, and his epic hero becomes the most powerful symbol the nation. The king's varied depiction has led Christopher Ivic to argue that "The king's body . . . serves as a conflicted site upon which anxiety about national and cultural identity is focused" (89). In fact, Shakespeare characterizes Henry's national identity as varied and contradictory, as shown in his rhetorical claims to many different cultural legacies. According to Henry, he is English, Welsh, and French; his lack of stable national identity echoes the Irish Captain MacMorris' piercing question, "what ish my nation?" (3.2.122).

Henry relies on his ability to transcend national and cultural stereotypes, images, and boundaries, in order to rule a nation whose shape and limits are just as vaguely

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<sup>62</sup> The reference to a Scot invasion is fraught with timely urgency: as the play was completed and first performed in 1599, with Elizabeth I visibly nearing death and Scottish James VI waiting to take the throne, the uncertainty surrounding James' future rule certainly left many feeling vulnerable, as looming questions arose: England's future as a Protestant realm, the center of the British polity, and a sovereign nation was hanging in the balance.

demarcated. His sense of national identity may artificially appear as unstable as the play's presentation of his individual identity. For Shakespeare depicts Henry playing many different roles over the course of the drama: the reformed prodigal son (1.1), the wise ruler (2.2), the skilled politician using rhetorical power to avoid violence (3.3), the lover wooing the French princess (5.2), and the sovereign beleaguered by the staggering responsibilities and stress of rule (4.1). All of these roles work together to contribute to a more expansive understanding of Henry's character, for they are all equally important in shaping his successful rule, and can be understood as providing insight into different aspects of the same character. The various claims Henry makes to national identity by contrast appear much more contradictory—Shakespeare depicts Henry striking different national poses, none of which can be easily reconciled with each other.

Ivic interprets the contradictory depiction of Henry's national identity as a reflection of England's position within the greater British polity emerging in late Tudor England: "That Henry himself is anxiously imagined as a cultural hybrid—as we shall see, he is addressed as '*brother Ireland*' (5.2.12; emphasis added); moreover, he woos the French Princess Katherine, in broken French, and twice he dubs himself a Welshman—suggests that the play's nascent English nationalism is at odds with the interests of the emergent multi-national British state" (89).<sup>63</sup> Henry's national

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<sup>63</sup> Many scholars have analyzed the various national identities that Henry claims in the play. His claims to Welsh origins have been give particular attention by Philip Schwyzer. He sees Henry's claim to Welsh ancestry as a link to the Tudor monarchs, but he highlights Shakespeare's paradoxical depiction of Henry's Welsh heritage: Though the Tudors "invited memorialization of their Welsh ancestry," they never "claimed to be Welsh" (*Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 126). On the other hand, on "the very twilight of the sixteenth century...an English monarch would at last overcome these

schizophrenia undermines his self-identification as “Harry England” (3.4.48). Yet I would suggest that Shakespeare is not merely exposing the contradictions at the heart of the emerging British nation. Henry’s ability to rule all of these nations at once requires him to personify all of these national identities, for according to Renaissance theories of spiritual kingship, the king physically embodies the nation he rules. In showing Henry assuming so many national identities, Shakespeare exemplifies Henry’s precarious position as monarch, for the king of a growing empire must somehow transcend limitations of his body physical to mystically embody the contradictions of his body politic (especially if he is to forge peaceful cohabitation among them).

Henry later renames himself “Harry le Roy” (4.1.49), a name that uncovers his real identity to his unsuspecting troops in the scene where he mingles among them while disguised as a commoner. But his troops who are united around a shared English language (no matter how poorly, or even incomprehensibly they speak it), do not recognize their king in this moment, because they do not understand Henry’s French. In giving himself a French name that reveals his title and political position, Henry also acknowledges that his kingdom, which by the play’s end includes France, must now accommodate the very enemy against which he defined English identity earlier in the play.

