

***Mucedorus*: The Last Ludic Playbook, the First Stage Arcadia.**

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***Mucedorus*: The Last Ludic Playbook, the First Stage Arcadia.**

This article argues that two seemingly contradictory factors contributed to and sustained the success of the anonymous Elizabethan play *Mucedorus* (c. 1590; pub. 1598). Firstly, that both the initial composition of *Mucedorus* and its Jacobean revival were driven in part by the popularity of its source, Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. This is suggested by the play's title and by comparing the publication and republication rhythms of the two texts. Secondly, the playbook's invitation to amateur playing allowed its romance narrative to be adopted and repurposed by diverse social groups. These two factors combined to create something of a paradox, suggesting that *Mucedorus* was both open to all yet iconographically connected to an elite author's popular text. This study will argue that *Mucedorus* pioneered the fashion for "continuations" or adaptations of the famously unfinished *Arcadia*, and one element of its success in print was its presentation as an affordable and performable version of Sidney's elite work. The Jacobean revival of *Mucedorus* by the King's Men is thus evidence of a strategy of engagement with the *Arcadia* designed to please the new Stuart monarchs. This association with the monarchy in part determined the cultural functions of the *Arcadia* and *Mucedorus* through the Interregnum to the close of the seventeenth century.

Keywords: word; *Pericles*; Philip Sidney; romance; King's Men; Charles I; Jacobean drama

Word count: 11,106.

Introduction

In the first scene of the 1598 first quarto of the anonymous play *Mucedorus* (Q1), the figure of Comedie enters and promises to make “merry them that coms to ioy with thee,” but is interrupted by blood-smearred Envie, who threatens to disrupt the play and “mixe your musicke with a tragick end” (sig. A2r). Comedie, trying to dissuade Envie, pleads that “*Comedie* is mild gentle, willing for to please, / And seekes to gaine the loue of all estates” (sig. A2v). The play’s outcome is a happy one, and Comedie not only wins the battle but predicts the commercial fate of the play over which she presides.

Mucedorus would become the most frequently published playbook of the early modern period, receiving eighteen editions by 1668. By its second edition it was already well-known enough to be mocked in Francis Beaumont’s satire *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (perf. 1607) for its appeal to London’s citizen class as a source for amateur dramatics: the stage-invading apprentice Rafe is said to have played “*Musidorus* before the Wardens of our Company” (sig. B2r). Yet this apparently naive work was revived for a royal command performance in 1610 by the King’s Men in a version “[a]mplified with new additions” (sig. A1r), as commemorated on the title page of its third edition, published the same year (Q3). References to the play continued into the Interregnum, where an illicit performance in a Witney inn in 1651 was so well-attended that the floor fell through, killing several people.¹ From London’s citizens, via the royal court, and out into the rest of England, *Mucedorus* seems to have succeeded in its aim to “gaine the loue of all estates”. This article argues that the play’s popularity was driven in part by a marketing strategy presenting it as an affordable

¹ This event was recorded in detail in John Rowe’s antitheatrical tract *Tragi-Comoedia* (1653).

and performable analogue for Philip Sidney's hugely influential *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1590) through its titular protagonist – Musidorus is one of the *Arcadia*'s two princely heroes – if not through its details of language and plot, marking it as both *of* and *not of* Sidney's work. I also argue that this connection with the *Arcadia* was further activated by the playbook's inclusion of a doubling chart stating that "eight persons may easily play it" (sig. A1v). The chart invited the buyer and his or her community to make *Mucedorus*, and therefore the *Arcadia*, their own through amateur performance. This, then, is to some extent a commercial rather than literary reading of *Mucedorus* that follows the play from its inception through to the Restoration. This study begins with an examination of critical discourse relating to the play's popularity in print, followed by three broadly chronological sections addressing the early modern publication and cultural uses of *Mucedorus*.

***Mucedorus*: Questions of Popularity**

The popularity of *Mucedorus* is not in doubt, although it long disgruntled critics who dismissed its combination of apparently simplistic romance and clowning as an example of "simple-minded plays of the public theatre" (Frye 378).² However, this assessment evaded the question of precisely why *Mucedorus*, of all the plays against which such criticisms might be levelled, proved so popular. Subsequently, Tucker-Brooke's reason for dismissing the play, that it "displays so little of the individual author and so much of the vulgar dramatic taste" (vi; qtd. in Sharpe 713), has become the reason why more recent criticism has once again taken interest. Peter Kirwan, investigating the play's appeal, concludes that the "popularity of *Mucedorus* ... ultimately becomes an effect of the play's success in both elite

² Similar criticisms were made by Murch (124), Knight (1867), and Bullough (249).

and popular spheres” (“*Mucedorus*” 234) but that this wide social appeal was not fully triggered until Q3, a text which “offers prestige to a play hitherto associated with apprentice performance and amateur playing” (231) via its title-page description of performance “before the Kings Maiestie at White-hall” (sig. A1r). As Richard Proudfoot has observed, this distinction would make *Mucedorus* “the most popular Jacobean, rather than Elizabethan play” (20). But the court performance and Q3 were, I suggest, effects of a pre-existing usefulness and cultural currency in *Mucedorus*. They emerge from, but do not explain, the play’s endurance up to the moment of its selection for royal command performance around twenty years after its initial appearance.

Richard Preiss has argued that Q3 drove the play’s subsequent success via its title-page attribution to the King’s Men, and that this was a strategy on the company’s part to protect their repertory, licensing “under their own imprimatur” a little-regarded old play, and approving via the inclusion of a doubling-chart its “infinite appropriation and reproduction in the performance of others” (127). Whilst this may have been the effect, however, Preiss’s suggestion that the production of Q3 was driven by the King’s Men requires qualification. The stationer William Jones owned the rights to the play – he had already republished it in 1606. The 1610 republication is likely to have been determined by Jones, along with the content of the title-page and paratext.³ In addition, the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* suggests that the play’s openness to the “performance of others” was already well-known.⁴

One cause of *Mucedorus*’s popularity might then be its “appeal to amateur performers” (Proudfoot 20), such as those portrayed in *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and also

³ This is supported by Greg, who notes that Q3 appears to be based on the text of Q2 with the additions inserted (102). That is, Jones purchased the additions and used them to augment a new edition of his playbook.

⁴ Kirwan also critiques Preiss’s reading, noting that the play “carried this invitation from its earliest publication” (“*Mucedorus*” 229).

to “small professional touring groups” (Jupin 16). A possible definition for a text that prioritises the buyer’s performative interaction might be “ludic playbook,” and that is the term I will use here. In the early modern period, “amateur” playing might technically include anything from Inns of Court performances to royal participation in Stuart court masques. So, for the purposes of this article I will use the term in relation to performances by merchant class and non-elite purchasers, including their servants, families, and peers as well as, eventually, the “Country men that had learn’d to make a Play” who performed at Witney in 1651 (Rowe, sig. *2r).⁵ This appeal is engineered by *Mucedorus*’s doubling chart which, as will be shown, makes *Mucedorus* almost unique amongst playbooks published after 1581. This sense of the play as a property that is offered by its makers for the buyer to adapt, alter, and play with, is enhanced by its plot, which binds elements of the *Arcadia* to a sequence of appropriable pastoral and romance archetypes: a disguised prince, a captive princess, a wicked courtier, and lovers seeking one another in the wilderness.

Mucedorus tells the tale of a prince who disguises himself as a shepherd in order to get a better look at a princess, Amadine, who is promised to the scheming though comically inept courtier, Segasto. Mucedorus rescues the princess first from a bear and then from the wild man Bremono, whom he slays; Segasto’s plots are foiled, Amadine declares her love for Mucedorus not knowing his princely status and, after first suffering banishment, Mucedorus endears himself to Amadine’s royal father; Segasto repents his plots, and all is well. The

⁵ Early modern references to *Mucedorus* frequently place the play in this context: *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*’s reference to the play being acted by the apprentice Rafe (sig. B2r) has already been noted; in Cowley’s *The Guardian* (perf. 1642; pub. 1650), a servant speaks of having acted the play’s famous bear (sig. E4v); and in Langbaine’s reference to the play being performed by “Country people” in his 1691 *Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (f. 541-42).

action is regularly disrupted by a rustic clown, Mouse, whose anarchic appeal is indicated by his prominence on the play's title-page, which promises the "merie conceites of Mouse" (sig. A1r) and whose role was expanded in the 1610 additions. Helen Cooper frames the tropes of medieval romance as a "meme" that can be endlessly repurposed and deployed in popular cultural properties (3). At the time of *Mucedorus*'s probable first performance, utilising the romance meme was a smart commercial move.

