



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI GENOVA

Corso di Dottorato in Letterature e culture classiche e moderne

Curriculum Letterature anglo-germaniche

Ciclo XXXVI

Thomas May: Playwright, Translator, and Historian

Relatore: Prof. Domenico Lovascio

Correlatore: Prof. David McInnis

Candidato: Maddalena Repetto

Anno Accademico 2022/2023

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	5
1. The Early Life and Career of Thomas May (1596-1625)	
1.1 The May Family	13
1.2 May in the 1610s	25
1.3 <i>The Heir</i>	41
1.4 Travel to the Netherlands	57
1.5 John Barclay's <i>Argenis</i>	66
2. The Breakthrough (1626-1627)	
2.1 Lucan's <i>Pharsalia</i>	77
2.2 <i>The Tragedy of Cleopatra</i>	112
2.3 Other poems written in 1627	126
3. Rising Fame (1628-1629)	
3.1 Virgil's <i>Georgics</i>	136
3.2 <i>The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina</i>	146
3.3 <i>The Tragedy of Antigone</i>	170
3.4 Martial's <i>Epigrams</i>	189
4. The Court Years (1630-1639)	
4.1 The English <i>Continuation</i> of Lucan's <i>Pharsalia</i>	198
4.2 <i>The Old Couple</i>	206
4.3 Poem upon the birth of Prince Charles in 1630	217
4.4 Barclay's <i>Mirror of Minds</i>	219
4.5 The poem to Queen Henrietta Maria	229
4.6 <i>The Reign of King Henry the Second</i>	232
4.7 1633-1635: May's friendships and his poem to Lady Venetia Digby	240
4.8 <i>The Reign of King Edward the Third</i>	249
4.9 1636-1639: biographical notes, dedications, and the question of the laureateship ...	261
5. The Parliamentary Years (1640-1650)	
5.1 The <i>Supplementum Lucani</i> and May's journey to the Netherlands	273
5.2 The lost 'Julius Caesar'	285
5.3 Back in England: Massinger, the <i>Observations</i> , and the first political pamphlets ...	291
5.4 <i>The History of the Parliament of England</i>	310
5.5 The <i>Breviarium</i> and <i>Breviary</i> and May's last published work	323
5.6 May's death	329

Conclusion	333
Appendix 1: a proposed chronology of the works composed by May	342
Appendix 2: May's commendatory poems to friends and colleagues	343
Bibliography	349

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the outcome of over three years of work, during which I was helped, assisted, supported, and encouraged by many people; without them, I could not have done it, and I wish to thank all of them.

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor, Professor Domenico Lovascio, who has been supporting me since my graduate thesis. Over these past three and a half years, he has provided critical expertise and encouragement, even when presented with countless questions and bizarre theories. His guidance has been invaluable, and this thesis could not even have been conceived without his help. I also want to express my gratitude to my co-supervisor, Professor David McInnis. With his insightful comments he has helped me steer my thesis in the right direction, and his observations have been essential in giving this work the shape it has now. Thank you to Matthew Steggle for the encouragement at the early stages of this PhD. I would also like to thank the many people on whose expertise I relied at various points during the draft of this thesis: thank you Janet Clare, for providing early guidance; Gary Rivett, for sending me material and exchanging thoughts about May; Duncan Salkeld, for a truly invaluable palaeography course and expert opinion; Angelica Vedelago, for sharing opinions and materials about May and for her interest in my work; Robert Weir, for sending me his papers and some much valuable additional material; all of these people, whom I bothered (sometimes repeatedly) with questions and inquiries, have always been extremely helpful. I also wish to thank the teaching staff, particularly Luisa Villa, and the always helpful librarians of the Foreign Language Department of the University of Genoa. Thank you to Ilaria Pernici and Cristiano Ragni of the Genoa PRIN team and especially thank you to Michela Compagnoni for your support. Special gratitude goes to Andrew Hiscock and Lisa Hopkins for welcoming me and making me part of their wonderful series of seminars. Thank you to the Italian Association of

Shakespearean and Early Modern Studies for offering so many occasions to meet both fellow students and renowned scholars. I would also like to thank Emma Buckley, Andrew Duxfield, Maddalena Pennacchia, Emanuel Stelzer, and Dana Sutton, who offered their support and expertise at various points during these years.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family, who were always kind enough to listen (or pretend to listen) to my ramblings about Thomas May. Thank you to Pupu. Thank you to Giulia and Raffaella. Thank you to Pamela for sharing both my enthusiasm and my apprehension. Thank you to my brother Martino and to his wonderful family, Martina and now tiny Giacomo. Thank you to my parents Lidia and Stefano, who have never stopped supporting me and without whom I would not be the person I am now. Thank you to Simone, for everything. This thesis is dedicated to all of you.

Introduction

When asked about his occupation, Eugenio, one of the main characters of Thomas May's early comedy *The Heir*, introduces himself as 'A poor scholar' 'little beholding to fortune'; when encouraged to turn to more lucrative, but dishonest, professions, Eugenio replies that such courses of action would not be lawful and that, in any case, he was brought up a scholar. Financial instability and unprofitable avenues, a desire to act in accordance with his moral principles, and an almost ideological refusal to renounce his chosen path of scholarly ambition are characteristics that apply to May himself as much as they do to Eugenio. Although the play was composed in 1620, when May was only 24 and far from reaching the level of fame and status he would come to earn over the course of his life, this passage from *The Heir* effectively functions as a summary of the core of its author's character that could still be used to describe him thirty years after it was written.

This thesis purports to offer a comprehensive analysis of the life and works of Thomas May and to propose a fresh outlook on this relatively minor poet. Partly owing to historical reasons beyond his control, May's contribution to the artistic milieu of Caroline England has been relegated to the margins: although he is occasionally cited, it is usually in the company of poets, playwrights, and historians of greater renown, rarely featuring as an artist in his own right. If he does, it is usually as the author of individual works, chiefly his version of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. The only book-length analysis exclusively dedicated to the figure of May remains, to this day, Allan Griffith Chester's monograph *Thomas May: Man of Letters, 1595-1650*, published in 1932 and therefore by now inevitably dated.

This is not to say that May has been entirely ignored in the past few decades. Possibly spurred by Chester's efforts, there have been a number of critical editions, as well as articles and monographs on May's works, starting from the 1960s. Among the most notable

contributors, apart from those mentioned throughout this thesis, one should list David Norbrook and his works from the 1990s onwards on the intersections between Lucan and May's political stances; J. G. A. Pocock and his analyses of May's contributions to contemporary historiography; and Edward Paleit and his focus on May's *Pharsalia*, including a recent critical edition (with Emma Buckley).

My thesis seeks to follow and expand upon this trend of rediscovery and to provide an updated biography of the poet, thereby rectifying some of the mistakes or misconceptions found in Chester's work, integrating well-known facts with new information, and providing a different perspective on some of the commentary written about May throughout the centuries.

The first chapter opens with a section about the larger May family and their properties in Sussex, then shifting the focus on the poet's immediate family. Based on some archival discoveries, a date of birth for the poet is proposed. Archival work supplements the entire section, with the few certain biographical facts punctuating the scant biography of May. His first known work, a poem in honour of the late Prince Henry written while he was at Cambridge, is analysed: interestingly, despite having been composed more than a decade before May's breakthrough, it is noted how the poem already features many of the defining *topoi* of his later successes. Then, the final section of the chapter is devoted to May's early documented career, which was inaugurated by the publication of the comedy *The Heir*. As with all of May's other printed works throughout this thesis, the play is discussed within its historical and literary context: an attempt is made to approximate a more exact date of composition, publication, and performance and to reconstruct possible motives behind May's choice of subject and literary medium; then a synopsis is given, as well as an analysis of the play; finally, its legacy and fortune in the coming decades are briefly discussed. This examination of *The Heir* is followed by yet another archival discovery, which helps shed some light on perhaps the most obscure years of May's career, the period 1621-24. According to official records of soldiers swearing

their oath of allegiance before embarking to fight on the continent, in 1621 May left England as a volunteer soldier to join the battle in support of Protestantism in the Netherlands. Such early involvement in ‘patriotic’ causes chimes in perfectly with the image of May that can be pieced together by reading his early and later works, and, by showing that hints of his strong personal and political principles can be traced as far back as the early 1620s, it contributes to dispelling the negative reputation that has accompanied May for almost four hundred years. The chapter concludes with an examination of May’s first translation from Latin, John Barclay’s *Argenis*. Though not particularly remarkable in itself, this work, when observed alongside his other works composed between 1612 and 1625, contributes another piece to the definition of a literary profile of May that, with very few alterations, would remain consistent until his death: the profile of a man at ease with the classics, yet unwilling to restrict his scope to the erudite Latin-speaking audience; a man who favoured English and who, even when translating from Latin, sought to produce something that could be enjoyed by English readers in its own right, without the need to resort to previous knowledge; a strong-principled man who, even when material conditions forced him to seek the protection of the king, never explicitly denied his convictions nor abandoned himself to unbridled flattery; a man who enjoyed the dramatic arts, but, seeing how these yielded little fortune, was forced to turn to more profitable avenues such as translation; a man who respected classical and contemporary sources as equally valid; a man who was part of a circle of highly esteemed intellectuals who showed mutual respect and praise for him and whose friendship accompanied him throughout their life.

Chapter 2 covers a very limited span of time: the years 1626 and 1627. This partition was rendered necessary by the huge defining impact that this couple of years had over the life and career of May. 1626 witnessed the composition of *The Tragedy of Cleopatra*, a play that, as was custom for May, exploited Roman history to pass judgement on contemporary events: although the references are never explicit, nods to the political abuses committed by the duke of

Buckingham and to the consequences of the king's questionable policies can be found in *Cleopatra*. May makes eclectic use of classical and contemporary sources to write what, it is argued, is essentially a political play, with Cleopatra performing the role of the monarch rather than that of one half of a romantic duo; partial confirmation that May intended the play to serve as political commentary is evidenced by the fact that he chose to publish it more than a decade later, in 1639. However, by far the most significant occurrence in these two years and the one that marks 1627 as the turning point of May's life and career was the publication of the full English translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. This section of the chapter attempts to reconstruct a chronology of the inception and publication of the translation; then it delves into both the implications of choosing such a controversial subject, and the clear and explicit choice operated by May first in dedicating the work to known opponents of Buckingham, then in rushing to remove such potentially damaging dedications once the volume hit the market. Aside from the fact that Lucan would soon universally rise to become May's defining work both in life and in death (with many contemporary and posthumous tributes remembering him as 'Lucan's translator'), the section argues that the *Pharsalia* was also a watershed in May's production, in that it marked the moment at which he decided momentarily to put an end to his most overtly political writings in order to pursue the literary patronage of high-ranking members of the court. This abrupt change of attitude is evidenced in particular by another publication dated 1627, a poem written to celebrate Charles and the royal fleet.

The third chapter, also covering only two years, 1628 and 1629, is concerned with finding further evidence attesting to this shift in the many works composed by May at the time. The chapter deals with two Latin translations, Virgil's *Georgics* and Martial's *Epigrams*, and two classical tragedies, *Antigone* and *Agrippina*; despite their chronological closeness, however, May's approach to these works is varied. The two translations, the chapter contends, were conceived with the precise intention of luring the dedicatees into patronising May financially:

the Latin authors chosen were very popular and the poet probably hoped to capitalise on the success of his *Pharsalia*. The two tragedies, on the other hand, were not intended to reach the market any time soon after they were composed and, it is argued, are both heavily underscored by an agenda. The targets are once more Charles's policies, his excessive trust in advisors, the abuses of personal power, and the duke of Buckingham; once again, the theatre and the classics are exploited as means to satirise or comment upon contemporary political events. The potential controversy that could have arisen from these plays was avoided by May by postponing their publication: *Agrippina* was published alongside *Cleopatra* over ten years later, and *Antigone* in 1631, when Buckingham had been dead for a few years and any connection would have appeared weaker and much less suspicious. Indeed, the chapter proposes a new date for *Antigone*, that is, early 1629, based on the political implications discovered in the text and on May's invariable tendency to permeate most of his works with insightful references to contemporary politics.

Chapter 4 covers a whole decade, 1630-39. Although comparatively less productive, this decade was the one in which May finally acquired financial stability and, in all likelihood, spent a good deal of his time at court; for this reason, works belonging to this period have been grouped together in a single, if slightly longer, chapter. The work opening the chapter is May's other *magnum opus*, the English *Continuation* of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, and the shift from independent writer to 'court poet' is signalled by the very first pages of the work, which contain a dedication to Charles. The chapter illustrates how, upon finally achieving the royal patronage he had so desperately been chasing, May slightly adjusted the aim and scope of his production: all dramatic works, unprofitable and potentially problematic, were abandoned, with only a harmless comedy – *The Old Couple* – being composed at the beginning of the decade; translations from Latin were also discarded, with the exception of another translation from the royally approved Barclay, *The Mirror of Minds*; overall, long, historical epic poems made up

the bulk of May's production in the 1630s, alongside shorter dedicatory poems in honour of various members of the royal family or illustrious intellectuals. The chapter, as usual, presents works and events in a chronological order, attempting to retrace the poet's steps during a decade that, owing to May's presence at court, ought to be better documented, but ultimately proved not to be. In this sense, the discovery of a manuscript poem written upon the birth of the future Charles II provides an invaluable insight into reconstructing May's movements and courtly status. The chapter also includes other hitherto unpublished poems, including one in honour of Henrietta Maria, and a record of all of May's known dedications to colleagues and friends upon the publication of some of their works. Two separate sections analyse May's two royally commissioned historical poems, *Henry II* and *Edward III*, published between 1633 and 1635, and the last portion of the chapter is largely devoted to perhaps the most infamous anecdote surrounding the life of May, i.e., the rumour that he turned his back on the king because he was denied the post of poet laureate at court. The thesis supports the argument that, despite some fragments of truth, the accusations have been vastly exaggerated and mythologised by political opponents and scholars throughout the centuries, in more or less malicious attempts to portray May as a resentful, incompetent hypocrite inspired by selfish, rather than heartfelt, motivations. As the thesis seeks to demonstrate throughout, May's political beliefs remained virtually unchanged over the course of his life, merely manifesting themselves with varying intensity according to the poet's personal needs. If anything, May could be accused of being calculating, although even that is sometimes debatable: the dedications originally attached to his *Pharsalia* are a testimony in that sense, as is the fact that, even in the writings that were directly sponsored by Charles, May never openly denied any of his beliefs about the supremacy of Parliament, nor did he praise the king with excessive enthusiasm.

The eventual developments of May's political stance are discussed in the fifth and final chapter, which chronicles the last decade of his life. Just like the previous chapter opened with

the English *Continuation*, this one is inaugurated by its Latin version, the *Supplementum*. The almost unheard-of feat of writing in English and then in Latin, as well as the fact that the (commissioned) *Supplementum* was produced for a wider European audience, tally with the thesis's overarching theory that May favoured English and a local heterogeneous readership. May's travel to the Netherlands in 1640, the hitherto unprecedented use of Latin, and the renewed handling of the story of Julius Caesar (the *Supplementum* ends with Caesar's assassination) inform the hypothesis that the lost play 'Julius Caesar', of which nothing is known except title and subject, was written around this date. The chapter then delves into the complicated chronology of May's political writings in the mid-1640s, when he became a correspondent for the parliamentarian side and published several pamphlets; it also pieces together the documentation detailing May's association with Parliament in an official capacity, a collaboration that lasted until his death in 1650. The only other major work published during this decade, *The History of the Parliament of England*, is then analysed and its influence and importance discussed; a section follows analysing the last published works and efforts of the poet, and then the chapter ends with a section on May's unexpected death. The thesis chronicles the aftermath: on the one hand, May's death was discussed in Parliament and arrangements were made to provide him with a deign tribute; on the other hand, the deluge of satirical output was inaugurated probably just weeks later by Andrew Marvell's poem *Tom May's Death*. The satire is discussed, and its enormous impact examined, noting how it influenced the collective perception of May much more than any other contemporary flattering praise. The thesis concludes with a general assessment of May and his relevance within the artistic framework of early Stuart England.

As these chapter summaries have illustrated, my work on the thesis that follows has focused on offering a portrait of May as exhaustive and objective as possible, a task rendered difficult by most testimonies' either being limited or extremely biased. This outcome, which I

have hopefully achieved, was intended as a way to dignify May with the recognition he deserves as an incredibly versatile poet, capable of tackling tragedies, comedies, translations, verse and prose histories, poetry, and original epic works, and as an undeniably important figure in Jacobean and especially Caroline England, both in terms of literary output and political commitment.

1. The Early Life and Career of Thomas May (1596-1625)

1.1 The May Family

Thomas May was born in the early months (probably February) of 1596. In the opening chapter of the only monograph ever devoted to May, Allan Griffith Chester chronicles the early history of the May family starting from the fifteenth century, but tracing the (Norman) origins of the surname and the family's settlement in Eastern Sussex as far back as to the late thirteenth century.¹ The first direct ancestor of the poet whose dealings can be related with certainty is his great-great-grandfather and namesake Thomas May, a 'yeoman farmer of considerable business shrewdness' who died around 1500 and who expanded the family fortune significantly.² When Thomas died in 1500, two sons survived him: Thomas and William.³

The younger son, William, was the forefather of the branch that arguably earned the highest distinction during the seventeenth century and that, interestingly, can be enumerated among the most noteworthy and faithful Royalist families. Not much is known about William himself: Chester relates that, being a younger brother with no prospects of inheriting the family estate, he migrated to Portugal, got married, and had issue, including Richard May; Richard May then returned to England, settled in London, and there joined the Company of Merchant Taylors.⁴ Richard prospered as a merchant and accumulated enough fortune to improve the prestige of his branch of the family, not only by purchasing the manor of Rawmere, in Western Sussex, in 1581, but also by making several donations to charitable causes in his will.⁵ Richard

¹ Chester, 11.

² Chester, 12.

³ Chester briefly expands upon the various branches of the family that stemmed from different members and flourished independently, but he mistakes William May as one of the grandsons of the Thomas May who died in 1500, when, according to a contemporary family tree of the May family, he actually was his son. See Bruce, 104-105.

⁴ Chester, 13.

⁵ Dunkin, 1915, 306-307. He donated money to clothworkers (see Strype, 62), left 300 pounds to the Chamber of London towards the building of Blackwell Hall, and 90 pounds to Christ's Hospital (Strype, 268).

married Mary Hullardson, or Hillersden, and together they had at least 13 children; as a testimony to the newly acquired reputation of the name May, several of Richard's sons and daughters married into noble families or became members of the court themselves.⁶

Their eldest daughter, Elizabeth, married Baptist Hicks, first Viscount Campden and silk merchant. Although he was only knighted and created baronet (and then viscount) after his marriage to Elizabeth in 1585, by the late 1580s he had accumulated a great fortune through his frequent business transactions with the court, which were facilitated by his brother Michael's being Secretary to Lord Burghley and Sir Robert Cecil.⁷ The fifth of Richard and Mary's children, Humphrey May, was a member of the court and later a favourite of King Charles I: by 1604 he had been appointed groom of the King's privy chamber, and the following year he was elected MP; in 1613 he was knighted by James, and he remained at court as a staunch defender of the monarchy until his death in 1630.⁸ His son Baptist May would go on to be remembered as one of Charles II's most trusted servants.⁹ John May, the sixth or seventh child of Richard, was not particularly notable in his own right, but two of his sons gained some importance at court: Adrian May was named groom of the privy chamber to Charles I in 1633 and was 'a trusted servant of the King' in the Civil War; during the Restoration, he was appointed supervisor of the King's gardeners and worked as a landscape designer for the court in various capacities.¹⁰ His younger brother Hugh, who occasionally worked with him, was an architect whose most significant work was the remodelling of a ward of Windsor Castle.¹¹ Another daughter of Richard and Mary, Joan May, married Sir William Herrick, goldsmith and eventually jeweller to James I, who later appointed him one of the tellers of the Exchequer.¹²

⁶ See *Boyd's Inhabitants of London & Family Units 1200-1946* (online, accessed through www.findmypast.co.uk).

⁷ See https://www.chippingcampdenhistory.org.uk/content/history/people-2/sir_baptist_hicks (last accessed 17 August 2023).

⁸ Hopper, 550-551.

⁹ Barclay, 543.

¹⁰ Malcolm, 857-859.

¹¹ Bold, 549.

¹² Welch, 56.

It is apparent that William — although penniless, forced to emigrate to Portugal, and seemingly prospectless when compared to his brother Thomas and his inheritance — succeeded in establishing a thriving dynasty through his son Richard, a dynasty that certainly contributed to tying the name May to Royalist loyalties during the first decades of the seventeenth century as well as during the Restoration.

The other branch of the family, the one that stemmed from William's brother Thomas, had a very different history. This Thomas May, great-grandfather of the poet, followed in the footsteps of his father in his pledge to better the family's condition: he was responsible for the acquisition of the manors of Bromeham and Blackford, and by the time he died in 1553 his family had attained enough respectability for him to be granted the title of 'gentleman' in post-mortem documents.¹³ He was survived by two sons.

The eldest was also named Thomas. According to the 1553 Post-Mortem Inquisition document, this Thomas was 'aged 25 at his father's death' and he was named heir, thus inheriting the manor of Pashley in Ticehurst.¹⁴ Not much is known about his dealings, though according to his will, which was made in 1577, he named his eldest son as the sole heir of his lands, and left only monetary bequests to his other sons and daughters.¹⁵ His eldest son, also named Thomas, died around 1611, naming his eldest son Anthony, then 20 years old, as his heir and bequeathing the manor of Pashley as well as 'Bromehurst' (possibly Bromeham, as no Bromehurst exists), in Ticehurst and Etchingham, to him.¹⁶ Anthony May, who was second cousin to the poet and just a few years older, was high sheriff of Surrey and Sussex in 1629, a position that still carried some prestige during the Stuart era but that was considerably less financially rewarding and more exacting when compared to the previous centuries.¹⁷

¹³ Chester, 13.

¹⁴ Attree, 152.

¹⁵ Will accessed through the online database <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>, record number PROB 11/59/263 (last accessed 19 August 2023).

¹⁶ Attree, 153.

¹⁷ See <https://highsheriffs.com/east-sussex/about/> (last accessed 20 August 2023).

Nevertheless, it seems that Anthony was able to maintain and pass on the wealth acquired by his ancestors, for his Post-Mortem Inquisition document records him still in possession of a great part of the same lands and manors, plus some small additional acquisitions.¹⁸

It is unclear whether any other members of this branch of the family besides Anthony reached any level of notoriety during the lifetime of May the poet, but Chester's claim that Anthony's son Adrian May 'served with distinction' in the Royalist forces during the Civil War appears to be incorrect.¹⁹ It seems that Chester is conflating the identity of the much younger son of Anthony, who was indeed named Adrian but who was probably born in the 1630s, with another Adrian from the branch of the family that stemmed from William May, the Groom of the Privy Chamber to Charles I who had turned landscape designer during the Restoration. In any case, it appears that this side of the May family enjoyed a relatively uneventful but comfortable life in Ticehurst, Sussex, just a few miles from the village of Burwash, where Thomas May the poet would eventually be born.

The second and youngest surviving son of the Thomas who died in 1553 was George May, grandfather of the poet. According to his father's Post-Mortem, George inherited the manor of Pycards in Wadhurst and, despite the moderate income and disadvantaged position as a younger son, he succeeded in expanding his family's estate.²⁰ Without ever leaving the parish of Burwash, he established a business as an iron-founder and achieved enough fame and fortune to acquire additional properties — namely the manor of Gyles or St Gyles and some other smaller tenements — and to become one of the wealthier men in the county.²¹ As Chester points out, this branch of the family, albeit clearly successful financially and business-wise, had not

¹⁸ Attree, 152.

¹⁹ Chester, 13.

²⁰ Attree, 152.

²¹ Chester, 14-15.

yet succeeded in reaching the social standing of a county family, a feat that would be accomplished by George's son Thomas, the father of the poet.²²

When George died in 1593 in Burwash, he was survived by two daughters, Jane and Margaret, and an only son and heir, Thomas.²³ Thomas was aged '30 or more' at the time of his father's death and had been married for almost ten years; a record of his wedding shows that he had married Barbara Rich in 1584 in London, in the church of St Andrew Undershaft.²⁴ Careful examination of the circumstances of the marriage unearths a series of fascinating clues concerning the life of Thomas May and, consequently, his son the poet. First, as pointed out by Chester, this was a very good match for the son of George May: Barbara was the daughter of Edward Rich of Hornden, Essex, and the Rich family, descended from Richard Rich, Sheriff of London in 1441, 'were people of some importance in county and national affairs.'²⁵ Although Edward Rich of Hornden belonged to a less important branch of the family, his more distinguished relatives had long been involved in royal affairs: Richard Rich, first Baron Rich, had been Lord Chancellor during the reign of Edward VI, and his grandson Robert Rich, first Earl of Warwick, was an important member of the court of Elizabeth and then James alongside his wife, Penelope Devereux, sister of Robert, Earl of Essex.²⁶ A second piece of evidence that emerges from the marriage record is the fact that the couple married in London. Although not decisive on its own, the permanence of the Mays in the capital could suggest an enduring effort, on Thomas's part, to secure a place at court, and could possibly help solve the mystery of the date and place of birth of his son the poet.

²² Chester, 15.

²³ Bruce, 105.

²⁴ Attree, 152. See *Boyd's First Miscellaneous Marriage Index, 1414-1808* (online, accessed through www.findmypast.co.uk).

²⁵ Chester, 16.

²⁶ See Carter, 681-682, and Usher, 684-685. One of the couple's sons, Charles Rich, died in battle in 1627 and was commemorated by Thomas May in a poem. Further discussion in Chapter 2.

Chester understandably assumes that Thomas would have likely been born in Burwash, as his grandfather George had recently died and passed the property on to his son; however, Chester also reports that the Burwash parish registers hold no record of the birth of the poet and that he cannot have been born in Mayfield, for his father only acquired the manor in 1598.²⁷ As mentioned above, the only clue to his date of birth is the Post-Mortem Inquisition of his father, where the poet is stated to be ‘20 years 6 months and not more’ at his father’s death.²⁸ Given that Thomas Sr, according to the same document, died on 23 August 1616, his son must have been born in the early months of 1596 – most likely, if we assume the document to be accurate in its estimation of his age, in late February. No trace of any such person exists in any baptism database for the whole county of Sussex; however, extending my research to London, I found the baptism record of a ‘Thomas Maye’ born in London and christened on 22 February 1596, which would make the 20 years, six months estimation exact almost to the day.²⁹ A small piece of evidence would concur to support the fact that, at the time, the Mays had ongoing business (or at the very least family bonds), that tied them to London and its vicinity: in the will of Edward Rich, father of Barbara, composed at Horndon on the Hill in 1598, Thomas May Sr is mentioned among the witnesses, which would suggest that he was not new to travelling between his home village, the capital, and its surroundings.³⁰ Still, the birth of his firstborn outside of Sussex was apparently an exception, for the rest of his children were all born in Burwash or in Mayfield, starting with the second son Edward, named after his maternal grandfather, in 1597.

The existence of a brother named Edward prompts the question of whether he could be identified with the Edward May who published, in 1633, a book entitled *Epigrams, Divine and Morals* – a tantalising hypothesis that, I think, deserves some scrutiny. The birth record of the

²⁷ Chester, 16.

²⁸ Attree, 153.

²⁹ See *England Births & Baptisms 1538-1975* (online, accessed through www.findmypast.co.uk).

³⁰ Will accessed through the online database <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>, record number PROB 11/92/27 (last accessed 25 August 2023).

poet's brother reports that he was christened on 3 July 1597 in the parish of Burwash and that his father was named Thomas.³¹ As a second son, born almost at the height of the then-promising social climb of his father and very close in age to the first son and heir, it would be reasonable to assume that young Edward received an early education similar to that of his brother Thomas; as for a possible university education, traces of his presence at either Cambridge or Oxford are scant at best. No Edward May of compatible age can be found in the *ACAD – A Cambridge Alumni Database*, and the *Alumni Oxonienses 1500–1714* only lists one Edward May, who however obtained his B.A. from Trinity College in June 1610,³² when the Edward May born in Burwash would have been barely thirteen, making the argument of an identification between these two Edwards tenuous at best. There is also an Edward Maie, chaplain of Lincoln's Inn and author of a controversial sermon preached in 1620, but he looks like an unlikely candidate as well: when his sermon *The Communion of Saints* was published in 1621, he had already been chaplain at Lincoln's Inn for five years, i.e., from 3 February 1616.³³ Furthermore, when he was appointed chaplain, he already held a Master of Arts, which would likely exclude him on the same grounds of age as the Edward May who studied at Oxford (and which could very well suggest that the Oxoniensis May and the preacher Maie were, in fact, the same person).³⁴

Not much is known about the Edward May who authored the epigrams, except for the fact that he is styled 'Gent.' on the title page of the printed book. Hoyt H. Hudson speculates that Edward was educated at a grammar school, where he doubtlessly acquired 'the methods of translation, imitation, and verse-paraphrase' that he displays in his work.³⁵ He then advances the hypothesis that he might be the Edward May who was graduated B.A. at Oxford in 1610,

³¹ See *England Births & Baptisms 1538-1975* (online, accessed through www.findmypast.co.uk).

³² See *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714*, pages 982-1007 (Mascall-Meyrick), <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/alumni-oxon/1500-1714/pp982-1007> (last accessed 22 August 2023).

³³ Salazar, 55.

³⁴ Baildon and Walker, 179.

³⁵ Hudson, 24.

and reasonably identifies him with the ‘Ed. May’ who contributed a dedicatory poem to Thomas Jordan’s 1637 *Poetical Varieties* and to Thomas Beedome’s 1641 *Poems, Divine and Humane*, both of whom he dubs ‘friends.’³⁶ I have also identified a third instance of an Edward May penning a dedication to a work by one of his friends, that is, Samuel Sheppard’s *The Socratic Session, or the Arraignment and Conviction of Julius Scaliger*, printed together with Sheppard’s own *Epigrams Theological, Philosophical, and Romantic*, and, although in this case he signs his poem ‘Edward’ in place of ‘Ed’, the style of the poems is similar enough to conclude that all three commendatory poems were authored by the same person. Notably, all three copiously reference the classical world and classical mythology, all are quite grandiose in manner, and all allude to the dedicatee wearing, or deserving to wear, a laurel crown: ‘Nor for the land will I forsake the streams [of Jordan, here identifying both the river and the dedicatee Thomas Jordan], / On whose brow danceth flowery anadems’³⁷; ‘and every line ... I do season with my brine, / Though there was salt enough in them before, / To keep thy bays still fresh’³⁸; ‘thy praise / Should not be thanks, but anadems of bays.’³⁹ The tone and mythological setting of these dedications would easily fit with the profile proposed by Hudson of a man well-versed in grammar school teachings and classical authors.

Interestingly, I have also found an Edward May among the cast of Shackerley Marmion’s *Holland’s Leaguer*, first performed in 1631 by the second iteration of Prince Charles’s Men.⁴⁰ This company, which was under the patronage of the infant Prince Charles, was licenced in December 1631, and *Holland’s Leaguer* was very likely the first play they ever performed.⁴¹

³⁶ Hudson, 26.

³⁷ Thomas Jordan, *Poeticall Varieties: or, Varietie of Fancies*, London, printed by T[homas] C[otes] for Humphry Blunden, 1637, B1v; modernisation mine.

³⁸ Thomas Beedome, *Poems Divine, and Humane*, London, printed by E. P. for John Sweeting, 1641, A2r; modernisation mine.

³⁹ Samuel Sheppard, *Epigrams Theological, Philosophical, and Romantick; and also the Socratic Session, or, The Arraignment and Conviction of Julius Scaliger; with Other Select Poems*, London, printed by G. D. for Thomas Bucknell, 1651, O3r; modernisation mine.

⁴⁰ Shackerley Marmion, *Hollands Leaguer. An Excellent Comedy*, London, printed by J[ohn] B[eale] for John Grove, 1632, A4r.

⁴¹ Bentley, *JCS 1*, 302.

Though Edward May is not mentioned in any of the (very few) documents pertaining to the company, his name appears in the list of *dramatis personae* attached to the manuscript of the anonymous *Edmund Ironside*, although Prince Charles's Men were known to have produced only a handful of plays – Bentley lists six – which would suggest a little more than a casual acquaintance with the company.⁴² Furthermore, his role in Marmion's play, evidently intended for an adult performer, was 'not insignificant', which would point towards an actor with some stage experience.⁴³ Although no element clearly ties the actor Edward to the Edward who wrote commendatory poems to Jordan, Beedome, and Sheppard, it is undeniable that the 'dedicator' Edward is in the company of many distinguished names, several of whom belonged to the dramatic scene (Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome in Jordan's volume, Henry Glapthorne in Beedome's, and Thomas Nabbes in both), a vicinity that makes it not unreasonable to suppose, on his part, some level of familiarity with the theatre.

In his thorough analysis of the *Epigrams, Divine and Moral* by Edward May, Hudson notes that the descriptors attached to the title are little more than an expedient to appeal to potential readers: the epigrams classifiable as 'divine' comprise but a small group at the beginning of the anthology, and, although poems dealing with 'moral' issues do represent a larger portion of the book, the sum of 'epigrams divine and moral' is no more than half of the two hundred and one poems total.⁴⁴ The rest are a collection of 'girds and witticisms, scurrilous anecdotes, imitations and translations from Martial and the Greek Anthology', as well as love songs echoing lyrics by popular poets of the time such as John Ford, John Donne, and Ben Jonson.⁴⁵

The presence of translations from epigrams by Martial certainly draws the attention of anyone attempting to establish a connection between Thomas and Edward May, particularly

⁴² Bentley, *JCS I*, 323.

⁴³ Bentley, 'Caroline Acting Troupe', 226.

⁴⁴ Hudson, 28.

⁴⁵ Hudson, 26-28.

considering the dates of publication of their respective collections: *Selected Epigrams of Martial, Englished by Thomas May Esquire* was printed in 1629, and Edward's *Epigrams, Divine and Moral* a mere four years later. Ascribing a surge of interest in the poetry of Martial purely to the publication of Thomas May's translation would be misguided: Martial had been the subject of scholarly attention since the previous century, particularly influencing Jonson, and before 1633 translations of selected epigrams had been published by Simon Vachan (1571), Timothy Kendall (1577), and John Ashmore (1621).⁴⁶ Moreover, Thomas Farnaby had published a commentary on the epigrams in 1615, which was reprinted in 1633.⁴⁷ Hudson points out that each of Martial's epigrams translated by Edward May (who draws heavily upon Kendall's anthology *Flowers of Epigrams*, often reworking and improving his verbose translations) is to be found in Kendall's volume, but he also underlines that, unlike with other classical authors, Edward probably did read some other versions of Martial's epigrams and that Kendall's translations serve as mere starting points from which to develop freely.⁴⁸ Of the epigrams by Martial included in Edward's anthology, four have also been translated by Thomas and, as a matter of fact, it is unclear whether Edward drew more from his version or Kendall's.⁴⁹ In fact, in some cases (such as with Epigram V, 76), Edward's rendering more closely resembles Thomas's, even though, arguably, all versions are distinct enough to evade accusations of plagiarism.⁵⁰

All in all, it is hard to establish whether Thomas's translations were a direct influence on Edward's adaptations of the poems; however, it would also be irresponsible to discount the

⁴⁶ Cummings and Gillespie, 25.

⁴⁷ Thomas Farnaby, *M. Val. Martialis Epigrammaton Libri. Animadversi, emendati et commentariolis luculenter explicati*, London, printed by Felix Kingston for William Welby, 1615.

⁴⁸ Hudson, 41.

⁴⁹ These are Epigram V, 76, Epigram I, 97, and I, 13, as well as the poem 25b from Martial's *De Spectaculis*. For a complete list of all Martial's epigrams translated by Edward May, see Hudson 1937: 52-58.

⁵⁰ See Timothy Kendall, *Flowers of Epigrammes, ovt of sundrie the moste singular authours selected, as well auncient as late writers*, London, printed by John Shepperd, 1577, A8v; Thomas May, *Selected Epigrams of Martial, Englished by Thomas May Esquire*, London, printed for Thomas Walkley, 1629, C8v; Edward May, *Epigrams, Divine and Morall*, London, printed by J[ohn] B[eale] for John Grove, 1633, D7v.

impact of a publication so thematically and chronologically close to Edward's own. Of course, whether this proves, or contributes to proving, that the two Mays were brothers is another matter entirely, and it is probably a mystery that will remain unsolved unless new evidence resurfaces.