If any monarch would be up to the daunting task of bringing France into an already divided British polity, it seems that Henry might be gifted enough to give the nation if not true union, at least rhetorical shape. He might be able to articulate a new

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inhibitions and proudly lay claim to Welsh nationality. That monarch...was a king of the house of Lancaster, Henry V in Shakespeare’s play” (126).

idea of nationhood that would eventually accommodate the French among all the other cultural groups he rules. Shakespeare depicts a future French assimilation as next to impossible, however, based on Henry's reliance on a collective view of the past for his victory. Henry evokes his and his troops' shared past to beat the French, for like other Shakespearean kings, he succeeds in his historical victory by summoning and replicating a past example. In fact, Henry patterns his actions on another famous English monarch who led England to defeat the French, Edward III. Willy Maley points out that "*Henry V* is a telling instance of a play ostensibly reconstructing a famous victory for England over France [the historical English victory over the French at Crécy, of 1346]." <sup>64</sup> Philip Schwyzer interprets Henry's (and Shakespeare's) backward gaze as another instance of historical nostalgia, which allows a collective sense of national identity to emerge: "Desperate to get back to Crécy, subsequent generations invoke Edward's spirit and re-enact his deeds, on the fields of Agincourt and later on the London stage" (130). Indeed, Henry is himself all too aware of the stakes, for he interprets his actions as producing two possible outcomes—"Either our history shall with full mouth / Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave, / Like Turkish mute, shall have a tongueless mouth, / Not worshipp'd with a waxen epitaph" (1.2.230-3). The French, who could hardly begin to view this conquest as part of a shared past, are unlikely to ever view themselves as part of Henry's England.

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<sup>64</sup> Willy Maley links Shakespeare's depiction of an historical victory over French, which is itself modeled on another historical victory against the French, to late Tudor and early Stuart England, for he suggests that Shakespeare "constructs the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland as both a lesser form of that victory, a variation on the imperial theme, and as a necessary prerequisite for the repetition of such a famous victory" (*Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton*. Chippenham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 20).

But England is not an impossible ideal for Henry and the other *British* nationalities he rules, and Shakespeare does not allow Henry or his spectators to forget the important role of the subjects of the English crown in producing such a nation. Shakespeare shows that Henry's victory entirely depends on the loyalty of the MacMorrises, the Fluellens, and the Jamises of his realm(s) to an idea of nationhood that if in no other respect, at least rhetorically includes them. Shakespeare does not ever erase the divisions plaguing Henry's realm in his staging of England's past, and the play ends with the pessimistic reminder that England will lose Henry and France in the years' following the play's concluding action. Nevertheless, the play reenacts Henry's victory as predicated upon the valiant contributions of all of these groups. So long, it seems, as the historical myths can be reproduced in a language that appeals to the heroic sensibilities of subjects such as Fluellen, England will ironically emerge stronger from its very non-Englishness. Henry's ability to claim a multi-national identity allows him to serve as the head of a body politic whose Irish arms, and Scottish and Welsh legs, are unlikely to be entirely assimilated by the realm's English torso. This body politic, however, can serve a king who knows how to shape the past so that it can live in the imaginations of the realms' collectivity. In his fragmented depiction, Henry becomes Shakespeare's most fitting emblem of the English nation.

### **Conclusion**

Over the course of the 1590s, Shakespeare's history plays gradually moved away from a blatant replication of the Tudor myth in *Richard III*, and towards an image of national identity that acknowledged the underlying tensions inherent in glorified depictions of England, even while they celebrated a temporary triumph of English

identity emerging out of a shared sense of purpose in moments of national crisis. In the awareness of the divisions plaguing the realm that are depicted clearly in *1 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, Shakespeare's plays look forward to England's Jacobean future. Toward the end of the decade, as the country witnessed time take its toll on their aged Virgin queen, the English wondered what Stuart England might hold. Certainly the promise of a king who would eliminate the uncertainty of dynastic politics by marrying and producing an heir must have been attractive. Yet fears for England's future likely ran high as well, for by the end of the decade the English were faced with the reality that England was not the only polity on the "scepter'd isle."

