



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

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

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 histories” 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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3 Keywords: *King Lear*; *Leir*; James I; Geoffrey of Monmouth; Brutan histories;
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5 Anthony Munday; history play;
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10 The historicity of the anonymous plays *Leir* (c. 1590; pub. 1605), Shakespeare's *King Lear*
11 (c. 1606; pub. 1608) and the chronicles of pre-Roman Britain from which they were drawn
12 was still widely accepted at all levels of early modern English society, even as an awareness
13 that this tradition derived from a medieval forgery spread glacially outwards from
14 historiographic circles into popular culture. This prolonged and – for some – painful process
15 of etiological erosion has been termed a “crisis of belief” (Ferguson 26). This article embeds
16 *Leir* and *King Lear* within early modern approaches to the historiography and performance of
17 pre-Christian Britain in order to re-examine their possible modes of reception at the very
18 moment that these traditions were simultaneously being revived in the name of James VI and
19 I's project to unite Britain and eroded from the record of lived history. A further purpose of
20 this article is to argue for a new term for the account of ancient British history, usually
21 referred to as “Galfridian”, or “the British History”, from which the figure of Lear derived:
22 the “Brutan histories”.

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39 *Leir* and *King Lear* were published at a time of seismic change for English history and
40 historiography. Following his 1603 accession to the English throne, James VI and I was
41 battling with his English Parliament to unite Scotland and England into a single kingdom.
42 James's project “was so prominent in public discourse” that it served as a particularly potent
43 and complex theme for playmakers (Marcus 148); in the case of *Leir* this may have extended
44 to the publication of older, newly relevant properties. Both plays address the life of the
45 ancient British king Lear and the disastrous consequences of his decision to divide Britain
46 between his daughters. The negative parallels between Lear's and James's projects have long
47 been clear to critics.¹ Both plays – the Elizabethan *Leir* in publication and possible revival –
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3 emerged from the re-energising of the use of ancient British narratives and monarchs in the
4 poetry and pageantry responding to James's succession. These themes in turn raised
5 questions of nationhood and origins and "gave an additional impetus" to interest in the
6 chronicle accounts of British antiquity (Parry 156). It was frequently argued that James was
7 reunifying a once-integrated kingdom of Britain that its founder, the Trojan Brute, had
8 divided between his three sons in the twelfth century BCE, rather than splicing two discrete
9 and traditionally hostile nations. This deployment of spurious history was, of course, merely a
10 continuation of the widespread medieval and early modern strategy of "colonizing time [and]
11 tenanting the past with nonexistent ancestors" in order to authorise the operation of power in
12 the present (Ingledeu 675).
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26 However, despite James's efforts, his struggle with parliament has been summarised
27 by Conrad Russell as "one single reiterated point: the House of Commons said 'no' ... With
28 each 'no,' James retreated to a smaller request, but the 'no' remained the same" (127). The
29 faltering progress and ultimate failure of James's union project may be figuratively mapped
30 upon plays of this period that feature ancient British narratives, and James himself can be
31 considered an authorising effect upon the production and publication of "British" texts and
32 events across his reign. For example, a reference to Trojan Brute in the London edition of
33 James's *Basilikon Doron* seems to pre-empt Anthony Munday's 1605 Lord Mayor's Show,
34 *The Trivmphes of Re-vnited Britania*, which spectacularly presented Brute and his sons to
35 Londoners and London's livery companies in order to configure James as a "second Brute",
36 that is, a second founder of Britain, a term that Munday uses four times in two pages (sig.
37 B1v-B2r). These plays and performances in fact belonged to a much older tradition of
38 performing the history of pre-Roman Britain, a narrative continuum I term the "Brutan
39 histories", that dated at least as far back as civic pageants performed before Henry VII on his
40 1486 post-Bosworth progress of England. By 1612, Thomas Heywood could claim in his
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3 *Apology for Actors* that plays in the public theatres had “taught the vnlearned the knowledge
4 of many famous histories”, particularly “the discouery of all our English Chronicles ... from
5 the landing of Brute, vntill this day” (sig. F3r). In other words, *Triumphs* and *King Lear* in
6 performance, and *Leir* in print, are timely responses to the Jacobean moment and the
7 continuation of a dramaturgical tradition dating back at least as far as the fifteenth century.
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16 The following sections outline this tradition’s medieval origins, my reasoning for
17 adopting the term “Brutan histories”, and the early modern “crisis of belief”. Secondly, I will
18 give a necessarily brief account of the tradition of performing ancient British figures and
19 narratives from 1486 until the Jacobean period, for which *The Triumphs of Re-vnited Britania*
20 will serve as a case-study. I then offer analyses of *Leir* and *King Lear* in terms of their
21 possible reception in 1605-08. For many early Jacobean readers these plays’ entanglement
22 with both historical tradition and current events may have been complicated by *Leir*’s
23 dislocation from historical chronology and *King Lear*’s potential to be read as an enactment
24 of Brutan erosion as embodied in the figure of Lear himself.
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39 **The Brutan Tradition**

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42 Medieval accounts of British antiquity reached early modern England via a tradition of
43 anonymous manuscript histories known collectively as the prose *Brut*, so named for its
44 narrative beginning with the founding and naming of Britain by Brute, a descendant of the
45 Trojan Aeneas (Drukker 451).² On his death, Brute divided the island of Britain between his
46 three sons, creating the three territories – Albania/Scotland, Loegria/England, and
47 Cambria/Wales – into which ancient Britain would periodically fracture at times of war and
48 crises of succession. This narrative could be traced directly and exclusively to Geoffrey of
49 Monmouth’s incalculably influential *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1135). Geoffrey had
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3 noted that he had found nothing in previous chronicles touching on “the kings who lived here
4 before Christ’s incarnation” (4). He thus addressed this omission with reference to a “certain
5 old book” or *liber vetustissimus*, written in an ancient version of Welsh and translated into
6 Latin by Geoffrey himself (4). This “old book” was, as a growing number of early modern
7 writers were discovering, an enabling fiction that had given Geoffrey a *tabula rasa* from
8 which to concoct the pre-Roman-invasion portions of his work *ex nihilo*.³ One indicator of
9 Geoffrey’s success is that “[t]hroughout the Middle Ages and the early modern period, both
10 the English and the Welsh made the idea of an ancient British heritage the historical
11 cornerstone of their national identity” (MacColl 249). Indeed, the Welsh were often
12 considered the truer Brutan ancestors, being descended from those pushed west by Saxon
13 incursion, somewhat complicating any sense of shared heritage. This is evident in the 1593
14 playbook of George Peele’s *Edward I*, published 108 years after the Welsh-descended Henry
15 Tudor took the English throne supported by claims of Arthurian descent. Whilst Edward and
16 his followers are described as “Albions Champions, / Equivalent with *Trotans* auncient fame”
17 (sig. A2v), Edward’s rival Lluellan forcefully claims Brute for the Welsh, described as “true
18 *Britaines* sprong of *Troians* seede” (sig. C3r). Despite such nuances, however, Brutan narratives
19 were frequently deployed in the service and rhetoric of English power.⁴

