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Abstract
Considers the influence of Williams on Heath-Stubbs's Arthurian poem cycle. Part I looks at zodiacal imagery. Part II examines particularly the symbolism of the Muses in Artorius. The conclusion primarily considers the influence of Williams and Eliot on Heath-Stubbs.

Additional Keywords
Arthur, King—In poetry; Eliot, T.S.—Influence on John Heath-Stubbs; Heath-Stubbs, John—Influence of Charles Williams; Heath-Stubbs, John. Artorius; Muses in Artorius; Williams, Charles—Influence on John Heath-Stubbs; Zodiac in Artorius

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# John Heath-Stubbs' Artorius and the Influence of Charles Williams

Joe R. Christopher

## Part III

IV. The Arthuriad of Charles Williams

> A figure who commanded the admiration of Heath-Stubbs and his contemporaries at Oxford was the Anglican poet and publisher Charles Williams.
>
> --A.T. Tolley

Charles Williams published his two major Arthurian works -- Taliessin through Logres and The Region of Summer Stars --in 1938 and 1944, respectively. He had published a few Arthurian lyrics earlier; he wrote at least three essays on the Arthurian mythos during those years, two of them collected in The Image of the City (1958); and his incomplete "The Figure of Arthur" appeared after his death. Had John Heath-Stubbs read all of these works? His acknowledgement of Williams as one of his important teachers at Oxford suggests he would have read at least the two books of Arthurian odes and "The Figure of Arthur."

But I can be more specific than that. In 1947, not too long after Williams' death, Heath-Stubbs published an article, "The Poetic Achievement of Charles Williams"; then, in 1955, he published the pamphlet Charles Williams in the British Writers and Their Work series; finally, in 1963, he edited Williams' Collected Plays. (I say "finally," but these are his major works on Williams -- he has written four other essays; further, about a third of a year after this paper was read at Mythopoeic Conference 17, Heath-Stubbs was scheduled to talk at the International Charles Williams Symposium on 6 November 1986 in Germany -- and, I assume, did talk -- on "Charles Williams as I Knew Him.") The first of these titles and the third demonstrate Heath-Stubbs' knowledge of Williams' poems and plays specifically; the second, his knowledge of Williams' novels and theological works as well. The pamphlet is especially interesting for its report of a never-published lecture by Williams on the Image of the City. In short, Heath-Stubbs is knowledgeable about Williams, and the few allusions to Williams' odes which follow have a good chance, I believe, of being legitimate -- that is, of being actually intended allusions, not just chance likenesses.

I should make it clear that I am not arguing that Williams was the primary or only source of Artorius. The paucity of echoes denies that. In earlier sections of this paper, I have mentioned, first, a book of this poem which is based on a reference to Arthur's underground wars by Milton, and, second, another book's list of names connected to Arthurian "history" -- both the early documents and the modern studies -- cited in a fictional lecture. So Heath-Stubbs is not limited to Williams, nor would one expect him to be.

I have three matters I want to discuss as examples of Charles Williams' influence, positive and negative, on this poem. First is the use of the Greek Emperor, second is a rejection of Williams' type of mathematical imagery, and third is a direct reference to Williams. The first of these is Williams' most likely direct contribution to Artorius; the second is a negative influence, and not quite as certain; the third is an acknowledgement.

First, therefore, the emphasis on the Emperor at Byzantium. So far as I am aware, Charles Williams was the first modern Arthurian writer to stress that, although the western Roman Empire was in the process of falling to Goths and other Germanic tribes, the eastern Roman Empire still stood. Indeed, C.S. Lewis, in his commentary on Williams' Arthurian poems, says, "it is feigned that Arthurian Britain was a province... of the Byzantine empire" (104). The reader of Williams' poems will find Taliessin in "The Calling of Taliessin" to be a pagan poet who is commanded by Merlin to go to Byzantium; in "The Vision of the Empire," Taliessin is there, having seen the Emperor and having become a Christian; in "Taliessin's Return to Logres," a briefer lyric, the poet does the titular action. These are, I believe, the main Byzantine poems. Perhaps Williams, a poet of the twentieth century, was influenced by Yeats to consider Byzantium; but he does something somewhat different with this image, which is the significant point here.

