"The wonder is, he hath endured so long": King Lear and the Erosion of the Brutan Histories

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Using the anonymous play *Leir* (c. 1590; pub. 1605) and Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a case-study, this article argues that the early modern performance of figures and narratives addressing pre-Roman Britain should be understood as emerging from and participating in a five-hundred-year tradition in which the British, or more properly the English, believed themselves descended from the Trojan exile Brute and his descendants. Although originating in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1135), I argue that the traditional term for this account, "Galfridian," fails to accommodate the centuries of textual and oral cultural transmission, often via anonymous texts known as the prose *Brut*, through which these narratives became embedded as the authoritative version of English etiology. Therefore, I propose the term "Brutan histoiries" in order to de-centre Geoffrey's authorship in favour of anonymous transmission and Brute's centrality to the account of British etiology.

Pageants, plays and spectacles deriving from the Brutan histories can be dated back to the fifteenth century, and often appear in the context of civic or institutional encounters with English monarchs. This is the long tradition from which *Leir* and *King Lear* emerged. However, by the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras many spectators and readers may have been experiencing a sense of historical dissonance as historiographers' discovery of the tradition's fictional origins gradually worked outwards into popular consciousness. The early Jacobean moment was a time of heightened focus on Brutan tropes due to their rhetorical value for VI and I's project to unite England and Scotland. This engagement was endorsed by the English edition of James's own *Basilikon Doron* (1603) and spectacularly staged in Anthony Munday's pageant *The Triumphs of Re-united Britannia* (1605). However, *Leir* and *King Lear*'s dissonant approaches to temporality, anachronism and the language of negation may have triggered a disturbing sense of these histories' cultural collapse as an account of lived history or, as Lear terms it, "historica passio," at the very moment they were utilised in the name of British unity.

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The received historicity of the anonymous plays *Leir* (*c.* 1590; pub. 1605), Shakespeare's *King Lear* (*c.* 1606; pub. 1608) and the chronicles of pre-Roman Britain from which they were drawn was still widely accepted at all levels of early modern English society, even as an awareness that this tradition derived from a medieval forgery spread glacially outwards from historiographic circles into popular culture. This prolonged and – for some – painful process of etiological erosion has been termed a "crisis of belief" (Ferguson 26). This article embeds *Leir* and *King Lear* within early modern approaches to the historiography and performance of pre-Christian Britain in order to re-examine their possible modes of reception at the very moment that these traditions were simultaneously being revived in the name of James VI and I's project to unite Britain and eroded from the record of lived history. A further purpose of this article is to argue for a new term for the account of ancient British history, usually referred to as "Galfridian," or "the British History," from which the figure of Lear derived: the "Brutan histories".

Leir and *King Lear* were published at a time of seismic change for English history and historiography. Following his 1603 accession to the English throne, James VI and I was battling with his English Parliament to unite Scotland and England into a single kingdom. James's project "was so prominent in public discourse" that it served as a particularly potent and complex theme for playmakers (Marcus 148); in the case of *Leir* this may have extended to the publication of older, newly relevant properties. Both plays address the life of the ancient British king Lear and the disastrous consequences of his decision to divide Britain between his daughters. The negative parallels between Lear's and James's projects have long

been clear to critics.[1] Both plays – the Elizabethan *Leir* in publication and possible revival –

emerged from the re-energising of the use of ancient British narratives and monarchs in the

poetry and pageantry responding to James's succession. These themes in turn raised

questions of nationhood and origins and "gave an additional impetus" to interest in the

chronicle accounts of British antiquity (Parry 156). It was frequently argued that James was

reunifying a once-integrated kingdom of Britain that its founder, the Trojan Brute, had

divided between his three sons in the twelfth century BCE, rather than splicing two discrete

and traditionally hostile nations. This deployment of spurious history was, of course, merely a

continuation of the widespread medieval and early modern strategy of "colonizing time [and]

tenanting the past with nonexistent ancestors" in order to authorise the operation of power in

the present (Ingledew 675).

However, despite James's efforts, his struggle with parliament has been summarised

by Conrad Russell as "one single reiterated point: the House of Commons said 'no' ... With

each 'no,' James retreated to a smaller request, but the 'no' remained the same" (127). The

faltering progress and ultimate failure of James's union project may be figuratively mapped

upon plays of this period that feature ancient British narratives, and James himself can be

considered an authorising effect upon the production and publication of "British" texts and

events across his reign. For example, a reference to Trojan Brute in the London edition of

James's *Basilikon Doron* seems to pre-empt Anthony Munday's 1605 Lord Mayor's Show,

The Trivmphes of Re-vnited Britania, which spectacularly presented Brute and his sons to

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[1] In 1937, John Draper asked, rhetorically, "could any well-informed person of that time" have seen

King Lear and not recognised parallels with James's early reign and his project for British union?"

(176); and Curtis Perry refers to the "familiar litany of topical elements in King Lear" (125). James

Forse provides a recent summary of work on King Lear's Jacobean contexts (64), citing Farley-

Hills (1990); Patterson (1989), 106–09; Foakes, "Introduction" (1997); and Schwyzer (2006).

Londoners and London's livery companies in order to configure James as a "second Brute," that is, a second founder of Britain, a term that Munday uses four times in two pages (sig. B1v-B2r). These plays and performances in fact belonged to a much older tradition of performing the history of pre-Roman Britain, a narrative continuum I term the "Brutan histories," that dated at least as far back as civic pageants performed before Henry VII on his 1486 post-Bosworth progress of England. By 1612, Thomas Heywood could claim in his *Apology for Actors* that plays in the public theatres had "taught the vnlearned the knowledge of many famous histories," particularly "the discouery of all our English Chronicles ... from the landing of Brute, vntill this day" (sig. F3r). In other words, *Triumphs* and *King Lear* in performance, and *Leir* in print, are timely responses to the Jacobean moment and the continuation of a dramaturgical tradition dating back at least as far as the fifteenth century.

The following section outlines this tradition's medieval origins, my reasoning for adopting the term "Brutan histories," and the early modern "crisis of belief". Secondly, I will give a necessarily brief account of the tradition of performing ancient British figures and narratives from 1486 until the Jacobean period, for which *The Triumphs of Re-vnited Britania* will serve as a case-study. I then offer analyses of *Leir* and *King Lear* in terms of their possible reception in 1605-08. For many early Jacobean readers these plays' entanglement with both historical tradition and current events may have been complicated by *Leir*'s dislocation from historical chronology and King Lear's potential to be read as an enactment of Brutan erosion as embodied in the figure of Lear himself.

The Brutan Tradition

Medieval accounts of British antiquity reached early modern England via a tradition of anonymous manuscript histories known collectively as the prose *Brut,* so named for its

narrative beginning with the founding and naming of Britain by Brute, a descendant of the Trojan Aeneas (Drukker 451).[2] On his death, Brute divided the island of Britain between his three sons, creating the three territories – Albania/Scotland, Loegria/England, and Cambria/Wales – into which ancient Britain would periodically fracture at times of war and crises of succession. This narrative could be traced directly and exclusively to Geoffrey of Monmouth's incalculably influential *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*c.* 1135). Geoffrey had noted that he had found nothing in previous chronicles touching on "the kings who lived here before Christ's incarnation" (4). He thus addressed this omission with reference to a "certain old book" or *liber vetustissimus*, written in an ancient version of Welsh and translated into Latin by Geoffrey himself (4). This "old book" was, as a growing number of early modern writers were discovering, an enabling fiction that had given Geoffrey a *tabula rasa* from which to concoct the pre-Roman-invasion portions of his work *ex nihilo*.[3] One indicator of Geoffrey's success is that "[t]hroughout the Middle Ages and the early modern period, both the English and the Welsh made the idea of an ancient British heritage the historical cornerstone of their national identity" (MacColl 249). Indeed, the Welsh were often considered the truer Brutan ancestors, being descended from those pushed west by Saxon incursion, somewhat complicating any sense of shared heritage. Thus, even in the 1593 playbook of George Peele's *Edward I,* published 108 years after the Welsh-descended Henry Tudor took the English throne supported by claims of Arthurian descent, whilst Edward and his followers are described as "Albions Champions, / Equiualent with *Trotans* auncient fame" (sig. A2v), Edward's rival Lluellan forcefully claims Brute for the Welsh, described as "true

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[2] The adoption of members of the Trojan diaspora in order to establish origins was not unusual for Europe's "newly emergent nations" seeking "classical glory" (Weijer 45).