Shakespeare may have had many of these concerns in mind as he completed *Henry V*, for the play attempts to imagine a *British* future that is located in an idealized *English* identity. Even within this most patriotic of the history plays discussed here, Shakespeare never entirely allows for his depiction of history to erase the past or present problems of the English monarchy and country. While he is clearly willing to expose the threats to, problems and fears of the nation in all three plays, he also delivers histories that appeal greatly to his London audiences, both royal and common. He transforms his model kings into national symbols for people of all ranks, for he suggests that England can only emerge in moments when these groups, whose daily ambitions, desires, and concerns divide them, can find reason to forge a collective purpose. In this way, he reveals monarchal history as a form of *collective* history.

## Chapter 6:

### Conclusions

In the *Princesse de Clèves*, Lafayette incorporates both Elizabeth I of England and Marguerite de Navarre of France into her narrative; although they are both marginal to the heroine's main plot, they figure within the text in the national and international politics of Henri II's sixteenth-century court and contribute to the possibilities and constraints of the text's heroine. Lafayette does not forge any greater connections between these real historical figures within her text's fictional storyline, but their inscriptions in the same novel are interesting in light of the Queen of Navarre's documented extratextual influence on Elizabeth: in 1545, at the age of eleven, Elizabeth translated Marguerite's *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (1531) into English and presented the book as a gift to her guardian Katherine Parr (Snyder 453). In light of this fact, it is tempting to view the French queen as a real-life didactic model for Elizabeth's reign. As Susan Snyder points out, however, "Marguerite's title of 'queen of Navarre' carried with it a fairly limited sovereignty" (443). Though Elizabeth I may have viewed other queens as didactic models to emulate, she was unlikely to have learned lessons of statecraft from Marguerite de Navarre.

Indeed, Marguerite's lasting legacy in sixteenth-century England was not political, but literary. However, her impact on English literary culture was not limited to Elizabeth and members of the royal court. Fifteen of her tales from the *Heptaméron* were included in William Painter's important collection of *nouvelles*, titled *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566) (Lee 129). *The Palace of Pleasure*—a compilation of translations of sixteenth-century French, Italian, and Spanish *nouvelles*—includes among its many

translations Marguerite de Navarre's twenty-first tale, the story of Rolandine that I have discussed in chapter two. Painter's text has a significant place in English literary history because the most influential Elizabethan dramatists and prose writers draw from it to shape their own dramatic and fictional plots.

Despite the literary influence of Painter's translations on Elizabethan fiction, middle-ranking English writers exploring nationhood were not inspired by Marguerite de Navarre's story of the idealized aristocratic French heroine, for their works of historical fiction do not replicate the French queen's socially elite view of national identity. English historical fiction offers a broader range of images of nationhood than Marguerite's French narrative, as it reflects the concerns of a larger and more diverse group of people. Drawing on different generic forms and conventions, they privilege many images of national identity within their historical fictions, imagining for varied social groups a historical past, as well as an integral role in the present in shaping the nation. The English writers' ideas about England differ profoundly; whereas Spenser depicts English identity as embodied in an intellectual elite—his England is composed of “gentlemen” and “noble persons” fashioned by his erudite epic poem—Deloney imagines a much broader contingent of unpretentious tradesmen and local entrepreneurs as forming the nation's mores and morals.

They use fiction's forms to articulate their competing visions. Spenser authorizes his version of the past within the conventions of his epic poem, which has as complex a literary heritage. In the “Letter to the Authors” Spenser is as keen to articulate the poem's literary heritage as he is to narrate England's monarchical legacy in the mock-chronicle that he inscribes in Books II and III of *The Faerie Queene*.

Deloney, on the other hand, establishes his “history” as an attempt to recover “out of the dust of forgetfulness” not merely his eponymous hero, but the historical contributions to the realm and to England’s identity an entire rank of laborers of “manuall Arts” (3). His use of prose narrative, which is perceived as a less prestigious genre of fiction writing than epic, fits his purpose and reflects his hero’s humility. Through his depiction of Jack within the popular prose fiction circulating widely in Elizabethan England, Deloney preserves in the nation’s memory the contributions of people who would otherwise be overlooked in other historical forms.