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43 In brief, the *Historia* extended from the life of Brute, whom the Elizabethan
44 chronicler John Stow stated had conquered Albion in the year 1108BCE, to that of the
45 seventh-century Cadwallader, the “last king of Britayne” (*Summarie*, f. 9; f. 36r). In the years
46 covered by and following Roman historians’ accounts of invading Britain (c. 52BCE), these,
47 along with continental and Anglo-Saxon chronicles, increasingly provided sources that
48 Geoffrey sometimes drew from and sometimes contradicted. From the twelfth to the sixteenth
49 centuries, Geoffrey’s narrative dominated as a habit of thought deeply embedded at all levels
50 of English culture. It was disseminated and sustained through the prose *Brut* and its early
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3 modern print analogues, through elite genealogy, civic history, romance, *de casibus* literature,
4 ballads, drama, and oral tradition. However, despite Geoffrey's role as the originator of this
5 tradition, and its claim to address the history of ancient Britain, I suggest that the critical
6 terms most often used to categorise it, "Galfridian", and "the British History", should be re-
7 examined.
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14 "Galfridian" semantically localises five centuries of collective cultural exchange and
15 transmission to a single author and a Latin text that would have been inaccessible to most
16 medieval and early modern English. In contrast, the term "Brutan histories" creates an
17 etymological connection between the prose *Brut* narratives in all their textual and cultural
18 forms, as well as foregrounding Brute as the putative founder of Britain.⁵ Bruts altered the
19 *Historia*'s narrative in ways large and small and, over the centuries, their unknown compilers
20 added more and more additional material, updating the narratives with the effect that the
21 ancient history beginning with Brute always reached into the present moment. Bruts often
22 provided substantive material for chronicle and historiographic texts printed in the early
23 modern period; the earliest of these, William Caxton's *Cronicles of Englond* (1480), was a
24 print edition of a manuscript Brut. Whilst Geoffrey was cited in many of these texts, his
25 *Historia* itself was never published in English or in England in the early modern period.⁶
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27 More widespread still was the dissemination of his creation into oral culture. Adam Fox gives
28 an account of soldiers visiting Leicester in the 1630s being told by the attendant at a local inn
29 that the city had been built "by the British king Leir, near 1000 yeeeres before Christ" (231).⁷
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31 Thus many spectators of *Leir*'s performance at the Rose playhouse in 1594 (Foakes,
32 *Henslowe's* 21), or the lost 1598 play *The Conqueste of Brute* (100) at the same venue could
33 experience a narrative drawn directly from the Brut tradition without having ever heard of
34 Geoffrey of Monmouth or his book.
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59 "Brutan histories" also engages with another phrase that is often still adopted by
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3 critics, “the British History”, and which as far back as 1950 Thomas Kendrick could adopt
4 the phrase “in accordance with ... custom”, indicating its antiquated status (6). “The British
5 History” raises questions of what – now, and in the early modern period – constituted
6 “Britain”. This is particularly apposite when we consider that in practice the Brutian histories
7 served as English histories bolstering English interests and competed with a rival, and very
8 different, Scottish account of ancient Britain.⁸ The phrase’s uses and function were
9 challenged in the 1970s when John Pocock made an influential call for a new “British
10 history”, that is, for new methodologies that questioned the Anglo-centric nature of
11 historiographic approaches to the region Pocock termed the “Atlantic archipelago” (603).
12 This in turn has produced much literary criticism focussing on the distinct and dissonant
13 representations of British territories and regional cultures in early modern literature.⁹ In short,
14 I suggest “the British History” is far too entangled with outmoded critical tradition *and* recent
15 progressive critical discourse to sustain independent meaning as a term for the fictionalised
16 period of antiquity sustained by the prose *Brut* and the multifarious cultural emanations it
17 authorised.
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41 **The “Crisis of Belief”**

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43 The death knell for the Brutian histories is often seen as coming in the 1530s with the Italian
44 Polydore Vergil’s *Anglia Historia* (Basel, 1534). This work effectively triggered the
45 controversy by expressing scepticism over the *Historia*’s account of pre-Roman Britain and
46 the later reign of King Arthur. A typical critic of Vergil was the Protestant polemicist John
47 Bale, “a man of great learning ... blinded by religious prejudice” (Kendrick 69) who argued
48 that Vergil was “polutynge oure Englyshe chronicles most shamefullye” (*A Breffe Chronycle*
49 5r). The controversy, however, seems to have remained largely confined to scholarly circles,
50 and when addressed in English-language chronicles, this scepticism was often dismissed as a
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3 species of foreign subterfuge. In Richard Grafton's *Chronicle at Large* (1569), Thomas
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5 Norton, co-author of the Brutan play *Gorboduc*, writes in his "letter to the reader" that
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7 Grafton's work is protecting English readers, particularly "princes", from the "slanderous
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9 reportes of foreyne writers", a probable reference to Vergil (not paginated).

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13 It was not until 1586 that William Camden's Latin *Britannia* appeared tacitly to
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15 accept Vergil's historiography, defending the Brutan histories with the rather weak proviso,
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17 quoting Pliny, that "Even falsely to claime ... descents from famous personages, implieth in
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19 some sort a love of virtue" (1610; f. 8-9). Camden was followed by John Speed's *The*
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21 *Historie of Great Britaine* (1611), which determined that the Brutan histories' fictiveness
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23 "appeareth by the silence of the Romane writers therein, who name neither Brute nor his
24
25 father in the genealogie of the Latine Kings" (f. 164). That is, Speed prioritises classical and
26
27 continental historiography over medieval English tradition. Thus Kendrick describes Speed
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29 as "the great antiquary who settled the matter for us" (124). For *us*, perhaps. But in fact the
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31 period saw numerous Brutan-endorsing chronicles, most famously Raphael Holinshed's
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33 *Chronicles* (1577) and John Stow's numerous works, alongside hugely successful *poesie-*
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35 *historical* texts that adopted and promoted Brutan narratives as historical for didactic and
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37 ideological purposes, such as John Higgins's 1574 additions to the *Mirror for Magistrates*,
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39 William Warner's *Albions England* (1586), and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590).

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45 Yet the textual form that perhaps most simply and eloquently demonstrates the
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47 permeation and habit of popular belief in the Brutan histories is the almanac. These
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49 inexpensive texts included calendrical information, astrological prognostication regarding
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51 harvests and weather and, frequently, timelines of world history. The popularity of almanacs
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53 grew across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries until they became "arguably the most
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55 popular books of the early modern period", making them a useful means of assessing early
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57 modern "assumptions and reading practices" (Chapman 1258-59). An almanac's timeline
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3 very often indicated the beginning of British chronology with the arrival of Brute, a practice
4 that became more common after 1585 and often orientated Brutan events via reference to
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6 parallel moments from biblical and classical history (Capp 215-16). Daniel Woolf asserts that
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8 almanacs were “so plentiful that for the majority of Britons they were the most accessible
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10 form of history lesson” (321). If so, it was frequently a lesson in Brutan history. In *A*
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12 *Yorkshire Tragedy* (pub. 1608), the character Sam returns to Yorkshire “[f]urnisht with things
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14 from London”, and describes himself as carrying “three hats, and two glasses ... two rebato
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16 wyers vpon my brest, a capcase by my side, a brush at my back, an Almanack in my pocket,
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18 [and] three ballats in my Codpeece, naie I am the true picture of a Common seruingman” (sig.
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20 A2v). In other words, to carry an almanac is integral to the popular image, or “true picture”,
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22 of a “common servingman”. The Brutan histories’ inclusion amongst the almanacs’ bare,
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24 “factual”, data, information through which readers sought to situate themselves within
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26 metaphysical, seasonal and historical time, argues that for many they were not something to
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28 be “believed”, or “disbelieved”, any more than were the weather or the seasons. There were
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30 many competing publishers of almanacs but, to cite a single example, those produced by
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32 Thomas Bretnor seem to have been especially well-known in the early Jacobean period,
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34 receiving mentions in texts by Thomas Middleton and Ben Jonson (Capp, Bretnor, *ODNB*).
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36 Bretnor’s 1607 almanac, published midway between the quartos of *Leir* and *King Lear*, opens
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38 with a brief world chronology in which the year Brute “entred this Iland” is foregrounded as
39
40 the fourth significant event of history after the Creation, the Flood and the destruction of Troy
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42 (sig. A1v). Thus, from *Britannia* to the almanac, an early modern individual’s sense of
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44 history, and of the truth value of Britain’s Trojan origins, depended on the discourses and
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46 texts to which he or she had access within his or her textual community, whether the
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48 community that frequented a Leicester Inn or the Inns of Court.¹⁰ Another culturally
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50 ubiquitous channel for Brutan history, of course, was drama.
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3 Following his victory at Bosworth in 1485 Henry VII conducted a progress through
4 his new kingdom. In many towns he was met by pageantry that both begged his indulgence
5 and asserted local civic rights.¹¹ Twice, this pageantry confronted Henry with Brutan figures
6 as personifications of both civic antiquity and Henry's own ancestry. At York, the seat of the
7 dynasty Henry had defeated, the king was addressed by the Brutan king Ebrauk, described as
8 York's founder, or "beginner" (REED: York, 1.139; 1.36). Ebrauk presents Henry with the
9 keys of the city but also interweaves his origins with Henry's own, by asserting his right to
10 Henry's "remembrance / Seth [since] that I am prematiue of Your progenie" (140; 1.20). At
11 the beginning of his reign, Henry had accentuated his putative descent from the celebrated
12 King Arthur, after whom he named his eldest son; Ebrauk, Brute's great-great-grandson, thus
13 gently but firmly reminds the young king of his and the city's shared ancestry, and of
14 Ebrauk's seniority within that ancestry.