Shortly after the birth of his second son Edward in the parish of Burwash, Thomas May Sr acquired the manor of Mayfield and all its numerous surrounding tenements and moved there with the family in 1598.⁵¹ Another son was born one year after the acquisition and two years after Edward: the registers of the parish of Mayfield record the baptism of George May, son of Thomas, on 8 April 1599.⁵² Then, in January of 1601 or 1602, the three boys' mother Barbara died.⁵³ Chester writes that young George died shortly thereafter, and the burial of a George May in October of 1602 is indeed recorded in the parish registers.⁵⁴ However, I believe that Chester is mistaken and that this is not the George May son of Thomas, but rather another George May, born to a Richard in 1601. Proof that George survived is found in a partial genealogy of the May family, in which he is styled 'of Orssutt' in Essex (a misspelling of Orsett) and married to Anne, surname unknown.⁵⁵ A record of the marriage between a George May and Anne Piddock, or Piddocke, in February of 1628, in the parish of Stifford, which is located in the Orsett district, would seem to confirm that he did indeed survive and move away from Sussex.⁵⁶

After the death of his wife, Thomas did not remain unmarried for long. Though no record of a second marriage exists, the registers of the parish of Mayfield record the birth of four daughters (and the burial of one of them) between 1604 and 1615 — Martha, Judith, Anne, and

⁵¹ Dunkin, 1915, 295.

⁵² See *Online Parish Clerks for the English counties of East and West Sussex*, http://www.sussex-opc.org/index.php?p=138&n=may*&t=baptism&k=120823&l=102 (last accessed 23 August 2023).

⁵³ Chester has 1602 (Chester 1932: 20), but the online parish register has 1601, and it is unclear whether this confusion is due to a mistake over the calendar on the part of Chester or the online parish clerks.

⁵⁴ Chester, 20. See *Online Parish Clerks for the English counties of East and West Sussex*, http://www.sussex-opc.org/index.php?p=138&n=may*&t=burial&k=20472&l=102 (last accessed 24 August 2023).

⁵⁵ Bruce, 105.

⁵⁶ See *England Marriages 1538-1973* (online, accessed through www.findmypast.co.uk).

Susanna — and his family’s genealogy reports that he married Jane Sands, or Sandys, of Throwley, in Kent.⁵⁷

In the meantime, Thomas had at last obtained a title to attest to the successful social climb of his branch of the family: on 23 July 1603 he was knighted at Whitehall by the soon-to-be-crowned King James.⁵⁸ Rightfully pointing out that knighthoods were dispensed so frequently by James to render the honour almost worthless, Chester speculates that Thomas May might have been knighted as a reward for the allegiance he promptly showed upon the accession of the new king.⁵⁹ Regardless of the original reason behind the knighthood, Sir Thomas demonstrated his loyalty to James — although ‘probably in some trifling and unimportant ways’ — throughout the following decade and until his death, most remarkably by taking part, in 1615, in the schemes to humiliate Somerset, the King’s favourite (p. 21-2).⁶⁰

Rather paradoxically, his social ascent was accompanied by an increasingly disastrous management of his personal finances and estate. Following the acquisition of Mayfield in 1598, it is apparent that Thomas had no means to maintain his newly acquired estate (or perhaps an extravagant lifestyle), a circumstance that in 1600 forced him to sell the old manor of Gyles, in Burwash, which the family had recently vacated.⁶¹ The revenue from Mayfield was still evidently not enough to support Sir Thomas’s life as a knight, for in 1604 he ceded part of the properties and tributes pertaining to the rectory of Mayfield and, in 1609, he definitively quitclaimed what remained of them; as for the small tenements that had been left to him in Echingham, Salehurst, and Ticehurst, he was forced to quitclaim them in 1612.⁶² The Post-Mortem Inquisition following his death in 1616 reveals the full extent of his shameful downfall:

⁵⁷ See *Online Parish Clerks for the English counties of East and West Sussex*, <http://www.sussex-opc.org/index.php?t=baptism&no=9> (last accessed 24 August 2023), and Bruce, 105.

⁵⁸ A record of this achievement is available in *Britain, Knights of The Realm & Commonwealth Index* (online, accessed through www.findmypast.co.uk).

⁵⁹ Chester, 21.

⁶⁰ Chester, 21-22.

⁶¹ Dunkin, 1914, 191-192.

⁶² Dunkin, 1915, 296, and Dunkin, 1914, 202.

the manors of Mayfield and Pennybridge had been mortgaged in 1608 to several people, including a Richard May (probably a relative) and, when Thomas had failed to pay, certain parts of the lands had been legally transferred to Richard; moreover, the park of Mayfield had been leased since 1615.⁶³ Possibly to cover Sir Thomas's debts, his son Thomas and his widow Jane sold, in 1618, the manor of Mayfield and all related properties.⁶⁴

Before his family's prospects definitively collapsed, however, young Thomas must have received, as Chester puts it, 'an education ... for young gentlemen who one day might expect to fall heir to the ownership and management of great estates.'⁶⁵ Chester deems it more probable that, after an early education at the hands of his mother and, later, of his stepmother, the poet was tutored by the local vicar rather than at a local school, and, although it is entirely possible that young Thomas was sent to study in one of the few endowed schools to be found in Sussex at the time, historical evidence would appear to favour Chester's hypothesis: no schools were established in Mayfield or in its surroundings until 1707, and until that time most licensed tutors were curates or readers.⁶⁶

The first non-speculative proof of the existence of Thomas May is the record of his admission and later graduation at Cambridge.

1.2 May in the 1610s

May was admitted Fellow Commoner at Sidney Sussex College on 7 September 1609, at the age of thirteen, and graduated B.A. in the early months of 1613.⁶⁷ The title of Fellow Commoner

⁶³ Attree, 153.

⁶⁴ Dunkin, 1915, 295.

⁶⁵ Chester, 22.

⁶⁶ Chester, 20; Wadey, 270-273.

⁶⁷ See *ACAD – A Cambridge Alumni Database*, record number MY609T; the online record is a transcription of the original entry in Venn and Venn, *Alumni*, 167. Here Venn and Venn also report May's date of death, but, I believe, incorrectly identify his place of death and residence, for they write 'Will 1650/1651; as of St Mary Aldermanbury, London, and Roughmere, Sussex', and I think they are basing their identification on the will of a Thomas May dated 1651 (will accessed through the online database <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>, record number PROB 11/216/534). Said Thomas is almost certainly not the poet, but one of the sons of Richard May who owned

gives us an indication of his father's ambition and relatively high social ranking at the time: a Fellow Commoner was 'an affluent, usually aristocratic, student' who enjoyed certain privileges, chiefly that of sitting alongside the Fellows and the Master of his college at the high table and having to share his room with only one 'chamber-fellow.'⁶⁸ The exceptionality and prestige of this position is confirmed by the fact that, out of the 21 students admitted at Sidney Sussex in 1609, May was the only one who held the title and privileges of Fellow Commoner.⁶⁹

The college to which May was admitted, as Chester remarks, is also essential in attempting to draw a picture of his university life and in reconstructing the varied intellectual stimuli that influenced young Thomas in his formative years.

Sidney Sussex was a college of relatively recent birth: it was founded in 1596 and initially welcomed students from two nearby colleges, Christ's and Emmanuel. Whereas Christ's was older, Emmanuel had been founded only a few years prior by a former Christ's fellow; however, both shared a reputation for being particularly radical in their religious beliefs and for training 'godly protestant preachers.'⁷⁰ It was not surprising, therefore, that Sidney Sussex distinguished itself as markedly Puritan since its foundation.

During May's years at Cambridge, Sidney Sussex was under the rectory of two different masters. Francis Aldrich, one of the original fellows of Sidney, was appointed in April 1608, but he died in December 1609.⁷¹ His position was filled shortly after by Samuel Ward, also one of the original fellows, who remained at Sidney Sussex as master from 1610 until his death in 1643.⁷² Ward, who was notoriously Puritan, devoted himself to the study and circulation of the Bible, contributing part of the translation of James' Authorised Version of 1611; in the face of

the manor of Rawmere in Sussex, for the will mentions two of his brothers (Richard and John) and two of his brothers in law, all of whom correspond to the biographical information available regarding this branch of the family.

⁶⁸ See <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/university-archives/glossary/fellow-commoner> (last accessed 2 September 2023); Edwards, 73.

⁶⁹ Information regarding the number and type of matriculations was taken from Venn and Venn, *Matriculations*.

⁷⁰ Todd, 241.

⁷¹ Venn and Venn, *Alumni*, 14.

⁷² Todd, 239.

the growing radicalism associated with certain Puritan factions in the 1640s, he took a moderate stance and was accordingly imprisoned for failing to support the Parliament.⁷³ Other former Sidney pupils were supporters of the royalist cause, but the vast majority of Sidney Sussex men sided with Parliament during the Civil War.

Some examples of parliamentarists include Edward Montagu, whom Chester lists among the royalist supporters despite his not having switched allegiance until the Restoration,⁷⁴ who was commander of the parliamentary forces during the Civil War;⁷⁵ William Armine, who matriculated one year after May and who later became MP and a strong supporter of Parliament;⁷⁶ and many other students who served in the parliamentary forces in some capacity. Chester also mentions several who were noted for their staunch Puritanism and anti-Catholicism, including Will Bradshaw, Jeremy Whitaker, and John Bramhall.⁷⁷ Finally, some measure of the kind of environment and ideas circulating within the college during the first decades of the seventeenth century can be grasped by mentioning perhaps the most illustrious alumnus of Sidney Sussex: Oliver Cromwell, who was admitted in 1616 as fellow commoner.⁷⁸

As concerns the dramatic and entertainment tradition of Sidney Sussex, in the *Records of Early English Drama* at Cambridge the year 1600 marks the first mention of the college, with a registered payment to waits, which were groups of town musicians who regularly played at universities. Sidney Sussex's expenses towards entertainment grew slowly over the following years, registering 'an unusually large number of contributions to other musicians and trumpeters' as compared to other colleges,⁷⁹ although there are no records of payments made to professional acting companies before or during May's years at Cambridge.⁸⁰ The only play ever

⁷³ Todd, 264.

⁷⁴ Chester, 23.

⁷⁵ *ACAD*, #MNTG617E.

⁷⁶ *ACAD*, #ARMN609W.

⁷⁷ Chester, 23.

⁷⁸ *ACAD*, #CRML616O and Chester, 23.

⁷⁹ *REED* 2, 773.

⁸⁰ *REED* 1, 376-496.

consistently tied to the college is May's own lost Latin tragedy 'Julius Caesar', although this link, which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5, is deemed 'most unlikely' by Alan H. Nelson.⁸¹

It is possible that May attended performances staged by other, more prolific, colleges, such as St John's and Trinity. Whereas plays were occasionally staged privately by colleges and open to that specific college's members only, most theatrical performances had a public character and could be attended by all Cambridge students, possibly even by the general public.⁸² Among the plays known to have been performed at Cambridge between 1609 and 1613 were the Latin plays *Adelphe* (Samuel Brooke, 1612) and *Scyros* (Samuel Brooke, 1613),⁸³ as well as Terence's *Andria* in 1610,⁸⁴ the English play *Preist the Barber* (anonymous, 1611),⁸⁵ plus several plays of which the title is unknown and various other forms of academic entertainment in English and Latin.⁸⁶ The distribution of performances throughout the year normally depended on the liturgic and academic calendar, with the occasional visit by a member of the royal family or a dignitary forcing the university to adapt its schedule to the visitor.⁸⁷ The only royal visit that May could possibly have attended as a student was Prince Charles's visit on 2–4 March 1613 with Frederick, the Elector Palatine, although, not knowing precisely at what time of the year he graduated B.A. in 1612/13, it is also possible he was no longer lodging at Sidney Sussex by that time.⁸⁸

May's name cannot be found in any of the extant lists of actors who took part in stage performances during his years at Cambridge, and there is really no element hinting at his possible involvement in theatre productions at that time. Although the notion that a student

⁸¹ REED 2, 773.

⁸² Nelson, 116.

⁸³ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1672 and #1702.

⁸⁴ REED 2, 974.

⁸⁵ REED 2, 916-917.

⁸⁶ REED 2, 974.

⁸⁷ REED 2, 715.

⁸⁸ REED 2, 736.

could be involved in another college's production is not unheard of, as proven by the charming, and probably false, anecdote that Oliver Cromwell played the role of a king in a comedy acted at Trinity College,⁸⁹ university records do not invite speculation of this kind regarding May.

Overall, the period of the poet's residence at Cambridge was relatively uneventful, except for a riot which, incidentally, took place during the representation of a comedy by Trinity College on two consecutive nights, 6 and 7 February 1611, and which saw a conflict between St John's College men and Trinity College men.⁹⁰ By all accounts, May was a model student: in 1662, Thomas Fuller writes that he 'seriously applied himself to his studies',⁹¹ while Gerald Langbaine notes that he was a 'very close student' whose efforts at Cambridge are apparent from his works.⁹² During his residence at Cambridge May evidently started to acquaint himself with writing poetry, for the first known bit of writing attributable to him is a poem composed to commemorate the death of Prince Henry in 1612, which was included in the anthology known as *Epicedium Cantabrigiense*.

As opposed to Oxford, where the practice was more widespread, the tradition of publishing volumes commemorating notable deaths or celebrating public events had not yet flourished in Cambridge, where the entire reign of James I saw the publication of only four volumes, including the *Threnothriambeuticon*, which was published in 1603 upon the death of Elizabeth.⁹³ The *Epicedium* was only the second volume published by the university during the Stuart age and the only one printed during May's stay at Cambridge; all evidence suggests its publication must have occurred rather quickly and efficiently. Because we know Prince Henry died on 6 November 1612, and both editions of the book carry the date '1612', they must have been printed in or before March 1613; indeed, although no direct evidence exists for the

⁸⁹ REED 2, 991-993.

⁹⁰ REED 2, 1030-1034.

⁹¹ Fuller, 110.

⁹² Langbaine, 360.

⁹³ Forster, 141.

Epicedium, all other contemporary editions ‘were completed, printed, corrected and bound within about a month of the event celebrated’, that is, while May was still a full-time student at Sidney Sussex College.⁹⁴

What is most interesting about this early publication, though, is the language in which May chose to present his contribution – English. At that time, Latin dominated learned publications of all kinds, and English struggled to be recognised as an acceptable language in academic anthologies, as demonstrated by the almost complete lack of vernacular poems in Cambridge volumes: one of the editions of the 1612 *Epicedium* boasts just two, while the 1619 *Lacrymae* to commemorate Queen Anne’s death contains only one; English verses would not reappear in Cambridge publications until 1640.⁹⁵ However, the *Epicedium*, at least in part, proved an exception. The book was published in two separate, but chronologically very close, editions which were almost identical, except for the final pages: one of them contained 118 compositions, out of which just two were in English, while in the other edition twenty Latin, plus one French, poems were replaced with twelve in English.⁹⁶ Although there is no testimony offering a conclusive explanation as to the reason behind this choice, nor any substantial clue indicating which of the two editions was published first, both hypotheses have been scrutinised. Arthur E. Case theorises that the ‘Latin’ edition predates the ‘English’ one,⁹⁷ and his case is supported by the British Museum’s *General Catalogue*.⁹⁸ J. C. T. Oates argues that historical evidence does not support this assertion, for compositions in ‘learned tongues’ had precedence over vernacular poetry, and he speculates that the twelve English poems were included in the first edition of the volume as a sort of ‘stop-gap’, until other more classical, and thus more prestigious, compositions could be added. In support of his theory, Oates presents these lines,

⁹⁴ Forster, 145.

⁹⁵ Forster, 147-148.

⁹⁶ Forster, 148.

⁹⁷ Case, 30-31.

⁹⁸ Oates, 397.

signed 'A. B.', from the 'English' edition, 'The grief I cannot hide I thought to show / In a less vulgar tongue, but as my due / I am thrust back and must resign my place / To better wits that are in better grace' (sig. P2r), which would appear to reference a future version of the anthology in which English 'resigns its place' in favour of Latin.⁹⁹

May's contribution was among the twelve poems only included in one of the two editions. The reasons behind the decision to write in English are not clear, especially considering a possible exclusion in favour of Latin, but they mark the first manifestation of this peculiar attitude from the then soon-to-be-seventeen Thomas May. It would be perhaps easy to dismiss the choice as the result of an imperfect mastery of Latin and, to paraphrase the unknown 'A. B.' quoted above, as the display of a lesser wit in lesser grace. Nevertheless, although his name would become associated with the classics only over a decade later, it would be hard to propose that his fondness for Latin literature was not at least partly fostered by his grammar-school first and, then, Cambridge education, and it would be even more implausible to suggest that a near-graduate did not possess enough competency in Latin to compose a short lyric for the anthology. Moreover, as will be shown throughout the following chapters, the argument in favour of a conscious decision to forego Latin in favour of English is, I argue, forcefully borne out by the subsequent literary production and literary choices made by May throughout his career.

Owing to the rather obscure nature of the publication, I think it is helpful to report the contribution to the anthology by May here:

The Pythagoreans (noble Prince) in thee
For transmigration sure confuted be.
Thy purer spirit of so heavenly nature,
Never before came out of mortal creature,
And now departing, can none other fit:
There's not a subject capable of it.

⁹⁹ Oates, 397.

For had it from some other issued forth,
Some Stuart, or Plantagenet, thy worth,
Or warlike Tudor, would have equalised;
But none of these with Henry may be prized.
For all the virtues of that threefold blood,
Unioned in thee, to make one perfect Good.

Thy shining virtues made the earth admire thee,
And rare perfections made the heavens desire thee:
Else could we not have seen so sad an hour,
The hopes of *England* cropped in sorest flour.
Nor had too early mourning reaved our rest,
But thou thy Kingdoms, we had thee possessed.¹⁰⁰

The composition prematurely displays some of the characteristics of May's poetry. Specifically, the mention of Pythagoreans would be echoed years later in a poem celebrating Charles I and the English fleet¹⁰¹ and in one dedicated to Sir Kenelm Digby, friend of the poet,¹⁰² references to England's missing the departed after his life was 'cropped' can also be found in 'An Elegy on Sir Charles Rich slain at the Isle of Rhé', written fifteen years later.¹⁰³ Moreover, although the poem mourning Prince Henry could be deemed uncharacteristically devoid of classical references, all of the funeral elegies attributed to May share this feature, the only exception being the one he penned to commemorate Ben Jonson, whose association with the classics could hardly be ignored, especially by the classicist May, as will later be discussed.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *Epicidium*, O3r; all of May's works quoted in this thesis are modernised by me. For other early modern texts, I used modern spelling when already available in the source text; otherwise, and as stated in footnotes, modernisations are mine.

¹⁰¹ Poem extant in manuscript and fully transcribed in Phelps, 414.

¹⁰² Poem extant in manuscript and fully transcribed in Pask, 110.

¹⁰³ Poem extant in manuscript and fully transcribed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁴ The four funeral elegies attributable to May with certainty commemorate Prince Henry, Sir Charles Rich, Lady Venetia Digby, and Ben Jonson; for discussion on the other three see Chapters 2 and 4 of this thesis.

This elegy marks the first, and only, composition irrefutably written in the 1610s that is conclusively attributable to May; the rest of the decade is partly shrouded in mystery.

It is unknown what May did immediately after his graduation. As mentioned, it is possible that he attended Prince Charles and the Elector Palatine's visit to Cambridge made shortly after the latter's marriage to Princess Elizabeth. During their visit, the two princes were each gifted a volume containing celebratory poetry by various students and members of Cambridge's teaching staff;¹⁰⁵ one of these volumes is still extant in manuscript, but it does not contain any writing by May.¹⁰⁶ Contributions by the poet are seemingly absent from all later commemorative poems printed at Cambridge in subsequent years as well, despite many poems being authored by former students.¹⁰⁷ Although this does not necessarily mean that May did not attend any of these events, it does imply that he did not maintain a significant bond with his university, which appears to lead to the possible conclusion that he left Cambridge soon after obtaining his degree. Anthony à Wood, one of his earliest biographers, writes that, after studying at Cambridge, 'he retired to, and mostly lived in, the City of *Westminster*', which seems plausible, although, theories aside, what May did between 1613 and August 1615 is impossible to ascertain.¹⁰⁸ Being still only seventeen, it is possible that he returned to Mayfield for a short time, although, as Chester rightly concludes, 'it is idle to speculate': unless new evidence were to resurface, it is highly unlikely that new light will be shed on this short period of the poet's life.¹⁰⁹

The first tangible proof of his whereabouts after graduation is dated 6 August 1615, when he was admitted at Gray's Inn. The entry on the register reads 'Thomas Maye, son and heir of

¹⁰⁵ Bradner, 208.

¹⁰⁶ The volume is MSS Pal. lat. 1736 and is available digitally on the website of the Vatican Library at <https://digi.vatlib.it/mss/Pal.lat>. Although many of the contributors to the volume sign with their initials rather than their full name, there is neither a 'Thomas May' nor a 'T.M.' among them.

¹⁰⁷ The volumes that were published during the 1610s and 1620s were printed, respectively, upon the death of Queen Anne (1619), the return of Prince Charles from Spain (1623), the death of King James (1625), and the marriage of King Charles (1625). See Forster, 155-156 for a full list of the books and famous contributors to each.

¹⁰⁸ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume II, 295.

¹⁰⁹ Chester, 25.

Thomas M., of Mayfield, Sussex, Knight.’¹¹⁰ It is likely that May had been in London for at least some time, for admission to an Inn of Court was preceded by a mandatory introductory course study in one of the Inns of Chancery. The admission to Gray’s Inn had a monetary price, which in 1556 was of twenty shillings, and a yearly pension cost.¹¹¹ As a ‘freshman’ at Gray’s Inn, contrary to his privileged position as a fellow commoner at Cambridge, May’s social rank was not particularly prestigious as compared to that of his fellows. Among the people who were admitted with May in August 1615 alone, there were certainly fellows of lower social standing, but also many who could boast the appellation of ‘gent.’ themselves, several other sons of knights, the son of a Baron of the Exchequer, and even a knight and gentleman of the King’s Privy Chamber.¹¹²

Life at Gray’s Inn was highly communal in nature. The routine consisted of breakfast, dinner, and supper in the Hall, which also hosted lectures and disputations; readings were held every morning throughout the whole duration of the term; during the day, students gathered in the Chapel for common prayer and mass. Although most of the students’ study was done in private, the shared experience was a major element in the life of a member of Gray’s Inn.¹¹³ The library of the Inn, which mainly relied upon donations, was furnished with quite a diverse assortment of books, ranging from volumes on forensic topics of various kinds (which were, of course, the majority) to English history, to classical literature, to volumes in other vernacular European languages such as French;¹¹⁴ it also held a small, but valuable, collection of manuscripts, mostly of monkish and medieval literature.¹¹⁵

As regards entertainment, the Inns of Court traditionally gave licence to students to organise masques and shows during certain periods, e.g., from Christmas to Shrovetide; this

¹¹⁰ Foster, *Gray’s Inn*, 137.

¹¹¹ Douthwaite, *Notes*, 30.

¹¹² Foster, *Gray’s Inn*, 137-141.

¹¹³ Fletcher, xxxii-xxxiii.

¹¹⁴ Douthwaite, *History*, 172-176.

¹¹⁵ Douthwaite, *History*, 180.

was intended partly as a ‘contained’ way to relax from their study, partly to offer demonstrations of the Inn’s grandeur and hospitality. The first record of a masque being staged at Gray’s Inn dates back to 1525, and from then on pageants became part of the traditions of the Inn.¹¹⁶ During these revels, Gray’s Inn is known to have staged masques, comedies written specially for such occasions, plays by renowned professional playwrights, including Shakespeare, and even vernacular translations from classical or contemporary European plays.¹¹⁷ Some attempts have been made to date the composition and staging of the lost Latin play ‘Julius Caesar’ to May’s time at Gray’s Inn,¹¹⁸ a hypothesis that, however, is not supported by any historical evidence, for it appears that all of the entertainment produced by and offered at Gray’s Inn was in English, with not a single mention of anything in Latin. Nevertheless, the dramatic tradition of Gray’s Inn was solid enough to gain an independent reputation, and members of the Inn are known to have assisted in theatrical productions staged elsewhere and for larger audiences.¹¹⁹

Aside from the forms of entertainment offered by the Inn itself, law students knew where to look for distractions on their own. While Gray’s Inn had a ‘retired character’ and was ‘surrounded by [the] quietude’ of Holborn, the neighbourhood where it was (and still is) situated,¹²⁰ theatres on the Bankside played an important role in the daily life of students. Contemporary accounts attest to the students’ frequent visit to the Globe, the Rose, and the Swan, and often impose their negative judgement on the practice; it is worth reporting this condemnation by Bishop Earle, quoted in Chester, which strongly emphasises the relationship between Inns and theatres:

That the inns of court men were undone but for the players; that they are their chiefest guests and employment, and the sole business that makes them afternoon’s men: that this

¹¹⁶ Douthwaite, *History*, 222-223.

¹¹⁷ Douthwaite, *History*, 225, 229-230.

¹¹⁸ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1669.

¹¹⁹ Most notably, members of Gray’s Inn were engaged at all levels of production in the 1588 staging of *The Misfortunes of Arthur* for Queen Elizabeth at Greenwich. See Douthwaite, *History*, 226-227.

¹²⁰ Douthwaite, *History*, xii-xiii.

is one of the first things they learn, as soon as they are admitted; to see stage-plays and take smoke at a playhouse, which they commonly make their study.¹²¹

Judging by these accounts and by May's foray into playwriting as early as 1620, Chester rightfully determines that, however markedly Puritan his education at Cambridge may have been, clearly May did not participate in the condemnation of the theatre.¹²²

Regardless of what he did during his spare time, it is highly unlikely that May completed the full study curriculum offered by Gray's Inn. Obtaining the title of Barrister required three years of residence at the Inn.¹²³ Although it is possible that May completed this course of studies and formally became barrister, no historical source testifies to this fact and no biographer or contemporary ever refers to him as such; some sources do, however, attribute a speech impediment to May, which may have been severe enough to warrant the decision to abandon the forensic career. In his autobiography, Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon, a contemporary of May, describes 'an Imperfection in his Speech' which caused him great embarrassment and prevented him from speaking in public except when in the company of his close friends.¹²⁴ While I do believe this speech defect would have eventually made May reconsider his career as a barrister in any case, I am convinced a much more dramatic life event led him away from London (momentarily) and from Gray's Inn (perhaps permanently): the death of his father.

Regardless of his aspirations, his time at Gray's Inn must have been brusquely cut short by the news, and only after barely a year of residence there. Sir Thomas died on 23 August¹²⁵ and was buried a day later in the church of St Dunstan, in Mayfield.¹²⁶ Being his firstborn son and heir, May was certainly involved in succession matters and likely spent a considerable

¹²¹ Chester, 27.

¹²² Chester, 27.

¹²³ Douthwaite, *Notes*, 30.

¹²⁴ Clarendon, 35.

¹²⁵ Attree, 153.

¹²⁶ See *Online Parish Clerks for the English counties of East and West Sussex*, <http://www.sussex-opc.org/index.php?p=138&n=may&t=burial&k=20985&l=102> (last accessed 18 September 2023).

amount of time in Mayfield, especially considering the poor shape of his father's estate and legacy. As detailed in the previous chapter, by 1616 Sir Thomas had barely any property left that was entirely his own, with most having been quitclaimed or leased; the only significant property he still partially owned was the manor of Mayfield, in which young Thomas had spent the better part of his childhood. However, his father evidently left the Mays in such a critical financial situation as to force the family to sell the manor the following year: the document, dated 17 November 1617, details the sale of the property to a John Baker of Mayfield by 'Dame Jane Maye, widow of Sir Thomas Maye of Mayfield in y^e co. of Sussex, kt., deceased, and Thomas Maye of Mayfield, Esq., son and heir of y^e said Sir Thomas Maye.'¹²⁷ Although it is possible that May travelled back to London after his father's funeral in 1616 and then came back in November of the following year to settle this matter, I deem it far more likely that he remained in Mayfield uninterruptedly for more than a year, possibly helping the rest of his family deal with the complicated state of his father's affairs. I do not believe, however, that he remained in Mayfield much longer after the sale: the document that legally finalised the passage of the manor to John Baker, which is dated 1 January 1618, does not mention May as being present to witness the deed, but only his stepmother Jane.¹²⁸ Despite the sale of the manor, young Thomas was left with no estate and apparently very little money to support himself; Clarendon writes of him: 'born to a Fortune, if his Father had not spent it; so that He had only an Annuity left him, not proportionable to a liberal Education.'¹²⁹

This sudden event probably dictated a change of plans, culling May's hopes of enjoying a comfortable youth in London with the prospect of a gentleman's life in the country, and I think it was much more impactful on his decisions than the alleged stammer. Moreover, none of May's contemporary biographers mention Gray's Inn at all, which would seem to suggest

¹²⁷ SAC, 63.

¹²⁸ Dunkin 1915, 295.

¹²⁹ Clarendon, 35.

that his residence there was short and insignificant enough not to be worth mentioning. On these grounds, I believe it is reasonable to conclude that, upon his return to London, May did not resume his place at Gray's Inn but found alternative lodging elsewhere.

By the start of 1618, May was about to celebrate his twenty-second birthday and, according to the document dated 1 January, he was most likely already back in London after the period at Mayfield. At this point, there is no trace of May until the composition of *The Heir*, which, according to the title page of the 1633 edition, was performed for the first time in 1620. However, contemporary biographers and May's own play prove to be enough testimony to formulate educated guesses.

Starting off with May's own words, which should be deemed the most reliable source inasmuch as they are the only document written while the poet was alive, the opening scene of *The Heir* offers us a timid peek into his life in London. As Andrew Gurr notes, the scene vividly recalls the recently deceased Richard Burbage in the role of Hieronimo:¹³⁰

[*Roscio*]. ... has not your Lordship seen
A player personate Hieronimo?
Pol[ymetes]. By th'masse tis true, I have seen the knave paint grief
In such a lively colour, that for false
And acted passion he has drawn true tears
From the spectators' eyes, ladies in the boxes
Kept time with sighs, and tears to his sad accents
As had he truly been the new man he seemed.¹³¹

Because Burbage had died on 13 March 1619, May must have attended a performance of *The Spanish Tragedy* possibly as early as 1615, when he was admitted to Gray's Inn and started residing in London steadily. Therefore, though there are unfortunately no performance records

¹³⁰ Gurr, 137-138.

¹³¹ *Heir*, 1622, B1r.

to attest to any of this, the assumption formulated above, i.e., that May had been a frequenter of dramatic performances and familiar with the commercial theatre possibly since as early as his Gray's Inn days, can be reasonably substantiated. As a matter of fact, biographical accounts written in the seventeenth century paint quite a colourful picture of May's youth, which may explain the lack of solid evidence and the difficulty in reconstructing these years of the poet's life.

John Aubrey, who compiled his biographies between 1669 and 1696 and who seems to have had access to a first-hand account, writes thus:

Thomas May [...] [was] a great acquaintance of Tom Chaloner. Would, when *inter pocula*, speak slightingly of the Trinity. [...] Thomas May, esq., a handsome man, debauched *ad omnia*; lodged in the little [court] by Canon Row, as you go through the alley. [...] As to Tom May, Mr. Edmund Wylde told me that he was acquainted with him when he was young, and then he was as other young men of this town are, *scil.* he said he was debauched *ad omnia*: but do not by any means take notice of it – for we have all been young.¹³²

It should be noted that the Edmund Wylde mentioned by Aubrey as having known May 'when he was young' may not be the most reliable and direct source for the 1610s and 1620s. Member of Parliament between 1646 and 1653, Wylde matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1633 at the age of fifteen,¹³³ which would make him much too young to have met May any earlier than the 1630s and which partly discounts the validity of his supposed first-hand testimony, at least as concerns May's earlier years in London. Moreover, the home address given, Canon Row, is far more likely to be the place where May took residence during the latter part of his life and during his parliamentary years, which is when he most probably met Wylde: the street is just under 500 metres from the Palace of Westminster but comparably far from the theatres,

¹³² Aubrey 2, 56; modernisation mine.

¹³³ Williams, 123-124.

Gray's Inn, the Mermaid Tavern, and all the places May is known to have frequented during his youth. Indeed, Canon Row is often mentioned in connection with parliamentary affairs and even clandestine meetings by groups of parliamentarians, which encourages the intriguing hypothesis that May might have been part of those meetings held in secret by candlelight.¹³⁴

Still, Aubrey's account should not be discounted in its entirety. For one thing, it is possible that Wylde's source for the declarations about May's early years was May himself after all: although no source directly links the two of them except Aubrey, they were both MPs at the same time, so they surely spent time together, and it is not impossible to imagine that the older man shared memories of his youth. Secondly, despite compiling his *Brief Lives* during the Restoration, Aubrey displays a neutral tone in his biography, and he does not seem willing to accuse May of anything more than necessary. He does not, for instance, speculate as to the reason why May turned to Parliament in the 1640s: in reporting the poet's republican tendencies, he merely attributes them to his enjoyment of Lucan, and not to a perceived slight by Charles I as was instead common at the time. Overall, I think this short character analysis by Aubrey ought to be taken as one of the most faithful accounts, or as faithful as a biography of May could be from the Restoration onwards, and certainly more truthful than contemporary royalist propaganda. Consequently, although otherwise fairly balanced in his account of other biographical and literary facts concerning May, Wood's judgement of the character of May, which magnifies and exacerbates all the negative traits described by Aubrey,¹³⁵ should be approached with the knowledge that Wood was, to quote Chester, an 'ardent royalist.'¹³⁶

¹³⁴ See <https://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/CANN1.htm> (last accessed 20 October 2023).

¹³⁵ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume II, 295. It is apparent that, as concerns May's personality, Wood is merely paraphrasing and exaggerating Aubrey's words, for he writes that May 'became a Debauchee *ad omnia*, entertained ill principles as to Religion, spoke often very slightly of the *Holy Trinity*, kept beastly and atheistical company, of whom *Tho. Chaloner* the regicide was one.'

¹³⁶ Chester, 27.

1.3 *The Heir*

The start of May's professional career as a writer can be safely pinpointed to the composition of *The Heir*.

The Heir was printed in quarto for the first time in 1622, and then again in 1633. The full title-page of the first edition reads: 'The Heir an excellent comedy. As it was lately acted by the Company of the Revels. Written by T. M. Gent. Printed by B. A. for Thomas Jones, and are to be sold at his shop in Chancery Lane, over-against the Rolls, and in Westminster Hall. 1622'; 'B. A.' is Bernard Alsop.

Whereas this 1622 edition (henceforth referred to as *HQ1*) is not particularly informative as concerns the composition date, the 1633 edition (*HQ2*) fills in some of the gaps, for its title-page provides an additional detail: 'As it was acted by the Company of the Revels. 1620.' Although both *HQ1*'s and *HQ2*'s title-pages only credit the author as 'T. M.', May's full name is provided by Thomas Carew's dedicatory epistle prefacing both editions, titled 'To my honoured friend, Master Thomas May, upon his comedy *The Heir*.' There seems to be little reason to doubt 1620 as the composition date; although Carew's epistle informs the reader that the play was first staged privately ('*The Heir* being born was in his tender age / Rocked in the cradle of a private stage'¹³⁷), Wiggins argues that the private performance 'cannot have been very long before the public one, since May borrowed verbally from *The Fatal Dowry*'.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, an argument could be made for 1619 as the composition date, based on the reference, in 1.1, to Richard Burbage's death: because Burbage died in March of 1619, an evocative mention of him would have been all the more impactful on the public if closer to his death, possibly as early as mid-1619 (though no earlier than May, as all theatres were closed in March upon queen Anne's death and reopened in May). Moreover, most early modern

¹³⁷ *Heir*, 1622, A3r.

¹³⁸ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1943.

occurrences of the phrase ‘private stage’ appear to indicate either performances by university colleges, or performances by boy companies in indoor theatres.¹³⁹ As the reference to Burbage’s death forces 1619 as the earliest possible composition date, well after May had left Cambridge, and given that Sidney Sussex did not have a dramatic history of any kind, ‘private stage’ could reasonably be assumed to mean ‘indoor theatre.’ It is indeed possible that the play was originally meant for indoor performance; however, as no other definitive information concerning such early performance of *The Heir* is available, we must be forced to rely on the only known company responsible for staging the play.