[3] The term *ex nihilo* has been applied to Geoffrey's creation of the *Historia* by several critics, including Pace 54; and Davies 4.

Britaines sprong of *Troians* seede" (sig. C3r). Despite such nuances, however, Brutan narratives were frequently deployed in the service and rhetoric of English power. [4]

In brief, the *Historia* extended from the life of Brute, whom the Elizabethan chronicler John Stow stated had conquered Albion in the year 1108BCE, to that of the seventh-century Cadwallader, the "last king of Britayne" (*Summarie*, f. 9; f. 36r). In the years covered by and following Roman historians' accounts of invading Britain (*c.* 52BCE), these, along with continental and Anglo-Saxon chronicles increasingly provided sources that Geoffrey sometimes drew from and sometimes contradicted. From the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, Geoffrey's narrative dominated as a habit of thought deeply embedded at all levels of English culture. It was disseminated and sustained through the prose *Brut* and its early modern print analogues, through elite genealogy, civic history, romance, *de casibus* literature, ballads, drama, and oral tradition. However, despite Geoffrey's role as the originator of this tradition, and its claim to address the history of ancient Britain, I suggest that the critical terms most often used to categorise it, "Galfridian," and "the British History," should be re-examined.

"Galfridian" semantically localises five centuries of collective cultural exchange and transmission to a single author and a Latin text that would have been inaccessible to most medieval and early modern English. In contrast, the term "Brutan histories" creates an etymological connection between the prose *Brut* narratives in all their textual and cultural

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[4] Brutan themes had long served English interests. In 1301, Edward I wrote a letter to the Pope defending his right to Scotland via reference to Brutan history (MacColl 257). His claim centred on the precedence of Brute's son Locrine over the younger Albanacht, inheritor of northern Britain and, therefore, Scotland.

forms, as well as foregrounding Brute as the putative founder of Britain.[5] Bruts altered the *Historia'*s narrative in ways large and small and, over the centuries, their unknown compilers added more and more additional material, updating the narratives with the effect that the ancient history beginning with Brute always reached into the present moment. Bruts often provided substantive material for chronicle and historiographic texts printed in the early modern period; the earliest of these, William Caxton's *Cronicles of Englond* (1480), was a print edition of a manuscript Brut. Whilst Geoffrey was cited in many of these texts, his *Historia* itself was never published in English or in England in the early modern period.[6] More widespread still was the dissemination of his creation into oral culture. Adam Fox gives an account of soldiers visiting Leicester in the 1630s being told by the attendant at a local inn that the city had been built "by the British king Leir, near 1000 yeeres before Christ" (231).[7] Thus many spectators of *Leir*'s performance at the Rose playhouse in 1594 (Foakes, *Henslowe's* 21), or the lost 1598 play *The Conqueste of Brute* (100) at the same venue could experience a narrative drawn directly from the Brut tradition without having ever heard of Geoffrey of Monmouth or his book.

"Brutan histories" also engages with another phrase that is often still adopted by critics, "the British History," and which as far back as 1950 Thomas Kendrick could adopt the phrase "in accordance with ... custom," indicating its antiquated status (6). "The British

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[5] The phrase "Brutan Histories" is used in early modern print, in Richard Harvey's vehemently pro-Brutan *Philadelphus*, wherein Harvey complains of "outlandish intruders" attempting to "vsurpe the censure of the Brutan Histories" (sig. C3r).

[6] A 1587 Latin edition of the *Historia* published by Jerome Commelin in Heidelberg became the standard edition in England (Escobedo, "Britannia," 63).

[7] For this account Fox cites BL, Additional MS, 15917; f.5.

History" raises questions of what – now, and in the early modern period – constituted "Britain". This is particularly apposite when we consider that in practice the Brutan histories served as English histories bolstering English interests and competed with a rival, and very different, Scottish account of ancient Britain.[8] The phrase's uses and function were challenged in the 1970s when John Pocock made an influential call for a new "British history," that is, for new methodologies that both questioned the Anglo-centric nature of historiographic approaches to the region Pocock termed the "Atlantic archipelago" (603). This in turn has produced much literary criticism focussing on the distinct and dissonant representations of British territories and regional cultures in early modern literature.[9] In short, I suggest "the British History" is far too entangled with outmoded critical tradition *and* recent progressive critical discourse to sustain independent meaning as a term for the fictionalised period of antiquity sustained by the prose *Brut* and the multifarious cultural emanations it authorised.

The "Crisis of Belief"

The death knell for the Brutan histories is often seen as coming in the 1530s with the Italian Polydore Vergil's *Anglia Historia* (Basel, 1534). This work effectively triggered the controversy by expressing scepticism over the *Historia*'s account of pre-Roman Britain and the later reign of King Arthur. A typical critic of Vergil was the Protestant polemicist John Bale, "a man of great learning ... blinded by religious prejudice" (Kendrick 69) who argued

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[8] Scottish antiquity was provided by Hector Boece in his *Scotorum Historiae* (Edinburgh, 1540) which, like Geoffrey's *Historia*, claimed access to previously unknown sources (Mason 65).

[9] Some examples of this which are pertinent to my own thesis include: Escobedo, *Historical Loss*; Hadfield; Helgerson; Kerrigan; Kumar; and McEachern.

that Vergil was "polutynge oure Englyshe chronicles most shamefullye" (*A Brefe Chronycle* 5r). The controversy, however, seems to have remained largely confined to scholarly circles, and when addressed in English-language chronicles, this scepticism was often dismissed as a species of foreign subterfuge. In Richard Grafton's *Chronicle at Large* (1569), Thomas Norton, co-author or the Brutan play *Gorboduc*, writes in his "letter to the reader" that Grafton's work is protecting English readers, particularly "princes," from the "slaunderous reportes of foreyne writers," a probable reference to Vergil (not paginated).

It was not until 1586 that William Camden's Latin *Britannia* appeared tacitly to accept Vergil's historiography, defending the Brutan histories with the rather weak proviso, quoting Pliny, that "*Even falsely to claime … descents from famous personages, implieth in some sort a love of virtue*" (1610; f. 8-9). Camden was followed by John Speed's *The Historie of Great Britaine* (1611), which determined that the Brutan histories' fictiveness "appeareth by the silence of the Romane writers therein, who name neither Brute nor his father in the genealogie of the Latine Kings" (f. 164). That is, Speed prioritises classical and continental historiography over medieval English tradition. Thus Kendrick describes Speed as "the great antiquary who settled the matter for us" (124). For *us,* perhaps. But in fact the period saw numerous Brutan-endorsing chronicles, most famously Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577) and John Stow's numerous works, alongside hugely successful *poesie-historical* texts that adopted and promoted Brutan narratives as historical for didactic and ideological purposes, such as John Higgins's 1574 additions to the *Mirror for Magistrates,* William Warner's *Albions England* (1586), and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590).