The years surrounding *Mucedorus*'s composition saw an explosion of prose romances by writers such as Anthony Munday and Robert Greene (Syme 45), alongside the "ubiquitous" presence of romance plays in the London playhouses (Knutson 41). However, the very ubiquity and popularity of romance in the 1580s-90s compromises the suggestion that *Mucedorus*'s unusual popularity derives solely from the wide appeal of its genre. I suggest that the play's endurance is rooted not in its openness but, paradoxically, in a combination of this openness and a marketed attachment to an elite popular text. *Mucedorus* draws its title, the name of its protagonist, its opening episode – the hero disguised as a shepherd saving a princess from a bear – and its clown, from *The Countess of Pembrokes Arcadia* (1590). New editions of these two texts often coincided in phases that also encompassed the performance, publication, and re-publication of other *Arcadia*-related texts:

- 1590 – 98: *Mucedorus* is believed to have been written and performed in the years directly following the *Arcadia*'s publication in 1590. A second, expanded edition of the *Arcadia* was published in 1593. *Mucedorus* first appeared in print in 1598, the same year as the *Arcadia*'s third edition.
- 1605 – 1609: After a gap of seven years, both texts were once again republished within a year of one another: the *Arcadia* in 1605 and *Mucedorus* in 1606 (Q2). The

timing of this is concurrent with what I will argue was a widespread attempt by London's playing companies and writers to engage with a perceived taste for *Arcadia*-related material on the part of the new Stuart monarchs.

- 1610 – 1623: In 1610, *Mucedorus* was republished with its additions and a title-page reference to royal performance by the King's Men. These years saw a sequence of eight editions of *Mucedorus* in eleven years – unparalleled amongst early modern playbooks.⁶ In this phase, three new editions of the *Arcadia* were published – one of which was printed in Dublin with surplus copies being shipped to London (*DEEP* ref. 5036). Both texts can be contextualised within a high volume of *Arcadia*-related plays and continuations appearing in print and performance. As will be suggested, the end of *Mucedorus*'s unbroken eleven-year print run may be related to external political events in 1623.
- 1624 – 1649: After 1623, a slowdown in new editions of *Mucedorus* reveals frequent correlations both with new editions of the *Arcadia* and with the highly popular *Arcadia* offshoot, Francis Quarles's narrative poem *Argalus and Parthenia* (1629). This is in addition to a sequence of dramatic adaptations of the *Arcadia*, including James Shirley's *Arcadia* (perf. 1632-39; pub. 1640), Glapthorne's play of *Argalus and Parthenia* (perf. 1632-8; pub. 1639), and the anonymous, undated manuscript play *Loves Changelinges Change* (Egerton MS 1994). An incomplete edition of *Mucedorus* was dated to c. 1629 by Greg based on its perceived orthographic

⁶ The existence of the 1621 edition is confirmed in the ESTC as ref. S94250, situated in the Biblioteka Gdanska, and is referred to as such by Warnke and Proescholdt (5), Bartlett (63), and Proudfoot (19). However, the edition now resides in the Gdansk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Polska Akademia Nauk Biblioteka Gdańska); it is bound together in a sammelband with eleven other early modern books and plays, the latest dated 1629, including seventeenth-century editions of *The Shoemakers Holiday*, *Catiline*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and *Edward II*.

relationship with the 1626 and 1631 editions, further supported by a reference to an otherwise unknown 1629 edition in the 1782 *Biographia Dramatica* (104).⁷ The 1634 and 1639 editions of *Mucedorus* each appear a year after the *Arcadia*'s only 1630s editions (of 1633 and 1638).

- 1650 – 1668: No Interregnum editions of *Mucedorus* can be securely proven. An undated edition is speculatively assigned to 1556 in the *ESTC*, based on the title-page attribution to the stationer Francis Coles, to whom the rights were transferred that year (*DEEP* ref. 258). This would resonate with the republication of the *Arcadia* in 1655 after a seventeen-year hiatus, but the association cannot be proven. As will be shown, the figure of Musidorus-Mucedorus appears to have survived this period to re-emerge in the Restoration through ballad, drama, and civic pageantry. The first Restoration edition of the *Arcadia* appeared in 1662. The final early modern editions of *Mucedorus* followed in 1663 and 1668.

In performance and print from 1598 to 1668, *Mucedorus* often appears to run parallel with new editions of the *Arcadia*. To put it another way: whilst new editions of *Mucedorus* do not always appear within a year of new editions of the *Arcadia*, between 1598 and 1621 a new edition of the *Arcadia* always coincides with a new edition of *Mucedorus* dated to the same or the following year. If Greg's dating of the incomplete edition to 1629 is correct, this pattern extends to 1634, making the 1623 *Arcadia* the single exception; this will be discussed in section three. This suggests that the play's stationers were alert to new editions of the *Arcadia* and its associated texts. Nonetheless, interconnections between *Mucedorus* and the *Arcadia* have traditionally been resisted, Jupin stating that "the debt" *Mucedorus* owes

⁷ If Greg's surmise is correct, this edition would have appeared in the same year as a new edition of the *Arcadia* and the first edition of *Argalus and Parthenia*.

Sidney “is relatively slight” (19).⁸ These analyses are based in large part on the lack of similarities between the two texts in terms of plot and language. I suggest that such direct parallels were unnecessary for customers to draw the connection – this was made, directly and simply, by the appearance of the protagonist’s name on the title-page.⁹ A customer for whom the *Arcadia* had appeal, whether through literary interest or social aspiration, whether or not he or she had read it, whether or not he or she could afford it, could watch, and eventually purchase *Mucedorus* with the understanding that the two texts were in some way connected without ever becoming aware of the disparities between the two. It was an analogue *Arcadia* for the popular market, the first of many. In this way, *Mucedorus* announced its affinity to the *Arcadia* in the playhouse and at William Jones’s bookstall. As such any attempt to trace or account for the play’s popularity should begin here.

The following section examines *Mucedorus* in more detail as emerging from the 1590s’ milieu of print, stage, and the commercial interaction between elite and popular literary forms. Close examination of Q1 identifies several characteristics that mark *Mucedorus* out as a text simultaneously regressive, avant-garde, yet responsive to the *Arcadia* and its cultural moment. Dobranski states that the *Arcadia* served not only as source material, but also

⁸ Reynolds states that “one surely may doubt whether the popularity of either had much effect on that of the other” (253), Skretkowicz lists almost sixty works appearing between 1590 and 1660 that, he suggests, in some way drew upon the *Arcadia*, describing *Mucedorus* only amongst the “more oblique” examples (xlvii–lii). The *Arcadia* is not listed as a source in Martin Wiggins’s *British Drama: A Catalogue, 1533-1642* (Vol. III, ref. 884).

⁹ In texts accessible via *EEBO* the name “Mucedorus” appears nowhere in early modern print outside editions of the play, John Rowe’s references to the play, later seventeenth-century play catalogues, and Thomas Jordan’s Lord Mayor’s show, *London’s Royal Triumph* (1684). The name “Musidorus,” appears more widely but, until the mid-seventeenth century, only in editions or continuations of the *Arcadia*. Thus the character’s name, read or spoken between 1590 and 1598, is likely to have carried strong associations with the *Arcadia*’s hero.