Oddly enough, there is a slight historical justification for what Williams does, in the Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain three times refers to Leo as the Emperor when Arthur invades Gaul -- that is, Leo is Emperor of Gaul, not of Britain (Bk. 9, Ch. 11; Bk. 10, Ch. 6; Bk. 11, Ch. 1). Leo I was Emperor at Constantinople from 457 to 474, and he is the only appropriate Emperor for these references (cf. Geoffrey Ashes, "Leo I," in Lacy 335-36). Williams recognizes the general situation in his "Figure of Arthur":

> ...Arthur proceeded to Gaul. This was a more serious matter, for Gaul was under the government of Flollo, a Roman tribune, who held it from the Emperor Leo, as the city of Rome itself is held in the same way by the procurator Lucius Tiberius. The seat of the imperial power in Byzantium is not mentioned; the king [Arthur] is to be concerned with the west. By Geoffrey's day, of course, the Empire was divided, and yet still theoretically one. But it was as if he had enough historic sense to remember that in his Arthur's own supposedly historic day, it was not so. The king is not allowed to make war on the Emperor himself. (30)

"It was as if," Williams writes; but the reference to Leo shows that Geoffrey had a precise historical sense.

Now then, what does John Heath-Stubbs make of this? The first reference is entirely general. Daegrafn, the Saxon poet, is bragging of the courts he has fictionally attended as a poet; he says, in these terms,

that he has sung his lays "with the Caesar of the Greeks in their great city" (8). This simply indicates the existence of a ruler in Constantinople.

The second reference is when Bishop Bedwini tells of the Church Council which Artorius called;

> The weather of April is uncertain, [sic; not a semicolon] nevertheless the synod was held in the open air. Artorius presided under an oak tree, exercising that diaconal surveyance which in a Christian commonwealth is the prerogative, of all lawfully constituted authority. He exercised it, not as having yet received the diaconal stole, but on behalf of the distant Emperor who sat at Byzantium. (17)

It is difficult to know what to make of this passage. A deacon is a server or a helper in the Church -- in a hierarchial Church, where the rank is separate from that of priest and usually considered below that of a priest. Bishop Bedwini seems to mean that the ruler "in a Christian commonwealth" is a helper of the Church. (Artorius is given the diaconal stole at his coronation [44].) Besides variously supporting the Church, the ruler seems to be able to convene and run a Church Council when the Church itself is disordered ("diaconal surveyance"). Implicitly, this says that the later actions of Henry VIII in the English Church were improper. But I am not certain of the ecclesiastical authority of the Emperor. Is it just limited to the same calling of Church Councils, and supervising them, when there are ecclesiastical upsets? Perhaps so. But that is not what a reading of the biographies of some of the Emperors suggests. Perhaps they too, like Henry VIII, overstepped their proper power.

The third passage appears in an ambiguous context -- a speech by Modred in which he urges Artorius to conquer Gaul. His emphasis is on the need for Artorius to give a Pax Arthurian to the Empire, for the current situation will not last:

> Sits in Byzantium
> The distant Caesar, serene and dim.
> Justinian will be subject, in his season, to senility.
> The proud Theodora, the prop of his throne,
> Will go to her rest, if rest can reward
> So restless a spirit. Is his writ subscribed
> Westward in Gaul, now wasted and worried
> By the hordes of the Franks -- or, further, in Hesperia?
> Will Belisarius, rugged in battle, restore,
> Indeed, the order of the Empire in Italy,
> Grinding to powder the power of the Goths
> In the name of Rome? (63)

The passage goes on to mention the invasion by the Lombards, but this gives the flavor -- and three datable names.

What is Heath-Stubbs doing here historically? Obviously he is referring not to Leo I but to the much more famous Justinian the Great, who ruled from 527 until his death in 565. Theodore, his wife, married him in the year he became emperor; but she died earlier, in 548. (the dates of Belisarius do not affect those given.) Thus Heath-Stubbs has dated his epic later than Geoffrey of Monmouth dated his history. Geoffrey says between 457 and 474; Heath-Stubbs says between 527 and 548. Both are possible dates for the Arthurian period.

But the reference to Belisarius, the brilliant general of Justinian, gives a different flavor to this passage. In an interview, Heath-Stubbs said, "I first discovered [the Byzantine, Alexandrian world] when in 1938 I read Robert Graves' Count Belisarius and that awoke my interest. It's one of things that led to the writing of Artorius" (Wightman 898). So Heath-Stubbs' choice of Emperor is a homage to Graves. Again, I do not feel that this contradicts a more general influence from Williams here.

