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DOI:

[10.1086/675420](https://doi.org/10.1086/675420)

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Citation for published version (APA):

Munro, L. (2014). "Nemp your sexes!": Anachronistic Aesthetics in Hengist, King of Kent and the Jacobean "Anglo-Saxon" Play. *MODERN PHILOLOGY*, 111(4), 734-761. <https://doi.org/10.1086/675420>

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“Nemp your sexes!”: Anachronistic Aesthetics
in *Hengist, King of Kent* and the Jacobean
“Anglo-Saxon” Play

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Thomas Middleton’s *Hengist, King of Kent, or The Mayor of Queenborough*, first performed by the King’s Men around 1619–20,¹ contains what might be the ultimate Anglophone linguistic archaism, a phrase in Old English. Focusing on the arrival of Hengist and his Saxon forces in Britain in the middle of the fifth century, and the treachery through which they established themselves in their new land, Middleton devotes considerable attention to one pivotal event: the legendary massacre of the British forces by the Saxons on Salisbury Plain. Needing a signal or watchword to indicate to his troops that they should break their truce with the British, Hengist chooses the phrase “Nemp your sexes,” a mangled version of an Old English phrase meaning “take your daggers.”² The phrase is derived from Middleton’s

For their insightful comments on drafts of this essay, I am extremely grateful to Tanya Polard; the participants in Kate Chedzoy and Julie Sanders’s 2009 Shakespeare Association of America seminar, “Sites of Memory/Sites of Performance” (especially Anita Sherman, Nina Levine, and Tripti Pillai); the two anonymous readers for *Modern Philology*; and Richard Strier. I would also like to thank the Leverhulme Trust and Keele University for their generous support.

1. It was included in a list of plays apparently being considered for court performance around 1619–20: see G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941–68), 1:127. In *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works* (ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino [Oxford University Press, 2007], 410–14), Taylor dates it to June–December 1620.

2. Thomas Middleton, *The Mayor of Queenborough* [or *Hengist, King of Kent*], ed. Howard Marchitello (London: Nick Hern Books, 2004), 4.3.22. Marchitello’s text is based on the first quarto edition of 1661 (and he follows its title); there are also two manuscript versions: the “Portland” manuscript (University of Nottingham Library, Portland Collection, MS PwV20) and the “Lambarde” manuscript (Folger Shakespeare Library MS J.b.6). See Grace Ioppolo, ed., *Hengist, King of Kent*, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford University Press, 2007), based on the Lambarde Manuscript, and *Hengist, King of Kent, or the Mayor of Queenborough* (Oxford: Malone Society, 2003), which reproduces the Portland Manuscript. All citations are to Marchitello’s edition; any major variations in the manuscript texts are indicated in the notes.

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sources in the chronicle histories of Raphael Holinshed and others, and—as in these sources—it is an isolated quotation, a fragment of Old English embedded in a text that is composed mainly in Early Modern English.³ The archaic phrase does not function, however, as an authenticating or purely historicizing gesture but as a powerful anachronism, a moment at which temporal distance is at once asserted and collapsed.

This extraordinary moment, in which a fragment of a dead language reverberates around the early modern playhouse, epitomizes the opportunities available to dramatists when they chose to represent historical events of the period between the Saxon and Norman invasions. For early modern writers, the Anglo-Saxon period was a locus for theories and anxieties about national, linguistic, and religious identity, and it could represent both historical continuity and fragmentation. Hengist was simultaneously a founder of the English nation and an invading barbarian; Old English was the ancestor of the English language and the dregs of a rough and savage past; the Saxons were represented as pagans and Christian converts, and their church as both the ancestor of the Protestant Church of England and part of a continuing Roman Catholic tradition.⁴ In representations of Hengist's invasion, the Saxons are often portrayed as the religious and linguistic "other," but in representations of the later Danish or Norman invasions they become "English." Furthermore, the period's historical remoteness meant that it straddled the boundaries between history, myth, and legend; a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historians expressed skep-

3. See Raphael Holinshed, *The First and Second Volumes of Chronicles* (London, 1587), 2:81; on the uses of Old English in medieval historians' accounts of this moment, see Mary Catherine Davidson, *Medievalism, Multilingualism, and Chaucer* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 48–71. A multilingual approach to the depiction of the Saxon invasion can be traced as far back as the Pseudo-Nennian *Historia Brittonum* (ca. 840); see Davidson, *Medievalism*, 50–54; Nicholas Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church, 400–1066* (London: Hambledon, 2000), 80–84.

4. On these issues and tensions, see Theodore H. Leinbaugh, "Ælfric's *Sermo de sacrificio in die Pasce*: Anglican Polemic in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: The First Three Centuries*, ed. Carl T. Berkhout and Milton McC. Gatch (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), 51–68; Allan J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Traditions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), esp. 35–50, 130–67; Graham Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Timothy Graham, "Anglo-Saxon Studies: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Philip Pulsiano and Elaine M. Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 415–33; Benedict S. Robinson, "John Foxe and the Anglo-Saxons," in *John Foxe and His World*, ed. Christopher Highley and John N. King (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 54–72; Donna B. Hamilton, "Catholic Use of Anglo-Saxon Precedents, 1565–1625," *Recusant History* 26 (2003): 537–55; Felicity Heal, "Appropriating History: Catholic and Protestant Polemics and the National Past," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68 (2005): 109–32; Christopher Highley, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 84–91.

ticism about the historicity of King Arthur, legendary foe of the Saxons, and other aspects of the Saxon invasion were also debated.⁵ While these ambiguities posed problems for historians, they provided narrative and aesthetic opportunities for the writers of fiction. The Anglo-Saxon past became an important medium through which dramatists could explore questions relating to national, linguistic, and religious identities and origins, and at least twenty-five plays dealing with this subject were performed between the late 1580s and the early 1640s.⁶

In order to explore these issues, this essay first outlines the origins and development of the early modern Anglo-Saxon play, before focusing on four Jacobean works: *Hengist, King of Kent*; William Rowley's *The Birth of Merlin* (1622); Thomas Dekker and John Ford's *The Welsh Ambassador* (1623); and the anonymous *Thorney Abbey* (ca. 1606–16). The Jacobean period was a fertile ground for these plays, in part as a result of the new ideas

5. See, for instance, the account of Vortigern's son Vortimer in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, 2:80–81. On early modern historians' responses to the narratives relating to Arthur and the Saxon invasion, see Roberta Florence Brinkley, *Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932); T. D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London: Methuen, 1950), esp. 78–133; F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1967), 65–67; May McKisack, *Medieval History in the Tudor Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971).

6. Gordon McMullan, "The Colonisation of Early Britain on the Jacobean Stage," in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 119–40, app. 1, lists plays performed before 1625. To this list should be added two 1590s plays listed in Henslowe's Diary as having been performed by the Admiral's Men: *Wartlamcester* (1594–95), apparently dealing with the history of St. Albans, and *Osrice* (1597). See *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 26, 28, 30, 56; Martin Wiggins in association with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama, 1533–1642: A Catalogue*, vol. 3, 1590–1597 (Oxford University Press, 2013), 46, 56. Later plays include Richard Brome's *The Queen's Exchange* (ca. 1630–35); the two-part *Devil and Collier* (1638); *England's First Happiness, or the Life of St Augustine* (1641); and a manuscript fragment of a play on Ethelbert and Oswald, which survives in British Library MS Egerton 2623, fols. 37–38. The fact that most of the Anglo-Saxon plays were not printed until long after their first performances, and some were not printed at all, being either lost or preserved in manuscript, seems to have contributed to their scholarly neglect. For a survey of some of these plays, and their relationship with other dramatizations of "legendary" history, see Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (1957; repr., London: Methuen, 1965), 224–65. The most important recent accounts include Julia Briggs, "Middleton's Forgotten Tragedy: *Hengist, King of Kent*," *Review of English Studies* 41 (1990): 479–95; Grace Ioppolo, "Sexual Treason, Treasonous Sexuality, and the Eventful Politics of James I in Middleton's *Hengist, King of Kent*," *Ben Jonson Journal* 3 (1996): 87–107; Leah Scragg, "Saxons versus Danes: The Anonymous *Edmond Ironside*," in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 93–106; Julia Briggs, "New Times and Old Stories: Middleton's *Hengist*," in Scragg and Weinberg, *Literary Appropriations*, 107–21; Tristan Marshall, *Theatre and Empire: Great Britain on the London Stages under James VI and I* (Manchester University Press, 2000), esp. 145–84; McMullan, "Colonisation of Early Britain."