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17 This recourse to Brutan figures in civic-monarchical encounters was repeated in a
18 speech intended for Elizabeth I's 1578 entry into Norwich. Elizabeth was to be greeted by
19 Norwich's founder Gurgunt, who declares himself as having lain "[t]wo thousand yeares
20 welnye in silence lurking still", but reanimated by the Queen's approach (sig. B3r).¹² Gurgunt
21 recounts the events of his reign and asserts his right as a historical figure to emerge from
22 history and speak for his city.¹³ Similarly, the first recorded Brutan play also addressed a
23 monarch directly. Thomases Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* (1562; pub. 1565) was
24 performed, according to the title page of the 1565 quarto, "before the *QVENES* most
25 excellent Maiestie, in her highnes Court of Whitehall" (sig. A1r). *Gorboduc* constituted "a
26 direct intervention in the political controversy surrounding ... the uncertainty of [Elizabeth
27 I's] succession" (James and Walker 109). Ebrauk had cited his status as Henry VII's ancestor
28 as a rhetorical device; similarly, *Gorboduc* enhances its sense of tragedy by foregrounding its
29 characters' shared Brutan origins, asking "how much Brutish blod hath sithence been spilt /
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3 To ioyne againe the sondred vnitie?" (sig. B1r). In elite and public spaces, then, and in
4 pageantry and play, Brutan figures were used to celebrate and negotiate the complex
5 relationships between the monarch and his or her subjects' institutions. *King Lear* can be seen
6 as emerging from this deep and genre-crossing theatrical tradition.
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12 Just as acceptance of the Brutan histories in popular culture is hinted at by the use of
13 Brutan timelines in almanacs, so the records of "lost" plays, particularly Philip Henslowe's
14 "diary" of repertory at the Rose playhouse in the 1590s, demonstrates the scope of public
15 Brutan drama alluded to by Heywood in 1612.¹⁴ This is the theatrical culture from which *Leir*
16 emerged. The scarcity of anti-Brutan writing in the 1560s suggests that *Gorboduc*, for
17 example, could be received as a representation of lived, ancestral history. However, by the
18 early seventeenth century, knowledge of the Brutan controversy was spreading. I have
19 emphasised the cultural embeddedness of the Brutan histories so emphatically in order to
20 suggest that to move from belief to doubt might not simply entail an intellectual change of
21 course. Addressing the complex territories between belief and doubt in ancient Greek
22 attitudes to their religious and historiographic narratives, Paul Veyne finds evidence for
23 "modalities of wavering belief", marked by a "capacity to simultaneously believe in
24 incompatible truths" (56), and Ferguson has argued for the usefulness of Veyne's theories
25 when considering early modern attitudes to the remote past (2). This sense of "wavering
26 belief" may have further extended and complicated a process that already involved the
27 affective transformation of an individual's sense of their national, civic, and personal origins,
28 even as figures such as Brute were appropriated in the name of James VI and I's dream of
29 British unity.
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53 To question the historical truth of Brute, or his descendants Lear and Gorboduc, was
54 to undermine the integrity of the whole historiographic macrostructure of pre-Roman British
55 culture and origins as a whole, characterised as a civilisation of cities, temples, conquering
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3 armies, and universities, long pre-dating ancient Rome.¹⁵ Thus the Brutan histories' sheer
4 cultural *usefulness*, along with the vertiginous lack of anything with which to replace them,
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6 energised those that resisted their erosion. The Jacobean writer Edmund Bolton expressed his
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8 concern that their abandonment would leave a "vast Blanck upon the Times of our Country,
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10 from the Creation of the World till the coming of Julius Caesar" (sig. Cc2v-3r).¹⁶ I suggest
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12 that the unease of readers and spectators regarding this "vast blanke" would have been
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14 projectible onto plays such as *Leir*, *King Lear* and the contemporary Brutan drama *No-body*
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16 *and Some-body* (c. 1604; pub. 1606): "Who of nothing can something make?" (sig. A2v) asks
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18 the prologue in *No-body and Some-body*, a play which forces its putatively historical Brutan
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20 monarch Elidure to share the stage with a character called Nobody. "[N]othing can come of
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22 nothing" *King Lear* replies (sig. B2r).
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31 **Brutan Doubt and British Union in Early Jacobean England**

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33 The central theme of this article, then, is historical dissonance, and the ways in which Brutan
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35 drama may have evoked etiological erosion even as that etiology was being deployed to
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37 promote James VI and I's project to "reunite" England and Scotland, the kingdoms
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39 supposedly divided by Brute. Possible interaction between the London edition of James's
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41 *Basilikon Doron* (1603) and Munday's *Triumphes of Re-vnited Britania* (1605) shows both
42
43 how official approaches to historiography might influence drama. Parallels may be found in
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45 the way that the scepticism and resistance that greeted James's project are echoed in the
46
47 scepticism and resistance that increasingly characterised attitudes to the Brutan histories.
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50 John Ross of the Inner Temple attests to the public nature of the Brutan controversy in his
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52 *Britannica* (1607). This collection of Latin poems recounts the Brutan histories' core
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54 narrative and demonstrates the continued engagement with those histories on the part of
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56 London's legal community (Hardin, "Geoffrey", 235). In an appended "apology", Ross offers
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3 a defence of Brutan historicity as proving Britain's originary unity and therefore supporting
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5 James's plan for union: "we are to be transformed from English and Scotsmen and be called
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7 Britons once more" (trans. Sutton). Ross characterises the public debate surrounding the
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9 Brutan histories as emotive and suffused with doubt:
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15 For the question of whether Brutus existed or not is on all men's lips. Good God!
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17 Nowadays what is not called into question by these petty little doubts? In meetings, at
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19 banquets, in assemblies, even in barbershops men wrangle over this ... I do not desire
20
21 to conjecture what any man might feel or whisper about this thing, since I am quite
22
23 familiar with the fact that nothing is ever so well-polished, nothing can be so
24
25 complete, as they say, down to its very fingertips, which other men (and learned ones
26
27 at that) cannot rip it to shreds. (trans. Sutton)¹⁷
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33 I am interested in the "petty little doubts", identified by Ross, and how these might have
34
35 worked upon readers and spectators of Brutan drama at this time. Unlike Ross, I will
36
37 conjecture what some may have been provoked to "feel or whisper" regarding these doubts,
38
39 and how *Leir* and *King Lear* might have agitated this uncertainty, much as Anne Lake
40
41 Prescott has described the historiographer John Selden's sceptical "illustrations" to *Poly-*
42
43 *Olbion* (1612) as eroding Michael Drayton's Brutan themes "like acid eating a book from its
44
45 edges" (309). Andrew Hadfield describes Drayton's engagement with the question of union
46
47 in *Poly-Olbion* as "beset by nervous anxiety and division" (160). Radicalising and
48
49 foregrounding this erosion, anxiety, and doubt, however, was the public utilisation of the
50
51 Brutan histories in the service of James VI and I's union project, a strategy that appeared to
52
53 originate with James himself.
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3 In *Basilikon Doron*, James appeared to advise his young son, Henry, to beware the
4 dangers of dividing the realm between heirs: “by deviding your kingdomes, yee shall leaue
5 the seed of diuision and discord among your posteritie; as befell to this Ile, by the diuision
6 and assignement thereof, to the three sonnes of Brutus, Lochrine, Albanact, and Camber”
7
8 (Fischlin and Fortier 142).¹⁸ However, as James Shapiro has noted, the passage relating to
9 Brute and his sons did not appear in the original, Scottish, version of *Basilikon Doron*,
10 published in a limited run of seven copies in Edinburgh in 1599 (39-40). It was inserted into
11 the English edition published in London in the wake of Elizabeth I’s death in March 1603.
12 This suggests that the text was amended with a specifically English readership in mind, one
13 believed to be familiar with and receptive to the use of Brutan history for rhetorical purposes.
14 Citing an unpublished study by Peter Blayney, Jenny Wormald narrates the “dramatic”
15 London publication of *Basilikon Doron*. Within four days of Elizabeth’s death on 24 March
16 1603, James’s book appeared in the Stationers’ Register, and by 13 April it is likely that eight
17 editions were issued, with between 13,000 and 16,000 copies printed overall (51).¹⁹