“symbolically ... validated” those works drawing upon it “like a celebrity offering a commercial endorsement” (74). After 1603, this “endorsement” was reenergised by the accession of James VI and I, his queen consort Anna of Denmark and the centrality to Jacobean repertory of “the universal phenomenon of patronage” (Zagorin 70; qtd in Holbrook 149). Therefore, the second section of this article argues that the republication of *Mucedorus* in 1606 (Q2), and its possible theatrical revival at that time, were part of a surge in dramatic treatments of the *Arcadia* driven by a desire to engage with the new royal patrons’ tastes and expectations. In 1605, Samuel Daniel, whose patronage connections with the Sidney family were longstanding (Pitcher) presented a play named *The Queenes Arcadia* to Anna and her son, Prince Henry. In the following years, two of London’s leading theatre companies, the King’s Men and the Children of the Queen’s Revels, offered a number of plays drawing upon the *Arcadia*.¹⁰ In this period, *Mucedorus* can be seen as influencing playhouse repertory and, between 1610 and 1621, enjoying the most successful republication rate of any early modern play.

In the final section of this study, I will briefly outline the ways in which the *Arcadia* and *Mucedorus* may have served similar cultural functions during the Civil War and Interregnum. By the Restoration, the character of Musidorus-Mucedorus appears to have broken free of both texts whilst surviving via what appears to have been, by the 1690s, a sustained tradition of rural amateur playing.

¹⁰ These include Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (perf. c. 1606; pub. 1608), Shakespeare and George Wilkins’s *Pericles* (perf. c. 1607; pub. 1609), *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (perf. c. 1607; pub. 1613), John Day’s *The Ile of Gulls* (perf. 1606; pub. 1606), and Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Cupids Revenge* (c. 1607; pub. 1615).

Mucedorus in the City: elite and popular circuits of authorship: 1590 – 1603

The publication of the *Arcadia* provided *Mucedorus* with its title and determined its most commercial characteristics; its dashing hero, its clown, and its pastoral romance trappings. Helen Cooper notes that the manuscript culture in which the *Arcadia* first circulated, and for which Sidney exclusively intended it, was the “rich and leisured or educated elite and to the upwardly mobile,” but that this “gave way to print, with its potential for mass circulation” (5). Thus, to investigate the cultural energies leading from the *Arcadia* to *Mucedorus* and which drove their continued interaction is in part a study of this “giving way”.

Drawing from the *Arcadia* for new work was to become a popular commercial and literary gambit. William Prynne attacked “popular Stage-playes” in his *Histrion-mastix* (1633), including “Arcadiaes” as a discrete genre alongside comedies, histories and tragedies (f. 923). He was responding to what was by the 1630s an established tradition of readers using Sidney’s romance “to write their own supplements and sequels,” a response invited by the *Arcadia*’s abrupt conclusion mid-sentence (62).¹¹ Marea Mitchell highlights the fact that “parts of the story were extracted and rewritten many times, and reproduced in different modes and forms” (Vol. I, vii). As Dobranski notes, “the text [of the *Arcadia*] encourages readers to become writers” (80). Q1 *Mucedorus*, the first retelling of the *Arcadia*, extends this impulse further by inviting readers to become performers.

Steven Mentz concisely outlines the *Arcadia*’s immediate significance and success: “following Sir Philip Sidney’s death, Elizabethan publishers clamoured to print his unpublished literary works. He was the biggest game in town: a national hero” (151). The

¹¹ Mentz notes that “Pseudo-Sidneian works in the 1590s” were produced by Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge, John Dickenson, Anthony Munday, Barnabe Riche,” and Thomas Nashe (n.163).

decision by Sidney's friend Fulke Greville to see the *Arcadia* into print initiated what Mentz calls a "process of transferring [Sidney] from coterie circles to printed publication" (152) by the stationer William Ponsonby.¹² This process displaced the *Arcadia* into the print romance market dominated by authors such as Anthony Munday and Robert Greene, who provides a useful model for *Mucedorus*'s authorial milieu. As Kirk Melnikoff notes, "Greene's perspective was the unique sum of engagements with two very different burgeoning economies: the print trade and the professional theatre" ("Greene" 6). As such, Greene was precisely the kind of writer who might have produced something like *Mucedorus*. His *Pandosto* (1588), which "looks like everything Sidney would have claimed to have hated" (Wilson 194), was, along with another Greene romance, *Menaphon* (1589), hugely successful over decades.

Sidney had not wanted his work published.¹³ His attempts to contain the *Arcadia* within his own coterie via manuscript circulation seems to have been relatively successful, Woudhuysen noting the scarcity of references to the *Arcadia* before 1590, and that many of these reveal little knowledge of the work beyond its title (302). Sidney had described contemporary poets as "base men with servile wits ... who think it enough if they can be rewarded of the printer" (*Apologie*, 109/11–12); for him, success in print was the wrong kind of success. One reason for Sidney's resistance was that he seems to have understood that if the *Arcadia* appeared in bookstalls alongside works such as Greene's, where "popular plays and broadsides could be had next door," then this threatened the exclusive boundaries of the aristocratic milieu (Mentz 167). Sidney, on his own terms, was right to have felt threatened.

¹² Ponsonby's pre-eminence as a publisher of elite romance texts was established in 1590 not only by the *Arcadia* but by his publication of the first three books of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (Lee).

¹³ Mentz addresses this notion of print authority, stating that "the 1590 *Arcadia* was Greville's text" (160).

For example, the publisher of *Menaphon*'s 1610 edition muddies this boundary by renaming it *Greenes Arcadia*, thereby presenting the long-dead Greene's text in terms of authorial name-recognition, but also marketing it *up* by gesturing to the *Arcadia*. As with *Mucedorus*, this is an example of a publisher using a title-page association with the *Arcadia* for marketing purposes, regardless of that text's literary affinity with Sidney's work. Greville's decision to see the *Arcadia* published released Sidney's coterie text, with its incomplete final sentence, into the marketplace. This opened it up to such liminal and unsettled figures as Greene and *Mucedorus*'s anonymous playmakers, who would transplant Sidney's protagonist even further down the cultural scale into the hands of players and their audiences.

No records of social or literary tensions surrounding the original performance or publication of *Mucedorus* exist. However, in the preface to his *The English Arcadia* (1607), the first published continuation of the *Arcadia*, Gervase Markham expresses unease that he might be perceived as committing social transgression and plagiarism. This discomfort offers some insight into the tensions at work between the *Arcadia* and popular forms. Markham, like Greene, "strove to make money through a huge variety of written genres" (Mitchell 1) and would write his own comic romance play, comparable to *Mucedorus*, *The Dumb Knight* (perf. 1606-8; pub. 1608). In his preface, Markham claims to have withheld *The English Arcadia* for a decade, fearing "the imputations of arrogancie immitation, affectation, and euen absurd ignorance, which I euer feared Enuie would vniustly lay vpon me" (sig. A2v). Whilst *Mucedorus* is silent on its relationship to its source, Markham's statement that he had withheld his work due to fears he would be accused of arrogance, imitation, affectation, and ignorance, are revealing as the first printed commentary by a writer choosing to appropriate the *Arcadia* for a popular market. *Mucedorus* is arguably a product of the same combination of social tensions and commercial motivations recorded in *The English Arcadia*.

