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Kingship and tyranny in Beunans Ke and Beunans Meriasek

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Supervised by Professor Helen Fulton and Professor Ad Putter

University of Bristol, 2019

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol for the award of Master of Philosophy from
the Faculty of Arts, Centre for Medieval Studies, March 2019

Abstract

This study concerns the depiction of kingship and tyranny in the Cornish hagiographic miracle plays of the cycles *Beunans Ke* and *Beunans Meriasek*, exploring how characters of legendary kings such as Arthur in the cycle *Beunans Ke* and the tyrant Teudar- who appears in both *Beunans Meriasek* and *Beunans Ke*- provide paradigms of idealised kingship and its antithesis, and how these characterisations may have resonated with a Cornish audience. I examine how the portrayal of saints and lay lords in the cycles exemplifies a tacit, passive yet provocative resistance to tyranny, most especially when a tyrant encroaches upon the liberties, customs and privileges of the Church.

I consider how the cycles portray the issues at the core of worldly lay authority in their portrayal of rulers and tyrants, and I explore how aspects of dissent and resistance against tyranny can intersect with the plays' established Cornish identity, promulgation of religious orthodoxy and veneration for the Church. By using available archival evidence of the plays' production and performance, and by employing a historicist reading of the plays alongside historical and historiographical accounts and sources, I will demonstrate that the anti-Tudor, anti-Anglo-centrism and unrest which was prevalent in Cornwall throughout this turbulent period is reflected within the action, allegory and subtexts of the plays and is therefore a valuable consideration in their thorough reading. With the relatively recent discovery of *Beunans Ke* (in 2000)- a play cycle whose heroes demonstrate dissent, both passively and violently, against tyrannical authority- it can be argued that there is presently scope for further assessment of the portrayal the subject-church-ruler dynamics within these works.

Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University of Bristol 's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: DATE:.....

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List of abbreviations

BK *Beunans Ke*

BM *Beunans Meriasek*

HRB *Historia Regum Britanniae, Geoffrey of Monmouth*

LA *Legenda Aurea*

Introduction

This thesis will be principally centred around two hagiographical miracle play cycles from early Tudor Cornwall: *Beunans Meriasek* (circa 1504) and *Beunans Ke* (circa 1500), and the ways in which these can be seen to demonstrate pronounced themes of kingship, governance, rule, and tyrannical corruption from outside forces; whether they be foreign tyrants, suppressive or corrupt religious policies, or even demons and dragons (often seen as a metaphor for the satanic in medieval folklore). The Cornish ‘guary’ miracle plays were performed at the Plen-an-Gwarry in St Just in Penwith and at other plen-an-guary sites across Cornwall, such as the Perran Round of Rose (near Perranporth). Both *BM* and *BK* also display markedly dissenting sentiments towards the contemporary Tudor royal authority, going as far as to feature what may very likely have been interpreted as a villainous pastiche of King Henry VII in the person of the tyrannical King Teudar, who rigorously persecutes the titular saints. The conservative Christian values of the saints and their prominent role throughout the plays serve to emphasise the venerated position of Glasney within Cornish society and thus provide an identifying ethos for the audience of the plays. I intend to demonstrate how, when appraising both *BK* and *BM*, an over-arching theme of the conflict between just rule and tyranny emerges which performs a similarly liminal communal function. More specifically, the plays demonstrate a struggle between good Christian rule and tyranny which abuses the Christian foundations of medieval rulership, where characters like Teudar, the Tyrant, Constantine, and even Arthur himself, demonstrate how, without the guidance of and due veneration for God and the Church, worldly rulers are inevitably led astray leading to poor governance and disquiet in Cornwall, Britain, and further afield. Within the exegesis of the plays, good, pious rule on the part of a lay lord becomes as much the interest of (the commons of) the contemporary Cornish audience as just governance and respect for the ancient customs and rights of the region. And, vicariously, this investment in the spiritual health of the country and its ruling elite is portrayed as of primary interest to the clergy of Glasney - justifying the involvement of religious houses such as Glasney with the politics and safeguarding of the realm.¹ As respect for local customs and for good Christian practices are inextricably linked throughout the plays, the discussion of aspects of dissent and regional identity expressed within them must therefore benefit from consideration of both

¹ This active involvement in the affairs of the state on the part of the Cornish clergy, including those at Glasney, is evidenced historically in this period by clergymen such as John Oby, Provost of Glasney and his apparent involvement with the 2nd Cornish rising of 1497, see p. 27.

their socio-political and religious contexts. Of key interest here are the kings and lay lords whom the saints counsel and, at times, combat. In their perilous, and occasionally violent confrontations with overbearing and misguided rulers and tyrants, we are reminded of the long-standing association between Glasney and St. Thomas Becket² – seen by many people in late medieval and Tudor England as the patron saint of customary and clerical rights and the embodiment of lawful opposition to tyranny.³

This dissertation will be divided into a number of sections each concerning primary king or tyrant characters within *BM* or *BK*. As the roles many kings such as Arthur, Messen, and the Duke of Cornwall play within *BM* or *BK* are in part defined by their struggle against a specific opposing lord or tyrant with a hostile set of ideals, such kings will be considered alongside their nemesis within the cycle. Shorter sections concerning the text, sources, and staging of the plays are included between larger sections in order to elucidate aspects of the plays which, whilst beyond the scope of this thesis, can provide a useful insight into the plays' contextual history, performance, and presentation. Olson has posited that *BM* is persistently centred around themes of tyranny and oppression, with all the episodes of the cycle prominently featuring tyrants of some kind, each of whom ultimately face their comeuppance;⁴ whether by divine intervention or, as in the instance of The Duke of Cornwall's clash with Teudar at the end of the first day, by stout Cornish piety combined with righteous force of arms. Throughout all these episodes the principle figures of the titular saints emerge as important intermediaries between the spiritual and the secular, interceding on the part of the Holy Trinity and preventing the laity from falling afoul of spiritual ailments. In so doing, the saints of *BM* and *BK* represent the institution of the Church in Cornwall, and specifically Glasney College - as signified by their founding of several of Glasney's religious houses and sacred sites within the action of the plays.⁵ The College of St. Thomas the Martyr at Glasney in Penryn was the most probable point of origin for all of the extant miracle plays (and the Cornish mystery cycle of *the Ordinalia*, as illustrated by

² 'Thomas Becket who foretold his recovery, and told him on his return west, to found in the woods of Glasney in the episcopal manor of Penryn a collegiate church to the glory of God and in the name of St Thomas the Martyr ...' in James Whetter, *The History of Glasney College* (Cornwall: Tabb House, 1988) pp.42-43.

³ Michael Goodich, *Violence and miracle in the fourteenth century: private grief and public salvation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) pp.14-9.

⁴ Lynette Olson, 'Tyranny in Beunans Meriasek', in *Cornish Studies: Five*, Philip Payton (ed.) (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), pp. 53-54.

⁵ Nicholas Orme and O. J. Padel, *A history of the county of Cornwall: religious history to 1560* (Woodbridge; Rochester: Blackwells, 2010), pp.17-23.

Bakere)⁶ as it is here they were very likely composed and written.⁷ Fletcher has asserted that it is probable the surviving manuscript of *BK* (MSS NLW 23849) was produced in the vicinity of Penryn, though the palaeographical research of Thomas and Williams suggests that it was most likely copied sometime after the destruction of the college in 1545.⁸ Though textual evidence of the Saint plays' productions is sadly limited, it can be reasonably asserted that they would have been performed at *plen-an-gwarrys* either within the manors of Glasney itself, or within the peculiars of Exeter Cathedral and those of its Bishop and Archdeacon.⁹ From 1050 till the formation of the Diocese of Truro in 1876, Cornwall formed an archdeaconry of the Diocese of Exeter, with Exeter Cathedral as its episcopal seat.¹⁰ The Bishop of Exeter's representative in Cornwall was the Archdeacon, whose chief seat, from its foundation (1265) was at Glasney; Glasney College was itself modelled after Exeter Cathedral. Situated in Penryn, at the head of the River Fal estuary, Glasney was at its foundation the largest ecclesiastical house in all of Cornwall.¹¹ A college of secular canons, benefiting from the patronage of 16 parishes, Glasney was a preeminent cultural hub and centre of learning in medieval and early modern Cornwall. It has been suggested that a prominent reason for establishment of Glasney College may have been the awareness, on the part of the Bishops of Exeter, of the difficulties in administering to their culturally and linguistic distinct parishioners in many parts of Cornwall.¹² The concern which the Bishops of Exeter felt towards the somewhat removed saintly cults of their Cornish subjects are reflected by an ordinance given by Bishop John Grandisson (1327-69) in 1330 instructing that the *vitas* of such saints should be copied in triplicate. It is also evident that however popular the production of miracle plays were with the canons of Glasney, the tradition was not always well regarded by the presiding diocesan; Grandisson is known to have banned the production of miracle plays in 1360-1¹³, and as early in Glasney's history as 1287, Bishop

⁶ Jane A. Bakere, *The Cornish Ordinalia - a Critical Study* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980).

⁷ See O. J. Padel, 'Glasney College, Penryn, Cornwall' in *Europe: A Literary History 1348-1418, Vol. III: St Andrews to Finistère*, David Wallace (ed.) (Oxford: OUP, 2016). See also: Thomas Graham and Nicholas Williams (eds.), *Bewnans Ke: the Life of St Kea* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press; National Library of Wales, 2007), pp. xxxix-xlii

⁸ Alan J. Fletcher, 'The Staging of the Middle Cornish Play *Bewnans Ke* ('The Life of St Kea')', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 43 (2013) Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/yearenglstud.43.2013.0156> doi:1.

⁹ Nicholas Orme and Oliver Padel, *A history of the county of Cornwall: religious history to 1560*, (Woodbridge: University of London, Institute for Historical Research, 2010), pp. 21-2.

¹⁰ C. R. Sowell, 'The Collegiate Church of St. Thomas of Glasney', *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, XXV (Truro: Royal Institution of Cornwall, 1936).

¹¹ Nicholas Orme, *Cornwall and the Cross: Christianity, 500-1560* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2007), p.23.

¹² O. J. Padel, *op. cit.*

¹³ Joyce and Newlyn, *Records of Early English Drama: Cornwall* (Toronto Buffalo: University of Toronto and Buffalo, 1999), pp. 503-05.

Peter Quinnell (1280-91) advised against the production of miracle plays as ‘the sacred canons [the statutes of canon law] loathe for such stage plays and shows of derision to be introduced, by which the decency of churches is polluted.’¹⁴ It should be noted that this does not necessarily point to a pre-existing miracle play tradition at Glasney, but is rather evidence for why such plays are not evidenced prior to the 14th Century in Cornwall, as in other places in Britain, since there seems to have been a popular perception amongst many senior English clergy of the 13th Century that such plays were of dubious worth.¹⁵ Although the records of many of Cornwall’s Western parishes are more scant than those of the East – which were in greater proximity to Exeter and therefore received more regular visitations - there is considerable evidence for the popularity of plays such as the miracle plays in many parts of Cornwall in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries, with the Churchwardens’ accounts of numerous parishes listing expenses paid to players, craftsmen, and musicians who had performed, and assizes of ale sold at the feast days on which the plays would have been performed.¹⁶

The sustained references to the role of godly faith and just rule in defeating foreign tyranny in *BM* and *BK* bear additional weight in the context of the violent uprisings of 1497,¹⁷ which likely only shortly preceded the production of these plays. The persistent mockery of the character of King Teudar as a grasping, vain, upstart tyrant - all qualities which had notably been associated with Henry Tudor by his opponents such as the pretender Perkin Warbeck and his followers¹⁸ – supports the argument that *BK* and *BM* may reflect a

¹⁴Alan M. Kent, *The Theatre of Cornwall- space, place, performance* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 2010), p.156.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 156-8.

¹⁶ Evidence of this can be seen in accounts of payments for costumes and props used in the plays, such as: ‘1494-5/ *General Recievers’ Accounts* – CRO: B/Bod/314/3/10 single mb (4 October- 4 October) (*Payments*) ... {item payed to} Wyllyam Carpynter for syluer and the making of [a] Garnement and for colours occupied for dyadems & crownys & such oder {longyng to Cor...} Christi game and for tynfoyle that Iohn Wythyall had of Rafe Stayner – iii s.’ in Joyce and Newlyn, *op. cit.*, pp. 469-70.

¹⁷ Taken collectively, the two Cornish risings of 1497 would have a decimating effect upon the Cornish-speaking communities of West Cornwall who would have made up a large proportion of the audience for *BM* and *BK*. These communal losses would then be further compounded by those incurred in the Prayer Book Rebellion of 1549, a few years after the dissolution of Glasney College. As Stoye notes: ‘The Cornish paid a terrible price for their rebelliousness. Many hundred Cornishmen were killed at Blackheath in 1497; 300-400 more died in Warbeck’s assaults on Exeter later that year; an unknown number were executed after the 1497 risings; seven were hanged in 1548; 2,000 were slaughtered in 1549 ... These figures may not sound very large, but then neither was the total population of Cornwall. And if, as seems probable, a disproportionate number of the casualties came from West Cornwall, then the effect of these periodic blood-lettings on the Cornish-speaking population must have been little short of catastrophic. It is small wonder that traditional Cornish culture eventually collapsed beneath the impact of these successive blows.’ Mark Stoye, *West Britons: Cornish identities and the early modern British state* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p.28.

¹⁸ Ian Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy 1491-1499* (Stroud: 1994), pp.140-148.

growing Cornish antipathy towards the Tudor monarchy, viewed by many dissenters as oppressive, illegitimate and morally bankrupt. At the same time, a primary intention of the plays is also to celebrate some of the founding saints of the Cornish Church and to emphasise the importance of houses such as Glasney to the just and godly governance of Cornwall. This is evidenced by plot elements such as Meriasek's varied travels and miracles in Cornwall in *BM*, events which one does not find in any of the surviving Breton *vitas* of the saint.¹⁹ It should also be noted that St. Kea had pre-existing links to Glasney, the college having been granted most of the parish of St. Kea's estates by its founder, Walter Bronescombe.²⁰ Whilst critiquing the rule of irreligious and greedy monarchs who will not be governed by the wise counsel of the Church and Saints – and by extension, God - the Cornish miracle plays also prophesy the inevitable downfall of such tyrants, and their replacement by rulers who show a due respect for both the Church, and the rights and customs of their subjects. In so doing, the writers of the plays deliberately propagate a popular Cornish regional identity – as distinct from the broader English identity - both as a means of othering their foreign tyrant characters, and as a means of appealing to popular local communal kinship between Cornwall and the institution of Glasney College.

A note on staging and directions

BM, *BK*, and presumably many of the other, now lost, Cornish miracle cycles, were designed to be performed at a *plen-an-gwarry* round theatre. The wide, open-air, open-access nature of the round allowed for complex and large-scale productions involving multiple levels of pavilions and platforms.²¹ Frank has described how the raised position of the audience enabled an elevated perspective from which multiple settings could be presented and scene changes could be affected fluidly:

It made possible a splendid and highly diversified spectacle. It allowed the action of the play to move from station to station without scene-shifting so that the sequence of

¹⁹ Doble has suggested these events in *BM* may have even been adapted from legends surrounding St. Kea, see: Gilbert H. Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall, Padstow and Redruth* (Truro: Parrett & Neeves, 1981), pp. 111-23.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp.219-21.

²¹ Sydney Higgins, *Theatre in the Round: The Staging of Cornish Medieval Drama* (North Carolina: CreateSpace, 2014) pp.76-9.

events could proceed without breaking the illusion no matter where the action occurred. At need, action could even go forward in different places simultaneously.²²

As with miracle plays, staging in *BM* was organised with symbolic as well as functional needs in mind. Heaven is always orientated in the east of the stage, Hell appears to the north.²³ On the first day, the Duke of Brittany introduces the court of Brittany in the south whilst the Duke of Cornwall and Teudar are both placed to the west of the stage.²⁴ Some characters' dramatic entrances and exits are explicitly indicated by the Latin directions, such as the entrance of King Conan '*Hic pombabit Rex Conanus*'²⁵ – Here King Conan will parade. There are also several Latin directions which indicate musical accompaniment.²⁶ The central position of Mary of Camborne's Chapel on both days²⁷ indicates that it was likely both a thematic and visual centrepiece in the drama.

Higgins has suggested that central sets were replaced using mobile platforms, exchanging, for example, the Duke of Brittany's feast in the third scene for a wheeled ship to represent the storm-wracked vessel on which Meriasek is conveyed to Cornwall, and then afterwards replacing this element with a large model rock which could be used variously as a platform, a cave, a spring and a hermitage.²⁸ The multifunctional nature of these devices would certainly have made for some imaginative use of the set, providing a source for many of the miraculous actions and imagery required by the saint characters, as indicated throughout the text.²⁹ Higgins has demonstrated these depictions of miraculous ingenuity through the example of the rock being used as the platform for Meriasek to escape Teudar's torturers by crawling up it onto the conveniently waiting ship which had borne him earlier.³⁰ Afterwards, the same rock platform is used to represent the shore of Brittany bending upwards to receive Meriasek from the ship: '[The rock has bowed down to welcome you to the shore].'³¹ The same model rock platform thus serves as the setting where many of

²² G. Frank, *The Medieval Passion Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p.90.

²³ See fig 1 and 2, p.27, 29.

²⁴ See fig 1, p.27.

²⁵ Myrna Combella-Harris, op. cit. p. 158.

²⁶ Sydney Higgins, op. cit. pp. 80-1.

²⁷ See fig 1 and 2, pp.27, 29.

²⁸ Sydney Higgins, op. cit. pp 82-6.

²⁹ A discussion of the possible design features of these platforms can be found in Alan M. Kent, op. cit., pp.169-74. References to individual instances of miracles described in directions or in the text can be found in Sydney Higgins, *ibid.*, pp. 84-102.

³⁰ Sydney Higgins, *ibid.*, pp 89-91.

³¹ Myrna Combella-Harris, op. cit., *BM*: 1094-5.

Meriasek's miracles are performed. This is most appropriate for a saint who was strongly associated with a legendary great rock in the parish, which Roscarrock informs us still bore his name, the 'Carrek Veryasek'.³² Mobile platforms also perform a vital role in the action of the second play of the *BM* cycle, *Beunans Sylvester*. Meriasek's great mountain (once again likely achieved with the rock platform), upon which he remains standing,³³ is wheeled off and, after Constantine's parade, replaced with a portable gallows with which Constantine's torturers threaten and then martyr a Christian Doctor and an Earl for their refusal to denounce Christ.³⁴ Higgins places the gallows between the position of Heaven (to the east of the stage) and Sylvester's entrance (just to the south).³⁵ Thus the martyrdom takes place in full view of Heaven and also Sylvester and his followers. This enables the character of Jesus, from his Heaven platform, to send forth the angels Michael and Gabriel to interrupt the torturers' desecration of the bodies and collect the souls of the martyrs.³⁶ Sylvester then enters the scene (from which the torturers have now fled) with his followers, meditates on the mercy of God and has the bodies of the martyrs placed in an awaiting tomb platform for burial.³⁷ These examples of inventive use of staging above demonstrate how platforms and other devices were used for both dramatic and thematic effect in productions of *BM*.