18
19 However, whilst James Forse has argued that *Basilikon Doron* demonstrates that
20 “James knew his legendary British history” (56), I suggest that the insertion of the Lochrine
21 reference invites the possibility of collaborative intervention. The book’s publisher John
22 Norton was a “friend to [Robert] Cecil” (51). As Elizabeth’s Secretary of State, Cecil is a
23 possible recipient of the Edinburgh edition of *Basilikon Doron* sent to England before
24 Elizabeth’s death and used as copy for the London editions. James’s manuscript for *Basilikon*
25 *Doron* shows that, amongst its many crossings-out and amendments, there is no mention of
26 Brute or Lochrine.²⁰ Thus the insertion of Brute’s narrative may have been at the suggestion,
27 or even the instigation, of Cecil or the text’s London stationers. In the aftermath of accession,
28 this recourse to identifiably English historiography would have a powerful effect on
29 playwrights and stationers although, by the time many of these texts began appearing in print
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3 from 1605, James's union project had stalled in parliament (Hill, "Representing", 20). The
4
5 most immediate and explicit response to *Basilikon Doron* may have been Anthony Munday's
6
7 1605 Lord Mayor's show *The Trivmphes of Re-vnited Britania*, which paraded children
8
9 costumed as Brute, his sons, and attendant personifications of British rivers and cities,
10
11 through London's streets repeatedly proclaiming James a "second Brute" (sig. B1v-B2r; sig.
12
13 B3v; sig. B4v; sig. C3r). *Trivmphes*, perhaps, can make this comparison without risking the
14
15 insinuation that James will repeat Brute's perceived error of dividing his kingdom precisely
16
17 because this is the very mistake identified and warned against in *Basilikon Doron*. As Tracey
18
19 Hill notes, Lord Mayor's Shows were "*public* events, witnessed by thousands" (*Pageantry* 4);
20
21 thus *Trivmphes* was perhaps the most spectacular early modern performance of Brutan
22
23 history, although James himself was represented in the show by an empty chair (Hill,
24
25 "Representing" 23). Just as Gurgunt at Norwich described himself as emerging from the
26
27 distant past, Philip Schwyzer notes a similar theme in *Trivmphes*: "there are two separate
28
29 resurrections heralded here: that of Brutus and his kin, who are awakened from death ... and
30
31 that of Britain itself" (37). In performance, this endorsement and its supporting
32
33 historiography are presented as joyous and unequivocal. In print, Brutan origins are
34
35 compromised by Munday himself. In the quarto of *Trivmphes*, Munday addresses the Brutan
36
37 controversy:
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47 Because our present conceit, reacheth vnto the antiquitie of *Brytaine*, which (in
48
49 many mindes) hath carried as many and variable opinions: I thought it not
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51 vnecessary, (being thereto earnestly solicited) to speake somewhat concerning the
52
53 estate of this our Countrey. (sig. A2r)
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3 Munday's confusing syntax invokes historical dissonance even as he works to allay it. It
4 might be read that there are "many and variable opinions" carried in the "many mindes" of
5 numerous individuals or, both additionally and alternatively, that each of these "mindes"
6 carries churning within it "many and variable opinions", that is, multiple and contradictory
7 visions of the past. For some spectators and readers of playbooks, then, the celebration of
8 Brutan origins and the erosive debate surrounding their historicity in the early Jacobean
9 period could be encountered within a single text. It is within this context, if more obliquely,
10 that *Leir* and *King Lear* will be addressed.

21 To examine *Leir* and *King Lear* within the Jacobean moment is to uproot the earlier
22 play from the conditions of its earliest recorded performance at the Rose in 1594, and to
23 examine it instead as a 1605 Jacobean playbook, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*. To
24 ask why stationers chose to publish Brutan plays at all at this time – beginning with the more-
25 than-decade-old *Leir* – is to pose productive questions about the interests of those stationers'
26 customers. *Leir*, a play about a king's division of Britain and that kingdom's subsequent
27 happy reunion, would have been topical at any time in the first years of James's reign
28 although, by 1605, the project was already on shaky ground.²¹ However, Zachary Lesser
29 argues that it is possible to move "from the readings that publishers imagine", when they
30 select which texts to invest in, "to the meanings that their customers made out of these
31 books" (*Renaissance* 17-18). In 1605, the meanings made by purchasers of *Leir* could have
32 been shaped by the relevance of its Brutan subject to the rhetoric of union. This utility also
33 highlighted the play's function as an account of history, a perspective which, perhaps
34 paradoxically, could have drawn attention to characteristics of the play that might, for certain
35 readers, provoke questions of etiological erosion. *Leir* uproots its characters from the Brutan
36 epoch, thus dislocating them from the continuum of world history presented in almanacs and
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3 chronicles, the continuum that underwrote the Brutan rhetoric of *Triumphs* and James's
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5 argument for union.
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10 *Leir*

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12 Genealogies and Brutan timelines were invaluable to James VI and I's self-legitimation and
13
14 union project. In 1605, the year *Leir* was published, the genealogist Thomas Lyte was
15
16 working on an illustrated table "comprising nine parchment skins ... over two metres wide
17
18 and almost two metres high" that traced the Stuart ancestry from Brute and included a
19
20 depiction of the temple of Janus said to have been founded by Lear (de Guevara). Lyte's table
21
22 shows the importance of situating forbears and ancestors securely within chronological space
23
24 if they were to offer meaning and authority in the present. In contrast to this anchoring of
25
26 King Lear's narrative within the Brutan-Jacobean timeline, *Leir* disrupts Brutan temporality
27
28 through pervasive Christian references, anachronisms that might be perceived as eroding the
29
30 title-page's claim to represent "true chronicle history". For *Leir*'s early Jacobean readers the
31
32 play's dislocation of its Brutan narrative from the apparatus of world chronology – and thus
33
34 from the continuity of royal descent – held the potential to trigger those "petty little doubts"
35
36 in Brutan historicity. These doubts may have been compounded and personified by the
37
38 character Skalliger who, in a correlation that has gone almost unnoticed by critics, shares his
39
40 name with two prominent early modern scholars, Julius Caesar Scaliger and his son Joseph
41
42 Scaliger; the latter being the era's foremost theorist and collator of world chronology
43
44 (Grafton 77-78). These associations were available even to non-specialist readers, who could
45
46 have encountered references to both Scaligers in a wide variety of texts.
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54 *Leir* may digress or adapt but always ends in realignment with the Brutan histories'
55
56 genealogical continuity. Yet, as Margreta de Grazia notes, this nominally Brutan play
57
58 "flagrantly occurs in AD time" (139), explicitly a realm or era termed "Christendom". The
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1
2
3 play extracts itself wholesale from wider accounts of the pre-Christian world, a concatenation
4
5 of international historiographies known as universal history, representing the “scholarly
6
7 desire” to order the fragmentary and contradictory accounts of ancient world histories into
8
9 “some kind of order, some rational time scheme” (Ferguson 147). This macro-narrative, into
10
11 which English writers from Geoffrey onwards had been careful to embed the Brutan histories,
12
13 accommodated biblical, classical, continental, near eastern, and other chronologies, and many
14
15 chronicle texts provided marginal timelines or commentary that worked to situate a particular
16
17 narrative within this wider context. For example, Holinshed anchors the Brutan kings within
18
19 universal chronology, stating that Lear ruled “in the yeare of the world 3105, at what time
20
21 Ioaſ reigned in Iuda” (12). This is also, as shown, reflected in the skeletal but widely
22
23 circulated universal timelines included in many almanacs.