We do not know which playing company first performed *Mucedorus*, but we can learn much from examining the dramaturgical milieu from which it emerged. Peter Happé and others assign it to the Queen's Men (238), in part because of the perceived "Tarltonian" qualities of the clown, Mouse. The clown Richard Tarlton was one of the company's principal assets until his death in 1588. It is one consequence of *Mucedorus*'s openness that the play can be read as either operating unselfconsciously within the romance tradition – that it is "the kind of play that the mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are thinking of when ... Flute hopes Thisbe is 'a wandering knight'" (Kozlenko 168) – or rather that, as a late entrant, it critiques and satirises the genre as "a sophisticated look back upon its own origins" (Jupin 71). The play in fact does both, looking back whilst engaging with recent literary trends. *Mucedorus*'s playmakers created a stage play that targeted known tastes for clowning and stage romance and harnessed these to the appeal of a newly published work of elite English prose. My research suggests, in fact, that it may have been the first adaptation for stage of an English prose romance.¹⁴

The critical view is that "*Mucedorus* is just the sort of drama Sir Philip Sidney would have disapproved" (Holzknecht 61). That is, the playmakers were engaging with material that repelled rather than invited their attention, that the *Arcadia* was required to be distorted,

¹⁴ A review of both extant and lost plays catalogued as "romance" in Wiggins vols I-III, cross-referenced with Cyrus Mulready's taxonomy of what he terms "stage romances" (200-03), and Helen Cooper's list of medieval romance texts, which notes those that received theatrical adaptation (409-29), supports this. The plays in all three lists derive either from continental (e.g. *Amadis of Gaul*), verse (Chaucer), or medieval – and often therefore originally often Anglo-Norman or Latin – originals. These are of course grey areas. Mulready lists Arthurian material as romance, whilst Wiggins does not. Arthurian material often derived from chronicle texts and as such could still be presented as what were popularly believed to be historical events; as were, admittedly, many romance narratives. In the context of the prose romances of Sidney, Munday, Greene, and others, *Mucedorus* is the pioneering property by several years.

rather than adapted, for the stage. Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry* (1595) is well-known for his decrying of the theatre's predilection for "mingling kings and clowns ... with neither decency or discretion" (112/1–6). This is easily applied to *Mucedorus*, a play that gives a great deal of stage time to Mouse, who climbs the social ladder from rustic workman to a member of the court and insolently addresses the king, whose very existence is news to him, as "maister King" (sig. C2r). But I would argue that clowning, rather than further separating *Mucedorus* from its source, is in fact central to the episode of the *Arcadia* from which *Mucedorus*'s opening is lifted, an episode featuring the foolish shepherd Dametas in which Musidorus rescues his beloved Pamela from a bear. Both Mouse and Dametas are closely integrated into these sequences. In the *Arcadia*, Pamela describes Dametas hiding from the wild beast in an act of comical cowardice:

[A]t length we both perceiued the gentle *Dametas*, lying with his breast and head as farre as he could thrust himselfe into a bush: drawing vp his legges as close vnto him as hee coulde: for, like a man of a very kind nature, soone to take pittie of himselfe, he was full resolved not to see his owne death. (sig. M4r)

In Q1 *Mucedorus*, Mouse runs onstage, escaping the bear, and tells the tale of his escape to Segasto:

[A]s I was going a fielde to serue my fathers greate horse, & caried a bottly of hay vpon my head, now doe you see sir, I fast hudwinckt, that I could see nothing, perceiuing the beare comming, I threw my hay into the hedge and ran away. (sig. B1v)

These two instances of comic cowardice, both of which incorporate images of shrubbery and restricted vision, highlight ways in which the *Arcadia* might actively invite a dramaturgical reading. This is supported by Sidney's theatrical description of Dametas having "the voice of one that plaieth Hercules in a play" (sig. I2v). Mouse has been described by Preiss as "Tarltonian" (119), and this reference to Richard Tarlton, the "first English actor to ... exert

an influence that was recognised for generations” (Baskervill 96), is also telling. Sidney was godfather to Tarlton’s son (Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle* 35), a formal association suggesting at least that Sidney was happy to offer public patronage to a clown and that he was familiar with Tarlton’s work. *Mucedorus*’s playmakers, then, were working with the *Arcadia* rather than against it in developing their opening scene.

The foregrounding of this encounter with a bear was enhanced by the publication of the *Arcadia*’s 1593 edition. The frontispiece border illustrations showed Musidorus disguised as a shepherd and Pyrocles in his disguise as the Amazon, Zelmane. Above Musidorus stands the figure of a bear, and above Pyrocles a Lion, highlighting the emblematic associations between hero and animal. *Mucedorus* subtly assimilates the two beasts’ slayings. In the play, Mucedorus kills the bear offstage and then enters carrying its head (sig. A3v); in the *Arcadia*, Pyrocles takes the head of his lion as a trophy, whereas Musidorus selects the bear’s paw (f. 83). In staging terms, the choice of the bear’s head over its paw is arguably the more visually striking choice, again suggesting a careful dramaturgical reading of the *Arcadia*.¹⁵

¹⁵ There is another possible connection between Mouse and Dametas. When Musidorus is sentenced to death for killing his would-be assassin, Tremelio, Mouse is ordered by the king to “take him away, & doe him to execution straight” (sig. C2r). The sentence is commuted to banishment after Amadine relates being saved from the bear, and Mouse complains to Segasto that he has “lost me a good occupation,” because “now I cannot hang the shepherd” (sig. C3r). In the *Arcadia*, when Musidorus is sentenced to execution, it is declared that Dametas is to be the executioner (f. 240v). In both cases, rustic clowns become the potential executioners of Musidorus-Mucedorus. If this connection between the two texts is accepted, it also has implications for dating the play. This episode in the *Arcadia* only appeared in its extended 1593 edition. This would mean that if the playmakers were working from a print edition of the *Arcadia*, then *Mucedorus* would have to have been written, or modified, after this time. Alternatively, the dramatists could have been working earlier, from a manuscript of this version of *Arcadia*. This would imply an affinity with Sidney’s social circle: Woudhuysen argues that such a manuscript had perhaps been seen by the writer Thomas Lodge and, via Lodge, Robert Greene (302). This would allow a composition date preceding the *Arcadia*’s 1590 publication.

Mucedorus draws its clown, its most apparently non-Sidnean component, from the only episode of the play it takes directly from the *Arcadia*, as well as the slaying of a beast emblematically associated with its protagonist. Once *Mucedorus* was published, this ludic appropriation of Sidney's characters was available to all for the price of a playbook.¹⁶

At some point between the first staging of *Mucedorus* and 1598, the rights to publish the play were purchased by the stationer William Jones, who was to determine the identity of *Mucedorus* in print.¹⁷ A publisher "was fully entitled to alter a manuscript if he saw fit" (Orgel, "Text," 84). Jones was no Ponsonby; his few titles were non-elite, under a hundred pages long, and generally only saw second editions once sold on to other stationers. Indeed, *Mucedorus* appears to have been Jones's only successful property. 1598 was Jones's busiest and possibly most successful period in terms of playbooks, being the year in which, as well as *Mucedorus* and the second quarto of Marlowe's *Edward II*, he published the Admiral's Men's *The Blinde Begger of Alexandria*, one "of the 10 most successful plays during the part of the Admiral's Men's career recorded in Henslowe" (Ostovich and Syme *et al* 9). This shows Jones as responsive to playhouse popularity. Yet the playbook of *Mucedorus* is unusual in ways that have been separately observed but not, I think, collated. Some causes of the play's pre-eminence and particular identity in the Jacobean period may be visible in, and determined by, the ways in which Jones's title-page text positions *Mucedorus* within its

¹⁶ Later stage adaptations of the *Arcadia*, *The Ile of Gulls*, Shirley's *Arcadia*, and *Loves Changelings Change*, all follow *Mucedorus* in featuring Dametas as a clown figure, suggesting the character's role in the *Arcadia*'s popularity. None of these plays, however, features or even refers to the slaying of the bear. This might be read as indicating the extent to which *Mucedorus* had become synonymous with staging this moment and later dramatists thus omitted it to avoid the association.

¹⁷ There is no entry in the Stationers Register for *Mucedorus* before 1618, when Jones's widow sold the rights to John Wright.

market:

A most pleasant comedie of Mucedorus the kings sonne of Valentia and Amadine the Kings daughter of Arragon with the merie conceites of Mouse. Newly set fourth, as it hath bin sundrie times plaide in the honorable cittie of London. Very delectable and full of mirth. (sig. A1v)

Firstly, given the play's later association with citizens, we should examine the title-page's claim to have been "plaide in the honorable cittie of London". This statement is unusual. Menzer notes that of 836 title pages of plays in English published between 1512 and 1689, only eight refer to the City of London, and that, excepting Q2 *Mucedorus* and a 1631 reprint of *Fair Em* (perf. c. 1590; pub. c. 1591), this feature disappears from new plays printed after 1603 ("Tragedians" 163). Menzer also notes that two other plays in this period claim performances in London "without referring specifically to 'the City'" (n. 163). These are *The Wounds of Civil War* (1594) and *The Blinde Beggar of Alexandria*. Of the eight plays identified by Menzer, Q2 *Edward II*, *Blinde Beggar*, and *Mucedorus* were published by William Jones, raising the possibility that Jones's particular strategy was to target London's citizens – merchants, guild members, their families and apprentices. That Q1 *Mucedorus* appears in the same year as the *Arcadia*'s third edition suggests that Jones hoped his playbook could both target a civic play-going readership and also draw an association with Sidney's work.