BK lacks the staging diagrams of *BM* and we are therefore dependent upon *BK*'s Latin stage directions, as well as indicators given in the dialogue, to determine how *BK* was staged and blocked. Whilst we can gauge very little about how the third day of the cycle was staged due to its missing fragments,³⁸ what does stand out is significant increase in the scale of the action and assembled characters between the first day of the cycle, concerning Kea's struggle against Teudar and his torturers, and the second with its *HRB* inspired courtly setting. Where the action of the first day of the cycle largely revolves around Teudar, Kea, and a group of secondary characters, the second revolves around dozens of named characters who parade and clash in support of their respective liege. It seems likely that this upscaling was deliberate on the part of *BK*'s author, providing a headline event for the festival the cycle was performed at. We can infer from the stage direction's references to 'tentum' that the cycle's

³² Nicholas Orme, *Nicholas Roscarrock's Lives of the saints: Cornwall and Devon* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1992), p. 151.

³³ 'Glory to Christ, Son of a Virgin! The hill is a good thousand paces from the ground to the top./ God will help me./ I will establish my house/ and lay its foundations right away.' *BM*: 1147-1152.

³⁴ *BM*: 1210-1263.

³⁵ Sydney Higgins, op. cit., pp 92-3.

³⁶ *BM*: 1288-1311.

³⁷ *BM*: 1312-1347.

³⁸ See section concerning the structure of *BK* below.

setting, like other guary plays, would have made use of scaffolds to indicate different locations and residences.³⁹ Fletcher notes that references to ‘palaces’ and ‘halls’ in the stage directions likely indicates that individual scaffolds were utilised as part of the play’s set: ‘occasionally a scaffold may be referred to in terms directly evocative of its role in the dramatic narrative. Thus the scaffold of King Arthur is more imposingly referred to, twice as his ‘palace’ (palacium) and once as his ‘hall’ (aula)’.⁴⁰ It is easy then to imagine then how the structures of scaffolds might have been decorated (i.e. in the ‘royal’ regalia of Arthur’s) so as to evoke their implied setting and characterise individual scenes. This spectacle may well have been used to dramatic as well as practical effect, with some scaffold settings being built to more impressive or intimidating scale; for instance, Fletcher asserts that the scaffold which situated Arthur’s court must have been able to accommodate at least 25 actors in one scene.⁴¹

The space of the plen-an-gwary round effectively performed a thematic function, in and of itself. Action performed in any part of the stage was as visible to the actors on the Heaven and Hell platforms as it was to the audience, providing the omniscient characters on these stages (eg. Christ) the opportunity to comment upon and influence these events – whether via intermediary angelic characters or directly, as with Mary’s miraculous intervention in *The Heavenly Hostage* play. The model represented by the miracle play cycle in the round, is that of a world in which the acts of individual characters are judged and appraised by divine and malefic powers, even whilst they occur; a practical demonstration of *deus ex machina*.⁴² Meriasek and his fellow saints have power only through their intercession to Christ and his ascended saints. It is through their recognition of Christ’s literal, as well as metaphorical, presence on stage and their beseeching to him that their miracles are affected. In keeping with the allegorical nature of the plays, the saints’ capacity to help those who come to them as supplicants ultimately amounts to helping these supplicant characters recognise this presence of divine characters also; only then are their cures affected. In this manner, the presence of the divine and malefic characters on stage helps to create a liminal metanarrative, whereby the rejection of the temporal becomes an empowering element of catechises.

³⁹ See directions to ‘*tentum*’ under lines 1633, 2195 in *BK*, (ff.11r, ff.14r).

⁴⁰ Alan J. Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.164.

⁴² For expanded discussion of dramatic devices used to indicate miracles and divine intervention, together with performances and effects of daemons devils and dragons within the production of *Beunans Meriasek* see Alan M. Kent, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-44.

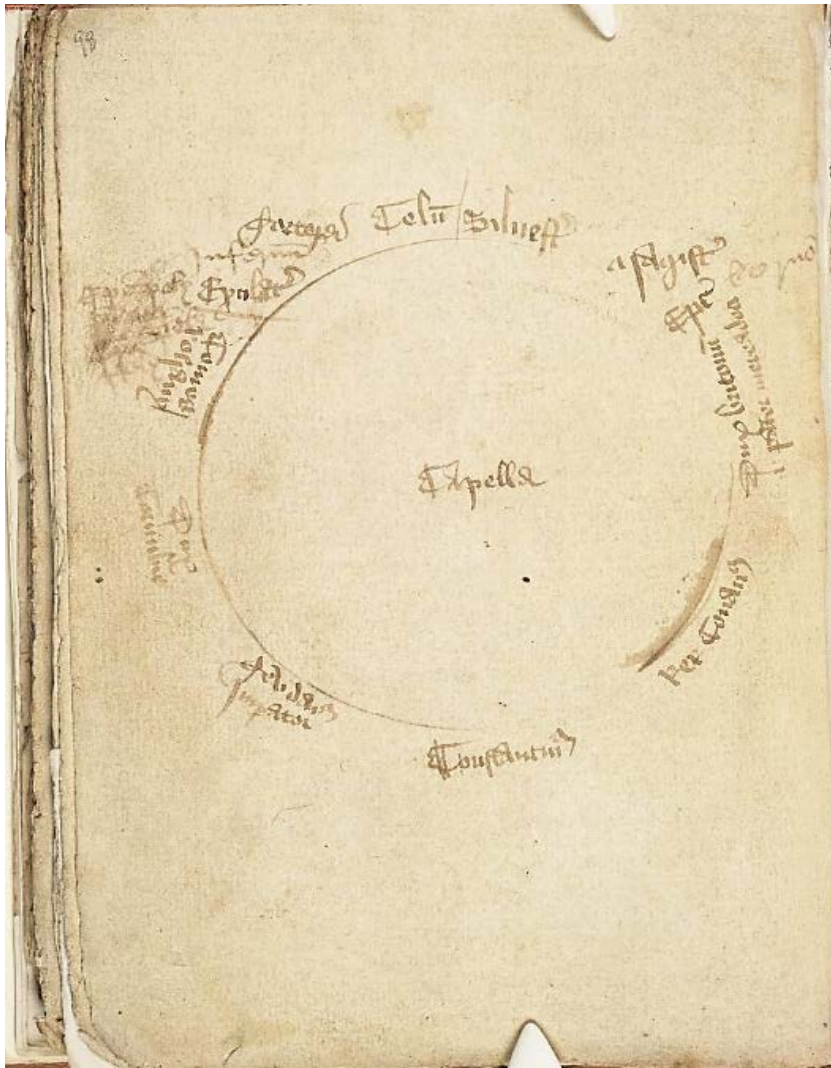


Fig 1: Staging diagram for the first day of *Beunans Meriasek* with dramatis personae and positions (in English and Cornish), clockwise from top: '[Silvester, Schoolmaster, Bishop of Kernow, Duke of Brittany, King Conan, Constantine, Teudar, Duke of Cornwall, Earl of Rohan, Bishop Poly, Outlaws, Hell, Torturers, Heaven]’.

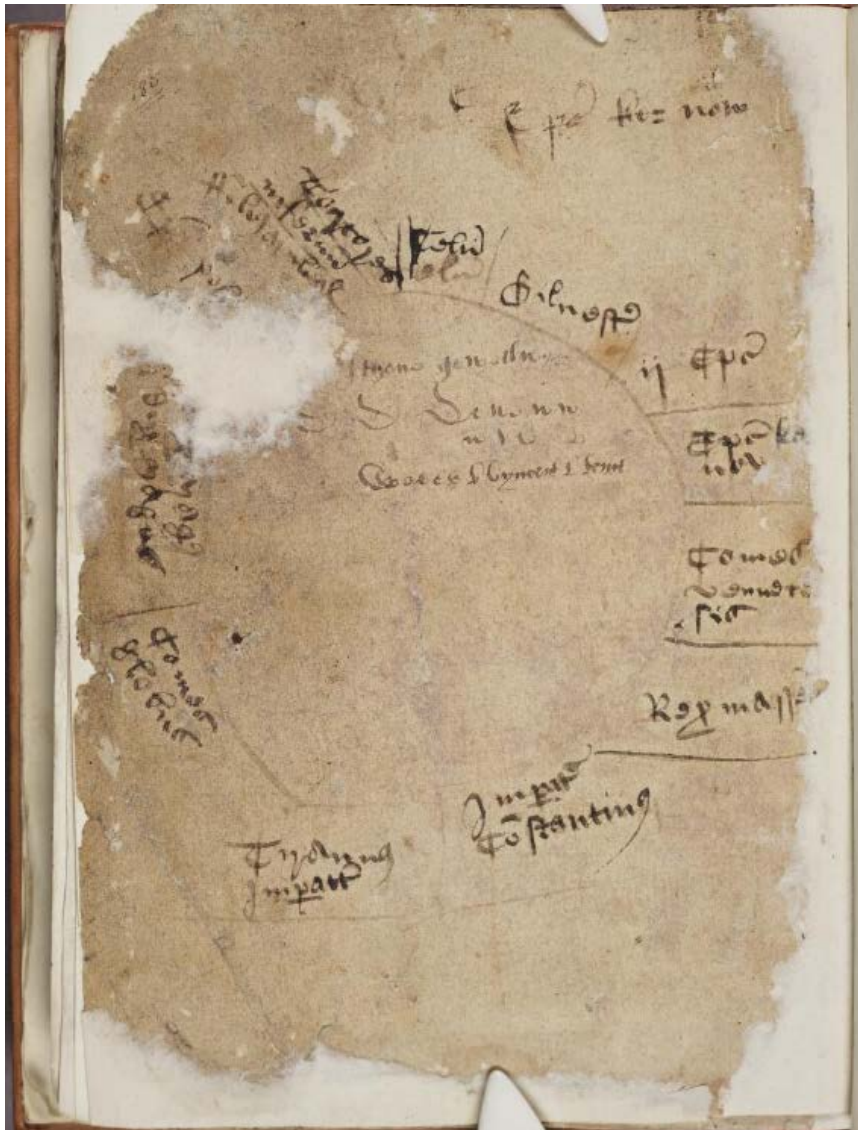


Fig.2: Staging diagram for the second day of *Beunans Meriasek* with dramatis personae and positions (in English and Cornish), clockwise from top: '[Heaven, Silvester, Second Bishop, Earl of Vannes, King Massen, Emperor Constantine, Tyrant Emperor, Earl Globus, First & Second Duke Magus, Bishop of Poly, The Woman's Son, Hell, Torturers]' MS. Aberystwyth, NLW, Peniarth 105, *Beunans Meriasek*, p.180.

A note on the text and sources of *Beunans Ke*

BK survives as a single manuscript copy NLW MS 23849D. It was discovered among the personal papers of Prof. J. E. Caerwyn Williams (1912-99), after these were donated to the National Library by his late widow in 2000. The history of the manuscript up until this point is unknown;⁴³ it is even a mystery how Prof. Williams came to acquire the manuscript in the first instance as there seems to be no record of him having discussed it with any other academic.⁴⁴ The discovery of the text was remarkable, not only in providing the first extensive example of Middle Cornish literature for a century, but also in that it has substantially increased knowledge of the language itself, as many words of the text are otherwise unattested.⁴⁵ A transcription of the cycle was published by Graham Thomas and Nicholas Williams in 2007 under the title *Bewnans Ke – The Life of St Kea*.⁴⁶ NLW MS 23849D, which Thomas and Williams refer to as S, consists of a substantial 3308 fragment of the original cycle *BK*.⁴⁷ The exemplar of S, which they call C, and estimate to have been copied c. 1500,⁴⁸ was itself likely a fragmentary copy of an older manuscript, termed O, as indicated by copies of Latin annotations in places where the text is believed to be deficient, and which do not fit the orthography of S's scribe.⁴⁹ While S lacks a date or copyist's name, based on the palaeography of S Graham and Nicholas have posited a date for the manuscript within the mid-to-late 16th century.⁵⁰ The text is largely the work of a single scribe writing in Tudor secretary script, though there is also the presence of a second hand (also in secretary) which provides glosses of Cornish words in English.⁵¹ Besides the strong evidence that S was an imperfect copy, the manuscript itself has also suffered considerable degradation in places lacks many leaves, as indicated by the original foliation, the scribe complains in ff.2 and 20

⁴³ National Library of Wales, Online MSS Catalogue, *Beunans Ke* (2015) available at:

<https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/early-modern-period/beunans-ke/>

⁴⁴ Graham, Thomas and Nicholas Williams (eds.) op. cit., p. x.

⁴⁵ National Library of Wales, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Graham, Thomas and Nicholas Williams (eds.) op. cit. This is, as of 2018, the only published transcription of *BK*.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. xlv.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. xlv.

⁴⁹ Thomas and Williams note the wide-ranging orthography of CK: 'The scribe's inability to write Cornish correctly is paralleled by his barbarous spelling of Latin.' Ibid., p. xlv.

⁵⁰ Ibid, xlv. Fletcher has also offered a more specific range for the date: 'the hand of the principal scribe of S is more likely of the mid- than late-sixteenth century; a date sometime during the reign of Queen Mary (1553–58) seems equally conceivable, if not, indeed, a date in the 1540s.' Alan J. Fletcher, op. cit., p.157.

⁵¹ As Fletcher notes, the presence of this 2nd scribe who was clearly was familiar with Cornish strongly indicates that the S manuscript was produced, if not in Penryn, then somewhere in Western Cornwall where scribes still had knowledge of the language. Ibid., p. 14.

that their older copy from which they were working was defective.⁵² The play is written in rhymed verse of diverse patterns⁵³ divided into stanzas of four and seven syllables, with the exception of lines 2452-87 which have five each; the stage directions are in Latin.

Despite its regrettable condition, what remains of the *BK* can be highly instructive to discussion of the Cornish conception of kingship and tyranny. *BK* is unique among the extant Cornish miracle plays in that it features what survives as a purely secular episode – although it is probable that the titular saint would have re-entered the story at some, now sadly lost, juncture in the narrative to attempt to counsel and mediate between the warring parties of King Arthur and Mordred.⁵⁴ It is also, notably, the only extant example of medieval Arthurian drama.⁵⁵ The remaining play can be split into two arcs which, given the cyclical nature of the other extant miracle plays, could be argued to constitute two distinct plays of a cycle: the one concerning the miracles of St. Kea in Cornwall and his confrontations with the local tyrant, Teudar, and a second which concerns King Arthur's conquest of Rome after refusing the demands of the Emperor, Lucius Tiberius that Britain pay homage and tithes to Rome, and Mordred's subsequent attempt to usurp Arthur's throne. As the final pages of both episodes are missing it is difficult to determine how exactly the two parts of *BK* match up. However, the evidence of the Breton vita, Albert le Grand's *Life of St Ke* (1659), which Thomas has linked to *BK*,⁵⁶ suggests that the two narrative threads would have been brought together in the final scenes, with St. Kea somehow resolving Arthur's betrayal by Mordred and Guenivere.⁵⁷ The final direction on p.13- following Teudar's ultimate tirade against Christians in his kingdom and his comically addled prayer to Jovyn (Jove) 'Jovyn, pen cog, du bothorag, gwyth ve orth drog! Te, glovorag, re 'foga caught!' ⁵⁸- reads: 'Keladocus [v]enit

⁵² National Library of Wales, op. cit.

⁵³ A full list of *BK*'s verses rhyming patterns can be found in Graham, Thomas and Nicholas Williams (eds.) op. cit., pp. lxxv-lxxviii.

⁵⁴ Basing their assessment of *BK*'s original structure on an amalgamation of the extant exemplar and the more extensive vita by Albert le Grand, Graham and Williams have posited a three day structure for the cycle: '*Third Day*: This would have dealt with events following the failed delegation of Kea and the bishops to reconcile Arthur and Mordred, and Kea's decision to return to Brittany.' Graham, Thomas and Nicholas Williams (eds.), op. cit. xxxiv.

⁵⁵ O. J. Padel, op. cit.

⁵⁶ Graham, Thomas and Nicholas Williams (eds.), op. cit. xxii-xxxiv.

⁵⁷ In this vita, Ke then travels to Brittany from Landegu and only returns to Britain upon the rebellion of Mordredus. Ke is ultimately unsuccessful in saving Arthur and his kingdom, as Mordredus's Saxon allies ultimately join with him and confront Arthur, making it impossible for Ke to negotiate a peaceful solution. However, a measure of the dignity of the royal house is somewhat redeemed when Ke confronts Guenaran for her part in the rebellion and convinces her to retire to a convent. The vita survives in a 1680 edition entitled: *Les Vies des Saints de la Bretagne Armoiique* on pp.549-53. See Thomas Graham, op. cit., pp. xi-xvi.

⁵⁸ 'Jovyn, blockhead, a god of hard hearing, keep me from evil! You, leprous one, damn you!' *BM*, 1247-51.

ad Rege[m]’⁵⁹ and this may well indicate the end of the scene. Yet whether the king Kea visits is Teudar, Arthur, or some other ruler, is unclear from the text. Albert le Grand’s *Life of St Ke*, completes this episode in the saint’s life by having Theodoric - Teudar’s counterpart in the vita - struck down by a mysterious ailment which causes him to reflect upon his crimes against Ke and the Christians in his kingdom. This leads him to summon Ke to be baptised by him and afterwards to give to Ke grants of land and livestock.⁶⁰ Whether this series of events would have played out within the space afforded by the two missing pages of *BK* is difficult to assert with any degree of confidence as, unlike Constantine, Teudar never appears as a redeemable figure in Cornish drama.