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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

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3 of *Iuda*” (sig. H4v). These Old Testament references could be argued to still, loosely, situate
4
5 *Leir* within a pre-Christian, internationalist, Britain. Yet the characters exhibit explicitly
6
7 Christian behaviour and references. *Leir* pledges to “take me to my prayers and my beads”, in
8
9 the care of his daughters, “the kindest Gyrls in Christen dome” (sig. C1r). The play’s
10
11 engagement with Christianity extends to referencing post-biblical figures such as
12
13 “Saint *Denis*, and Saint *George*” (sig. I3r), patron saints of Paris and England respectively,
14
15 the two powers united both by Gallia’s marriage to Cordella and their joint support of *Leir*’s
16
17 cause. Thus, the play’s references to post-Brutan, and post-biblical, Christianity are not mere
18
19 decoration, but often offer thematic commentary. Taking in both Catholic doctrine and early
20
21 modern Protestant caricature, Gonorill calls Cordella a “Puritan” and threatens to “make you
22
23 wish your selfe in Purgatory” (sig. I3v); to present the wicked Gonerill as adopting a term of
24
25 abuse used towards those perceived as radical Protestants transports these Brutan figures into,
26
27 and defines them via, the sectarian milieux and schisms of post-Reformation England. The
28
29 more persistently *Leir*’s characters adopt the language of early modern Christianity, the more
30
31 they dislocate Brutan time from its pre-Christian chronology. For readers of the 1605
32
33 playbook, this dislocation – unremarkable in much early modern literature, as noted – has the
34
35 potential to aggravate those dissonant “petty little doubts” in Brutan historicity. This potential
36
37 is exacerbated by the presence of the minor character Skalliger.

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39
40 Lord Skalliger, a character inserted into *Leir*’s Brutan plot by its playmakers, is a
41
42 meddling, villainous advisor. He is textually prominent, the only character other than *Leir* to
43
44 speak and be named on the play’s opening page, thus prioritising his presence and name
45
46 before that of the other characters. Skalliger’s first action is to propose the fateful love test,
47
48 that *Leir* should reward his daughters “[a]s is their worth, to them that love profess” (sig.
49
50 A2v), before immediately rushing off to “bewray your [*Leir*’s] secrecy” to Gonerill and
51
52 Ragan (sig. A3r). Thus Skalliger “betrays *Leir*’s confidence [and] it is Skalliger, not *Leir*,

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2
3 who supports giving a larger portion to the daughter who wins the love contest” (Brink 214).
4
5 By instigating and manipulating the love test, Skalliger triggers the play’s “historical” events.
6
7 His influence over the defining events of Leir’s reign, then, is considerable. His interventions
8
9 are almost dramaturgical, as he directs, even creates, events purporting to be historical. His
10
11 authorising agency and manipulation of “history” raise the question of why Skalliger shares
12
13 his unusual name with two renowned early modern French scholars. Apart from Sidney Lee’s
14
15 1909 edition of the play (xxxiv), critics have rarely noted, and never explored, the
16
17 relationship between *Leir*, Julius Caesar Scaliger and, especially, his son Joseph Scaliger.
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21 The possible influence of the Scaligers upon *Leir* suggests evidence of an interaction
22
23 between continental literary and historiographic theories, popular drama, and Brutan history.
24
25 Clare McManus has stressed the importance, when considering “British” culture, of
26
27 remembering that “although it came late to the Renaissance, in its ‘high’ cultural form at
28
29 least, Britain consciously based its self-expression upon an idea of learning and a value
30
31 system from beyond its own borders” (187). *Leir*’s Skalliger could have been interpreted as
32
33 displaying, and perhaps satirising, just such an influence. Julius Caesar Scaliger was a
34
35 theorist of poetics and “the most notorious of Renaissance categorizers” (Orgel 113). His
36
37 *Poetices Libri Septem* (Lyons, 1581) sought to assiduously define and assert rules regarding
38
39 literary and poetic genre. Scaliger’s work was praised in Philip Sidney’s *Defense of Poesie* (c.
40
41 1580; pub. 1595), and Stephen Orgel has noted both writers’ resistance to drama derived
42
43 from the fact that “neither is capable of the minimally imaginative effort required by plays
44
45 which ignore the unities of place or time” (115). *Leir*’s Skalliger may have appeared to some
46
47 as a playmakers’ rebuke against such “limited” critiques of drama, pertinent to a play that,
48
49 disregarding “unities of place and time”, dislocated itself from one temporality to another.²²
50
51 It is Scaliger’s son, Joseph Justus, however, who had the greater presence in English print by
52
53 the Jacobean period, and who dedicated his career to perfecting a theory of universal
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3 chronology, the very system into which chronicles such as Holinshed's embedded Brutan
4 history and from which *Leir* dislocates itself. Scaliger junior addressed the problem of "how
5 to harmonise Biblical chronology with the chronologies of the other nations of antiquity"
6
7
8 with his *De Emendation Temporum* (Paris, 1583) (Burke 47). This work was "lavishly
9
10
11
12 illustrated with tables", and "reduced all chronologies to a new one, the Julian" (Burke 47).
13
14 Anthony Grafton outlines the significance of Joseph Scaliger's work: "[He] won renown for
15 his reformation of the traditional approach to chronology", by combining and coordinating
16
17 data from classical and biblical sources in order to detect "gaps in the historical record [and]
18
19 fill them by astonishing feats of historical detective work (77). References to Joseph Scaliger,
20
21 frequently praiseful, abound in English print.
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26
27 John Eliot's French primer, *Ortho-epia Gallica* (1593), includes a translation of a
28
29 poem by Bathas praising Scaliger as a polymath who
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33 Not by one onely Idiome
34
35 his secrets to vnfold,
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37 But as the learned Scaliger,
38
39 whom men the wonder hold
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43 O rich and supple spirit that can
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45 his tongue so quickly change,
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47 Cameleon-like into what author
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49 likes him best to range. (f. 17-18)
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57 This poem was reproduced in a different translation in Robert Allott's poetry anthology
58
59 *Englands Parnassus* (1600), presenting Scaliger as an exemplary polymath, although its
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3 reference to Scaliger as “wits Chamelion” (f. 495) suggests a quality that, in the negative,
4
5 could also apply to *Leir*’s Skalliger, who adapts his demeanour and honesty according to his
6
7 schemes. Perhaps most allusive to *Leir*’s treatment of Scaliger is a reference from the clown
8
9 Clove in Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1600). Clove cites Scaliger as “the best
10
11 Nauigator in his time” (sig. H4v), thus suggesting, punningly, a figure adept at temporal
12
13 orientation. *Leir* uproots itself from the Brutan chronology that was essential to its potential
14
15 meanings in 1605 and emphasises this dislocation by naming the play’s villainous instigator
16
17 after the era’s most famous custodian and theorist of universal history. The mischievous
18
19 manipulation of the play’s “historical” events by this character were not, perhaps, so different
20
21 from the charges of manipulation and fictionalising levelled at Geoffrey of Monmouth.
22
23 Skalliger’s final words before disappearing from the play appear to be in direct address:
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31 And me a villain, that to curry favour
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33 Have given the daughter counsel ’gainst the father
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35 But us the world doth this experience give,
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37 That he that cannot flatter, cannot live. (sig. C4v)
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42 The appropriation and promotion of Brutan iconography by writers and stationers in support
43
44 of James’s union project could, like Skalliger’s cynical invocation of “experience”, be
45
46 perceived as disingenuous flattery of the monarch driven by self-interest. History, in this
47
48 light, is a function of just the kind of political contingency that was driving the union project.
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50 In its Jacobean context, the Elizabethan *Leir*’s mysterious temporal relocation and insertion
51
52 of a Skalliger combine in ways that might agitate Brutan certainties.
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3 ***King Lear***
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5 In the version of *King Lear* published amongst the tragedies included in the 1623 folio of
6 Shakespeare's plays, the Fool ends his topsy-turvy prophecy with a comment that situates
7 him, and therefore the play, within the Brutan continuum: "This prophecie *Merlin* shall
8 make, for I liue before his time" (f. 197). However equivocally or satirically, the Fool's
9 comment looks ahead to the post-Christian centuries of Arthur and Merlin (de Grazia 141).
10 However, this passing expression of wider chronological context was not included in the
11 play's 1608 quarto, resulting in its frequent reading as a play that transcends history,
12 characterised by David Scott Kastan as existing in "a time that offers neither restoration nor
13 regeneration but only defeat and destruction" (102). However, just as the play has been
14 shown to engage closely with early Jacobean questions of British unification, I suggest a
15 particular textual quirk elided by subsequent editorial practice may have, like the presence of
16 Skalliger in *Leir*, resonated with historical dissonance for the playbook's first readers in
17 1608-09.
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35 According to Peter Blayney, few early modern printed playtexts contain as many
36 "self-evident blunders" as the first quarto of *King Lear* (*Texts* 184; cited in Clegg, 162). For
37 editors, one of the least troubling of these "blunders" occurs during Lear's recognition of his
38 own rising madness: "O how this mother swels vp toward my hart / *Historica passio* downe
39 thou climing sorrow" (sig. E4r). This term, "*Historica passio*", is almost universally emended
40 in modern editions to "*Hysterica passio*".²³ However, early modern stationers allowed the
41 original reading to stand until F4 in 1685 (Halpern 215), suggesting that Q1's "*historica*"
42 was, or could be, received as not a misprint but as invoking some sense of historicity.²⁴ This
43 association is perhaps strengthened by the phrase's appearance in Q1 only three lines below
44 the running title, "*The Historie of King Lear*". I suggest that *historica passio* may be read as a
45 coinage that, even if unfamiliar, could cause the reader to reflect upon its possible meanings,
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3 provoking reflection on the play's representations of "true chronicle history", inviting a
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5 reading of its "division of the kingdoms" (sig. B1r) not only as a historical or topical
6
7 reference, but resonant of a terminal division between Brutus and lived history.
8
9