The Company of the Revels, who is indeed reported as having staged the play, had been stationed at the Red Bull since 1619. The Red Bull was a so-called ‘citizen’ playhouse, an amphitheatre in the northern suburbs of the city which catered to a more ‘popular’ audience.¹⁴⁰ It had been built in 1605, apparently converted from an inn rather than built from the ground up, and had probably started operating in 1607.¹⁴¹ Although its characteristics were similar to those of other outdoor playhouses, some evidence suggests that spectators, other than sitting and standing in the galleries, could sit on the stage, a feature often associated with indoor theatres.¹⁴² Like the Fortune, the Red Bull was square-shaped, and it possessed a large number of features that could be exploited to great dramatic effect, including several discovery scenes, i.e. nooks where actors could hide and be revealed to the audience, and possibly a removable curtained booth.¹⁴³ During the first decade of the theatre’s activity, its leading playwright,

¹³⁹ In John Marston’s *The Wonder of Women, or The Tragedy of Sophonisba*, performed by the Children of the Queen’s Revels at Blackfriars and printed in 1606, the epilogue informs the reader that ‘it [the play] is printed only as it was presented by youths, and after the fashion of the private stage’ (Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, G3v; modernisation mine). In the post-Restoration 1661 edition of William Rowley’s *The Thracian Wonder*, the editor comments that the ‘private stage’ had been ‘for some years clouded’, evidently referring to theatres, rather than private residences hosting dramatic performances (Rowley, *The Thracian Wonder*, A2r). At the end of the seventeenth century, in George Ridpath’s *The Stage Condemned*, printed in 1698, the phrase denotes plays ‘acted by scholars in private colleges’ (Ridpath, *The Stage Condemned*, 207; modernisation mine).

¹⁴⁰ Gurr, 24.

¹⁴¹ Bruster, 225.

¹⁴² White, ‘London playhouses’, 322.

¹⁴³ Gurr, 187-188.

Thomas Heywood, was responsible for staging elaborate and lavish plays, and hall playhouses would often borrow plays from the Red Bull to stage for their more refined audiences.¹⁴⁴ More generally, the playhouse was known for reviving old and successful plays, such as Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, during the days in which it was home to Queen Anne's Company.¹⁴⁵ In spite of this, the playhouse quickly acquired the reputation of a 'downmarket venue', to the point that Webster blamed the poor reception of *The White Devil* in 1612 on its uneducated audience.¹⁴⁶ Upon the queen's death in March of 1619, the theatres closed presumably until her funeral in May, and the now patronless Queen Anne's Company disbanded; by November of the same year, its members were known to have joined different existing troupes, mainly Prince Charles's Men. However, a remnant of players remained at the Red Bull and were granted a patent as Players of the Revels or Company of the Revels; it was this company that performed *The Heir* on a public stage for the first time.¹⁴⁷ Other than old plays, dramas known to have been written for the Company of the Revels and performed at the Red Bull in the early 1620s include plays by Thomas Dekker, Philip Massinger, and William Rowley.¹⁴⁸

Although it is impossible to know for certain why May chose the Red Bull among the variety of playhouses that London could offer at the time as the stage for his first foray into commercial theatre, its position within the city may offer a partial explanation. The Red Bull was located at the upper end of St John's Street, Clerkenwell, on the outer border of the city, and, according to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century maps of London, it was the playhouse closest to Gray's Inn.¹⁴⁹ Considering that May's familiarity with contemporary theatre, as shall

¹⁴⁴ Gurr, 24-25.

¹⁴⁵ Bentley, *JCS* 6, 218.

¹⁴⁶ White, 'London playhouses', 322.

¹⁴⁷ Bentley, *JCS* 1, 164-165. The company is sometimes referred to as Red Bull Company, such as in Gurr.

¹⁴⁸ For a full list, see Bentley, *JCS* 1, 174-175 and Gurr, 287-298.

¹⁴⁹ Bentley, *JCS* 6, 215. For an approximation of the Red Bull's location in relation to other early modern playhouses, see *Agas Map of Early Modern London* (<https://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/agas.htm>) and the map of London theatres from John Norden's *Civitas Londini*, reproduced in White, 'London playhouses', 336-337. According to Google Maps, Gray's Inn was just about a fifteen minutes' walk from the Red Bull; comparably close playhouses include Whitefriars and the Cockpit/Phoenix.

be discussed, was already quite apparent in *The Heir*, it can be supposed that he was an avid frequenter of nearby playhouses; in fact, some of the plays known to have been part of the Red Bull's repertory during the 1610s can be found among the sources of *The Heir*.

As regards the play's editorial history and revisions, *HQ2* appears almost identical to *HQ1* but for a few small, but significant, details. Most commonly, *HQ2* appears to rectify many of the mistakes found in *HQ1*: prose dialogues, which had sometimes been printed in verse, are properly formatted in prose; the occasional incongruous metre is fixed by adding or subtracting superfluous words; grammar mistakes are amended; erroneously attributed lines of dialogue are given to the correct character; more rarely, the entire meaning of certain sentences is changed and improved according to sense.¹⁵⁰ The spelling of each edition is sufficiently distinctive as to, again, suggest different hypotexts. Religious interjections, such as 'by heaven', are censored and replaced with more neutral exclamations, and there are also two instances of heavier censorship: in one case, a sexually suggestive pun is reworked, and in the other case, an entire joke at the expense of the Pope is completely eliminated.¹⁵¹ Additionally, both the prologue and the epilogue have been changed, the former only marginally, the latter completely.

Judicious friends, if what shall here be seen	Judicious friends, if what shall here be seen
May test your sense, or ope your tickled spleen,	May test your sense, or ope your tickled spleen,
Our author has his wish. He does not mean	Our author has his wish. He does not mean
To rub your galls with a satiric scene	To rub your galls with a satiric scene,
Nor toil your brains to find the fustian sense	Nor toil your brains to find the fustian sense,
Of those poor lines that cannot recompense	Of those poor lines that cannot recompense
The pains of study: comedy's soft strain	The pains of study: comedy's soft strain
Should not perplex but recreate the brain.	Should not perplex, but recreate the brain.
His strain is such, he hopes, he dares not swear	His strain is such he hopes it, but refers

¹⁵⁰ Just one example: 'Stay, I'll *not* curse him briefly' in *Heir*, 1622, D1r, which is followed by the character cursing another, rightfully becomes 'Stay, I'll *but* curse him briefly' in *Heir*, 1633, D1r (emphasis mine).

¹⁵¹ Upon Philocles' throwing a stone wrapped in his letter at Leucothoe, his friend Clerimont comments: 'Lady look to yourself, he that now throws one / Stone at you, hopes to hit you with two' (*Heir*, 1622, C4r). In the 1633 edition, the lines are condensed in: 'Lady look to yourself, now't comes to proof' (*Heir*, 1633, C4r). The religious joke will be discussed further below.

That he refers to your judicious ear.
Our author knows, and therefore does not vaunt,
No fool so hateful as the arrogant.¹⁵²

That to the test of your judicious ears.¹⁵³

The removal of a reference to the author in the otherwise verbatim prologue, in which ‘our author’ is mentioned plenty of times, appears rather perplexing. One possible explanation is that the prologue was reworked to end with a more positive and ingratiating nod to the audience’s ‘judicious ears.’ The epilogue, on the other hand, was rewritten entirely:

Our author’s heir, if it be legitimate,
’Tis his; if not, he dares the worst of fate,
For, if a bastard, charity is such
That what you give, it cannot be too much,
And he, and we, vow, if it may be shown,
To do as much for yours as for our own.¹⁵⁴

Our heir is fallen from her inheritance
But has obtained her love; you may advance
Her higher yet and from your pleased hands give
A dowry that will make her truly live.¹⁵⁵

Again, the 1633 epilogue appears to have removed what were probably perceived as the author’s personal connections to the play and replaced them with a more generic plea to the generosity of the audience and an appeal for applause. In both cases, it is apparent that the play was not reworked with a readership in mind before being offered to the publisher for a printed edition, and that both prologue and epilogue were clearly tailored to a live audience in a theatre, rather than to readers (‘if what shall here be seen’, ‘judicious ear(s)’, ‘pleased hands’), thus strongly suggesting that the printer’s source was a playhouse manuscript or a transcript thereof and that May, who, as shall be discussed, usually took great care in arranging and curating printed editions of his work, was not involved in the editorial process at any stage.

¹⁵² *Heir*, 1622, A4v.

¹⁵³ *Heir*, 1633, A4v.

¹⁵⁴ *Heir*, 1622, I3r.

¹⁵⁵ *Heir*, 1633, I3r.

This information allows for an educated guess concerning May's approach to his career as a playwright, for all evidence indicates that he was not interested in publishing his plays. Although it could be argued that this sentiment applies only to May's first work, for he was indeed responsible for the publication of subsequent plays (namely *Cleopatra*, *Agrippina*, and *Antigone*), in all cases he did so only many years after composing them, and always dedicating his work to a prospective patron.

Evidence challenging this argument could be the fact that the printer's shop in Chancery Lane mentioned on the title page of *HQ1* was just under 500 metres from Gray's Inn, which, if May was indeed personally responsible for the publication of *The Heir*, could provide a plausible explanation as to why this particular printer was chosen. However, the printer responsible for *HQ2* is no longer Bernard Alsop, but Augustine Matthews, and this change of publisher and the related circumstances appear to support the hypothesis that May did not have any say in the publication of his play. Why Matthews decided to print an old play in 1633 may be partially answered by an entry in the Stationers' Register dated 24 October 1633, which records the passage of publishing rights 'by consent of a full court' from Thomas Jones to 'Master Matthews' of a series of plays and other compositions, including *The Heir*.¹⁵⁶ The list includes 13 items: five are of religious nature, one is May's own translation of the *Pharsalia*, one is a poetry book, and six are seemingly disparate plays: the anonymous *The Tragedy of Nero*, Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*, May's *The Heir*, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *Cupid's Revenge* and *The Scornful Lady*, and W. Smith's *The Palsgrave*.¹⁵⁷ As it happens, with the possible exception of *The Tragedy of Nero*, for which no performance history

¹⁵⁶ Stationers' Register Online, SRO9183.

¹⁵⁷ The full list: Doctor Dunn [John Donne]'s 'devotions'; five sermons of John Donne; one sermon of 'Dr Taylor'; Bartholomew Keckermann's *Divinity* in Thomas Vicars' translation; 'Father's blessing'; *Tragedy of Nero*; *Virgin Martyr*; *The Heir*; *Cupid's Revenge*; *The Scornful Lady*; *The Palsgrave*; Lucan's *Pharsalia* in Thomas May's translation; *Woodman's Bear* by Josuah Sylvester. As concerns the paternity of *The Palsgrave*, the play has alternatively been ascribed to William or Wentworth Smith on the basis of the title page's credit to 'W. Smith', but no conclusive attribution has been made; see Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1707.

is recorded, the common denominator between these plays seem to be the fact that they all belonged to the repertory of companies that at some point had performed at the Red Bull; accordingly, a conclusion could be drawn that *Nero*, too, had been staged at the same venue.¹⁵⁸

At any rate, it seems that Matthews did not take full advantage of the rights he had been granted, for he did not publish anew all the plays mentioned in the Stationers' Register entry, but only *The Tragedy of Nero* and *The Heir* in 1633, and *Cupid's Revenge* in 1635. As demonstrated by the existence of copies of *HQ2* with the subtitle 'The second impression', *The Heir* in particular was apparently printed twice in the same year. It is possible that Matthews' decision was motivated by the popularity of the plays he chose to print, which prompts the question of whether *The Heir* ever achieved success on the stage. Carew's congratulatory poem once again offers a hint in this regard:

The Heir, being born, was in his tender age
Rocked in the cradle of a private stage,
Where, lifted up by many a willing hand,
The child doth from the first day fairly stand,
Since, having gathered strength, he dares prefer¹⁵⁹
His steps into the public theatre —
The world, where he despairs not but to find
A doom from men more able, but less kind.¹⁶⁰

Carew, other than revealing that the comedy had already been performed on a 'private stage', seems to suggest that only after having obtained support ('many a willing hand', possibly

¹⁵⁸ The performance and publishing history for each play is detailed in Wiggins, *Catalogue*, respectively #1917, #1957, #1943, #1533, #1626, #1707. *The Virgin Martyr*, *The Heir*, and *The Palsgrave* are known to have been performed at the Red Bull by the Company of the Revels. As for *Cupid's Revenge* and *The Scornful Lady*, according to Wiggins, they were first performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels, around 1607 and 1610 respectively, at the Whitefriars or Blackfriars. However, the Children of the Queen's Revels merged with Lady Elizabeth's players in 1613, and then with Prince Charles's Men in 1614, and this new company settled at the Red Bull from the winter of 1616-17 until 1619, and then from 1623; during this period, the Children of the Queen's Revels' repertory was likely acquired by the new company performing at the Red Bull. See Nicol, 57-58.

¹⁵⁹ Advance.

¹⁶⁰ *Heir*, 1622, A3r.

colleagues, or maybe the clapping hands of the audience) and having achieved a certain degree of success ('having gathered strength'), it had been offered for printing. This dedication contributes to challenging the notion that May was never rewarded with appreciation for his theatrical efforts, a fact that has been often part of the narrative surrounding May's decision to support Parliament in the last years of his life.

In fact, when investigating the play's fortune in subsequent decades, one must wonder whether *The Heir*, May's very first printed endeavour, actually turned out to be the most successful among his dramatic ventures; Hans Daniel Strube, author of a comparison between *The Heir* and the 1702 comedy *The Stolen Heiress*, goes as far as to affirm that it was *the only* drama by May to achieve any success.¹⁶¹ For one, *The Heir* is the only play by May to have been printed more than once during the poet's lifetime. As noted, Augustine Matthews arranged the 1633 edition, and the play apparently proved so popular as to warrant a second impression during the same year. To our knowledge, no other play by May was ever printed more than once between 1620 and 1650: *Antigone* was printed once in 1631, *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina* came out as a joint edition in 1639 and later in 1654 only after the poet was dead, and *The Old Couple* was not published until 1658. Moreover, the 1633 edition's prologue and epilogue, specially revised for the benefit of a theatrical audience, indicate that the play must have been staged on more than one occasion, some time (possibly years) after its first public performance. It should also be noted that *HQ2* does not feature May's name on the title page but, as was the case in 1622, merely his initials. Considering that, in 1633, May was probably at the height of his fame, it would have seemed appropriate to credit him fully and possibly exploit his notoriety to sell more copies; the fact that the editor failed to do so may suggest that *The Heir* enjoyed a popular success that had little to do so with the fame later achieved by its author. To be sure, Wiggins'

¹⁶¹ Strube, 7.

Catalogue entry lists a certain number of known owners of either *HQ1* or *HQ2* over the course of the seventeenth century, which would seem to substantiate this hypothesis.¹⁶²

Perhaps most significantly, *The Heir* also features substantially in John Cotgrave's 1655 miscellany book *Wits Interpreter, the English Parnassus*. The volume, which can be described as '[a] mixture of literary anthology, self-improvement, and rainy-day book', comprises a collection of fifty-one dialogues drawn from thirty printed plays, including works by James Shirley, Fletcher, and Massinger, none of which is credited; in a section focused on theatrical dialogues centring on courtship, *The Heir* features three times, with excerpts from the second and third act in which the characters' names are omitted or changed.¹⁶³ The fact that May, by 1655 remembered as an ardent parliamentarist, was featured in a 'strictly royalist anthology' speaks more to the popularity of *The Heir* than to his own; in fact, given that none of the authors are acknowledged in the anthology, it becomes apparent that the extracts were chosen for merits beyond their authors' political involvement, most likely as paradigms of the theatre of courtship of which Cotgrave was seeking to provide examples.¹⁶⁴

Finally, it should speak as a testament to *The Heir*'s success the fact that in 1702, more than eighty years after it was first performed, Susanna Centlivre adapted and refashioned the play into the comedy *The Stolen Heiress*. While comparing the two plays, Strube notes that Centlivre's adaptation forgoes *The Heir*'s secondary storyline to replace it with an original subplot, but is otherwise very closely related to May's work, down to most of the characters' names. Despite the many similarities, *The Stolen Heiress* is, in Strube's opinion, distinctly inferior to *The Heir*, particularly as concerns the balance of humorous and improbable characters and situations.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1943.

¹⁶³ Astington, 601-602, 612.

¹⁶⁴ Astington, 611.

¹⁶⁵ Strube, 9.

The plot of *The Heir*, as will be seen, often relies on well-known dramatic *topoi*. As Chester rightfully observes, although it opens with a purely comedic and realistic scene, the play never really fulfils its promise of *Volpone*-sque developments and ultimately should be categorised as a romantic tragicomedy.¹⁶⁶ Some of the major plot points presented in the play are redolent of earlier, highly popular dramas, and, admittedly, a few of the dramatic devices borrowed from other playwrights are employed, according to Chester, ‘not always with due regard for suitability.’¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, *The Heir* also presents a number of wholly original developments and situations, which are illustrated in the plot summary that follows.

The Heir follows two storylines, which are then merged and resolved in the fifth act; the first act lays out all the characters and sets the tone of the play. The main storyline begins with Polimetes, a nobleman in Syracuse, where the story is set, plotting with his servant Roscio: the man plans to circulate the fake news of his son Eugenio’s death in Athens to attract suitors to the hand of his daughter Leucothoe, who, upon the supposed death of her brother, would become Polimetes’ only heir. The target of the plot is the old and rich count Virro, who immediately falls for the bait. An introduction to the second storyline concludes the first act: Luce, daughter and heir of old Franklin, is in love with humble Francisco and is carrying his child; her father, who strongly opposes the union, plans to marry her against her wishes to rich but foolish Shallow and pass off the child as his.

In the second act, Philocles, son and heir of Euphues, Polimetes’ archenemy, and Clerimont, his servant, observe Leucothoe from a distance and Philocles falls in love with her at first sight. Meanwhile, a dialogue between Leucothoe and her maid Psecas reveals that, unbeknownst to Philocles, the girl has been reciprocating his love for a while, for she, too, has fallen in love upon first seeing the young man. Shortly after, Philocles, with the help of Psecas, arranges a meeting with Leucothoe. In the midst of the arrangements for Leucothoe’s marriage

¹⁶⁶ Chester, 86.

¹⁶⁷ Chester, 87.

to count Virro, a messenger delivers the news that Eugenio did not really die in Athens but is alive and well; nevertheless, Polimetes decides to ignore this news for fear that Virro would not want to marry Leucothoe were she no longer heir to his fortune. The messenger is then revealed to be none other than Eugenio himself in disguise, who vows to help his sister escape the marriage. As for the subplot, the marriage between Luce and the foolish Shallow is momentarily prevented by Francisco with the help of a summoner.

From the third act onwards, the play takes a rather tragic turn and, barring a few scenes concerning the secondary storyline and some other 'lowly' characters, almost entirely abandons its comic undertones until the resolution in the final scene. Psecas, the maid, is revealed to be complicit with Polimetes, who, having learned of Philocles and Leucothoe's planned elopement, plots to catch them in the act and have Philocles arrested and sentenced to death for kidnapping an heiress. Virro, meanwhile, upon discovering that Eugenio is still alive, and that his would-be marriage to Leucothoe would therefore not entitle him to her inheritance, decides to have Eugenio poisoned and unknowingly entrusts Eugenio himself with the task. The act ends with Polimetes' catching his daughter and Philocles in the act of eloping, and having the young man arrested.

The fourth act opens with another discovery: the seemingly destitute Francisco is revealed by the sailor Alphonso to be none other than Euphues' long-lost second son. In the meantime, Philocles is brought to be judged before the King, who falls unexpectedly smitten with Leucothoe and, during a private conversation with her, swears that he will never pardon Philocles unless she lays with him; although increasingly desperate, she refuses. Immediately regretting his rash oath, the King seeks both a religious and a legal way out to formally forgive Philocles but is ultimately unable to annul his oath. Eugenio, staging a loud monologue in which he pretends to have committed the murder he was tasked with, is apprehended by a constable and his watchmen.

The fifth act opens with the resolution of the secondary storyline: Luce's pregnancy turns out to be fake, a stratagem devised to get to marry Francisco, and Francisco reveals his true parentage, finally persuading Franklin to accept the marriage between him and his daughter. The remainder of the act is then devoted to Philocles' trial. Soon after Philocles is judged irredeemably guilty and sentenced to death, Eugenio is brought forth by the constable and accused of confessing to a murder: he reveals that Virro instructed him to murder Eugenio, and both he and Virro are also sentenced to death. After a few moments of grief on all parts, Eugenio finally unmask himself, thereby causing all accusations to fall: the supposed murder never occurred and Leucothoe was never an heir to begin with, so Philocles' actions do not qualify as a crime. All tensions between the parties are resolved, everyone is forgiven, and Eugenio is rewarded with the hand of Euphues' niece Leda, ending the play with the announcement of a double marriage.

As will be apparent from the plot, the play borrows a great number of tropes and plot points from Shakespeare, most of which have been identified and analysed by Chester. Most obviously, the plot point of a young man and a young woman from families at war with each other falling in love at first sight is reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*; an official offering to pardon a convict in exchange for sexual favours from the woman pleading for the criminal's life is borrowed from *Measure for Measure*; *Much Ado about Nothing* appears to be the inspiration for a comical exchange between a constable and his watchmen; and the fact that the two brothers being reunited after a shipwreck had separated their destinies occurs in *Syracuse* suggests that May got the idea from *A Comedy of Errors*.¹⁶⁸ Strube goes, I think, too far in attributing common early modern tropes to 'plagiarism' ('Plagiat') on May's part, for he claims that even the idea of Eugenio's disguise was stolen from Shakespeare – he does not name a

¹⁶⁸ Chester, 87-88.

specific play (and acknowledges that many of his predecessors had employed the trope) but acts as if the concept of a character in disguise had been so evidently a trademark of Shakespeare's works that May could only have borrowed it from him.¹⁶⁹

Expanding upon Chester's comment that some of the tropes are not always employed to the best result, the intertwining of the two subplots together in the fifth act does appear quite forced. As a matter of fact, until the poor Francisco is revealed to be the son – supposedly lost at sea – of lord Euphues, is given back his true birth name Lysandro, and is then introduced to his father and brother, the two storylines run completely different courses. Arguably, even *after* the twist, the revelation does not seem to have much impact on the main plot at all: Francisco is not once referred to as 'Lysandro', his relationship with his newfound brother Philocles is limited to a couple of comments that are marred by the death sentence pending on the latter's head, and his wedding to Luce does not feature in the closing scene. Indeed, inexplicably, the King's closing comment that a double marriage shall soon be celebrated is referring to Philocles' and Eugenio's weddings, not Francisco's, as if the final scene had been written without that third wedding in mind. Even the respective characters' names indicate that the two subplots belong to different social settings, with most of the main characters bearing names of Greek origin (Polimetes, Eugenio, Leucothoe, Euphues, Philocles, Psecas, Nicanor, Matho) and the secondary plot's characters a mixture of English (Franklin, Shallow) and Latin (Luce, Francisco; the latter's ennoblement is further indicated by his new Greek name Lysandro).¹⁷⁰ Overall, while the resulting merger of the two plots is on the whole not unpleasant, it almost feels as though the plot revolving around Luce and Francisco's relationship was developed independently and only later added to the main plot.

¹⁶⁹ Strube, 48.

¹⁷⁰ The remaining characters from the main plot are either of lower origins or villainous: count Virro, whose name was presumably chosen because of its assonance with the Latin 'virus', the servant Roscio (Latin), and Philocles' friend Clerimont (Latin or French, probably borrowed from one of the characters from Jonson's *Epicoene*).

On a related note, again with reference to Chester's remark, the character of the King deserves examination. By all appearances, the character seems to be constructed rather clumsily: without warning, and rather undignifiedly, he starts lusting after Leucothoe, to the point that his judgement is severely impaired as a result; equally abruptly, he starts expressing regret over his oath and seeks a way to undo it, but he is unsuccessful. The lengthy scene in which he desperately consults a book of indulgences and a lawyer does not advance the plot at all; likewise, his character adds nothing to the final scene but his blessing for the double marriage about to take place, for Philocles has already been exonerated by the circumstances and Eugenio has been rewarded by Euphues by then. Overall, it is hard to imagine why May wrote the character into the play at all, except for reasons that fall outside the scope of *The Heir's* plot: to insert a nod to yet another Shakespeare play and therefore to exploit *topoi* well-known to the audience, to offer (personal?) commentary on the Catholic church and on lawyers and lawmen in general, or perhaps to express disapproval of the figure of a monarch? It should perhaps be noted that a good portion of the King's lines are in prose rather than in blank verse, including the entirety of his dialogue with Leucothoe, throughout which, as if to better highlight her moral superiority and hint at the King's state of agitation, she speaks in verse.

As to the first point, *The Heir* appears to be early proof of a tendency to pay tribute to contemporary playwrights by way of both textual and narrative nods, a tendency to which May would show to be prone throughout his entire career as a dramatist. What distinguishes and elevates this tendency from base plagiarism to intentional creative choice is the fact that the many references and nods are embellished by May's personal touch, and they are moreover embedded in a plot of which the main narrative points are, on the whole, original.

The second point also marks the first manifestation of a tendency, somewhat better concealed throughout May's career, to disparage the Catholic church and the Pope. One quip in particular, evidently judged suitable for publication in 1622, was deemed so abrasive as to be

completely expunged from the 1633 edition. During the dialogue between the King and his attendant Nicanor, the former inquires as to whether the book of indulgences that is being consulted lists the price for having one's atheism pardoned, to which Nicanor replies, 'Here's none for that my lord, his holiness / Can pardon that in no man but himself.'¹⁷¹ Even barring this especially egregious instance, the whole dialogue is a tongue-in-cheek satire of the Catholic church's greed and inadequacy, and it is perhaps, in 1620, the most glaring consequence of May's having been educated at Sidney Sussex college and having absorbed its militant puritanism.

As for the anathema against lawyers, the play presents not one but at least three scenes in which the forensic profession is mocked and subjected to harsh judgement, and one cannot help but recognise May's own resentment towards a career to which, as can be now safely assumed, he had initially turned not out of personal interest, but likely out of familial persuasion. Some of the accusations could also be ascribable to May's residence at Mayfield shortly after his father's death, when he had to oversee his father's poor finances and estate, a period during which he surely encountered a good number of lawyers and executors of the law. Indeed, lawmen are first accused of being corrupted by the rich: 'if 'twere not for corruption, every poor rascal might have justice as well as one of us [rich men], and that were a shame.'¹⁷² The aforementioned dialogue between the King and his advisors also contains long tirades against lawyers, which are categorically concluded by the sentence 'I shall forever hate your profession.'¹⁷³ Finally, lawmen and the Catholic church are once more the subject of satire in a dialogue between the old count Virro and Eugenio:

¹⁷¹ *Heir*, 1622, G3r; in *Heir*, 1633, Nicanor does not reply at all and the King continues talking as if he had made no inquiry. The volume in question is explicitly named in the play: Nicanor calls it *The Taxes of the Apostolical Chancery*, and the book is said to be 'from Paris' (G3r); this is *Taxe cancellarie apostolice et taxe sacre penitentiarie itidem apostolice*, published in Paris in 1520.

¹⁷² *Heir*, 1622, D3v.

¹⁷³ *Heir*, 1622, G4r. Some excerpts from the King's lines are particularly noteworthy: 'I have seen some of his profession ... pick out such hard inextricable doubts / That they have spun a suit of seven year long / And lead their hoodwinked clients in a wood ... Till they have quite consumed them'; 'thou shouldst do / As other lawyers do, first take my money / And then tell me thou canst do me [no] good'; 'For some rich griping landlord you could

Vir. Now what are you?

Eug. A poor scholar, my lord, one that am little beholding to fortune.

Vir. So are most of your profession. Thou shouldst take some more thriving occupation, to be a judges' man, they are the bravest nowadays, or a cardinal's pander, that were a good profession and gainful.

Eug. But not lawful, my Lord.

Vir. Lawful! That cardinal may come to be pope, and then he could pardon thee and himself too.

Eug. My Lord, I was brought up a scholar.¹⁷⁴

Even dispensing with wild guesses, this passage ought likely to be read as at least obliquely autobiographical: Eugenio is commenting upon the penniless fate of men of letters, to which Virro suggests taking up more lucrative professions – lawyer and ‘cardinal’s pander.’

All in all, although more reliable information concerning the life of May at the time is unavailable, *The Heir* and its printed editions paint a suggestive picture: that May was in London, possibly still lodging at Gray’s Inn, that he was aiming to live as a ‘scholar’ but had discovered just how financially unviable that path could be, that he enjoyed the private and public theatre, and that he himself was interested in playwriting, but perhaps less so in publishing his dramatic work. Moreover, some elements indicate that he was already part of the circle of poets and writers that gravitated on the periphery of England’s intellectual life. Carew’s dedication, for one, appears to hint at this: Carew was just one year older than May and, like him, had initially pursued a forensic career, having been admitted to Middle Temple in 1613; however, from that same year, he travelled to Italy and later to the Netherlands as an

grind / The face of his poor tenant, stretch the law / To serve his turn’ (G3v-G4r). It would be hard to deny, in a play not especially focused on legal matters, that May’s comments appear particularly heated and overly abundant. Some of them, such as the slight against landlords, could be indicative of some personal grudge relating to the transfer of land from the Mays to other owners between 1616 and 1618, as detailed in the previous section.

¹⁷⁴ *Heir*, 1622, E3r.

ambassador, and then, in 1619, he joined the English embassy in Paris. Carew's dedication to May is one of his first datable poems and the first to appear in print; his poems, though few were printed during his lifetime, were widely read and circulated in manuscript.¹⁷⁵ May and Carew were part of the same circle until at least 1626, when the earl of Clarendon was a student at Middle Temple; according to Clarendon, the group also included Jonson, John Selden, Charles Cotton, John Vaughan, and Kenelm Digby.¹⁷⁶ The fact that *The Heir* was performed at a venue where some of Massinger's plays debuted, particularly in light of the known friendship between May and Massinger that will be further examined in later chapters, may also suggest that the two men met and started to develop their relationship on those occasions. However, no proof of any of these conjectures is available, for at this point May briefly vanishes from history's records.

1.4 Travel to the Netherlands

By all appearances and according to all accounts up until this point, May entered a period of virtual inactivity after the composition of *The Heir*, to resurface in 1625 with the translation of John Barclay's *Argenis*, published anonymously. What he did in those five years has been the subject of speculation, given that no information of any kind was available concerning May's activities. Chester writes, 'it is possible that he engaged in anonymous hackwork, even that he was employed in the obscure dramatic collaboration which in that age was so common', but ultimately refuses to advance more elaborate hypotheses, as do most of the contemporary biographers of the poet.¹⁷⁷ Over the course of my research, however, I have uncovered a document that may help solve, at least in part, the mystery surrounding May's activities during those five years, and possibly even constitute an early example of his political leanings.

¹⁷⁵ Nixon, 65-66.

¹⁷⁶ Clarendon, 30.

¹⁷⁷ Chester, 32.

May's name appears in an entry in a volume of the *Registers of Licences to Pass Beyond the Seas, 1573-1677*; namely, he is named in the seventh volume, which is the *Registers of soldiers taking the oath of allegiance before going to serve in the Low Countries*. In an entry dated 13 July 1621, May, alongside someone named John Blith, or Blyth, is said to have taken his oath of allegiance and to be soon departing for Utrecht as part of a company under 'Colonel Cecil.' The document also provides us with May's signature. Here is the full modernized transcription of the record:

xiii^o die Julii 1621

Bond taken according to the Statute	John Blith aged 22 years, and Thomas May aged 25 years, gent. of a Comp[any] under Colonel Cecil in Utrecht have taken the oath of allegiance and entered into bond. [?] Edward Brett aged 17 years is to pass over with the gent.
-------------------------------------	---

John Blyth
Tho: May¹⁷⁸

Identification of this Thomas May with the poet is, I think, indisputable: not only would May have been twenty-five in July of 1621, but here he is also described as 'gent.' Besides, previous familiarity with the Netherlands could also help explain why he decided to visit the country again in or before 1640.¹⁷⁹ Finally, although this is admittedly very scant evidence, if evidence it can be called, there is a passage in May's comedy *The Old Couple* hinting at a travel beyond the sea that might be an allusion to this. As has been discussed, the character of Eugenio in *The Heir* presents some traits and delivers some lines that are very probably autobiographical, namely his presenting himself as a scholar 'little beholding to fortune.' In *The Old Couple*, the character of Theodore, son of a rich but stingy old man, is described thus: 'He goes in black;

¹⁷⁸ See *Registers of Licences to Pass beyond the Seas 1573-1677: Registers of Licences to Pass beyond the Seas*, National Archive reference E 157/7, folio 61.

¹⁷⁹ Further discussion about this in Chapter 5.

they say he is a scholar, / Has been beyond sea too, there it may lie', and numerous mentions are made of him having just returned from abroad.¹⁸⁰ Given May's previously demonstrated willingness to make references to himself and his life, it appears legitimate to conjecture that this one, too, might be another self-allusion in one of his comedies.

Going back to the registry entry, reconstructing the identities of the two men with whom May was traveling is far from straightforward. As concerns John Blyth, it seems impossible to establish whether he was a friend of the poet or merely someone who happened to be taking his oath of allegiance at the same time, because I could not conclusively identify him.

It is also unclear who the younger man was, why he embarked with them, and if he was an acquaintance or not; possibly due to his young age, he did not sign the entry, which might suggest that May signed for both.¹⁸¹ Further research into the name 'Brett' turned up a Jeremiah Brett, aged 19, who took his oath on 18 June 1621 and who also departed for Utrecht to fight with the company of Colonel Cecil; the shared surname, the closeness in age, and the fact that they both embarked with the same company make it likely for Edward to be Jeremiah's younger brother.¹⁸² Expanding the scope of the search to variations of the surname revealed the existence of an Edward Bright, aged eighteen in November 1621, within the same set of records of people obtaining permission to travel beyond the sea; this Edward was a servant to a gold wire drawer.¹⁸³ Although it is possible that, as their age might suggest, this Bright was the same person as the Brett who travelled with May, and that the young man accompanied May as a servant, I do not find the latter hypothesis plausible: as we have seen, May's poor finances at the time would have been unlikely to suffice. A possible explanation, and one I find more

¹⁸⁰ *TOC*, B2r.

¹⁸¹ The phrase '[he] is to pass over with the gent' seems to suggest that he was attached to May rather than Blyth.

¹⁸² See *Registers Of Licences To Pass Beyond The Seas 1573-1677: Registers of Licences to pass beyond the seas*, National Archive reference E 157/7, folio 55.

¹⁸³ See *Registers Of Licences To Pass Beyond The Seas 1573-1677: Registers of Licences to pass beyond the seas*, National Archive reference E 157/27, folio 43.

believable, is that Brett was traveling on his own but needed an adult's signature to authorise his travel, which May provided.

As concerns the rest of the information yielded by the record concerning May, the Colonel Cecil under whose company May enrolled as a soldier was Sir Edward Cecil, later in life created Viscount Wimbledon, who was grandson of William Cecil, first Baron Burghley, and nephew of Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury, both of whom had been Secretaries of State at some point. Cecil had distinguished himself since 1596 as a military commander in the Netherlands and in various conflicts with the Spanish, and he was a convinced protestant.¹⁸⁴ Upon the outbreak of the Palatinate conflict, Cecil had been lamenting the peaceful stall and lack of military action for quite some time; as soon as news of distant battle reached England, he left the country and joined the English troops in the Netherlands in June of 1619.¹⁸⁵ Cecil was hopeful that the Protestant princes of Germany were going to take up arms and request help from the English soon, which he was eager to provide; however, no request came, and so Cecil had to be content with visiting his regiment in Utrecht and paying his respects to other military leaders. In any case, he was back in England in September, when he took part in the ceremony for the inauguration of Dulwich College, founded by Edward Alleyn.¹⁸⁶

In the meantime, in August, the young Elector Palatine and son-in-law of James I, Frederick, was offered the crown of Bohemia. Although the vast majority of Frederick's advisors were against the idea of his accepting the crown due to fear of a war, a different situation was emerging in England: the English people, envisioning him as the champion chosen to uphold the Protestant cause in Bohemia, were unanimously in favour of Frederick's being King of Bohemia, 'and would have gone through fire and water to support him'; James, on the other hand, would not commit to one decision or the other, and ultimately did not offer any

¹⁸⁴ Lockyer, 724-725.

¹⁸⁵ Dalton, 299.