The fourth and final reference to the Emperor appears in one of the visionary passages in Professor Chelifer's lecture; he says, "I bore a banner in the battle order of Artorius. I behold him among the dark forests of America, in rebellion against the Emperor, an act of hubris" (74). Obviously, Artorius could not rebel unless he had been under the Emperor to begin with.

Let me be very specific about the difference and the likeness of Williams and Heath-Stubbs on the image of the Byzantine Emperor. First, the difference. For Williams, he is an image of God (cf. Lewis 107); for Heath-Stubbs, an image of social and religious order. No doubt Williams would have included orderliness, with geometric imagery, in his understanding of God and the Emperor; but, still, the two writers tend in different directions: Williams, to supernatural vision; Heath-Stubbs, to natural concern. Second, the likeness. Very simply, they both picture Britain as part of the larger Roman Empire. The Emperor is the ultimate ruler of Britain, both indicate. This is not a likely assumption. After all, Rome withdrew its troops from Britain in 410 in a futile attempt to protect the city of Rome. Britain was the last province conquered in the Roman Empire and the first abandoned. That being so, the assumption of a connection in Arthur's time between Britain and far Byzantium seems unlikely. No doubt some Romanized Celts about the year 500 dreamed of a day when Britain would return to the Empire; but surely in practice, ninety years after the fact, no action was based on it. Williams and Heath-Stubbs run counter to this prevailing view of Arthurian Britain. Geoffrey of Monmouth, one remembers, made the Emperor sovereign of Gaul, not of Britain.

I mentioned Williams' geometric imagery above. Actually, it is not just geometry which is used. Here are five lines from "The Vision of the Empire":

> The milk rises in the breasts of Gaul,
> trigometrical milk of doctrine.
> Man sucks it; his joints harden,
> sucking logic, learning, law,
> drawing on the breasts of intelligo and credo. (8)

I am overstressing that word trigometrical, of course, since the basic image of the passage is that of a baby being nursed by his mother; but this suggests what I mean. Williams repeats this word in "The Coming of Palomides":

> Talaat ibn Kula of Ispahan
> taught me the measurements of man
> that Euclid and Archimedes showed,
> ere I took the Western road
> across the strait of the Spanish seas.

When Palomides reached Gaul and then Italy, he reports:

> Gospels trigonometrical

measured the height of God-in-man
by the swinging hazels of Lateran.... (33)

But the basic imagery I want to quote is Palomides' song upon the arm of Iseult at the Court of Mark:

Blessed (I sang) the Cornish queen;
for till to-day no eyes have seen
how curves of golden life define
the straightness of a perfect line,
till the queen's blessed arms became
a rigid bar of golden flame
where might Archimedes prove
the doctrine of Euclidean love.... (34-35)

Palomides continues for thirty-eight more lines, mentioning "compass," "circles," "arc[s]," "equilateral" (used twice), "angles," "sides," and "isosceles."

Later, in another poem, "The Sister of Percival," Taliessin watches a slave woman draw a bucket of water from a well:

A round plane of water rose shining in the sun;
she steadied the handle, the strain ceased; her arm
balanced the line of the spine and reached for the gain.

Taliessin, watching, played with a line: 'O
Logres centre, can we know what proportion
bear the radii so to the full circumference everywhere?' (52)

The imagery continues with the arrival of Blanchefleur --and in other poems -- but I have made my point.

If I read two brief allusion in Artorius aright, Heath-Stubbs rejects this approach. Certainly he does not use such imagery. In the book of "Libra," the poet Gwion makes a point about the political debate which begins from his poetical practices:

The words I work with
Come to me with the marks of common currency;
Language is to be moulded, not mathematical logic,
To constitute the perfect consort of a poem.
The wise in such matters will work so with men,
Kneading their fallibility to the fruition of freedom,
Which is also an act to be acquired by application.

The significance here is not the political application but the two lines about writing poetry:

Language is to be moulded, not mathematical logic,
To constitute the perfect consort of a poem.