Yet the textual form that perhaps most simply and eloquently demonstrates the permeation and habit of popular belief in the Brutan histories is the almanac. These inexpensive texts included calendrical information, astrological prognostication regarding harvests, weather and, frequently, timelines of world history. The popularity of almanacs

grew across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to become "arguably the most popular books of the early modern period," making them a useful means of assessing early modern "assumptions and reading practices" (Chapman 1258-59). An almanac's timeline very often indicated the beginning of British chronology with the arrival of Brute, a practice that became more common after 1585 and often orientated Brutan events via reference to parallel moments from biblical and classical history (Capp 215-16). Daniel Woolf asserts that almanacs were "so plentiful that for the majority of Britons they were the most accessible form of history lesson" (321). If so, it was frequently a lesson in Brutan history. In *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (pub. 1608)*,* the character Sam returns to Yorkshire "[f]urnisht with things from London," and describes himself as carrying "three hats, and two glasses … two rebato wyers vpon my brest, a capcase by my side, a brush at my back, an Almanack in my pocket, [and] three ballats in my Codpeece, naie I am the true picture of a Common seruingman" (sig. A2v). In other words, to carry an almanac is integral to the popular image, or "true picture," of a "common servingman". The Brutan histories' inclusion amongst the almanacs' bare, "factual," data, information through which readers sought to situate themselves within seasonal and historical time, argues that for many they were not something to be "believed," or "disbelieved," any more than were the weather or the seasons. There were many competing publishers of almanacs but, to cite a single example, those produced by Thomas Bretnor seem to have been especially well-known in the early Jacobean period, receiving mentions in texts by Thomas Middleton and Ben Jonson (Capp, Bretnor, *ODNB*). Bretnor's 1607 almanac, published midway between the quartos of *Leir* and *King Leir,* opens with a brief world chronology in which the year Brute "entred this Iland" appears as only the fourth significant event of history after the Creation, the Flood and the destruction of Troy (sig. A1v). Thus, from *Britannia* to the almanac, an early modern individual's sense of history, and of the truth value of Britain's Trojan origins, depended on the discourses and texts to

which he or she had access within his or her textual community, whether the community that frequented a Leicester Inn or the Inns of Court.[10] Another culturally ubiquitous channel for Brutan history, of course, was drama.

Following his victory at Bosworth in 1485 Henry VII conducted a progress through his new kingdom. In many towns he was met by pageantry that both begged his indulgence and asserted local civic rights.[11] Twice, this pageantry confronted Henry with Brutan figures as personifications of both civic antiquity and Henry's own ancestry. At York, the seat of the dynasty Henry had defeated, the king was addressed by the Brutan king Ebrauk, described as York's founder, or "beginner" (REED: York, 1.139; l. 36). Ebrauk presents Henry with the keys of the city but also interweaves his origins with Henry's own, by asserting his right to Henry's "remembrance / Seth [since] that I am prematiue of Your progenie" (140; l. 20). At the beginning of his reign, Henry had accentuated his putative descent from the celebrated King Arthur, after whom he named his eldest son; The pageant thus reminds Henry that Arthur was in turn a descendent of Ebrauk, and thus asserts York's ancient rights. This recourse to Brutan figures in civic-monarchical encounters was repeated in a speech intended for Elizabeth I's 1578 entry into Norwich. Elizabeth was to be greeted by Norwich's founder Gurgunt, who declares himself as having lain "[t]wo thousand yeares welnye in

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[10] The term "textual communities" is cited by Amy Noelle Vines. Vines attributes the term to Brian Stock, who "presents a model of the text's role as a force which offers organisation and cohesiveness to a group of people" thus providing "a useful tool in examining patterns in medieval readership" (qtd. in Vines 71).

[11] Henry visited Cambridge, Huntingdon, and Stamford, although these pageants are not recorded; Lincoln (Meagher 48); Nottingham; York (49); Worcester (61); Hereford (67); Gloucester (68); Bristol (69).

silence lurking still," but reanimated by the Queen's approach (sig. B3r).[12] Gurgunt recounts

the events of his reign and asserts his right as a historical figure to emerge from history and

speak for his city.[13] Similarly, the first recorded Brutan play also addressed a monarch

directly. Thomases Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* (1562; pub. 1565) was performed,

according to the title page of the 1565 quarto, "before the *QVENES* most excellent Maiestie,

in her highnes Court of Whitehall" (sig. A1r). *Gorboduc* constituted "a direct intervention in

the political controversy surrounding … the uncertainty of [Elizabeth I's] succession" (James

and Walker 109). Ebrauk had cited his status as Henry VII's ancestor as a rhetorical device;

similarly, *Gorboduc* enhances its sense of tragedy by foregrounding its characters' shared

Brutan origins, asking "how much Brutish blod hath sithence been spilt / To ioyne againe the

sondred vnitie?" (sig. B1r).

In elite and public spaces, then, and in pageantry and play, Brutan figures were used

to celebrate and negotiate the complex relationships between the monarch and his or her

subjects' institutions. And just as acceptance of the Brutan histories in popular culture is

hinted at by the use of Brutan timelines in almanacs, so the records of "lost" plays,

particularly Philip Henslowe's "diary" of repertory at the Rose playhouse in the 1590s,

demonstrates the scope of public Brutan drama alluded to by Heywood in 1612.[14] This is the

theatrical culture from which *Leir* emerged. The scarcity of anti-Brutan writing in the 1560s

suggests that *Gorboduc,* for example, could be received as a representation of lived, ancestral

history. However, by the early seventeenth century, knowledge of the Brutan controversy was

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[12] In the event, Gurgunt's speech was cancelled "by reason of a showre of raine" (sig. B2v).

[13] This episode also usefully argues for the term "Brutan histories". Gurgunt is an invention of

Geoffrey of Monmouth, but his founding of Norwich is a much later, anonymous tradition.

[14] For a taxonomy of drama and performances featuring Brutan figures or narratives, including the

seven Brutan plays recorded by Henslowe in his Diary, see Appendix One.

spreading. I have emphasised the cultural embeddedness of the Brutan histories so emphatically in order to suggest that to move from belief to doubt might not simply entail an intellectual change of course. Addressing the complex territories between belief and doubt in ancient Greek attitudes to their religious and historiographic narratives, Paul Veyne finds evidence for "modalities of wavering belief," marked by a "capacity to simultaneously believe in incompatible truths" (56), and Ferguson has argued for the usefulness of Veyne's theories when considering early modern attitudes to the remote past (2). This sense of "wavering belief" may have further extended and complicated a process that already involved the deep, affective transformation of an individual's sense of their national, civic, and personal origins, even as figures such as Brute were appropriated in the name of James VI and I's dream of British unity.

To question the historical truth of Brute, or his descendants Lear and Gorboduc, was to undermine the integrity of the whole historiographic macrostructure of pre-Roman British culture and origins as a whole, characterised as a civilisation of cities, temples, conquering armies, and universities, long pre-dating ancient Rome.[15] Thus the Brutan histories' sheer cultural *usefulness*, along with the vertiginous lack of anything with which to replace them, energised those that resisted their erosion. The Jacobean writer Edmund Bolton expressed his concern that their abandonment would leave a "vast Blanck upon the Times of our Country, from the Creation of the World till the coming of Julius Caesar" (sig. Cc2v-3r).[16] I suggest that the unease of readers and spectators regarding this "vast blanke" would have been projectible onto plays such as *Leir, King Lear* and the contemporary Brutan drama *No-body and Some-body* (*c.* 1604; pub. 1606): "Who of nothing can something make?" (sig. A2v) asks

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[15] Throughout Roman Invasions, John Curran argues that English competition with Rome was the driving motivation for the Historia and early modern depictions of the Brutan histories.

[16] Edmund Bolton's Hypercritica (c. 1618; pub. 1722); qtd in MacDougall 23.

the prologue in *No-body and Some-body,* a play which forces its putatively historical Brutan monarch Elidure to share the stage with a character called Nobody. "[N]othing can come of nothing" *King Lear* replies (sig. B2r).