about nationhood aroused by the accession of the king of Scotland to the throne of England. James VI and I famously styled himself "King of Great Britain, France and Ireland," claiming that his accession reunited "these two mightie, famous, and ancient Kingdomes of England and Scotland, under one Imperiall Crowne."⁷ Although the project for political union between England and Scotland stalled in the face of English hostility in 1607, James nonetheless continued to attempt to integrate his two kingdoms, and his continued commitment to Scotland was underlined in his progress to and around his native land in 1617.⁸

In this context, the Anglo-Saxon period, which was thought to have seen the end of a united Britain, and the eventual creation of separate English and Scottish kingdoms, represented a provocative site for the examination of both unity and fragmentation. Depictions of the Saxon invasion might stress the integrity of pre-Saxon Britain, implicitly or explicitly supporting King James's attempts to create political union between his two kingdoms in the early years of his English reign. Alternatively, they might examine the place of Hengist and his followers as ancestors of the English, suggesting an independent national history for the English rather than a shared British heritage. Narratives surrounding later invasions, or conflicts between the English and other British nations—for instance, the Danish invasions of tenth and early eleventh centuries, or King Althelstan's early tenth-century campaigns against the Scots—might represent specific stress points in the relationships between the kingdoms. The potency of this material lay in the incomplete nature of the union between England and Scotland in the early seventeenth century; as a period of disunity and division, and of changing national, religious, and linguistic identities, the Anglo-Saxon past enabled writers to focus on the complex relationships that might exist between an English/British past and an English/British present.

The interest of the Anglo-Saxon play lies, however, not merely in its subject matter but in the manner in which it is handled. The particular problems raised by their chosen *mise-en-scène* led dramatists to develop specific formal strategies, strategies that I will term "anachronistic aesthetics." Although they are deeply interested in the allusive or analogical uses to which their material might be put, dramatists increasingly resist the purely veri-

7. James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes, eds., *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973–83), 1:95–97.

8. The historical literature on the Union is immense. For varying recent accounts of James's plans and his reaction to the events of 1607, see Jenny Wormald, "James VI, James I and the Identity of Britain," in *The British Problem, c. 1534–1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago*, ed. Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 148–71; Glenn Burgess, ed., *The New British History: Founding a Modern State, 1603–1715* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); Andrew D. Nicholls, *The Jacobean Union: A Reconsideration of British Civil Policies under the Early Stuarts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), esp. 23–46.

similar representation of historical events. Instead, they draw on a variety of metatheatrical and presentational effects, producing a dramaturgy that is linguistically and aesthetically disjunctive, generically ambiguous, and remarkably fluid in its treatment of temporality. Within *Hengist*, *The Birth of Merlin*, *The Welsh Ambassador*, and *Thorney Abbey*, anachronistic elements or fragments, such as linguistic archaism and neologism, prophecy, and palimpsest, possess the capacity to collapse the boundaries between past and present or to mediate between competing narratives about the past. Like Roland Barthes's *punctum*—the “sensitive point” in a photograph, the almost ineffable detail that arouses a personal, emotional response in a viewer—the anachronistic fragment is an aesthetic irritant, a point that draws attention to both the artificial construction of theater and the contingent nature of its response to contemporary political and social pressures.⁹ And while devices such as the chorus and dumb shows were not, in themselves, archaic or anachronistic, their presence in these plays helps to intensify their nonverisimilar effect.¹⁰

In *Hengist*, the focus is on national and linguistic community, as Middleton revisits a foundational moment in linguistic historiography. Rather than building community, Hengist's Old English watchword has the potential to estrange spectators from their putative national and linguistic origins. Setting one origin narrative against another, the play questions political strategies that located the origins of Jacobean subjects in either the ancient British or the invading Saxons, thereby offering a critique of King James's cherished project of political union and the discourses that surrounded it. In *The Birth of Merlin* and *The Welsh Ambassador*, the anachronistic fragments are prophecies, around which anxieties about national identity, origin, and survival coalesce. *The Birth of Merlin* concludes with a prophecy of King Arthur's future greatness and death, and of Saxon domination, betraying a pervasive fear that a nation might be written out of history and a fundamental uncertainty about national origins. Similar anxieties are displayed in *The Welsh Ambassador*, set several centuries later and focusing on the tensions between the English, Welsh, and Irish. Here, a mock-prophetic “chronicle” composed by the Clown not only disavows another national myth, that of the Trojan origin of the English nation, but also deliberately fractures the illusion of temporal distance created by the period setting. The sequence's effect is again achieved in part through language, in this case a series of glaringly anachronistic early seventeenth-century neologisms (“shapperones

9. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1981), 25–26, 43.

10. Choruses are used extensively in Jacobean drama, appearing more rarely in Caroline plays, while dumb shows are common in plays of the 1620s and '30s. See Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb-Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention* (London: Methuen, 1965).

and maqueroones and baboones, and laroones, and petoones") that collapse the past into the present.¹¹ In its treatment of language, national identity, and temporality, *The Welsh Ambassador* evokes some of the fractures evident in Jacobean visions of a new "British" nation.

Finally, in *Thorney Abbey* the anachronistic fragment is still more elusive: the semimythic Anglo-Saxon abbey—predecessor of Edward the Confessor's Westminster Abbey—the building of which is central to one of the play's interwoven narratives. Invoked through dialogue and dumb show, the Saxon Thorney Abbey functions as the bottom layer of an anachronistic palimpsest, overlaid and overwritten by the later abbey with which the play's audiences would have been familiar. Like *Hengist*, *The Birth of Merlin*, and *The Welsh Ambassador*, *Thorney Abbey* reworks a historical narrative, in this case that of the Saxon abbey and its founder. In doing so, it attempts to efface the religious turmoil and trauma of the Reformation and to present Anglo-Saxon religious practices as a mirror image of those of the Jacobean Church of England. David Womersley has argued that for Tudor polemicists such as John Bale and John Foxe, "the recovery of true religion demanded nothing less than a root-and-branch rewriting of the English past," a rewriting in which the Anglo-Saxon period played a crucial role.¹² These strategies are played out in miniature in *Thorney Abbey*, but the tensions and contradictions inherent in the play's rewriting of history cannot, ultimately, be contained within its narrative.

THE ANGLO-SAXON PLAY

Playwrights' interest in the dramatic potential of the Anglo-Saxon past often appears as a response to specific political events and pressures: uncertainty about the succession to the English throne in the 1590s; the stalled project for union between the kingdoms of England and Scotland in the 1610s and early 1620s; increasingly violent religio-political tensions in continental Europe in the same period; and Charles I's "personal rule" in the 1630s, during which the relationship between monarch and people became progressively more strained.

The earliest recorded appearance of an Anglo-Saxon setting in early modern drama is in the Inns of Court play *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, performed at Gray's Inn in 1588; this production was followed by a burst of plays on similar themes in the commercial theaters of the 1590s. The most prominent playing companies of this period all had plays featuring Anglo-

11. Fredson Bowers, ed., *The Welsh Ambassador* [sic] 5.3.100–101, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, vol. 4 (Cambridge University Press, 1961). All quotations are from this edition.

12. David Womersley, "Against the Teleology of Technique," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68 (2005): 95–108, quotation at 103.

Saxon settings or characters; the fact that the majority are now lost has perhaps blinded scholars to their commercial importance at this time.¹³ The late Elizabethan Anglo-Saxon play was an offshoot of the popular history play, and like the history play, it takes a number of forms. It was often concerned with invasion, conquest, and succession, if titles such as *William the Conqueror* (Sussex's Men, ca. 1591–93), *Vortigern* (Admiral's Men, 1596), *Hardicnut* (Pembroke's/Admiral's Men, 1597), *Hengist* (Admiral's Men, 1597), *Uther Pendragon* (Admiral's Men, 1597), and *Earl Godwin and his Three Sons* (Admiral's Men, 1598) are any indication.¹⁴ *Edmond Ironside, or War Hath Made All Friends* (auspices uncertain, ca. 1594–97) is a rare survival from this group of otherwise lost plays, focusing on King Edmond's resistance to the Danish invader Canutus (Cnut).¹⁵ Other plays either focused on the lives of saints, such as William Haughton's *Grim, the Collier of Croydon* (Admiral's Men, 1600),¹⁶ featuring Saint Dunstan, or used the Anglo-Saxon past as a more generalized temporally remote setting, as in *A Knack to Know a Knave* (Strange's Men, 1592) or Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* (Admiral's Men, 1599).¹⁷

The Anglo-Saxon play is also like the history play in general in its stubborn survival into the seventeenth century—in the form of both new plays and revivals of old ones—and its ready adaptation to suit new political and aesthetic demands. Writers such as Dekker and Middleton had worked for the Admiral's Men in the late 1590s and early 1600s, and, given that some titles and topics recur in later years, it is possible that they looked back to plays and topics with which they were familiar and perhaps even reworked

13. Two ongoing projects, Martin Wiggins's *British Drama, 1533–1642: A Catalogue* (Oxford University Press, 2011–), and Roslyn L. Knutson and David McInnes's *Lost Plays Database* (<http://www.lostplays.org>), are throwing welcome light on lost plays of the early modern period.