Later in this same book, when Modred is praying to Venus Pandemia after the political meeting, he says:

Goddess and pastmistress,
Weaver of stratagems, I want your support.
I know more law in the lust of my loins;
I observe more order in the inclination of an arm,
In the glance of sunlight on the golden softness
Of a halo of hair, in the smoothness of a hip,
Than in all the abstractions of these old men's arguments. (64-5)

In context, Modred is rejecting the establishment of law in favor of sensuality, but could Heath-Stubbs write

I observe... order in the inclination of an arm

without thinking of Palomides on Iseult's arm and Taliessin on the back, arm, and bucket of the slave woman? Perhaps he could, of course; but I cannot help wondering if this is not a touch of parody of Williams, giving a hint of Williams' sensibility to Modred. If so, what it suggests is not that the saints (Palomides momentarily) and great poets (Taliessin) may not see something beyond sex in a woman's form; instead, it balances Williams with the statement that sinful man (Modred) will reduce the geometric vision, the hint of God's order, to something sensual.

If I lam right about these allusions to Williams' imagery, then -- as with the treatment of the Byzantine Emperor -- the reader finds Heath-Stubbs rejecting the mystical for the social. But the final reference I have promised is not another rejection, but an acknowledgement. Other references to Arthurian authors have been mentioned as appearing in the poem: Nennius (72), Geoffrey of Monmouth (71), Wace (71), Layamon (72), John Dryden in his opera (32). But the most fascinating comes at the end of Professor Chelifer's lecture in the ninth book, "Sagittarius":

And I Taliesin-Tiresias, churchwarden in Gloucester Road or proof-reader for the Press, and evening lecturer in Stukeley Street, foreknew and foresuffered all, and the waste land and the dolorous blow. (74)

This passage is a delightful double allusion to T.S. Eliot (Tiresias) and Charles Williams (Taliesin [perhaps a typo for Williams' use of Tennyson's Taliessin, with the double s]). Eliot was a churchwarden in Gloucester Road; Williams was a proof-reader for the Oxford University Press. Williams was an evening lecturer for the London County Council, and he spoke at the London Day Training College in Stukeley Street for the L.C.C. (Hadfield 59). The Language of "foreknew and foresuffered all" echoes Tiresias in Eliot's The Waste Land, and the reference to "the dolorous blow" alludes to Williams' poetry. In the preface to The Region of Summer Stars, Williams writes, "the wounding of King Pelles (the Keeper of the Hallows) by Lord Balin the Savage was the Dolorous Blow which prevented the union of Carbonek and Logres and therefore the coming of the Grail" (vii-viii). There is not central telling of the Dolorous Blow in Williams' poetry, but there are several allusions. Here are six lines from "The Son of Lancelot";

Palles the Wounded King lay in Carbonek,
bound by the grating pain of the dolorous blow;
his flesh from dawn-star to noontide day by day
ran as a woman's under the moon;
[that is, he bled]
in midsun
he called on the reckless heart of God and the Emperor;
he commended to them and commanded himself and his land.
(Taliessin through Logres 56)

Thus Heath-Stubbs gives homages to the two greatest Arthurian poems of the earlier twentieth century in Britain --Arthurian by allusion, in Eliot's case, and by direct reshaping, in Williams' case. However much Heath-Stubbs may differ from Williams in con-

tent, he does not deny his general indebtedness to Williams' example.

What else do these three comparisons show? Two things, I. believe. First, whether Heath-Stubbs accepted material from Williams or reacted against his writings, his concern with Williams indicated again Williams' influence on modern poetry and drama. Someday a good book will be written on the influence of Williams on T.S. Eliot, on W.H. Auden, on C.S. Lewis, on John Heath-Stubbs, on Anne Ridler, more generally on Christopher Fry, and probably on several others. It is part of the claim of Williams to literary importance that he influenced other writers in his time.

Second, several of the comparisons have suggested that Williams' mysticism and Heath-Stubbs' social concerns let their poetry in different directions. I said in my opening section of this long essay that I thought Artorius had a more general appeal than Williams' Arthurian odes. I did not argue this matter of audience to be a matter of merit. I think it is now possible to make this case more clearly. I would suggest, although I have not offered full evidence, that Williams' poetry has depths and heights beyond Heath-Stubbs'. To make a complete case, one would also have to consider Artorius's preparation of kingship in his "underground wars." But, even there, I believe the material to be more psychological than spiritual. However, I leave that matter for a different critic. If I am right, a literary historian can expect to find Williams' reaching a limited number of readers again and again through the centuries -- reaching them and influencing them greatly. Heath-Stubbs should, in the long run, become closer to a standard author -- Artorius read and thought about, like Tennyson's Idylls of the King, by readers both within and without the literary community.