However, perhaps the most significant feature of Q1 *Mucedorus* is the inclusion of the doubling chart. Atkin and Smith have shown that "around a quarter of all plays" printed in the two decades following 1560 "present their character list in a form directed towards acting" (15–16). However, after 1581 only two plays were published using this format:

Mucedorus and the anonymous *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1607).¹⁸ In 1598, then, William Jones’s inclusion of a doubling chart made *Mucedorus* a singular proposition. Pangallo states that “audiences of the English Renaissance were accustomed to influencing and changing the plays they saw” and that “we can usefully think of the playgoer as a ‘maker’ of plays and collaborator in the creation of their meanings” (“Spectator” 39). And, as Peter Happé observes, *Mucedorus* bears “valuable witness to the now-neglected concept of text as a basis for improvisation and development” (238). Jones’s ludic playbook offers the same agency to reader-players, directing them to possess a version of Sidney’s elite work by controlling its dramaturgy and meaning through amateur performance.

Evidence of private amateur drama is scarce, however. Therefore, the following section explores possible models of ludic playreading and, crucially, how this may have affected the reader-player’s relationship with the *Arcadia*.¹⁹

[Fig. 1: *Mucedorus* doubling chart]

¹⁸ *Fair Maid* is clearly influenced by the 1606 reprint of *Mucedorus*; it lifts Q1 and Q2’s unique title-page phrase “very delectable and full of mirth”. Thus, in inviting private or amateur performance, and in its title drawing direct attention to heart of the City, the Exchange, *Fair Maid* is not a companion to Q2 *Mucedorus* but a commercial response to that edition.

¹⁹ Clegg uses playbook paratexts to distinguish between “readerly and popular plays” (26), but refers to player-readers only in passing and in relation to *Mucedorus*, its doubling chart raising “the curious possibility that readers are also expected to perform the play” (33). Evidence of the use of playbooks for Jacobean amateur performance can be found in Sir Edward Dering’s annotated copies of *Henry IV* (Lenam 145; Dobson 27); although this represents a very different social milieu to the amateur performances associated with *Mucedorus*. In terms of citizen performance, Ceri Sullivan notes that “[a]mateur dramatics were part of a city company’s commercial affairs” (124), and Pangallo relates evidence of amateur playing in London’s merchant communities in the 1580s, also noting the scarcity of such evidence (*Playwriting* 17).

Mucedorus's doubling chart offers the buyer ingenious dramaturgical opportunities. For example, Envie and his manifestations – the wild man Bremo, the would-be assassin Tremelio – are to be played by the same person, and there is evidence that this player might also play the bear.²⁰ There is much comic and poetic value in seeing a performer one knows, whether a professional actor or social peer, don the guise of one villainous character after another only for each to be “killed” by Mucedorus. In a different register, when the young actor playing Comedie reappears as the silent servant boy who presents the bear’s head to King Adrastus, it might be perceived as an evocative emblem of the triumph of good over evil (sig. C2v).²¹ The role of Mucedorus himself might, as in *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, offer an opportunity for an apprentice to subvert social rank by playing the princely hero, just as Mucedorus subverts social status with his shepherd’s disguise, and as the play subverts its elite source. Cowley’s *The Guardian*, performed in 1641 “before Prince Charls” (sig. A1r) offers a later reference to *Mucedorus* and amateur playing:

Blade. Didst not thou once act the Clown in *Musidorus*?

Servant. No, Sir; but I plaid the Bear there.

Blade. A well pen’d part. (sig. E4v)

Here, as in *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *Mucedorus* is contextualised through amateur performance by a servant and there is a suggestion that the text was a springboard for autonomous interpretation, rather than adherence to an author’s “well pen’d part”: the bear’s

²⁰ Rowe in *Tragi-Comoedia* describes “the *wild man* then acting the Bares part” (sig. *2v). This evidence appears to support the speculative conclusion reached by Tom Rooney (262).

²¹ Exploring the dramaturgy of the Queen’s Men, McMillin and MacLean note that this approach to doubling can, in performance, be “part of [a] play’s beauty” (112). The concept of a poetics of doubling is addressed by Alan C. Dessen who uses *Mucedorus* as a case study in “conceptual doubling” (68).

“part” would presumably consist of extemporised growls and roars, centring the role’s characterisation on the servant’s voice and improvisatory skills.²² As in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, this reference suggests a condescension towards *Mucedorus* that inadvertently offers evidence regarding the social milieus in which the play was performed.

The text’s appeal, then, derived not only from what the purchaser might read in it but from what he or she (or they) might communally *do* with it: an interaction that connected the performer to the iconography of the *Arcadia*. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* presents an analagous example of just such an interaction between an amateur performer and a popular prose romance. As Cyrus Mulready observes, Rafe enters reading the romance *Palmerin of England* and this leads directly into his “attempts to write, or perform his way into that story” (71) by translating it into a dramatic monologue (sig. C1r-C2v). This instance of autonomous play afforded specificity through the iconography of a prose romance suggests ways in which *Mucedorus* might have been used: For Rafe, the romance text is *Palmerin*; for purchasers of *Mucedorus*, it is the *Arcadia*.

Q1 *Mucedorus* is both an avant-garde text deriving from an opportunistic and astute dramaturgical reading of the *Arcadia* and a timely knock-off of an elite prose work made possible by early modern London’s authorship, patronage and entertainment economies. But I also argue that the peculiar reach of *Mucedorus* derives from its “open” nature as a performance blueprint, rather than as a literary text. The specific connection with the *Arcadia* is thus complicated by certain unusual elements of *Mucedorus* in print. These are its appeal to citizen purchasers and its invitation to performance. Hence, by 1598 the *Arcadia*’s popularity

²² Thomas Jevon’s Restoration comedy, *The Devil of a Wife* (pub. 1686), is an adaptation of a subplot in the *Arcadia*. It includes a scene in which a servant dresses as a bear (f. 21); a possible, if oblique, intertheatrical allusion to *Mucedorus*.

manifested in a ludic playbook that invited the buyer to perform analogue versions of Sidney's Musidorus and Pamela, the clownish Dametas, and even the bear. *Mucedorus*, singularly amongst playbooks appearing after 1581, materialises and promotes the notion that "authority to determine meaning belongs to the consumer, not the producer" (Pangallo, "Spectator," 46). Like Rafe, *Mucedorus*'s amateur performers both celebrated and subverted the *Arcadia* by appropriating its iconography for the precise social estates that Sidney had wished to exclude.

Mucedorus at Court: Stuart Arcadias, 1603 – 1623

In *The English Romance in Time*, Helen Cooper notes that "an out-of-time romance can intersect with the historical moment of its reading or rereading in new and unexpected ways" (21). Here, I examine the "new and unexpected ways" in which the Elizabethan *Mucedorus* and *Arcadia* interacted with patronage, stage and print in the Stuart era. I suggest that the play became a strategic repertory piece in a competitive outpouring of *Arcadia*-related material intended to gain favour with James VI and I and Anna of Denmark. In this context, the revival of *Mucedorus* by the King's Men was a commercially astute response to royal and public tastes. Further into the Stuart era, Charles I's associations with romance and the *Arcadia* provide possible contexts for *Mucedorus* both in and out of print. First, as with any good romance, we begin with a storm at sea and an instance of piracy.