14. For records of writing and performance see Foakes and Rickert, *Henslowe's Diary*, 20, 55–60, 88–90, 92; for summaries of evidence and probable narratives, see Wiggins, *British Drama*, 128–29, 346–47, 382–84. *Hengist* may be the same play as *Vortigern*.

15. The play survives in British Library MS Egerton 1994. For detailed discussion of its theatrical contexts, see Randall Martin, ed., *"Edmond Ironside" and Anthony Brewer's "The Love-sick King"* (New York: Garland, 1991), 370–75; Wiggins, *British Drama*, 373–74. Roslyn L. Knutson has recently suggested that it may have been written for the Queen's Men; see "The Start of Something Big," in *Locating the Queen's Men, 1583–1603: Material Practices and Conditions of Playing*, ed. Helen Ostovich, Holger Schott Syme, and Andrew Griffin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 99–108, esp. 104–5.

16. The 1662 collection *Gratiae Theatrales* credits the play to "I.T.," but it is generally attributed to William Haughton on the basis of a payment by the Admiral's Men to "w^m harton" on May 6, 1600, "in earneste [of a Boocke] w^{ch} he wold calle the the devell & his dame" (Foakes and Rickert, *Henslowe's Diary*, 134; their brackets). William M. Baillie, "The Date and Authorship of *Grim the Collier of Croydon*," *Modern Philology* 76 (1978): 179–84, makes the most convincing case for Haughton's authorship.

17. See Foakes and Rickert, *Henslowe's Diary*, 19, 126–28.

material from the earlier plays. However, the relationships between (for instance) the Admiral's Men's *Vortigern* and the Jacobean plays of Middleton and Rowley cannot be fully discerned. Like their Elizabethan predecessors, the Anglo-Saxon plays produced under James I and Charles I are not restricted to any particular playing company or type of theater; while some of the plays appear to have been performed at amphitheaters such as the Curtain, Fortune, Globe, and Red Bull, others have been associated with indoor playhouses such as the Blackfriars, the Cockpit, and Salisbury Court.

New plays emerging in these years include *Thorney Abbey* (auspices uncertain, ca. 1606–16)¹⁸ and Anthony Brewer's *The Lovesick King* (often thought to have been designed for performance before James I in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1617 but possibly produced by the Company of the Revels at the Red Bull between 1619 and 1623).¹⁹ It also seems likely that Haughton's *Grim, the Collier of Croydon* was revived around 1611.²⁰ Examples cluster in the years 1619–23, perhaps as a result of the intensification of the theater's engagement with political affairs during the period of the Palatinate Crisis and the Spanish Match, and the renewed attention that these events threw onto issues of national and religious identity and allegiance.²¹ They

18. Current scholarship, pointing to *Thorney Abbey*'s apparent indebtedness to *Macbeth* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, suggests that the play was originally written after 1606. In his edition of the volume in which it was published, *A Choice Ternary of English Plays: Gratiae Theatrales* (1662) (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1984), William M. Baillie tentatively dates *Thorney Abbey* to ca. 1615. *Gratiae Theatrales*'s attribution to "T.W." is generally discounted; Baillie suggests William Rowley as a likely author, while another possible candidate is Thomas Heywood. I am very grateful to Martin Wiggins for discussing the date and authorship of *Thorney Abbey* with me and for letting me see a draft entry in a forthcoming volume of his *British Drama, 1533–1642: A Catalogue*.

19. For discussion, see Madeline Hope Dodds, "Edmond Ironside and *The Love-Sick King*," *Modern Language Review* 19 (1924): 158–68; Martin, "Edmond Ironside" and Anthony Brewer's "*The Love-sick King*," 200–217. The "Anth: Brewer, Gent." named as author on the play's 1655 title page may be the "Anth Brew:" mentioned in the bookkeeper's notes in the manuscript of *The Two Noble Ladies* in British Library MS Egerton 1994 (the same manuscript that preserves *Edmond Ironside*), performed by the Company of the Revels at the Red Bull ca. 1621.

20. In a sermon at Paul's Cross on August 25, 1611, published as *Abraham's Suit to Sodom* (London, 1612), Robert Milles attacks "mimicall Comedians, and apish actors, who with *Thraso* thunder out *sesquipedalia verba*, a heape of inkehome tearmes to the tenour of a poore Collier, and with a ridiculous *Tu quoq[ue]* moue many a foole to laugh at their owne follies." The "ridiculous *Tu quoq[ue]*" refers to *Greene's Tu Quoque*, revived by Queen Anna's Men in 1611, and in this context it appears likely that the "Collier" refers to Haughton's play.

21. On the political contexts of these plays see Marshall, *Theatre and Empire*, 145–84. Marshall works with an earlier dating of *The Birth of Merlin*, which has now been convincingly dated to 1622 (see n. 22). For general accounts of drama and politics in these years, see Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics, 1623/24* (Cambridge University Press, 1986); A. A. Bromham and Zara Bruzzi, "*The Changeling*" and the Years of Crisis, 1619–1624: *A Hieroglyph of Britain* (London: Pinter, 1990); Paul Salzman, *Literary Culture in Jacobean England: Reading 1621* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

include *Hengist, King of Kent*, performed by the King's Men at the Globe and/or Blackfriars around 1620; Rowley's *The Birth of Merlin, or The Child Hath Found his Father*, performed by Prince Charles's Men at the Curtain in 1622;²² and Dekker and Ford's *The Welsh Ambassador*, performed by Lady Elizabeth's Men at the Cockpit around 1623.²³ Underlining the appeal of Anglo-Saxon subject matter across professional and amateur stages, this period also saw the performance of three plays on Anglo-Saxon subjects at the English College at Douai: William Drury's *Aluredus, sive Alfredus* (1619), and both *Fatum Vortigerni* (1619) and the lost *Emma Angliae Regina* (1620) by Thomas Carleton.²⁴ Although written in Latin, and from an explicitly Roman Catholic perspective, these plays share many aspects of their dramaturgy with their commercial counterparts. In *Aluredus, sive Alfredus*, for example, Saint Cuthbert returns to life to act as Alfred's patron and guide, while Death plays a choric role in *Fatum Vortigerni*, which also features a dumb show of Prince Vortumer's funeral and the appearances of an angel and the god Pluto to Vortigern.²⁵

A theatrical investment in the Anglo-Saxon period recurred again during Charles I's "personal rule," the period from March 1629 to April 1640 during which the king refused to summon Parliament and ruled without it. Charles's political opponents often drew on Anglo-Saxon sources in their attempts to define the limits of monarchical power and the status of the common law; as Jessica Dyson notes, "Common lawyers opposed to the extra-legal use of royal prerogative . . . argued that there was a continuity in English common law from the Saxons (whose laws were made by consent of the people) through to the present, and for this reason, the king was not above the law, nor was he its origin."²⁶ It is therefore unsurprising that dramatists and playing companies returned to this material. Richard Brome

22. The date and auspices are confirmed by a record of its licensing by Sir John Astley, Master of the Revels from March 1622 to July 1623; see N. W. Bawcutt, ed., *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 1623–73* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 136.

23. See Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 3:267–68. On the play as a Dekker/Ford collaboration see Bertram Lloyd, "The Authorship of *The Welsh Ambassador*," *Review of English Studies* 21 (1945): 192–201; Cyrus Hoy, *Introduction, Notes, and Commentaries to Texts in "The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker,"* vol. 4 (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 137–41.

24. *Aluredus, sive Alfredus* was translated by Robert Knightley in 1659 as *Alfredus; or, Right Reinthroned* (Bodleian MS. Rawlinson Poet. 80); see Albert H. Tricomi, ed., *Alfredus; or, Right Reinthroned* (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1993).

25. See Tricomi, *Alfredus; or Right Reinthroned*; Thomas Carleton, *Fatum Vortigerni*, ed. and trans. Dana F. Sutton, in *The Philological Museum* (2007); <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/vort>.