On this centennial of Williams' birth, it is appropriate we should remind ourselves both of his limits and of his merits -- both of them great, both of them due to his intensely spiritual focus.

(A note on an apparent contradiction: in the first section of this paper, I said The Waste Land, although having Arthurian allusions, could not be considered really an Arthurian poem -- that is my view; the celebration of Eliot as an Arthurian poet in this fourth section reflects, I believe, Heath-Stubbs' view.)

## V. The Third Dark Age

> John Heath-Stubbs once described himself as "A contumacious poet in an unjust, barbarous age." For all who understand what he is writing, the last adjective remains undeniable.
>
> --Derek Stanford

I have a feeling that what I have written in the second and third sections of this essay -- "The Signs of the Zodiac" and "The Nine Muses -- and a Tenth" -- suggests only that Artorius is a delightful piece of medievalizing (with classical touches). "Surely," a reader may say, "there needs to be some application to the present time for a work to be valuable." Different genres, of course, make their relevance known in different ways, according to their appropriate types. And different genres are limited in what they can say. The realistic novel, for example, is good at human psychology and at the influences of particular societies on their members; but it is not good at presenting values derived from philosophy or any sort of dedication to abstractions -- yet some people are like that. When was the last time a novel presented a character who was passionately interested in calculus or accounting -- with a stream of consciousness technique?

I am not trying to argue any elaborate generic theory here, nor am I trying to establish what sorts of truths an epic can discuss. Indeed, C.S. Lewis in A Preface to "Paradise Lost" suggests that the themes of epics have changed with the history of the western world -- and no doubt that is true of the eastern world also. But one brief way of indicating some of the applicability of Artorius occurs to me. I would like to point to the three references in the poem to the present age as a third Dark Age. Whether or not a reader agrees with Heath-Stubbs about the modern period, his statements surely indicate something more than just meaningless medievalizing.

Artorius itself is set "at the beginning of the Second Dark Age" (23); I take that phrase from a humorous context -- the opening of Phyllidulus' lecture on classical poetry to the tadpoles and pollywogs of his swamp. But the point he makes is that there is no Dark Age poetry worth discussing, and that therefore he must turn to the classical poetry. If we put this in the context of history, Phyllidulus is not completely wrong. The Germanic invaders of Britain started about 450 A.D., and in 577, at the Battle of Deorham, their success in what is now called England was essentially achieved. Arthur, or Artorius, if he existed, held them off during this period -- say, about the year 500 (or in the period of 527 to 548, if one wished to follow Heath-Stubbs closely). Phyllidulus says,

> One is aware that there are grammarians in Massilia, but one is not sure whether one has come across their productions. Here in this island, one notes with a certain hopefulness that the victories of Artorius have initiated a degree of stability -- it may be only temporary -- in the social situation from which, one might venture, with some optimism, to envisage eventually the burgeoning, if not the flourishing, of a literature which might go beyond, in some measure, the crudities of primordial epic lays or the mere technical virtuosities of Celtic panegyric and bardic exercises.... (23-24)

That is, some Germanic and Celtic literature existed, but Phyllidulus was not the man to appreciate the works. We also need to remember that the Irish and Welsh mythology, which was to be partly Christianized before it was written down, was still oral in the 500s. Phyllidulus would not have considered that literature. The Prose Edda was not written down until about 1220. Even Boethius, whom we think of as a Dark Ages author, wrote his Consolation of Philosophy about the beginning of Heath-Stubbs' Arthurian period, 524; Phyllidulus would not have heard of it.

A few Latin creative writers of the time might have been available to Phyllidulus. Prudentius' Psychomachia was written in the general period of St. Augustine's Confessions and The City of God. More precisely, Prudentius died in the year 410 -- the year when Rome fell and thereby inspired St. Augustine's second title. Claudian wrote some poems in the 400s. Martinaus Capella's Marriage of Philology and Mercury dates from the general Arthurian period. But Heath-Stubbs is more involved in parodying F.R. Leavis in Phyllidulus' parentheses-clogged style and in his negativism about standard authors than he is in being

really medieval -- than he is in providing Phyllidulus with such authors as existed. Of course, the sheer fact of the parody of Leavis in this speech suggests it does have a certain type of applicability to the modern era.