¹⁸⁶ Dalton, 301-2.

advice at all to his son-in-law.¹⁸⁷ Unable to wait for James' reply to his request of guidance any longer, Frederick accepted, and in November he and his young wife (James's daughter Elizabeth) were crowned; if the protestant forces now naturally expected support from the King of England, father of the newly crowned Queen, they were sorely mistaken. In fact, James was furious at having been publicly consulted, because the natural conclusion to be drawn was that Frederick had accepted the crown only after having received his father-in-law's approval.¹⁸⁸ To his citizens, on the other hand, James's irresolute attitude in dealing with the Spaniards, at the time unanimously deemed Britain's national enemy, largely appeared 'wholly unintelligible', and his decision to finally give orders to send a garrison of volunteers and issue a public declaration against Spain as late as August 1620 was welcomed with 'a burst of patriotic joy.'¹⁸⁹

Volunteers commanded by Horace Vere sailed for the Netherlands in July, and the Spaniards, led by Ambrogio Spinola, invaded the Palatinate the following month; however, Frederick was soon defeated and forced to flee with his young queen to The Hague.¹⁹⁰ In the meantime, the public appreciation of James generated by the King's support of the campaign faded quickly: only a few months later, James resumed his indecisive conduct in hope to maintain peace, going against the English public opinion, which, most importantly, was now reflected in a Parliament urging for war.¹⁹¹ In the meantime, on the field, things were not proceeding at a great pace. In September of 1621, at a time when the contingent of volunteers which had embarked in July and which included May had already reached the battleground, Cecil writes: 'Though we are in the field, we have little to write of, notwithstanding the great preparations of the enemy'; and again, in October: 'in time of war there never was so little done.'¹⁹² The troops were hampered by rain and sickness, and many men perished, not in

¹⁸⁷ Dalton, 306-7.

¹⁸⁸ Zaller, 146.

¹⁸⁹ Zaller, 148-149.

¹⁹⁰ Trim, 301.

¹⁹¹ Zaller, 157.

¹⁹² Quoted in Dalton, 364-365; modernisation mine.

military skirmishes – as the two armies apparently never engaged – but by disease; the armies were stopped by winter and retired into their winter quarters in December, dispirited by the great losses and the hardships endured during the campaign.¹⁹³

The war efforts did not last very long after the 1621-22 winter: a vast Spanish army had assembled, and Heidelberg was stormed on 16 September 1622; two weeks later, Vere was forced to surrender Mannheim, and he marched back to the Netherlands with his surviving troops.¹⁹⁴ Although no register documenting the return of these English soldiers survives, it can be assumed that May returned to England in the autumn of 1622 with Vere's remaining troops.

It is hard to find explicit references to May's military experience in the Netherlands in the works he published throughout his career, but traces of it can be glimpsed in different places. When, as the next chapter will examine, May published the complete translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia* in 1627, he ambitiously dedicated the effort to eight different patrons; interestingly enough, all these dedications, except the one prefacing the volume, were excised from the numerous subsequent reprints of the volume and even physically ripped from copies of the 1627 edition.¹⁹⁵ It is likely that the reason behind this curious decision, possibly operated by May himself, was a change in the political climate in the early months of 1627, and probably a choice, on May's part, not to sabotage his chances to obtain royal patronage. The eight dedicatees were all noblemen and military men whom May was hoping to impress and at whose financial support he was undoubtedly aiming: several had fought Catholic powers abroad – a feat that is invariably celebrated by May – and many had puritanical sympathies and, more generally, opposed George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham's influence and 'Charles's proto-absolutist style'; some of them ended up supporting Parliament in the Civil War.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Dalton, 366.

¹⁹⁴ Trim, 301.

¹⁹⁵ Buckley and Paleit, 25.

¹⁹⁶ Buckley and Paleit, 24.

Of these men, at least two had strong connections with the Palatinate war. Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex, to whom May dedicated the fourth book, was a member of Parliament and a soldier; between 1620 and 1624, he served in protestant armies in the Netherlands – in 1620 under Horace Vere – returning to England at the start of every summer to raise volunteers to join the army, and he distinguished himself for his popularity among the soldiers. In 1625, Charles I and Buckingham planned an expedition to Cadiz, and named Essex vice-admiral under Sir Edward Cecil; the expedition was a complete and embarrassing failure, though Essex was blameless. Politically, he assiduously attended every parliamentary session in the 1620s and he earned Charles’s mistrust by continuously being ‘a thorn in the royal flesh’, a stance that would later fully manifest itself in his support and command of the Parliament’s army.¹⁹⁷ Horace (Horatio) Vere, Baron Vere of Tilbury, dedicatee of the seventh book, was a renowned military leader during both Elizabeth’s and James’s reigns and held puritan views. Having distinguished himself at the battle of Nieuwpoort, or Newport, in 1600 – a victory that May explicitly celebrates in his dedication – he became one of the four English colonels in the Netherlands, and in 1620 he was appointed general of the English expedition for the Palatinate. In 1622 he returned to England, where he was enthusiastically welcomed, with Jonson and George Chapman composing verses to honour his prowess.¹⁹⁸

Aware of these strong connections between Essex and Vere and the Netherlands campaign joined by May, in reading Essex’s dedication one might even perhaps glimpse an allusion to May’s engagement as a soldier there:

What name can fitter patronage afford
To this fourth book, which keeps th’ admirèd record
Of truth and faithful love shown past belief
By valiant soldiers to a valiant chief,

¹⁹⁷ Morrill, 960-966.

¹⁹⁸ Trim, 299-301.

Than you, most lovèd lord?¹⁹⁹

Although May is said to have embarked with Sir Edward Cecil, it is possible that he personally knew or witnessed Essex's skills as a commander on the battlefield, and even, perhaps, that he joined the forces in Utrecht in 1621 in response to a rallying call by Essex. In any case, the explicit reference to 'valiant soldiers' paying homage to a 'valiant chief' is undoubtedly evocative. Also intriguingly, in the dedication to Vere May 'parallels Dutch and Roman "liberty" ... and their respective champions, Vere and Pompey', possibly offering another layer to the interpretation of May's choice to translate Lucan.²⁰⁰

Besides these references in the dedications attached to the *Pharsalia*, small traces of May's negative view of James's behaviour can be found in later writings as well. Although May does not dwell extensively on the Netherlands in his *History of the Parliament of England* of 1647, he still manages to voice his opinion concerning the conduct of King James regarding the Palatinate:

Neither was it easy for the King to turn himself out of that way, when he was once entered into it; so that at last the Papists began by degrees to be admitted nearer to him in service and conversation. ... Thus was the King by degrees brought not only to forsake, but to oppose his own interest both in civil and religious affairs, which was most unhappily seen in that cause (as the Duke of Rohan observed) wherein, besides the interest of all Protestants and the honour of his nation, the estate and livelihood of his own children were at the height concerned: the Palatinate business. From hence slowed a farther mischief, for the King, being loath perchance that the whole people should take notice of those ways in which he trod, grew extremely disaffected to Parliaments, calling them for nothing but to supply his expenses, dissolving them when they began to meddle with state affairs, and divers times imprisoning the members for speeches made in Parliament against the fundamental privileges of that high court.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, F2r.

²⁰⁰ Buckley and Paleit, 254n3.

²⁰¹ *History of Parliament*, C3r-C3v.

The Duke of Rohan, whose judgement towards James is reported and validated by May, is Henri de Rohan, a French military leader who authored treatises of various nature. The one essay that May had in mind while writing the *History of Parliament* and which is being referenced here is a volume originally published in France in 1638 as *De l'intérêt des princes et États de la Chrétienté*, and later translated by Henry Hunt and printed in English in 1640 with the title *A treatise of the interest of the princes and states of Christendom*.²⁰² Discussing the different parties' reasons behind their military engagement in the Palatinate from 1619 onwards, Rohan comments upon James thus: 'King James, more interested than [the King of Denmark], forgetteth his interest concerning his son in law.'²⁰³ In the passage quoted above from the *History of Parliament*, May agrees with Rohan's assessment but expands upon it and goes as far as to indicate James's hesitancy to oppose Spain openly and to support the protestant cause as the main root of the King's 'disaffection' with Parliament.

Although the reasons behind May's departure for the Netherlands as a volunteer in 1621 are ultimately impossible to ascertain beyond doubt, we are presented with the view he held on the matter in 1647. In the eyes of both the public opinion and Parliament, the defence of protestantism was equated with patriotic duty; therefore, May's military commitment was the first demonstration of his siding with Parliament against the King, two decades before he publicly espoused the same side in the ensuing Civil War and five years before he published the first three books of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, a feat that has sometimes been indicated as the source of his anti-monarchic and parliamentary sympathies. Although, as will be discussed, the decision to translate Lucan could be perceived as politically charged and may have indeed

²⁰² Interestingly, Hunt's English translation was also initially published in Paris. In England, the volume was entered in the Stationers' Register on the 29th of July 1640 (Stationers' Register Online, SRO10400) and printed the following year by Richard Hodgkinson.

²⁰³ Rohan's words are reported here in the 1640 English translation; see Rohan, *Princes and States of Christendom*, 01v.

contributed to May's radicalisation, his engagement in the Netherlands suggests that he had been nursing views hostile to the King years before 1626.

1.5 John Barclay's *Argenis*

Once again, barring the publication of *The Heir* in 1622, May vanished from history's radar for a few years, to reappear in 1625, when the English translation of John Barclay's *Argenis* was published; however, his contribution to the translation would not be publicly acknowledged until 1628, when a second edition of the English *Argenis* was printed and May was finally credited on the title-page.

John Barclay was the French-born son of a Scottish writer and a French woman; Barclay was ostensibly very proud of his Scottish ancestry, and he spent several years in England, where he pledged allegiance to King James, to whom Barclay's family proved a valuable asset. William Barclay, John's father, despite being a Catholic, endorsed James's idea of an absolute monarchy without incursions from the pope, and John was sent to the continent by the King to promulgate the views that James had expressed in his *Premonition* (1609).²⁰⁴ Barclay's first original work was a Menippean satire modelled on Petronius' *Satyricon* called *Euphormionis lusinini satyricon* and published in parts between 1605 and 1607. The book was immensely successful, and it spurred the publication of several keys to interpret its meaning and allegorical characters, as well as French, German, and Dutch translations. In 1614 he published *Icon animorum*, another satire, sometimes considered the fourth instalment of Barclay's *Satyricon*; the following year, despite the continued favour he enjoyed at the Stuart court, he moved to Rome with his family, where he composed *Argenis*. Shortly after completing the volume, he

²⁰⁴ Salzman, 105.

died in 1621, and *Argenis* was published in Paris posthumously and with a dedication to King Louis XIII of France.²⁰⁵

Argenis, considered by some Barclay's masterpiece, is a romance *à clef* in five books; it is written in prose, with poetical compositions spread more or less uniformly throughout the work, for a total of 37 poems. The book was first published in England in Latin in 1622; from then on, its editorial history in Britain becomes intricate and at times confusing. By all accounts, the Latin book was an 'international sensation': aside from being popular among intellectuals, it was read and appreciated by James himself, who interpreted it as supportive of his ideas of monarchical rule; in fact, as mentioned above, Barclay and his father had been enjoying a fair share of popularity at the Stuart court for some time. The plot of *Argenis*, heavy with historical and political references, and the text's many thinly disguised allegories, ensured an immediate success, and this, as testified by the newsletter writer John Chamberlain in 1622, prompted the King to '[give] order to Ben Johnson [sic] to translate it.'²⁰⁶

Apparently, Jonson did set out to the task: an entry in the Stationers' Register dated 2 October 1623 reads 'Entered for his copy under the hands of Master Doctor Worrall, and Master Cole warden, a book called John Barclay's *Argenis*, translated by Benjamin Jonson.'²⁰⁷ However, the entry was premature: Jonson had allegedly translated three books out of five when a fire wrecked his library in November 1623; as he laments in 'An Execration upon Vulcan', the fire destroyed, among other things, 'three books not afraid / To speak the fate of the Sicilian maid / To our own ladies.'²⁰⁸ At this point, it seems that Jonson abandoned the King's mission and, possibly too affected by the consequences of the fire, did not seek to reprise the translation again.

²⁰⁵ Royan, 768-769.

²⁰⁶ Salzman, 106; modernisation mine.

²⁰⁷ Stationers' Register Online, SRO7848.

²⁰⁸ Quoted in Miola, 'Jonson', 108.

It was not until 1625 that James's wish was granted, although the King had probably already died by the time the book was published. A Stationers' Register entry dated 1 January 1625 reads, 'Entered for his copy under the hands of Doctor Worall and Master Lownes warden a book called Barclay's *Argenis* in English translated by [~~John~~] Kingsmill Long gent[leman]', and another, dated 19 June 1625, adds the detail, 'the prose translated by master Kingsmill Long and the verses therein by Master Thomas May.'²⁰⁹ However, despite the clear indication that May translated the verses, the volume was ultimately printed by 'G. P.' for Henry Seile with the title *Barclay His Argenis: or, the Loves of Poliarchus and Argenis, Faithfully Translated out of Latin into English by Kingsmill Long, Gent.*, with no mention of May anywhere in the text. Perhaps even more bafflingly, in his dedication to William Dunch of Avebury that prefaces the translation, despite delving extensively upon the reasons that led him to translate the book and upon the choice to publish it, Kingsmill Long makes no reference to a second contributor to the work:

And though I found myself unable to draw them to the full life with an English pencil, or show them in our native looking glass, yet, for an essay of my strength, and to better my own knowledge, I have adventured (though, I confess, with more confidence than judgement) to show them in a dim perspective. This rude piece, such as it is, hath long lain by me since it was finished, I not thinking it worthy to see the light. I had always a desire and hope to have it undertaken by a more able workman, that our nation may not be deprived of the use of so excellent a story; but finding none in so long time to have done it, and knowing, while it spoke not English, though it were a rich jewel to the learned linguist, yet it was close locked from all those to whom education had not given more languages than nature tongues. I have adventured to become the key to this piece of hidden treasure.²¹⁰

Similarly, the two dedicatory epistles by Owen Felltham and 'N. C.' accompanying the volume explicitly acknowledge only one translator: 'I would praise *thee*', '*thy* *Argenis*, who by *thy* pain

²⁰⁹ Stationers' Register Online, SRO8063 and SRO8138, respectively.

²¹⁰ *Argenis*, 1625, A3r-A3v.

is naturalised’, ‘*thy* known modesty doth check my pen.’²¹¹ The identity of the translator himself is not helpful in attempting to reconstruct a possible relationship with May: the name Kingsmill, or Kingsmill, Long does not feature anywhere else but in connection with this translation of *Argenis*.²¹² Equally interesting is the total lack of references, in the author’s preface, to James’s desire to have the book translated: according to the volume’s dedication, Kingsmill’s work was not commissioned by James, but rather an endeavour undertaken for personal reasons and financed by the patronage of William Dunch.²¹³

That, however, is not the case for the 1628 edition of *Argenis*, printed by Felix Kingston for Richard Meighen and Henry Seile: the title page now bears the subtitle ‘Translated out of Latine into English: the Prose upon His Majesties Command by Sir Robert Le Grys, Knight; and the Verses by Thomas May, Esquire’; the point is reiterated a few lines below by the inscription ‘And published by his Maiesties Command.’ To be sure, this time the book is prefaced by a dedication ‘To his most sacred Maiestie’ in which Robert Le Grys recognises the fact that the idea was originally James’s and that Charles inherited the ‘long-bred’ desire to publish the volume from his ‘royal father’, and that, so far, no ‘more artful hand’ has yet brought the piece to life.²¹⁴ This translation apparently had a long and troubled journey: first entered in the Stationers’ Register in January of 1627 to be ‘[c]ontinued to be printed when it is further authorised’, it was entered a second time in April of the following year, presumably when it

²¹¹ *Argenis*, 1625, A4v. My italics.

²¹² ‘Kingsmill’ could be the surname. The William Dunch of Avebury to whom the work is dedicated is very likely the son of Walter Dunch of Avebury, MP, and Deborah Pilkington, born in 1594 and dead by 1639. No other information is available concerning him, but his mother Deborah is the daughter of an Alice Kingsmill; though this Kingsmill family includes no person named ‘Long’, it does feature a certain number of males named ‘John’, which, taking into account the aforementioned January entry in the Stationers’ Register initially attributing the work to a John, a name that was later scratched, suggests that this ‘Kingsmill Long’ may really be the ‘pseudonym’ of a member of this family. Whatever his name, no further information could be found on the elusive Kingsmill. See <https://www.stirnet.com/genie/data/british/dd/dunch1.php> for the Dunch family and <https://www.stirnet.com/genie/data/british/kk/kingsmill1.php> for the Kingsmill family (both last accessed on 13 February 2024).

²¹³ It does seem that at least one of the authors of the two dedications, the anonymous N. C., knew about Jonson’s previous effort and his lamentation, for in his poem he writes: ‘And *Argenis* doth live, despite the fire / That through the world did blaze her martyred fate / For which the limping god was cursed of late’, and later, ‘I think he could not that first went about / To undertake it have more truly hit / The author’s purpose’; *Argenis*, 1625, A4v.

²¹⁴ *Argenis*, 1628, A2v-A3r.

was finally published.²¹⁵ According to the ‘To the understanding reader’ preface, the task was ‘imposed’ upon the author, who claims that, ‘if his Majesty had not so much hastened the publication’, he would have made some amendments to the text before printing it.²¹⁶ So it seems that Charles, perhaps in an effort to follow in his father’s footsteps in sanctioning a greatly popular book, showed great interest in the publication and made personally sure it was published in a timely manner. Although, again, May’s involvement is not acknowledged by the prose translator, it is possible that his contribution was reused in an effort to speed up the publication process: according to the second Stationers’ Register entry dated April 1628, ‘the verses of Thomas May are to be added to this translation[,] so often as they [*i.e.* Meighen and Seile][or either of them if the other shall refuse][,] shall think fit to imprint the same ... Provided that this entrance shall not in any sort be a bar to Henry Seile in his right of his former entrance.’ Possibly for the same reason, this edition does not boast any dedicatory poem.

In any case, as mentioned earlier, the book was very successful, and both translations enjoyed subsequent editions. Long’s translation was published again in 1636, this time with a richly decorated title page and numerous illustrations accompanying many chapters; probably in imitation of the other English edition, a key to the romance was added as a preface to the book. Curiously, whereas Owen Felltham’s dedication still features, ‘N. C.’s is missing, as is May’s acknowledgement on the title-page. Le Gry’s translation was apparently so successful as to deserve a second, seemingly identical, edition the following year, 1629.

It is, overall, difficult to establish the level of May’s involvement in the publication and his reasons for undertaking the task. As for the first point, though no proof exists as to either hypothesis, it is safe to conjecture that he was not involved at all. In the 1625 edition, not only was his name omitted from the title-page, but he was also ignored by the dedicatory epistles praising the prose translator; in the 1628 edition, although he was acknowledged on the title-

²¹⁵ Stationers’ Register Online, SRO8291 and SRO8441, respectively.

²¹⁶ *Argenis*, 1628, A4r.

page, his translation was plainly lifted verbatim from the previous edition, indicating that he offered no revisions of any kind. Moreover, as is the case with *The Heir*, collaboration with the printers may also be excluded on the grounds of May's care in curating his future publications, which is completely absent in both editions of *Argenis*.

As for May's reasons for translating the lyrical portion of Barclay's work, the answer may not be as obvious and may require a certain degree of speculation. Based solely on what is known of May's biography, the choice to translate a Catholic and royalist author's work appears at the very least discordant. First, it should be noted that, during a historical period characterised by polarising opinions on the matter of religion, Barclay was a moderate kind of Catholic: he often attacked extremisms and religious sects and was strongly opposed to the Church's interference with state affairs.²¹⁷ Second, although his personal relationship with James had been positive during his permanence at the Stuart court, his move to Rome meant that he had to give proof of his loyalty to the Pope, whom he had previously attacked, and this led some to speculate that Barclay was the author of the harsh satire *Corona Regia* (1615), directed at James.²¹⁸ Indeed, Barclay's alter ego in *Argenis*, the character Nicopompus, does not shy away from condemning monarchical shortcomings, and whereas Queen Hianisbe was certainly inspired by Elizabeth I, references to financial troubles and to the tense relationship with Parliament are a clear allusion to James.²¹⁹ It is also possible that May simply admired the Scottish writer, and that, as testified by his choice to translate another work of Barclay, *Icon animorum*, in 1631, he took it upon himself to make his work accessible to English readers. Another, perhaps a little more prosaic, hypothesis, is the one formulated by Chester, who speculates that May decided to give an English translation to Barclay's works inspired by the immense success of his works and the potential return in popularity they could offer; in this

²¹⁷ Carbone, 2.

²¹⁸ Invernizzi, 32-33.

²¹⁹ Invernizzi, 37, 56.

case, his intuition was rewarded, as subsequent editions of his translation of both *Argenis* and *Icon animorum* would appear to prove.²²⁰ Finally, the possibility that May undertook the job because of his proximity to Jonson should not be dismissed. While this hypothesis certainly requires a number of leaps of faith, the relationship between the two poets has been, and will be here too, demonstrated and discussed; and we know that Jonson commended his ‘chosen friend’ May’s translation of Lucan in March 1627, signing the dedication ‘Your true friend in judgement and choice.’²²¹ It would not therefore be too far-fetched to suggest that the two had been friends for a few years, that May knew of Jonson’s aborted – or rather, lost – translation of *Argenis*, and that perhaps he was motivated by that to work on it himself.

Here is a short summary of the plot of *Argenis*.

Book one. On the Sicilian shores, Archombrotus meets the lady Timoclea, who begs him to help Poliarchus, who is being attacked by thieves; in the meantime, the latter has already dealt with the bandits, who turn out to be acting on the orders of Lycogenes, a nobleman in open rebellion against King Meleander. The group receive the news that Poliarchus has been accused of murdering Lycogenes’ envoys and of being a traitor; Poliarchus thus decides to spread the news of his death and to hide in a cave, meanwhile plotting his escape to Italy with his friends Arsidas. The princess Argenis, who is in love with Poliarchus, upon receiving the news of his death intends to commit suicide but is stopped by her nurse; through Arsidas, Poliarchus manages to inform Argenis of his true state of health. Archombrotus, meanwhile, is arrested and brought before the King. Poliarchus decides to visit Argenis in disguise during a public ritual that she is officiating, but the ceremony as well as the peace negotiations fail.

Book two. At the court of Eipercte, Archombrotus, who has discovered himself in love with Argenis, saves the King and proposes that Poliarchus be forgiven and called back.

²²⁰ Chester, 142.

²²¹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, a7r.

Lycogenes sends a poisoned bracelet to Poliarchus, but he manages to uncover the plot by reading one of Lycogenes' letters and, after being involved in a shipwreck, defeats the pirates recovering the treasure of Queen Hianisbe of Mauritania. Poliarchus sends his friend Gelanorus to Argenis, in Sicily, where he meets Antenor, Nicopompus, and Hieroleander. Being presented with Lycogenes' letter testifying to the attempted poisoning, King Meleander sentences two of Lycogenes' servants to death, exacerbating the conflict. The King promises to pardon any rebel who will lay down their arms, and many do. Intending to marry Argenis and inheriting Sicily, King Radiobanes of Sardinia arrives at court.

Book three. Archombrotus and Radiobanes successfully lead an attack against the rebels; after the celebrations, Radiobanes officially asks Meleander for Argenis' hand in marriage, but she refuses. Radiobanes enlists the help of Argenis' maid Selenissa to discover her mistress' secrets; Selenissa reveals that a woman named Theocrine who had saved both Argenis and Meleander the previous year was none other than Poliarchus in disguise. Meanwhile, Poliarchus arrives in Sicily and meets Argenis, but departs shortly after. Meanwhile, Radiobanes and Selenissa plot to abduct Argenis during a dance; however, the treason is discovered by Archombrotus, and the plan fails.

Book four. Radiobanes reveals in a letter to Meleander the true identity of Theocrine; Argenis is confronted by his father and, upon finding out that her betrayal has been discovered, Selenissa commits suicide. Convinced that the cause of Sicily's misfortune is the absence of a male heir, Meleander resolves to marry Argenis to Archombrotus, and she, desperate, sends Arsidias to find Poliarchus. It is unearthed that Poliarchus is really Astioristes, the son of King Britomandes and Queen Timandria. Poliarchus ends up in Mauritania again, and there he vows to help Queen Hianisbe defeat Radiobanes; the two face each other in a naval battle and Poliarchus triumphs.

Book five. Waiting for Poliarchus to recover from his injuries, Archombrotus attacks and conquers Sardinia. The two men are divided by their mutual jealousy and their love for Argenis, but Queen Hianisbe assures them that a single letter from her to Meleander will solve the situation, and so it does: the letter contains the news that Archombrotus is Meleander's son by his first wife, and therefore not only heir to Sicily but also Argenis' half-brother. Archombrotus' recent conquest of Sardinia and its annexation to Sicily clears the final obstacle to the two lovers' marriage, an ancient law that stated that members of the Sicilian ruling family could only marry into less powerful families; the story concludes with the wedding between Poliarchus and Argenis and the promise of Poliarchus' sister's hand to Archombrotus.

Analysing the differences between Long's and Le Grys's prose translation is beyond the scope of this thesis; to give a general idea, I will merely borrow Paul Salzman's assessment that the two versions of the prose are quite different, and that Long's is more fluid, albeit 'somewhat ornate.'²²² As concerns other editorial differences between the two editions, there are few. Most notably, Le Grys's translation is followed by a key that offers correspondences between the characters in the text and their historical counterparts. Whereas Le Grys follows the volume's original structure, Long subdivides the five books into small chapters – ranging from twenty to twenty-five for each book – and prefaces each by giving a brief summary of its content. As for May's translation, it is almost identical in both editions, down to the punctuation and capitalisation: across the entire text, I found only three variations, all of which can be ascribed to the compositor responsible for preparing the 1628 copy misreading the text he was given.²²³ The only other notable difference is the systematic capitalisation of instances of 'god(s)', and occasionally 'heaven(s)', written with lowercase in *Argenis*, 1625.

²²² Salzman, 108.

²²³ The three variations are 'bride' in place of 'pride' (*Argenis*, 1625, L3r and *Argenis*, 1628, G6r), 'thou' in place of 'thus' (*Argenis*, 1625, M2r and *Argenis*, 1628, H2v), and 'dryes' in place of 'dyes' (*Argenis*, 1625, Bb1v and *Argenis*, 1628, Q1v). In all three cases, the version in *Argenis*, 1625 appears to be the correct one.

May adapts the Latin exámetro almost invariably into rhymed couplets in iambic pentameter, with only two exceptions out of a total of 37 poems: the two poems are songs, and in both cases he switches to iambic tetrameter. Despite the difficulty in maintaining the economy of the Latin, May succeeds in producing an English translation that both preserves the length of the source text and arguably achieves poetical merit. As an example, here is the first lyrical piece encountered in the poem compared with May's English translation:

<p>Sic roseis stat forma genis, sic frontis honorae Fulget apex, tales accendunt lumina flammae. Humanum ne crede decus; non pulchrior altos Phoebus agit currus. Non unquam sidere tanto Oebalii micuere dei, quos nauta solutis Puppibus et iam iam vincentibus invocat undis. Nec tu Lemniacis Mavors formosior armis Fraena quatis, Paphiisve soles mitescere blandus Cultibus, ab misero tantum metuende marito!²²⁴</p>	<p>So rosy are their cheeks, so fair a rise Show their high fronts, such vigour cast their eyes; Think it no human beauty: not more bright Is mounted Phoebus, nor with such fair light Shine Leda's sons, whom midst the waves' rude strokes The now near-sinking mariner invokes. Not fairer's Mars, when, clad in Lemnian arms, He rides or smiles, pleased with fair Venus' charms, Threat'ning to none, but her poor husband, harm.²²⁵</p>
---	---

Although only his first known published foray into translation from Latin, May's *Argenis* already possesses many of the characteristics its author would later display in the works with which he would achieve fame. When commenting upon May's poetic translations, Chester praises his capacity for brevity: 'It is no small ability ... to render literally the succinctness of Latin into English without a consequent diffuseness. This ability to be literal without verbosity May possessed to the full.' He likewise commends his avoidance of 'excessive Latinity' and

²²⁴ Barclay, *Argenis*, A4v.

²²⁵ *Argenis*, 1625, B2r.

the ability to create a fluidity in English ‘which makes his translations appear ... more free than they actually are.’²²⁶

However, it was with another translation that May gained the fame that would forever immortalise him as ‘the translator of Lucan.’

²²⁶ Chester, 147.

2. The Breakthrough (1626-1627)

2.1 Lucan's *Pharsalia*

At some point before 1626, May started working on what many critics, both modern and contemporary to May, consider his *magnum opus*: the English translation of Lucan's *De Bello Ciuile*, also known as *Pharsalia*. In this section I will give a short summary of the history of the Latin work and of its reception in early modern England, then I will introduce possible political and personal reasons why May might have wanted to undertake this translation; I will then try to reconstruct the editorial history of the volume and to provide a political and literary analysis of the work; finally, a brief overview of the early modern and contemporary legacy of May's Lucan will close the section. Throughout these pages, I will attempt to piece together a 'profile' of the man May, of his circle of friends, and of his political leanings.

The *Pharsalia*, or *De Bello Ciuili*, or *Bellum Ciuile*, is an epic poem in ten books written by Lucan around 61-65 AD recounting the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. Lucan, nephew of the philosopher and dramatist Seneca the Younger, was initially close to emperor Nero, but then, for reasons not entirely clear, he joined a conspiracy to overthrow him, was arrested, and was consequently forced to commit suicide at the age of 25. Lucan's poem in epic hexameter was, by all appearances, left unfinished: the action, which opens with the crossing of the Rubicon by Caesar, ends abruptly sometime after Pompey's death, with Caesar in danger in Alexandria. Speculations as to when Lucan originally intended to interrupt the narrative abound, with the most popular hypotheses proposing either Augustus' victory at Actium in 31 or the battle of Philippi in 42; in his *Continuation*, May himself chose to extend it until Caesar's tyrannicide in 44.¹

¹ Paleit, *Lucan*, 17.

Despite its anti-Caesarist and therefore anti-imperial narrative, the *Pharsalia* was able to establish its place in the English school curriculum. This was possible through allegorical or pedagogical readings of the text, which either entailed refashioning Pompey as the representative of legitimate authority rather than of the republic or interpreting the *Pharsalia* as a general warning against civil strife and a celebration of imperial peace over republican bloodshed – a conclusion that Lucan refuses to draw in the text.² Latin editions of Lucan were published in England in 1589, a reprint of the one published by Anton Gryphius in Lyons twenty years earlier, and in 1618, a volume edited and with commentary by Thomas Farnaby and with a dedication by John Selden; another influential volume was the 1614 Dutch edition by Hugo Grotius, on which Farnaby's edition was modelled.³

May's translation was not the first time Lucan had appeared in English. Most famously, Christopher Marlowe had translated the first book, which was published posthumously in 1600 as *Lucan's First Book, Translated Line for Line by Christopher Marlowe*. The use of blank verse like in the Earl of Surrey's translations from Virgil, David Norbrook suggests, might indicate that Marlowe was pursuing the ambition of giving the imperial Virgil a republican counterpart.⁴ Little is known about this literary endeavour: critics have speculated their composition date to be close to Marlowe's 'apprentice days', and that, because key features of his Lucan can be spotted throughout his whole dramatic canon, Marlowe translated Lucan (and Ovid) as an exercise in learning how to write poetry.⁵ Nevertheless, the book was not particularly successful and was mostly ignored; Catherine Carroll Cliff speculates that this was due either to its being only a fragment, or perhaps because Marlowe's reputation 'prejudiced the readership.'⁶ Fourteen years after Marlowe, Arthur Gorges produced the first complete English translation of

² Norbrook, 'Lucan, May, and Republican Literary Culture', 50.

³ Paleit, *Lucan*, 13.

⁴ Norbrook, 'Lucan, May, and Republican Literary Culture', 51.

⁵ Brooke, 396; Stapleton, 221–2.

⁶ Cliff, 23–24.

Lucan. In his dedicatory epistle to Lady Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, Gorges' son Carew offers very little of historical or literary interest, and presents his choice to publish his father's translation of Lucan's poem as born almost out of chance ('[I present] your Ladyship with this poem, which by chance I did see in my father's study').⁷ The epistle is otherwise almost entirely devoted to the drawn-out praise of his patroness, and Carew does not delve on the potential literary value of his father's work. Still, despite the seemingly innocuous tone of the dedication, its nature should be questioned: not only was Carew Gorges only ten at the time, thus highly unlikely to undertake the publication on his own, but the Countess of Bedford was a patron of the Calvinist cause in Europe and an active opposer of pro-Spanish policies; finally, the dedicatory poems, including one by the imprisoned Walter Raleigh, a close friend of Gorges, lean heavily on the political angle, making the publication of the volume as a whole a statement against the most recent royal policies.⁸ This translation, however, was no more successful than Marlowe's, and certainly no better. Whereas Marlowe's rendition has often been praised for its artistic brilliance and effectiveness in evoking the images present in the Latin text, Gorges fell decidedly short of his predecessor, with his octosyllabic rhymed couplets being more reminiscent of a 'jingle' than an epic poem about internecine strife.⁹

May's complete translation therefore appeared on the English book market only thirteen years after Gorges'. Undoubtedly, May judged Gorges' rendition unsatisfactory: in his translation, he reuses none of Gorges' verbal choices in the text, whereas he draws significantly upon Marlowe's translation of the first book. However, aside from a purely 'aesthetical' reason for undertaking the translation of the text, it is fair to assume that Lucan carried for May political as well as literary meaning. Given the anti-Caesarean nature of the text, which I will delve into

⁷ Gorges, *Pharsalia*, A3r.

⁸ Norbrook, 'Lucan, May, and Republican Literary Culture', 51-53.

⁹ Gill, 26.

shortly, and the political connotation of the dedications May attached to his work, it is natural to attempt to seek political motivations behind his choice to translate Lucan.

A critical stance on Julius Caesar is particularly relevant in the historical context of 1626 and acquires an even deeper level of meaning when paired with May's own military foray in the Netherlands. The character of Caesar itself in general was suited for conflicting readings (from his debated involvement in Catiline's conspiracy to his role in the civil war, from his genuine or faked tears when confronted with Pompey's head to the heated discourse surrounding the legitimacy of his murder) and the ambiguity surrounding the character was testified and simultaneously fostered by the innumerable interpretations of his nature and motives circulating in the early modern period.¹⁰ Paulina Kewes argues that, throughout his reign, James showed signs of a great fascination with Julius Caesar and sought to draw analogies between himself and the Roman leader and between Jacobean England and Caesarean Rome, an analogy 'which was implicit in James' published writings, and ... explicit in the writings he sponsored and patronised.'¹¹ As a consequence, James would have viewed Lucan, an eminent critic of Caesar, as 'a traitor to his sovereign', and the *Pharsalia* as an unacceptably republican historical account. The only known engagement of James with Lucan indeed shows an attempt at subverting the meaning of a passage from the *Pharsalia*: in translating and interpreting an excerpt from the fifth book, in which Caesar quells a mutiny with a rhetorical speech that is condemned by Lucan, James completely twists the nature of the episode and turns the passage into a condemnation of rebellion.¹²

On the other hand, over the course of the seventeenth century Lucan's Caesar and Caesar in general had increasingly come to be associated with anti-Protestant or Catholic tyranny: in *The Massacre at Paris*, Marlowe, obviously familiar with Lucan, modelled the Catholic leader

¹⁰ Lovascio, 'Rewriting Julius Caesar', 221.

¹¹ Kewes, 'Julius Caesar', 159-160.

¹² Kewes, 'Julius Caesar', 175-176.

Guise on Julius Caesar; Gorges' translation was published in the midst of growing hostility towards James due to his progressive rejection of Elizabeth's anti-Spain and anti-Catholic policies; Hugo Grotius published his edition of Lucan in 1619 with the hope that it would incite the Dutch readership to hate the Spanish king; in 1621, a pamphlet, *Violenti imperii imago*, used quotations from Lucan to comment on the Palatinate situation and to propose a comparison between the defeated Frederick V and Pompey.¹³ With respects to theatrical representations of Caesar, in all seven extant plays dating from the 1590s to the 1620s in which he appears as a character he assumed the role of a 'symbolic, ideal arch-enemy of the country', at least partially overturning his previous status as a legendary, heroic figure that had dominated the medieval and early Tudor ages.¹⁴ In this context, political and literary readings of Julius Caesar could not be divorced from the reception of Lucan in early modern England. There is little doubt that, in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the character of Caesar is both intended as a protagonist – and therefore implicitly a hero – and a villain, guilty of prioritising his private interests over the *res publica*; conversely, in Lucan's narrative Pompey fulfils the role of the anti-hero and the republic's champion by selflessly choosing to prioritise Cicero's, and the Senate's, will over his own, and consequently unleashing 'horrificing bloodshed' and bringing about his own doom.¹⁵ Confirmation that these 'pro-liberty' views of Lucan were deemed controversial and potentially subversive can be found in Edmund Bolton's royally sanctioned new account of Nero's reign, published in 1624, in which Bolton condemns Lucan as the 'shrillest trumpet of popular parity, and the boldest decrier of monarchy.'¹⁶

Edward Paleit partially challenges the absolute identification of Lucan with proto-republican ideals in early modern England by presenting examples of 'Caesarist' readings of the *Pharsalia* between 1590 and 1610, which were indicative of the plurality of approaches to

¹³ Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 41-42.