The story of Arthur’s rebellion in *BK*, and his nephew Mordred’s subsequent usurpation seems to have been heavily inspired by Geoffrey of Monmouth’s enormously influential *Historia Regum Britanniae (HRB)*.⁶¹ As Padel and Thomas have convincingly demonstrated, the number of shared characters and plot points are too numerous as to be incidental.⁶² It might be mentioned that Arthurian scholars continue to vigorously debate whether Geoffrey of Monmouth’s work itself was his own invention, or whether, as he claimed, it was transcribed and translated from an older Celtic text (probably Old Welsh).⁶³ Geoffrey’s text itself served an important purpose by creating an epic unification myth for the peoples of Britain which identified regional differences whilst creating a precedent for the governance of the entire British Isles by a single line of great kings.⁶⁴ Arthur inherits his right to rule from Uther Pendragon, who is himself the son of the Emperor Constantine II, and grandson of Constantine the Great. Thus, instead of being placed in a purely Celtic context of the great tribal warlord of the old Brythonic legends, Geoffrey identifies Arthur with a more cosmopolitan and courtlier environment as *Arthur Imperator*. In many respects, the Arthur we are presented with in *BK* mirrors the character of the king established by Geoffrey and his near-successors. The Arthur of the *HRB*, like the Arthur of *BK*, receives the vital support of

⁵⁹ MS. Aberystwyth, NLW 23849, Beunans Ke, available online at:

<https://www.llgc.org.uk/en/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/early-modern-period/beunans-ke/>

⁶⁰ Thomas Graham, op. cit., pp. xi-xvi.

⁶¹ ‘There is no doubt that the Arthurian section of the play is based upon Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia* together with some elements from local Cornish traditions concerning Arthur and with some possible contemporary, political references.’ Thomas Graham, op. cit., p. xxx.

⁶² O. J. Padel (2005) op. cit. 108-112.

⁶³ ‘A certain very ancient book written in the British language’ given to him by Archdeacon Walter of Oxford. See Ashe, Geoffrey, “A Certain Very Ancient Book”: Traces of an Arthurian Source in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s History, *Speculum* Vol. 56, No. 2 (The University of Chicago Press, April 1981), pp. 301-323.

⁶⁴ ‘During the same period, Geoffrey’s image of Arthur as king of Britain served to articulate regional relationships and to define concepts of identity and difference within the parameters of a British world.’ Wood, Juliette, op. cit. p.102.

the country's clergy and is characterised by his generosity to his subjects, his respect for their customs and privileges, and his strength as a unifying force that defends his subjects from foreign threats.⁶⁵ It is interesting to note the longstanding tradition of Brythonic Saints, such as Dubricius, who first crowns Arthur in *HRB*, becoming associated with the Arthurian legend as important side characters; a tradition which, as noted, *BK* likely also inherited. As Orme has shown, the *vitas* of Nicholas Roscarrock also demonstrate an enduring tradition of associating regional Cornish saints with King Arthur and his knights in local folklore, as in his lives of St. Cadoc and St. Aurelion.⁶⁶

Arthur and Lucius in *Beunans Ke*

So much of the cultural landscape of Cornwall derives its names and folklore from the Cornish saints, to whom a vast quantity of local legends have been attributed.⁶⁷ However, the figure who has arguably wielded the greatest influence over the Cornish literary imagination is its legendary prince, King Arthur. Cornwall is not alone amongst British regions that have claimed Arthur as a popular folk hero. As Padel has demonstrated, many of medieval Cornwall's most recurring and enduring folktales, such as the legends of Arthur, Tristan and Iseult, and that of the Sunken City can be found in different iterations across the popular traditions of Brythonic nations.⁶⁸ Despite the paucity of early medieval Cornish literary material that has survived in a textual form, Cornish pride and belief in the figure of Arthur as a 'native son' can be well attested, even before the great proliferation of the Arthurian legend by Geoffrey of Monmouth and his successors. This is evidenced in one account from Heriman de Tournai (c.1090-1143) who records how visiting French canons from Laon almost incited a riot in Bodmin when they disputed whether Arthur was still in fact 'yet

⁶⁵Michael D. Reeve (ed.), *Geoffrey of Monmouth: the history of the kings of Britain: an edition and translation of De gestis Britonum (Historia regnum Britanniae)*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), p.149

⁶⁶ Orme, Nicholas (ed.), *Nicholas Roscarrock's lives of the saints: Cornwall and Devon* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1992) pp. 90-2; 122-7.

⁶⁷ The most exacting list of these Saints and their associated legends is to be found in Nicholas Roscarrock's *Lives of the Saints* and Nicholas Orme's edited transcript thereof: Nicholas Orme (ed.), *Nicholas Roscarrock's lives of the saints: Cornwall and Devon* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1992). The work of Canon Doble is also valuable here, see: Doble, Gilbert H., *The Saints of Cornwall, Padstow and Redruth*, (Truro, Parrett & Neeves, 1981). The work of Sabine Baring-Gould on this subject is also of interest although he has been shown to have misappropriated a number of such Cornish *vitas*: Sabine Baring-Gould, *The lives of the saints*, Volume XVI (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1898).

⁶⁸ O. J. Padel, "Oral and literary culture in medieval Cornwall", in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, Helen Fulton (ed.), (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp.98-103.

living' with some indignant Cornish parishioners.⁶⁹ The pre-eminence of Arthuriana in Cornish literature is also apparent from the earliest extant examples thereof. The oldest known surviving Cornish literary manuscript, the *Prophetia Merlini* (c.1141), written by the theologian John of Cornwall,⁷⁰ is a somewhat cryptically esoteric poem recounting a number of prophecies concerning invasions of foreign peoples (including both Saxons and Normans) and trials which will beset the Britons under seven of their kings.⁷¹ In a clear example of how medieval Cornishmen actively engaged in Arthurian myth making, at home and abroad (John studied and worked in Paris), John attributes these prophecies directly to Merlin.⁷² Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully engage with the many discourses surrounding Arthur, his sources and antecedents in Cornwall and its literature, what is of significance here is the manner in which Arthur and other kings act as recognisable models for kingship and tyranny in Tudor Cornish drama. The question of Arthurian authenticity does however carry some important connotations when considering the Cornish saint plays and their portrayal of rulership, especially that of the heavily Arthurian *BK*. As noted, the figure of King Arthur played a great part in the Cornish conception of kingship and Cornish identity but was also a useful propaganda tool for a number of English monarchs, including the Tudors. During his precarious and in many ways unlikely rise to power, Henry Tudor utilised both Brythonic regional iconography and popular folklore in his heraldry, and in his and his followers' rhetoric and proclamations in order to attract as much popular support from these peripheral quarters as possible.⁷³ As Stoye notes, this strategy achieved significant success in Cornwall

⁶⁹ This episode is recorded in Heriman's *De miraculis sanctae Mariae Laudunensis* and described in Thomas Green, *Arthuriana: Early Arthurian Tradition and the Origins of the Legend* (The Linders Press: Lincolnshire, 2009), pp. 79-81.

⁷⁰ The body of the poem is written in Latin hexameters but includes Cornish marginalia and was claimed by John to have been translated from a pre-existing Cornish version. The *Prophetia...* bears a number of similarities to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini* (c.1130) but also appears to have drawn on other sources with less than a third of the prophecies appearing to come from Geoffrey. See: A. G. Rigg, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature, 1066-1422* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) pp. 46-7.

⁷¹ Kent has posited that John's reference to several Old Cornish sources for his text is evidence that 'Cornish literary tradition[s] were thriving around 1150, despite the loss of native noble patronage in light of the Norman Conquest.' If such was indeed the case, then it is a reasonable argument that Arthuriana featured prominently, given that the sources John refers to each apparently relate back to Merlin and Arthur. This view is however challenged by the lack of direct evidence of Merlin in British literature prior to Geoffrey's *Prophetea...* and the significant evidence that Geoffrey was the first to translate Myrddin, from which the name Merlin is derived, as *Merlinus*. See: Alan M, *The Theatre of Cornwall- space, place, performance* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 2010), pp. 76-78; and O. J. Padel, "Recent Work on the Origins of the Arthurian Legend: A Comment", in *Arthuriana*, Vol. 5, No. 3, *The Historical Arthur* (Fall, 1995), pp. 103-114, found at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869128>

⁷² Interestingly, much of John's marginalia also relates a number of the prophecies specifically to topographical and semi-historical events in Cornwall. For a full discussion of the text, see: Michael A. Faletra, 'Merlin in Cornwall: The Source and Contexts of John of Cornwall's *Prophetia Merlini*', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 111, No. 3 (July 2012), pp. 304-338.

⁷³ In addition to Arthur, Henry also notably claimed descent from the legendary Welsh King Cadwallader, and commissioned genealogists to find support for his claim, as the Welsh antiquarian David Powell writing in 1584

and Wales, providing the promise of cultural renewal and the defence of customary privileges for those who supported Henry's claim:

During the 1480s Cornwall provided support for Henry Tudor in his attempts to seize the English throne. Henry, a Welshman by birth, claimed to be descended from King Arthur, and his supporters averred that the return of 'Arthur's line would bring about the Celtic resurgence of ancient prophecy. Such promises did not go entirely unfulfilled; after Henry's triumph at Bosworth many Cornish (and Welsh) gentlemen were richly rewarded. Yet the favours lavished upon the Cornish gentry did nothing to stem the erosion of traditional Cornish identity. Rather, they accelerated that process, drawing the local gentry into a still closer alliance with the central government, and prompting them to jettison their native customs. As a result, the split which already existed between rulers and ruled in West Cornwall grew wider.⁷⁴

As well as describing the growing divisions between an increasingly Anglicised Cornish gentry and the Cornish commons (who comprised the greatest portion of Cornish speaking communities), Stoye here alludes to the ultimately culturally suppressive results of early Tudor policies in Cornwall. Clearly the appropriation of national and regional folk heroes such as Arthur could play an important role both culturally and politically in Tudor rule. It is interesting then to see a portrayal of King Arthur presented alongside a biting mocking satire of Henry VII, 'King Teudar' in *BK*; and to see how Arthur, Teudar, and the other lay lords - who, besides the saints, largely form the plays' principle characters - provide contrasting portrayals of how distinct types of rulers respond to their subjects, the Church, and the laws and traditions of the land.

The entrance of King Arthur on the second day of *BK* introduces him as a warlike and heroic figure, almost deific in his stature and authority. Here is a king who epitomises a British desire for independence, self-governance, and freedom from foreign bondage, but who also expresses a desire for unparalleled, even godlike, status:

ARTHURUS REX BRITANIE: *Peys! Syth Y hot wyld and tam,*
(*que nunc Anglia dicitur*) den ha best peswartrosak,

notes: 'they drew his perfect geneologie from the ancient kings of Brytaine and princes of Wales'. See Marsden, Gordon, 'Henry VII, Miracle King' in *History Today*, Mar2009, Vol. 59 Issue 3, p54-60, retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.bris.idm.oclc.org>.

⁷⁴ Mark Stoye, *op. cit.*, p.52.

I say Arthur is my nam,
 Myghtern bras ha galosak
 Ha conquerror.
 Mara tof ha trewelas,
 ny vyth mab den ou gwelas
 rag [arsevnans] ha terrur.
 War pur nebas lavarow
 me ew den na'n gevas par.
 Ya, ou golag ew garow
 ha'm strykyes a omwel dar,
 in suer heb mar.
 Mara pethaf dywenhys,
 me a'm bues gallos I'n bys.⁷⁵

Such an unapologetically proud and menacing claim to status and power should seem to bear a ready comparison with the arrogant boasts of the tyrannical character of Teudar, as portrayed in both *BK* and *BM*, who likewise professes his right to rule on the basis of martial might and willingness to mete out terrible wrath upon any who might defy him. And yet, Arthur is clearly represented as more than simply a tyrannical caricature. Teudar often emerges as a satirical figure, unable to control his raging emotions, and seems to be fully deserving of mockery and scorn, even that of his servants. By contrast, Arthur, at least in the initial scenes of the Arthurian episode of *BK*, appears to be every inch the mighty king that he claims to be - with the stage directions themselves declaring his skill at arms.⁷⁶ Considering the central and often exalted place of King Arthur in contemporary Cornish folklore, it is difficult to conceive of the character of Arthur being readily received as a tyrannical figure by late medieval or early modern Cornish audiences. Whilst common Cornish audiences cannot have been likely to have responded to the character of Arthur in the same manner they would

⁷⁵ 'ARTHUR KING OF BRITAIN (which is now called England): Peace! Since I command wild and tame, man and four-footed beast, I say Arthur is my name, a great and powerful king, and a conqueror. If I happen to be angry, no human dare look on me, for unease and terror. In a very few words, I am a man who has no equal. Yes, my look is harsh, and my blows appear to be fierce, surely indeed. If I am afflicted, I have power in the world, and my enemies will fare badly.'⁷⁵ – *BK*, 1397- 1412.

⁷⁶ 'Arthor pan v ova angry a the I'n bis the'n yskerans a throkfare.' – '[Arthur, whenever he is angry, comes into the world to the enemies who then suffer for it.]' – *BK*, p. 36.

have responded to Teudar, it should be remembered that the writer (or writers) and producer (or producers) of the exemplar text of *BK*, like Dom. Tonn of *BM*, were almost certainly clergymen, and there are numerous examples of clerical writers portraying a flawed, or tragic Arthur character. Indeed, there are even a number of examples in Latin hagiography which portray Arthur as a villain or a foil to the saintly protagonists.⁷⁷ There are also a number of pieces of post-Galfridian Arthuriana which, whilst not overtly hostile to the figure of Arthur, nevertheless paint the king in a less than flattering light, notably the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (c.1400).⁷⁸ Of interest here too, are the Scottish chronicles, in which Mordred is seen as the rightful heir to the throne and Arthur an illegitimate interloper (and moreover one brought about through the devious magic of a sorcerer).⁷⁹ A number of medieval Welsh Arthurian poems are similarly ambiguous about the characters of Arthur and Mordred (or Medrawt).⁸⁰ The political context in which many Arthuriana chroniclers were writing clearly played an important role in their respective portrayals of the king. For Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing during the turbulent opening years of The Anarchy, the primacy of Arthur's line of succession is of less apparent significance than his ability to unify the conflicting factions of Britain. As Wood notes however, Scottish writers, many of whom were writing in the wake of the Wars of Scottish Independence, had different considerations:

An important dimension of Geoffrey's vision of Arthur was the assumption that unity brought stability under a legitimate king. In Scotland, there was a greater concern with the obligations of the good ruler and with Scottish sovereignty and independence. Concern for the latter helps explain the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory attitudes to Arthur in Scottish chronicles.⁸¹

It is important then to consider how the context in which *BK* was received have influenced the writing and reception of *BK*'s Arthur and Lucius as king or tyrant types. One characteristic of Tudor rule which proved to be a persistent source of unrest in Cornwall, as in other peripheral regions, were the issues of legitimacy and legitimate succession which

⁷⁷O. J. Padel, *Arthur in medieval Welsh literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales press, 2000), pp.37-44.

⁷⁸ This text shares many of the plot elements Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, but has been read as far more critical of the character of Arthur as a single-minded conqueror whose hubris arguably brought about the end of his kingdom. See: Dorsey Armstrong, op. cit.

⁷⁹ In these versions of the legend, such as Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* (c.1447) Mordred is the son of Arthur's half-sister and the Scottish lord Loth, and would therefore possess a better claim to the throne via cognatic inheritance. See Wood, Juliette, 'The Arthurian Legend In Scotland and Cornwall', in Helen Fulton (ed.) *A Companion to Arthurian Literature* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp.106-110.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 103.

⁸¹Ibid, p.108.

surrounded the Tudor dynasty. Whilst legitimacy, by right of birth, nation, and respect for custom, is a consistent theme in both *BM* and *BK* - and a vital element of what characterises just and unjust kingship in the plays - in the surviving *BK* the legitimacy of Arthur's position is never questioned, at least from within his own kingdom. In Arthur's court, his knights and liege lords each in turn voice Arthur's praises and declare their resolution to destroy his enemies wherever they might emerge: 'KAYUS: *Ave patri eterno!* Lowenha thu'm arluth mas! *Rex potens es in bono*/ ha guartheyvas in pub cas,/ certain heb mar.'⁸² Clearly, the support of Arthur's vassals verges on the religious, as indicated by the Latin code-switching of Kay. However, a more conflicted depiction of Arthur does emerge in the scenes at the court of the Emperor Lucius. Indeed, where Arthur and his court are keen to respond aggressively to the implied insult of the requested tithe, the court of Lucius paints a different picture of the relationship between the king and the emperor, seeing Arthur as a capable but brutal tyrant and Lucius as a noble civilising force: 'UNDECIMUS LEGATUS: Hayl, arluth freth/ ha gallasak!/ A un mab leth/ ny ve torrak/ thege parow/ marnys Arthur,/ an dyawl dygnas./ Saw henna suer/ ew guarthyfyas/ ha corf garow.'⁸³

Where *HRB* introduces the threat of Lucius abruptly through a written proclamation, the writer of *BK* instead invests a considerable portion of the play in introducing both courts; establishing the claims, counter-claims, and declarations of both parties. Whilst the rather protracted parade of a host of nobles in both courts, each in turn making a pledge of support to their respective liege, makes for very repetitious reading, it would be both uncharitable and inaccurate to assume these parade scenes exist solely to pad-out the action of the play, as these scenes provide important characterisations of both courts. What is immediately evident from these scenes is the remarkable degree of similarity between the two courts, and especially between the two principle rulers themselves. As we can see in the initial address of Lucius:

Lucius Hiberius Imperator Romanorum:

Pax, omnes Christiani

et barbarorum gentes,

Scoti, Picti, pagani,

⁸² 'KAY: Hail to the eternal father!/ Hail to my good lord!/ You are a king powerful in goodness/ and an overlord in every case,/ most certainly.' - *BK*, 1522-26.

⁸³ 'ELEVENTH LEGATE: [to Lucius] Hail, lord brave/ and powerful!/ Of any baby boy/ no woman was pregnant/ that was equal to you,/ except Arthur,/ the graceless demon./ But that man indeed/ is a tyrant/ and a person uncivilised.' - *BK*, 1780-89.

Quot sub sole viventes!
 Bethan pur glor,
 rag mar tema ha rowtya
 ha ferneuwhy ha stowtya,
 ny vith mab den na'm dowtya
 na whath graflost yn dan dor.
 Me ew Lucie, an empror,
 A'm bes trubyt a pub tyr.
 Drys Bryttyn rag ow onor
 Ha der vestry ha der wyr
 Me a'm byth ef.
 Marrak lym, orth both ow brys,
 Uhal-worthyys of I'n bys,
 Moy agys Du, me a grys,
 In e dron in gwylaskor nef.⁸⁴

Both entrances addresses emphasise the kings' power, primacy and lofty ambitions. Moreover, power over diverse groups of British people is a key aspect to the characters' claim to pre-eminence in both passages. However, despite the similarities there are notable differences between the speeches given by Arthur and by Lucius. Latin code-switching is again employed in the initial stanza, but is used here in self-aggrandisement, emphasising both Lucius's arrogance and foreignness. Arthur, whilst declaring himself to have no equal amongst men, and emphasising his readiness to mete out terrible violence to those who oppose him, does not commit directly the cardinal sin of blasphemy in announcing himself the equal, or better, of God as Lucius brazenly does. And this (arguably rather thin) rhetorical line does serve to distinguish Arthur from *BK* and *BM*'s villainous and antagonistic tyrants somewhat. Though the surviving text of *BK* lacks evidence of the devilish, divine and angelic characters who form a key part of the cast attending the stage throughout the action of *BM*⁸⁵ the implication of this deadly sin by such a character was a clear signifier to audiences of a

⁸⁴ LUCIUS HIBERIUS *Emperor of the Romans*: Peace, all Christians/ and tribes of barbarians,/ Scots, Picts, pagans,/ as many as live under the sun!/ Let them be very docile,/ for if I happen to domineer / and rage and brag,/ there will be no man who does not fear me/ nor even any goblin under the earth./ I am Lucius , the emperor,/ I who have the tribute from every country./ Over Britain for my honour/ and by conquest and by right/ I shall have it./ A keen knight, to my heart's desire,/ highly revered am I in the world,/ more than God, I believe,/ upon his throne in the kingdom of heaven.' - *BK*, 1633-1652.