Clare McManus observes that James VI of Scotland seems to have understood himself as the protagonist in his own romance. As with many romance narratives, this was manifested in a quest to both rescue and obtain a woman. He took to the seas when his "wife-by-proxy," Anna of Denmark, was caught in heavy storms on her journey to Scotland; this event

subsequently “governed Anna’s representation within Scottish court culture” (McManus 62–3). Anna arrived in a Scotland that had “a flourishing aristocratic culture, intensely open to continental and especially French influence” (68) and which was conversant with both elite and popular, as well as international and local, theatrical traditions (Carpenter 15). There is also evidence of grants made to troupes of comedians from 1594 to 1603 (Mill 109). One of these companies was the Queen’s Men, who were invited to perform at the royal wedding, although this performance is unlikely to have taken place, after adverse weather delayed Anne in Oslo (McMillin and MacLean 58). As noted, the Queen’s Men’s repertory appears to have prioritised the kind of clowning offered by the “Tarltonian” Mouse and a mixture of chronicle and romance material that, by the turn of the century, may have been more representative of English touring theatre than London’s playhouse trends. This raises the possibility that James and Anna’s understanding of “English” theatre may not have reflected what was happening in the London playhouses when they arrived in 1604, but would have been shaped by older repertory and performance styles reflective of plays such as *Mucedorus*. The response of two companies receiving royal patronage, the King’s Men and the Children of the Queen’s Revels, may then represent an awareness of royal expectations. For the former, this occasioned a turn to earlier romance forms that resonated with James’s apparent self-image as a romance hero. The latter appear to have taken a more sceptical and satirical approach to romance, consistent with Queen Anna’s continental-influenced tastes. In both cases, developments in theatrical repertory were often expressed via engagement with the *Arcadia*.

We can also definitively place the *Arcadia* in Edinburgh in 1599, when a pirated edition was published by James’s royal printer, Robert Waldegrave for a rogue consortium of London stationers (McKerrow, “Dictionary,” 279). One of these stationers, John Harrison, was caught returning from Edinburgh “by sea” with large stocks of his *Arcadia* (126). That

stationers were willing to pirate the *Arcadia* in Scotland and ship it to England indicates both high demand from English customers and its presence in Edinburgh prior to James's English accession. This raises the possibility that the *Arcadia* was a text with which the Stuarts were familiar before 1603. Whether or not the Stuarts were familiar with the *Arcadia* when they arrived in England, London's dramatists certainly seem to have thought they were.

Katherine Duncan-Jones tells us that James's imminent arrival in England, following Elizabeth I's death in 1603 "provoked fevered excitement" and that "London's printers worked at high speed and overtime" to produce works addressing the new regime (*Ungentle* 161). Shakespeare's company, although receiving James's patronage within ten days of Elizabeth's death, may have gained this preferment thanks to "the urging of a powerful young friend at court ... the Earl of Pembroke" (172). Pembroke was the nephew of Philip Sidney, and his closeness to the King's Men is attested to by his inclusion as a dedicatee of the 1623 First Folio (sig. A2r-v). Pembroke had been tutored by Samuel Daniel, the "friend and brother-in-law" of Anna of Denmark's Italian tutor in England, John Florio (Munro, *Children* 102). Lucy Munro notes that one of the first dramatic responses to the new regime, Daniel's "Guardini pastoral," *Arcadia Reformed*, was playing to "Anna's literary tastes" (103). The connection with Anna (and Sidney) was highlighted in 1606 when the play was published as *The Queen's Arcadia* by the publishers of Sidney's *Arcadia*.²³ In the same year, John Day's *Arcadia* satire *The Ile of Gulls* was published, and both *Mucedorus* and the *Arcadia* received their first seventeenth-century editions.

²³ Published as "A Pastorall Trage-comedie," it was "the first English play to receive the Italianate generic tag" (Munro 103).

Q2 *Mucedorus* appears superficially identical to Q1, yet it is alert to the new regime (Thornberry 364). Its final lines, addressed to Elizabeth in Q1 as “[t]he Commons and the subiectes grant them grace / Their prince to serue, her to obey, & reason to deface: / Long maie she raine, in ioy and greate felicitie” (sig. F4v),” alter the gender of the figure addressed in Q2 to “him to obey,” and [l]ong may he raigne” (sig. F4v). Thornberry argues that this alteration, combined with the title-page’s repeating of Q1’s claim to London performance, is evidence of a theatrical revival between 1604 and 1606 (362–64).²⁴ *King Lear* also appeared in 1606, adopting for its Gloucester subplot the 1593 *Arcadia*’s tale of the suicidal King of Paphlagonia. I suggest that this rush of activity represents the widespread aim of producing material pleasing to the Stuarts.²⁵ This supports the notion that the Jacobean revival and republication of *Mucedorus* was triggered by playwrights and publishers drawing a connection between the Stuarts and the *Arcadia*.

At this time the King’s Men were engaging with the *Arcadia* in other ways, beyond the revival of *Mucedorus*. In developing *King Lear*’s subplot of the house of Gloucester, Shakespeare may have more than simply “remembered an episode” in the *Arcadia*, as R.A. Foakes suggests (100). The King’s Men may instead have, like Daniel, Day, and Fletcher, strategically invoked the *Arcadia*, just as they had adopted *Mucedorus*. Following *Mucedorus* and *King Lear*, the King’s Men produced *Pericles*, the most frequently printed of Shakespeare’s plays between 1609 and 1623 (Young 9). But *Pericles*, in terms of the play’s most apparent branding, its name, seems designed to appeal directly to those who had

²⁴ Thornberry’s argument is persuasive, particularly given the proximity of any revival to the performance of *Arcadia Reformed*. Yet it should be noted that amendments to a published text need not originate from a performed text, but might be undertaken by the publisher acting as editor (Wiggins, Vol. III, ref. 884).

²⁵ Gillian Woods also associates Q2 *Mucedorus* with an “interest in Sidnean material in the first years of the seventeenth century” but does not explicitly associate this with the Stuarts’ arrival (313).

enjoyed *Mucedorus* and the *Arcadia*. Munro suggests that “the writing of *Pericles* was a response to the combined success of *The Malcontent* and *Mucedorus*” (*Children* 104), and Suzanne Gossett notes that *Pericles* was apparently written following the success at court of the revived *Mucedorus*, outlining similarities of event and language that connect *Pericles* to the *Arcadia*, including Pyrocles’s being shipwrecked and given clothes by shepherds, a rescue by pirates, and Musidorus finding a suit of armour (72).²⁶

But the most egregious and commercialising attempt to connect *Pericles* to the *Arcadia* and, explicitly, *Mucedorus*, may be its title. *Pericles* derives largely from John Gower’s tale of Apollonius of Tyre, yet the apparently unmotivated alteration of the protagonist’s name is rarely commented upon.²⁷ Just as Musidorus became Mucedorus, his friend Pyrocles is parachuted into another romantic hero’s boots and becomes Pericles. The connection is also implied by a later theatrical reference. *Pericles* enjoyed a revival in 1631 (Gurr, *Company* 284). In James Shirley’s play of the *Arcadia*, the clown Dametas makes a direct reference to *Pericles*:

Pamela. What haste does tire you?

Dametas. Tire me, I am no woman ...

Nor am I *Pericles* prince of Tyre. (sig. B4v)

This pun appears within a play featuring both Sidney’s Musidorus and Pyrocles. It seems – through Dametas’s scorn – to both acknowledge and repudiate the association of Shirley’s

²⁶ John Cutts also argues that the *Arcadia* “may well have provided ... basic material for *Pericles* in rusty armour and for the matachine dance of the knights at the court of Simonides” (51); and H. Dugdale Sykes identifies several similarities of language and metaphor between the two texts, largely in scenes from the play thought to have been written by George Wilkins (174-76).

²⁷ Gossett records that “Steevens ... suggested that *Pericles* is derived from Sidney’s Pyrocles” (72).

faithful, and elite, reading of the *Arcadia* with *Pericles*.²⁸ By 1608, The King's Men were in possession of two plays bearing the names of Sidney's heroes. In reviving *Mucedorus*, staging the Gloucester subplot, and appropriating Pyrocles, the King's Men do more than borrow from the *Arcadia*. They possess it.