Brutan Doubt and British Union in Early Jacobean England

The central theme of this article, then, is historical dissonance, and the ways in which Brutan drama may have evoked etiological erosion even as that etiology was being deployed to promote James VI and I's project to "reunite" England and Scotland, the kingdoms supposedly divided by Brute. Possible interaction between the London edition of James's *Basilikon Doron* (1603) and Munday's *Trivmphes of Re-vnited Britania* (1605) shows both how official approaches to historiography might influence drama. Parallels may be found in the way that the scepticism and resistance that greeted James's project are echoed in the scepticism and resistance that increasingly characterised attitudes to the Brutan histories. John Ross of the Inner Temple attests to the public nature of the Brutan controversy in his *Britannica* (1607). This collection of Latin poems recounts the Brutan histories' core narrative and demonstrates the continued engagement with those histories on the part of London's legal community (Hardin, "Geoffrey," 235). In an appended "apology," Ross offers a defence of Brutan historicity as proving Britain's originary unity and therefore supporting James's plan for union: "we are to be transformed from English and Scotsmen and be called Britons once more" (trans. Sutton). Ross characterises the public debate surrounding the Brutan histories as emotive and suffused with doubt:

> For the question of whether Brutus existed or not is on all men's lips. Good God!
> Nowadays what is not called into question by these petty little doubts? In meetings, at
> banquets, in assemblies, even in barbershops men wrangle over this ... I do not desire

to conjecture what any man might feel or whisper about this thing, since I am quite

familiar with the fact that nothing is ever so well-polished, nothing can be so

complete, as they say, down to its very fingertips, which other men (and learned ones

at that) cannot rip it to shreds. (trans. Sutton)[17]

I am interested in the "petty little doubts," identified by Ross, and how these might have

worked upon readers and spectators of Brutan drama at this time. Unlike Ross, I will

conjecture what some may have been provoked to "feel or whisper" regarding these doubts,

and how *Leir* and *King Lear* might have agitated this uncertainty, much as Anne Lake

Prescott has described the historiographer John Selden's sceptical "illustrations" to *Poly-*

Olbion (1612) as eroding Michael Drayton's Brutan themes "like acid eating a book from its

edges" (309). Hadfield describes Drayton's engagement with the question of union in *Poly-*

Olbion as "beset by nervous anxiety and division" (160). Radicalising and foregrounding this

erosion, anxiety, and doubt, however, was the public utilisation of the Brutan histories in the

service of James VI and I's union project, a strategy that appeared to originate with James

himself.

In *Basilikon Doron,* James appeared to advise his young son, Henry, to beware the

dangers of dividing the realm between heirs: "by deuiding your kingdomes, yee shall leaue

the seed of diuision and discord among your posteritie; as befell to this Ile, by the diuision

and assignement thereof, to the three sonnes of Brutus, Locrine, Albanact, and Camber"

(Fischlin and Fortier 142).[18] However, as James Shapiro has noted, the passage relating to

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[17] Ross's mention of barbershops is intriguing; Fox notes that these "acted both as centres of news and
gossip and as places where newsletters and pamphlets might be seen" and read aloud for the
benefit of non-readers (39).

[18] This event and its repercussions had been portrayed in the Brutan play *Locrine* (c. 1590; pub. 1595).

Brute and his sons did not appear in the original, Scottish, version of *Basilikon Doron,*

published in a limited run of seven copies in Edinburgh in 1599 (39-40). It was inserted into

the English edition published in London in the wake of Elizabeth I's death in March 1603.

This suggests that the text was amended with a specifically English readership in mind, one

believed to be familiar with and receptive to the use of Brutan history for rhetorical purposes.

Citing an unpublished study by Peter Blayney, Jenny Wormald narrates the "dramatic"

London publication of *Basilikon Doron*. Within four days of Elizabeth's death on 24 March

1603, James's book appeared in the Stationer's Register, and by 13 April it is likely that eight

editions were issued, with between 13,000 and 16,000 copies printed overall (51).[19]

However, whilst James Forse has argued that *Basilikon Doron* demonstrates that

"James knew his legendary British history" (56), I suggest that the insertion of the Locrine

reference invites the possibility of collaborative intervention. The book's publisher John

Norton was a "friend to [Robert] Cecil," Elizabeth's Secretary of State and a possible

recipient of the Edinburgh edition of *Basilikon Doron* used as copy for the London editions

(51). James's manuscript for *Basilikon Doron* shows that, amongst its many crossings-out

and amendments, there is no mention of Brute or Locrine.[20] Thus the insertion of Brute's

narrative may have been at the suggestion, or even the instigation, of Cecil or the text's

London stationers. In the aftermath of accession, this recourse to identifiably English

historiography would have a powerful effect on playmakers and stationers although, by the

time many of these texts began appearing in print from 1605, James's union project had

stalled in parliament (Hill, "Representing," 20). The most immediate and explicit response to

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[19] This was a huge print run in comparison with those given to playbooks and other non-official

printed books, which were restricted by "guild regulations to a "maximum press run of 1,250 to

1,500 copies for most edition" (Farmer and Lesser 17-18).

[20] Royal MS 18 B XV (fol. 23v, ll. 12-14).

Basilikon Doron may have been Anthony Munday's 1605 Lord Mayor's show *The Trivmphes of Re-vnited Britania*, which paraded children costumed as Brute, his sons, and attendant personifications of British rivers and cities, through London's streets repeatedly proclaiming James a "second Brute" (sig. B1v-B2r; sig. B3v; sig. B4v; sig. C3r). *Trivmphes*, perhaps, can make this comparison without risking the insinuation that James will repeat Brute's perceived error of dividing his kingdom precisely because this is the very mistake identified and warned against in *Basilikon Doron.* As Tracey Hill notes, Lord Mayor's Shows were "*public* events, witnessed by thousands" (*Pageantry* 4); thus *Trivmphes* was perhaps the most spectacular early modern performance of Brutan history, although James himself was represented in the show by an empty chair (Hill, "Representing," 23). Just as Gurgunt at Norwich described himself as emerging from the distant past, Philip Schwyzer notes a similar theme in *Trivmphs*: "there are two separate resurrections heralded here: that of Brutus and his kin, who are awakened from death ... and that of Britain itself" (37). In performance, this endorsement and its supporting historiography are presented as joyous and unequivocal. In print, Brutan origins are compromised by Munday himself. In the quarto of *Trivmphes,* Munday addresses the Brutan controversy:

> Because our present conceit, reacheth vnto the antiquitie of *Brytaine,* which (in many mindes) hath carried as many and variable opinions: I thought it not vnnecessary, (being thereto earnestly solicited) to speake somewhat concerning the estate of this our Countrey. (sig. A2r)

Munday's confusing syntax invokes historical dissonance even as he works to allay it. It might be read that there are "many and variable opinions" carried in the "many mindes" of numerous individuals or, both additionally and alternatively, that each of these "mindes"

carries churning within it "many and variable opinions," that is, multiple and contradictory visions of the past. For some spectators and readers of playbooks, then, the celebration of Brutan origins and the erosive debate surrounding their historicity in the early Jacobean period could be encountered within a single text. It is within this context, if more obliquely, that *Leir* and *King Lear* will be addressed.

To examine *Leir* and *King Lear* within the Jacobean moment is to uproot the earlier play from the conditions of its earliest recorded performance at the Rose in 1594, and to examine it instead as a 1605 Jacobean playbook, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*. To ask why stationers chose to publish Brutan plays at all at this time – beginning with the more-than-decade-old *Leir* – is to pose productive questions about the interests of those stationers' customers. *Leir,* a play about a king's division of Britain and that kingdom's subsequent happy reunion, would have been topical at any time in the first years of James's reign although, by 1605, the project was already on shaky ground.[21] However, Zachary Lesser argues that it is possible to move "from the readings that publishers imagine," when they select which texts to invest in, "to the meanings that their customers made out of these books" (*Renaissance* 17-18). In 1605, the meanings made by purchasers of *Leir* would have been shaped by the relevance of its Brutan subject to the rhetoric of union. This utility also highlighted the play's function as an account of history, a perspective which, perhaps

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[21] A further topical motive for publication could have been the birth of James and Anna's daughter, Mary. Mary was not only the first Stuart born in England, and the first English royal birth since 1537, she was – in terms of James's desired union – the first "British" royal child. *Leir,* which concerns the restorative reunion of Britain through the joint action of a British king and his youngest daughter certainly chimes with this moment. On the fifth of May 1605, Following much national celebration, Mary was baptised at Greenwich palace (Barroll 106). Three days later, *Leir* was registered for publication.

paradoxically, could have drawn attention to characteristics of the play that might, for certain readers, provoke questions of etiological erosion. *Leir* uproots its characters from the Brutan epoch, thus dislocating them from the continuum of world history presented in almanacs and chronicles, the continuum that underwrote the Brutan rhetoric of *Triumphs* and James's argument for union.