¹⁴ Lovascio, 'Rewriting Julius Caesar', 221-222.

¹⁵ Norbrook, 'Lucan, May, and Republican Literary Culture', 48.

¹⁶ Quoted in Norbrook, 'Lucan, May, and Republican Literary Culture', 56; modernisation mine.

the classics at the time. Far from being interpreted as ideological monoliths, classical texts such as Lucan's could also 'be read to test, rather than assert, the horizons of a reader's political vision, uncovering contradictions and posing questions, not forwarding one point of view.'¹⁷

Regardless, Paleit's observations are not incompatible with the notion that, as Norbrook points out, choosing to translate Lucan in 1626 was a charged political decision, and May's 1627 translation can be interpreted, by all means, as 'a gesture of support for an international anti-absolutist alliance.'¹⁸ If May's initial resolution in late 1625 or early 1626 appears motivated by patriotic sentiment, the Forced Loan of late 1626 and the ever-growing influence of Buckingham on Charles' policies, discussed below, add another layer of political relevance to the complete translation of 1627 and its dedications to many influential opposers of Stuart policies.

Beyond the political dimension, the personal reasons behind the choice to translate Lucan appear to be several. As Paleit points out, May's literary circle must have undoubtedly played a role: Philip Massinger certainly knew Lucan well and was likely immersed in Roman history at the time May began his work on the translation, as *The Roman Actor* was first performed in 1626; likewise, Ben Jonson was extremely familiar with the *Pharsalia* and, as demonstrated by Paleit, May was in turn familiar with Jonson's reading of Lucan.¹⁹ Moreover, as briefly discussed in the previous chapter, Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, claims in his memoir membership of a circle of common-lawyers and ex-Inns-of-Court writers who gravitated around Jonson and included, other than Clarendon himself and May, John Selden, John Vaughan, Sir Kenelm Digby, Charles Cotton, and Thomas Carew. Although Clarendon only joined the group in 1626, there are several links connecting the various members that predate Clarendon's arrival by a few years, including an association with Lucan: not only did Jonson and Vaughan pen

¹⁷ Paleit, 'Caesarist Reader', 238.

¹⁸ Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 43.

¹⁹ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 216-221.

commendatory poems for May's translation in 1627, but Selden had also contributed a poem to Thomas Farnaby's 1618 edition of Lucan.²⁰ As will be further discussed, I believe Thomas Hobbes as well, author of a translation of Thucydides published in 1629 but completed much earlier, ought to be included among the number of May's acquaintances who worked closely with the classics at the time.

Whatever his motivations for tackling Lucan's *Pharsalia* might have been, May's intuition seems to have paid off, for this translation finally enabled him to reap some of the popularity he had hitherto being denied. The translation was immensely successful, and its popularity is attested by the exceptional number of editions printed both during May's lifetime and afterwards. A partial version of the translation was published in 1626, and the first complete edition in 1627; with few revisions, the 1627 was the basis for all future editions. May's Lucan was republished in 1631, 1635, and 1650 during his lifetime; in all these instances, the volume bore a subtitle numbering it the second, third, and fourth edition, respectively, and a statement that the translation had been revised by the author himself. After May's death, his Lucan was republished in 1659 in a volume including May's own *Continuation*, and again in 1679 on its own.

Thanks to the translation's editorial history, we can surmise a fairly precise chronology for its inception. The first appearance of the work in the Stationers' Register dates back to 18 April 1626, when the following is entered: '*Lucan's Pharsalia, or the Civil Wars of Rome between Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar*, translated into English verse by Thomas May.'²¹ However, only the first three books were published in 1626, by John Norton and Augustine Matthews, with that title and the subtitle 'The three first books'; the reason behind this decision is unknown. In their modern edition of the text, Buckley and Paleit offer a series of possible

²⁰ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 222.

²¹ Stationers' Register Online, SRO8208; modernisation mine.

reasons, including May or the publishers rushing to publish the first books in an ‘attempt at political timeliness’, but the most convincing explanation seems to be a most trivial one – money.²² As testified by the second entry of the *Pharsalia* in the Stationers’ Register almost a year later, dated 12 March 1627, prior to the publication of the complete edition in 1627 the publishing rights were transferred from Norton and Matthews to John Marriot and Thomas Jones, who, according to the Register’s entry, were to ‘have the printing at a specified rate of fifteen shillings the heap for fifteen hundred sheets.’²³ This arrangement effectively entailed a transfer of the financial risk to Marriot and Jones, and it may indicate that the two original publishers, both with the 1626 edition and with this move, were attempting to recover their investment: possibly having already paid May for his work, they were not satisfied with the rate at which he was writing, and decided to print the first three books to recoup part of the money.²⁴ The fascinating, though unlikely, possibility that May sought to emulate Lucan in publishing practices should also be mentioned: according to the biographer Vacca, Lucan initially circulated only three books of the *Pharsalia* (presumably the first three), a testimony that is corroborated by the change of tone and attitude towards Nero that differentiates Books 1-3 from Books 4-7.²⁵ However intriguing this theory may sound, I do not find it likely, for evidence suggests otherwise. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that May himself had any direct involvement in the publication of the 1626 edition, especially when comparing it with the scrupulously curated complete edition of the following year: the partial edition lacks the dedicatory epistle, a summary of the life of Lucan, three commendatory poems by friends of May, and the separate dedication prefacing each individual book, all of which are present in the complete edition. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, May took great care in curating the printed editions of his works, a tendency that the 1631, 1635, and 1650 revised editions would appear to

²² Buckley and Paleit, 12-13.

²³ Stationers’ Register Online, SRO8310; modernisation mine.

²⁴ Buckley and Paleit, 13.

²⁵ Martindale, ‘Lucan’, 69.

confirm; conversely, the 1626 edition appears at the very least rushed, cementing Buckley and Paleit's hypothesis that it was the publishers', rather than May's, doing. Another point in favour of this thesis is the subtitle to the 1631 edition of the work, 'The second edition, corrected, and the annotations enlarged by the author': if May labelled this the second, rather than third, edition of his translation, it is safe to conclude that he did not consider the 1626 as part of his literary canon. Since the 1626 and 1627 editions, as concerns the translation proper of the first three books, do not differ in any significant way, I will be only considering the text of the 1627 version.²⁶

Contrary to its 1626 predecessor, the complete edition shows all signs of having been prepared for printing, despite a relatively cheap octavo format, with the utmost care and attention to detail. The title page consists of a set of elaborately engraved scenes: a depiction of Lucan committing suicide sits in the upper part of the page, accompanied by two lines from one of Martial's epigrams mourning the death of the poet at Nero's orders, and the title of the translation rests between the two armour-clad figures of Pompey and Caesar facing each other.²⁷ The engraver, the Dutchman Friedrich Hulsén, is known to have worked in England in 1627, where he produced engravings for publications 'celebrating the country's Protestant traditions and identity.'²⁸ The title page is faced by a poem by May that celebrates Lucan and compares him to Virgil, lamenting the opposite fate of the two poets: 'Thy [Virgil's] favoured Muse did find a different fate: / Thou got'st Augustus' love, he Nero's hate.'²⁹

Immediately following the title page is the epistle to the main dedicatee of the work, William Cavendish, 2nd Earl of Devonshire, to whom May also dedicates the sixth book; this is

²⁶ For details on the variations between the two versions, see Buckley and Paleit's edition of the text.

²⁷ The epigram in question is VII, 21; May's own anthology of Martial's epigrams includes the translation of the epigram immediately following this one, VII, 22. See Martial, 92.

²⁸ Buckley and Paleit, 13.

²⁹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, title page. May himself would later be celebrated with a paraphrase of this line in a poem contained in the 1640 anthology *Wits Recreations*: 'Thou son of Mercury whose fluent tongue / Made Lucan finish his Pharsalian song, / Thy fame is equal, better is thy fate, / Thou hast got Charles his love, he Nero's hate'; see Anonymous, *Wits Recreations*, B6v.

one out of a total of eight dedicatees. Cavendish was a prominent member of court society and a friend of King James, as well as a pupil of Thomas Hobbes and one of his lifelong friends.³⁰ Despite his prominence in Jacobean circles, it is probable that, motivated by anti-Spanish patriotic sentiment, Cavendish was responsible for circulating letters written by the Venetian scholar Fulgenzio Micanzio and translated by Hobbes, in which James's foreign policy was criticised 'in increasingly bitter terms.'³¹ In 1626, when he inherited his father's seat in the House of Lords, he opposed the Duke of Buckingham's attempt to declare a speech of Dudley Diggs as treasonous.³²

It is possible that the close connection to Hobbes – then a young intellectual who worked as a tutor and secretary for Cavendish himself – persuaded May that Cavendish might be the most likely, of all his prospective patrons, to support poets or translators, and he indeed addresses him as 'lover of all good learning' in the dedication. In fact, it is possible that May was personally acquainted with Hobbes and that the two were a mutual influence on their respective literary endeavours at the time. In 1629, Hobbes published the English translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Though not the first English translation, it was the first, according to Hobbes's 'To the reader' epistle, directly translated out of the original Greek rather than via other languages; and, according to the same preface, the work had already withstood the scrutiny 'of some, whose judgement I [Hobbes] very much esteem.'³³ Although published in 1629, by Hobbes's own admission – 'After I had finished it, it lay long by me' – the translation was completed earlier, a claim supported by its entry in the Stationers' Register, which is dated 18 March 1628.³⁴ In the meantime, however, Cavendish died on the 20th of June 1628, and Hobbes was unable to dedicate the work to him while he was still alive; the dedicatory

³⁰ Lee, 654.

³¹ Malcolm, 'Hobbes and the Virginia Company', 314.

³² Lee, 654.

³³ Hobbes, *Peloponnesian War*, A3r; modernisation mine. Thucydides' work had already been translated in English from French by Thomas Nichols in 1550.

³⁴ Hobbes, *Peloponnesian War*, A4r; modernisation mine; Stationers' Register Online, SRO8436.

epistle is therefore addressed to Cavendish's young son, also named William, and Hobbes remarks that his work on the translation was supported financially by Cavendish, whom he had long served as a tutor and secretary.³⁵ According to the biographer John Aubrey, Hobbes had sought the approval of Ben Jonson and the Scottish poet Robert Ayton before publishing his rendition of Thucydides, and Jonson is described by Aubrey as Hobbes's 'loving and familiar acquaintance.'³⁶ It is not therefore baseless to suppose that May and Hobbes, both relatively unknown at the time, may have belonged to the same circle of intellectuals gravitating around Jonson, and that the choice to translate classical historical poems about civil wars might have been born in the same fertile academic humus. Unfortunately for May, the death of Cavendish a mere year after the publication of the *Pharsalia* quashed all hopes of earning his patronage, a prospect that, particularly in light of Hobbes's being financed for translating Thucydides, must surely have seemed likely to the expectant May.

In the epistle, other than the praise of the dedicatee and the customary display of modesty, May also explicitly, and seemingly in contrast with Jonson, identifies Pompey as the 'hero' of the civil war. In the notes to his 1609 *Masque of Queens*, while describing Inigo Jones's stage design, Jonson lists a series of statues depicting 'the most excellent poets, as Homer, Virgil, Lucan, etc.' and, situated on the upper part of the stage, the statues of 'Achilles, Aeneas, Caesar, and those great heroes, which these poets had celebrated.'³⁷ Conversely, in presenting the subject of Lucan's work, even though he avoids appearing too mournful in the face of the demise of republican Rome by ostensibly denying any analogy between imperial Rome and contemporary England, May describes the *Pharsalia*'s protagonists thus: 'The two heads of this great division (if we may term Pompey the head of a faction, and not rather the true servant of the public state) were Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar, men of greater eminence than the

³⁵ Hobbes, *Peloponnesian War*, A1r-A1v.

³⁶ Aubrey 1, 365.

³⁷ Jonson, *Masque of Queens*, E4r.

former ages had seen any.³⁸ Not for the last time, May demonstrates the capacity to absorb the literary and ideological influence of Jonson in his love for the classics without mechanically adopting the latter's interpretation of it. Whereas, as Paleit illustrates, allusions to Jonson's *oeuvre* can be found throughout the translation, May maintains his individuality and does not subordinate his work to the older playwright's lumbering shadow, but rather expands upon his input and displays a comparatively original approach to the classics. Rather than adopting a reverential attitude towards classical writers, he integrates and interweaves them with contemporary influences, generating a personal – and fully early modern English – literary creation.

Following this potentially controversial dedicatory epistle to Cavendish is a four-page summary of the life of Lucan. The brief biography appears to be largely based on the accounts of multiple authors, with a reference to Tacitus in the text. The main source seems to be the commentator Vacca; May must have had access to it through Hugo Grotius' 1619 edition of Lucan's book, which includes two biographical accounts of the poet's life, including Vacca's, whose account is reported anonymously and described as 'most ancient commentary' ('ex Commentario antiquissimo'). Other works utilised and sometimes reworked by May include Tacitus' *Annales*, Pietro Crinito's 1505 (but often republished) *De Poetis Latinis*, and the collated biography of Giovanni Sulpizio (reprinted in Farnaby's edition). As Buckley and Paleit note, even though many of the sources he employs presented both positive and negative biographical material, May's account of the life of Lucan is 'overwhelmingly favourable.'³⁹ Therefore, unsurprisingly, May's sources seem to deliberately disregard Suetonius' *De Poetis*, which is arguably the biography most critical of Lucan: none of the evidence exclusively reported by Suetonius, and especially not his strongly disapproving attitude towards Lucan's

³⁸ Cliff, 22; *Pharsalia*, 1627, a4r.

³⁹ Buckley and Paleit, 40n1.

role in Piso's conspiracy and the legitimacy of tyrannicide, feature in May's biography of the Latin poet. An opposition to Suetonius is already apparent in the positive parallel between Lucan and Virgil in the title page poem: according to Suetonius, in a now lost preface to the *Pharsalia* Lucan arrogantly 'dared' ('ausus sit') compare himself to Virgil by asking 'et quantum mihi restat / Ad *Culicem*?'; the accompanying word choice strongly suggests that Suetonius, unlike May, did not agree with the comparison.⁴⁰ Moreover, whereas Suetonius describes Lucan's falling out with Nero as a result of the former's pettiness, May, although acknowledging that 'discontent' was the main reason behind Lucan's taking part in the conspiracy, shifts the blame on Nero's envy of the poet's wit and his alleged veto prohibiting Lucan from ever reciting verses again.⁴¹ Of course, in a twist of fate that May surely could not predict, his own contemporary biographers displayed to him an attitude similar to Suetonius' in their accusations of ingratitude towards Charles and in their interpretation of it as the reason for May's turning against the king, unwittingly strengthening the comparison between Lucan and May.

Lucan's biography is followed by three dedications to May. The second one is signed 'H. V.' and it celebrates May by comparing him to Lucan: 'Who now is fit [to narrate the story of Pompey and Caesar] but May, as Lucan then?'⁴² The nameless author refers to May as 'sweet friend' and he addresses the poem 'To his all-deserving and learned friend, the translator of Lucan: Thomas May Esquire.' This dedication, unlike the other two, was removed from all subsequent editions of the book starting from 1631. Perhaps on account of this, theories concerning the identity of the unknown 'H. V.' have been few. Paleit has tentatively attributed the dedication to Henry Vaughan, MP for Camarthenshire in the 1620s and later royalist officer,

⁴⁰ Suetonius, 500. The sentence attributed to Lucan roughly translates to 'How much do I need to reach the *Culex*?'; the *Culex* ('the gnat') is a short poem (400 exametres) that belongs to the *Appendix Virgiliana* and is attributed to Virgil.

⁴¹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, a6r.

⁴² *Pharsalia*, 1627, a7v.

while in their recent edition of May's translation he and Buckley have speculated 'H. V.' to have been a relative of John Vaughan, author of the second dedication.⁴³ A search for possible matches among late 1500s and early 1600s Cambridge or Oxford students enables me to propose another candidate: Henry Vane, or Fane, who was admitted at Gray's Inn in 1606, aged sixteen, and later obtained an M.A. at Cambridge in March of 1613, around the time May graduated B.A.⁴⁴ Vane began a career as a member of Parliament in 1614 and was able to ingratiate himself with both James and Charles, being included in the group of men who accompanied Charles in Madrid in 1623. Probably shortly after, he had a quarrel with Buckingham that forced him momentarily to retire to the Netherlands; the dispute, however, was resolved by April 1625, when Vane was received back into royal favour. In the same year he became cofferer of the king's household alongside Marmaduke Darrell, and in August 1626 he was sent to the Netherlands on a royal mission; in 1629 he was sent again as an ambassador to the Netherlands to Frederick and Elizabeth of Bohemia. In 1640 he was appointed secretary of state, but, amidst his growing disillusionment with Charles's policies, he was dismissed the following year and he shortly after joined the parliamentarians; he died in 1655 and was the subject of vicious comments by royalists, including Clarendon.⁴⁵ The profile of Vane as an ambitious Cambridge and Gray's Inn educated man willing to rise the ranks of royal favour through all possible means, who had had a past grudge with Buckingham and experience in the Netherlands, and who later realised he could no longer endorse the king's policies and therefore turned parliamentarian is strikingly similar to May's own. Although we do not know precisely when Vane returned from his mission to the Netherlands for which he departed in August 1626, an entry in the Calendar of State Papers dated 17 March 1627 issuing a payment to be made to

⁴³ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 222n35; Buckley and Paleit, 44n1.

⁴⁴ See ACAD – A Cambridge Alumni Database, record number FN612H. The record entry states that Vane graduated M.A. upon Prince Charles' visit to Cambridge on 2-4 March 1613 (see Venn and Venn, *Alumni*, 242); the exact date of May's graduation is not known, but it was between January and March 1613 (see previous chapter). The surname is occasionally spelled 'Fane', though the spelling 'Vane' is much more common.

⁴⁵ Smuts, 104-108.

the cofferers of the household for services provided testifies that Vane was already back in England by that date, conceivably in time to add his dedication to May's work.⁴⁶ The dedication itself is not indicative of someone particularly attuned to writing poetry; if anything, it is quite mechanical and repetitive, with the first three lines reciting: 'Pompey and Caesar, worthies more than men, / Are more than worthy of a lasting story / And worthy more than of a vulgar pen.'⁴⁷ Vane is briefly mentioned by May in his 1647 *History of Parliament* in connection with his and his son's role in the trial against the Earl of Strafford. The decisive evidence which tipped Parliament in favour of a guilty verdict and subsequent death sentence was found in some of Vane's notes, which were presented to Parliament by Vane's son (also named Henry). About the episode May writes: 'These notes Sir Henry Vane, eldest son to the before named Sir Henry, had found (as he alleged to the House) in his father's cabinet, and produced before the House without his father's knowledge, who seemed extremely angry with his son for it.'⁴⁸ Finally, a line of the short poem might hide a clue as to the identity of the mysterious 'H. V.': 'Forward sweet friend, led by rich Lucan's *vein*' (emphasis mine), with 'vein' possibly suggesting a pun on its presumed author's surname Vane.⁴⁹ Although there is ultimately no proof that the two men even met each other, I deem Henry Vane a good candidate for the author of this dedication, which, like May's dedicatory poems to various enemies of Buckingham, was to be excised from all subsequent editions of the *Pharsalia*. This decision, were Vane the author, might suggest regret in so publicly praising a potentially controversial text, and a desire to keep a 'low profile' to further maintain his prestigious positions at court.

The third poem is signed by John Vaughan. Vaughan was a lawyer and later an MP, and during the 1620s he belonged to the same circle as Jonson and May. Also in 1627, Vaughan and

⁴⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, 1627-1628*, 97.

⁴⁷ *Pharsalia*, 1627, a7v.

⁴⁸ *History of Parliament*, O3r.

⁴⁹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, a7v.

Jonson contributed commendatory poems to Michael Drayton's *The Battle of Agincourt*.⁵⁰ The grandiose and verbose dedication with which Vaughan addresses May makes a couple of interesting remarks:

Till Rome was met in England in that state
That was, at once, her greatness and her fate,
So all to us discovered that nought's hid
Which either she could speak or Caesar did.
Beyond which nothing can be done by thee,
Though thou hadst more of Lucan than we see
Revealed in this[.]⁵¹

Vaughan claims that England has paralleled Rome in both greatness and 'fate', and that May can do nothing about it, despite being more similar to Lucan than what is apparent in his choice to translate his work. Is Vaughan, perhaps unwisely, indicating that the similarities between May and Lucan go beyond literary ability and extend to their political stances? Or is this statement more meekly suggesting that May, should he choose to, could expand his work to go 'beyond' Lucan's and add to it – a feat that the poet would indeed accomplish three years later with his *Continuation*? The fact that this dedication was preserved in all subsequent editions of the *Pharsalia* throughout the 1630s implies that Vaughan's assertion was not especially subversive, and so that the second interpretation perhaps should be preferred. Nevertheless, the suggestion that May was more akin to Lucan than previously assumed is compelling and, in light of the events of the 1640s, prophetic.

Finally, and most famously, the first dedication prefaced to the translation is by Jonson, who signs the poem as 'Your true friend in judgment and choice.' As mentioned before, May and the older playwright had probably known each other for quite some time and were, as

⁵⁰ Buckley and Paleit, 45n1.

⁵¹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, a8r.

Jonson's signature suggests, on intimate terms; as speculated in the previous chapter, there is also the possibility that May had undertaken the translation of Barclay's *Argenis* in 1625 under the influence of Jonson, who had failed to complete his own. The nature of the relationship between Jonson and May has been often discussed and presented as that of master and student, with the younger May eager to learn and absorb Jonson's teachings; these assertions of wanting to follow in Jonson's steps haunted May until long after his death, with a vast majority of critics, as shall be discussed in Chapter 4, excessively focusing on May's desire to take up Jonson's position as poet laureate at court. In his infamous 1650 ode 'Tom May's Death', Andrew Marvell cements the point by berating the recently deceased May for betraying 'the Jonsonian literary values that he had once exemplified in Caroline England.'⁵² But had May truly and fully embodied the 'Jonsonian literary values'?

After Schmid categorically – and undeservedly – painted May as an inept caricature of Jonson, incapable of achieving greatness even when blatantly copying from his supposed master, Chester was the first to attempt a slight deviation from this narrative.⁵³ Chester opens his examination of *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina* by proclaiming that Jonson, being May's master in many respects, should be the 'starting point' of any attempt to analyse his Roman tragedies, and that May did, in fact, '[follow] his master in theory.'⁵⁴ After several paragraphs devoted to analysing and comparing Jonson's approach to bringing the classics on the stage with that of his contemporaries, Chester concludes that May was, on the surface, a follower of Jonson; however, he also highlights one important difference between the two: he notes that May was 'possessed of an inherent romanticism' that compelled him to draw inspiration from Shakespeare and Fletcher almost as much as from Jonson. The impact of Jonson on May, possibly even on the very decision to translate Lucan and to engage with the classics in general,

⁵² McDowell, 132.

⁵³ Schmid, 82.

⁵⁴ Chester, 100.

is of course undeniable, particularly with respect to his ‘antiquarian zeal.’⁵⁵ In May’s *Pharsalia*, Buckley and Paleit identify echoes of Jonson’s attitude towards Lucan’s ‘disputed generic status’ as both a poet and a historian, and, despite defending Lucan’s hybrid identity in the preface, May is sometimes unable to hide his ‘discomfort’ at the departure from factual truth, going as far as to tweak his translation to slightly deviate from Lucan and match other more widely accepted historical accounts.⁵⁶ Yet, in spite of such rigidity, likely heavily influenced by Jonson’s personal outlook on history and historiography, Chester illustrates a series of differences between the two men, including May’s occasional willingness to deviate from slavish historical accuracy, particularly when writing for the theatre, for the sake of the ‘exigencies of the drama’, which call into question the traditional attempts to pigeon-hole May as just another ‘son of Ben’ and paint a picture in which Jonson was merely *one* of several contemporary influences.⁵⁷

Indeed, patterns of imitation and appropriation from Jonson – such as will be progressively analysed over the course of this thesis – are not exclusively applied to Jonson but are, in fact, comparable to other borrowings from different playwrights as well as classical authors that May makes in his works – even in such a seemingly constrained setting as translation. Therefore, while the importance that Jonson’s works exercised over May should not be excessively downplayed, I think it needs to be acknowledged that the nature of such imprint is not unique, and that May’s oeuvre is the result of what appears to me a conscious effort to blend many diverse sources and influences rather than a mere attempt to imitate or replicate the work of a single master.

Indeed, while friendship with the older and venerated Jonson must have certainly played a significant role for a younger poet struggling to emerge, it should be noted that Jonson was

⁵⁵ Chester, 103-106.

⁵⁶ Buckley and Paleit, 20-21.

⁵⁷ Chester, 106.

not the only popular playwright or intellectual with whom May was friends, nor was he unarguably the most influential over May. In fact, plays published in the late 1620s prove that May had close relationships with other major playwrights of the time, as well as numerous lesser-known poets and playwright of the Jacobean and Caroline age.

A lifelong friend of May was James Shirley; evidence of their friendship can be traced with certainty to 1629, but the two had been friends most likely for a few years. Shirley's play *The Wedding*, published in 1629 but probably written in 1626, contains a commendatory poem by May.⁵⁸ The poem is titled 'To my deserving friend James Shirley upon his comedy *The Wedding*' and the tone is far from the usual pomp reserved for dedicatory poems; on the contrary, it may be denotative of a close friendship, for the playwright is addressed as 'friend' in the body of the poem as well, and May's comments appear to allude to the fear, evidently expressed by Shirley to his friend, that the comedy would not perform well (on which, May reassures, 'Thy comedy is good: 'twill pass alone / And fair enough').⁵⁹ The friendship between the two playwrights lasted for decades, likely until May's death, and apparently even withstood Shirley's commitment as a royalist during the Civil War, for May penned another dedication for his friend in 1646, upon the publication of a collection of Shirley's poems.⁶⁰

While not at all implausible, May's friendship with John Ford cannot be irrefutably corroborated by the existence of a poem, dated 1629, which Chester references in his monograph.⁶¹ The poem in question was allegedly written in response to a charge of plagiarism

⁵⁸ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #2184; other dedications to the play were by Edmond Coles, Robert Harvey, William Habington, and John Ford.

⁵⁹ Shirley, *The Wedding*, A4v.

⁶⁰ For Shirley's support of the royalist cause, see Clark, 394-395; May's dedication is in Shirley, *The Wedding*, A5r. The dedication appears to give evidence to the fact that, in spite of his career as a dramatist, May was in agreement with the Puritans on the closure of the theatres: 'Although thou want the theatres' applause, / Which now is fitly silenced by the laws / Since these sad times that civil swords did rage / And make three Kingdoms the lamented stage / Of real tragedies'; modernisation mine.

⁶¹ Chester, 36.

by Jonson against Ford, accused of having lifted the plot of *The Lover's Melancholy* from Shakespeare; the lyric is short and effective enough to deserve being quoted in full, as reproduced in the Boswell-Malone *Shakespeare*, which was apparently the first Shakespearean edition to print it:

To my worthy friend John Ford
'Tis said from Shakespeare's mine your play you drew:
What need, when Shakespeare still survives in you?
But grant it were from his vast treasury rest,
That plunderer Ben ne'er made so rich a theft.⁶²

Not only would this quip confirm the existence of a mutual friendship between May and Ford, but the closing line would also contribute to disproving May's alleged unwavering veneration of Jonson; unfortunately, its authenticity has been called into question. Even though Chester reports May's comment as if it were authentic and does not mention the controversy surrounding the very existence of the pamphlet, other scholars have plausibly claimed it to be a forgery. The poem first appeared in 1748, when the Shakespearean actor Charles Macklin published a letter in which he purported the existence of a pamphlet entitled 'Old Ben's *Light Heart made Heavy by Young John's Melancholy Lover*' which, as the title suggests, detailed the alleged controversy surrounding Ford's play and Jonson's resulting envy and accusations. The poem, reprinted by several sources, including Edmond Malone, was debunked by Malone himself as a hoax, probably devised by Macklin to promote his revival of a play by Ford.⁶³ Whether May would have openly risen in defence of Ford against Jonson in such a fashion or not, it is still likely that the two knew each other well, as they belonged to the same intellectual circles; for one, they had a mutual friend in another dramatist of the age – Philip Massinger.

⁶² Boswell-Malone, 1, 405; modernisation mine.

⁶³ Barish, 3-4.

Indeed, most famously, by 1626 May was closely acquainted with Massinger. Proof of a later friendship can be found in the 1629 edition of Massinger's own *The Roman Actor*, first performed in 1626, which contains a commendatory poem by May addressed 'To his deserving friend Mr Philip Massinger, upon his tragedy *The Roman Actor*.'⁶⁴ There May highly praises Massinger's talent in conjuring the actor Paris' spirit on 'our Roman stage' and favourably compares Massinger's work to Martial's in lyrics that are, as was coming to be customary for May, rife with classical allusions. But while it could be argued that this poem only proves that May was acquainted with Massinger in 1629, thus at least a couple of years after May's breakthrough, textual evidence found in May's *Pharsalia* rather suggests that the two were on friendly terms at least as early as 1626 and that May might have had access to the manuscript of Fletcher and Massinger's *The False One* before publishing his translation of Lucan. Indeed, a number of verbal choices in May's Lucan display such a close relationship with Fletcher and Massinger's play that it would be difficult to imagine that May might have reworked them from memory of a performance, rather than from direct contact with the text. Although fainter echoes of *The False One* could probably be located throughout the entirety of May's *Pharsalia*, the following selected quotations bear the most striking resemblance:⁶⁵

	'tis madness,	O blind ambitious madness to declare
Nay, more, a secure impotence to tempt		Your wealth to him that makes a civil war,
An armed guest. ⁶⁶		And tempt an armed guest. ⁶⁷
<i>Caesar.</i>	Oh, the gods! Be braved thus?	Nor now can Caesar a superior brook,
And be compelled to bear this from a slave		Nor Pompey brook a peer; ⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Massinger, *The Roman Actor*, A3v. Other dedicatory poems are by Sir Thomas Jay, Thomas Goffe, John Ford, Robert Harvey, and Joseph Taylor; see Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #2190.

⁶⁵ I am grateful to Domenico Lovascio for finding these (and more) and pointing them out to me.

⁶⁶ Fletcher and Massinger, *The False One*, Rr2v.

⁶⁷ *Pharsalia*, 1627, S8v.

⁶⁹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, A3r.

That would not brook great Pompey his superior?⁶⁸

Caesar. I am ashamed I warred at home, my friends,
When such wealth may be got abroad! What honour,
Nay, everlasting glory had Rome purchased,
Had she a just cause but to visit Egypt?⁷⁰

There Caesar's taught
The riches of the spoiled world to take,
And is ashamed that he a war did make
With his poor son-in-law, desiring now
Some quarrel would 'twixt him and Egypt grow.⁷²

and let their swords determine
Who hath the better cause.⁷¹

this the day that tries
(Witnessed by fate) whose cause the juster is.⁷³

In some of these cases, words seem to be lifted almost verbatim from *The False One* – the first example being particularly egregious – and in one case constitute the only instance where that word is used in the whole translation ('superior'). By contrast, none of these words or phrases is adopted by Gorges, suggesting that these were not necessarily common translation choices but were rather inspired by Fletcher and Massinger.⁷⁴ Although an exhaustive comparison between *The False One* and May's Lucan would be deserving of its own dedicated analysis, a few examples should constitute sufficient evidence that May was not only familiar with the play before its publication, but he was likely able to consult *The False One*'s manuscript extensively while translating Lucan in 1626 and exploit it as a verbal source. Indeed, although most of the

⁶⁸ Fletcher and Massinger, *The False One*, Ss2r.

⁷⁰ Fletcher and Massinger, *The False One*, Rr4r.

⁷¹ Fletcher and Massinger, *The False One*, Qq1r.

⁷² *Pharsalia*, 1627, T1r.

⁷³ *Pharsalia*, 1627, M6r.

⁷⁴ Gorges translates these passages, respectively: 'O blind and mazed ambitious rage / That sets thy treasures on a stage / To him, that civil war did wage; / So to provoke with riches charms / A guest, so powerful great in arms!' (Gorges, *Pharsalia*, Oo6v); 'For Pompey will no equal have, / Nor supreme Lord must Caesar brave' (Gorges, *Pharsalia*, C1v); 'Here Caesar learns to take the spoils / Of all the whole world's richest soils, / And now the wars he doth detest / That his poor son-in-law oppressed, / Wishing withal that some debate / Might turn his Mars on Egypt's state' (Gorges, *Pharsalia*, Pp1r); 'This day shall witness whether part, / By Fates' just doom, had best pretence / To take up arms for rights' defence' (Gorges, *Pharsalia*, Bb1v). The only similarity between the two versions is the use of the adjective 'poor' attached to 'son-in-law', although Lucan does indeed use 'paupere', so May's choice might have simply been a literal translation from the original text.

verbal borrowings apply to Book 10, the use of the verb ‘brook’ in that context occurs in Book 1, which had already been published in 1626.⁷⁵

Further evidence of the lifelong bond between May and Massinger is provided by one of Massinger’s bequests upon his death in 1640: as evidenced by Robert Weir, in 1641 May inherited a copy of Thomas Farnaby’s 1618 edition of Lucan’s *Pharsalia* that had first belonged to Jonson and then to Massinger. The title page of the book, which, according to Weir, could have been bought by Massinger from Jonson to ease his financial situation after the fire of 1623, bears a handwritten inscription that reads, ‘Sum liber Th May Ex libris Massingeris Ex dono relictis Farna[bii] 1641.’⁷⁶ The reason behind the specific bequest of an edition of Lucan to May is self-evident, but the mention of May in Massinger’s will no doubt indicates a close bond that lasted beyond May’s supposed detachment from intellectual circles after 1637, the year Jonson died and May failed to be nominated poet laureate of the court.

Of particular interest in the context of the 1627 Lucan is another link between May and Massinger, which is particularly relevant due to its political nature: the two poets appeared to share a strong dislike for James’s foreign policies of the late 1610s and early 1620s, as well as a particular disdain for the royal favourite, the Duke of Buckingham. In Massinger’s case, these outlooks emerge in his personal history, as well as in a number of works that predate May’s translation; in May’s case, they can be traced in the poet’s personal engagement in the Netherlands in 1621, in the 1627 Lucan, and, many years later, in the 1647 *History of the Parliament*.

Massinger’s political hostility towards the Duke of Buckingham is ‘beyond doubt’: the playwright was critical of royal favourites, pro-Spanish policies, and the failure to defend the

⁷⁵ *Pharsalia*, 1626, A4r.

⁷⁶ Weir, 5. I am grateful to Dr Robert Weir for his assistance and the additional material he kindly sent me, including scans of the book’s title page with aids to deciphering May’s signature, as well as a copy of the presentation he delivered at the annual CAC Conference in St John’s in 2017. The chronicle of the ownership of this copy of Farnaby after May yields even more interesting results, as will be discussed in later chapters concerning May’s parliamentary years.

Palatinate; in short, he was critical ‘of all that Buckingham stood for.’⁷⁷ Characters that could be read as satirical portraits of Buckingham appear in *The Duke of Milan* (1621) and *The Bondman* (1623); *Believe as You List* (1631) was originally censored for being anti-Spanish; and *The Maid of Honour* (1630) presents several allusions to the failure to intervene in a significant and impactful way in the Thirty Years’ War, in addition to discussions about divine right in which Massinger appears to side with the constitutionalists.⁷⁸

As for May, the most glaring example of political opposition to the Stuarts’ ‘pacifist’ policies and to Buckingham lies in the choice of prospective patrons to whom he dedicated his 1627 *Pharsalia*, for most of them had been military leaders in campaigns against Catholics and many were outspoken political opponents of the royal favourite. As already discussed, William Cavendish, to whom May dedicated the whole volume as well as the sixth book, had openly opposed Buckingham and the king’s policies, such as the Forced Loan; with one exception, the rest of May’s dedicatees shared similar experiences and political allegiances. As the *Pharsalia*, as well as the other works on which May was working on in this period, is profoundly political in nature, I deem it necessary to delve thoroughly into the political implications of each dedication, both individually and in relation to the greater framework of May’s translation. For this reason, this section contains detailed biographies of all dedicatees and, when relevant, the reason why May chose to dedicate one book or the other to each of them. This latter point in particular supports the notion that May took great care in curating the printed editions of his works, whereas the removal of the dedications is the starting point for theorising a radical change in his approach to patronage around the first half of 1627.