26. Jessica Dyson, "Staging Legal Authority: Ideas of Law in Caroline Drama" (PhD diss., University of Stirling, 2007), 125. I am very grateful to Dr. Dyson for sharing her work with me and allowing me to cite it.

wrote *The Queen's Exchange* for the King's Men in the early 1630s;²⁷ both *Edmond Ironside* and *Hengist, King of Kent* appear to have been revived;²⁸ and a play titled *England's First Happiness, or the Life of St Augustine* was entered in the Stationers' Register on April 15, 1641, suggesting that the Anglo-Saxon saint's play was still theatrically viable.²⁹ In addition, the two parts of "Devil and Collyer" licensed for the Red Bull in 1638 may have drawn on the same material as *Grim, the Collier of Croydon*.³⁰

As this survey demonstrates, the Anglo-Saxon play was more widespread and enduring than is often acknowledged. Moreover, the extant plays demonstrate remarkable continuities in their dramaturgy and in the development of the anachronistic aesthetic that I will examine in the Jacobean plays. Surviving Elizabethan examples range from chronicle history to more fantastically hybrid works such as *A Knack to Know a Knave* and *Old Fortunatus*, but even plays written in the former mode seem unable to resist anachronism or self-consciously theatrical devices. *Edmond Ironside* has rightly been described as one of the most historically verisimilar of early modern chronicle histories; Leah Scragg notes that it "is firmly set within the Anglo-Saxon period and is entirely devoid of fairy tale or fantastic elements."³¹ However, even this play features such metatheatrical devices as a chorus and dumb show. It also boasts anachronisms such as Edricus's statement "yet I Can play an *Ambodexters* parte"—probably an allusion to the equivocating Vice figure in Thomas Preston's 1560's play *Cambises*—and references to both the plain blue coats worn by late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century servants, which were so ubiquitous that they were often known as "blue coats," and the "sattine dobles" that they would rather have worn.³²

This combination of anachronism and the self-consciously theatrical is not unusual in the late-Elizabethan history play—we might look, for in-

27. For discussion of the date and performance contexts, see Marion O'Connor, "The Queen's Exchange: A Critical Introduction," in *Richard Brome Online*, gen. ed. Richard Allen Cave (Royal Holloway, University of London/Humanities Research Institute, University of Sheffield, 2010); <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome>. I have followed the 1657 title page's ascription to the Blackfriars, but, as O'Connor points out, this is open to question.

28. The playhouse manuscript of *Edmond Ironside* includes the names of actors associated with Prince Charles (II) Men at Salisbury Court ca. 1632 (see Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 1:323). An allusion to a performance of *Hengist* in *The Book of Bulls* (London, 1636), f9r-v, suggests that it was current on the stage; it is among the plays protected for the King's Men on August 7, 1641 (Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 1:66).

29. See Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 5:1326; Matthew Steggle, "England's First Happiness, or The Life of St. Austin," *Lost Plays Database*; http://www.lostplays.org/index.php/England's_First_Happiness,_or_The_Life_of_St._Austin.

30. See Bawcutt, *Control and Censorship*, 202.

31. Scragg, "Saxons versus Danes," 97.

32. Eleanore Boswell, ed., *Edmond Ironside, or War Hath Made All Friends* (Oxford: Malone Society, 1928), lines 330, 1245–46; see *OED*, <http://oed.com>, s.v. "blue coat," n.

stance, to Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, in which such techniques are prominent.³³ However, the Anglo-Saxon play resists a general tendency in the seventeenth-century history play toward a relatively realistic treatment of its material and away from the fantasy elements used by Robert Greene and other writers of the 1590s. While the prologue to Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* (Queen Henrietta Maria's Men, ca. 1633) could claim that the author "shew's a Historie, couch't in a Play,"³⁴ Jacobean and Caroline Anglo-Saxon plays refuse to form their material to the demands of chronicle history. Like the Fool's prophecy in the Folio text of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, they capitalize on the fact that the early medieval period is a point at which history becomes difficult to disentangle from legend and myth, and they are riddled with what Marjorie Garber has termed "temporal dissonances."³⁵ Thus, in *The Lovesick King*, Brewer relocates and recasts the legend of the love affair between the Ottoman Emperor Mahomet (Mehmet II) and Irene, a Christian captured at the fall of Constantinople in 1453, using it as the model for his depiction of the Danish conqueror King Canutus's infatuation with Cartesmunda, "the beauteous Nun of Winchester."³⁶ This is not purely the "English Tragical History" described on the play's 1655 title page, but a temporal, national, and religious hybrid.³⁷

In these plays, archaic and anachronistic elements are coupled with the frequent appearance of prophecy, the use of presentational chorus figures and dumb shows, the palimpsesting of material traces of the present onto the past, and the presentation of characters with an intense—albeit fleeting—sense of their own historicity. In his recent book, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*, Jonathan Gil Harris suggests, drawing on Michel Serres, that "time in Shakespeare's plays is sometimes a progressive line that follows the arc of the sun, but it is also counterintuitively a plane in which the future is behind and the past ahead, and a preposterous folded cloth in which

33. Valuable recent accounts of temporality and anachronism in these plays include Alison Thorne, "There is a History in All Men's Lives: Reinventing History in *2 Henry IV*," in *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories*, ed. Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves, and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester University Press, 2006), 49–66; Patricia A. Cahill, *Unto the Breach: Martial Formations, Historical Trauma, and the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 71–101; Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 66–94.

34. John Ford, *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck: A Strange Truth* (London, 1634), A4v.

35. See the discussion of anachronism in "Shakespeare's Laundry List," in Marjorie Garber, *Profiling Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2008), 195–213 ("temporal dissonances" is from 206).

36. Anthony Brewer, *The Love-sick King, an English Tragical History: With the Life and Death of Cartesmunda, the Fair Nun of Winchester* (London, 1655), F4v.

37. For detailed discussion of this issue, see McMullan, "Colonisation of Early Britain," 125–27.

before and after are coeval."³⁸ Jacobean and Caroline Anglo-Saxon plays similarly challenge conventional, linear models of time, utilizing notions of historical distance at some points in their narratives but more often collapsing the distinctions between one time period and another. Simon in *Hengist, King of Kent* addresses both the characters onstage and the audience as his "neighbours"; the citizen-hero Thornton in *The Lovesick King* is based on the late-medieval merchant Roger de Thornton; and Anthynus in Brome's *The Queen's Exchange* is granted a Macbeth-like prophetic vision, a dumb show featuring "six Saxon Kings' ghosts crowned, with sceptres in their hands," in which his accession to the West Saxon throne is foretold.³⁹

As described above, a notable feature of the dramaturgy of the Anglo-Saxon plays is their dependence on the anachronistic fragment. Temporally dissonant moments insecurely embedded in the plays' narratives, these phrases, prophecies or palimpsests act as stress points on which concerns about history and identity focus. We can see some of this effect in the Fool's prophecy in *King Lear*, but these plays exploit temporal dissonance in a yet more sustained fashion, capitalizing on the peculiar national, political, religious, and linguistic tensions that the period brought together. In *Hengist*, *The Birth of Merlin*, *The Welsh Ambassador*, and *Thorney Abbey*, the fragment functions as an example of what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself."⁴⁰ These crystallized recollections call into question the status of cultural and community memory, and anxieties about English national, linguistic, and religious identities run through them.

LANGUAGE: *HENGIST, KING OF KENT*

We can appreciate the power of the anachronistic use of Old English in *Hengist, King of Kent* if we look at the treatment of the language in the work of Jacobean antiquarians, and its association with their notions of national history and identity. These connections are clear in William Camden's comments on Old English in his influential antiquarian work *Remains*, first published in 1605. Camden treats language itself as a symbol of conquest, writ-

38. Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 3–4. See Michel Serres, with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 59–61.

39. O'Connor, *The Queen's Exchange*, 3.2.speech423SD (this edition uses speech numbers instead of line numbers). On the play's use of its Anglo-Saxon setting see Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–1642* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 265–67; Matthew Steggle, *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester University Press, 2004), 53–57; Dyson, "Staging Legal Authority," 147–65.

40. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7.

ing that “the *English-Saxon* tongue came in by the *English-Saxons* o[u]t of *Germany*, who valiantly and wisely performed heere all the three things, which implicate a full conquest, viz. the alteration of lawes, language, and attire.”⁴¹ The extent to which such attitudes became embedded can be seen in an intriguing poem prefacing James Howell’s 1660 dictionary, *Lexicon Tetraglotton*. Howell invokes the origins of English in the context of its relationship with other European languages, telling the romance languages, French, Italian, and Spanish,

To perfect your *odd* Number, be not shy
 To take a *Fourth* to your society,
 The high *Teutonick* Dialect which bold
Hengistus with his *Saxons* brought of old
 Among the *Brittains*, when by *Knife* and *Sword*
 He first of *England* did *create* the *Word*;
 Nor is’t a small advantage to admit
 So *Male a speech* to mix with you, and knitt,
 Who by her *Consonants* and tougher strains
 Will bring more *Arteries* ’mong your *soft* veins[.]⁴²

Despite the inclusion in *Lexicon Tetraglotton* of a frontispiece depicting all four languages as women, and the reference to “her *Consonants*,” Howell is at pains to cast English as a masculine counterpart to the effeminized romance languages. My principal interest here, however, lies in his description of Hengist “creat[ing] the word” “by *Knife* and *Sword*,” which refers both to the violence of conquest—we can compare it with Camden’s comment on the “alteration of lawes, language, and attire” necessary to a “full conquest”—and to the Old English watchword attributed to Hengist by historians and spoken on stage, as we have seen, in *Hengist, King of Kent*.

In Middleton’s version of this foundational moment, which is drawn largely from Holinshed’s *Chronicles*,⁴³ the watchword is first set up between Hengist and his forces:

1 SAXON. Give us the word, my lord, and we are perfect.
 HENGIST. That’s true, the word; I lose myself. *Nemp your sexes.*
 It shall be that.
 1 SAXON. Enough sir; then we strike.

(4.3.21–23)

41. William Camden, *Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britaine* (London, 1605), C3r.

42. James Howell, “Touching the Association of the *English-Toung*, with the *French, Italian, and Spanish, &c.*,” in *Lexicon Tetraglotton: An English-French-Italian-Spanish Dictionary* (London, 1660), (*) 1r.

43. On Middleton’s sources see R. C. Bald, ed., *Hengist, King of Kent; or, The Mayor of Queenborough* (New York: Scribner’s, 1938), xxxvii–xl; Briggs, “New Times and Old Stories,” 110–14.

when *Hengist* gaue the watch-word, *Nem eour Seaxes*, that is, *Take you[r] Swords*.⁴⁶ No translation of “*nemp your sexes*” is provided in Middleton’s version of the scene, though the drawing of daggers might provide a visual gloss. The Old English phrase becomes a signal for conspiracy and betrayal, and for national and religious difference; as scholars such as Julia Briggs, Gordon McMullan, and Thomas Roebuck argue, it underlines the foreignness of the Saxons.⁴⁷ What this overlooks, however, is that in this moment of aural dissonance, what a playhouse audience hears is the ancestor of its own language. English spectators are effectively estranged from their own past, and from their own national and linguistic origins, through their inability to understand what Camden and other antiquarians term the “English-Saxon” tongue. Simultaneously, however, the inclusion of “*nemp your sexes*” itself invokes the antiquarians’ narratives about English descent and identity.

Both *Hengist* and *The Birth of Merlin*—which deals, like *Hengist*, with the arrival of the Saxons in Britain—contain references to language at the key moments at which the British first encounter the Saxons. In *Hengist*, Vortiger remarks as he greets Hengist, “There can be no more pleasure to a king / If all the languages earth spake were ransack’d” (2.2.26–27),⁴⁸ while in *The Birth of Merlin*, King Aurelius remarks on first meeting the treacherous Artesia, sister of “Warlike *Ostorius* the East *Angles* King”—who will eventually poison him—“my tongue turns Traitor, and will betray my heart.”⁴⁹ In these plays, language becomes a key means through which loyalty and treachery, national unity and alterity are negotiated. The linguistic otherness of the Saxons is part of a broader strategy. As critics have noted, the religious difference asserted at the end of *Hengist*, when the Saxon Roxena is identified with the Whore of Babylon, suggests the extent to which Protestant England is being distanced from its pagan forbears, who are associated instead with the Roman Catholic church.⁵⁰ An audience’s sympathies are directed not toward the “English Saxons,” but toward the British.

46. John Speed, *The History of Great Britaine Under the Conquests of ye Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans* (London, 1611), 285.

47. See Briggs, “Middleton’s Forgotten Tragedy,” 489; McMullan, “Colonisation of Early Britain,” 129; Thomas Roebuck, “Middleton’s Historical Imagination,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford University Press, 2010), 123–24.

48. In Ioppolo’s edition of the Lambarde manuscript the first line here appears as “There can be no more wished to a king’s pleasures” (2.3.27–28); in her transcript of the Portland manuscript it is “their Can be noe more wish to a kins [*sic*] pleasure” (line 656).

49. Joanna Udall, ed., *A Critical, Old-Spelling Edition of The Birth of Merlin (Q 1662)* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1991), 1.2.75, 92. All citations are to this edition.

50. See Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 141; Briggs, “Middleton’s Forgotten Tragedy,” 490–91; Swapam Chakravorty, *Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton*

Hengist draws implicitly on two narratives of national origin: the antiquarians' arguments for the Anglo-Saxon descent of the English, and a political desire to seek the origins of the Jacobean state in a united, pre-Saxon Britain that traced its original foundation to the Trojan Brutus. The English also claimed Trojan descent and, as Mary Floyd-Wilson notes, "in a sense, Britain's Trojan lineage and the emergent myth of Anglo-Saxon purity satisfied the same desire—the longing for a narrative that sustained and fixed English identity over time."⁵¹ However, when the two narratives are invoked within the same dramatic fiction they are not complementary but competitive. Even though it appears to privilege the British, *Hengist* ultimately calls into question any sense of smooth progression from either early Britain or early England to the present day. It does this partly by deploying a theatrical time that does not run in a purely linear fashion; at some moments in this play, in Harris's terms, "the future is behind and the past ahead." Simon, the hero of the play's comic plot, steps out of the frame to educate both the fictional townsmen and the playhouse audience about "The time when Kent stands out of Christendom" (5.1.38), and the use of a chorus contributes to this dramaturgical self-consciousness. Closely following the pattern of Shakespeare and Wilkins's *Pericles* (King's Men, 1607–8), in which the poet Gower, author of one of the play's sources, appears as chorus, *Hengist* features the medieval chronicler Ranulph Higden, whose *Polychronicon* was a source for the history retold in this play (although possibly not one that Middleton consulted directly). Like Gower, Higden is conscious of the status of the material he presents as narrative, commenting in the prologue,

Ancient stories have been best;
Fashions that are now call'd new
Have been worn by more than you.
Elder times have us'd the same,
Though these new ones get the name.
So in story what now told
That takes not part with days of old?

(Prologue, 10–16)⁵²

Nothing, suggests the revived medieval monk, is ever truly new, or truly old; time is not linear, but strangely circular. Narratives of English and Brit-

(Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 120–26, esp. 121–22; Briggs, "New Times and Old Stories," 118–20; McMullan, "Colonisation of Early Britain," 130–31.

51. Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 48.

52. Gower declares in the first lines of the prologue of *Pericles*: "To sing a song that old was sung / From ashes ancient Gower is come" (*Pericles*, ed. Suzanne Gossett [London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004]).

ish descent are thus held in suspension between past and present, unresolved.

PROPHECY: *THE BIRTH OF MERLIN* AND *THE WELSH AMBASSADOR*

In *The Birth of Merlin* and *The Welsh Ambassador*, historical-mythic narratives of national origin are similarly a site of fascination and of unease. In both plays, this anxiety is embodied in a prophecy, an anachronistic moment at which past, present, and future are intertwined. *The Birth of Merlin* concludes with a political prophecy uttered by Merlin, accompanied by a dumb show, which forms a self-conscious coda after the conclusion of the play's main narrative and which picks up some of the issues raised in *Hengist*. The point at which history meets myth is fittingly dramatized through a metatheatrical device; as Joanna Udall remarks, Merlin's speech is "the first self-conscious utterance in the play, acknowledging the story's status as myth," and its temporal dissonances underline the problematic status of Arthur as English or British national hero.⁵³

Having dispatched the Saxon invaders and succeeded Aurelius as king of Britain, the newly enthroned Uter Pendragon asks Merlin to show, through his "divining Art," "the full event, / That shall both end our Reign and Chronicle" (5.2.75, 77–78). Intriguingly, Uter is concerned here not merely with the historical events themselves but with the ways in which they will be narrated to future generations. Although Merlin declares "Long happiness attend *Pendragons* Reign," he acknowledges that "What Heaven decrees, fate hath no power to alter" (5.2.83–84) and tells the king:

The Saxons, sir, will keep the ground they have,
And by supplying numbers still increase,
Till *Brittain* be no more.