Leir

Genealogies and Brutan timelines were invaluable to James VI and I's self-legitimation and union project. In 1605, the year *Leir* was published, the genealogist Thomas Lyte was working on an illustrated table "comprising nine parchment skins ... over two metres wide and almost two metres high" that traced the Stuart ancestry from Brute and included a depiction of the temple of Janus said to have been founded by Lear (de Guevara). Lyte's table shows the importance of situating forbears and ancestors securely within chronological space if they were to offer meaning and authority in the present. In contrast to this anchoring of King Lear's narrative within the Brutan-Jacobean timeline, *Leir* disrupts Brutan temporality through pervasive Christian references, anachronisms that might be perceived as eroding the title-page's claim to represent "true chronicle history". For *Leir*'s early Jacobean readers the play's dislocation of its Brutan narrative from the apparatus of world chronology - and thus from the continuity of royal descent - held the potential to trigger those "petty little doubts" in Brutan historicity. These doubts may have been compounded and personified by the character Skalliger who, in a correlation that has gone almost unnoticed by critics, shares his name with two prominent early modern scholars, Julius Caesar Scaliger and his son Joseph Scaliger; the latter being the era's foremost theorist and collator of world chronology (Grafton 77-78). These associations were available even to non-specialist readers, who could have encountered references to both Scaligers in a wide variety of texts.

Leir may digress or adapt but always ends in realignment with the Brutan histories' genealogical continuity. Yet, as Margreta de Grazia notes, this nominally Brutan play "flagrantly occurs in AD time" (139), explicitly a realm or era termed "Christendom". The play extracts itself wholesale from wider accounts of the pre-Christian world, a concatenation of international historiographies known as universal history, representing the "scholarly desire" to order the fragmentary and contradictory accounts of ancient world histories into "some kind of order, some rational time scheme" (Ferguson 147). This macro-narrative, into which English writers from Geoffrey onwards had been careful to embed the Brutan histories, accommodated biblical, classical, continental, near eastern, and other chronologies, and many chronicle texts provided marginal timelines or commentary that worked to situate a particular narrative within this wider context. For example, Holinshed anchors the Brutan kings within universal chronology, stating that Lear ruled "in the yeare of the world 3105, at what time Ioas reigned in Iuda" (1587: I, *Hist.* 12). This is also, as shown, reflected in the skeletal but widely circulated universal timelines included in many almanacs.

There will always be anachronisms, large and small, that are better attributed to playmakers' haste or imperfect knowledge than to authorial strategy, such as Gloucester's use of "spectacles" in *King Lear* (Q1; sig. C1v). Stuart Piggott notes that the "propensity of early writers (and illustrators) to project the modern into the ancient world without any sense of what came to be known as anachronism, is a commonplace" (44). This is certainly true; but *Leir*, for whatever original dramaturgical purpose, does not so much "bring the modern into the ancient world" as parachute the ancient and pagan wholesale in into the Christian world. Christian imagery permeates *Leir*, and Christian thinking drives its characters' behaviour and understanding of their world.

Leir's good counsellor, Perillus, calls upon "iust Iehoua, whose almighty power / Doth gouerne all things in this spacious world" (sig. F3v). Biblical references are precise

rather than generalised: Leir compares an unexpected banquet to "the blessed Manna, / That raynd from heauen amongst the Israelites" (sig. H2v-H3r) and, upon being reconciled with Cordella, offers her the same "blessing, which the God of *Abraham* gaue / Vnto the trybe of *Iuda*" (sig. H4v). These Old Testament references could be argued to still, loosely, situate *Leir* within a pre-Christian, internationalist, Britain. Yet the characters exhibit explicitly Christian behaviour and references. Leir pledges to "take me to my prayers and my beads," in the care of his daughters, "the kindest Gyrles in Christen dome" (sig. C1r). The play's engagement with Christianity extends to referencing post-biblical figures such as "Saint *Denis,* and Saint *George*" (sig. I3r), patron saints of Paris and England respectively, the two powers united both by Gallia's marriage to Cordella and their joint support of Leir's cause. Thus, the play's references to post-Brutan, and post-biblical, Christianity are not mere decoration, but often offer thematic commentary. Taking in both Catholic doctrine and early modern Protestant caricature, Gonorill calls Cordella a "Puritan" and threatens to "make you wish your selfe in Purgatory" (sig. I3v); to present the wicked Gonerill as adopting a term of abuse used towards those perceived as radical Protestants transports these Brutan figures into, and defines them via, the sectarian milieux and schisms of post-Reformation England. The more persistently *Leir*'s characters adopt the language of early modern Christianity, the more they dislocate Brutan time from its pre-Christian chronology. For many readers of the 1605 playbook, this dislocation – unremarkable in much early modern literature, as noted – has the potential to aggravate those dissonant "petty little doubts" in Brutan historicity. This potential is further exacerbated by the presence of the minor character Skalliger.

Lord Skalliger, a character inserted into *Leir*'s Brutan plot by its playmakers, is a meddling, villainous advisor. He is textually prominent, the only character other than Leir to speak and be named on the play's opening page, thus prioritising his presence and name before that of the other characters. Skalliger's first action is to propose the fateful love test,

that Leir should reward his daughters "[a]s is their worth, to them that love profess" (sig.

A2v), before immediately rushing off to "bewray your [Leir's] secrecy" to Gonerill and

Ragan (sig. A3r). Thus Skalliger "betrays Leir's confidence [and] it is Skalliger, not Leir,

who supports giving a larger portion to the daughter who wins the love contest" (Brink 214).

By instigating and manipulating the love test, Skalliger triggers the play's "historical" events.

His influence over the defining events of Leir's reign, then, is considerable. His interventions

are almost dramaturgical, as he directs, even creates, events purporting to be historical. His

authorising agency and manipulation of "history" beg the question of why Skalliger shares

his unusual name with two renowned early modern French scholars. Apart from Sidney Lee's

1909 edition of the play (xxxiv), critics have rarely noted, and never explored, the

relationship between *Leir*, Julius Caesar Scaliger and, especially, his son Joseph Scaliger.

The possible influence of the Scaligers upon *Leir* suggests evidence of an interaction

between continental literary and historiographic theories, popular drama, and Brutan history.

Clare McManus has stressed the importance, when considering "British" culture, of

remembering that "although it came late to the Renaissance, in its 'high' cultural form at

least, Britain consciously based its self-expression upon an idea of learning and a value

system from beyond its own borders" (187). *Leir*'s Skalliger could have been interpreted as

displaying, and perhaps satirising, just such an influence. Julius Caesar Scaliger was a

theorist of poetics and "the most notorious of Renaissance categorizers" (Orgel 113). His

Poetices Libri Septem (Lyons, 1581) sought to assiduously define and assert rules regarding

literary and poetic genre. Scaliger's work was praised in Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesie* (*c.*

1580; pub. 1595), and Stephen Orgel has noted both writers' resistance to drama derived

from the fact that "neither is capable of the minimally imaginative effort required by plays

which ignore the unities of place or time" (115). *Leir*'s Skalliger may have appeared to some

as a playmakers' rebuke against such "limited" critiques of drama, pertinent to a play that, disregarding "unities of place and time," dislocated itself from one temporality to another.[22]

It is Scaliger's son, Joseph Justus, however, who had the greater presence in English print by the Jacobean period, and who dedicated his career to perfecting a theory of universal chronology, the very system into which chronicles such as Holinshed's embedded Brutan history and from which *Leir* dislocates itself. Scaliger junior addressed the problem of "how to harmonise Biblical chronology with the chronologies of the other nations of antiquity" with his *De Emendation Temporum* (Paris, 1583) (Burke 47). This work was "lavishly illustrated with tables," and "reduced all chronologies to a new one, the Julian" (Burke 47). Anthony Grafton outlines the significance of Joseph Scaliger's work: "[He] won renown for his reformation of the traditional approach to chronology," by combining and coordinating data from classical and biblical sources in order to detect "gaps in the historical record [and] fill them by astonishing feats of historical detective work (77). References to Joseph Scaliger, frequently praiseful, abound in English print.