10 Richard Halpern, the only critic I have identified to accept and address the original
11
12 reading, imagines *historica passio* as "the bearing or enduring or manifestation of historical
13
14 force through one's person and one's body", produced by the tensions of representation
15
16 between dramatic character and the "historical actants – collective or impersonal" those
17
18 characters represent (217). Halpern is discussing forces of historical change relevant to his
19
20 reading of the play as exploring "tension between feudal and proto-capitalist cultures" (216),
21
22 but the physicality of his formulation is evocative and useful to the present reading, in which
23
24 *King Lear* is read in the context of the Brutus histories' erosion. *Historica passio* thus
25
26 becomes a term suggesting embodied historiographic crisis: a once-historical figure's
27
28 agonistic experience of the process by which he becomes a fictional non-being.
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33 *King Lear* was published in 1608, contemporaneous with parliament's final rejection
34
35 of James's union proposals, "perhaps the most humiliating rebuff suffered by a Stuart king
36
37 from the House of Commons" before the 1640s (Russell 62). As noted, readings of the play
38
39 as a "union text" are well-served. Analyses broadly pivot upon the question of whether *King*
40
41 *Lear* presents Lear as James's disastrous antithesis, thereby supporting the union project, or
42
43 as an analogue critiquing his perceived absolutism. Both readings are possible, of course, and
44
45 Annabel Patterson highlights the play's "flexible hermeneutics" (107). However, few have
46
47 examined the play as a putatively historical narrative, the possible meanings of its location in
48
49 British antiquity or the ways it might resonate with the Brutus controversy. Reading closely
50
51 between the presentation of the Brutus histories in *Trivmphes* and *King Lear*, Richard Dutton
52
53 notes that, in *Trivmphes*, "Brute rejoices in the power of poetry that has revived the
54
55 characters of ancient legends, allowing them to witness the final resolution of the discord
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3 which their own actions had created” (142). *King Lear*, however, not only cancels the Brutan
4 line through the childless deaths of Regan and Cornwall, but enacts “violence” upon the
5 Brutan histories “as a whole” (146); that is, to their structural and historiographic integrity.
6
7 As de Grazia notes, critics since the seventeenth century have been aware that Cordelia’s
8 death represented a striking turn from the play’s chronicle sources (149). Yet it is Regan and
9 Cornwall’s deaths, more than those of Lear and Cordelia, that damage the play’s usefulness
10 as a potential pro-union text; they were the parents of Cunedagus, the king succeeding
11 Cordelia, and putative ancestor of James (Schwyzer 40-41). To read *King Lear* in 1608 was to
12 encounter all aspects of this negative conjuration in the aftermath of failed union. Finally,
13 *King Lear*’s language of negation, its insistence that “nothing can come of nothing” (sig.
14 B2r), had the potential to work upon a reader’s perception of Brutan historicity.

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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.²⁵ 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