(5.2.85–87)

Uter is therefore asked to imagine the eventual destruction of his nation and people.

In this prediction Merlin in fact echoes the fears expressed by Uter himself earlier in the play, when the prince told the traitorous Vortiger

the Kingdom
Which thou usurp'st, thou most unhappy Tyrant,
Is leaving thee, the Saxons which thou broughtst
To back thy usurpations, are grown great,
And where they seat themselves, do hourly seek

53. Udall, *Birth of Merlin*, 103.

To blot the Records of old *Brute* and *Brittains*,
 From memory of men, calling themselves
Hingest-men, and *Hingest-land*, that no more
 The *Brittain* name be known.

(4.3.10–18)

Uter invokes familiar genealogies and (false) etymologies, in which the British are associated with the Trojan Brutus and the English with the Saxon “*Hingest-men*.”⁵⁴ The fear that runs throughout *The Birth of Merlin* is that a nation might not only be defeated but replaced, and erased from collective memory entirely, its place in the historical record and its very language overwritten by invaders. Thus, while *The Birth of Merlin* does not include any Old English, it nonetheless conceives of national identity as something constituted through language, as “old *Brute* and *Brittains*” are replaced by “*Hingest-men*, and *Hingest-land*.” Like *Hengist, King of Kent*, *The Birth of Merlin* casts the Saxons as alien invaders, aligning its audiences behind the British. But like his erstwhile collaborator, Middleton, Rowley is alert to the ironies implicit in this strategy, not least the fact that his play is written in the language of the “*Hingest-men*.”

Having delivered his depressing news that the Saxons will increase “till *Brittain* be no more,” Merlin then offers to present “in visible apparitions” prophecies about the rulers that will follow Uter: “Succeeding Princes, which my Art shall raise, / Till men shall call these times the latter days” (5.2.87, 90–91). A dumb show presents a carefully edited version of the career of Uter’s son Arthur:

*Hoebys. Enter a King in Armour, his Sheild quarter’d with thirteen Crowns.
 At the other door enter divers Princes who present their Crowns to him at
 his feet, and do him homage, then enters Death and strikes him, he growing
 sick, Crowns Constantine.*

Exeunt.

(5.2.93.1–4)

Merlin offers a verbal gloss, concluding with the statement,

But death (who neither favors the weak nor valliant)
 In the midst of all his glories, soon shall seize him,

54. Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, for example, states that after Brutus’s conquest “he by the aduice of his nobles commanded this Ile (which before hight Albion) to be called Britaine, and the inhabitants Britons after his name”; the Saxon settlers “called it Hengistland, accordinglie as the same Hengist had in times past ordeined: the which name after for shortnesse of spéeche was somewhat altered, and so lastlie called England, and the people Englishmen” (*Chronicles*, 2:11, 98).

Scarcely permitting him to appoint one
In all his purchased Kingdoms to succeed him.

(5.2.101–4)

In the style of *de casibus* tragedy, Arthur is to be struck down at the height of his glory, and the focus is on dynastic succession; this is not the “once and future king” of some traditions, who departs, mortally wounded, for Avalon.⁵⁵ Uter thanks Merlin for this “so wish’d for satisfaction”—perhaps an ironic comment, in context—saying that “we learn that always Fate / Must be observ’d,” and the play concludes with the resounding couplet: “All future times shall still record this Story, / Of *Merlin’s* learned worth, and *Arthur’s* glory” (5.2.106–10). Despite the emphasis on future “glory,” the prophecy presents us with the moment at which Britain is on the verge of succumbing to Saxon invasion, and this is the last thing that the play presents dramatically to its audience. The impression given is that Uter’s victories and those of his son will be only temporary solutions, and the division of Britain is unavoidable. Spectators are assumed to be unavoidably conscious of the way in which these multiple historical and mythic narratives will end, but their perspective is uncertain. Are they to align themselves with the soon-to-be-extinct British, as citizens of a renewed polity under James I, “King of Great Britain,” or do they instead identify with the incoming “English,” in the dubious shape of Hengist and his Saxon invaders?

The utility of the Anglo-Saxon play’s anachronistic aesthetics in complicating Jacobean notions of British and English identity is also clear in *The Welsh Ambassador*, which is set during the reign of King Athelstan (924/925–939). While *Hengist* and *The Birth of Merlin* focus on the arrival of Germanic invader-settlers and the dissolution of Britain, *The Welsh Ambassador* is set in the tenth century, when the Anglo-Saxons have become more securely “English.” However, *The Welsh Ambassador* nonetheless bears the strain of the complexity of national identity in Jacobean “Britain.” The play features a set of “British” national identities, focusing part of its narrative on three English nobles, Penda, Eldred, and Edmond, who disguise respectively themselves as a Welsh ambassador, his attendant, and an Irish footman, and it foregrounds its anxieties about unity and otherness in their extravagantly caricatured accents. The temporal, political, and aesthetic strains in *The Welsh Ambassador* are crystallized in a sequence towards the

55. The Avalon tradition appears in written texts as early as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (ca. 1138), and it features in Thomas Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur* (1469–70) and other late-medieval accounts. See Helen Fulton, “History and Myth: Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*,” in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), 44–57; Andrew Lynch, “... ‘If Indeed I Go’: Arthur’s Uncertain End in Malory and Tennyson,” *Arthurian Literature* 27 (2010): 19–32.

end of the play in which the Clown presents King Athelstan with what he calls a "chronicle," a text which, it turns out, poses a sustained challenge to Jacobean conventions of historical writing and their narratives about national origins.

Following a tradition associating the English, rather than solely the British, with Trojan descent, Winchester asks the Clown, "Your cronicle begins with *Brute* the sonne of *Silvius* the sonne of A<s[tyanax]> the sonne of *Aeneas* as other cronicles of *England* doe, dost not?"⁵⁶ The Clown, however, immediately destabilizes this tradition by confusing the Trojan Brutus with one of his Roman namesakes. He responds, "*Brute*? noe my lord; thincke you I will make brute beasts of cun<try [men?]> I weare a sweet Brute then. *Brutus* was noe more heere than I <[was]> heere. Where was *Cassius* when *Brutus* was heere?" (5.3.43–46). Having thoroughly confused the conventional narrative, the Clown then reveals that he is not really interested in history at all, telling Winchester, "To tell you true, my cronicle is not an egg laid as others haue been, myne is an ephemerides fore tellinge whatt shall happen in kings raignes to come, for that thats past wee all know" (5.3.48–50). History, for the Clown, has nothing to tell us, and there is no point in chronicling past events. Instead, he redefines his work as an "ephemerides"—a journal or astronomical table—and "chronicles" the future rather than the past, transforming history into prophecy.

The Clown delivers predictions for selected years from 1217 to "the yeares 1621: 22 and 23" (5.3.95–96), the present of the play's first performances. Disavowing any satirical or political intent, he focuses on quotidian events concerning fashion, food, venereal disease among prostitutes and their clients, and the loss of the steeple on St. Paul's Cathedral in 1561. The temporal negotiations of the "chronicle" are crystallized in the final prophecy, in which the Clown claims that "now in the raigne of this kinge heere in the yeares 1621: 22 and 23 such a wooden fashion will come vpp that hee whoe walkes not with a *Battoone* shalbee held noe gallant" (5.3.95–97). Both the word "battoone" and the social custom to which it refers—a trend for gallants to carry sticks, rather than the swords that conventionally signaled their status as gentlemen—are flagrantly and calculatedly anachronistic.⁵⁷

56. Bowers, *Welsh Ambassador* 5.3.40–42. The play survives in a manuscript (Cardiff Central Library MS 4.12) that is mutilated at the foot of the leaves and sometimes at the edges; in Bowers's edition, "Known missing text is indicated by pointed brackets < >, and letters found within these pointed brackets have been guessed at from partial indications in the manuscript. When no evidence exists to identify the missing letters or words but they have been supplied by editorial conjecture, square brackets enclose the guessed-at material within the pointed brackets indicating the mutilated areas" (Bowers, 311).