⁸⁵Sydney Higgins, op. cit., pp. 75-9.

saint play⁸⁶ – Lucius has from his first speech doomed himself and set himself up for a fall. The parade of Lucius’ courtiers is at once similar to and distinct from that of Arthur’s court. Though Lucius’ followers heap every bit as much praise on him as Arthur’s, tellingly their praise is directed largely towards his wealth and finery: ‘Haryl, arluth bold,/ del os *sauns* per!/ Clothys of gold/ ha velvet ker/ eu the aray,/ damask, boytkyn,/ inweth cendal,/ bys ha satynn/ ye porpor pal/ ha pannow gay.’⁸⁷ where Arthur’s followers instead praise his military power and good sense.

Arthur is described with awe by the nearly all of the Senators - who have returned from Arthur’s court bearing his response to the Emperor’s message – as both a great and terrible king, and as a foolish and illegitimate upstart. These mixed responses in turn infuriate the Emperor into a vengeful tirade against Arthur’s character. This represents something of a departure from the *Historia Regnum Britanniae (HRB)* in which no such back-and-forth discussion of Arthur’s response at the Emperor’s court appears, but careful consideration is instead given to the Empire’s levying and wartime preparations.⁸⁸ Similarly, whilst Geoffrey applies considerable attention to Arthur’s wartime council with his Dukes and liegemen prior to Arthur’s declaration of war,⁸⁹ in *BK Arthur*, who has already been assured by each of his men in turn of their loyalty, instead acts independently in rejecting the demands of the Emperor and offering his own grisly threat in return:

Arthuris: Lavar the’th arluth, cosyn:
me re leverys heb flows,
rag an trubut a wovyn
na goyth nahen war nebas ous
the’n stat a Rome,
mars e ben ef dybynnys
Mar goyth pan ew govynnys,
Me a’n danfen thy yuys,

⁸⁶ Diane Murphy, op. cit., pp 164-8.

⁸⁷ ‘SIXTH LEGATE: Hail courageous lord/ as you are without peer!/ Cloths of gold/ and expensive velvet/ is your apparel,/ damask, baudkin/ and also silk cloth,/ rich linen and satin,/ yea purple in mantles/ and brightly coloured cloths.’ - *BK*, 1720-1729.

⁸⁸ Michael D. Reeve, op. cit., p. 223.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, pp.215-21.

*By the dreadful day of dom!*⁹⁰

The reference to the Emperor's severed head serving as adequate payment for the Emperor's imposed levies is a play on the popular image of a monarch's own engraved coinage, a comically dark-reimagining of the biblical phrase 'Render unto Caesar...' which appears unique to *BK*'s portrayal of the *HRB* legend. Arthur's reasoning and rhetoric in defying the emperor's tithes would have born a specific significance for contemporary audiences of *BK* in the light of the position of Cornwall's stannary parliament, the restriction of its privileges by Prince Arthur and Henry Tudor in reaction to Cornwall's refusal to pay levied tax, and the subsequent Cornish rising of 1497. Whilst it is possible that a pre-war council scene between Arthur and his liege lords existed in the original undamaged draft of *BK*,⁹¹ it seems probable given the treatment of Arthur in the text that the writer chose instead to omit such a scene in favour of emphasising Arthur's role as a leader and as a force of great and decisive power. This approach was also likely taken in the interests of *BK*'s dramatic form, as the entrance of Arthur with his liegemen allows for a physical display of support which was beyond the ambitions of Geoffrey's chosen medium. It is notable that the writer also engages in the Cornish-English code-switching, identified in other areas of the plays by Mills,⁹² in having Arthur offer his threatening oath 'By the dreadful day of dom!' Arthur is at once emphasising the foreign nature of the Senators by using English as a curse, whilst also engaging in popular contemporary British idiom. Nevertheless, it is also of interest that, despite the innumerable praises sung by courtiers in *BK* of Arthur as a peerless warrior and leader, there is one virtue which the Arthur of *HRB* demonstrates which the Arthur of *BK* does not display (at least in the play as it survives): that of directly seeking sage counsel from his supporters before commencing war. In making his declaration of war, Arthur jibes Lucius by declaring 'Ny worthebe' thotha/ toching the'n questons eral,/ bys may tancanho thymma/ py war ganow leverall/ in erbers I'n pow adro/ an lynes in tyawgal/ prag e tevons/ heb den vith th'aga gonys,/ saw rag own bos somonys?/ An Romans a vyth wystyys,/ ymstorvye pan

⁹⁰ 'Tell your lord, my friend:/ I have said without trifling,/ as for the tribute he demands / there does not fall for some time now / to the state of Rome / anything other than his decapitated head. / Since it is insolently demanded, / I shall send it thither indeed, / by the dreadful day of dom!' – *BK*, 2112-2120.

⁹¹ The scribe seems to have missed a folio at this stage in the narrative (f. 20) due to the degradation of the corresponding folio in the exemplar copy, see: <https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/early-modern-period/beunans-ke/>.

⁹² Mills, Jon (2012) Depiction of Tyranny in the Cornish Miracle Plays: Tenor, Code Switching and Sociolinguistic Variables. In: Liam Mac Amhlaigh & Brian Ó Curnáin (eds.), *Ilteangach, Ilseiftiúil: Féilscribhinn in ómós do Nicholas Williams: A festschrift in honour of Nicholas Williams* (Arlen House, Dublin, 2012), pp. 139-157, available at: <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/32245/>.

na alhons.’⁹³ The implication here is that Arthur is mocking Lucius for surrounding himself with a poor council of sycophants and weaklings who cannot defend what they claim to be theirs. Whilst it is certainly true that Lucius’ messengers are portrayed mostly as being more terrified of Arthur than they are of their master—resulting in scenes at Emperor’s court with notable comical undertones - there is an irony in Arthur’s assertion as he ultimately finds himself betrayed by his trusted nephew Mordred - who himself seems to build upon Arthur’s staunchly despotic and opportunistic policy of ‘might makes right’ at the expense of obligations to Church and state.

Intriguingly, the stage directions of *BK* occasionally refer to Arthur ‘*stando ad modum tyranni*’.⁹⁴ Fletcher asserts that this may indicate a conventional style used by actors to appear intimidating, similar to the ‘pomping’ performed by numerous kings and nobles in parade scenes, and does not necessarily reflect on the behaviour of Arthur’s character.⁹⁵ However, it is perhaps telling that this direction is given for one of Arthur’s most unreasoning rages, in which he curses Lucius’ messengers upon the Trinity and, like the tyrant characters, seems barely able to contain his violent impulses: ‘ARTHURUS: Assof engrys!/ The ves omden!/ Py, ru’n Drengys!/ skettyaf the ben/ ha’th coloven/ theworth the scoyth/ gans the gonha/ kepar ha goyth,/ te mab hora,/ tebal-voran!’⁹⁶ As Murphy notes, surviving saint plays across Europe share a regrettable dearth of information available in regards to their playwrights and audiences, often making it difficult to address authorial intention and popular reception.⁹⁷ However, we can find that much hagiographical drama shares a common tendency of exploring the nature of virtue and vice in its characters through examination of their efficacy, with moral virtue being contrasted with sinful moral bankruptcy.⁹⁸ As noted previously, these ethical examinations gain additional significance in the examination of king and tyrant characters in the Cornish saint plays, as the king’s morality is shown to directly

⁹³ ‘ARTHUR: I shall not answer him/ touching these questions,/ until he sends to me/ or tells me by word of mouth/ why in the gardens in the country round about/ do the nettles/ safely grow/ without anybody to weed tem, if not for fear of being summoned?/ The Romans will be ravaged,/ since they cannot starve themselves.’ - *BK*, 2127-2137.

⁹⁴ ‘Standing in the manner of a tyrant’ - *BK*, f. xiii, v. 290.

⁹⁵ Alan J. Fletcher, *op. cit.*

⁹⁶ ‘ARTHUR: How angry I am! / Take yourself off! Or, by the Trinity!/ I’ll smash your head/ and your skull/ from your shoulder/ along with your neck/ like a goose,/ you son of a whore, an evil woman!’ - *BK*, 2156-2165.

⁹⁷ Murphy, Diane, *Medieval Mystery Plays As Popular Culture- Performing The Lives Of Saints* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), pp. 159-161.

⁹⁸ Grantley has compared this facet of miracle plays to near-contemporary morality plays, with their similar biographic focus and attention to the Christian moral condition of the plays’ principle characters. See Darryll Grantley, ‘Saint Plays’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, Richard Beadle (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.269-72.

influence his ability to govern both justly and effectively. Perhaps tellingly, in Arthur's final surviving lines in *BK* he laments the loss of a host of his most favoured followers, including Sir Gawain, Kay and Bedevere in his wars with Lucius and Mordred,⁹⁹ indicating the heavy cost which Arthur's persistent warring has resulted in.

BK frequently reaffirms Arthur's connection to Cornwall as 'Arthur a Gyllywyk' – 'Arthur of Kellywyk'¹⁰⁰ or otherwise 'Arthur Gornow'¹⁰¹ – 'Arthur the Cornishman'. Despite the numerous similarities between the Arthurian episodes of the *HRB* and *BK* there are a number of key differences in the material of *BK* (besides that of the change from Latin prose to Cornish verse) which mark out the Arthurian episode in *BK* as a uniquely Cornish interpretation of the legend. The writer places more emphasis than Geoffrey on the assertion that Arthur is both king of all the Britons and that he originates from Cornwall. As Armstrong puts it: '[*Beunans Ke*] affirms the long-standing imbrication of the Arthurian legend with the geographic place of Cornwall, its language and its people.'¹⁰² Arthur is first referenced in the second day of *BK*, when his numerous courtiers, allies and liegemen declare their undying support for the king and his rule. Arthur is described in the Latin stage directions as 'Arturus Rex Britanniae, ke nunc Anglia decitour' -Arthur king of Britain- which is now called England'. The fact that the writer or writers of *BK* felt the need to emphasise the changing nomenclature of Britain hints both at the conflicted nature of English and regional British identities at this time, and the conflict between British writers severally claiming Arthur as one of their countrymen. This is of particular significance in a play that is very much concerned with sovereignty and legitimate rule. What we see here is that, even in the late medieval and early modern periods, the matter of Britain's national identity is not settled.¹⁰³ But the writer of *BK* wanted there to be no doubt of the origins of Britain's greatest king; he is 'Arthor nan gevas par... thu'm gwelha gour/ a ve bythquath a Gurnow!'¹⁰⁴ -'Arthur, without equal... the greatest champion who ever came from Cornwall!'

⁹⁹ *BK*, 3277-3293.

¹⁰⁰ *BK*, 1270. The location of Arthur's birthplace at 'Kellywick' also appears in *Culhwch and Olwen*, its only other attestation in Arthuriana. Padel has asserted that the writer of *BK* was either familiar with this Welsh tradition or, as is perhaps more likely, this was a tradition circulating in contemporary Cornish oral literature. See O. J. Padel, (2005) op. cit., pp. 112-4.

¹⁰¹ *BK*, 2502.

¹⁰² Armstrong, Dorsey (2015), op. cit.

¹⁰³ *BK*, 249-260.

¹⁰⁴ *BK*, 1913-8.

Teudar in *Beunans Ke*

If Arthur possessed a unique place in the Cornish literary imagination, which cannot help but have influenced the way in which Cornish audiences of *BK* would have responded to the character of the king in the play, then it is important also to note the broader historical context of how Arthur was understood across Tudor England – politically, as well as culturally – as these perceptions place *BK* in a specific post-colonial context.¹⁰⁵ The Tudor monarchy frequently sought to associate itself with the figure of King Arthur in order to strategically appeal to popular support and bolster its tenuous claim to the English throne. This can be seen in Henry VII's decision to name his first son and heir Arthur – a child who was regarded by many as the great hope for England's unification after the tumult of the Wars of the Roses, and who became the Duke of Cornwall at birth¹⁰⁶ - but also in more symbolic actions, such as the deliberate choice of Winchester – popularly associated with Camelot by English writers, notably Malory¹⁰⁷ - as Arthur Tudor's birthplace (1486). English subjects and dramatists also appear to have responded favourably at times to this Tudor-Arthurian conceit. During the Coventry pageantry series, devised to welcome Prince Arthur to that city in 1498, the opening procession featured a depiction of the Nine Worthies. In previous productions, each Worthy had in turn welcomed the more celebrated members of the audience to the festivities but, in 1498, King Arthur stepped forward alone to welcome Prince Arthur to the city.¹⁰⁸ Henry VIII was also clearly drawn to the concept of King Arthur, both as a chivalric model and as an absolute monarch, and Henry continued to employ him as a symbol of his own right to rule. This alignment between King Arthur and Henry VIII became a useful propaganda tool in the English Reformation, when the figure of *Arthuris Imperator* was invoked as a justification for Henry's split from Rome¹⁰⁹. In 1533, at the same time that England's monastic houses were being inspected and suppressed, antiquaries, including John Leland, were commissioned by the crown with the task of finding ancient records and chronicles in these houses which might

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of how in medieval literature a colonised people can emerge as both othered and denigrated as a justification for their subjugation, whilst a shared ancestral origin or kinship on the part of the coloniser is paradoxically emphasised as a justification for the suitability of the subjugating conqueror to rule the said subjugated people, 'difference and sameness in apparently impossible simultaneity' see: Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, 'Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales', in Jeffrey Jerome, Cohen, (ed.), *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp.85-105.

¹⁰⁶ John Wagner and Susan Schmid, *Encyclopaedia of Tudor England* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2011), pp.1102-5.

¹⁰⁷ Sydney Anglo, op. cit., pp. 18-23.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.32-3.

¹⁰⁹ David Starkey, 'King Henry and King Arthur', in *Arthurian Literature XVI*, James P. Carley and Felicity Rigley (ed.) (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998), pp. 171-8.

be utilised in support of Henry's claims that there were indeed ancient precedents for England enjoying complete jurisdictional freedom from Rome.¹¹⁰ Of foremost interest were records that might corroborate both the historicity of the reign of Arthur and the popular legend of Arthur's conquest of Rome established by Geoffrey of Monmouth.¹¹¹ In what was perhaps one of Henry VIII's least subtle appropriations of the Arthurian legend, he readopted the Winchester Round Table— a relic bearing many of the names of Arthur's knights which was then widely believed to be the actual table at which Arthur had once sat (although now dated to the reign of Edward I) – and had it repainted in the Tudor colours, with a model of Henry himself painted under the inscription 'King Arthur', which stood above a resplendent Tudor rose at the centre of the table.¹¹²

It is ironic then that the portrayal of Henry Tudor in *BK* is alike to Arthur only in his flawed prideful and warlike tendencies, and is otherwise a figure of scorn and ridicule. Teudar first appears at line 78 of *BK* as Kea is brought before him at the town of Colan. The first sign of Teudar's tyrannical practice in the region is indicated in the conduct of the Forester who first demands to know Kea's business when he lands and finds himself in the forest of Rosewa, and then, when Kea refuses to oblige, forcibly apprehends him and physically drags him before Teudar, all the way to Colan.¹¹³ The language of the Forester indicates the dread with which he regards his liege, as he clearly does not expect the forthright Kea to survive his encounter with Teudar:

FORESTARIUS: A, the'th corf ancombryngy!

Dar, fol e reta sengy

Teuthar an arluth gwella?

Cogy pan ves denethys.

The dermyn ew devethys.

Ny'th ues bewa nafella.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰Sian Echard, (ed.), *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature – The Development and Dissemination of the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011) pp.151-3.

¹¹¹ Ibid. pp.153-5.

¹¹² Jon Whitman, 'National Icon: The Winchester Round Table and the Revelation of Authority' *Arthuriana* Vol. 18, No. 4, In Memoriam: Elisabeth Brewer, Derek Brewer (Winter, 2008), available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27870936>, pp. 33-65.

¹¹³ In practical terms, though it is unclear whereabouts in Rosewa forest (today, the Roseland Coast) Kea lands in the play, this would have meant between a 16 and 20 mile walk.

¹¹⁴ 'Oh, confusion on your body!/ What! Do you consider Teudar,/ the best of lords, to be a fool?/ Woe to you that you were born./ Your time has come./ You cannot live any longer.' – *BK*, 64-69.

Though it is difficult to interpret which remark of Kea's impels the Forester's dire warning, due to the damaged condition of the first few folios, it is clear from the first that Teudar is not a king who will take criticism gladly. Interestingly, the manner of the Forester's testy greeting, one of a few English lines within the play, coupled with the Forester's threatening demands to know Kea's purpose, seem to be indicative of a popular satire of the increasing number of private enclosures of forests which had previously been common land in Cornwall- an unpopular practice in many rural parts of the kingdom which increased dramatically throughout the Tudor period. This is borne out by the Forester's claim that he caught Kea trespassing: 'FORESTARIUS: I'n forest ha'n yet degys.'¹¹⁵ And by Teudar's immediate wrath and suspicion in his accusations that Kea has been trespassing to hunt his stags: 'TEUDAR: A, out warnas, traytor puer!/ Lader eth oys./ Me a wor e lytste sur/ abarth o'm coys/ ran a'm kyrwas./ Re Syn Jovyn a'n cur loys!/ Me a vyn gwelas the woys./ Te a verew inter hyrwas.'¹¹⁶ For all of Teudar's threats and suspicions however, he is easily made to lose his nerve when Kea dares to stand up to him and chastise him for his evidently unchristian way. As in the theological debate between Meriasek and Teudar in *BM*, when the wills of Kea and Teudar clash in *BK* Teudar is shown to be violent, unreasoning and fickle in his passions:

TEUDAR: Out, out, out!
 A! out! Pleth af the guthy?
 Galsaf in fol!
 An Jowl re dueth thu'm cuthy
 in mes a'e dol!
 By Godys arme!
 gans gwas eth of deuwnhys
 ha'm du Jovyn eselhys!
 Ogh, povogyk ew ow garme!
 Lavor uskys, te jaudyn,
 raf casadow,
 pan du us gwel ys Jovyn,

¹¹⁵ 'in the forest with the gate shut.' - *BK*, 77.