1
2
3 short, for some of its first readers *King Lear* may have appeared disturbingly aware of its
4
5 collapsing historiographic macrostructure. Reading *King Lear* in this context invites the
6
7 strange question of how it might feel physically to suffer the kind of historiographic rejection
8
9 the Brutan histories were undergoing, a *historica passio* – Halpern’s “manifestation of
10
11 historical force through one’s person and one’s body” – and how that suffering might be
12
13 expressed.
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16
17 In this reading, Lear embodies what Ross characterises as the unhappy loss of Brutan
18
19 history, as if the histories themselves could physically and emotionally experience their own
20
21 implosion into the “vast blanke” of which Edmund Bolton had warned. Ross frames the
22
23 Brutan histories’ critics as thankless, warning that “[i]f they ungratefully reject it ... they
24
25 unhappily lose it” (trans. Sutton); Lear also fixates on gratitude and loss. Complaining that
26
27 his daughters’ ingratitude has “wrencht my frame of nature from the fixt place” (sig. D2r), he
28
29 defiantly pledges to reclaim the status of king that he has surrendered, and to “resume the
30
31 shape which thou dost think I have cast off forever” (sig. D2v). Here, Lear’s words also
32
33 resonate with those fighting to sustain the Brutan histories within the “fixt place” of English
34
35 time and universal history from which they were being “wrencht” and in which they had only
36
37 ever been a forged entry. In his madness, Lear, too, denies forgery, crying “they cannot touch
38
39 me for coyning. I am the king himself” (sig. I3v), evoking a monarch’s authority to licence
40
41 the creation of money yet also inviting the double sense that the “king himself” is counterfeit.
42
43 The *historica passio*, however, overpowers these objections.
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50 At York in 1486, in *Gorboduc*, in Elizabeth I’s entry to Norwich, and in *Triumphs* in
51
52 1605, Brutan figures and narratives were used in performances before, or invoking, the
53
54 monarch in order to navigate questions of local or national transformation. These figures
55
56 often spoke a language of temporal resilience and as entities that had endured across
57
58 millennia. In Lear we see this transtemporal privilege and authority collapse:
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5 Doth any here know mee? why this is not *Lear*, doth *Lear* walke thus? speake thus?
6
7 where are his eyes, either his notion, weaknes, or his discernings are lethergie,
8
9 sleeping, or wakeing; ha! sure tis not so, who is it that can tell me who I am?
10
11
12 *Lears* shadow. (sig. D1v)
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17 In the Norwich entry, King Gurgunt has the temporal resilience “in presence to appear”
18 before the monarch after “[t]wo thousand yeares welnye in silence lurking still” (sig. B3r) in
19 order to assert his Brutan lineage and that of his descendants, just as Ebrauk had declared
20 himself the source of Henry VII’s “progenie” at York. Lear, in contrast, has only questions,
21 and anxiously calls for the renewed remembrance of an identity that appears to be slipping
22 from him. Similarly, Brute’s announcement in *Trivmphes* that “after so long slumbring in our
23 toombes / Such multitudes of yeares, rich poesie ... does reuiue vs” (sig. B3r) repeats
24 Gurgunt’s formula of a vital awakening. Lear, experiencing *historica passio*, cannot discern
25 between “sleeping, or wakeing”. The historiographic force that had enabled Gurgunt’s
26 “presence” and Brute’s revivification is terminally weakened. Lear cannot define himself
27 and, less than an embodied Brutan founder or inhabitant of lived history, he has become
28 “*Lears* shadow” or, to cite *No-body and Some-body*, a “shadowes shadow” (sig. A2v), a
29 secondary effect of something that is itself without substance, the nothing that comes of
30 nothing. Lear’s authority thus collapses into an impotent stammer: “I will haue such reuenges
31 on you both, / That all the world shall, I will doe such things, / What they are yet I know not,
32 but they shalbe / The terrors of the earth, you thinke ile weepe” (sig. F2v-F3r). Without
33 historical authority Lear becomes incoherent, intermingling Jacobean and Brutan questions of
34 power. When Lear complains that “[t]hey told me I was every thing, tis a lye” (sig. I3v),
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3 Brute as rejected Brutan founder, and James, rejected British unifier and notional occupant of
4
5 *Triumphs*'s empty chair, might have sympathised.
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8 It is not only Lear but his fellow Brutans and their containing narrative that are
9
10 subject to eradication. Attacking Cordelia, the woman who in the Brutan histories was to
11
12 become his royal successor, Lear berates her "little seeming substance" (sig. B3v), claiming
13
14 that "we have no such daughter" (sig. B4v), configuring her first as flimsily transparent, then
15
16 in some way non-existent. Even Albany, representative of James's Scotland and the only
17
18 Brutan to survive, exclaims that he too is "almost ready to dissolve" (sig. L2v). When the
19
20 potential for futurity is restored at the play's conclusion, this is achieved through the Brutan
21
22 histories' displacement by a synthesis of characters drawn from a subplot lifted from Philip
23
24 Sidney's *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* and a more securely historical Anglo-Saxon
25
26 dynasty. *King Lear*'s Gloucester subplot is adapted from the *Arcadia*'s "story of the
27
28 Paphlagonian King and his two sons" (Dutton 147). Dutton also notes that Shakespeare's
29
30 choice of the name of Gloucester's son Edgar gestures towards an Anglo-Saxon king with a
31
32 claim to being "the first historical (as distinct from mythological) King of Britain" (148).
33
34 This realignment may also have resonated with Richard Verstegan's contemporaneous
35
36 *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (1605), which argued that the Saxons, rather than the
37
38 ancient Brutans were "the racial and cultural source of modern England" (Escobdeo,
39
40 "Britannia" 75). Yet, just as the presence of Skalliger might trigger readerly preoccupations
41
42 with the Brutan histories' chronological and historiographic security in *Leir*, it is the *Arcadia*-
43
44 derived subplot that can be perceived as driving *King Lear*'s swerve from Brutan continuity.
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50
51 Sidney's hugely popular and influential romance received its first seventeenth-century
52
53 edition in 1605 and served as a source for several contemporary plays.²⁶ Shakespeare's use of
54
55 Sidney's romance was, in literary terms, topical. As has been noted, *King Lear* cancels
56
57 historical continuity through the killing of Cordelia before she can become queen and through
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1
2
3 the deaths of Cornwall and Regan as the parents of the future king, Cunedagus. Lear's death,
4 too, represents a slippage from the Brutan histories. He dies without being restored to the
5 throne, his and Cordelia's invasion of Britain having been defeated in direct contradiction of
6 tradition. All of these events, the defeat of Lear and Cordelia, Cordelia's execution, even the
7 poisoning of Regan by her sister, are caused by the intervention of a non-Brutan character,
8 Edmund, based on the *Arcadia's* Plexirtus, the illegitimate "hard-harted vngratefulnes of a
9 sonne" of the king of Paphlagonia (1593; f. 69v). In *King Lear*, an illegitimate villain derails
10 an illegitimate history.
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21 It is Edmund who leads the army that defeats Lear and Cordelia's invasion, his
22 centrality to the victory emblematised through his entrance "with Lear and Cordelia
23 prisoners" following the battle; it is Edmund who orders Cordelia's execution (sig. K4r); his
24 dual seduction triggering the rivalry between Goneril and Regan that leads to the sisters'
25 deaths – as he recognises, "one the other poysoned for my sake, / And after slue her selfe"
26 (sig. L3r).²⁷ His function within the subplot gradually insinuates its nihilistic presence into
27 *King Lear's* wider structure, wrecking the Brutan histories' macro-narrative and reducing
28 their inhabitants to a pile of corpses; "The bodies of Gonorill and Regan are brought in" (sig.
29 L3r), "Enter Lear with Cordelia in his armes" (sig. L3v). If, at the play's end, not only
30 Cordelia but everything around her will "come no more" (sig. L4r), this is largely Edmund's
31 doing. Thus the cancellation of Lear and his daughters' futurity is brought about by a
32 character representing fictionality, a force more powerful than the Brutan histories and,
33 indeed, the force from which they had emerged via Geoffrey of Monmouth's ingenious and
34 imagined *liber vetustissimus*.
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53 At Lear's death, the non-Brutan Kent, as if speaking to those readers still shoring up
54 their Brutan faith, counsels Edgar to allow Lear to die, to "let him passe", marvelling that
55 "the wonder is, he hath endured so long" (sig. L4r). Exasperated sceptics, for whom Lear and
56
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1
2
3 the Brutan histories were manifest fictions, might have agreed. After almost five centuries of
4 cultural utility, King Lear's greatest visibility and historiographic resonance in drama and
5
6 public life coincided with the moment at which the historicity underwriting that very utility
7
8 was being rejected. As the appended chart shows, drama of the 1620s and 1630s saw only
9
10 sporadic engagement with Brutan themes—and did so in very different ways to *Leir* and *King*
11
12 *Lear*. Thus early Jacobean pageantry, performances and playbooks provide evidence of the
13
14 last sustained output of Brutan drama in the early modern period. This output, or its possible
15
16 reception, was deeply equivocal. I have argued that, in *Leir*, the presence of Skalliger may
17
18 have foregrounded the play's temporal dislocation, and that, in *King Lear*, the accelerating
19
20 erosion of this same historicity runs parallel to the aftermath of James's failed reunion
21
22 project, his own *historica passio*. Without the authority of the Brutan histories the division of
23
24 the kingdoms was an originary state, not a royal decree. No king, Lear or James, could
25
26 damage or repair a union that had never been.
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37
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39
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41
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43
44 responses of my examiners, Andrew Hadfield and Andy Kesson. Finally, thank you to
45
46 *Shakespeare's* anonymous readers, who (once again) have suggested essential revisions and
47
48 spurred me to productive second thoughts.
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52 **Appendix: Brutan Drama in Performance and Print, 1486-1634**

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56 The following chart is indebted to the table of pre-conquest drama in Gordon McMullan's
57
58 "The Colonisation of Britain on the Early Modern Stage" (139-40); however, I focus here
59
60 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. Finally, whilst a number of Lord Mayor's Shows, particularly from the Jacobean and Caroline periods, make occasional use of Brutan terms such as "Troinovant" or "Lud's Town" for London, these have not been included unless featuring personifications of Brutan figures or contextual reference to Brutan events or narratives. For example, John Webster's *Monuments of Honour* (1624) features a personification of Troinovant but no reference to the name's Brutan origins; conversely, Thomas Heywood's *Londini Speculum* (1637) includes a paratextual synopsis of London's Brutan origins yet these do not feature in the pageant itself, a useful example of how the shaping of a text for publication might create a markedly different historiographic context from that available to spectators.

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.
<i>Gorboduc</i> (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

<i>The Joyful Receiving of the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty</i> (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
<i>King Ebrauk with All His Sons</i> (performance recorded in BL: Harley MS. 2125, f. 43*)	perf. 1589	Performers unknown; performed at Chester before the Earl of Derby	Anon.
<i>Locrine</i> (text extant)	perf. c. 1590 pub. 1595	Unknown	auth. anon.; pub. Thomas Creede
<i>Guthlack</i> (Cutlack) (recorded in Philip Henslowe's <i>Diary</i>)	perf. 1594	Admiral's Men; Rose playhouse	Anon.
<i>Leir</i> (text extant)	perf. 1594 pub. 1605	Queen's Men	auth. anon.; pub. John Wright
<i>King Lud</i> (Henslowe)	perf. 1594	Sussex's Men; Rose playhouse	Anon.
<i>2 Seven Deadly Sins</i> ²⁸ (plot recorded in Dulwich College, MS xix)	perf. c. 1597	see note	Anon.
<i>Mulmutius Dunwallow</i> (Henslowe)	perf. 1598	Admiral's Men; Rose playhouse	William Rankin
<i>The Conquest of Brute</i> (Henslowe)	perf. 1598	Admiral's Men; Rose playhouse	John Day and Henry Chettle
<i>Brute Greenshield</i> (Henslowe)	perf. 1599	Admiral's Men; Rose playhouse	Anon.
<i>Ferrex & Porrex</i> (Henslowe)	perf. 1600	Admiral's Men; Rose playhouse	William Haughton
<i>The Triumphs of Re-united Britania</i> (text extant)	perf. 1605; pub. 1605	Lord Mayor's Show (sponsored by the Merchant Taylors' Company)	auth. Anthony Munday; pub. William Jaggard
<i>No-body and Some-body</i> (text extant)	c. 1604; pub. 1606	Queen Anna's Men; Unknown	auth. anon.; pub. John Trundle
<i>King Lear</i> (text extant)	perf. 1606; pub. 1608	The King's Men; Globe playhouse and Whitehall Banqueting House	auth. William Shakespeare; pub. Nathaniel Butter