57. The trend is also mentioned in John Fletcher's *The Elder Brother* (King's Men, ca. 1625–26; London, 1637), in which Egremont declares that a baton is "twenty times more courtlike"

Emphasizing this point, Dekker and Ford introduce a series of further anachronisms when the Clown defines a “battoone” as “A kind of cudgell noe longer then that which a water spaniel carries crosse his chopps. You haue seene shapperoones and maqueroones and baboones, and laroones, and petoones, and gogs noones, but this lyninge of plimoth cloake (calld the battoone) is a stuff but new cutt out of the loome” (5.3.99–103). In this fluent display of bravura nonsense, words are evidently chosen for their aural similarity; however, they also foreground the muddled temporalities of the “chronicle.” “Gogs noones” may have been a somewhat old-fashioned oath in the seventeenth century, but the other words are modern, and some of them were novel even in the 1620s.⁵⁸ In this way, the linguistic fabric of the Clown’s “chronicle” mediates between archaism and neologism, and between past and present, as blatantly anachronistic Jacobean words appear in the mock-prophetic speech of a character from the tenth century. One neologism might be passed over, but the sheer density of new words here underlines the prophecy’s disjunctive and temporally dissonant quality. In drawing attention to the English language, the “chronicle” also emphasizes its privileged position within *The Welsh Ambassador*, in which the Welsh and Irish are consistently presented as linguistically “other” through the regional accents that Penda, Eldred, and Edmond adopt in their disguises.

Tristan Marshall argues that the Clown’s disavowal of the myth of Trojan origin “does not mean any diminishing of the power of the British history” and that the play “celebrates the amity of Wales and Ireland within a British framework.”⁵⁹ However, the inferior position of Wales and Ireland in *The Welsh Ambassador* is signaled in their linguistic othering, and there is

than a sword, “and lesse trouble” (sig. 11r). The *OED*’s earliest citation for “batoon” is from *The Elder Brother*, but “baton” is traced from 1548.

58. In Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass* the oath is given to the Vice Iniquity, an embodiment of a past age and its dramaturgy. See *The Devil Is an Ass*, ed. Peter Happé (Manchester University Press, 1994), 1.1.50. “Shapperoones” (chaperons) were caps or hoods worn by nobles and, after the sixteenth century, by nobles (a usage the *OED* traces back to 1380); from the late sixteenth century the word was used to refer to part of the costume of Knights of the Garter (*OED*, s.v. “chaperon,” 1). “Maqueroones” (macaroons) refers either to macaroni (the *OED*’s earliest citation is 1425) or, more likely, either to biscuits (the *OED*’s earliest citation is 1611) or to fools, a late sixteenth-century usage. For the latter usage, see *OED*, s.v. “macaroon,” *n.*3, and John Donne, “Satire Four”: “I sigh, and sweat / To hear this Macaron talk” (lines 116–17, in *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976], 167 and gloss). “Laroones” (larons) is a word for robbers deriving from Old French; the *OED*’s earliest example dates from the fourteenth century, but it seems to be rare until the late sixteenth century (see *OED*, s.v. “laron,” *n.*). “Petoone” was a native South American word for tobacco (the *OED*’s earliest example is from 1568, and it was still fairly novel in the 1620s). “Plymouth cloak,” a Jacobean slang term for a cudgel, is dated by the *OED* to 1629, but it is used by Dekker in *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London* (London, 1606), E1r.

59. Marshall, *Theatre and Empire*, 176.

a significant omission in this celebration of British amity: the Scots. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the play's Jacobean context, the play displaces the historical King Athelstan's victories against the Scots onto the Welsh. But the result is to leave a gap at the heart of the play's vision of Britain, and the vexed relationship between the two most powerful British nations is elided in a vision of English supremacy over Wales and Ireland. The "chronicle" is thus part of an attempt to reconfigure the relationship between the English and the other inhabitants of the British Isles, but its anachronisms represent in miniature the refusal of the Anglo-Saxon play to fully historicize itself, or to resist collapsing past into present.

PALIMPSEST: *THORNEY ABBEY*

Probably performed a decade or so before *The Welsh Ambassador*, *Thorney Abbey* (ca. 1606–16) employs yet another semimythical narrative of Anglo-Saxon origin, here linked to religious history and tradition. In this strangely neglected play, the anachronistic fragment around which concerns about national and religious memory and identity congregate is architectural: the lost early Saxon abbey that preceded the familiar Westminster Abbey built by King Edward the Confessor in the eleventh century. The mediation between the two abbeys is crucial to the play's impact, and two distinct strategies are at work within the surviving text. A prologue apparently written for an early 1660s revival blurs the distinctions between the two buildings, declaring that the play aims

To shew how *Royal* bloud's reveng'd when spilt,
And *THORNY-Abbey* first came to be built,
A place for great devotion of much fame,
Which since to *Westminster* hath chang'd its name.⁶⁰

Like the Protestant polemicists who sought the origins of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church of England in the Anglo-Saxon church, the prologue attempts to manufacture a smooth progression from one abbey to the other and, with it, a sense of historical and religious continuity.

Within the play itself, though, the effect is not one of smooth continuation but of a palimpsest in which the two abbeys are held in suspension, the first overwritten by audiences' memories of the second. Like the prologue, this represents an attempt to efface both the rebuilding of the abbey itself and the turmoil of the Reformation's attack on the fabric of religious buildings. But as Harris points out, the salient quality of a palimpsest is that both

60. Prologue to *Thorney Abbey*, lines 33–36, in Baillie, in *Gratiae Theatrales*. All references are to this edition.

earlier and later sets of writing are visible, and in some cases legible: “the most archaic inscriptions in a palimpsest have the power to transform and displace the texts that have been written over them, even as the latter equally transform and displace their predecessors.”⁶¹ In *Thorney Abbey*, traces of “authentic” Anglo-Saxon customs such as monasticism emerge; the trauma of the Reformation is evoked in displaced form in the building of the abbey.

Thorney Abbey presents an invented account of the abbey’s origins, adapted freely and self-consciously from a widely circulated semimythic tradition. As Emma Mason relates, the eleventh-century Westminster monk Sulcard writes that King Æthelbert of Kent (560–616) wished to honor Saint Peter by founding a church, having already founded St. Paul’s. He therefore persuaded a wealthy London couple to build a church in the saint’s honor on Thorney Island, so called because it was overgrown with thorns. The couple were later identified as the East Saxon Sæberht and his wife Æthelgoda, who were supposedly buried in the new church early in the seventh century.⁶² *Thorney Abbey* takes parts of this narrative and rejects others, transferring Sæberht’s name onto the villainous Earl who kills the king in the play’s second plot, and making the founder of the abbey the eponymous Thorney, a wealthy citizen.

Thorney’s desire to build an abbey does not originate in a royal order, or even in piety alone; instead, it is the result of a traumatic act: the seduction and abandonment of his daughter, Anne, by the king’s brother, Edmund. Although Edmund finally redeems Anne and legitimates their son at the end of the play, her seduction has a radical effect on Thorney. He swiftly adopts the misanthropy of Timon of Athens and the personal hygiene of Shakespeare and Wilkins’s Pericles, refusing to pay any attention to his appearance after the “loss” of his daughter and spending the money that he had put aside for Anne’s dowry on a project to build an abbey. Having hoped that Anne would “keep my name alive unto posterity” (2.36–37), he now declares that the

wealth [that] should have indow’d thy nuptials
Shall build a sanctuary for holy men,
To make thy peace in heaven.

(8.137–39)

61. Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 16.

62. Emma Mason, *Westminster Abbey and Its People, c. 1050–c. 1216* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1996), 2. For early modern accounts, see John Stow, *A Survey of London* (London, 1598), 377; Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 2:102. *Thorney Abbey* ignores the alternative narrative, mentioned by Holinshed and recounted by Stow from Sulcard (*Survey*, 377), that the Saxon abbey had been preceded by a Christian church built by King Lucius and, before that, a temple of Apollo.

The play emphasizes the link between daughter and abbey by consistently identifying Anne with the building and presenting it as a substitute for the family line that Thorney hoped to create; "since I have no child to keep my fame," Thorney tells a group of supportive citizens, "I'll call it Thorny-Abbey by my name" (13.62–63).

Thorney's role in the play is emphasized in an epilogue, also published in 1662, which links the two plots and summarizes neatly the way in which the play is presumed to work in the playhouse:

Lest you approve your selves a kin to those
Who sooner then comply with Kings, depose:
Th'old Hermit's Doctrine only wee'l apply,
And teach you from a Stage to learn to dy,
Whose Monumental Lesson, though't be true,
That death betides to Men, and Tapers too,
Yet this one favour we do hope you'l give,
Through your Applause that this our Play may live.