William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke (1580-1630), dedicatee of the second book, of strong Protestant and anti-Spanish tendencies, was one of the public figures most directly

⁷⁷ Thomson, 172.

⁷⁸ Thomson, 172; for the plays’ dates, see Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1994, #2074, #2338, and #2291, respectively.

involved in public displays of enmity towards Buckingham, for he was among the MPs who attempted to impeach the Duke in 1626.⁷⁹ Beginning on the 8th of May 1626, a group of eight members of Parliament, including Pembroke, read the charges against the Duke and asked for his removal from his offices.⁸⁰ Charles' reaction to the request was 'immediate and sharp', for he interpreted the attack against Buckingham as an attack against himself: he rushed to the defence of the Duke and ordered Sir Dudley Diggs and Sir John Eliot to be arrested, and later, on the 15th of June, when the House of Commons passed a declaration of grievances against Buckingham, dissolved Parliament.⁸¹ Possible evidence that May's appeal to the patronage of most of these men was unsuccessful is an anecdote dated 1634 and reported by multiple contemporary sources that reveals that Philip Herbert, younger brother and inheritor of the title of Earl of Pembroke upon William's death in 1630, had no idea who May was well into the 1630s. According to the story, in February of 1634 the Earl of Pembroke, 'not knowing who he was', broke his staff over May's head or back. May was rescued from embarrassment by the king himself, who referred to him as 'my poet', and Pembroke excused himself by sending money to May the following morning.⁸² The anecdote is supplied by G. Gerrard in a letter to the Earl of Strafford, by Francis Osborne while illustrating examples of Pembroke's irascibility, and is parodied – to both May's and Pembroke's expense – in at least one satirical pamphlet written upon Pembroke's death in 1650.⁸³ Unfortunately, this story appears to be the only trace

⁷⁹ Buckley and Paleit, 82n1.

⁸⁰ MacDonald, 169-170. The full list includes Sir Dudley Diggs, William Herbert, John Selden, John Glanville, John Pym, Christopher Sherland, Christopher Wandesford, Sir John Eliot; for a transcript of the proceedings, see John Rushworth, 'Historical Collections: The impeachment of Buckingham (1626)', in *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State: Volume 1, 1618-29* (London, 1721), pp. 302-358, *British History Online*, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/rushworth-papers/vol1/pp302-358> (last accessed 10 January 2024). As will be discussed in later chapters, May also had personal connections with John Selden.

⁸¹ MacDonald, 174-177. Massinger also appears to have pursued Pembroke as a potential patron and to have been close to him in general: in an undated letter to the Earl, then Lord Chamberlain, the dramatist sings his praises and implicitly requests his patronage; see Lawless, 41-42. Massinger's bids for patronage to the Herbert family eventually earned him the favour of William Herbert's brother Philip, Earl of Montgomery and later of Pembroke, who granted Massinger a yearly pension; see Tricomi, 344.

⁸² Berry, vi-vii.

⁸³ The first two are quoted in Berry, vi-vii; the latter instances will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

of May's collateral relationship with any of the 1627 *Pharsalia* prospective patrons or members of their family in the following years.

The dedicatee of the third book, Edmund, second Baron Sheffield and first Earl of Mulgrave (1565-1646), was a veteran of the wars against Spain, and embodied a 'spirit of militant Protestant nationalism'; May's poem emphasises his naval victories, particularly his contribution to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.⁸⁴

Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex (1591-1646), to whom May dedicates the fourth book and who was briefly discussed in the previous chapter, was 'a staunch Calvinist and defender of parliamentary privilege', as well as a military commander during the Thirty Years' War.⁸⁵ Having earned the dislike of James during the late 1610s for publicly expressing criticism of the crown, his spell as a commander for the Palatinate lasted from 1619 to 1624, and during four consecutive summers from 1621 – the summer May embarked overseas – he personally led appeals for volunteers, all of which were very successful.⁸⁶ After the disaster at Cadiz at the hands of Buckingham, where the blameless Essex commanded a regiment, he became an outspoken opponent of the Duke and, in 1626, he refused and vocally opposed what would be later known as Forced Loan.⁸⁷ In September 1626, Charles and Buckingham were anxious to arrange an expedition to relieve Protestants at La Rochelle, but the financial situation of the crown was dire. To resolve this, after fruitless attempts at raising money through voluntary gifts, Charles issued orders to collect loans from wealthy subjects from all counties; the order, henceforth known as Forced Loan, was decidedly unpopular, and it prompted many refusals to comply. These refusals resulted in the arrest of seventy-six men, including three dedicatees of

⁸⁴ Buckley and Paleit, 115n1. May misspells Edmund, Earl of Mulgrave's name as *Edward*, Earl of *Mowbray*, and this embarrassing misspelling has sometimes been indicated as a reason for excising the whole eight dedications from copies of the volume (see Buckley and Paleit, 25); this hypothesis is discussed further below.

⁸⁵ Buckley and Paleit, 147n1. The possibility that May might have been personally acquainted with Essex or have witnessed his actions on the battlefield is briefly acknowledged in the previous chapter.

⁸⁶ Morrill, 962.

⁸⁷ Morrill, 963.

May: Lincoln, Warwick, and Essex himself; Cavendish, dedicatee of the whole volume, was not arrested but was also among those who refused to pay.⁸⁸ Years later, during the Civil War, Essex immediately espoused the Parliament's cause and became a general for the parliamentary forces.⁸⁹ Essex's valour and distinction at Cadiz under the incompetent direction of Buckingham is explicitly singled out and praised by May by means of a parallel with Vulteius, a Caesarean commander who committed suicide alongside his men rather than surrender, stressing the identification of Buckingham with Caesar: 'to th'amaze of all posterity ... bold Vulteius dies, / Scorning to yield to Caesar's enemies / Or live a vanquished man, a thing unknown / In Caesar's troops.'⁹⁰

Robert Bertie, Earl of Lindsey and Lord Chamberlain since 1626 (1582-1642), to whom the fifth book is dedicated, bears the distinction of being the sole known supporter of Buckingham among the dedicatees.⁹¹ Whereas this choice might seem at odds with the general political intent of the book, the dedication could be, and probably should be, subject to a satirical reading: Book 5 recounts the mutiny suffered by Caesar and his failed attempt to sail to Italy, thwarted by the winter storms, which prompts parallels with Lindsey's own troubles with his mutinous troops in 1624 and his failed expedition in late 1626, stopped by heavy storms.⁹² Additionally, Lindsey is the only dedicatee whom May directly compares to Caesar, rather than Pompey or other heroes of republican Rome, which again emphasises May's personal dislike of Caesar's cause against Pompey.

The seventh book is dedicated to Horace Vere, Baron Vere of Tilbury (1565-1635), who was a celebrated military commander of marked Puritan sympathies. He had distinguished himself in wars against Catholic Spain and had been chosen to command the English forces

⁸⁸ Gregg, 162-163.

⁸⁹ Morrill, 965-967.

⁹⁰ *Pharsalia*, 1627, F2r.

⁹¹ Buckley and Paleit, 24.

⁹² Buckley and Paleit, 181n1.

during the Palatinate crisis ‘in the face of Buckingham’s preferred candidate.’⁹³ In the poem, May refers to Pompey’s side as ‘the better cause’ and closes the tribute to Vere’s military triumphs – particularly ‘the greatest battle that this age has seen’, namely the battle of Newport in 1600 – with a comparison between Dutch and Roman liberty.⁹⁴

Theophilus Clinton, 4th Earl of Lincoln (c. 1600-1667), dedicatee of the eighth book, was also a Puritan member of Parliament and a military commander of Protestant campaigns in the early 1620s, as well as a public opposer of the Forced Loan. As Buckley and Paleit note, May’s labelling of Lincoln as ‘most noble patriot’ and the mention of ‘good (though fallen) [men]’ are politically relevant: as a consequence of his resistance to the Forced Loan, Lincoln was arrested and confined to the Tower of London and released in March 1628, and was therefore still imprisoned when the 1627 edition of *Lucan* was published.⁹⁵ By giving Lincoln ‘pride of place’ as patron of the eighth book, in which Pompey is murdered, May was essentially making him ‘the custodian of Pompey’s spirit’, which, in the heated political context surrounding the imprisoned Lincoln, was an ‘extremely provocative’ gesture.⁹⁶

Prefacing the ninth book and closing the series of dedications is the poem to Robert Rich, 2nd Earl of Warwick (1587-1658), naval officer and member of Parliament. Enthusiastically Puritan and anti-Spanish, Warwick grew gradually estranged from court from 1626 onwards, when he opposed Buckingham openly and was imprisoned for his refusal to pay the Forced Loan. Later on, he came into conflict with Charles I repeatedly, until he espoused the parliamentary side and became a prominent naval commander during the Civil War.⁹⁷ Robert Rich was also a distant cousin of May through his mother’s relatives, and was an older brother of Charles Rich, who died in June 1627 during an expedition to the Isle of Rhé under

⁹³ Buckley and Paleit, 254n1.

⁹⁴ *Pharsalia*, 1627, M1r.

⁹⁵ Buckley and Paleit, 292n1.

⁹⁶ Norbrook, ‘*Lucan*, May, and Republican Literary Culture’, 59.

⁹⁷ Kelsey, 685-690.

Buckingham's command and to whom May wrote an eulogy, which will be discussed further below.⁹⁸

The political topicality and potential subversiveness of these dedications offer, I think, enough reasons to warrant their manual excision from all existing copies of the book and their complete omission from future editions. It could be argued that the translation as a whole was a political statement against the risks implicit in trusting too much power into the hands of a single man (like Buckingham), and that personal ambition could easily lead to the degeneration of any government. The emphasis on the negative effects of ambition is already apparent in the dedicatory epistle, in which May cautions against what he terms 'the greatness of private citizens', but it is then given great prominence in the translation proper.⁹⁹ As Paleit notes, while the concept was not entirely alien to Lucan's original text, May greatly stresses its importance and often favours it over more canonical English translations:

Where Lucan calls Caesar and Pompey 'blinded by excess lust', for example, he terms them 'ambition-blinded Lords', and where Lucan states that 'rivalrous virtue urges them on', he writes that 'powerfull aemulation bears / On their ambitious spirits.' Caesar was always 'seeking the utmost', Lucan says; for May this is simply 'ambition.' He also uses 'ambition' to characterize the rivals later in the conflict. When Pompey's advisors in Lucan's text accuse him of shilly-shallying because he is enjoying temporary 'monarchy of the world', in May's they tell him he is 'ambitious still of sovereignty'. Finally, where Lucan writes that at Pharsalia one side fights in hope of monarchy (*regnum*) and the other in fear of it, May translates 'one for ambition, th'other freedome fight', here identifying ambition, not monarchy, as liberty's real opponent.¹⁰⁰

This specific stress on ambition, particularly its identification as the real enemy of liberty rather than monarchy, had great relevance in the political context of 1626-27, as it was 'a major theme

⁹⁸ For sources of the familial relationship between May and the Rich family, see the previous chapter.

⁹⁹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, a3v.

¹⁰⁰ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 239.

of contemporary anti-Buckingham rhetoric', even making an appearance in Sir John Eliot's speech calling for the Duke's impeachment in 1626.¹⁰¹ In the dedication to Pembroke, who spoke alongside Eliot and publicly denounced Buckingham, he is praised for not being 'engaged by a private cause' and being 'free from ambition' and 'free from faction.'¹⁰² Other features of May's translation that could signal a denouncement of Buckingham are the repeated use of 'faction' and 'factious', the latter again featuring in Eliot's impeachment speech, and the translation of Lucan's 'crimes' as 'treason' when describing Caesar's invasion of Rome – whereas the concept of 'treason' had no exact legal correspondent in Rome, it carried a specific meaning in early modern England, and Buckingham had been indeed accused of treason by his would-be impeachers.¹⁰³

Finally, although May evidently suppressed these sentiments while actively seeking employment and financial support from Charles and other prominent courtiers, they nevertheless resurfaced many years later in his chronicle of the history of Parliament. In the *History*, May invariably expresses harsh judgements towards Buckingham, accusing him of having 'swayed' both James and Charles, and at one point even describes him as 'an unhappy vapour exhaled from the earth to so great a height, as to cloud not only the rising, but the setting sun.'¹⁰⁴

Interestingly, an association between anti-Buckingham sentiment and Lucan would be echoed a year after the publication of the complete *Pharsalia* in one of the many celebratory epitaphs composed to commemorate John Felton, Buckingham's assassin, after his execution and the public display of his corpse. The epitaph can be found on the final leaf of a manuscript containing various writings about Buckingham, and its closing words are a direct quotation from Lucan. The quotation hails from a passage in which Caesar denies burial to the many

¹⁰¹ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 239.

¹⁰² *Pharsalia*, 1627, B6r; see Buckley and Paleit, 82n1.

¹⁰³ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 240-241.

¹⁰⁴ *History of Parliament*, C3v.

corpses strewn on the battlefield, an action that is judged severely by the narrator, who states that the dead will rise to heaven anyway, and Caesar will not reach as high as them; in the aftermath of Felton's execution, this quotation invites a dangerous parallel between Caesar and Charles, implying that the king, too, may one day meet his Brutus.¹⁰⁵ Whether the reference to Lucan was inspired by the publication of May's translation and the political intent behind it is impossible to say, but it is enough to conjecture an association between Lucan and anti-establishment, potentially subversive sentiments.

At all events, the epistle to Cavendish introducing the whole of May's *Pharsalia* boasts the distinction of being the only dedication that was preserved in subsequent editions of the volume; the other poems were not reprinted again for almost four hundred years, until Buckley and Paleit's edition in 2020. As mentioned above, I do not find the hypothesis that the dedications were hastily removed due to a misprint of the Earl of Mulgrave as 'Mowbray' in the third book very plausible: although the mistake would have indeed caused embarrassment, it would have probably made more sense only to eliminate the 'guilty' dedication and to retain the rest, particularly as two other books, one and ten, also lacked prefatory dedications and would have therefore made the absence of one in the third book less conspicuous.¹⁰⁶ I think it is much more likely that these poems were removed due to their sensitive political associations, as suggested by the apparent haste and carelessness with which the pages were ripped from the books, and I agree with Buckley and Paleit that the reason must have been, at least in part, political. The two editors present a compelling argument that highlights how, around the time when May's translation was published, Buckingham was preparing an expedition to aid French

¹⁰⁵ Norbrook, 'May, Lucan, and Republican Literary Culture', 55.

¹⁰⁶ Hypothesis discussed in Buckley and Paleit, 25, and Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 48.

Protestants at La Rochelle, an occasion upon which May even wrote a commendatory poem, which will be discussed below.¹⁰⁷

However, it is also possible that the decision was motivated by reasons unrelated to a single specific political circumstance, and that, more generally, May had grown afraid that his controversial political position would cost him his livelihood as a poet. Indeed, the publication of Lucan's translation marked a decisive point in May's career: from 1627 onwards, possibly, as hypothesised, spurred by his observation of Thomas Hobbes, or by a broader desire to live off his published works, he appears to have started actively seeking patronage, and he also began to curate and select his publications. This change of publishing tactics, which will be delved into in more detail later, roughly coincided with the aftermath of the publication of Lucan's translation, which is why it helps answer, I think, the question of why May removed the prefaces from the existing copies of the volume.

Overall, May's version of Lucan is an undeniably political text, and an analysis of it cannot overlook this circumstance. Although, as Buckley and Paleit caution, it would be a mistake to ascribe all of May's translation practices to a single ideological principle, or to univocally try to force him into the mould of the 'republican', it is nevertheless true that his Lucan possesses 'an ideological edge and topical urgency' that sets it apart from other translations from the classics of the period and that prefigures the markedly partisan versions of classical works produced during the Civil War.¹⁰⁸

As concerns the sources of his work, May displayed a rather flexible approach that allowed him to produce a peculiar blend of classical and early modern influences. As his main source text, May mostly relied on Farnaby's Latin edition and commentary; his annotations at the end of each book are mostly translations of portions of Farnaby's commentary. Farnaby was

¹⁰⁷ Buckley and Paleit, 25.

¹⁰⁸ Buckley and Paleit, 26.

a friend of Jonson and a London intellectual whom May likely knew personally. Farnaby's text was modelled on Grotius' 1614 edition; May's adherence to Farnaby's readings, although largely dominant, is sometimes integrated with some of Grotius' conjectures, or with some of the variants mentioned by Farnaby in his commentary. Sometimes, May amends Lucan's mistakes concerning historical events and scientific details borrowing some of Farnaby's commentary.¹⁰⁹

This, as Buckley and Paleit remark, denotes 'a certain autonomy, within the constraints of the method.'¹¹⁰ It also reveals a tendency to enclose his works in a classical yet recognisably early modern framework of references and a penchant for giving his writings a 'contemporary', up-to-date edge, making him perhaps more akin to 'popular' playwrights than to the archetype of the rigorous, uncompromising classicist who he is sometimes said to have embodied. Likewise, unlike many classical scholars, May appears to forego the traditional reverence reserved to the classics, and to treat classical and contemporary sources with equal respect. This tendency to 'popularise' the classics might be found, I think, in many of his other works, and shall be a recurrent point throughout the rest of this thesis.

For one, in his translation May reuses and appropriates previous English engagements of the *Pharsalia*, a unique feature of his Lucan. Not only does he display the influence of Marlowe on the verbal choices of the first book, but he also appropriates from the different Lucanian voices found in Jonson's *Masque of Queens* (1609) and *Sejanus His Fall* (1603), in John Marston's *Sophonisba, or The Wonder of Women* (1605), the anonymous *Tragedy of Caesar and Pompey, or Caesar's Revenge* (c. 1595), and, as has been discussed, Fletcher and Massinger's *The False One* (c. 1620).¹¹¹ Most interestingly, May's translation shows signs of influence by contemporary writers such as Shakespeare, Spenser, and Sidney, other than

¹⁰⁹ Buckley and Paleit, 15.

¹¹⁰ Buckley and Paleit, 15.

¹¹¹ Buckley and Paleit, 15-16. Notably, as noted above, he almost entirely ignores Gorges' efforts.

Jonson's *Sejanus* and *Catiline His Conspiracy*, thereby demonstrating, again, not only a familiarity with contemporary 'popular' works that rivals his knowledge of the classics, but also a willingness to consider Shakespeare and Fletcher as worthy as Plutarch and Suetonius to be referenced in his works.

From a linguistic point of view, Buckley and Paleit argue, May's translation is still heavily Latinate in nature, with many Latin import words and some recognisable calques and neologisms, as well as the paradoxical and contrasting style and the sentence construction patently modelled on Lucan's syntax (sometimes with less than clear results).¹¹² However, I counter that this only applies to linguistic features of May's translation rather than to its general feel: May was not merely making Lucan readable by an English audience, but, by interweaving classical epic with vernacular theatre, he was attempting to create a fully 'Englished' version of the poet and a lively, contemporary text arranged specifically for the sensibility of the early modern English reader.

Qualitatively speaking, Roma Gill, in a comparison between the English versions of Marlowe, Gorges, and May, judges that of Marlowe undeniably superior to both others, but acknowledges that 'May's heroic couplet has more dignity' than Gorges's translation, even though May occasionally falls victim to a rather stilted 'translationese.'¹¹³ Indeed, as Cliff notes, Jonson's praise in the dedicatory epistle assesses the value of his friend's work quite appropriately: Jonson commends May for producing a flawless translation, in which 'not the smallest joint or gentlest word / In the great mass or machine there is stirred' – a fair judgement of May's verse, which, 'for better or worse, is always smooth and professional.'¹¹⁴

¹¹² Buckley and Paleit, 16-18.

¹¹³ Gill, 26.

¹¹⁴ Cliff, 26; Jonson's lines are from *Pharsalia*, 1627, a7r.

More generally, May displays a thorough understanding of the style of Lucan, which allows him to produce a translation that is both thematically and stylistically faithful. Referring to his *Continuation*, published for the first time in 1630, Paleit labels it ‘perhaps the most faithful replication of Lucan’s voice ever achieved in the English language’; unsurprisingly, signs of May’s capacity to assimilate and reproduce stylistic features of the *Pharsalia* were already apparent in the 1627 translation.¹¹⁵ Aware of the characteristics of Lucan’s writing, May is able not only to replicate them when required by the Latin original, but occasionally to supplement them autonomously without adding unnecessary prolixity to the translation or a personal voice to the text: Lucan’s ‘sustained interest in paradox and contrast’ is sometimes recreated through the use of reduplication and repetition, and his penchant for moral *sententiae* is evoked through the occasional addition of a moralising aphorism, absent in the Latin text.¹¹⁶ Therefore, although Marlowe’s English Lucan undoubtedly bests May’s in terms of sheer lyrical taste, it also carries the ‘coldly powerful, near-contemptuous onward thrust’ of its translator and sometimes ends up obscuring Lucan’s voice, which is otherwise more faithfully reproduced in May’s version.¹¹⁷

As early modern accounts can attest, the translation was very successful, and May’s renown while he was alive was chiefly tied to it. As early as 1631, in the volume *Ancient Funeral Monuments* by the antiquarian John Weever, May’s translation is used for quotations from Lucan and referred to as ‘[that] exquisite translation.’¹¹⁸ In early modern lyrics or accounts that reference May, his name is invariably put together with that of Lucan. In the two contemporary accounts relating the anecdote of Pembroke’s losing his temper and breaking his

¹¹⁵ Paleit, *Lucan*, 10.

¹¹⁶ Buckley and Paleit, 18.

¹¹⁷ Buckley and Paleit, 18-19.

¹¹⁸ Weever, *Funeral Monuments*, A2v. May’s translation is again praised with a similar phrase, ‘exquisitely translated.’ Weever also quotes from the *Continuation*, and May is described as ‘my worthy friend, the continuer of Lucan’s historical poem’; see Weever, *Funeral Monuments*, C6v.

staff on May's head in 1634, May is identified as 'Mr May ... he who translated Lucan' and 'Mr May that translated Lucan', respectively.¹¹⁹ In the poem 'The Session of the Poets' by John Suckling, published posthumously in 1646 (Suckling died in 1641), a group of contemporary poets is presented, and May is not mentioned by name, but rather called 'Lucan's translator.'¹²⁰ On the gravestone originally placed in Westminster Hall, Marchamont Needham commemorates May as 'Lucanus alter', another Lucan, and even the critical epitaph made in response to Needham's verses during the Restoration qualifies him as 'Lucani interpretem', i.e., the translator of Lucan.¹²¹

This early modern success is mirrored by the modern scholarly interest that, particularly in recent years, has been bestowed upon May and his English translation of the *Pharsalia*. From the seminal contributions by Norbrook and the more recent ones by Paleit focusing on the reception of Lucan and the so-called 'republican culture' of Early Stuart England, to Buckley and Paleit's recent edition of the volume, to various works devoted to political and literary analysis of the translation, May's Lucan is the work that has attracted the most sustained critical attention by far. The 'second place' on this scale of scholarly attention is occupied by a dramatic work that May composed while translating Lucan: *The Tragedy of Cleopatra*.

2.2 *The Tragedy of Cleopatra*

This section deals with May's earliest extant tragedy, *Cleopatra*. An editorial and manuscript history of the play is followed by discussions on the alleged performance and dating of the play. Then a plot summary is provided for the reader's convenience, and a verbal, stylistic, and political analysis of the play closes the section.

¹¹⁹ Both quoted in Berry, vi-vii.

¹²⁰ Suckling, A4r.

¹²¹ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume II, 811.

At around the same time as he was translating Lucan, May composed *The Tragedy of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt*. Its first and only entry in the Stationers' Register is dated 26 October 1638, when it was recorded alongside *Agrippina*: 'Entered for his copies under the hands of Master Clay and Master Mead warden two plays called *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* and *Julia Agrippina Empress of Rome*.'¹²²

The tragedy was printed shortly after, in 1639, by Thomas Harper for Thomas Walkley with the full title *The Tragedy of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt*, credited to 'T. M.' on the title page, and, according to the subtitle, 'Acted 1626.' On the title page there is also a Latin quotation from the tenth book of Lucan's *Pharsalia*: '— quantum impulit Argos, / Iliacasque domos facie Spartana nocenti, / Hesperios auxit tantum Cleopatra furores.'¹²³ The play was published a second time by Humphrey Moseley in 1654 in a joint edition with *Agrippina*, but, as Denzell S. Smith argues, the book is not a new edition but merely a reissue of the 1639 one; in his commentary on the tragedy, Heinrich Wolf lists some of the differences between the editions and points out that the vast majority is ascribable to different spelling conventions.¹²⁴ Wolf also claims that the first edition of the play features a short epilogue, which he transcribes; however, not only is this information not corroborated by any evidence, but the epilogue in question was lifted from Lodowick Carlell's *Arviragus and Philicia*, thus making Wolf's claim invalid.¹²⁵

Cleopatra also bears the distinction of being the only dramatic endeavour by May to have survived in manuscript. The manuscript copy, Royal MS 18 C VII, held by the British Library, belongs to a series of manuscripts of royal ownership including May's own *The Reign of King*

¹²² Stationers' Register Online, SRO9992; modernisation mine.

¹²³ In his complete edition of the translation, May renders it 'As much as Helena's bewitching face / Fatal to Troy and her own Greeks did prove, / As much Rome's broils did Cleopatra move'; see *Pharsalia*, 1627, S7r.

¹²⁴ Smith, *Cleopatra*, v-vi; Wolf, 2.

¹²⁵ See Wolf, 2; the epilogue does not match the tone or the circumstances of the tragedy at all, for it mentions the play's ending with 'shows of marriage', which *Cleopatra* most certainly does not. I believe confusion on Wolf's part may have arisen due to Carlell's play also having been printed in 1639 and bearing the same imprimatur ('28 October 1638, Matthew Clay').

Henry the Second (Royal MS 18 C XII); according to Wiggins, the MS ‘was presented to a member of the royal family and was probably kept in King Charles I’s private library at Whitehall Palace.’¹²⁶ This suggests that the manuscript copy, probably handwritten by May himself (more below), was produced at least one year after the original performance of 1626, for any contact between May and the royal family before 1627 is highly unlikely. Although it is not possible to establish a more precise date with certainty, the presence of *The Reign of Henry the Second* (1633) alongside *Cleopatra* in the same collection of manuscripts may indicate that they were produced around the same time. Indeed, in his critical edition, Vittorio Gabrieli notes that, in the dedicatory epistle to Kenelm Digby, the latter is implied to be familiar with the play; ruling out the unlikely possibility that Digby witnessed the 1626 performance (for the fact would have been most certainly directly mentioned by May) or that the playwright could reference such an old and obscure performance in its preface, it must be concluded that Digby was acquainted with the play through other means, most likely a manuscript circulating in the 1630s.¹²⁷ Moreover, Gabrieli claims that echoes of May’s *Cleopatra* can be traced in letters written by Digby in the year following his wife’s death in 1633; therefore, unless Digby had access to a different handwritten copy, the manuscript must have been created between 1626 and 1633.¹²⁸ As for the hand that transcribed the play, Götz Schmitz has no doubt that it is May’s own. In his edition of *The Reign of King Henry the Second*, Schmitz compares the handwriting of the *Cleopatra* MS with that of an inscription by May to the Dutch humanist Daniel Heinsius on a presentation copy of May’s newly published *Supplementum Lucani* (1640). Unfortunately, the inscription was sold by Sotheby’s in 1990 to a private collector who refused to authorise the publication of the scanned inscription, so Schmitz was unable to reproduce it, but he claims that the hand is the same.¹²⁹ Like the printed version, the manuscript

¹²⁶ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #2188.

¹²⁷ Gabrieli, *Cleopatra*, XXXVI.

¹²⁸ Gabrieli, *Cleopatra*, XXXVII.

¹²⁹ Schmitz, xxxii-xxxiv.

carries the performance date and the quotation from Lucan, but it presents a series of revisions. Revisions are of two kinds, non-substantive (corrections of smeared ink, spelling, and false start) and substantive, the latter being particularly interesting insofar as they reveal May's 'careful attention to phrasing' and to metre, with four revisions correcting the previously irregular blank verse (there are otherwise only three instances of irregular blank verse in the whole play).¹³⁰ The other substantive revisions alter the sense of the sentence; four of them are more significant and support the hypothesis that the author himself copied the manuscript.¹³¹

No information survives concerning the stage history — if any — of the play beyond 1626. Bentley theorises a public performance on the basis that, had the play been presented at a more 'learned' stage such as the court, a college, or the Inns of Court, May would have mentioned the performance in his dedicatory epistle to Sir Kenelm Digby.¹³² While I do not necessarily disagree with the conclusion, I do not share Bentley's reasoning: it is possible that, with thirteen years separating composition and publication of the play, May simply chose to omit details concerning its by then long-forgotten performance, particularly if the tragedy had not been successful on the stage. The possibility that the play did not do well in theatres is formulated by Chester, who defends *Cleopatra* as a valid play, both lyrically and dramatically, but claims that, by 1626, Roman plays had for the most part been slowly going out of fashion and therefore the fate of the tragedy might have been influenced by 'the temper of the time.'¹³³

The 1626 date alleged on the printed edition mostly matches the use of Lucan that May makes in the tragedy: the books he references most extensively are the ninth and tenth, and

¹³⁰ Smith, *Cleopatra*, xx-xxiv.

¹³¹ For an extended analysis of all revisions, see Smith, *Cleopatra*, xix-xxxiii.

¹³² Bentley, *JCS*, 4, 835.

¹³³ Chester, 108. Chester's claim is however dubious, given the success of *The Roman Actor* in the same year.

none of the Lucanian passages in *Cleopatra* resembles the English translation of Lucan's 1627 edition. Here are a couple of examples:

And could we think that our Antonius, A man not master of that temperance That Caesar had, could find a strength to guard His soul against that beauty now set off With so much wealth and majesty? ¹³⁴	Who would not pardon Antonius' mad love, When Caesar's flinty breast desire could move In midst of war, when heat of fight raged most, And in a court haunted by Pompey's ghost? ¹³⁵
--	--

These two, Agrippa, in their infancy Their doubting sires to try their lawful births (As eagles try their eaglets 'gainst the sun) Exposed to mortal serpents, and were so Confirmed in what they sought, the trembling snakes Durst not assault the infants. ¹³⁶	Of their own broods such certain proofs have all, That when to ground a newborn child doth fall, Fearing strange Venus hath their beds defiled, By deadly asps they try the doubted child. As the eagle when her eaglets are disclosed, Lays them against the rising sun exposed[.] ¹³⁷
---	---

While Lucan's influence is evident, it is also clear that *Cleopatra* does not borrow from any of the passages translated. The only, admittedly small, instance in which there is a clear similarity between the two works is drawn from Book 7 of the *Pharsalia*:

this the day that tries (Witnessed by fate) whose cause the juster is. ¹³⁸	Whose cause is justest let the Gods determine. ¹³⁹
--	---

Although this passage, which has already been discussed above, might as well have been lifted from *The False One*, it is also likely that May was working on both *Cleopatra* and the *Pharsalia*

¹³⁴ *Cleopatra*, B1v.

¹³⁵ *Pharsalia*, 1627, S7v; this is from Book 10.

¹³⁶ *Cleopatra*, E1r.

¹³⁷ *Pharsalia*, 1627, S1v; this is from Book 9.

¹³⁸ *Pharsalia*, 1627, M6r.

¹³⁹ *Cleopatra*, B10v.

simultaneously, and that by that time he had completed or was completing Book 7 but had not yet started working on the translation of Books 9 and 10.

The play, together with *Agrippina*, was dedicated by May to Sir Kenelm Digby. It is not known precisely when the two men first met, but their relationship had grown relatively close by May 1633, when Digby's wife Venetia died and May composed a short eulogy to commemorate her, which means that by 1639 the two had known each other for quite a few years.¹⁴⁰ Even though their relationship will be discussed in depth in subsequent chapters, the dedication merits a brief comment. In partial opposition to the ones penned for the various dedicatees of the *Pharsalia*, here May dedicates the play to Digby only on account of his fondness for literature rather than his politics too (which were, as shall be seen, decidedly royalist). The years elapsed between the composition and publication of these plays (thirteen years in *Cleopatra*'s case, eleven in *Agrippina*'s), as well as a possible consequent professional detachment from them, affect the tone of the dedication: May does not provide his usual comments on the subject choice or process of composition, but instead exclusively focuses on their publication. According to May, Digby 'cast an eye of favour upon these poor plays', which prompted May to publish them under Digby's name.¹⁴¹ No specific comment is offered on the nature of the tragedies, except the customary expression of hope that, in spite of their 'defects', they will be accepted and May forgiven by the patron. No documents besides proof of a relationship between May and Digby attest whether the former was successful in his appeal for the latter's patronage. Even if he was, however, the financial support must have been short-lived: upon the breakout of the Civil War, Digby was arrested by Parliament in 1642 and released the following year, when he retired to France and there remained until the Restoration,

¹⁴⁰ The eulogy is extant in manuscript and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

¹⁴¹ *Cleopatra*, A2r.

maintaining steady support for the king and queen until his return to England.¹⁴² I do not believe that May had any particular reason for dedicating these two specific tragedies to Digby other than the claim, which can be assumed to be true, that the wealthy Digby had read them privately and expressed his liking of them. May then evidently saw an opportunity to ‘recycle’ his old plays in order to finance himself in a period in which, to our knowledge, he had not been particularly prolific, certain that any dangerous political allusions buried in the plays must by then have been forgotten or, at least, forgiven.¹⁴³

Cleopatra takes place in Egypt and stages events that occurred between 34 and 30 BC. Although the tragedy dramatizes well-known historical events, a plot summary is provided here due to its being, as most of May’s works, relatively obscure.

The play opens with a dialogue between minor Roman characters discussing the influence that Cleopatra has over Antony (called Antonius throughout the play) and the possibility of civil war; in the following scene, Antony crowns Cleopatra queen of the three eastern provinces of Rome. The second act opens with news that Octavian (who is referred to as Caesar throughout the play) has divested the consuls of their power and seized it for himself, and that the Senate has waged war against Cleopatra; upon hearing this news, Titius and Plancus plan to switch sides and turn against Antonius.

Antony wakes from his romantic reverie and starts preparing for war. Cleopatra convinces Canidius to persuade Antony to bring her with him on the war he is about to start; she then manipulates Antony himself, and he relents. The priest Acoreus reveals that he has received multiple presages from the gods, including a comet, and there is news of prodigious portents in Rome too.

¹⁴² Foster, ‘Digby’, 157.

¹⁴³ His last known efforts before 1639 both dated back to 1635 (the third revised edition of the *Pharsalia* and *The Victorious Reign of King Edward the Third*).

At the beginning of the third act, the messenger Gallus reports on the battle that has recently been fought: Antony has abandoned his fleet and his army to follow the fleeing Cleopatra, and his soldiers have all yielded to Octavian, who has entered Egypt victorious. Octavian receives a messenger who reports that Antony has retired to the isle of Pharos and now lives as Timon of Athens, and that Cleopatra has sent a letter in which she offers herself and her fortunes in exchange for Octavian letting her keep the Egyptian throne. Octavian is tempted by the offer, but also wants to bring Cleopatra to Rome as a prisoner to boast of his triumph, so he plans a trick. As he does not want her to commit suicide until he has brought her on his triumph, he commands Thyreus to tell Cleopatra that he is in love with her and wants her to betray Antony for him. A scene with the melancholic Antony disguised as Timon of Athens concludes the act.

In the fourth act, Cleopatra consults Glaucus for information about quick poisons, then tries an asp's venom on a prisoner condemned to death, who dies immediately and painlessly. She hopes Octavian will fall victim to her charms, and a messenger confirms her hopes, claiming that Octavian has indeed fallen in love with her. Antony and his companions, suspecting a plot, imprison Thyreus; Cleopatra accuses Antony of being jealous and threatens suicide, so Antony relents and releases Thyreus, ordering him back to Caesar. Cleopatra retires to her tomb.