John Eliot's French primer, *Ortho-epia Gallica* (1593), includes a translation of a poem by Bathas praising Scaliger as a polymath who

> Not by one onely Idiome
>
> his secrets to vnfold,

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[22] Scaliger senior was certainly on dramatists' radars; in *Wits Miserie,* Thomas Lodge interrupts a bawdy tale, sarcastically claiming himself "afraid that Iulius Scaliger should haue cause to checke mée of [for] teaching sinne" (f. 39); similarly, George Chapman attacked Scaliger as "soule-blind" for his "impalsied diminution of Homer" (sig. A3v), although the contingency of this judgement is demonstrated by its appearance in Chapman's own Homeric effort, *Achilles Shield* (1598).

But as the learned Scaliger,

whom men the wonder hold

 ...

O rich and supple spirit that can

his tongue so quickly change,

Cameleon-like into what author

likes him best to range. (f. 17-18)

This poem was reproduced in a different translation in Robert Allott's poetry anthology *Englands Parnassus* (1600), presenting Scaliger as an exemplary polymath, although its reference to Scaliger as "wits Chamelion" (f. 495) suggests a quality that, in the negative, could also apply to *Leir*'s Skalliger, who adapts his demeanour and honesty according to his schemes. Perhaps most allusive to *Leir*'s treatment of Scaliger is a reference from the clown Clove in Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1600). Clove cites Scaliger as "the best Nauigator in his time" (sig. H4v), thus suggesting, punningly, a figure adept at temporal orientation. *Leir* uproots itself from the Brutan chronology that was essential to its potential meanings in 1605 and emphasises this dislocation by naming the play's villainous instigator after the era's most famous custodian and theorist of universal history. The mischievous manipulation of the play's "historical" events by this character were not, perhaps, so different from the charges of manipulation and fictionalising levelled at Geoffrey of Monmouth. Skalliger's final words before disappearing from the play appear to be in direct address:

And me a villain, that to curry favour

Have given the daughter counsel 'gainst the father

But us the world doth this experience give,

That he that cannot flatter, cannot live. (sig. C4v)

The appropriation and promotion of Brutan iconography by writers and stationers in support of James's union project could, like Skalliger's cynical invocation of "experience," be perceived as disingenuous flattery of the monarch driven by self-interest. History, in this light, is a function of just the kind of political contingency that was driving the union project. In its Jacobean context, the Elizabethan *Leir*'s mysterious temporal relocation and insertion of a Skalliger combine in ways that might agitate to Brutan certainties.

King Lear

In the version of *King Lear* published amongst the tragedies included in the 1623 folio of Shakespeare's plays, the Fool ends his topsy-turvy prophecy with a comment that situates him, and therefore the play, within the Brutan continuum: "This prophecie *Merlin* shall make, for I liue before his time" (f. 197). However equivocally or satirically, the Fool's comment looks ahead to the post-Christian centuries of Arthur and Merlin (de Grazia 141). However, this passing expression of wider chronological context was not included in the play's 1608 quarto, resulting in its frequent reading as a play that transcends history, characterised by David Scott Kastan as existing in "a time that offers neither restoration nor regeneration but only defeat and destruction" (102). However, just as the play has been shown to engage closely with early Jacobean questions of British unification, I suggest a particular textual quirk elided by subsequent editorial practice may have, like the presence of Skalliger in *Leir,* resonated with historical dissonance for the playbook's first readers in 1608-09.

According to Peter Blayney, few early modern printed playtexts contain as many "self-evident blunders" as the first quarto of *King Lear* (*Texts* 184; cited in Clegg, 162). For

editors, one of the least troubling of these "blunders" occurs during Lear's recognition of his own rising madness: "O how this mother swels vp toward my hart / *Historica passio* downe thou climing sorrow" (sig. E4r). This term, "*Historica passio*," is almost universally emended in modern editions to "*Hysterica passio*".[23] However, early modern stationers allowed the original reading to stand until F4 in 1685 (Halpern 215), suggesting that Q1's "*historica*" was, or could be, received as not a misprint but as invoking some sense of historicity.[24] This association is perhaps strengthened by the phrase's appearance in Q1 only three lines below the running title, "*The Historie of King* Lear". I suggest that *historica passio* may be read as a coinage that, even if unfamiliar, could cause the reader to reflect upon its possible meanings, provoking reflection on the play's representations of "true chronicle history," inviting a reading of its "division of the kingdoms" (sig. B1r) not only as a historical or topical reference, but resonant of a terminal division between Brutan and lived history.

　　Richard Halpern, the only critic I have identified to accept and address the original reading, imagines *historica passio* as "the bearing or enduring or manifestation of historical force through one's person and one's body," produced by the tensions of representation between dramatic character and the "historical actants – collective or impersonal" those characters represent (217). Halpern is discussing forces of historical change relevant to his reading of the play as exploring "tension between feudal and proto-capitalist cultures" (216), but the physicality of his formulation is evocative and useful to the present reading, in which

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[23] "Hysterica passio" was the term for a medical cause of apparent demonic possession, as Kaara Peterson has noted, has long been established as deriving from one of King Lear's sources, Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603; f. 25) (2).

[24] F3's amendment to "Hystorica" (Halio 67), i.e. adjusting the spelling but retaining the likely meaning, perhaps strengthens the argument that the phrase was at one moment at least understood as deriving from the etymology of narrative and historiography.

King Lear is read in the context of the Brutan histories' erosion. *Historica passio* thus becomes a term suggesting embodied historiographic crisis: a once-historical figure's agonistic experience of the process by which he becomes a fictional non-being.

 King Lear was published in 1608, contemporaneous with parliament's final rejection of James's union proposals, "perhaps the most humiliating rebuff suffered by a Stuart king from the House of Commons" before the 1640s (Russell 62). As noted, readings of the play as a "union text," are well-served. Analyses broadly pivot upon the question of whether *King Lear* presents Lear as James's disastrous antithesis, thereby supporting the union project, or as an analogue critiquing his perceived absolutism. Both readings are possible, of course, and Annabel Patterson highlights the play's "flexible hermeneutics" (107). However, few have examined the play as a putatively historical narrative, the possible meanings of its location in British antiquity, or the ways it might resonate with the Brutan controversy. Reading closely between the presentation of the Brutan histories in *Trivmphes* and *King Lear*, Richard Dutton notes that, in *Trivmphes,* "Brute rejoices in the power of poetry that has revived the characters of ancient legends, allowing them to witness the final resolution of the discord which their own actions had created" (142). *King Lear*, however, not only cancels the Brutan line through the childless deaths of Regan and Cornwall, but enacts "violence" upon the Brutan histories "as a whole" (146); that is, to their structural and historiographic integrity.[25] To read *King Lear* in 1608 was to encounter all aspects of this negative conjuration in the aftermath of failed union and, possibly, royal bereavement. Finally, *King Lear*'s language of negation, its insistence that "nothing can come of nothing" (sig. B2r), had the potential to work upon a reader's perception of Brutan historicity.