By the time of the 1610 royal performance and publication of Q3 *Mucedorus*, theatrical engagement with the *Arcadia* was a well-established phenomenon. Preiss argues that the 1610 court performance of *Mucedorus* came about because the King's Men had performed in two "marathon Christmas seasons" and therefore "their retreat to an old crowd-pleaser was possibly the result of exhausting their current stock" (119–120). I would argue that Q3 should instead be understood as a product of momentum that had accumulated from the preceding years of *Arcadia*- and patronage-related activity: the 1610 court performance and the expanded Q3 were less of a retreat and more of a victory lap. In fact, the King's Men in this period seem to have been consolidating their repertory with a wider and wider range of romance and tragicomic material, including *Philaster* (c. 1609; pub. 1620) and *Cymbeline* (Munro, *Children* 133). *Cymbeline*'s image of the prince-disguised-as-commoner Guiderius holding the severed head of Cloten has been compared with *Mucedorus*'s entrance holding a bear's head (Gibbons 38). *The Winter's Tale* also triangulated back to *Mucedorus* with its famous, repertory-cross-referencing onstage introduction of a rampaging bear. As such, Q3 *Mucedorus* symbolically commemorates the journey of the socially liminal 1590s playwrights and their dramaturgically dynamic yet maligned *Arcadia* knock-off to the apex of the trade in playbooks, civic appeal and royal patronage.²⁹

²⁸ Harbage describes Shirley's version as the first stage *Arcadia* to stick "sedulously to its literary original" (236).

²⁹ Q3 does not represent the only evidence of royal engagement with *Mucedorus*. In 2011 Kirwan rectified a longstanding scholarly error and reassigned a bound volume of eight separately printed play quartos entitled "Shakespeare, Vol. 1." to the library of Charles I, offering a

During *Mucedorus*'s exceptional print-run between 1610 and 1621, the rights to the play were sold to the stationer John Wright by William Jones's widow (*DEEP* ref. 258). Wright's commercial strategy was to acquire properties that had already been successful for other stationers (Lesser 109); a remit that *Mucedorus* already fitted. Several of his playbooks targeted citizen and popular readership, including Dekker's *The Shoemakers Holiday* (Q2, 1610), which included a dedication to "Professors of the Gentle Craft of what degree soeuer" (sig. A3r), cited by Clegg as amongst "pointed exceptions" to the predisposition of dramatists and stationers to imagine playreaders as "elite males" (33).³⁰ We might expect Wright's proven commercial strategy to have reinforced *Mucedorus*'s status within its urban market, and yet the 1621 edition, Wright's second, was the last until 1626. The play's association with Stuarts and romance may provide a reason for this lacuna.

[Fig. 2: Title-page of the 1621 edition of *Mucedorus*]

A new edition of *Mucedorus* might have been expected in 1623, given the biennial pattern that had obtained since 1610. In this year, King James's son Charles mimicked his father's penchant for romance heroics by secretly travelling to Spain in lowly disguise in order to "cut through all knots" preventing his controversial proposed marriage to the Spanish Infanta

fascinating insight into Charles's possible theatrical tastes ("Apocrypha"). One of the plays included in this volume was *Mucedorus*. The edition in Charles's possession was the 1598 Q1 (598). This challenges the importance often placed on the Q3 additions in triggering the monarchy's interest in the play.

³⁰ The *Shoemakers Holiday* is, as noted, one of the plays bound with *Mucedorus* in the Gdansk sammelbinding.

(Hirst 132-33). This union – known as the “Spanish Match” – was central to James’s irenic foreign policy and thus controversial with many English Protestants. A new edition of *Mucedorus*, a play about a disguised prince travelling in secret to witness the beauty of a Hispanic princess, and then marrying her, might have proven controversial even at the outset. James was, after all, associated with the play via the title-page’s reference to court performance. However, as Brennan Pursell relates, Charles’s adventure was disastrous, characterised by “[f]undamental misunderstandings” and “diplomatic blunders” (704), and resulted in the collapse of James’s decades-long policy. This outcome was celebrated by Hispanophobic and anti-Catholic factions in London and Charles became a “popular hero” upon his return (Hirst 133): he was believed to have eventually rejected and sabotaged the match and, indeed, was soon petitioning for war against Spain (Pursell 720). *Mucedorus*’s successful romancing of Amadine might at this time have been read as providing embarrassing contrast to the failures of the king’s policy. Or, conversely, *Mucedorus* and Amadine’s union might appear a less desirable outcome in the Hispanophobic mood of 1623.

The Spanish Match had a demonstrable influence on English drama and print.³¹ The London theatre responded to these events in 1624 with John Middleton’s *A Game at Chess*, which displayed “strident anti-catholicism” (Cogswell 276), viciously satirised the Spanish and celebrated Charles and his travelling companion the Duke of Buckingham.³² The play’s “suppression” by the authorities appears to have ended Middleton’s playwriting career (Munro, “Middleton,” 164): associating drama and Charles’s Spanish adventure could be

³¹ “Gary Taylor has argued that the Shakespeare First Folio (1623) was not dedicated to James in large part because the volume’s opening play, *The Tempest*, an astute choice earlier in the year, might have drawn newly unfortunate associations with the failure of the Spanish Match (“Making” 68).

³² *A Game at Chess* was the “most spectacularly and scandalously popular play of the English Renaissance,” running to nine consecutive performances (Taylor, “Middleton,” 49).

hazardous. John Wright duly published two poems celebrating Charles's return at the end of the year.³³ He did not publish *Mucedorus* again until 1626, the year following James's death. It would be ironic if *Mucedorus*'s eleven-year winning streak from 1610-21 was both ignited and extinguished by associations with the Stuarts' self-identification as romance figures. From this point until the end of the Interregnum, the *Arcadia* and *Mucedorus* seem to have fulfilled parallel cultural roles for their respective elite and popular communities, roles related to royalist sympathies and popular playing.

Mucedorus in the country: 1623 – 1684

In the 1630s, there was a revival of what William Prynne had termed stage "Arcadiaes," possibly prompted by Queen Henrietta Maria and the "rise of the courtier and academic dramatists after the mid-1620s," a group that included James Shirley (Pangallo, "Spectator," 43). Henrietta Maria frequently commissioned and performed in "Arcadian romances" meaning that "readers and writers began to take Sidney's *Arcadia* even more seriously" (Dobranski 77); continuations and supplements appeared "in part because the text's egregious omissions allowed readers to adapt the romance to the charged political climate" of the era (75).³⁴ This increased seriousness may have influenced a singular, figurative, staging of the *Arcadia*. Ten days after Charles I's execution in 1649, a document entitled *Eikon Basilike* and presented as the late king's "autobiography" appeared. It included as an appendix Charles's reported final prayer from the Whitehall scaffold (Spiller 230). But this prayer was in fact a

³³ These are John Taylor's *Prince Charles His Welcome From Spaine* and William Hockham's broadsheet *Prince Charles His Welcome to the Court*.

³⁴ In the 1620s, print-rates for the *Arcadia* doubled.

passage from the *Arcadia*, spoken by Pamela as she apparently faces execution.³⁵ In this way, *Eikon Basilike* presented Charles's execution as a stage romance, a darkly ludic event involving as it did a kind of reported, verbal transvestism: the *Arcadia* staged before a public audience by a condemned king speaking the words of a romance heroine. The final lines of Pamela's prayer in the *Arcadia* are "most gracious Lorde ... what euer become of me, preserue the vertuous *Musidorus*" (sig. Y4r). In this moment, the compilers of *Eikon Basilike* showed Charles performing the *Arcadia* in a way that, I suggest, was only conceivable given the tradition of stage Arcadias that began with *Mucedorus*. It is telling, also, that in *Eikonoklastes* (1649), a document through which John Milton "took upon himself the task ... of destroying the royal iconography" (Patterson 178), Milton zeroes in on this appropriation, complaining that "Charles" had used

a prayer stolen word for word from the mouth of a Heathen Woman praying to a heathen god; & that in no serious Book, but the vain amatorious Poem of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*; a book not worthy to be nam'd nor to be read at any time without good caution. (f. 12).

Charles's self-identification as a romance figure is cited by Milton as proof of his moral contamination, and the *Arcadia* is the specific text through which both monarchist and anti-monarchist text sought to configure Stuart identity.