Let me build my transition from Artorius's time and its authors to our own with a quotation from Harri Webb's essay "Artorius -- An Epic for Our Time":

> The ethos [John Heath-Stubbs] celebrated [in his early verse] was the synthesis of Christianity and humanism, the values which now seem under threat from a new species of barbarism. Arthur, therefore, the defender of order and Romanitas, religion and law, against the barbarians of the Dark Ages, is a most appropriate objective correlative for his abiding concerns. (63)

I wish Webb had spelled out more clearly these parallels, but he is satisfied with darting glances like this, finding the poet more clearly Christian than I do; thus, I will try to be, if not more specific about the Dark Ages, at least indirect in a different way.

The clearest description of what Heath-Stubbs means by the Dark Ages comes from another prose passage, this time from the lecture by a later professor, Cheiron Chelifer, to some learned Society. He mentions that he serves the muse Clio, describing her as a "hard mistress." He goes on to indicate that the Dark Ages are not appropriate times for writing history, beginning with a sentence fragment:

> Living as I do somewhere near the beginning of the third Dark Age of Europe civilisation. The first was that which intervened between the collapse of the Minoan-Mycenaean culture and the flowering of Hellas. Ilion falling, and Hector slain, and blind Homer turning even defeat to a tremulous delight. The second from the fall of the Western Empire to the First Crusade. And that also an age for epic and not for history. And whether the third began in nineteen hundred and forty five, or in nineteen hundred and fourteen, or as I am much more inclined to think, in seventeen hundred and eighty nine, I must leave you to decide. But where is our epic? (71)

That is, the second, according to Professor Chelifer, ran from A.D. 410 to 1096. The tree dates for beginning the third are the end of the Second World War, the beginning of the First World War, and the beginning of the French Revolution. These are suggestive dates; but they do not, in themselves, clarify the darkness of the age they introduce. Perhaps part of what is suggested is that the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic attempt at conquest which followed, introduced a series of modern wars rather like the series of barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire; the series of wars involve attempts at conquest, by Napoleon, by the Kaiser, by Hitler and the Japanese war party, which have so far been beaten down --but which will lead to a greater war of conquest, perhaps an atomic war, after which a truly Dark Age will appear. I am not certain of this reading, but it seems to be the likeliest of the possibilities found in this series of three dates. (In the discussion at the Mythopoeic Conference after this section was read, a variety of suggestions were made about social changes that accompanied this revolution and these wars --changes that might also suggest a coming Dark Age; but these readings may be left to the ingenuity of other commentators.)

There are two other references to the third Dark Age. One appears when Artorius has descended into the earth, at the lowest level, where he sees Ceridwen and her cauldron. Artorius looks into the steam of the cauldron and sees images of the future of Britain. This is the epic equivalent, of course, of Aeneas's sight of the souls of the great Romans yet to be born, during his trip through Hades, and of the future Biblical history recounted to Adam by an archangel near the end of Paradise Lost. For Artorius, the history begins with the defeat of the Celtic peoples by the Saxons (imaged as the fight of two dragons) and goes on down to the bombing of London during World War II; and the vision ends with Britain in a simile:

> Like a ship, offshore, with shattered masts,
> Battered and betrayed, the island of Britain,
> Through the thickening dusk of a third Dark Age,
> Drifted into dimness in a tedious decline,
> With two rival crews of contending rats. (43)

The decline of Britain's political and financial power in the world is undeniable, of course, and this emphasis on just Britain in this passage is appropriate in context. But I assume the reference to the French Revolution in the list of dates means that the Dark Age is not just a British concern throughout this poem, but at least European. (Let me add that my interest with reconciling these two accounts does not mean I am unaware of the power of this simile.)