¹¹⁶ 'TEUDAR: Oh, out with you, very traitor!/ You are a robber./ I know indeed that you have stolen/ within my wood/ some of my stags./ By Saint Jovyn of the holy court!/ I will see your blood./ You will die between harrows.' - *BK*, 102-110.

an caradow,
thym the gregy,
pot e a verew der passion,
kin fe Soudan Babylon
omma ragas ow pegy.¹¹⁷

Teudar's intermittent curses and vows, threats and requests show him both to be a tyrant and a weak willed, indecisive ruler. There is nothing sacred in Teudar's covenant with his gods, in fact he is seemingly desperate to seize upon Kea's God as a new potential source of power showing both his avarice and his cowardice before, he is, as Murdoch had it 'a composite of non-Christian elements'¹¹⁸ Teudar rebuts and rejects every doctrine of Catholic orthodoxy as Kea attempts to instruct him on each, rejecting the permanency of God's godhead; God's manhood in Christ; the Chalcedonian creed; the virgin birth of Mary and Christ; and the doctrine of the Trinity - refusing to see the Trinity as anything other than three deities in a pantheon.¹¹⁹ When Teudar is ultimately unable to best Kea in rhetoric or threaten him into submission he instead ascends to the north of the stage '*Hic Teuthatharus ascendit ad modum tyranni*'¹²⁰ - 'Here Teudar goes up in the manner of a tyrant' and demands that his jailors to pursue, capture, and torture Kea. Tellingly, though Teudar demands the imprisonment and grievous bodily torture of Kea several times throughout the drama - orders which his jailors and torturers gleefully carry out and then boast of doing in visceral detail - the results of these demands never proves anything but counterproductive for Teudar; his paranoia and unrest never cease, Kea only grows closer to his God through his suffering. Teudar's subjects only grow to despise Teudar more as he makes foolish promises and bequests of land to Kea by way of superstitious, self-serving, reparations for the damage he has purposelessly done to

¹¹⁷ 'Out, out, out!/ Oh! out! Where can I go to hide?/ I have gone mad!/ The Devil has come to torment me/ out of his hole!/ By God's arm!/ By a fellow I am afflicted/ and Jovyn, my god, despised!/ Oh, woeful is my cry!/ Say quickly, you rascal,/ loathsome rubbish,/ which god is better than Jovyn,/ the beloved, /for me to believe,/ or you will die by torment,/ though the Sultan of Babylon/ were interceding for you.' - *BK*, 117-133.

¹¹⁸ Murdoch, Brian, 'The Cornish Drama', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, Richard Beadle (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.231.

¹¹⁹ 'By Mahound's precious blood!/ you shall die/ in the view of the country./ You say, you cloth-tongue,/ that you have but one God./ I shall prove that you tell a lie./ The Father and the Son rationally/ must of necessity be God./ You will find I am right./ Attend and listen./ Don't be a fool!/ A third indeed is the Spirit/ who was mentioned before./ Therefore you have three gods:/ Jovyn, Beryth and Astrot.' - *BK*, 258-72.

¹²⁰ *BK*, f.6.

Kea's person, whilst failing to reward them for their services to the point that they are openly dissenting.

QUARTUS TORTOR: Ny a ra, syra, forsoth.

Aragough na ren gwelas

The servants, tues vras ha coyth,

Bos wottywath drog telys.

In gweyr he mar,

Henna ew laver kymmyn

Ha me a laver lymmyn:

Thynny re werys e bar.

[Rag dader telys, henna ew lavar kymmyn]¹²¹

The struggle of wills between Kea and Teudar recalls a key recurrent motif in hagiographical narratives, the defiance by the titular saint against the power of paganism or unorthodoxy. Saints are seen confronting this force in a wide variety of ways, from the passive though resolute endurance of torture to displays of supernatural power as they become agents of God. Though Kea, like many other saints, is drawn from the upper echelons of society, he nevertheless would have presented to a broad audience a satisfying picture of Christian conservatism triumphing over secular tyranny. Since the tyrants of these plays are invariably represented as being in positions of political authority, the ultimate triumph of their victims, in whatever terms, was probably a major part of the attraction of this literature for its audiences.¹²² Where the character of Arthur in *BK* is presented as a tyrant at times in the action whilst maintaining the loyalty and praise of many of his followers as the model image of a warrior king, Teudar in *BK*, vitally, lacks both the competence and force of character to rule others effectively. In *BK* Kea makes specific reference to the damage Teudar's lack of respect for the Church and the rights of his subjects is having upon his support from his people:

KELADOCUS: *Teuthare, bona dies!*

Pur wyer ny'th car neb lyes

¹²¹ 'Fourth Torturer: We will [get out of your sight], sir, indeed./ Before you let us not see/ that your servants, great and wise people, are badly recompensed in the end. Indeed without doubt,/ that is a well-known saying/ and I say now:/ the like has happened to us./ {*paid for goodness, that is a common saying.*} - *BK*, 754-762.

¹²² Darryll Grantley, op. cit. pp.267-8.

rag the debal-vanerow.
Henna me re aspeas.
Mar debal-los ny 'fyas,
A pe vas the oberow.'¹²³

A note on the text of *Beunans Meriasek*

Beunans Meriasek or *The Life of Meriasek* survives today as a single MS, MS Peniarth 105, as part of collection of the Peniarth collection at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. Whitley Stokes describes the manuscript, as he transcribed it, as consisting of a 6.5 by 8-inch paper quarto some 45 folios in length with the addition of a single manuscript leaf inserted immediately before the 46th leaf.¹²⁴ The original leather binding was replaced with a modern binding by The NLW.¹²⁵ The codex of the manuscript now also includes a note of its provenance left by W. W. E. Wynne of Peniarth connecting the manuscript to the collection of the antiquarian Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt (1592-1667)¹²⁶ as well as a series of notes of correspondence between Wynne, Rev. Robert Williams of Rhydycroesau and Stokes,¹²⁷ who would edit the first published and translated version of the text in 1872.¹²⁸ In this correspondence, Williams personally recommends Stokes as a transcriber and translator for the text, remarking upon him as 'one of the most accomplished philologists of the age'.¹²⁹ For his purposes, Stokes had access to the manuscript in Wynne's collection, and had it deposited for three months at the Trinity College Library in Dublin, where he compiled his

¹²³ 'Teudar, good day!/ Indeed not many people love you/ because of your evil ways./ That I have noticed./ You would not have such ill repute if your deeds were good.' - *BK*, 1064-8.

¹²⁴ National Library of Wales, Online MSS Catalogue, *Beunans Meriasek* (2015) available at: <https://www.llgc.org.uk/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/beunans-meriasek/>.

¹²⁵ Myrna Combellack-Harris, op. cit. p.10.

¹²⁶ Vaughan collected and preserved several, chiefly Welsh manuscripts from the medieval and Early Modern period, which may perhaps suggest that he had believed the text be written in Middle Welsh rather than Cornish; assuming Peniarth 105 was the manuscript he referenced at all. For a further description of Robert Vaughan and his collections see: National Library of Wales, Evan David Jones, Dictionary of Welsh Biography- Vaughan, Robert (1959) available at: <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s-VAUG-ROB-1592.html>.

¹²⁷ MS. Aberystwyth, NLW, Peniarth 105, *Beunans Meriasek*, pp 188-219.

¹²⁸ Whitley Stokes, *Beunans Meriasek: The Life of St Meriasek, Bishop and Confessor: A Cornish Drama* (London; Berlin: Trübner & Co., 1872).

¹²⁹ MS. Aberystwyth, NLW, Peniarth 105, *Beunans Meriasek*, p 190.

transcription.¹³⁰ Wynne had discovered the manuscript among a number of books fortuitously bequeathed to him from the Hengwrt Library in 1859. Interestingly, the opening line of the text is a Latin title: ‘*Ordinale de sancti Mereadoci episcopi et confessoris*’ but the more popular title can be found prominently above areas of text.¹³¹

The entire drama of *BM* comprises 4568 lines, written predominantly in Middle Cornish in lines which, like those of *BK*, range from between seven and four syllables.¹³² The text was found by Stokes to contain neat cursive hands from two scribes, one of whom seemed to have corrected the work of the other on at least ten pages.¹³³ Combellack has instead discerned the work of at least three scribes: the first scribe having written the majority of text on pages 11-179, a second scribe having written the first 10 pages and a third having provided directions in the marginalia of the first scribe’s work. Combellack also proposes that a fourth scribe may have been responsible for some marginalia, or doodles, along with some restorations to the text, though she also purports to be sceptical of the existence of this fourth scribe.¹³⁴ The first of these hands can be identified by means of a signature which was interpreted by Stokes as a ‘Dominus Hadton’¹³⁵ but has since been transcribed as either [Dominus] Had, Nad or Rad[ulphous] Ton[ne].¹³⁶ A date of 1504 is also given, placing the play’s completion only some 6-8 years¹³⁷ from the date of the Cornish rebellions of 1497.¹³⁸ Although it should be noted that some of the material from which the play was drawn may well have been older, perhaps significantly so in places,¹³⁹ linguistic analyses of the Middle Cornish has indicated that the bulk of the text is unlikely to have been copied from a text more than a few years more antiquated;¹⁴⁰ as we will see however, the compilation date of

¹³⁰ Whitley Stokes (1872) op. cit., p. v.

¹³¹ National Library of Wales, op. cit.

¹³² A study of the prosody and verse forms of both the *Ordinalia* and *Beunans Meriasek* can be found in Bruch, Benjamin Frederick, *Du gveras a.b.c./An pen can henna yv d: Cornish Verse Forms and the Evolution of Cornish Prosody, c. 1350-1611*, Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences (Harvard University, 2005).

¹³³ Stokes provides a complete list of these amendments. Whitley Stokes, op.cit. pp. v-vi.

¹³⁴ Myrna Combellack-Harris, op. cit. p. 11-12.

¹³⁵ Whitley Stokes, op.cit., p. v.

¹³⁶ Combellack (pp.14-16) expands upon the possible identity of the scribe and asserts that whilst a deed of 1547 includes a ‘Ricardus Tonn’ -proposed by Nance as a candidate or relation- ‘Ricardus Tonne’ should not necessarily be confused the Dom[inus] Rad Ton[ne] of the manuscript; due to the prevalence of the name Tonn and Tonne in the area at that time. Combellack (pp. 14-16) adds that the title Dominus indicates the scribe had likely attained a degree at one of the British colleges of divinity.

¹³⁷ C. R. Cheyney, *A Handbook of Dates for Students of British History*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: University Press, 2000).

¹³⁸ R. Morton Nance, ‘Notes on the Beunans Meriasek Manuscript’, in *Old Cornwall*: 9 (1979-85) pp.34-36.

¹³⁹ Combellack suggests a number of vitas and hagiographic sources which can be read as a source for *Beunans Meriasek*, see: Myrna Combellack-Harris, op. cit. pp 25-59.

¹⁴⁰ Ken George and Andrew Hawke have asserted that the demonstrable use of characteristics of the late (c. late 15th to early 16th Century) developments in Middle Cornish, use of a soft g in place of s, alongside a few notable

BM has some potentially strong implications in regards to themes of tyranny and dissent in the cycle.

The sources for the text are diverse, melding the lives of legendary figures such as the Breton King Conan Meriadoc¹⁴¹ with historical figures such as Constantine the Great, but the cycle focuses chiefly on the life of the titular saint. The play is split into two parts¹⁴² which would have been performed over the period of two days and performed at a *plen-an-gwary* round, as evinced by the damaged staging illustration on the final folio of the original manuscript (figure 1).¹⁴³ Stage directions are given in Latin or Cornish throughout the text. Save for the initial transcription and translation by Stokes (1872) the only published, complete and annotated transcriptions of the cycle is Combellack's (1985)¹⁴⁴ and Markham Harris' prose version (1977)¹⁴⁵. Morton Nance has also produced a translation of the cycle into his, once popular, but now heavily disputed system of Unified Cornish.¹⁴⁶

Of *BM*'s two days of performance, the first commences with a scene from Meriasek's youth. An additional play, *Beunans Sylvester*, is introduced (at 1153), which concerns the conversion of Constantine the Great and his cure from leprosy by Saint Sylvester. The action then returns to Brittany and Meriasek (1866), before reverting again to Cornwall (2205). The second day commences with Meriasek's cure of the Earl Globus (2522) which is followed by Meriasek's reluctant appointment as the Bishop of Vannes (2682-3150). Meriasek's episcopal appointment is followed in the text by an episode Combellack regards as an additional play,¹⁴⁷ which concerns the imprisonment of boy by a tyrant and his subsequent

instances of Late French and English, are strong indications that the *Beunans Meriasek* manuscript was compiled around the turn of the 16th Century. Markham Harris has instead suggested that the manuscript should likely be dated a generation before the 1504 date recorded in the manuscript colophon. See: Harris, Markham, *The Life of Meriasek: A medieval Cornish miracle play* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1977), pp.3-5.

¹⁴¹ For other examples of descriptions of Conan as he appears in Cornish literature see M. Faletta, Merlin in 'Cornwall: The Source and Contexts of John of Cornwall's *Prophetia Merlini*', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 111(3), (2012) Retrieved from:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jenglgermphil.111.3.0304>

¹⁴² John. T. Koch (ed.), *Celtic Culture- A Historical Encyclopaedia, Volume I: I-Celti* (Oxford; Santa Barbara: CA, ABC Clío, 2006).

¹⁴³ National Library of Wales, op. cit.

¹⁴⁴ Myrna Combellack-Harris, op. cit.

¹⁴⁵ Markham Harris, op. cit.

¹⁴⁶ Combellack's introduction to the cycle provides an extensive commentary on the manuscript's scholarly attention together with a short history of some notable productions. Myrna Combellack-Harris, op. cit. pp.2-10.

¹⁴⁷ Combellack has suggested that the cycle forms three distinct plays, but there is no clear delineation between these play episodes in the sense that there is for *the Ordinalia*, with no change of either folio or page to mark the opening of the third 'play', there is only a chorus speech which appears to act as an intermission between the two days of its performance; Combellack asserts that the source for the filial hostage episode, as well as *Beunans Sylvester*, may likely have been the popular medieval text *The Legenda Aurea*. Myrna Combellack-Harris, *ibid.* pp.25-50.

deliverance by his mother's intercession to Mary (3156-3803). The final episodes of *Beunans Meriasek* concern the defeat of a rampaging dragon by Saint Sylvester (3916-4180) and Meriasek's death and ascension (4180-4518). Interestingly, Combellack has noted that the addition of a scribal signature on F.23 (the opening of *Beunans Sylvester*) indicates that this was initially understood by the scribe to be the opening of the manuscript.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, the decision to collate *Beunans Sylvester* and the other episodes of *BM* was likely taken after the initial production of *Beunans Sylvester* and the combination of these episodes into a single, unified cycle are likely original to the Peniarth manuscript. This accounts for many of the narrative inconsistencies between the plays, though efforts may well have been taken on the part of Dom. Ton[n] to make scene changes appear less incongruous to the cycle's overarching narrative. As Combellack notes 'Radolphus Ton may have been an adapter as well as the scribe.'¹⁴⁹

Teudar and the Duke in *Beunans Meriasek*

Despite the remarkable similarities between the cycles (particularly in regard to the initial episode concerning St. Kea himself) *BM* differs from *BK* in a number of key respects. Firstly, our surviving manuscript of *BM* (NLW, Peniarth 105) survives in a considerably better, more complete condition than *BK* (NLW 23849). As noted above, the damage to NLW 23849 leaves us with some significant difficulties when attempting to assess the codifying of lay ruler characters such as Arthur, and the wider authorial intention behind the plays of *BK*. The absence of a conclusion to the Arthurian episode - which we can infer from the St. Kea vita Albert le Grand's *Life of St Ke* would likely have included the return of the titular saint, and his direct involvement with the action of the Arthurian episode - is especially unfortunate, in that it deprives us of what would likely have included (after the fashion of saint plays which delved into national or regional folk myths)¹⁵⁰ a didactic moralisation of the events of the play. *BM* has the advantage of featuring numerous complete dialogues between saint and ruler characters which serve to elucidate (and challenge) the vices and moral failings of lay ruler characters whilst demonstrating the value of the Church (and particularly Glasney). As a

¹⁴⁸ Myrna Combellack-Harris, op. cit. pp.37-9.

¹⁴⁹ Myrna Combellack-Harris, ibid, p. 38.

¹⁵⁰ See Murphy's discussion of saint plays as social drama. Diane Murphy, op. cit. pp 176-82.

result, the Church's role in challenging tyranny and encouraging just rule is more clearly and consistently emphasised in *BM* than *BK*. Throughout *BM* we see local saints providing good counsel and opposing tyrannical excesses and ungodly influence. One particularly prominent tyrant figure - given that he appears in two plays of the cycle and has more lines than any other lay ruler character - is Teudar. Lines from characters such as the Duke make it apparent that Teudar is perceived by his subjects in Cornwall as a foreign interloper, a ruthless tyrant and a dire enemy of the Christian faith. This is made particularly apparent in the play after he drives Meriasek into exile from Cornwall by sending his men repeatedly to accost and torture him.

Camerarius Ducis: Tevdar pagan ongrassyas

del glovsugh ha nynsyv pel

in povrna eff re dyrhays

ny vyn gothe vn crystyan

marthys eff yv den cruel

in y oges pur certen

Meryasek ganso lemen: helhys vue in kerth heb fael¹⁵¹

Although, as noted previously, *BM* was written down some decades before The Dissolution, it is nevertheless interesting to note that a house so similar in name to that of the Tudor dynasty can here be seen suppressing the Christian privileges of the Cornish and threatening and inflicting brutal punishments on those who resist. Teudar's chiefly referenced deity in the play, 'Mahound' is a medieval and early modern European version of Muhammad.¹⁵² In much of European literature during this period, Muhammad is widely assumed to be a principle deity of the Islamic faith, and whether for the sake of convenience, Christian propaganda, or because of genuine ignorance on the part of Christian authors, is frequently associated with a broader pantheon of pagan deities. In *BM*, Teudar's desire to spread the faith of Mahound across Britain may also reflect contemporary Christian concerns about the dramatic rise of Islam in the period, epitomised by the fall of Constantinople to an invading

¹⁵¹ 'The Duke's Chamberlain: As you have heard/ Teudar, an impious pagan./ has landed in this country/ and not long since./ He will certainly not tolerate a single Christian near him./ He is an incredibly cruel man!/ No doubt, Meriasek has now been driven away by him.' - *BM*, 2042-50.