<i>Belynus (&) Brennus</i> (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.
<i>Londons Love to the Royal Prince Henry</i> (text extant)	perf. 1610; pub. 1610	Royal Entertainment	auth. Anthony Munday; pub. Nathaniel Fosbrooke
<i>Cymbeline</i> (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
<i>Fuimus Troes</i> (text extant)	perf. c. 1611-32; pub. 1633	"Gentleman students"; Magdalen College, Oxford	auth. attributed to Jasper Fisher; pub. Robert Allott
<i>Albions Trivmph</i> (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
<i>A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle</i> (<i>Comus</i>) (text extant)	perf. 1634; pub. 1637	perf. by members of the Castlehaven family and household; Ludlow Castle	auth. John Milton; pub. Humphrey Robinson
<i>Madon, King of Britain (Madan?)</i>	perf. unknown; Stationers' Register entry: 1660	Unknown	Attributed to Francis Beaumont ²⁹

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

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4 Forse provides a recent summary of work on *King Lear*'s Jacobean contexts (64), citing Farley-
5 Hills; Patterson, 106–09; Foakes's Introduction; and Schwyzer.
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8
9 ² The adoption of members of the Trojan diaspora in order to establish origins was not unusual for
10 Europe's "newly emergent nations" seeking "classical glory" (Weijer 45).
11

12
13 ³ The term *ex nihilo* has been applied to Geoffrey's creation of the *Historia* by several critics,
14 including Pace 54 and Davies 4.
15
16

17
18 ⁴ Brutan themes had long served English interests. In 1301, Edward I wrote a letter to the Pope
19 defending his right to Scotland via reference to Brutan history (MacColl 257). His claim centred
20 on the precedence of Brute's son Lochrine over the younger Albanacht, inheritor of northern Britain
21 and, therefore, Scotland.
22
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24

25
26 ⁵ The phrase "Brutan Histories" is used in early modern print, in Richard Harvey's vehemently pro-
27 Brutan *Philadelphus*, wherein Harvey complains of "outlandish intruders" attempting to "vsurpe
28 the censure of the Brutan Histories" (sig. C3r).
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33 ⁶ A 1587 Latin edition of the *Historia* published by Jerome Commelin in Heidelberg became the
34 standard edition in England (Escobedo, "Britannia" 63).
35

36
37 ⁷ For this account Fox cites BL, Additional MS, 15917; f.5.

38
39 ⁸ Scottish antiquity was provided by Hector Boece in his *Scotorum Historiae* (Edinburgh, 1540)
40 which, like Geoffrey's *Historia*, claimed access to previously unknown sources (Mason 65).
41

42
43 ⁹ Some examples of this which are pertinent to my own thesis include Escobedo, *Historical Loss*;
44 Hadfield; Helgerson; Kerrigan; Kumar; and McEachern.
45

46
47 ¹⁰ The term "textual communities" is cited by Amy Noelle Vines. Vines attributes the term to Brian
48 Stock, who "presents a model of the text's role as a force which offers organisation and
49 cohesiveness to a group of people" thus providing "a useful tool in examining patterns in medieval
50 readership" (qtd. in Vines 71).
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53

54
55 ¹¹ Henry visited Cambridge, Huntingdon, and Stamford, although these pageants are not recorded;
56 Lincoln (Meagher 48); Nottingham; York (49); Worcester (61); Hereford (67); Gloucester (68);
57 Bristol (69).
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4 12 In the event, Gurgunt's speech was cancelled "by reason of a showre of raine" (sig. B2v).
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6
7 13 This episode also usefully argues for the term "Brutan histories". Gurgunt is an invention of
8
9 Geoffrey of Monmouth, but his founding of Norwich is a much later, anonymous tradition.
10
11 14 For a taxonomy of drama and performances featuring Brutan figures or narratives, including the
12
13 seven Brutan plays recorded by Henslowe in his Diary, see Appendix One.
14
15 15 Throughout *Roman Invasions*, John Curran argues that English competition with Rome was the
16
17 driving motivation for the *Historia* and early modern depictions of the Brutan histories.
18
19 16 Edmund Bolton's *Hypercritica* (c. 1618; pub. 1722); qtd in MacDougall 23.
20
21 17 Ross's mention of barbershops is intriguing; Fox notes that these "acted both as centres of news and
22
23 gossip and as places where newsletters and pamphlets might be seen" and read aloud for the
24
25 benefit of non-readers (39).
26
27 18 This event and its repercussions had been portrayed in the Brutan play *Lochrine* (c. 1590; pub. 1595).
28
29 19 This was a huge print run in comparison with those given to playbooks and other non-official
30
31 printed books, which were restricted by "guild regulations to a "maximum press run of 1,250 to
32
33 1,500 copies for most edition" (Farmer and Lesser 17-18).
34
35 20 Royal MS 18 B XV (fol. 23v, ll. 12-14).
36
37 21 A further topical motive for publication could have been the birth of James and Anna's daughter,
38
39 Mary. Mary was not only the first Stuart born in England, and the first English royal birth since
40
41 1537, she was – in terms of James's desired union – the first "British" royal child. *Leir*, which
42
43 concerns the restorative reunion of Britain through the joint action of a British king and his
44
45 youngest daughter certainly chimes with this moment. On the fifth of May 1605, following much
46
47 national celebration, Mary was baptised at Greenwich palace (Barroll 106). Three days later, *Leir*
48
49 was registered for publication.
50
51 22 Scaliger senior was certainly on dramatists' radars; in *Wits Miserie*, Thomas Lodge interrupts a
52
53 bawdy tale, sarcastically claiming himself "afraid that Iulius Scaliger should haue cause to checke
54
55 mée of [for] teaching sinne" (f. 39); similarly, George Chapman attacked Scaliger as "soule-blind"
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3
4 for his “impalsied diminution of Homer” (sig. A3v), although the contingency of this judgement is
5
6 demonstrated by its appearance in Chapman’s own Homeric effort, *Achilles Shield* (1598).
7
- 8
9 ²³ “Hysterica passio”, the term for a medical cause of apparent demonic possession, as Kaara Peterson
10 has noted, has long been established as deriving from one of *King Lear*’s sources, Samuel
11 Harsnett’s *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603; f. 25) (2).
12
- 13
14
15 ²⁴ F3’s amendment to “Hystorica” (Halio 67), i.e. adjusting the spelling but retaining the likely
16 meaning, perhaps strengthens the argument that the phrase was at one moment at least understood
17 as deriving from the etymology of narrative and historiography.
18
19
- 20
21 ²⁵ This may have resonated in other ways. As previously noted, James and Anna’s daughter Mary had
22 been born in May 1605. Mary died on 16 September 1607 (Weir 251). Two months later, on
23 November 26, *King Lear* was logged with the Stationers’ Register (*DEEP* ref. 517).
24
25
- 26
27 ²⁶ These include John Day’s *The Isle of Gulls* (perf. and pub. 1606); John Fletcher’s *The Faithful*
28 *Shepherdess* (perf. 1608; pub. 1610) and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *Cupid’s Revenge*
29 (perf. 1608; pub. 1615).
30
31
- 32
33
34 ²⁷ Even the Duke of Cornwall’s death at the hands of a servant is a result of his interference with
35 Gloucester, another Sidnean figure.
36
- 37
38 ²⁸ The dating and company attribution of this manuscript “plot” of players’ entrances and exits
39 surviving in Philip Henslowe’s papers (Dulwich College, MS xix) in controversial; see Kathman;
40 Gurr. Wiggins follows Kathman in dating and company attribution (3: ref 1065).
41
42
- 43
44 ²⁹ This attribution is doubtful, given that the same Stationers’ Register entry contains several unlikely
45 ascriptions, including several plays assigned to Shakespeare (Wiggins 4: ref. 1608).
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