The final act opens with the defeated Antony receiving false news of Cleopatra's death, to which he expresses the wish to commit suicide; his servant Eros refuses to aid him in the act and instead kills himself. Antony delivers his last monologue and then stabs himself; Mardio enters and announces, too late, that Cleopatra is in fact still alive and wishes to meet Antony in her tomb, upon which he asks to be transported there to die in her company. Meanwhile, Octavian receives news of Antony's death, who did manage to die in his lover's arms, and displays sadness and shock, before departing to see Cleopatra in her tomb. Upon meeting him,

Cleopatra realises that Octavian's love is deceitful; with an excuse, she sends Epaphroditus away, so she is free to commit suicide. Octavian understands that Epaphroditus is a trick sent by Cleopatra to deceive him, so he and his men run and try to stop her, but they arrive too late: Cleopatra, after learning of Antony's death, has already killed herself with an asp. A monologue by Octavian in which he honours both Antony and Cleopatra and sets sail back to Rome to reestablish the peace closes the play.

For his *Cleopatra*, May employs a selection of both classical and early modern sources; use of classical works is mostly disclosed in marginal notes by the author himself. The narrative is largely based on books 49-51 of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, cited by May in marginal notes a total of 49 times, and Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, explicitly mentioned 39 times but used more often. Other classical sources include Suetonius' life of Augustus, Florus, Strabo, Callimachus, Appian of Alexandria, Plinius the Younger, Solinus, and, of course, Lucan. Although May certainly knew and could read Greek, his translation is obviously based on Thomas North's translation of Plutarch rather than the original, just as he adopts the Latin translations of other historiographers who originally wrote in Greek such as Cassius Dio.

May's use of the classics in this play is eclectic. Sometimes the content of the classical sources is paraphrased very closely, almost pedantically, while on other occasions May reworks it and mixes it up with other sources or arranges it in a different order than it is presented in the original work.¹⁴⁴ May is especially indebted to Dio and Plutarch for their portrayal of Cleopatra as a 'wanton, lewd woman with great physical beauty, shrewd intelligence and cunning.'¹⁴⁵ I disagree with Berry's interpretation of the character as a more honourable and sympathetic figure than the one described by Plutarch, and tend to agree with Gabrieli that May's Cleopatra, rather than a besotted woman ennobled by her love for Antony, is a character dominated by

¹⁴⁴ Gabrieli, XXXIX-XL.

¹⁴⁵ Berry, xxxi.

political ambition, and that Antony, here a weak character, appears to seek to redeem himself only when on the verge of catastrophe.¹⁴⁶ Romantic subplots are not entirely absent from the play, and it is true that very rarely May deviates from historical accuracy to add or tweak short scenes and give more depth to his characters (an example being Antony worrying about the future of his associates, Lucilius and Aristocrates, a scene totally absent from historical sources), but, overall, *Cleopatra* reads more like the rise and fall of a queen than a love story. Even in the final scene, which Berry curiously reads as favourably romanticising the character of Cleopatra, her last thought is for Augustus, not Antony, and her dying speech ends on a last note of pride: ‘Maugre the power of Rome and Caesar’s spleen, / That Cleopatra lived and died a queen.’¹⁴⁷

As concerns the early modern sources, there are several. Chiefly, due to the play’s theme, it would have been impossible for a seventeenth-century playwright not to engage with Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, and May does so in multiple ways. Aside from verbal echoes, May, like Shakespeare, sets the play shortly after the meeting between Antony and Cleopatra, and the very first scene appears to echo its counterpart in Shakespeare’s play, in which Philo and Demetrius discuss Antony’s potentially dangerous infatuation with the queen.¹⁴⁸ Another playwright who influenced May’s tragedy was Samuel Daniel and his 1594 *The Tragedy of Cleopatra*, which shows that May, as was the case with Lucan, studied and familiarised himself with previous engagements with Cleopatra before attempting his own.¹⁴⁹

Aside from clearly ‘Cleopatran’ influences, while doubtlessly influenced by Jonson for his approach to the classics in general, as discussed in the previous section, May nevertheless

¹⁴⁶ Berry, xxxi; Gabrieli, XLIV.

¹⁴⁷ Berry, xl; *Cleopatra*, E2v.

¹⁴⁸ Gabrieli, XLIII.

¹⁴⁹ For a thorough analysis of May’s debts to Shakespeare and Daniel see Berry, xliii-lxii. For Daniel’s *Cleopatra*, which was published numerous times between 1594 and 1623, Berry bases his observations on the 1885 edition of the play by Alexander B. Grosart, which is based on the 1623 quarto but collates all editions and includes all readings; see Grosart, 19.

appears more directly indebted to the anonymous author of *The Tragedy of Nero*, printed in 1624 but probably acted around 1619.¹⁵⁰ Although both of them occasionally embellish, romanticise, or opportunely emphasise historical events for the sake of the stage, neither of them often, if ever, invents and dramatizes episodes absent from the sources; compared to the most recent of the two Roman plays of Jonson, *Catiline*, neither avails itself of any supernatural character's narrating the opening prologue (Sylla's ghost, in Jonson's case) or a classical chorus closing each act.

May also makes several references to Fletcher and Massinger's *The False One*, most notably in the scene in which Antony's death is announced to Augustus. Augustus' reaction echoes that of *The False One*'s Caesar when presented with the head of Pompey; in both cases, other characters on the scene doubt the sincerity of their general's grief, with May's Lucilius commenting in an aside 'Most royal Caesar-like dissimulation.'¹⁵¹ Again, May exhibits a tendency to treat contemporary sources as equally deserving as their classical counterpart, a trait which he appears to share with Fletcher himself. The latter, by reading and utilising classical and contemporary sources 'side by side', was capable of 'blending together the past and the present, Rome and home, history and romance, England and the Continent' to create a hybrid version of Rome that is distant from the ancient Rome solemnly revered by classical scholars.¹⁵² To a lesser extent, and minus the French and Spanish texts that Fletcher used, May demonstrates a similar inclination, which, in his case, rather than pan-European, results in an Englished version of Rome.

Attempts to offer qualitative judgements of the play have often debated its 'theatricality.' Chester concludes that, thanks to May's occasional departure from academic rigidity, his

¹⁵⁰ As will be discussed in the following chapter, the anonymous *Nero* has sometimes been improbably attributed to May on account of the latter's *Agrippina*. For speculation on the play's date, see Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1917.

¹⁵¹ *Cleopatra*, D8v.

¹⁵² Lovascio, *Fletcher's Rome*, 49, 52.

Roman plays (he includes *Agrippina* in his analysis) are, in some respects, more entertaining than their Jonsonian counterparts, and he judges *Cleopatra* the better of the two. Although the almost total absence of comic scenes probably condemned *Cleopatra* to a lack of popular success, May nevertheless imbues his story with a ‘dramatic’ quality, and the vast majority of the action, with the exception of the otherwise too-expensive-to-stage battle of Actium, takes place on the stage.¹⁵³ Gabrieli points out May’s inability to create strongly individualised characters guided by personal motives, which affects the play’s overall lack of dramatic drive.¹⁵⁴ Smith defends the play against the accusation of being the weakest dramatic adaptation of the Cleopatra story and summarises it as a ‘derivative and competent version’ with some innovative features, chiefly May’s portrayal of Cleopatra’s disloyalty to Antony.¹⁵⁵

These observations are insightful and fundamentally accurate. In the process of writing his *Cleopatra*, May ‘purged’ its characters of human frailties, which, while inevitably depriving the play of compelling passionnal conflicts (and possibly explaining the apparent lack of success on the stage), also turned the tragedy from a romance into a political play. The very title of the tragedy is symptomatic of the playwright’s choice: despite framing the play’s action within the limits of Antony and Cleopatra’s love story, the focus is on Cleopatra as the ‘queen of Egypt’, a political entity. It is, after all, not at all surprising that May chose this path: between 1626 and 1627 he was working on *Lucan*, itself a political text, and doing his best to ground it in contemporary political issues through his controversial dedications.

Echoes of May’s *Lucan* and allusions to the political situation of 1626 can indeed be found throughout the play. In general, the two Roman magistrates Titius and Plancus and, sometimes, the Roman Canidius often provide asides and comments on the political events unravelling in the play. For instance, a conversation between the three of them alludes to the

¹⁵³ Chester, 107.

¹⁵⁴ Gabrieli, XLV.

¹⁵⁵ Smith, *Cleopatra*, lxxiv.

charges formulated in the *Pharsalia* against Caesar of being dominated by ambition, rather than operating for the good of Rome: ‘if a war do grow twixt them [Antony and Octavian] (as surely / Ambition would ere long find out a cause / Although Octavia had not been neglected).’¹⁵⁶ A passage at the beginning of Act 2 reveals the political topicality of the play and, incidentally, helps it date more precisely after June 1626:

Antony. ’Tis not the place nor marble walls that make
A Senate lawful, or decrees of power,
But convocation of the men themselves,
The sacred order, by true magistrates.
... Fathers, know the face
Of your assembly, know your lawful power.
Consult, decree, and act whate’er may be
Happy and prosperous for the commonwealth.
Sossius. Whilst power of laws, whilst reverence of the Senate
And due respect t’a consul’s dignity
Could give protection to the consuls’ persons,
We did maintain thy cause, Antonius,
Against proud Caesar’s faction. Now, since laws
Are put to silence and the Senate forced,
The consuls’ sacred privilege infringed
By rage and lawless arms, we are expelled
And suffer banishment to be restored
And re-endenized by thy conquering sword.

References to a ‘Senate’ being shut down and deprived of its powers could not avoid being politically relevant: as mentioned above, on the 15th of June 1626 Charles, furious at the attempted impeachment of Buckingham, had dissolved Parliament and ordered the arrest of some of its members responsible for attacking the Duke.¹⁵⁷ The use of the phrase ‘proud

¹⁵⁶ *Cleopatra*, B3r.

¹⁵⁷ MacDonald, 174-177.

Caesar's *faction*' — which, as seen while discussing May's English rendering of Lucan, was used in the impeachment speech against Buckingham and by May himself in his translation — also immediately points to the political dimension of the scene. In a dialogue between Roman characters at the beginning of the play, Canidius remarks that they 'have already seen the breach of all / Rome's sacred laws' and that the consuls' power has been 'subjected by the lawless arms / Of private men', again possibly alluding to Parliament's being shut down by the king to protect the 'private man' Buckingham.¹⁵⁸ This dialogue at the very beginning sets the tone of the play and squarely frames it as political. Although, in the mind of the early modern playgoer, the name of Cleopatra probably created expectations of romantic tragedy, May exploits the historical material to stage the consequences of unbridled ambition and transforms the typically romantic subject into a political epic, in which even love can be used as currency.

Indeed, perhaps predictably, there is no evidence that the play achieved any success during the poet's lifetime. In spite of this, *Cleopatra* is the play by May that enjoyed the most critical attention in the twentieth century. Aside from the posthumous 1654 joint reprinting with *Agrippina*, the tragedy was the subject of a dissertation by Heinrich Wolf in 1914 and, most notably, was edited numerous times in the past century, three of which in the 1960s: by Mary Ransom Burke in 1943, Vittorio Gabrieli in 1961, Joe Wilkes Berry in 1964, and Denzell S. Smith in 1965 (published 1979).¹⁵⁹ Although this may testify more to the popularity of the character of Cleopatra as a dramatic subject and Shakespeare's play than May's own success,

¹⁵⁸ *Cleopatra*, B2v-B3r.

¹⁵⁹ See Thomas May, Mary Ransom Burke (ed.), *The Tragedy of Cleopatra, Queen of Aegypt by Thomas May: Edited, with an Introduction* (PhD thesis, Fordham University, 1943); Thomas May, Vittorio Gabrieli (ed.), *The Tragedie of Cleopatra Queene of Aegypt* (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1961); Thomas May, Joe Wilkes Berry (ed.), *A Critical Old-Spelling Edition of The Tragedy of Cleopatra, Queen of Aegypt by Thomas May* (PhD thesis, Rice University, 1964); Thomas May, Denzell S. Smith (ed.), *The Tragoedy of Cleopatra Queene of Aegypt by Thomas May: A Critical Edition* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979).

these editions are nevertheless indicative of the potential offered by the tragedy in the discourse on early modern dramatic practices and use of classical and contemporary sources.

2.3 Other poems written in 1627

As the translation of Lucan and *Cleopatra* can attest, 1626 and 1627 were very prolific years for May; however, I believe the significance of this specific period in May's life extends beyond the poet's published works. Based on the evidence found in both works, as well as in other unpublished poems of the same year, which will be discussed shortly, 1627 could be viewed as a watershed in terms of the trajectory of May's career and his approach to writing and patronage in general. These two phases of May's career, or rather, of his approach to patronage (initially based on political affinity, then on opportunity), are so clearly distinguished that it may even be possible to ascribe this 'readjustment' to a precise date, i.e., sometime between March 1627 – around the time when the translation of Lucan was published according to the entry in the Stationers' Register – and June of the same year – when May composed a poem celebrating Charles' fleet. Whether the choice was ultimately propelled by court politics, personal matters, or something else, is hard to ascertain; however, it is also evident that the publication of each of May's extant works printed after his translation of Lucan and until the poet's death was closely monitored by May himself, and that all those printed before his publicly declared allegiance to Parliament were dedicated to a member of the court or to the king.

Indeed, although, as evidenced by the dedications attached to his translation of Lucan, May had arguably already made conspicuous attempts at gaining the favour and financial support of powerful men, it was probably at this point that May realised that courtly patronage would have been a much safer route to pursue, and that it was best to sever potential connections tying him to more or less open enemies of the king and his court. This newfound attitude, as anticipated, may have been a contributing factor to the attempted removal of any evidence of

the eight potentially controversial dedications, and it certainly marked a sharp change in the kind of prospective patrons to whom May was to offer his works in the following years. This point is further proven by the composition, in June 1627, of a congratulatory poem in celebration of Charles and the English fleet, entitled 'Neptune to King Charles', which only exists in manuscript and is accordingly quoted in full:

Neptune to King Charles

Oft may returning Janus here
find thee great Charles, for every year
 he finds thee greater far.
Thy thankful Britons shall embrace
th'opinion of Pythagoras
 that numbers powerful are
And from the number of thy years increase
in honour, wealth, and well-established peace.

I feel thy greatness, nor alone
do lands adore thy awful¹⁶⁰ throne,
 but seas do honour thee.
Nor over my waves in time of old
did any Britain monarch hold
 so dear a sovereignty,
Or with less loss of blood or greater fear
was e'er acknowledged such a master here.

I saw third Edward stain my flood
by sluice with slaughtered Frenchmen's blood,
 and from Eliza's fleet
I saw the vanquished Spaniards fly,
but 'twas a greater mastery
 no foe at all to meet
When they without their ruin or dispute

¹⁶⁰ Here with the meaning of 'Arousing or inspiring reverential respect, mixed with wonder or fear; awe-inspiring'; see *OED*.

confess thy reign as sweet as absolute.¹⁶¹

Although nineteenth-century archivists catalogued the poem as having been written or publicly presented on 11 June, the day Charles visited Portsmouth to see the fleet, Wayne H. Phelps dates the poem to 27 June, the day the Duke of Buckingham departed from Portsmouth on an expedition to the Isle of Rhé to aid the besieged French Huguenots. Phelps bases his hypothesis on a more substantial clue than the nineteenth-century cataloguing, that is, the date ‘26-30 June 1627’ impressed on the collection of state papers to which this manuscript belongs.¹⁶² Although neither hypothesis is ultimately verifiable, both help support the theory that May was actively seeking royal patronage, and the Buckingham hypothesis in particular paints a wholly different picture than the one offered by the same man who, just a couple of months earlier, had penned dedications to no less than six known enemies of the royal favourite Buckingham himself. Yet, if, by all appearances, May hypocritically abandoned his patriotic fervour in favour of compliance to the king in the hope of financial gain, I think he nevertheless surreptitiously managed to infuse a bit of Lucanian spirit in his paean to Charles, much like Lucan himself did with Nero. In the proem to *Pharsalia*, Lucan inserts a magniloquent panegyric to Nero, which, particularly in light of Lucan’s subsequent endeavours, has been interpreted as sophisticated mockery of his sovereign ever since the Middle Ages; relevant excerpts from it are quoted in May’s English translation:¹⁶³

But if no other way to Nero’s reign
The Fates could find, if gods their crowns obtain
At such dear rates, and heaven could not obey
Her Jove, but after the stern giants’ fray,
Now we complain not, gods: mischief and war

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Phelps, 414, and modernised.

¹⁶² Phelps, 414-415.

¹⁶³ Martindale, ‘Lucan’, 67.

Pleasing to us, since so rewarded, are.
 Let dire Pharsalia groan with armed hosts
 And glut with blood the Carthaginian ghosts;
 With these let Munda's fatal battle go,
 Mutina's siege, Perugia's famine too;
 To these add Actium's bloody naval fight,
 And near Sicilia Sextus' slavish fleet.
 Yet much owes Rome to civil enmity
 For making thee our prince;
 ...
 Thence mayest thou shine
 Down on thy world; to thee all powers divine
 Will yield, and nature to thy choice will give
 What god to be, or where in heaven to live.
 ...
 Then let mankind forget all war and strife,
 And every nation love a peaceful life.
 Let peace through all the world in this blessed state
 Once more shut warlike Janus' iron gate.
 Oh be my god: if thou this breast inspire,
 Not Phoebus I'll from Cirrha's shades desire,
 Nor Nysa's Bacchus; Caesar can infuse
 Virtue enough into a Roman muse.¹⁶⁴

The general tone of the tribute reads as extravagant and hyperbolic: from the comparison of Nero with Jove and then later Phoebus, to nature submitting herself to Nero, to a possible jab at Nero's obesity disguised as an elaborate praise of his greatness, it is hardly surprising that the 'tribute' was read as satire by most commentators.¹⁶⁵ Some of these exaggerated elements can be traced, I think, in May's own 'Neptune to King Charles.' Owing to the maritime setting, Jove is changed to Neptune, but the reference to a Roman god is present nonetheless; lands and

¹⁶⁴ *Pharsalia*, 1627, A1v-A2r.

¹⁶⁵ 'If all thy weight one part of heaven should hold, / The honoured load would bow heaven's axletree', *Pharsalia*, 1627, A2r; see Buckley and Paleit, 50n4.

seas are said to adore Charles and his throne; famous battles fought by Rome and England, respectively, are mentioned, but in both cases the nation's crowning achievement is said to be the peace achieved under Nero's, and Charles's, reign. What I find most compelling, however, is the mention of Janus in both tributes: the temple of Janus was opened in times of war and closed when Rome was at peace, and the 'returning Janus' in May's poem suggests a long streak of peaceful years due to the god's being shut out of his temple, just like Janus will be shut 'once more' out of his temple under Nero's reign.¹⁶⁶ Finally, the last line of May's poem, which describes Charles' reign as 'sweet' and 'absolute', deserves consideration. The use of the term in association with a monarch had, during the early Stuart period, a flexible meaning: its use ranged from 'resolved, positive, uncompromising', to 'precise', to 'faultless, perfect', thus making May's description of Charles's reign as 'absolute' perfectly acceptable by 1620s terms.¹⁶⁷ However, between James's and Charles's reigns the term also gradually came to acquire a second, pejorative meaning which could roughly be summarised with the word 'arbitrary' and which could explain why, in the epistle dedicatory prefacing his Lucan translation, May writes 'in the other [i.e., a 'monarchy but most heavy and distasteful'] the vast strength and forces of the prince gave him too absolute and undetermined a power.'¹⁶⁸ Although not *all* uses of the term necessarily implied the definition of 'arbitrary', some of them did, and, with the Civil War, the concept of absolute power virtually became synonymous with tyranny.¹⁶⁹ This explains why, in 1647, the use that May makes of the term 'absolute' in relation to monarchies in his *History of the Parliament* is unambiguous, in that the term is used to describe abuses of power by the monarch at the expense of Parliament.¹⁷⁰ However, before the Civil War and thus at the time May wrote the poem to Charles, the idea of absolutism in England had

¹⁶⁶ Farnaby explains this custom in a note; see Farnaby, *Pharsalia*, B2v.

¹⁶⁷ Daly, 234-235.

¹⁶⁸ *Pharsalia*, 1627, a4v.

¹⁶⁹ Daly, 235; Burgess, 31-35.

¹⁷⁰ See, in particular, '[T]he French king had made himself an absolute lord, and quite depressed the power of Parliaments', *History of Parliament*, E1v.

not yet developed into the notion of ‘unlimited’ and ‘irresistible’ rule, i.e. that the monarch ‘could not only change laws, he could act without need to obey the law’ and his subjects would have no right to resist him, so allegations of treason towards May with respect to the use of ‘absolute’ in this poem would be anachronistic.¹⁷¹

There is little doubt that May was aware of the reading of Lucan’s panegyric as ironic, for Farnaby was familiar with the interpretation and mentioned it in a marginal note in his edition.¹⁷² It can also be argued that, regardless of its similarities to Lucan’s paean to Nero, ‘Neptune to King Charles’ features nearly caricatural elements, and that comparing Edward III and Elizabeth I’s naval victories to Charles’s own supposed achievement of finding ‘no foe at all’ on his journey verges on the ridiculous. When considering May’s past and future opposition to peaceful tolerance of Catholic Spain and his own brief spell as a volunteer soldier in the Netherlands, it is hard to read his celebration of Charles’s peaceful policies as heartfelt and complimentary. Whether this covertly seditious attitude went unnoticed by all at the time or whether May retained a circle of friends who enjoyed such private jokes at the expense of the king cannot be said with any certainty, but this apparent political realignment slowly started to yield fruits: from 1627 onwards, May dedicated his works to various members of the court, including Charles himself, and, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, in 1633 and 1635 he penned two historical poems ‘by his Majesty’s command’, a subtitle implying he was paid for his efforts.

Curiously, there exists further lyrical production by May, datable in late 1627, in connection with Buckingham’s departure from Portsmouth in June of 1627 for the Isle of Rhé,

¹⁷¹ Burgess, 29-30.

¹⁷² The note reads ‘Assentatio, quam vix excusaverit Ironia’, which roughly translates to ‘An adulation, which irony barely justifies’; see Farnaby, *Pharsalia*, B2r.

in the attempt to aid French Protestants. The poem, which, to my knowledge, has never been published in its entirety, is reproduced in modernised spelling below:

An Elegy on Sir Charles Rich

slain at the Isle of Rhé

How fain would we forget this fatal war
And blot from out our mourning calendar
A day so black, but that we dare not take
Comfort from such ingratitude or make
Th' oblivion of those worthies that then died
Our cure? No, rather let our grief abide.
Thou there wert slain, renowned Rich, and we,
Rather than lose the memory of thee,
Will court our sorrow; our sad song shall keep
That theme and teach posterity to weep.
Brave soul of honour, thou — whose mouth had raised
A stock of glory, great enough t'have praised
The eldest, ablest man, and at that age
Hadst worth enough t'have crowned a pilgrimage
Of threescore years — art now untimely cropped
By Fortune's envious hand, and France then lopped
From England's bleeding side when thou wert slain.
As brave a limb as e'er can grow again,
A limb so fair and active that, alas,
I need not tell how blessed the body was
That wore it late, nor need I show how once
Alive it flourished in brave actions.
What field of fame hath Europe lately seen,
Or where have Mars his horrid stations been,
Since thou hadst years, brave Rich, thy arms to wear,
But that thy name was known and honoured there?
The Netherlands, the sad Palatinate
(Which weeps since thou camst thence), each wounded state
Of Upper Germany, whose vast charms
Ennobled Mansfeld, and fierce Brunswick's arms;

Those two dead worthies still acknowledge thee
 In their best actions a large part to be.
 How great a share of fame — this one for all —
 Purchased thy valour in Gonzalo's fall?
 When thou, with Brunswick, jointly through and through
 Didst charge and break the battle of thy foe?
 Here would my thoughts fain stay, here would they dwell
 And nought of thee, but happy ending, tell.
 But fate controls my wish, grief seizeth me:
 That ever cursed and fatal Isle of Rhé
 Again calls back our griefs and turns again
 A song triumphant to a tragic strain.
 To which of all the conquered ghosts of France,
 Which our Third Edward's or Fifth Henry's lance
 Frighted from life, did fates decree that thou,
 Brave Rich, shouldst come a parentation now?¹⁷³
 Alas, it cannot be to one, no ghost
 Deserved so much, nor could that region boast
 So brave a soul as thine; accept thy due,
 And do not weigh how skilful, but how true,
 His sorrow is that writes; take this excuse:
 It was thy virtue only was this muse
 Inspired his thoughts this elegy to sing,
 And England's tears the Heliconian spring.¹⁷⁴

As briefly mentioned previously, the Charles Rich to whom the poem is dedicated was the younger brother of Robert Rich, one of the dedicatees of May's *Lucan*, and a distant cousin of the poet. May's mourning of the loss of Rich — who is never identified as a relative or otherwise personal connection of the poet, but rather as an English patriot — employs a couple of his favourite tropes, namely speaking in the name of England and describing the dead as being

¹⁷³ 'Parentation' is a neologism by May to indicate funeral rites, derived from the Roman festival of mourning, the *Parentalia*; he previously used it in the *Pharsalia*. See Buckley and Paleit, 17.

¹⁷⁴ Add MS 33998, f. 88; modernisation mine.

untimely ‘cropped’, and the comparison with valorous generals and kings.¹⁷⁵ All in all, the sombre and patriotic tone with which May imbues the poem sets it far apart from the veiled mockery he makes of Charles in his other extant 1627 poem, and the tribute, as well as the comparison with Edward III, reads this time as sincere.

The poem also offers another example of May’s interest in political matters and in England’s involvement in the Protestant wars: rather than a vague homage to Rich’s military and patriotic efforts, May pays very specific compliments to the man, and he mentions several key figures and events of the war. Count Ernst von Mansfeld was a military leader, popular with soldiers, who had been fighting for the Protestant cause since the beginning of the war; he died in 1626 after suffering a serious defeat at the Battle of Dessau Bridge.¹⁷⁶ Christian of Brunswick, a military commander who allegedly had many ‘enthusiastic admirers’, fought alongside Mansfeld in several battles between 1621 and 1626 and died shortly after Mansfeld in 1626.¹⁷⁷ The fight referenced by May (35-36) is certainly the Battle of Fleurus of August 1622, in which Mansfeld fought to relieve the siege of Bergen-op-Zoom held by the Spanish commander Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba (the Gonzalo mentioned at 34); ultimately, the military action was successful thanks to the intervention of Brunswick, who led the cavalry in spite of his wounded arm, which was later amputated.¹⁷⁸ The descriptiveness of the battle, with Brunswick and Rich’s charges ‘through and through’ the enemy lines, is suggestive; could it possibly indicate that May had been an eyewitness to the battle? After all, in the early 1640s, as will be illustrated in Chapter 5, May was to be a sort of ‘war correspondent’ for the Parliament’s side, reporting on at least two battles directly from the battlefield; postulating previous experience as an eyewitness to important battles would prove consistent with his later

¹⁷⁵ See the poem upon the death of Prince Henry in Chapter 1 and the poem mentioned in the present chapter for other uses of these tropes.

¹⁷⁶ Asch, 132-135.

¹⁷⁷ Gardiner, 53, 60-62, 94.

¹⁷⁸ Gardiner, 61-62.

experiences, although this theory, however intriguing, is no more than informed conjecture. Finally, reference to the Isle of Rhé ‘again’ turning into a crushing loss (40-42) is an allusion to a defeat endured by the Protestant faction two years prior: in September 1625, French Huguenots were surprised by the French Catholic fleet at the Isle of Rhé and suffered a serious defeat.¹⁷⁹

With regards to the themes of the poem, it should also be noted that, in contrast with his personal feelings towards Buckingham, May seemingly avoids directly blaming the Duke for the military disaster – despite its being almost entirely imputable to him — but rather merely formulates mild and generic complaints about the ‘fatal war’ and the ‘ever cursed and fatal Isle of Rhé’. For a poet writing about this defeat, an attitude of disparagement would not have been unexpected: contrarily to May, several contemporary poets harshly mocked and condemned Buckingham’s contribution to England’s debacle. The collection *Early Stuart Libels* (Anno?) assembles fourteen poems written about the expedition to the Isle of Rhé: of these, one is an apology of Buckingham, three are ambiguous in their leaning, and ten are categoric denigrations of the Duke, his military incompetence, and his influence over the king.¹⁸⁰ May, on the other hand, completely avoids any mention of the commander of the expedition, thus appearing faithful to his newly adopted attitude of complacency with the king and the royal favourite.

¹⁷⁹ Bercé, 97.

¹⁸⁰ *Early Stuart Libels*, poems Oii1-Oii14. As many of the poems critical of Buckingham are anonymous, it cannot be excluded that May did write one or more of them. The ferocious attack ‘And art return’d againe with all thy Faults’ is particularly intriguing as its author displays some of the verbal features found in May’s writing, associates Buckingham with ‘swollen ambition’ (May also uses ‘ambition’ in combination with the verb ‘swell’ in both his *Continuation* and in the translation of Barclay’s *Icon Animorum*), commemorates the death of Rich (alongside two others), and claims to have lost ‘a share of blood’ at the Isle of Rhé, which could be a reference to Rich’s being a distant relative. For the poem, see *Early Stuart Libels*, Oii12.

3. Rising Fame (1628-1629)

3.1 Virgil's *Georgics*

This chapter focuses on the period spanning the years 1628 and 1629, the most prolific time in the career of May. As with the preceding chapters, commentary on the life and works of May will be provided by way of a chronological discussion of his production. As will be apparent upon looking at the table of contents, in this chapter I will also propose a slightly different chronology for May's canon than previously established, namely as concerns his hard-to-date play *Antigone*, and I will integrate such chronology with unpublished poems and other dedications by May.

Possibly encouraged by the enthusiastic reception of his Lucan, May embarked shortly after on another translation, this time of Virgil's *Georgics*. The book made its first appearance in the Stationers' Register on 24 May 1628 as 'A book called *Virgil's Georgics*, Englished by Thomas May esquire' and was printed for Thomas Walkley in the same year and with the same title and subtitle.¹ The book was never reprinted, either in May's lifetime or later, and it has never been the subject of a critical edition. The volume is prefaced by an elaborately engraved title page which bears the signature 'Vaughan *fecit*' (probably to be identified with the Welsh engraver Robert Vaughan) and which features a portrait of Virgil and various husbandry-related imagery, including a beehive.² At least two volumes of May's *Georgics* show that the book was printed more than once in the same year, for two separate printings bear different engravings in the upper portion of the book's dedication, as well as different page numbering.³

¹ Stationers' Register Online, SRO8452.

² For information on Robert Vaughan, see <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG49472> (last accessed 15 January 2024).

³ The two copies found on EEBO belong, respectively, to the British Library and to the Huntington Library; the copy I quote from throughout this thesis is the one held by the British Library.

Although May's version was not the first time the four books were translated in English, the *Georgics* seems to have been the least popular work of an extremely popular author. Between 1513 and 1628, no less than nine complete or partial English translations of the *Aeneid* were printed, and from 1575 five English versions of the *Eclogues*, or *Bucolics*, started to appear, with one by William Lathum published the same year as May's *Georgics*. The first English version of the *Georgics* appeared for the first time in 1577, when selected passages were translated by Barnabe Googe as a supplement to his translation of Conrad Heresbach's *Four Books of Husbandry*.⁴ The *Georgics* were fully translated for the first time in 1589 by Abraham Fleming and were published alongside his translation of the *Eclogues*; the title page almost exclusively focuses on the latter, with the former only mentioned in the subtitle. The only other time Virgil's *Georgics* appeared in print before 1628 was in 1620, when John Brinsley translated only the fourth book, also known as *De Apibus*, and attached it to his English *Eclogues*.⁵

The fame of Virgil's *Georgics* was partly subordinate to that of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, which may be considered its antecedent in the same way that Theocritus' *Idylls* and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are for the *Eclogues* and the *Aeneid*, respectively.⁶ May is clearly aware of this literary precedent, for he mentions it in the dedicatory epistle – 'you [the dedicatee], who so well understand the original of it and the pattern of this original, the poem of Hesiod' – as apparently was the publisher Humphrey Lownes, who, in 1618, had been responsible for the publication of George Chapman's translation of the poem under the title *Georgics of Hesiod* and, in 1628, owned the publishing rights to May's translation of Virgil.⁷ The main distinguishing feature of Virgil's *Georgics*, and the reason why it was not as successful as the

⁴ Cooper, 204.

⁵ Cummings and Gillespie, 39. According to the Stationers' Register (Stationers' Register Online, SRO8475), Lathum's 1628 *Eclogues* were published a few months after May's *Georgics*.

⁶ Cheney, 173.

⁷ *Georgics*, A2v-A3r; Hosington, 51. Although Lownes' name is nowhere to be found on the title page, Brenda M. Hosington cites him as owner of the rights of both Chapman's and May's translations.

Aeneid or even the *Eclogues*, is that it was designed as a handbook firmly based on factual reality, which, with the exception of a few great poetic passages, allowed little room for ‘poems of the imagination.’⁸

Evidently marginal compared to Virgil’s production in the way early modern English scholars approached the work, the *Georgics* were alluded to or mentioned in very few popular dramatic works in the years preceding and following May’s translation, and many of the references are attributable to May himself in his own works. In Fletcher and Massinger’s *The Elder Brother* (1615-1625), Virgil’s work is referenced explicitly in a dialogue as a source of information on husbandry and beekeeping; the anonymous *Tragedy of Nero* (1619), as shall be discussed below, also borrows and adapts a long passage from the first book; otherwise, nods to the *Georgics* are few and far between, and the *Aeneid* and the *Eclogues* dominate the world of Virgilian references in early modern England.⁹

In the political climate of early Stuart England, the choice of Virgil as an immediate follow-up to Lucan comes across as May’s attempt to rid himself of the reputation attached to the dangerously subversive *Pharsalia*. To be sure, no author had embodied the imperial spirit as much as Virgil, and the assessment of the Roman poet as spokesperson for the monarchy held equally true in Renaissance Europe and Tudor and Stuart England as it had in imperial Rome: Virgil’s prophecies in the *Aeneid* and the *Eclogues* about the rebirth of Rome in the west were appropriated by monarchs wishing to present themselves as the embodiment of Augustan peace and prosperity, and Elizabethan propaganda in particular had immortalised the queen as Virgil’s prophesied virgin, ‘who would give her empire peace and *imperium sine fine*.’¹⁰ The *Aeneid* and *Eclogues* were especially significant in early modern England and had been

⁸ Cooper, 216.

⁹ For the two plays’ dates, see Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1866 and #1917.

¹⁰ Cox Jensen, 197.

instrumental in fashioning the myth of the English empire: in the *Aeneid*, when Aeneas and his fellow Trojan survivors finally reach Latium, the latter is heavily connoted by elements of isolation and distance, with its most prominent geographical feature being its position on the margins of the civilised world. Following and expanding upon a Homeric prophecy in the *Iliad* that predicted Aeneas would rule over the Trojans, Virgil parallels the downfall of a great empire with the birth of an even greater one and hints at the heritage of the Trojan empire being passed on to the Romans – with Augustus, fittingly, a blood descendant of Aeneas himself. The idea of an empire being inherited by a territory on the margins, barely within reach of the known world, could easily apply to Britain as well, and the direct mention of England, in Virgil's *Eclogues*, as a territory cut out from the rest of the world helped shaping this myth further.¹¹ The notion of Britain's being the sole heir of the Roman empire was known as *translatio imperii* and had a twofold function: the need to support the claims of military and cultural supremacy and legitimise the new-born Protestant identity against the ideological threats of Catholicism.¹² The need to distance the British from an Italian identity and language sparked a heated academic debate in the second half of the sixteenth century, which culminated with Richard Harvey's *Philadelphus, or a defence of Brutes* (1593). In it, Harvey addresses the matter of linguistic and historical heritage and offers a solution to the delicate conundrum of the cultural and linguistic dependence of England on Italy while still maintaining the narrative of a Virgilian, thus Roman, origin.¹³

Within this context, less easy to explain is the choice of the *Georgics* specifically. May's translation was the first time an English version of the *Georgics* had appeared on its own rather than attached to the more popular *Eclogues*. As Chester points out, although pastoral drama as a genre had its place at court well into the reign of Charles I, it was in the shape of other kinds

¹¹ Calvert, 3.

¹² Curran, 16.

¹³ Hopkins, *From the Romans to the Normans*, 5.

of pastoral poetry, and the ‘unadulterated classicism’ of the *Georgics*, coupled with its lack of dramatic power and the ever-interesting satirical commentary on court and city, meant that May’s work was not tailored for popular success despite garnering critical applause up until the eighteenth century.¹⁴ Perhaps the reason behind May’s choice was simply and precisely the fact that the *Georgics* had not been revived for many years – Fleming’s 1589 full translation being almost forty years old – and that May generally appears to have favoured lesser-known works in his choice of Latin translations.