¹⁵² John Esposito, *The Islamic threat: myth or reality?* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992), pp. 242-54.

Ottoman army in 1453, and the ensuing loss of key Italian ports, such as Otranto, and other, Balkan principalities in the latter half of the 15th Century; there are even contemporary folkloric accounts of Ottoman slave raids reaching the Scilly Isles.¹⁵³ In these repeated references to ‘Mahound’ in *BM* - and his association therein with old pagan deities – we can also see a development of the Galfridian conversion legend in which the pagan kings of Europe and their peoples, particularly the Picts and Saxons, after first invading Britain, were then afterwards converted through Arthur and his successor’s conquests. Where Arthur’s association with the Christian faith and his numerous invocations to the Trinity and the saints in *BK* is one of the key facets of the character which make his tyrannical characteristics redeemable as a warrior king who has united the Britons under Christendom: ‘Re Christ a’ m pernas I’n pren!’¹⁵⁴ Teudar is instead marked as an enemy and defiler of Christendom. By the late medieval period, the conversional aspect of the Arthurian legend had become associated with the Crusades¹⁵⁵ - particularly the Crusades to recapture the holy land. This continued to be the case even after recapturing the holy lands became strategically impossible in the wake of the collapse of the Crusader kingdoms. Whilst it is certain that fears and anxieties about the rising power of Islam continued to persist long after the Crusades in Western literature and drama, the sustained references to numerous other pagan deities worshipped alongside Muhammed by tyrant characters such as Teudar in *BM* and *BK* suggests that the association of these characters with these deities had as much to do with denigrating the character - and vicariously Henry Tudor in the instance of Teudar – as it did with denigrating opposing faiths. As Murphy demonstrates, whilst the choice of pagan or ‘foreign’ deities referenced in saint plays may often have served the interests of the plays’ rhyming scheme as much as addressing particular religious fears, the significance in the attribution of these deities is in othering the character and creating religious argument for their poor social (and political, in the instance of our lay rulers) conduct:

References to paganism functioned in a similar manner to those that targeted Islam as an inimical force. In fact, the name Mahound, a corruption of Mouhammed, was almost interchangeable with that of Jove or Apollo in semantic registers of late medieval drama. The choice of which gods a tyrant worshiped may have been determined as much by the practical exigencies of the rhyme scheme as by ideology.

¹⁵³ John Esposito, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ ‘By Christ who redeemed me on the tree!’ – *BM*, 3280.

¹⁵⁵ This was partly as a result of the adoption of historical crusaders and crusader imagery by romance writers, such as Jaques du Longuyon with his *Voeux du Paon* (1312) and partly by the strategic appropriation of Arthur by clergymen hoping to inspire laymen to join crusades. See Keith Busby (ed.) *Word and image in Arthurian literature* (New York; London: Garland, 1996), pp. 37-9.

Yet the fact that playwrights could rely on such appellations to carry negative connotations indicates that non-Christian belief systems, even if misinterpreted, were still held up as examples of “wrong” religious faith. Thus, the myriad saint plays that promoted this position can be considered propagandist in that they consistently denigrated Islamic and pagan beliefs.¹⁵⁶

In one of *BM*'s most striking scenes, Teudar has Meriasek brought before him and, as with the character of the Doctor who argues Christ's case in the *Passio Christi*, the two debate the significance and veracity of the virgin birth, and the Godhead of Christ. Where Teudar employs coarse, narrow-minded worldly logic to argue the implausibility of a virgin birth, Meriasek patiently offers the poetic analogy of light passing through glass.¹⁵⁷ The depiction of imaginative and spiritually eloquent saints reasoning with base and sometimes hypocritical tyrants and their officers has proved an enduring trope in Cornish folklore.¹⁵⁸ It is also another example of an episode within the plays in which a ruler's decision whether or not to respect and obey the counsel of the Church - and vicariously, Christ - through the person of the saint marks a key turning point in both the action of the play and the development of the ruler character. The efficacy and legitimacy of the Church is tested but is unshaken by Teudar's worldly-orientated criticism. Teudar declares it 'shameful' that the son of a god should be sacrificed 'boys lethys avel carov' – '[like a deer]'¹⁵⁹ but Meriasek artfully counters by stating that the Passion was essential to remove the stain of Adam's sin, framing it as the ultimate penance after the Cornish tradition of the Legend of the Rood.¹⁶⁰ Murphy notes that arguments over theology and ethics – both in a personal, and socio-political context - were a central motif in many medieval and early modern hagiographic dramas, which offered a popular platform for the exploration of the ethical dimensions of power, violence, wealth and sex.¹⁶¹ For example, the Florentine miracle play *La sacre rappresentazione di Santa Catarina* (c. 1566) – a play which, like *Beunans Sylvester*, was also likely to have been sourced in part from the *Legenda Aurea* – the titular St. Catherine of Alexander argues with a tyrannical pagan emperor 'by syllogistic reasoning as well as

¹⁵⁶ Diane Murphy, op. cit., pp. 159-60.

¹⁵⁷ Recalling the Chalcedonian definition of hypostatic union. See Madigan, Kevin (2015) *Medieval Christianity: A New History*, Available at: <https://www.audible.co.uk>, Downloaded: 21/04/2015

¹⁵⁸ For many examples of the same see J. Henry Harris, *Cornish Saints & Sinners* (London, William Clowes and Sons, 1926).

¹⁵⁹ *BM*, 874-81.

¹⁶⁰ *BM*, 882-890.

¹⁶¹ Diane Murphy, op. cit., pp. 165-8.

allegory and metaphor, logical and mystical inference.’¹⁶² *BM* does not perhaps defy quite so many cultural norms as the Florentine drama; Meriasek is, after all, the son of a Duke and the relatively high standard of his education is emphasised early on in the cycle. Nevertheless, reason, rhetoric and a keen understanding of natural and divine philosophy play a key role in the defiance of tyranny in the play cycle; Teudar is defeated in the arena of argument and theological debate long before The Duke of Cornwall bests him by force of arms. Teudar’s see-sawing of emotional behaviour clearly demarcates him as the play’s primary villain and as a figure of comic ridicule. Looking at his changeable speech patterns, one can easily imagine the comically exaggerated exclamations, flourishes and expostulations that the actor performing the part of Teudar might choose to employ for comic or shocking effect.¹⁶³ Teudar works as both a subversive and didactic device. By conveying the mercurial tendencies and violent passions to which the tyrant is prey, the play instructs its audience on the corrupting influence of sinful avarice and idolatry whilst at the same time mocking a foreign overlord by portraying him as an emotionally incontinent heathen. By contrast, there is the presence of the stern and unwavering character of Meriasek, who resists both Teudar’s threats and his tempting promises of power, wealth and influence. Tellingly, it is this stoic rejection of Teudar’s legitimacy as a king who lacks both inherited right to rule and the competency and composure to unite his supposed subjects which most often goads Teudar into fits of violent choler:

Teudar: outlayer fyys ath wlays,
 covs vn geer erbyn ov rays
 ha ty an noyll
 Me yv empour
 ha governour
 conquerrou r tyr
 arluth worthy
 mur ov mestry
 gothfeth ha myr¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Ibid, p.170.

¹⁶³ Allan Kent, op. cit., pp. 236-8.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Outlaw, fled from the country, /speak one word against my honour, / and you shall be sorry. /I am an emperor, /and a ruler, /conqueror of land, /an honoured lord. /My power is great. /Know and behold!!’ - *BM*, 930-8.

For all his boasts, Teudar's comical flight upon Meriasek's assertion that he will immediately baptise him - directly addressing the audience and the material nature of the stage in the process: -¹⁶⁵ marks him not only as a comical coward, but as a character who is possessed by evil spirits and devils. The scene's resolution also provides the occasion for the worldly might of Teudar to be defeated by the simple wisdom and piety of the humble saint, even if the saint must eventually flee Cornwall.

Mills has asserted that the choice of the name Teudar, and its corruption of the name Tudor, is a deliberate parody of Henry VII: 'The Cornish spelling 'Teudar' is a deliberate attempt to lampoon Henry Tudor (VII), since Teudar means 'fatness'.¹⁶⁶ So 'King Teudar' equates roughly with 'King Fatty'¹⁶⁷. As in *BK*, the Teudar of *BM* is portrayed as a mean and grasping king, opposed to giving ground to those to whom he has formerly offered clemency, and reluctant to grant the gifts or rewards that he has promised to his subjects. Both of these are character failings which had been attributed to Henry Tudor by his political detractors and opponents- notably the royal pretender, Perkin Warbeck, whose claim to the throne of England was actively supported by the Cornish in the second Cornish uprising of 1497.¹⁶⁸ Teudar is also cruel and brutish to his servants and subjects, who follow him only out of fear and greed. The king even resents Meriasek's miracles on the reasoning that they occur without his own instruction or authority, or that of his gods. There is also an irony in Teudar's presumption of royal authority in Cornwall, since he is neither a native, nor from a royal line, as the Duke of Cornwall notes when confronting Teudar:

Dux: Ty turant a thyscregyans:
 pendryv the kerth in povma
 tytel na chalyng dyblans
 aberth mam na tas oma
 purguir nyth us

¹⁶⁵ 'TEUDAR: Agh! Woe is me!/ Make way for me, so that I can get away from here quickly./ The Devil has come before my face,/ and wants to baptise me./ I am dead in the middle of the playing-place/ if I stay here long./ Mahound, show (your) displeasure/ to him who has troubled me..' - *BM*, 942-9.

¹⁶⁶ It should perhaps be noted that Nance gives the Cornish for fatness, or thickness, as 'tewder' rather than 'teudar'. However, given that Teudar's name is at points in both *BM* and *BK* given as 'Tewdar', and considering the clear phonetic similarity, the variation of spelling is reasonable. R. Morton Nance, *A New Cornish-English, English-Cornish Dictionary* (Redruth: Truran, 1990).

¹⁶⁷ Jon Mills, op. cit. p. 144.

¹⁶⁸ Ian Arthurson, op. cit., pp. 164-190.

ty re woress mes an gluas
Meryasek neb dremas
acontis certen a zus¹⁶⁹

Given Henry VII's generally peaceable relationship with the higher orders of the English Church in Cornwall throughout much of his reign, together with historic evidence of his piety within the county,¹⁷⁰ it may seem curious that that Cornish clergy in Glasney might wish to satirise and demonise him as a pagan tyrant. However, as Wooding has noted, the mocking pastiche presented in *BM* may be less indicative of a genuinely wide-spread belief in Henry Tudor's pagan practices and beliefs, but rather an indictment of an upstart king who levied heavy taxes from afar - the Cornish language of the plays, and even their traditional religious subject matter, serving as a convenient disguise for what was in part a subversive satire on the Crown:

[Teudar's] defeat by the Duke of Cornwall may well have been a statement of the locals' disillusionment with the distant king. The fact that the play itself was in the local language, probably not understood by English onlookers, might serve to reinforce the 'underworld', or slightly subversive quality of it.¹⁷¹

As previously noted, the chief complaint that Henry Tudor's opponents levied against him - besides decrying his upstart origins - was that he was a mean and grasping monarch, whose agents and officers worked tirelessly to recall debts and levy fines, thereby crippling the finances of his enemies whilst bolstering his own treasury.¹⁷² Whilst there are certainly many historical justifications for Henry VII's policy of depriving noble families of the military and political clout they had amassed throughout the medieval period – considering it was this milieu which ultimately culminated in the Wars of the Roses - several contemporary accounts of Henry, perhaps most famously that of the historian Polydore Vergil (c.1470-

¹⁶⁹ 'DUKE: You tyrant disbeliever!/ What is your right in this country?/ Obviously, you have no clear/ title or claim here/ on your mother's/ or father's side./ You have put Meriasek out of the kingdom,/ who was certainly accounted a good man.' - *BM*, 2369-76.

¹⁷⁰ For a view of the organisation of the Church in Cornwall and Henry's role in supporting it during this period see A. L. Rowse, *Tudor Cornwall* (Redruth: Dyllansow Truran, 1990) pp.141-8

¹⁷¹ Jonathan Wooding, *St Meriasek and King Tudor in Cornwall*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) pp.78-9.

¹⁷² Philip Payton, 'a... concealed envy against the English': a Note on the Aftermath of the 1497 Rebellions in Cornwall' in *Cornish Studies: One* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993).

1555), preserved an image of a king who was happy to ignore his ministers' corruption and malpractice as long as his own estates were increased.¹⁷³ Dissenters and pretenders such as Perkin Warbeck and his supporters were eager to emphasise not just the king's illegitimacy, but also his lack of regard for his subjects' customary rights, and the unjust and damaging nature of his fiscal policies:

It hath pleased God, who putteth down the mighty from their seat and exalteth the humble and suffreth not the hopes of the just to perish in the end, to give us means to show ourselves armed unto our lieges and people of England. But far be it from us to intend their hurt or damage, or to make war upon them, otherwise than to deliver ourself and them from tyranny and oppression. For our mortal enemy, Henry Tudor, a false usurper of the crown of England, which to us by natural and lineal right appertaineth, knowing in his own heart our undoubted right – we being the very Richard, Duke of York, younger and now surviving heir male of the noble and victorious Edward the fourth, late King of England – hath not only openly deprived us of our kingdom, but likewise by all foul and wicked means sought to betray us and bereave us of our life. Yet if his tyrant only extended itself to our person, although our royal blood teaches to be sensible of injuries, it should be less to our greif. But this Tudor, who boasteth himself to hath overthrown a tyrant, hath, ever since his first entrance into his usurped reign, put but little practice but tyranny and feats therof.

For King Richard, our unnatural uncle, although desire of rule did blind him, yet in his other actions, like a true Pantagenet, was noble, and loved the honour of the realm and contentment and comfort of his nobles and people. But this our mortal enemy, agreeable to the meanness of his birth, hath trodden under foot the honour of this nation, selling our best confederates for money, and making merchandise of the blood, estates, and fortunes of our peers and subjects by feigned wars and dishonourable peace, only to enrich his coffers. Nor unlike hath been his hateful misgovernment and evil deportments at home...¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford: University Press, 1988), pp 75-9.

¹⁷⁴ William Ball (ed.), *The Works of Lord Bacon*, Volume 1 (London: John Childs & Son, Paternoster Row, 1838), pp. 778-9. This account of a proclamation from Warbeck is given by Bacon in his life of Henry VII and dated to November 1495. In his marginal note Bacon here declares that: 'The original of this proclamation remaineth with Sir Robert Cotton...' no such copy is extant among the Cotton collection but Spedding has shown that a likely copy of this source does survive as BL, Harleian MSS 283 fol. 123b – which bears the transcriber's note: 'The original of this, in an old written hand, is in the hands of Sir Robert Cotton; 18 August, 1616'. Spedding has further shown that Bacon used passages from John Speed (c.1551-1629) in reference to the same source, which Bacon copies here almost verbatim. Spedding writes favourably of Bacon's account: 'Of the rest he has given, not a transcript, but a representation; the sort of representation which a clearheaded reporter will give of a confused message... The spirit and effect he has preserved faithfully; but he has omitted repetitions, changed the order, marked the transitions, and in some cases inserted a sentence or two to make the meaning clearer or more forcible.' See James Spedding; Robert Leslie Ellis; Douglas Denon Heath (eds.) *The Works of Francis Bacon - Volume 6: Literary and Professional Works 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.167-172; pp. 255-257. Vickers has supported this, whilst noting some stylistic differences in the representations given by Bacon and Speed. See: Brian Vickers, *Bacon: The History of the Reign of King Henry VII and Selected Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. xli-xlv; pp.128-32.

Warbeck's propaganda demonstrates that he and his supporters clearly understood how much antipathy and resentment the king's levied taxes had created across the country, and particularly in regions such as Cornwall. For Perkin, the excesses of his would-be uncle Richard III in conniving to have him and his would-be brother murdered to place himself on the throne were as nothing to the deviancy of Henry Tudor in violating the customary privileges of his subjects in Cornwall and elsewhere. In Warbeck's following proclamations he lists numerous complaints specific to Henry VII, declaring that he abused and broke sanctuary laws, that he was a traitor who murdered and robbed people and an extortioner with a cruel policy of taxation. Warbeck declared his promise, as the Duke of York, to remove the evil taxation. The would-be prince promised to revert to traditional taxation methods and to suppress 'benevolences', 'unlawful impositions' and 'grievous exactions' imposed by Henry VII; he would uphold the liberties of the Church, uphold the privileges of nobility, and confirm city, borough, and town charters.¹⁷⁵ Warbeck appealed directly to a growing Cornish desire to return to the largely self-governing institution of the Duchy that had existed throughout much of the late medieval period. During the Wars of the Roses a decentralised system of rule had been established in peripheral regions such as Cornwall, and the greater level of central control in the government of Henry Tudor, especially the King's fiscal policies - such as the nation-wide tax levies for border conflicts with the Scots - were particularly unpopular in Cornwall. The initial Cornish refusal to meet such levies and Henry's subsequent decision to deprive Cornwall of its stannary privileges ultimately led to riots and harassment of Henry VII's tax collectors.¹⁷⁶ One such episode which has been popularly remembered by Rowse and other Cornish scholars as evidence of the unpopularity of Henry VII's financial policies in Cornwall was the killing by a mob of one of his chief Cornish fine and tax collectors the Provost of Glasney, John Oby, during the Perkin Warbeck rising.¹⁷⁷ One possible explanation for John Oby's dangerous apparent defection from his Royal duties is the desperate circumstances under which the king's levied taxes had placed

¹⁷⁵ Ian Arthurson, op. cit., pp. 147-8.

¹⁷⁶ Philip Payton: 'a... concealed envy against the English': a Note on the Aftermath of the 1497 Rebellions in Cornwall' in *Cornish Studies: One* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993), pp.6-8.

¹⁷⁷ Rowse (who had it from Edward Hall's chronicle of Henry VII) gives an account of the Provost's murder: 'at this time, a band of several hundred sea-rovers, who had come to aid Perkin under the lead of one James, met with the unfortunate Provost of Glasney, whose exactions had been remembered against him. It was said that he had "gathered more money than came unto the King's use". They brought him to Taunton, and "there in the marketplace slew him piteously, in such wise that he was dismembered and cut in many and sundry pieces. So he perished, an example to too officious and eager tax-collectors.'" In, A. L. Rowse, *Tudor Cornwall*, op. cit. p.133.

the clergy of Cornwall under.¹⁷⁸ As Arthurson notes in 1496 and 1497 the clergy were assessed three times for taxes: ‘once for the loan in anticipation of taxes, once for their parliamentary tax, once for a special clerical tax... No wonder clergy were to the fore as rebels’¹⁷⁹.