No editions of *Mucedorus* can be definitively placed within the Interregnum period. Yet the play survived through its continued use as a ludic playbook in England's regions. This national appeal is often noted but rarely accounted for: how and why did *Mucedorus* become a staple of amateur performance outside London? One cause may be that the play's stationer, John Wright, was the "most substantial of the seventeenth-century ballad

³⁵ The selection of this text is ironic, for it is not Pamela speaking from the scaffold but the "faithless" Artesia whose lies have led to Pamela's prosecution (Spiller 230).

publishers” and his stock included chapbooks and so-called “penny merriments” (Watt 288; 289) which, with broadsides and pamphlets, accounted for sixty per cent of his output between 1605 and 1613 (Lesser 110). Because of the lower profits generated by cheaper unit costs, the trade in cheap print required higher sales. This was achieved via a distribution network beyond London sustained by travelling chapbook sellers, or chapmen. Wright’s shop was positioned near London’s Newgate, “well placed for carriers going west or north-west from the city” (Watt 76) to sell their wares in market towns and county fairs. He was thus topographically and professionally well-placed to introduce *Mucedorus* into the national retail network for affordable print.³⁶ Yet the evidence suggests that the playbook was utilised not by individuals but by groups, whose performances provide evidence of the play’s ongoing cultural usefulness.

Lois Potter specifies romance and plays as specifically royalist forms and that “[s]imply to write in either form was to make a statement about one’s relation to the party in power” (74). These statements might also be made, or be perceived as having been made, through performance. Such is the case with John Rowe’s *Tragi-Comoedia*, “a record of one of only

³⁶ That this was Wright’s strategy, and that it was successful enough to be taken up by the play’s subsequent stationers is suggested by the inclusion of “Mucedorus, a Play,” in a list of books “[p]rinted for, and ... to be sold by W. Thackeray,” in Thackeray’s 1689 edition of the popular romance *Bevis of Southampton* (f. 79). The following page contains a further list of books to be sold by “J. Deacon,” and announces that “[a]t the afore-mentioned places, any Country-Chapmen or others, may be furnished with all sorts of small Books, Broadsides and Ballads at very reasonable Rates” (f. 80). This evidence also argues that *Mucedorus*’s print run may in fact extend beyond its apparent final edition in 1668, although Thackeray may of course have been selling on old stock.

two known performances of a named play, secular or religious, by English parish players in the seventeenth century” (White 197).³⁷ The play was *Mucedorus*, performed by “Country men that had learn'd to make a Play” (Rowe, *2r). As noted, Rowe records a performance upstairs at a Witney inn during which the floor collapsed, killing several people. The purpose of Rowe’s text is to attribute the disaster to God’s displeasure at plays and playing. Dobranski notes that “it was Charles I’s supporters who most often celebrated drinking houses in their writings” (83), and Holtcamp concludes that “*Mucedorus* can be seen as symbolising the exiled Charles II” (152), who had escaped England, like his father in 1623, in lowly disguise. *Tragi-Comoedia* also testifies to the endurance and circulation of *Mucedorus* as a physical book. To quote accurately from the play, Rowe must have owned or had access to a copy (Holtcamp 146). We can add two further observations: firstly, the play’s social permeation was so wide that even an antitheatrical writer such as Rowe had a copy; secondly, the playbooks owned by Rowe and the Witney players must have been at least eleven years old, the most recent extant edition dating from 1639.³⁸ Rowe’s *Tragi-Comoedia* and Milton’s *Eikonoklastes* fulfil remarkably similar work in the years following Charles’s execution; and both do so through careful engagement with what Milton called “the polluted trash of Romances and *Arcadias*” (f. 13). Figuratively, these texts connect *Mucedorus* and the *Arcadia*: two fatal stage *Arcadias*, one on a Whitehall scaffold and one at an Oxfordshire inn, demonstrated divine justice over the performers even as Rowe and Milton revealed their

³⁷ Rowe’s text can actually be seen as alluding to several performances. He notes that the play had been performed “by some of Santon-Har-court men many years since,” and that the players at Witney had previously acted it “it three or foure times in their own Parish,” and “likewise in severall neighbowring Parishes” (sig. *2v), indicating a sustained tradition of performing *Mucedorus* on multiple occasions and across the region.

³⁸ Ascertaining the edition Rowe quotes is challenging. Vagaries of spelling and punctuation between Rowe and the various texts of *Mucedorus* do not point to a single edition, although the repetition of the word “stay” in Envie’s opening line (sig. A3r) points to an edition of 1618 or later.

close knowledge of the offending texts. Whilst the *Arcadia* continued to serve its purpose for early modern elites up to and including the king, and for both royalist and anti-royalist factions, *Mucedorus* replicated this function in England at large; and it did so through continued use as a ludic playbook.

In the 1680s, Musidorus appeared in a printed ballad, *The Wandring Prince and Princess or, Musidorus and Anadine* (sic.), documenting the hero's journey from manuscript coterie into a field of circulation the borders of which cannot quite be ascribed: "[T]here was theoretically no man, woman or child who could not have access to a broadside ballad, at least in its oral form, when it was sung aloud" (Watt 13). The intermingling of the *Arcadia* and *Mucedorus* is fully embodied in this work. Whilst the disguised "wandering prince" Musidorus derives the spelling of his name from the *Arcadia*, the princess he seeks and with whom he is reunited is named Amadine, after the play's heroine. The story bears little relation to either Sidney's work or the anonymous play, distilling the trope even further into an archetypal narrative of lovers lost and reunited. The ballad also broadens the tradition of inviting customers to perform the story themselves; in this case, by singing it.³⁹

In 1684, almost a century after *Mucedorus* was first performed in "the honourable Cittie of London," *Mucedorus* appeared in a City pageant, Thomas Jordan's *London's Royal Triumph for the City's Loyal Magistrate*, celebrating the investiture of the new Lord Mayor of London, Sir James Smith. In Jordan's text, *Mucedorus* featured amongst other pastoral figures as an "amorous shepherd" (f. 14). Unique amongst these shepherds, he bears the royal

³⁹ A modern recording of this ballad, which the broadsheet indicates is to be sung to the tune of "Young Phaon," can be found at the University of California's online *English Broadside Ballad Archive* (EBBA ID: 33982). One of the ballad's stationers was the same W. Thackery whose 1689 edition of *Bevis of Southampton* includes *Mucedorus* amongst books listed for sale.

arms and shares a spoken sonnet with his lover, Pastora, emphasising the power of love to overcome wealth and social rank. The 1684 triumph presents Mucedorus in several contexts simultaneously: as a nexus of City pride, royal patronage, and the rural-pastoral figure of the shepherd, unifying three symbolic estates of early modern England, the city, the court, and the country. Gerald Langbaine, in his *Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691), notes that *Mucedorus* “has been frequently the Diversion of Country-people, in *Christmas Time*” (f. 541-42). That is, by rural workers. Sidney’s creation, prince Musidorus disguised as a shepherd, had escaped his elite manuscript confines into a ludic playbook. This initiated a performance tradition of such social reach that a hundred years later he was being performed by the very rural workers once burlesqued as Dametas in the *Arcadia*, and as Mouse on the London stage.

Whether performed by Elizabethan players, London apprentices, the King’s Men, Caroline servants, or by rural workers in the Interregnum and Restoration eras, *Mucedorus* renewed itself and gained “the love of all estates” through an open invitation to appropriate and “continue” the *Arcadia* not only through playgoing and solitary reading but through adaptation and communal play.

I would like to acknowledge the guidance and support of Prof. Gordon McMullan, who supervised my MA dissertation at King’s College London, from which this article derives. I would also like to thank Dr Derek Dunne, Sophie Harrold, and Amy Lidster, who read and offered advice on this work at various stages of its development. I am entirely indebted to Marta Krupińska for her enquires first with the Gdansk Public Library and then the Gdansk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Polska Akademia Nauk Biblioteka Gdańska) and for facilitating communications with the Academy’s Beata Gryzio in order to confirm the current location of the 1621 *Mucedorus*. My thanks too to Ms Gryzio for her generous help, and to the Academy for permission to reproduce the edition’s title page. Finally, many thanks to my PhD supervisors, Prof. Clare McManus and Dr. Jane Kingsley-Smith for their encouragement and insightful comments.

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