(Epilogue, 5–12)

The pun on "monumental" yokes together Thorney's abbey and the tomb in which he lives during the building's construction, haunting the building site like a living ghost and clutching a skull as a memento mori; it suggests that Thorney's lesson is in his example not just as a church-builder but also as a godly man.

While the play's paratexts attempt to create a linear progression from one abbey to the next and to conflate the two buildings within a model of universal Christian piety and good works, the representation of the Anglo-Saxon abbey nonetheless has an effect analogous to that which Nora describes in *lieux de mémoire*: it is "a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists."⁶³ In *Thorney Abbey*, the "tear" is the physical break between the two Westminster Abbeys, as one building was dismantled and the next built, and also the metaphorical but no less violent rip that the Reformation made in religious and social life. Violent memories of religious turbulence are both embodied and concealed in the "site" of the abbey.

Despite the play's attempt to efface a history of Catholicism in England, elements of older religious practices, such as monasticism, appear through the palimpsest. Anne Thorney takes refuge at Holywell Priory, a nunnery to the north of the city of London in Shoreditch, founded before 1127 and dissolved in 1538, and becomes a votaress there. Late in *Thorney Abbey*, Edmund

63. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7.

disguises himself in the “holy habit of a frolick Fryer” (14.10) in order to visit her, aided by Bishop Lutius. The treatment of the disguise is somewhat jarring, especially the comment placed in the mouth of the bishop, that in his friar’s clothes Edmund “may be admitted unto all our Nunnes, / And be a helper to increase their store” (14.25–26). These allusions thus resist the play’s general attempt to present the Anglo-Saxon church as proto-Protestant, and they present an uneasy fusion of tolerance and satire.

Similar contradictions are embodied in Thorney, in part through a series of anachronisms that surround him. As a dramatic figure, he has much in common with the heroes of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean citizen comedy, such as Thomas Gresham, builder of the Royal Exchange, who features prominently in Thomas Heywood’s two-part *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* (Queen Anna’s Men, 1605–6), or Simon Eyre in Dekker’s *Shoemaker’s Holiday* (Admiral’s Men, 1599). Thorney’s desire to build a church also ties him to the early seventeenth century. Although the Caroline restoration and beautification of churches under William Laud is better known, the Jacobean period also saw sustained rebuilding in London and, especially, Westminster.⁶⁴ In addition, the building of the abbey and its framing as an act of piety associates Thorney with Jacobean anxieties about commemoration and charitable giving, both of which had been rendered problematic by the Reformation’s attack on purgatory and the merit of good works. As Ian Archer suggests, Protestant reformers attempted to disentangle “acts of commemoration and memorialization” from the “Catholic economy of good-works salvation.”⁶⁵ While monuments might commemorate good works, the “ultimate memorial lay in heaven.”⁶⁶ However, despite this conventional piety, Archer notes, “We may suspect that for many of those who sought memorialization, the desire to perpetuate their name and join the community of honour may have played as much of a role as the pious encouragement of others.”⁶⁷

Thorney thus epitomizes the contradictions inherent in post-Reformation “good works.” The play memorializes its fictional protagonist in the manner of a Jacobean civic hero; it is also unequivocal about the sanctity of the project and the heavenly reward that will follow. An angel appears to Thorney and promises him that he will be “made a bright Celestiall Sun” in heaven as a result of his piety (15.10), and the play’s closing couplet reiter-

64. See J. F. Merritt, “Puritans, Laudians, and the Phenomenon of Church-Building in Jacobean London,” *Historical Journal* 41 (1998): 935–60.

65. Ian Archer, “The Arts and Acts of Memorialization in Early Modern London,” in *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Styrpe, 1598–1720*, ed. J. F. Merritt (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 108–9.

66. *Ibid.*, 109.

67. *Ibid.*, 110.

ates this promise of immortality: "And while the world shall last, old *Thorney's* name / Shall live recorded in the book of Fame" (15.146–7). However, the presentation of Thorney himself complicates this picture. His desire to build the abbey does not derive solely from his desire to glorify God. It is a displacement of another kind of immortality, the legitimate line of descendents he hoped that Anne would produce. Like Archer's Jacobean citizens, he "desire[s] to perpetuate [his] name." There is, in addition, something troubling about the gusto with which Thorney throws himself into the role of the betrayed and distracted father, complete with Lear-like curses against the daughter who has disappointed him and thwarted his schemes.⁶⁸

Although *Thorney Abbey's* investment in the Anglo-Saxon past differs in some ways from those of the other plays examined here in that it draws on the religious rather than the national or linguistic past, it adopts similar aesthetic strategies. For instance, although its anachronistic fragment is produced through narrative rather than language or staging, the play deploys the metatheatrical techniques noted in *Hengist* and *The Birth of Merlin*. The pivotal moments in which Thorney commissions his abbey and Edmund is made aware of the existence of his son are juxtaposed in a complex dumb show, narrated by a chorus. Similarly, the appearance of the angel to Thorney disrupts verisimilar realism in order to present him as a living saint. These techniques underline the anachronisms through which the narrative is animated and its simultaneous assertion and dissolution of temporal distance.

In palimpsesting one abbey onto the other, and creating its own myth about the Saxon abbey's foundation, the play tries to erase the social and religious upheaval created by the Reformation and to integrate uncomfortable aspects of the Anglo-Saxon church, such as monasticism, within a broad framework of Jacobean piety. It is, however, unable to suppress these issues entirely, and they appear in their most potent form in the traumatized and distressed figure of Thorney, who is simultaneously secular saint and domestic tyrant. Like the national identities presented in *Hengist*, *The Birth of Merlin* and *The Welsh Ambassador*, religious identity in *Thorney Abbey* is fundamentally ambiguous, the product of an incomplete process of dissolution and reformation.

CONCLUSION

Preaching before King James in 1604, John Gordon, Dean of Salisbury, highlighted the roles of language, religion, and governance in creating a unified polity: "it is most evidently shewed to vs, that our great Britaine

68. On the ambivalent portrayal of Thorney see Baillie, *Gratiae Theatrales*, 39–41.

being in our daies vnited in one language, in one religion, and vnder one head, one King and supreame gouernour, we cannot by any law, be any more two nations, or two kingdomes, but only one."⁶⁹ Gordon presents the reunification of Britain as the culmination of an inevitable historical process of convergence, the recuperation of a lost unity. The Anglo-Saxon past presents the flip side of this vision. A period of linguistic diversity, religious division, and political fragmentation, it is used by dramatists as a means of presenting the cracks and fissures within narratives such as Gordon's. In *Hengist, King of Kent* a fragment of a superseded language calls into question historical narratives about the national origins of the English and British; in *The Birth of Merlin* a prophecy acts as a focal point for multiple historical and mythic narratives and for anxieties about the possible erasure of a population and their language; in *The Welsh Ambassador* tensions within Jacobean "Britain" are highlighted in the play's treatment of the English language and the Clown's revisionist "chronicle"; and in *Thorney Abbey* submerged memories of religious controversy persist in the depiction of a lost Saxon abbey and its founder.

The power of the Anglo-Saxon play lies in the flexibility of both its aesthetic and its approach to history and temporality. In a recent roundtable discussion, Annamarie Jagose offers a suggestive summary of alternative approaches to temporality, approaches that see time as not always linear but "cyclical, interrupted, multilayered, reversible, stalled."⁷⁰ Plays such as *Hengist*, *The Birth of Merlin*, *The Welsh Ambassador*, and *Thorney Abbey* exhibit complex, fractured, and fragmentary models of temporality in pursuit of aesthetic forms that are able to accommodate the contradictions and tensions evident in seventeenth-century attitudes toward the Anglo-Saxon past. Through the techniques of archaism, neologism, prophecy, and palimpsest, historical distance is simultaneously asserted and collapsed as dramatists recycle and re-embody key moments from Anglo-Saxon linguistic, political, and religious history.

Past and present are not identical in these plays—there is no simple timelessness or universality—but equally the plays refuse to maintain an uncomplicated opposition between a single past and a single present. In Kathleen Biddick's term, they exhibit "a temporality that is not one,"⁷¹ reconfiguring the relationships that might exist between multiple and hybrid

69. *Enotikon or A Sermon of the Union of Great Brittainie, in Antiquitie of Language, Name, Religion, and Kingdome* (London, 1604), 33.

70. Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2 (2007): 186–87.

71. Kathleen Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 20.

English/British pasts and English/British presents. With its power to capture both estrangement from the past and an odd, uneasy intimacy with it, anachronism represents not a failure properly to historicize but an attempt to come to terms with the competing demands of history, myth, legend, and contemporary politics.