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[25] Regan and Cornwall were the parents of Cundedagus, the king succeeding Cordelia, and putative ancestor of James. Their deaths, more than those of Lear and Cordelia, damage the play's usefulness as a potential pro-union text (Schwyzer 40-41).

Whilst in conception and performance *King Lear* may have included James's union project amongst its authorising effects, as a 1608 playbook it may have read like an autopsy for that same project.[26] This sense of belatedness might also infect its perceived status as history. To situate *King Lear* in Brutan time is not, however, to mitigate its annihilating energies, but to extend those energies' effects to Brutan historicity, and therefore the play's macro-narrative. Philip Schwyzer argues that the play's temporal closed system derives from a rejection of "the nostalgic spirit of nationalism" (45), resulting in a narrative that is "thorough in its dismantling of the figurative technologies of the union campaign," cancelling the means "by which the past can reach forward and touch the present" (42). Yet etiological erosion goes further than this; the Brutan past is not only severed from the present but erased in, and *as*, the past. The division of the play's characters from their audience and putative descendants might be conceived not as the vast but navigable temporal division between the once-living and their ancestors, but the void between lived reality and fiction, closing the channel between past and present that is opened in the Brutan pageants and *Gorboduc*. In short, for some of its first readers *King Lear* may have appeared disturbingly aware of its collapsing historiographic macrostructure. Reading *King Lear* in this context invites the strange question of how it might feel physically to suffer the kind of historiographic rejection the Brutan histories were undergoing, a *historica passio* - Halpern's "manifestation of historical force through one's person and one's body" - and how that suffering might be expressed.

In this reading, Lear embodies what Ross characterises as the unhappy loss of Brutan history, as if the histories themselves could physically and emotionally experience their own implosion into the "vast blanke" of which Edmund Bolton had warned. Ross frames the

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[26] This may have resonated in other ways. As previously noted, James and Anna's daughter Mary had been born in May 1605. Mary died on 16 September 1607 (Weir 251). Two months later, on November 26th, *King Lear* was logged with the Stationer's Register (*DEEP* ref. 517).

Brutan histories' critics as thankless, warning that "[i]f they ungratefully reject it ... they unhappily lose it" (trans. Sutton); Lear also fixates on gratitude and loss. Complaining that his daughters' ingratitude has "wrencht my frame of nature from the fixt place" (sig. D2r), he defiantly pledges to reclaim the status of king that he has surrendered, and to "resume the shape which thou dost think I have cast off forever" (sig. D2v). Here, Lear's words also resonate with those fighting to sustain the Brutan histories within the "fixt place" of English time and universal history from which they were being "wrencht" and in which they had only ever been a forged entry. In his madness, Lear, too, denies forgery, crying "they cannot touch me for coyning. I am the king himself" (sig. I3v), evoking a monarch's authority to licence the creation of money yet also inviting the double sense that the "king himself" is counterfeit. The *historica passio,* however, overpowers these objections.

At York in 1486, in *Gorboduc,* in Elizabeth I's entry to Norwich, and in *Triumphs* in 1605*,* Brutan figures and narratives were used in performances before, or invoking, the monarch in order to navigate questions of local or national transformation. These figures often spoke a language of temporal resilience and as entities that had endured across millennia. To place Lear within this tradition for a moment, if not as a pageant figure then as a Brutan ruler performed before an English monarch, this transtemporal privilege and authority collapses:

> Doth any here know mee? why this is not *Lear,* doth *Lear* walke thus? speake thus? where are his eyes, either his notion, weaknes, or his discernings are lethergie, sleeping, or wakeing; ha! sure tis not so, who is it that can tell me who I am?
>
> *Lears* shadow. (sig. D1v)

In the Norwich entry, King Gurgunt has the temporal resilience "in presence to appeare" before the monarch after "[t]wo thousand yeares welnye in silence lurking still" (sig. B3r) in order to assert his Brutan lineage and that of his descendants, just as Ebrauk had declared himself the source of Henry VII's "progenie" at York. Lear, in contrast, has only questions, and anxiously calls for the renewed remembrance of an identity that appears to be slipping from him. Similarly, Brute's announcement in *Trivmphes* that "after so long slumbring in our toombes / Such multitudes of yeares, rich poesie ... does reuiue vs" (sig. B3r) repeats Gurgunt's formula of a vital awakening. Lear, experiencing *historica passio,* cannot discern between "sleeping, or wakeing". The historiographic force that had enabled Gurgunt's "presence" and Brute's revivification is terminally weakened. Lear cannot define himself and, less than an embodied Brutan founder or inhabitant of lived history he has become "*Lears* shadow" or, to cite *No-body and Some-body,* a "shadowes shadow" (sig. A2v), a secondary effect of something that is itself without substance, the nothing that comes of nothing. Lear's authority thus collapses into an impotent stammer: "I will haue such reuenges on you both, / That all the world shall, I will doe such things, / What they are yet I know not, but they shalbe / The terrors of the earth, you thinke ile weepe" (sig. F2v-F3r). Without historical authority Lear becomes incoherent, intermingling Jacobean and Brutan questions of power. When Lear complains that "[t]hey told me I was every thing, tis a lye" (sig. I3v), Brute as rejected Brutan founder, and James, rejected British unifier and notional occupant of *Triumphs*'s empty chair, might have sympathised.

It is not only Lear but his fellow Brutans and their containing narrative that are subject to erosion. Attacking Cordelia, the woman who in the Brutan histories was to become his royal successor, Lear berates her "little seeming substance" (sig. B3v), claiming that "we have no such daughter" (sig. B4v), configuring her first as flimsily transparent, then in some way non-existent. Even Albany, representative of James's Scotland and the only Brutan to

survive, exclaims that he too is "almost ready to dissolue" (sig. L2v). When the potential for futurity is restored at the play's conclusion, this is achieved through the Brutan histories' displacement by a synthesis of characters drawn from a subplot lifted from Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and a more securely historical Anglo-Saxon dynasty. *King Lear*'s Gloucester subplot is adapted from the *Arcadia*'s "story of the Paphlagonian King and his two sons" (Dutton 147). Dutton also notes that Shakespeare's choice of the name of Gloucester's son Edgar gestures towards an Anglo-Saxon king with a claim to being "the first historical (as distinct from mythological) King of Britain" (148). This realignment may also have resonated with Richard Verstegan's contemporaneous *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (1605)*, which argued that the Saxons, rather than the ancient Brutans were "the racial and cultural source of modern England" (Escobdeo, "Britannia," 75). Yet, just as the presence of Skalliger might trigger readerly preoccupations with the Brutan histories' chronological and historiographic security in *Leir,* it is the *Arcadia*-derived subplot that can be perceived as driving *King Lear*'s annihilating digressions from Brutan continuity. The *Arcadia* received its first seventeenth-century edition in 1605 and served as a source for several contemporary plays.[27] Shakespeare's use of Sidney's romance was, in literary terms, topical.