Nashe and Shakespeare also experiment with the conventions of their fictional forms in order to claim a significant role for their literature in writing the English histories from which English identity emerges. Nashe combines the conventions of different prose genres within his satirical, picaresque novel, which allows him to reformulate a national literary identity for England. He links his literary ideal to social rank, for he celebrates bourgeois prose fiction, not the humanist or courtly texts of an intellectual elite in England. Shakespeare’s history plays borrow from chronicle history and literary sources to expose some of the myths and misconceptions of English identity. On the Renaissance stage, his monarchs compete and work with other valiant Englishmen to shape a glorious past. For Nashe and Shakespeare, the writing of the past allows them to depict the middle ranks as equally worthy models of national identity as their monarchs, who attain the English throne either through force, heredity, or actions—noble or ignoble.

Kingship and national identity are equally the preoccupation of seventeenth-century French writers, such as Lafayette, for Louis XIV effectively united all of

France, and his reign also provoked a greater cultural inquiry into French national identity. In Lafayette's novel, historical models from France *and* England prove equally important in understanding French historical identity during Louis XIV's absolutist regime. The novel illustrates very clearly what John D. Lyons claims is commonplace of Renaissance didactic uses of history: "example can reveal truth without providing models of proper conduct" (103). In fact, depicting Henri II's historical reign in idealized and hyperbolic language allows Lafayette to disguise a critique of Louis XIV's absolutist politics that she perceives as constraining the French aristocracy, weakening their power and influence. Ultimately, Lafayette's text reveals that France's best didactic examples are not historical, but rather fictional.

Nevertheless, Lafayette blurs the lines between fact and fiction in her heroine's depiction, for there are important resemblances between herself and her text's heroine; she like Mme de Clèves are both highly educated, illustrious aristocratic French women. Read in this way, we can speculate that she seeks to script in fiction a measure of autonomy for her heroine that is unavailable to her in seventeenth-century France.

All of the fictional texts explored in this dissertation have been read by new historicist and cultural materialist scholars alongside non-literary texts to show literature's relationship to Renaissance ideas of nationhood, revealing them as integral to a greater cultural dialogue about national identity in the early modern period. Yet their approach limits our understanding of literature's central place in reproducing, reformulating, and restructuring the histories from which ideas about nationhood emerge. By isolating texts whose social and cultural role might have been ambiguous, but whose generic conventions are understood as fictional, my project exposes the ways

that these writers rescript the past within fiction's conventions, in order to unearth the relationship between their fictions, the project of writing or rewriting national identity, and the relationships that they imagine between monarchs and subjects. This in turn allows us to understand more fully literature's impact on Renaissance perceptions of the past and its engagement with history.

By concentrating on fictional texts alone, this dissertation also shows that it is not enough to suggest that Renaissance historical fiction is just one sub-genre of an expanding list of historiographical writings in the Renaissance. For although Renaissance historical fiction is often classified as another type of history, it also performs a variety of functions, and has its own characteristics, concerns, and narrative potential within literature's generic conventions. Fictional literature's engagement with the past in fact offers Renaissance writers the freedom to recover unrecoverable "lost" histories. Moreover, fiction's ambiguous relationship to fact equally allows these writers to explore profoundly the biases that idealizing perceptions of the past evoke. Even as they replicate idealizing (and not so ideal) histories, they also unearth fears and anxieties about the future, as well as their hopes for playing a more significant role in shaping the nation. All of these writers forge collective identities for their nations that allow for greater societal participation for different segments of their countrymen and countrywomen, defined in contrast to the crown. Within these texts, the real or perceived distance between the government and the governed often collapses, yet these fictional histories equally reveal the constraints on different social groups in shaping national identity, limitations that the authors acknowledge within their texts. Just as Benedict Anderson argues that the printing press was a physical mechanism that

allowed for growing populations of the reading public to begin to imagine themselves as part of larger nations, “imagined communities,” this dissertation illustrates that fictional literature in the age of early modern print culture equally contributed to early modern writers and their readers’ ability to imagine themselves as part of larger national communities.

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