Given the pre-existing tradition of the portrayal of pagan tyrants acting as a foil to saints in medieval drama, both Rutt¹⁸⁰ and Cooper have suggested that the nearness in the names of the reigning monarch Henry VII and the pagan despot Teudar could be potentially coincidental:

The politics of *Beunans Meriasek* may be summarized thus. It must be significant that a king called Teudar was included in a play about a saint who had not previously been connected with this tyrant of local folklore. The question is, whether Teudar appears for dramatic or political reasons. The similarity to the name of England’s ruling dynasty may be accident or design. Either *Beunans* was compiled after 1497, in which case it may have served as a conscious expression of anger on the part of a group of defeated and fined men; or it represents an older, and much wider, interest on the part of a play-going public in tyrants and their downfall, and the age of conversion.¹⁸¹

Cooper notes that arguments for a subversive and political reading of *BM* are partially dependent on the supposed date for its composition, within a decade of the text’s completion in 1504. However, as Payton notes in his subsequent review of Cooper’s study, Cooper, despite his expressed aim of observing a general tradition of loyalty and stability in early modern Cornwall, sometimes contradicts his own arguments and very often finds himself at

¹⁷⁸ Whilst Rowse appears essentially correct in ascribing Oby’s unpleasant death to a common feeling of unrest amongst the Cornish, it is perhaps worth mentioning here that this particular episode of the Perkin Warbeck rising has a more complicated history than Rowse warranted it with. Whilst John Oby was certainly a tax and fine collector in Cornwall, in testament to the conflicted condition of Cornwall during this period, the evidence of more contemporary accounts in the *Chronicles of London, Vitellius A XVI* indicates he was also in fact believed to be directly involved in supporting and funding the rising and it was for this reason he was murdered by the pirate James the Rover (of whom we have no other account) and his gang in what was apparently an act of revenge amidst and against a failed rebellion: ‘And in this while one James a Rover, which had gadered in his cumpanye to the numbere of vj or vij C. Rebelles, Sechyng the forsaied Perkyn to haue assisted hym, mette w[ith] the Provost of Peryn, and brought hym vnto Taunton aforsaid; and there in the Market place slewe hym pytuously, in such wise that he was dismembred and kutte in many and sundry peces. The cause as it was said was for that he was one of the Occasioners of the Rebellyng of the Cornyssh men; for he was one of the commyssioners in that Cuntre and gadered, as they said, more money than came vnto the kynges vse. But what so euer the cause was, foule and piteously was he murdered.’ See Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (ed.), *Vitellius A XVI in Chronicles of London*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), pp 217-8, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316163405.004>.

¹⁷⁹ Ian, Arthurson, op. cit., p.163.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Rutt, ‘Love and Tears at the Camborne Play’, in *The Celtic Pen*: Vol 2, No.1, 1994), pp.18-20.

¹⁸¹ J. P. D. Cooper, op. cit. p.81.

odds with his original thesis.¹⁸² Nowhere is this more evident than in his discussion of *BM* where he is obliged to note that, regardless of the author's intention when incorporating an outsider tyrant figure named Teudar, *BM*'s subtext is frequently subversive in its depiction of royal and worldly authority and Teudar clearly represents a thematic threat to the country's Christian identity with the character's insistence upon a choice between idolatry or death.¹⁸³ In the character of Teudar, both theological and regional resentment are combined and personified. For this reason, Teudar's final comeuppance at the hands of the pious, righteous and nationalistic Duke of Cornwall marks an especially cathartic end to the first day of the cycle- restoring a Cornwall which will be led by godly Christian principles and respect for local custom rather than foreign unchristian tyranny:

Dux: The vyterneth schumunys :
 theth gueres bohes a veth
 galwy dis bras ha munys
 hag the varogyen keth
 hath arlythy
 me agis gorte in plen
 hag ov fobyl defry
 the Crist del off servont len.¹⁸⁴

King Massen and the Tyrant in the Holy Hostage play

If there is one episode in *BM* which best epitomises the cycle's investment in the theme of kingship and tyranny, it is that of the aptly named 'Tyrant' character and the 'Woman's Son'- sometimes termed 'the Holy Hostage'.¹⁸⁵ Where as the other plays of *BM* and *BK* celebrate the lives of local saints and national folk heroes - melding together historiography, romance and satire to reflect contemporary Cornish concerns - the Holy Hostage is instead devised

¹⁸² Philip Payton, *Journal of British Studies*, 44(3), 644-645. (2005). Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/432216> doi:1.

¹⁸³ J. P. D. Cooper, op. cit. pp. 79-84.

¹⁸⁴ 'Your accursed "sovereignty" /shall be of little help to you. /Call both the great and the humble to yourself, /And all your common horsemen, /and your "lords": /I shall await you on the field as I am assuredly/ A faithful servant to Christ and to all my people' - *BM*, 2430-8.

¹⁸⁵ Murdoch, Brian, 'The Holy Hostage: de filio mulieris in the Middle Cornish Play Beunans Meriasek', in *Medium Aevum*: 58 (1989).

purely as a religious allegory, as emphasised by the consistent identifying of characters purely by trope: ‘Son, Mother, Tyrant, etc...’ Because of this, the Holy Hostage is especially evocative in its use of imagery, symbols and signifiers. The play concerns a young Son character leaving the humble home of his devout mother to seek his fortune at the court of King Massen,¹⁸⁶ only to be taken captive by a hostile Tyrant who has taken up residence in the country and to be tortured and imprisoned when he refuses the Tyrant’s demand to renounce Christ and adopt the Tyrant’s own diabolical creed. Although the protagonist of the Holy Hostage play is neither a venerated saint nor a member of the clergy, unlike Meriasek or Kea, he is nevertheless, like them, framed as a devout figure who is persecuted for his faith by a greedy tyrant and threatened with martyrdom before his miraculous salvation from the Tyrant. The Son performs a similar function to the saint characters in representing the Church, its faithful and their duty to resist tyranny and irreligious rule. The play begins with a triumphant parade as good King Massen prepares his court for a grand hunt,¹⁸⁷ the picturesque pastime of a gregarious and active monarch. In his preparations, we can note Massen’s qualities of good fellowship, vitality, and generosity as he invites both laymen and the clergy to accompany him. Seemingly drawn by Massen’s call to service, adventure and vocation, the Son sets off from the Mother’s home:

FILIUS: The den yonk ythyv dufer:

bones in mesk arlythy
ena eff a desked dadder
ha manot pur eredy
mayfo the guel
me a vyn mones heb bern
lamen the corte an mytern
ov mam wek genogh farwel.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Combellack asserts King Massen is modelled after King Macsen Wledig of the *Mabinogion*. Myrna Combellack-Harris, op. cit. p.50.

¹⁸⁷ *BM*, 3156-3164.

¹⁸⁸ ‘The Son: For a young man, it is a duty/ to be amongst lords./ There, he learns manliness/ and what is good, /so that he may be the better./ Now I will go freely to the king’s court./ Farewell to you, my dear mother’ - *BM*, 3171-3179.

Combella has suggested the opening of this play emphasises a linked theme of learning and the proper instruction of youth in *BM*, as the Son's declaration that it is the duty of all young men to be instructed by the lords of the land mirrors that of Meriasek's father, the Duke of Brittany, in the first play that Meriasek must go to school 'dysky dadder may halla' – 'for him to learn goodness'.¹⁸⁹ The obvious difference in this third play of the cycle is that whilst Meriasek's education led him towards the clergy, the preoccupations of King Massen's court indicate that the Son will receive instruction towards joining the knightly estate. This suggests the emergence of romantic themes which are not commonly associated with the *Legenda Aurea* (LA) vita which Combella gives as the play's source.¹⁹⁰ The subject of the hunt for the White Hart- a side plot so much in the background of the play's action as to appear almost circumstantial - reinforces romantic and Arthurian themes as well as suggesting links to Brythonic folklore.¹⁹¹ It is significant, therefore, that the clash between a rightful ruler of the land (Massen) and an interloping force (the Tyrant) should occur during the hunt for the White Hart. The Hart in Arthurian legend has also been seen as a metaphor for the search for Christ, as seen in the Cornish Passion Poem, 'Pascon gans Arluth'.¹⁹² The Son presents himself at the court of King Massen, and, in the manner of a romantic would-be knight errant, requests that he be given the opportunity to prove himself 'awos arveth me an gruae'¹⁹³ – 'with or without wages', implying the possibility of feudal service. The hunt for the White Hart represents a significant departure from LA and facilitates much of the play's initial action as the king welcomes his new servant and prepares for the hunt with a final pragmatic warning that a mysterious Tyrant also abides in this country and that they had best be on their guard. This sets the stage for the Tyrant, who, sure enough, quickly assures the audience of his violent and threatening character:

Tyranus: Me yv turant heb parvo:

in dan an hovle pensevyk

pan veua fol ha garov:

nynsus in beys genesyk¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Myrna Combella-Harris, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, pp.48-52.

¹⁹¹ In old Brythonic folklore they are known to appear when one crosses a taboo. See John. T. Koch, (ed.), op. cit., pp. 137-8.

¹⁹² Alan M. Kent, op. cit., pp. 210-1.

¹⁹³ *BM*, 3201-2.

¹⁹⁴ 'I am a tyrant without equal, a prince under the sun. When I am mad and violent, there is none born in the world to oppose me.' - *BM*, 3208- 3212.

The Tyrant, like the king, extends an invitation to the laity of his court but, like the Emperor Lucius, notably neglects the clergy. The two parties meet during their hunt, and the King upon seeing them states that he suspects they are a people ‘without grace’ - ‘age bones ongrassyes’¹⁹⁵ indicating both their cruel countenance, and lack of Christian virtue. Interestingly, the King’s Second Hunter then describes the Tyrant as having ‘risen against [the king]’¹⁹⁶ indicating that this apparently chance encounter represents an act of sedition.

The Tyrant is also defined as such by the nature of the company and subjects he keeps. Like Teudar, he is followed everywhere by a gang of unruly torturers who bemoan their bondage to a mean and miserly lord who gives them hardly enough to sustain themselves: ‘PRIMUS TORTOR: Ony yllyn pee agen rent/ the guel awos y wagis/ mar ny veth thyn arluth guel/ ny venen bones na pel/by my sovre dotho pagys’¹⁹⁷ The torturers who follow both Teudar (in both *BM* and *BK*) and the Tyrant are ironically only kept in check by the threat of falling prey to the physical violence which they themselves dispense on the part of their respective liege. The inferior quality of servant which tyranny attracts is further established in the Holy Hostage play when the Menial of the Camp informs the Tyrant that the pages, insubordinately, will not go a step from home ‘for want of wages’¹⁹⁸ to which the Tyrant responds by threatening to: ‘me as pee in dan onen’¹⁹⁹ – ‘pay them under an ash’ - that is to say, pay them with beatings. Indeed, so eager is the Tyrant to dispense floggings that he promptly orders his followers to find switches. The Camp Menial eagerly follows his master’s order believing that he and the other followers will be paid for beating their absconding fellows: ‘CALO: atta guelynnny parys/ ha na sparyovgh bethens peys/ rag dysky dethe tountya.’²⁰⁰ Here, as before, there is a comical double irony in the Tyrant’s followers being paid to beat those of their fellows who have absconded for want of pay, emphasising not only the Tyrant’s brutality but also the inefficiency and vice which are endemic under his rule. What follows is a scene of comic relief as the Tyrant, cursing upon his god Mahound- the same deity revered by Teudar- pursues the Torturers into a tavern where they have been

¹⁹⁵ *BM*, 3234.

¹⁹⁶ ‘er agis py drehevys/ yn pur certen’ - *BM*, 3240-1.

¹⁹⁷ ‘We cannot pay our rent all the more,/ because of his wages./ If he is not a better lord to us,/ we will not be pages/ of his any longer.’ - *BM*, 3264-8.

¹⁹⁸ *BM*, 3285.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 3290.

²⁰⁰ ‘Here, the rods are ready and spare them not! Let them be paid for teaching them to be cheeky!’ - *BM*, 3298-3300.

carousing and complaining about their lot. When the Tyrant and his entourage enter with the son of one of the torturers, they begin whipping the torturers until they beg forgiveness in a scene which, whilst clearly comic, nevertheless emphasises the moral depravation of the Tyrant and his servants. The Torturer curses his own son for his betrayal in bringing the Tyrant to discover him and his fellows: ‘PRIMUS TORTOR: byth ny yllyn soweny/ boys agen gober hep pee/ a russe sokyr thynny/ naw nobyl a calame’²⁰¹ Whilst Massen’s court is a place where one will learn ‘manliness and what is good’ the Tyrant instead nurtures cruelty and bitter self-interest amongst his followers.

The Tyrant is then further established as a prince of malice and vice by the pair of demons who appear in his company when he makes sacrifices to his god, Jovyn. Besides providing the opportunity for spectacle in the form of elaborate costume,²⁰² the Demons, who give their names as ‘Moufras’ and ‘Skirlywit’,²⁰³ also represent the medieval Cornish fear of, and fascination with, pagan sacrifice and the sacrilegious arcane power this was believed to afford:

PRIMUS DEMON: Duen ny lemme then tempel
 an Turant a vyn cowel
 may hallo guthel moy drok
 my ryn orto vn golok²⁰⁴

The grisly nature of the offerings - the yet-bleeding severed heads of various beasts - conveys contemporary revulsion at the idea of pagan animal sacrifice whilst also providing a dark satire as the Tyrant and his followers eagerly lay down their ‘gifts’ whilst greedily demanding that God bless them for their offerings. That the two devils preside over the sacrifice, unnoticed by the Tyrant, is testament to the contemporary belief that pagan worship was devil worship, whether the worshippers in question were cognisant of this or not.²⁰⁵ Moufras’s

²⁰¹ ‘The curse of God upon the body of my boy./ His foot went so swiftly to you,/ to do us an injury.’ - *BM*, 3360—3.

²⁰² See accounts of devil costumes in Cornish drama provided by Alan M. Kent, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-5.

²⁰³ Nance has attributed the demon Moufras to the French mystery plays *Le Martyre de S. Pierre et de S. Paul* and *Les Miracles de Ste. Genevieve*; and the *Ludus Ceventriae* in the N-Town plays- R. M. Nance (ed.) – Myrna Combella-Harris, *op. cit.*, p.529.

²⁰⁴ ‘Let’s go to the temple now./ The Tyrant will complete a sacrifice,/ so that he may do more evil/ Let us take a look/ though that may not be to his advantage.’ - *BM*, 3882-7.

²⁰⁵ Madigan, Kevin, *op. cit.*

hailing of the crowd in English is a sinister reflection of the Duke of Brittany's greeting in the earlier play, as well as that of Arthur in *BK*: 'DEMON: Peys y hot both wylde and tame/ y say Moufras ys my name/ awoys gul drok/ benythe numbethe schame.'²⁰⁶ The frequent deployment of English by devils and villains when first addressing the crowd may have appealed to anti-English sentiments, grabbing the attention of Cornish-speaking audiences after a steady meter of Cornish, and localising the character as a foreigner and a threat.²⁰⁷ It is also interesting that the Demon (whether it be Moufras or Skirlywit is unclear in the text) grants the torturers the 'gift' of covetousness and greedy malice: 'DEMON: Me agis son an barth cleth/ drok hag anfusy inweth/ guetyogh vsia/ ha pyle bohosogyan/ molothov kentrevogyan'²⁰⁸ As has been discussed above, these were exactly the attributes that would have been unfavourably associated with the king's tax collectors in early Tudor Cornwall. The depiction of Teudar and the Tyrant's worldly greed as a deeply unnatural, even demonically influenced curse upon the people of Cornwall also notably recalls the anti-Tudor rhetoric employed by dissenters such as Warbeck. That the Torturers leave the Tyrant's sacrifice and are commanded to rob the poor – 'agen tass ens an barth north/ re roys thynny/ purgulr y venedyccyon/ commondias thyn defry/ ha pyle bohosogyon'²⁰⁹ - reinforces *BM*'s motif of tyrannical rulers and their agents leaching off the common folk of Cornwall, leading to the poor and the meek suffering most. The reference to 'Our holy father of the North side' is indicative of the entrance of the 'Devil' and 'Deamon' characters from the north side of the stage in Cornish drama. The third torturer even satirically notes that wherever the torturers may go they are hardly missed by their nearest of kin, who indeed often pray they never return home:

Tertius Tortor: Ny reys thyn fors pythellen

rag bener re thewellen

menogh y rer y pesy

gans agen kerens nessa

ha wath oll the lowenha

²⁰⁶ 'Peace, I command both wild and tame/ I say Moufras is my name/ dreaded among lords/ never ashamed of doing evil.' - *BM*, 3369-72.

²⁰⁷ Jon Mills (2012), op. cit., pp. 146-56.

²⁰⁸ 'Demon: I will give you a left-handed blessing. Take care to use both evil and misfortune, and to rob poor men. The curses of neighbours will make you thrive.' - *BM*, 3420-3425.

²⁰⁹ 'First Torturer: Our holy father on the North side/has given us his blessing, /and has commanded us / to rob poor men' - *BM*, 3428-31.

This seems a notably bitter reflection on the dehumanised position of the torturers as tax collectors, hated by friends and folk alike, and very much recalls the unfortunate fate of John Oby. They are ostracised by the nature of their profession and have seemingly little choice than to continue to profit from their king's greed and the suffering of poor folk. That this scene occurs immediately before the battle between the respective hunting parties of King Massen and the Tyrant, interspersed (presumably unchronologically) with the scene in which the two parties first meet, underscores the contrast between the two parties and, in part, serves to explain the defeat of the King Massen's party for the audience; as the defeat of a just party by an unjust one was often understood in medieval and early modern miracle plays to be the work of demonic entities, and so, accordingly, the Tyrant's party must be assisted by malefic power to defeat their more righteous adversaries. The corruption engendered by the tyrant's oppressive policies is personified in the figures of the demons and their gifts. Manning has asserted that the positioning of the Torturer characters throughout the Cornish miracle plays (between Hell in the North of the stage, and Heaven in the East) performs a symbolic function, indicative of their role as agents of violence within the temporal space of the stage:

They have a seat of their own in the NE, a seat that in almost all respects behaves as an entity of a cosmological order rather than a feudal one. The seat of the torturers is consistently the only seat between Heaven and Hell, corresponding to the location of Gog and Magog in Medieval *mappa mundi*, who are also uncomfortably poised between being historical and cosmological agents (waiting to serve as the armies of the antichrist), the torturers seem to represent not concrete historical characters like David, Caiaphas, and Solomon as much as they represent violence itself, elevated to a cosmological principle.²¹¹

In Manning's reading, then, the Torturers occupy a more liminal space, agents of chaos and oppression who, like the devils observing from hell, can be summoned forth to fit the worldly needs of a tyrant; much as the saintly protagonist is at times able to request the aid of angels from Heaven. Whilst this fits the medieval model of cosmological morality found in many miracle plays²¹² I would argue that the scenes described above demonstrate an attempt on the

²¹⁰ 'We need not care where we go,/ that we never return./ It is often prayed so by our nearest loved-ones,/ and yet shall always be the merrier.' - *BM*, 3446-8.