As has been noted, *King Lear* cancels historical continuity through the killing of Cordelia before she can become queen and through the deaths of Cornwall and Regan as the parents of a future king, Cunedagus. Lear's death, too, represents a slippage from the Brutan histories. He dies without being restored to the throne, his and Cordelia's invasion of Britain having been defeated in direct contradiction of tradition. All of these events, the defeat of Lear and Cordelia, Cordelia's execution, even the poisoning of Regan by her sister, are

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[27] These include John Day's *The Isle of Gulls* (perf. and pub. 1606); John Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (perf. 1608; pub. 1610) and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *Cupid's Revenge* (perf. 1608; pub. 1615).

caused by the intervention of a non-Brutan character, Edmund, based on the *Arcadia*'s

Plexirtus, the illegitimate "hard-harted vngratefulnes of a sonne" of the king of Paphlagonia

(1593; f. 69v). In *King Lear,* an illegitimate villain derails an illegitimate history. It is

Edmund who leads the army that defeats Lear and Cordelia's invasion, his victory

emblematised through his entrance "with Lear and Cordelia prisoners" following the battle

and it is Edmund who orders Cordelia's execution (sig. K4r); it is Edmund whose dual

seduction triggers the rivalry between Goneril and Regan that leads to the sisters' deaths – as

he admits, "one the other poysoned for my sake, / And after slue her selfe" (sig. L3r).[28] His

function within his subplot gradually insinuates its nihilistic presence into *King Lear*'s wider

structure, his ambition and actions redirecting and wrecking the Brutan histories' flow and

continuum until their representatives are reduced to a pile of corpses; "The bodies of Gonorill

and Regan are brought in" (sig. L3r), "Enter Lear with Cordelia in his armes" (sig. L3v). If, at

the play's end, not only Cordelia but everything around her will "come no more" (sig. L4r),

this is largely Edmund's doing. Thus the cancellation of Lear and his daughters' futurity is

brought about by a character representing fictionality, a force more powerful than the Brutan

histories and, indeed, the force from which they had emerged via Geoffrey of Monmouth's

ingenious and imagined *liber vetustissimus*.

At Lear's death, the non-Brutan Kent, as if speaking to those readers still shoring up

their Brutan faith, counsels Edgar to allow Lear to die, to "let him passe," marvelling that

"the wonder is, he hath endured so long" (sig. L4r). Exasperated sceptics, for whom Lear and

the Brutan histories were manifest fictions, might have agreed. After almost five centuries of

cultural utility, King Lear's greatest visibility and historiographic resonance in drama and

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[28] Even the Duke of Cornwall's death at the hands of a servant is a result of his interference with

Gloucester, another Sidnean figure.

public life coincided with the moment at which the historicity underwriting that very utility was being rejected. As the appended chart shows, drama of the 1620s and 1630s saw only sporadic engagement with Brutan themes—and did so in very different ways to *Leir* and *King Lear.* Thus early Jacobean pageantry, performances and playbooks provide evidence of the last sustained output of Brutan drama in the early modern period. This output, or its possible reception, was deeply equivocal. I have argued that, in *Leir,* the presence of Skalliger may have foregrounded the play's temporal dislocation, and that, in *King Lear,* the accelerating erosion of this same historicity runs parallel to the aftermath of James's failed reunion project, his own *historica passio*. With the Brutan histories' authority eroded the division of the kingdoms was an originary state, not a royal decree. No king, Lear or James, could damage or repair a union that had never been.

Appendix: Brutan Drama in Performance and Print,1486-1634

The following chart is indebted to the table of pre-conquest drama in Gordon McMullan's "The Colonisation of Britain on the Early Modern Stage" (139-140); however, I focus here only on Brutan figures of pre-Roman Britain, rather than plays which draw upon Roman, Arthurian, or later accounts of pre-conquest Britain. I have also expanded the range of texts and performances a little, incorporating the post-Bosworth civic pageants and Caroline texts

such as Milton's *A Masque,* and *Albions Triumph* (1632)*,* that feature Brutan figures in more allusive states. For example, in *A Masque,* the Brutan figure Sabren appears transfigured as the river goddess Sabrina, whilst in *Albions Trivmph,* Charles I performed the allegorical figure of Albanactus, derived from Albanacht, Brute's son and the first ruler of Albany-Scotland.

Text / Event (source noted for texts not published in print editions)	Perf. / Pub.	Company and performers; venue	Author(s); first publisher
Henry VII's entry at York (text recorded in Cottonian MS. Julius B. xii)	perf. 1486	"Diverse personage and minstrelsies"; performed at Micklegate Bar, York	Devised under the direction of Henry Hudson
Henry VII's entry at Bristol (text recorded in Cottonian MS. Julius B. xii)	perf. 1486	Unnamed citizens of Bristol; Performed near St John's Gate, Bristol	Anon.
Elizabeth I's royal entry at London (performance recorded in BL: Cotton MS. Vitellius F)	perf. 1558	Unnamed London livery company members; performed at Temple Bar, London	Anon.
Gorboduc (extant)	perf. 1562 pub. 1565	"Gentlemen of the Inner Temple"; performed at the Inner Temple and Whitehall Banqueting House	auth. Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton; pub. William Griffith
The Joyful Receiving of the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty (extant)	perf. 1578; pub. 1578	Passages performed by Sir Robert Wood, Mayor of Norwich, "and others"; Performed in the vicinity of St Stephen's Gate, Norwich	auth. Bernard Garter and Thomas Churchyard; pub. Henry Bynneman
King Ebrauk with All His Sons (performance recorded in BL: Harley MS. 2125, f. 43*)	perf. 1589	Performers unknown; performed at Chester before the Earl of Derby	Anon.
Locrine (text extant)	perf. *c.* 1590 pub. 1595	Unknown	auth. anon.; pub. Thomas Creede

Guthlack (Cutlack) (recorded in Philip Henslowe's *Diary*)	perf. 1594	Admiral's Men; Rose playhouse	Anon.
Leir (text extant)	perf. 1594 pub. 1605	Queen's men	auth. anon.; pub. John Wright
King Lude (Henslowe)	perf. 1594	Sussex's Men; Rose playhouse	Anon.
2 Seven Deadly Sins[29] (plot recorded in Dulwich College, MS xix)	perf. *c.* 1597	see note	Anon.
Mulmutius Dumwallow (Henslowe)	perf. 1598	Admiral's Men; Rose playhouse	William Rankin
The Conquest of Brute (Henslowe)	perf. 1598	Admiral's Men; Rose playhouse	John Day and Henry Chettle
Brute Greenshield (Henslowe)	perf. 1599	Admrial's Men; Rose playhouse	Anon.
Ferex & Porex (Henslowe)	perf. 1600	Admiral's Men; Rose playhouse	William Haughton
The Triumphs of Re-united Britania (text extant)	perf. 1605; pub. 1605	Lord Mayor's Show (sponsored by the Merchant Taylors' Company)	auth. Anthony Munday; pub: William Jaggard
No-body and Some-body (text extant)	*c.* 1604; pub. 1606	Queen Anna's Men; Unknown	auth. anon.; pub. John Trundle
King Lear (text extant)	perf. 1606; pub. 1608	The King's Men; Globe playhouse and Whitehall Banqueting House	auth. William Shakespeare; pub. Nathaniel Butter
Belynus (&) *Brennus* (recorded in Add MS 27632, f. 43r)	unknown; before 1609	The reference appears in a list of playbooks owned by Sir John Harrington, compiled *c.* 1609	Anon.

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[29] The dating and company attribution of this manuscript "plot" of players' entrances and exits

surviving in Philip Henslowe's papers (Dulwich College, MS xix) in controversial; see Kathman;

Gurr. Wiggins follows Kathman in dating and company attribution (3: ref 1065).

Cymbeline (text extant)	perf. *c.* 1611; pub. 1623	King's Men; Globe playhouse and Whitehall Banqueting House	auth. William Shakespeare; pub. Edward Blount and Isaac Jaggard
Fuimus Troes (text extant)	perf. *c.* 1611-32; pub. 1633	"Gentleman students"; Magdalen College, Oxford	auth. attributed to Jasper Fisher; pub. Robert Allott
Albions Trivmph (text extant)	perf. 1632; pub. 1632	"The King's Majesty and his lords" with Queen Henrietta Maria; Whitehall Banqueting House	auth. Aurelian Townshend; pub. Robert Allott
A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle (*Comus*) (text extant)	perf. 1634; pub. 1637	perf. by members of the Castlehaven family and household; Ludlow Castle	auth. John Milton; pub. Humphrey Robinson
Madon, King of Britain (*Madan*?)	perf. unknown; Stationer's Register entry: 1660	Unknown	Attributed to Francis Beaumont[30]

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[30] This attribution is doubtful, given that the same Stationer's Register entry contains several unlikely

ascriptions, including several plays assigned to Shakespeare (Wiggins 4: ref. 1608).

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