The third reference occurs while Gwion watches the success of Artorius at the battle of Mount Badon:

> Musing, Gwion muttered into his moustache:
> 'We evoke an order: an interim is assigned --
> As a poet, perhaps, in a future predicament
> Of the doubtfulness and dullness of a third Dark Age,
> Might undertake the unfashionable inditing of an epic,
> Though his colleagues and his confreres confined themselves merely
> To little linguistic and logical constructs,
> Or deployed their egos in the Dionysiac delirium
> Of surreal illumination, or psychodelic self-indulgence --
> He might establish an order, by the example of this experiment
> Driving his through-road across the thickets of thoughtlessness,
> And he also[,] if temporarily, might turn the tide --
> But they come back, they come back again, those currents of meaninglessness;
> Language lags, and languishes away --
> The Daughter of Chaos reconsolidates her reign,
> Universal Darkness, and delivers it to the dunces."
>
> (10-11)

The echo of the famed ending of The Dunciad at the end of this passage is also part of the epic tradition, since Pope's poem is a mock epic and is, at least at moments, deadly serious in its satire.

But most of this passage ties to Professor Chelifer's question, "Where is our epic?" Implicitly, John

Heath-Stubbs' Artorius is an attempt at this needed epic. In the first book, Artorius wins at Mount Badon, establishing a stable social order for the period; in the second, the Church Council that establishes orthodoxy for Artorius' kingdom is described; in the third, Gwion says,

> ...Artorius
> Commissioned the courteous Gwalchmai, who commissioned me,
> To clear the conduits of rhetoric in this land.
> ...............................................
> Let language... be clarified,
> Here by the banks of Cam. (21)

In the fourth book, Artorius undergoes his underground cleansing and preparation for rule. And in the seventh, Artorius begins the process of establishing a rule of law in his land. In short, here is an epic which, with humor oftentimes, depicts the essential establishing of a social, cultural, and religious order. I think the religious order -- orthodox Christianity -- may be bothersome to some American readers, since we tend to think of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and various other attempts of the religious right to draw up laws reflecting their beliefs. But England, with an established Church, is a different place, and we can at least see what Heath-Stubbs is doing and why he would assume the affirmation of the traditional creeds is part of an ordering process. It is also significant that Artorius, after the battle of Mount Badon, orders the burial of his foes according to their own pagan rites, in belief "though wrong" (11), and he refuses to order the burning of Christian heretics calling it murder (14). This lack of rigidity may be intended to be a prediction of Anglicanism in most (not all) of its history. Further, the orthodoxy, in essence, is an intellectually organizing device as well as a religious statement: it gives a shared worldview to the nation.

I said earlier that the seventh book on establishing the laws does not reach a conclusion. There are a few later references which imply that Artorius did establish laws ("the makeshift/ Of law is shattered now," 94); but George Every has a different complaint about this book:

> The discussion in Parliament ought to have been about empires, their fall and foundation, rather than about Aristotle's Politics, the Patriarcha of Sir Robert Filmer and the Leviathan of Hobbes. [The latter two anachronistically, and not by name.] We do not really understand why Artorius left the Saxons and Picts behind to invade Gaul. (68-69)

I think this is an example of a critic missing a point: the idea of conquest is a temptation tossed before Artorius by Modred; the invasion of Gaul is Artorius' flaw and sin and hamartia. But there is a second point here. Heath-Stubbs is presenting different views on government; there are eight speakers before Modred, and each says something different. Presumably Artorius' speech, based on Aristotle, just before Modred's, is Heath-Stubbs' final answer -- but that is not absolutely certain. In one sense, Heath-Stubbs in his epic must raise clearly the proper questions even more than give answers. The poet, according to the poem, "might establish an order,.../ Driving his through-road across the thickets of thoughtlessness." Surely no one could read the debate carefully and still be completely "thoughtless" about government.

I could say more on each of the books I have mentioned as setting up aspects of the kingdom --indeed, the pedant in me bids me to be exhaustive --but this once I think I will forego that labored pleasure. The point of the references to the second Dark Age in Artorius' time and the third in our own, like the description of what Artorius does and orders done to establish civilization for a period in his day, shows that this epic has a social theme of great importance, one that applies today as it is imagined to have applied to Artorius' time. I do not say that this is the main theme of the epic; but the social applicability is clearly part of what Heath-Stubbs has to say.

> ...principally you, Calliope, I presume to ask preside
> At equinox and at solstice, at the sun's turnings to sing
> Of War and of Justice, of Warlockry and a Wounding. (1)

Justice, in many of its senses, is one of the epic's themes.

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