²¹¹ Paul Manning, 'Staging the State and the Hypostasization of Violence in the Medieval Cornish Drama', in *Cornish Studies: Thirteen*, Philip Payton (ed.) (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), P.153

²¹² Diane Murphy, *op. cit.*, pp 141-58.

part of the writer to link the cosmological moral struggle, believed by medieval and early modern writers to directly influence and fashion worldly affairs, with the historical abuses of contemporary perceived tyrants and their agents. Like the tyrants, the torturers of *BM* are consistently othered by their profanity and their inability to abide by or respect the social customs and rights of the Cornish, with what Manning refers to as ‘their grotesque embodiment and fascination with scatology and sex, their ‘amoral and antisocial’ character, and their lack of ability to assimilate or reflect upon evil.’²¹³

In addition to the social and moral othering of the Tyrant and his servants, the rule of the Tyrant character is further delegitimised by the theme of inheritance in the play. To a contemporary rural Cornish audience - for whom the most powerful and influential governance had long come from the Duchy²¹⁴ - the right (or lack thereof) to make use of the land and forests was of great customary significance. To abuse such rights by claiming by force the use of lands to which a ruler had no inherited claim was one of the clearest signifiers of tyrannical rule. This is highlighted in this exchange between Massen and the Tyrant when meeting in their hunt:

Rex: Ser turant, ke war the gam
 bythqueth ny vue map the vam
 genys wath then eretons
 saff in heys na verth re tont
 me yv prest arluth an gront
 nansyv blethynnyov vgon²¹⁵

Massen asserts the impropriety of the Tyrant’s right to rule his lands, as he has not come upon them by inheritance but is instead a foreign interloper. It is notable that the King chooses to address the Tyrant in English: ‘Ser turant’. This is another example of the code switching described by Mills between Cornish and English (and occasionally French) in the plays as a method of asserting the legitimacy of the ruler’s right to rule in that country and, by extension, his opponent’s lack of legitimacy. Massen emphasises his Cornish origins whilst indicating that the Tyrant is Saxon or other. We can see this again in the King’s second

²¹³ Paul Manning, op. cit., p.155.

²¹⁴ R. M. Stanfield., op. cit., pp. 24-32.

²¹⁵ ‘Sir Tyrant, go on your wicked way./ Never yet was a son of your mother born/ to this inheritance. Stand closer!/ Do not be too impertinent./ I have been lord of this ground/ this twenty years.’ – *BM*, 3467-72

address to the Tyrant, ‘Nou by hym that Judas solde’, as he swears by Christ and thereby indicates his allegiance to the Christian creed and his consecrated right to rule, in contrast to the Tyrant.

Rex: ny sensefff ath geryov bolde
vn faven kuk
byth nynsoff the omager
na der reson vyth danger^{216- 217}

Massen, like Arthur and the Emperor, is eager to point out that he has never owed vassalage to the Tyrant. Once again, therefore, we see an apparently Cornish king disassociating himself from feudal bondage to a foreign ruler seeking to establish suzerainty over a Cornish king’s rightfully inherited lands. Whilst King Massen stakes his claim on the grounds of lawfully inherited rights, having held his title for some twenty years, the Tyrant instead lays claim by might alone. This directly recalls the exchange between Teudar and the Duke of Cornwall at the end of the first day of the cycle, and both the Duke and King directly attack their adversary’s lineage. Likewise, this exchange recalls Henry VII’s own weak hereditary claim to the throne which was a cause of considerable unrest during his reign and, as we have noted, was a prominent argument in the propaganda of the pretender Perkin Warbeck when rallying support amongst the Cornish. Massen decries the Tyrant’s imposition of power based on might alone and denounces his efforts to persecute good Christians:

Rex: Ny seff henna yth galloys
ty nag ongrassyas del oys
mentenour a thyscregyans
ren arluth Crist a vercy
me nyth sense guel e sky
denagh the tebelvyrans²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Combellack reads this as ‘danger’ - ‘danger dyso ny ruk’ - ‘nor lordship for thee have I made’ – from M.E. ‘daunger’ – ‘to be in the power of a superior’ - from Nance: ‘cafos yn danjer’ - ‘to be in feudal service.’ See Myrna Combellack-Harris, op. cit., p.537.

²¹⁷ ‘I do not care one blind bean for your bold words./ I am never your vassal,/ nor for any reason/ have I done any feudal service to you.’ - *BM*, 3480-3484.

²¹⁸ ‘That does not stand in your power,/ you, devoid of Grace as you are./ Upholder of Unbelief!/ By the Christ Lord of Mercy,/ I hold you no better than a dog./ Renounce your evil-doing/ or I will spill your blood here on the ground./ Never try at any time to threaten the Christians.’ - *BM*, 3497-3502.

Massen here exemplifies the model of a righteously wrathful Christian prince, who is vengeful and violent only when defending his people, their rights and, most importantly their faith when threatened by an outside power. The Tyrant, by contrast, curses the people of the Cornwall, demanding their conversion and obedience on pain of death:

Tyrannus: Fy dis hag oll theth nasconn
fy mylwyth then crustunyon
denagh the fay
bo ty ha myns us genas
a vyrwe omma re Satnas
der beyn ha mur anfusy²¹⁹

Here, the temporal conflict between the opposing forces of Massen and the Tyrant in the play directly reflects the wider, violent Manichean-esque cosmological struggle between the Church and godless worldly tyranny. Manning notes that this polarised conflict between godly kings and tyrants is not only present in the dialogue and action of the plays but also in the staging, reflecting a growing, almost Weberian interest in violence determining the social order of the state, which is not present in the earlier drama of *The Ordinalia*.²²⁰ One likely explanation for this shift towards violent political and religious power struggle as a primary theme of Cornish drama is the historical context of violent instability in contemporary Cornwall. Where as in the *The Ordinalia*, the positioning of secular lords, kings, and tyrannical figures such as Herod, is unitary, in *BM* and *BK* the placement of kings and tyrants becomes bifurcated in some of the plays with Christian lay rulers entering from the South-West and pagan, or oppositional, tyrants emerging from the North-West.²²¹ Tellingly, the redeemed tyrant Constantine emerges in between, directly West. The symbolism of the spectacle to the witnessing audience would be more apparent, with the tyrants entering from the position of the round nearest to Hell in the north, while the saints and clergy enter from the south-east, closest to Heaven.

²¹⁹ 'Fie on you and all your nation!/ A thousand times/ fie upon all the Christians./ Deny your faith,/ or, by Satan,/ you and everybody with you shall die here,/ through pain and great misfortune.' *BM*, 3509-3514

²²⁰ Paul Manning, op. cit., pp. 150-1.

²²¹ Ibid, pp.146-8.

The choice of the Tyrant's chosen method of torturing and dispatching the Son by ordering his hanging, drawing and quartering is significant as, since the codification of the Statute of Treasons in 1352 (though the first recorded instance of the punishment occurs in 1238, during the reign of Henry III)²²² up until its last recorded sentencing in 1839,²²³ hanging drawing and quartering remained the most severe method of execution which could be sentenced across England, and was reserved for those criminals whose crimes were seen to have directly injured -or threatened to injure- the state, such as regicides or attempted-regicides.²²⁴ The choice of this execution method by the Tyrant for a prisoner of war who owes him no fealty, makes a mockery of the contemporary justice system as it would have been understood by the writer and audience alike and re-emphasises the Draconian style of his rule. Nor is this the first reference to hanging, drawing and quartering in *BM* as, in *Beunans Sylvester*, Constantine declares that those who refuse to return the sacrificial children to their mothers will suffer the punishment.²²⁵ The instability of the Tudor period and the insecurity of its monarchs saw increasingly numerous incidences of this most severe mode of execution. In the aftermath of the Cornish Rising of 1497 the ringleaders of the rebellion, including the key figureheads Thomas Flamank and An Gof, were sentenced to death by being hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn.²²⁶ Mills has identified what are arguably direct references to An Gof in the *Passio Christi*²²⁷ and it is possible that the character of the Woman's Son, and the threat of imminent hanging, drawing, and quartering in *BM*, also served as signifiers of the communal figureheads and martyrs of the Cornish rebellions. Whilst there is no evidence the writer 'Dom. Tonn' would have taken any part in the uprisings himself, given the many potential disparaging allusions to Henry Tudor in the play, he may well have been sympathetic to the ill-fated leaders of the uprising. We should not overlook the lasting impression the gruesome execution and dismemberment of Flamank, Gof, and many others in the aftermath of the Cornish risings would have made in the minds of the Cornish; particularly in those Cornish speaking communities of Western Cornwall which, as Stoye notes,²²⁸ were decimated by the human cost of the revolts and hobbled by their

²²² Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, and Co., *Short Constitutional History of England*, (Oxford; London: B. H. Blackwell, 2009).

²²³ Each man given the sentence in this instance ultimately had their sentence commuted to transportation.

²²⁴ Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, and Co., op. cit.

²²⁵ *BM*, 1667-8.

²²⁶ A. L. Rowse., op. cit., pp.127-8.

²²⁷ Jon Mills (2012), op. cit., pp. 2-3.

²²⁸ Mark Stoye, op. cit., pp. 40-2.

subsequent fines. Although the most notable executions (such as those of Flamank and Gof) took place at Tyburn and not in Cornwall, the dreadful spectacle would certainly have recounted far and wide by those who had witnessed it; indeed, the chief aim of such extreme forms of capital punishment was to leave a lasting warning to other potentially rebellious subjects or would-be traitors. As noted above, the uprising of Perkin Warbeck that same year (1497) is testimony to the fact that unrest was still considerable amongst the Cornish after the rising, and many elements of Cornish society were clearly prepared to believe the pretender Warbeck's claim to the throne of England was indeed superior (or at least, more desirable) than that of Henry VII's. When we consider the frequent discussion of legitimacy and an inherited right to rule in *BM* it seems appropriate to consider the implication that *BM* could well have been received –whether intentionally or unintentionally - as a remarkably anti-Tudor play. The inclusion of a tyrant character who practices Draconian policies and enforces the cruellest of punishments is also notable since they are conspicuously absent from the text which certainly inspired the Holy Hostage play, the story of The Nativity of our Blessed Lady in the *LA* (c.1260).

Combellaack suggests that the decision to include The Holy Hostage play in the cycle is 'only explained by a strong cult of Mary in the parish of Camborne'.²²⁹ Whilst the veneration of the Cult of the Virgin and its legitimisation within the play is certainly an important element to consider in its reception by a contemporary Cornish audience, this view somewhat neglects a wider aspect of significance in the inclusion of King Massen and the Tyrant, figures notably apocryphal to the episode in the *LA* Combellaack cites as a probable source for the play. Here again we see the theme of a conservative Christian Cornish struggle against a perceived idolatrous and foreign tyranny emerge as a core element of Cornish drama. Furthermore, we can perceive two models for kingship emerge as polarised opposites in the bloodthirsty, Draconian Tyrant and the pious Massen. As noted, these models are further reflected in the subjects each ruler attracts. Where the Tyrant's torturers serve in the self-consuming interest of gaining wealth from the suffering of others just to sustain themselves, the Son seeks to serve Massen to better serve God and would unreservedly lay down his life for this cause. Interestingly, there is a contrast between the earlier episode of the cycle wherein the Duke of Cornwall emerges victorious over the pagan army of Teudar and his allies. Here, Massen is instead forced to retreat, suggesting that fortune does not always favour the righteous and indicating the perilous and constant nature of the cosmological

²²⁹ Myrna Combellaack-Harris, op. cit., p52.

moral struggle which is evident throughout the cycle. Nevertheless, it is the Tyrant who ultimately emerges at a disadvantage in the play, as the intercession of Mary deprives him of his prized prisoner and hostage through her direct intervention, leaving him to be mocked by the son of his terrified and confounded jailor:

GARCON: 'Ay turant ke war the gam
yma ree ov leferel
molleth du the vap the vam
heb ty vyth na govlya
fetel ywa dyogel
delyfrys der Varia
haggis boys wy de vlamys: war vohogoyon cruel'²³⁰

This provides the play with an encouraging and satisfying ending; the Cornish king may have lost the battle and the good Christian Son may have been captured and mutilated, but his miraculous deliverance gives the audience the confidence to have faith that tyrants will always ultimately be confounded; a message which would certainly have been appealing to a community recovering from the bitter wounds of two disastrous uprisings.

Conclusion

A key function of a saint play was to illustrate the universal and individual conflict between moral virtue and vice (and contrast the difference) yet the didactic treatment of just rule and tyranny is not always clear cut in the Cornish mystery plays. This is illustrated by a number of the cycles' lay ruler characters: Constantine, an Emperor with many tyrannical traits, is ultimately redeemed by listening to the sage and godly advice of St. Sylvester. The character of King Arthur in *BK* can also provide surprisingly conflicted readings as both a great king and, arguably, a fearsome tyrant whose rule ultimately spells tragedy for the Kingdom of Britain. Combellack has asserted in her initial description of the plays of *BM* that, whilst certain elements of the play show repetition, the plays are ultimately thematically

²³⁰ 'Oh, Tyrant, go on your way./ The curse of God/ on your mother's son!/ Some are saying,/ without any lying that he is free/ and that you are to blame for being cruel to poor men.' - *BM*, 3737-44.

unrelated.²³¹ However, this assumption is somewhat reductive, as Olson notes: ‘medieval people connected things together as much as possible. They held, after all, that God created the world with the symbolism and allegory already built in.’²³² Combellack’s conclusion seems to assume that the playwright was more chiefly concerned with the technical needs of composing a play which could endure for the cycle’s two-day period, whilst making optimal use of stage and players, than he was with crafting an instructional yet entertaining allegory - certainly a more natural proclivity for a clergyman. As Olson has stated in her brief article on the subject, the three plays of *BM* are all related by a shared theme of tyranny.²³³ I would venture to go a step further in adding that not only are each of the plays of *BM* related by a theme of tyranny, but they are also bound by a shared investment in the theme of the struggle between good, godly kingship and ungodly tyranny - viz. by their allegorical approach to ideals of poor and successful, just and unjust, rule. Furthermore, as I hope to have demonstrated in this thesis, this theme of suppressive tyranny, matched by the strengths of a king, lord, or saint who stands to defend the rights - whether these be spiritual or customary - of his people also runs throughout the cycle of the more recently discovered *BK*. Taken together then, both *BM* and *BK* demonstrate that the extant Cornish drama produced at Glasney in the Tudor period shared a common propensity for satirising the characters of tyrants who interfered with the religious and customary freedoms of the Cornish people, that the most commonly appearing amongst these tyrants is a figure named Teudar, and that these tyrants frequently meet their downfall, either at the hands of armed insurrection, military opposition, or a divine miracle. This is not to say however that just kingship and tyranny in *BM* and *BK* are purely axiomatic; the struggle between the two can be seen to play out within *BM* and *BK*’s leading lay lord characters themselves as much as on the cycles’ battlegrounds. Examples of this inner-struggle are seen in the character of Constantine in *BM*, a tyrant who is ultimately redeemed by his decision to put the lives of innocents before himself and his title, but also in Teudar – a tyrant who both Meriasek and Kea try, but ultimately fail, to reform; and, as noted, it can also be perceived in the character of Arthur. It is in the scenes of where saintly protagonists of *BM* and *BK* confront and counsel lay lords that the saints of the plays perform one of their primary functions in the narrative, interceding as a Christian compass for lay rulers where they have lost their way – a legacy which many contemporaries would have also applied to Glasney College’s patron saint, Thomas Becket.

²³¹ Myrna Combellack-Harris, op. cit., pp. 64-6.

²³² Lynette Olson, op. cit., p.53.

²³³Ibid. pp. 59-60.

Whilst *The Ordinalia* is saturated with topographical references which served as a means of asserting localised Cornish identity, it is notably bare of the Brythonic legends which make up so many distinctive elements of the medieval and early modern Cornish popular imagination. However, these Brythonic folklore elements are much more readily apparent in *BK* and *BM*.²³⁴ These secular folk legends of kings and lords, notably those relating to Arthur and other legendary Cornish and Breton rulers, can often seem to a modern audience to be out of place in the lives of saints and holy figures, but they serve an important function in the cycle's wider narrative by reinforcing the plays' ties to local identity. In this manner, the saints' plays perform both a catechetical and liminal function, both providing religious instruction and instilling regional pride. Arthur continued to appear as a figure of Cornish veneration and pride throughout the medieval and early modern period as evidenced by a number of antiquarian accounts.²³⁵ The enduring veneration of Arthur as a regional champion and king who would one day return was understood in wider England as a particular characteristic of the Cornish. In the latter half of the 15th Century, the English writer of the Red Book of Bath writes: '[the] Cornysch sayeth thus, that Arthur levyth yut parde and schalle come and be a kyng aye.'²³⁶ Stoyle has argued that such common anecdotes of Cornish prophecies 'betrayed a hidden longing to humble the Saxon English and to resurrect the imagined glories of Cornwall's independent past.'²³⁷ In fact, the enduring antipathy of the Cornish towards their English neighbours can be attested well into the early modern period (and indeed, beyond) as can be seen from the accounts of Carew and others and the apparently popular saying 'meea navidna crowzasawsneck'.²³⁸ This indicates how, despite the enormous widespread popularity of Arthuriana across England and Western Europe, the veneration of Arthur as a native son - much like the veneration of Brythonic saints - continued to be used by the Cornish as a means of emphasising Cornish identity and otherness.

²³⁴ O. J. Padel, op. cit. pp.95-7.

²³⁵ See account of 'King Arthur's Stone' in John Chynoweth, Nicholas Orme & Alexander Walsham (eds.) Richard Carew, *The Survey of Cornwall*, (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 2004).

²³⁶ Richard Barber, *Arthurian Literature*, Volume 1 (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1999), pp. 76-80.

²³⁷ Mark Stoyle, 'Re-discovering Difference: The Recent Historiography of Early Modern Cornwall', in *Cornish Studies: Ten*, (ed.) Philip Payton (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p.19.

²³⁸ Carew, whose Cornish was limited, accounts hearing the retort from many Cornish commoners. He translated it as: 'I can speak no Saxonage.' The actual phrase 'Ni vinav cowz Sawzwek' is closer to: 'I will not speak English!' See Jon Mills, 'Genocide and Ethnocide: The Suppression of the Cornish Language' in John Partidge (ed.), *Interfaces in Language*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp.200-1.

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