The person to whom May dedicated the *Georgics* initiates the trend of uncontroversial dedicatees pursued by May following the publication of his *Lucan*, though it does not yet appear to be an explicit appeal to a member of court as in the case of subsequent dedications. Being his first published work since *Lucan’s Pharsalia*, it is likely that, as with the choice of subject, May sought to distance himself from the potential danger connected to his *Lucan* and its many hastily removed dedications; at all events, the person he ultimately chose, Christopher Gardiner, was unfortunately unlikely to provide financially for him for long, for he left for the Americas shortly after, and it seems that May picked him on grounds of friendship as well as personal wealth. Like May, Gardiner had been a student at Sydney Sussex college at Cambridge, matriculating in 1613, and a member of the Inns of Court (the Inner Temple) since 1615.¹⁵ Between 1624 and 1626 Gardiner travelled abroad in Europe and was knighted as member of a Catholic order known as the ‘knights of the golden spur’; in 1627 he acquired Haling Manor at Croydon, in Surrey, which explains why May addresses him as ‘To my truly judicious friend, Christopher Gardiner of Haling, Esquire.’ In 1630 Gardiner left England for Massachusetts,

¹⁴ Chester, 140.

¹⁵ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 270.

possibly as an observer of Puritan activities sent by Sir Ferdinando Gorges. Later, during the Civil War, Gardiner fought as a royalist officer and died in 1662.¹⁶

As if to highlight his renunciation of any dangerous association with radical Puritans, in his dedicatory epistle to Gardiner May draws the reader's attention explicitly to religion: 'If there were any thing in my pains which might either offend an honest ear or justly suffer a great condemnation from a learned censorer, I should be fearful to commend it to you, whose religion, life, and learning are so well known unto me.'¹⁷ Aside from showing the lengths he was willing to walk to impress and gain the support of wealthy patrons, May's dedication is fascinating in other regards. For one thing, it gives credence to the hypothesis that May was productive but also highly selective when choosing which of his works were destined for publication. The remark 'I think it [publishing Virgil] better than publishing mine own fancies to the world, especially in an age so much cloyed with cobweb inventions and unprofitable poems' suggests that May had written at least a few 'fancies' but had deemed them either unprofitable or unsuitable for publication.¹⁸ It is known that by 1628 he had certainly written *Cleopatra* and a couple of short poems which were circulating in manuscript and which I discussed in the previous chapter, but no other earlier unpublished work is extant, prompting the question of just how much of his oeuvre has survived compared to the works that remained unpublished and were ultimately lost.¹⁹

Finally, the dedication contains the first glimpse of May's approach to translation and to the classics in general, which he would elaborate more thoroughly in prefaces to subsequent publications. Somewhat unusually, May offers no disparaging comment on the concept of translation itself, but rather treats translated works as if on par with the source texts. His

¹⁶ Scisco, 8-9, 12-15.

¹⁷ *Georgics*, A3r.

¹⁸ *Georgics*, A3v.

¹⁹ For speculation about a later composition of *Agrippina*, *Antigone*, *The Old Couple*, and the lost 'Julius Caesar' see below and in Chapters 4 and 5.

‘concerns’ regarding his own translation are mostly due to his adhering to the traditional self-deprecating tropes typical of literary dedications, and not to translation being an inferior means of accessing the classics: ‘This work may inform some, delight others, it can hurt none; it is no new thing (being a translation), but an old work.’ May then goes on voicing doubts concerning the quality of his translation and appears to be making a list of what he considered the prerequisites of a good translation: ‘How much I have failed in my undertaking (as missing the sense of Virgil, or not expressing of him highly and plainly enough) they only are able judges who can confer it.’²⁰ Capturing the ‘sense’ of the original author, and conveying the text in a manner high and plain enough – the latter, in particular, suggests a desire for clarity and immediacy that distances May from some of the ornate translations of the classics in circulation at the time.

As this preface shows, unlike his ‘master’ Jonson, May’s attitude towards lesser educated readers is not of scorn or condescendence. As the preamble to his ‘Annotations upon the first book’ also reveals, the target audience of his book was both the erudite and the ‘common’ reader. When expounding on why he decided to include annotations illustrating lesser known myths or stories referenced by Virgil, May writes: ‘I have thought fitting to relate [them] here for the ease or delight of the English reader, entreating all readers to pardon me for striving only to please them (for to me it can add nothing, since all men of judgement can tell how easily and where I find them).’²¹ This attitude, radically opposite to Jonson’s attacks to the ‘ignorant’ reader in his prefaces to *Catiline* and *Sejanus*, demonstrates a particular concern for vernacular-only readers, who in many cases would not be familiar with obscure historical or literary references in classical works.²² May’s subsequent assertion that he has not delved into all the works

²⁰ *Georgics*, A3r-A4r.

²¹ *Georgics*, B14r.

²² In the preface to *Sejanus*, which had not enjoyed popular acclaim but rather was ‘hissed off the stage’, Jonson makes it immediately clear that he has striven to respect the ‘truth of argument’ above all and that it is not ‘needful, or almost possible, in these our times ... to observe the old state and splendour of dramatic poems, with preservation of any popular delight’ (see Bolton, xi). A few years later, *Catiline*’s representation was possibly an

referenced by Virgil, ‘nor made a large comment upon the work to extend it to an unnecessary bulk, but mentioned such only as I thought fitting’ is further proof of his willingness to provide an informative yet enjoyable adaptation of Virgil’s *Georgics*, capable of offering readers a balanced blend of erudite and popular.²³

As concerns early modern influences on his work, contemporary engagements with the *Georgics* were, as has been noted, very rare, so it is not surprising that May had little with which to confront himself directly besides previous translations.

Fleming’s 1589 translation was seminal in that it was the first time the *Georgics* ever appeared in English, but it is very different from May’s. Like he did with his *Eclogues*, Fleming translated in unrhymed fourteeners or, as he calls them in the letter to the reader, ‘bare metre’; the resulting lines were so long and crammed that they required a different typographic font to be printed as single lines. There is also arguably little of the ‘bare’ adjective to be found in these long-winded and verbose lines, although that may be explained by the subtitle attached to the title page of the translation, which informs the reader that the original has been ‘grammatically translated.’ This, along with the bracketed words or phrases to be found within the text, has led some to speculate that Fleming’s translation was conceived as an aid for schoolboys to translating the English text back into the original Latin.²⁴

Similar observations, minus those concerning metre, can be applied to Brinsley’s 1620 prose *Georgics*. Whereas the pages of Brinsley’s translation, labelled ‘for the good of schools’ on the title page, are crammed with annotations and commentary, to the point that the translation itself only takes up about a third of each page, May’s arrangement is much more streamlined.

even greater fiasco than *Sejanus*, as it was rejected by both the uneducated and the sophisticated part of the public; this prompted Jonson to write a significantly harsher preface to the printed edition, which he addressed separately to ‘in ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ readers, and from which emerges a clear contempt for the ignorant audience and a pronounced ‘anti-theatricality’ (see Lovascio, *Catilina*, xi, 268).

²³ *Georgics*, B14r.

²⁴ Cummings, 162.

Replicating his own approach to the *Pharsalia*, May presents the text in a straightforward manner, with a short argument preceding and a small number of annotations (no more than eleven) following each book. Whereas Brinsley's annotations have an inevitable scholastic and overexplanatory feel to them, those by May provide only essential background information of the mythological, historical, and literary kind, with the explicit aim to, as mentioned above, 'ease or delight ... the English reader' and not create 'unnecessary bulk.'²⁵

Stylistic differences between the two previous translations and May's are self-evident: whereas Abraham overloads his poetry and Brinsley translates in a rather dry and mechanical prose, May imbues his Virgil with a simple yet pleasant, poetical quality. Therefore, where Fleming translates '[The husbandman] himself from lofty mountains bringing thyme / And pine tree leaves, and he, to whom such things are in regard, / Let him plant largely round about the houses of the bees / [Sweet thyme and pine tree]' and Brinsley, very similarly, '[And] he himself to whom such things are in regard, bringing thyme and pine trees from the high mountains, let him plant [them] largely round about the houses [of the bees]', May renders it simply 'Let him himself, which fears his bees to want, / Bring thyme and pines down from the hills to plant.'²⁶ As opposed to students, May's target audience appears to be adult readers, possibly without a grammar school or university education, for, as May himself admits in the appendix to the first book, most of the erudite public would have found the annotations superfluous, given that the *Georgics* was one of the texts that were regularly taught in grammar schools across the reign.

In line with this previously discussed idea of May's works being accessible to the early modern notion of 'general public', May's version of Virgilian Latin is characterised, as was customary for him, by succinctness and clarity of expression, with little room for verbosity. Analogously to his Lucan, May prefaces each book with a short (between 12 and 20 lines)

²⁵ *Georgics*, B14r.

²⁶ Fleming, *Georgics*, H4v; Brinsley, *Georgics*, Q2v; *Georgics*, H3r.

summary of its contents and concludes it with a section devoted to annotations, mostly clarifications on obscure myths. However, May's *Georgics* appear relevant in the greater picture of early modern and seventeenth-century literature not because of their 'metrical roughness' and 'marked terseness of expression', but rather because of their exceptional influence on subsequent translators.²⁷

As noted above, May's version of the *Georgics* was never reprinted and has never been edited. It is difficult to gauge the popularity of the work with May's contemporary popular readership, for no mentions of it survive. Despite its apparent irrelevance in terms of popular success, however, the translation had a tangible influence on subsequent versions of the *Georgics*. Helene Maxwell Hooker considers May's the ancestor of the 'genealogical succession of the seventeenth-century translations of Virgil', which culminated with John Dryden's in 1697: sizeable evidence of May's direct influence can also be traced in English translations of the *Georgics* by John Ogilby (1649), Richard Maitland, Earl of Lauderdale (1685), Joseph Addison (1694), and Charles Sedley (1702). The impact of the 1628 volume was deemed so great as to lead scholar William Benson, in 1724, to disparage Dryden's *Georgics* by comparing it unfavourably with May's version and accusing Dryden of copying hundreds of his predecessors' lines and rearranging them 'very little altered.' The charge, although occasionally unfounded in that Dryden sometimes borrowed from Lauderdale and not from May, is nevertheless overall sound and shows that May's translation provided a significant foundation for Dryden's, 'from the mere borrowing of end words to the appropriation of entire lines' – in several instances verbatim.²⁸

On the other hand, though testimony of the fact that May's translation was still read and appreciated almost a century after it was first published, Benson's critique of Dryden is also

²⁷ Maxwell Hooker, 282.

²⁸ Maxwell Hooker, 274-282.

symptomatic of the slowly deteriorating fame of May himself, whose work could evidently be copied mostly without fear of consequence due to his status as, to quote Benson, an ‘obscure author.’²⁹

3.2 *The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina*

Sometime in 1628, May wrote another tragedy set in the Roman world and centred on a powerful woman, *Agrippina*. The following analysis offers different political readings of the play and dates it after the *Georgics* based on that.

Agrippina shares most of its early modern editorial history with *Cleopatra*: both were entered in the Stationers’ Register – ‘Entered for his copies under the hands of Master Clay and Master Mead warden two plays called *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* and *Julia Agrippina Empress of Rome*’ – and printed for the first time in duodecimo in 1639, then without significant alterations again in 1654.³⁰ The two plays share the same dedicatee, Kenelm Digby, and the dedicatory epistle, discussed in the previous chapter, was written with reference to both plays, with no particular thought spared for one or the other individually; this gives the impression that May perhaps conceived the plays as the two halves of a pair. Like *Cleopatra*, *Agrippina* had allegedly been acted more than a decade before its publication, a performance of which no trace survives; unlike *Cleopatra*, however, there is no extant manuscript copy of the play. *Agrippina* was published in 1639 by Richard Hodgkinson for Thomas Walkley with the full title *The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina, Empress of Rome* and the author credited as ‘T. M. Esq.’; though the title page bears no claim of performance, the words ‘Acted 1628’ can be found in the first page of the volume, under the list of *dramatis personae*.

²⁹ Quoted in Maxwell Hooker, 282.

³⁰ Stationers’ Register Online, SRO9992; modernisation mine. For a complete list of the minor differences between the 1639 and 1654 editions, see Schmid, 7-9.

Although untraceable in historical records, there is no reason to doubt the performance, and therefore the date, of 1628.³¹ A textual clue within the play also helps date it definitively during or after the translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, which, as has been discussed, was entered in the Stationers' Register in May 1628. The passage in question was evidently composed after May translated Virgil's second book, for it quotes from it very accurately and simply rearranges some of the lines for better dramatic effect or alters some words for metric reasons (emphasis mine):

<p>Oh too, too happy, if their bliss they knew, Plain husbandmen, to whom the earth with true And bounteous justice, free from bloody war, Returns an easy food. Who ... yet rest secure, a harmless life, Enriched with several blessings, free from strife, Cool caves, dark shady groves, and fountains clear, Untroubled sleeps, and cattle's lowing there, And pleasant huntings want not. There they live By labour and small wealth; honour they give Unto their gods and parents; justice took Her last step there when she the earth forsook.³²</p>	<p><i>Crispinus.</i> None can describe the sweets of country life But those blessed men that do enjoy and taste them. Plain husbandmen, though far below our pitch Of fortune placed, enjoy a wealth above us. To whom the earth with true and bounteous justice Free from war's cares returns an easy food. They breath the fresh and uncorrupted air, And by clear brooks enjoy untroubled sleeps; Their state is fearless and secure, enriched With several blessings, such as greatest kings Might in true justice envy, and themselves Would count too happy if they truly knew them.³³</p>
--	---

³¹ No evidence of Agrippina ever being performed survives, and the 1639 edition is mostly devoid of stage directions concerning props or acting directions beyond the most rudimental. The scene in which Agrippina examines Lollia Paulina's head, discussed below, partly echoes a scene in Fletcher and Massinger's *The False One* in which Caesar is presented with Pompey's head, which would have required the prop of a head to be shown to the public. In his recent edition of *The False One*, Domenico Lovascio has tentatively put forward the hypothesis that the prop might have been modelled on the face of the recently deceased Richard Burbage (for the King's Men had previously owned such a prop for their *Macbeth*), all the more to shock the public with the announcement of Pompey's death; see Lovascio, *The False One*, 95-96n. Although this might prove too big of a leap nine years after *The False One* had supposedly been staged, it is tantalising to imagine that they could have used the same prop, to strengthen the parallel between the two plays. Interestingly, upon seeing the head Agrippina says 'Let me peruse this face: ha! 'tis much changed' (*Agrippina*, B2v), which may hint at the prop head's being disfigured, or not looking like a woman's at all.

³² *Georgics*, D6r-D6v.

³³ *Agrippina*, B7v.

It also appears that May composed *Agrippina* while translating Martial's *Epigrams*, which he published the following year but, as will be discussed below, on which he had been working for some time; contrarily to his use of the *Georgics* in the scene above, however, he probably had not yet fully completed the translation of the *Epigrams* when he quoted one in *Agrippina*. F. Ernst Schmid notes the use of a line from one of Martial's epigrams in the fifth act, 'Sit, precor, et tellus mitis et unda tibi'; the passage is rendered 'Gentle to thee let earth and water prove' in *Agrippina*, and 'to thee / Let both the earth and water gentle be' in *Martial's Epigrams*.³⁴ The two passages undoubtedly share some similarities, with the word 'gentle' for 'mitis' and the use of 'water' for 'unda' in place of the more obvious translation 'waves'; however, they also diverge in the choice of verb – 'prove' for 'be' – when the use of 'be' would not have altered the metric quantity of the verse and could therefore easily have been used. Though the question of the composition date of the *Epigrams* will be discussed in further detail below, this passage provides a small hint towards the reconstruction of a more accurate chronology of May's works and the understanding of his creative process and the many different influences he absorbed and reused in his *oeuvre*.

A better understanding of May's *modus operandi* may also help explain the choice of subject of this tragedy. Having translated and admired Lucan, May must have been fully steeped in the history of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, particularly Nero's reign; it is therefore unsurprising that *Agrippina* would be based on that segment of Roman history. What is a little more unusual in terms of subject matter is the focus on Agrippina the Younger, who, despite her potential as a dramatic type, was far from a popular character in early modern tragedies. Indeed, she features as a character in only two plays from 1566 to 1628: Thomas Nuce's *Octavia* (1566)

³⁴ *Agrippina*, D12r; *Epigrams*, C8r.

and Matthew Gwinne's Latin *Nero* (1603).³⁵ In neither case is she the protagonist of the play: in Nuce's play, which is an English translation of the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, the focus is almost exclusively on the title character and Agrippina is murdered early on in the play, only reappearing as a ghost; in the Latin *Nero*, a monumental retelling of Nero's life about 5,000 lines long, she features heavily in the first three acts, but is then murdered and only walks the stage again as a ghost at the beginning of the fourth act.

Conversely, the focus in May's play is chiefly on Agrippina, with the play ending – like *Cleopatra* and, later, *Antigone* – with her death. Unlike the two other contemporary plays about women written by May in this period, however, the play ends abruptly with the protagonist's speaking her last lines and the scene direction 'She dies.'³⁶ No commentary or speech is uttered, no consolation offered; indeed, a distinguishing feature of *Agrippina*, and possibly one of the reasons behind its speculated failure, is the lack of dramatic resolution at the end, with no conventional indication that the play is about to end.³⁷ Moreover, the play being based on very well-known historical characters, the audience would have recognised that dispatching the titular villain would have no positive consequences on the course of Roman history, but would rather signal Nero's further descent into cruelty and tyranny, making for a very bleak and unsatisfactory ending. The lack of dramatic potential of a story ending with a villain replacing

³⁵ List extrapolated from Berger, 16. Although characters by the name of 'Agrippina' (and different spellings) appear in more than three plays, it is either her mother Agrippina the Elder (such as in the case of Jonson's 1603 *Sejanus* and the anonymous 1605 *Claudius Tiberius Nero*) or an original character (such as in Thomas Dekker's 1599 *Fortunatus*, where the character is named 'Agrippine', and in the masque 1604 *Royal Entry of King James I into London* by Jonson and Dekker, which features a character named 'Agrypnie'). For the plays' dates, see Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1412, #1465, #1217, #1421.

³⁶ *Agrippina*, E6r.

³⁷ This incongruity, especially when compared with the more coherent ending of May's other plays, leads me to speculate that the play once contained a sort of epilogue spoken by other characters which was later purged for the print edition. In the final scene, when Agrippina is stabbed, she is not alone on stage, but surrounded by her two servants, Mnester and Seleucus, and by the men dispatched by Nero to kill his mother: a stage direction informs the reader that 'Enter Anicetus, Oloaritus, and others' (*Agrippina*, E5v). With a whole crowd of actors and extras awkwardly silent on the stage, it is hard to imagine an ending such as this being dramatically effective, and I find it more likely that the original spoken epilogue, perhaps potentially compromising for May in 1639, was removed entirely.

another villain might explain why the character of Agrippina had, before 1628, only been brought upon the stage within the frame of Nero's rise and fall. Nevertheless, as was the case with several of his previous and subsequent literary endeavours, May chose to engage with a more uncommon subject and stage a story that had few literary precedents.³⁸ Although the reason, as is often the case, cannot be ascertained, it is possible that a political motivation may have informed May's decision to stage this particular Roman character; this possibility shall be discussed below.

As to why May chose to publish the two Roman tragedies in 1639, the explanation might be as simple as financial need, and possibly a desire to exploit the recently revamped interest in Roman tragedies in general and particularly plays about the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Matthew Gwinne's 1603 Latin play *Nero* had been reprinted both in 1638 and in 1639, and Nathanael Richards' *Messalina*, which was published in 1640, had been entered in the Stationers' Register in October 1639 (one year after *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina*) but had been performed for the first time between 1634 and 1636.³⁹ Thomas Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece*, originally performed in 1607 at the Red Bull, was also revived in print in 1638 with the subtitle 'A true Roman Tragedy' and on the stage in 1639 by Beeston's Boys at the Cockpit.⁴⁰

This resurgence in popularity of Roman history also saw the republication, in 1640 and for the first time since 1622, of Henry Savile's *The End of Nero and Beginning of Galba* and Richard Grenewey's English translation of Tacitus' *Annales*.⁴¹

Narrative sources for *Agrippina* include Tacitus, Suetonius, and Xiphilinus' epitome of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*; as was the case with *Cleopatra*, Suetonius is used far less

³⁸ Among his translations, Virgil's *Georgics* was not very popular among English audiences, and *Antigone*, too, as shall be discussed, was an unusual choice in terms of subject.

³⁹ Astington, 'Messalina', 143; for *Messalina*, Stationers' Register Online, SRO10185.

⁴⁰ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1558.

⁴¹ Cummings and Gillespie, 36.

frequently compared to the other two, and only in cases of small pieces of information absent from Tacitus or Xiphilinus.⁴² As Schmid notes, May follows the historiographical material very closely, sometimes to the detriment of dramatic enjoyment; only when he is free to add his own creative input to the story, as in the recounting of the scarcely documented relationship between Otho and Poppaea, does May rise above his dry average language ('trockene Durchschnittssprache').⁴³

Verbal or thematic borrowings from non-historical Latin sources are several, many of which from May's own translations. The structure of the prologue is heavily reminiscent of Seneca's *Thyestes*: in both, the play opens with a Fury (Megaera) and a ghost (Caligula's in *Agrippina*, Tantalus' in *Thyestes*), who enters the stage wondering why he has been recalled from the underworld. A similar opening scene is to be found in Jonson's *Catiline*, in which the ghost of Sylla, however, performs a monologue rather than a dialogue.⁴⁴

The play also contains the translation of a long passage from Petronius' *Satyricon*, which marks the first time an English translation of the poet was published in print.⁴⁵ In the fourth act of the play, characters are attending a banquet, during which Nero tasks Petronius with writing a satire 'against those pleasures / Thou didst so lately praise, against th'attire / And costly diet of this notorious age.' Petronius obliges, prefacing his recitation by saying that he has already written such a satire, namely to complain 'That Rome's excess, corruption, luxury, / Ruined the present government, and twixt / Caesar and Pompey caused a civil war.'⁴⁶ The poet then goes on reciting one of the most famous passages from the *Satyricon*, which May, to inform the reader that what follows is not an original composition, frames within scare quotes. The excerpt is somewhat lengthy – 38 lines – and is translated quite faithfully and smoothly by May, who,

⁴² Schmid, 11.

⁴³ Schmid, 12-13.

⁴⁴ Schmid, 13-14.

⁴⁵ The first English translation from an episode of the *Satyricon* was completed and published in 1659 by Sir Walter Charleton with the title *The Ephesian Matron*; see Cummings and Gillespie, 30.

⁴⁶ *Agrippina*, D1v.

as was usual with his translation, maintains the same number of lines as the source text. It is likely that May, who is known to have been familiar with Grotius' 1619 edition of Lucan, used it as a source for Petronius: as appendices to his volume, Grotius included a number of commentaries, biographies, and other Latin engagements with the *Pharsalia*. Among these are Sulpicius' 'Appendicula' and 'Querela', relevant passages from Tacitus, epigrams by Martial, and the segment of Petronius' *Satyricon* known as *Bellum Civile*. The excerpt, which spans chapters 118 to 124, is reported by Grotius in its entirety and with the title 'Petronii Arbitri Specimen Belli Civilis.'⁴⁷

The choice to translate this sequence from Petronius is particularly interesting in light of May's biography. The passage, as suggested by the prose preface which May did not include in the play, has often been interpreted as Petronius' satire against his contemporary Lucan, for the text is a criticism against poets who embark on an epic poem 'without the epic equipment'; Petronius then supplies his own attempt at a civil war poem, which in *Agrippina* is abruptly cut short after 38 lines by Nero's intervention. Although contemporary critics such as Gerald Langbaine were perplexed by May's choice to include a satire written explicitly – or at least interpreted as such – as an attack against his favourite Lucan, Catherine Carroll Cliff observes that it was not unusual for May to 'include the unexpected, even the impertinent, in his work' and that 'quotation and imitation, allusion and transposition are so often forms of criticism, a way of questioning the authority to which they seem to appeal, an admission of opposing voices, and a refusal to take sides.'⁴⁸ It could also be argued that in 1628, a year after May's breakthrough with Lucan, such a reference to Petronius could be interpreted as a sort of self-deprecating 'inside joke', a nod to the more educated audience who would have known full well that May had recently been responsible for bringing Lucan's civil war to life.

⁴⁷ Grotius, *Pharsalia*, N2r.

⁴⁸ Cliff, 76-77.

May also adopted known tropes and borrowed scenes from other contemporary plays. A scene in which Agrippina is presented with her rival Lollia Paulina's head recalls the moment Pompey's head is brought on stage before Julius Caesar in *The False One*. In both plays, Caesar and Agrippina address the lifeless head in a monologue enumerating their rival's past glories; similarities between the scenes are reinforced by the comments uttered by bystanders to the scene, and by Caesar's (allegedly fake) tears and Agrippina's refusal to cry.⁴⁹ Similarly, May is inspired by *The Tragedy of Nero* and its handling of Nero's death in writing the final scene of his play (emphasis mine):

Nero. **Of thousand servants, friends, and followers,
Yet two are left**
...
Oh, must I die, must now my senses close,
For ever die, and ne'er return again,
Never more see the sun, nor heaven, nor earth?
Whither go I? What shall I be anon?
**What horrid journey wanderst thou, my soul,
Under th'earth, in dark, damp, dusky vaults?**
Or shall I now to nothing be resolved?
My fears become my hopes; oh, would I might!
Methinks I see the boiling Phlegethon
And the dull pool, feared of them, we fear
The dread and terror of the gods themselves,
The furies armed with links, with whips, with snakes,
And **my own furies far more mad than they:
My mother and those troops of slaughtered friends,**
And now the judge is brought unto the throne,
That will not leave unto authority
Nor favour the oppressions of the great.⁵⁰

Agrippina. But too soon,
Ay me, I fear the approach of villainy.
What noise is that at door? **Where are my
servants?**
Mnester, Seleucus, Galla, Xenophon?
No answer made! Are they departed too?
Then vanish all my hopes, false world farewell
With all thy fading glories! But alas,
Whither from hence shall Agrippina fly?
What regions are there in the other world
But my injustice has already filled
**With wrongèd ghosts? There young Silanus wanders,
Lollia Paulina and great Claudius,
My murdered Lord,** yet those sad spirits, perchance
Abhorring Nero's base ingratitude,
And glutted with revenge, will cease to hate
At last, and pity Agrippina's state.
Enter ANICETUS, OLOARITUS, and others
Ay me, is Anicetus come again?
Then I am dead past hope. Murder! Help! Help!⁵¹

⁴⁹ See Fletcher and Massinger, *The False One*, 126.; *Agrippina*, B2r-B2v.

⁵⁰ Anonymous, *The Tragedy of Nero*, I1v-I2r.

⁵¹ *Agrippina*, E5v.

Historiographical sources, namely Tacitus and Cassius Dio, only report the information, dutifully dramatized by May, that Agrippina instructed her assassins to strike her womb, for that had borne Nero. In a curious, retroactive sort of prophecy, May introduces the element of the ghosts haunting Agrippina moments before her death, just like his anonymous predecessor did with her son. Showing once again his debt to Massinger, May also borrows from his friend's *The Roman Actor*, to which he would later contribute a commendatory poem, at least twice. In *The Roman Actor*, Domitian praises Domitia's beauty thus: 'As lesser stars / That wait on Phoebe in her full of brightness, / Compared to her you are (thus I seat you) / By Caesar's side.'⁵² In a discussion concerning Poppaea's beauty in *Agrippina*, Acte says: 'I know Poppaea is a lady / Whose beauty does as far excel poor Acte / As Cynthia does the lesser stars.'⁵³ Schmid also identifies a similarity between a speech uttered by Domitia in Massinger's play, in which she regrets being married for she wishes she had given her virginity to the emperor, and a passage in *Agrippina* in which Poppaea expresses the same concept to her lover Otho.⁵⁴

As perhaps expected, Jonson's Roman plays, *Catiline* and *Sejanus*, inspire May in several ways: the character of Agrippina is partly modelled on that of her own mother, from *Sejanus*, and on Sempronia, from *Catiline*, and Jonson's plays provide other smaller lexical borrowings, including a clear echo from *Volpone*.⁵⁵ It could be argued that these borrowings from Jonson's Roman tragedies would be justified by the similarity in topics and historical material: portrayals of extremely dominant, villainous, and canonically 'masculine' Roman women in early modern drama were extremely rare, so it should not be surprising that May should draw inspiration from one of the very few comparable models he had available. In fact, May borrows Jonson's model but takes it one step further, upgrading the villainous Roman woman into the protagonist of his

⁵² Massinger, *The Roman Actor*, D4v.

⁵³ *Agrippina*, D1r.

⁵⁴ Schmid, 120-121.

⁵⁵ Schmid, 81-82, 138.

play, something that had never been done before but that would be imitated in subsequent years, as Nathanael Richards' *The Tragedy of Messalina* (1640) can attest.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in a 'departure from strictly Jonsonian methods', May allows himself the liberty of adding a romantic subplot narrating the vicissitudes of Otho and Poppaea, resulting in a play that is, in some respect, 'more entertaining than [its] Jonsonian [prototype]' and certainly more dynamic.⁵⁷

Far from providing evidence of May's debt to Jonson in terms of literary vision, *Agrippina* instead attests to the fact that May's idea of a Roman tragedy was unlike that of the older master, and that the two playwrights shared very different approaches to popular drama and to its public. As discussed in the context of Virgil's *Georgics*, the target audience of May's plays appears to be very far from what Jonson envisioned, and the prefaces addressed to the readers the latter attached to *Sejanus* and *Catiline* stand as testimony to his vision. Whereas, therefore, Jonson's Roman tragedies often depend 'upon playgoers' and readers' extra-dramatic knowledge of Roman history', May's do not overtly appear to do so.⁵⁸ While familiarity with the topics at hand would have certainly enabled a deeper and more nuanced appreciation and enjoyment of the events depicted on the stage, it seems that May was relying far more frequently on the audience's knowledge of early modern plays, *topoi*, and theatrical tropes fully to convey the complexity of his meanings and allusions. If anything, acquaintance with the classics appears to be a goal, rather than a prerequisite, of the play.

As the prefaces to both Martial's *Epigrams* and Barclay's *Icon Animorum*, examined below, will further clarify, this sentiment was a central part of May's vision. When combined with the fact that he contributed a significant number of translations of Latin works that had

⁵⁶ A search has yielded only Jonson's and May's characters, as well as the other Agrippinas in Gwinne's *Nero* and the anonymous *The Tragedy of Nero*, as villainous Roman women on the early modern stage. Of these, only May's is a protagonist.

⁵⁷ Chester, 106-107.

⁵⁸ Hunt, 79.

until then been unavailable to monolingual English readers, and with the fact that, despite his scholarly familiarity with Latin, he chose English as the composition language of his *Continuation of Lucan's Pharsalia*, the hypothesis that May considered less-educated members of the audience as equally worthy as the erudite ones appears more than plausible.

Although, like *Cleopatra*, *Agrippina* dramatizes historical events, a plot summary is provided for the benefit of readers who may be unfamiliar with the play.

The tragedy opens with a prologue spoken by the fury Megaera and the ghost of Caligula, who comment upon the state of corruption and vice at the Roman court. In the first act, a series of characters introduce the present state of Rome and Agrippina's plans to the audience: Pallas, a freedman in Agrippina's service, relates how Agrippina managed to persuade Claudius to adopt her son Nero, and Narcissus, also a freedman who had a hand in Messalina's execution, expresses his worries that Agrippina may turn her murderous attentions to Claudius and Britannicus. Nero and Britannicus quarrel over the latter's perceived display of disrespect; Agrippina boasts about her writing abilities and is presented with her former rival Lollia Paulina's head; she then manipulates Claudius into removing her political opponents from positions of power.

The second act introduces the romantic theme to the play: Poppaea, married to Rufus Crispinus, is entertaining an adulterous relationship with Otho; the enamoured Otho, afraid that the greedy Nero may attempt to take Poppaea for himself, momentarily diverts the emperor's attention to the freedwoman Acte. Narcissus warns Claudius against Agrippina's machinations, but the emperor accidentally reveals to her, while drunk, that he plans to reinstate Britannicus as his heir.

Claudius' death is announced, and Nero is proclaimed emperor by Burrhus amidst the cheers of servants and counsellors; however reluctantly, both soldiers and senators accept Nero's reign.

In the fourth act, Narcissus leaves Rome to escape Nero's revenge, and Crispinus is forcefully divorced from Poppaea by Nero in order for Otho to marry her. Otho wants to leave Rome out of fear that Nero may decide to woo Poppaea, but she is too ambitious to leave the court; her will is cemented when a fortune-teller predicts that she will marry the emperor. Nero orders Otho to bring Poppaea to the banquet he is having, during which Petronius gives a public reading of his book. Nero refuses to allow Agrippina special treatment during a visit by foreign ambassadors, and she takes offence; after she berates him for being unfaithful to Octavia and announces that she will start pursuing Britannicus' cause, Nero summons the poisoner Locusta to murder his rival.

Nero has Britannicus poisoned off-stage, to Agrippina's dismay. Otho is banished from Rome and Nero can finally take Poppaea as a lover, but she is jealous of Octavia and, wishing to become empress, persuades Nero to murder Octavia. The first attempt on Agrippina's life fails, as she manages to swim to safety from the shipwreck; Nero therefore sends Anicetus after his mother and this time she is murdered, ending the play with a dramatic speech.

When comparing May's two Roman plays, Chester judges *Agrippina* inferior to *Cleopatra*, partly confirming John Genest's assessment of *Agrippina* as a 'flat' drama.⁵⁹ In a note emendating a corrupted line in the tragedy, Matthew Steggle partially mitigates Chester's judgement by concluding that, despite widespread consensus that May is 'an interesting republican, but a bad dramatist', *Agrippina* might help improve the opinion surrounding his abilities as a playwright.⁶⁰ While I do not intend to give *Agrippina* more acclaim than it merits,

⁵⁹ Chester, 108.

⁶⁰ Steggle, 307.

I still believe it provides an interesting read and a substantial insight into May's playwriting style and political leanings.

Aside from the relatively marginal love (or lust) theme, *Agrippina* is predominantly a political play. It is relatively unusual in one major respect, namely the choice to focus on the 'masculine' woman Agrippina when the effeminate Nero was a popular villain at the time. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the image of Nero as the worst and cruellest of the Roman emperors was widespread, with pejorative comparisons often being made between him and Caligula. May himself adopts this trope, with the ghost of Caligula contradicting the fury Megaera in her observation that he, Caligula, was 'a fiend more black than any was in Hell', arguing that Nero's crimes eclipse his own.⁶¹ With such a prologue focusing on the evil character of Nero, the cathartic power of the ending is certainly diminished or even perhaps entirely absent: although the villainous Agrippina is finally dead, an early modern audience would have known that someone far crueller and more powerful had already replaced her and was in fact responsible for her death. Tragedies in which the protagonist dies at the end were not uncommon, obviously, but, as Agrippina is also a villain in her own play, her death deprives the audience of two different kinds of powerful emotions: both of the satisfaction of seeing the 'supervillain' dispatched at the end of the play, as occurs in *The Tragedy of Nero*, and of the heartbreak following a beloved character's tragic destiny, as is the case with Nuce's *Octavia*. The arc of Nero's madness and brutality had been brought to the stage twenty-five years earlier by Gwinne with his *Nero* and relatively recently by the anonymous playwright of *The Tragedy of Nero*, so it would be reasonable to suppose that May might not want to confront himself directly with a successful play so shortly after it had been put to print. Yet the choice of subject, once again a powerful and ambitious woman, begs the question as to whether May was attempting to force a specific reading of the play and its characters.

⁶¹ Gwyn, 439.

At least two attempts have been made to find contemporary equivalents of the title character in late 1620s politics: the queen consort, Henrietta Maria, and the queen's mother and mother of the king of France Louis XIII, Marie de' Medici. As concerns identifications with the latter, Emanuel Stelzer proposes that, aside from similarities between the English and French court, the strongest pieces of evidence for linking the two historical mothers are two: one, both were rumoured to have been involved in poison plots; two, May himself would later compare Marie de' Medici with Agrippina in his *History of Parliament*.⁶² However, not only would this sudden interest in French politics represent a departure in May's range of subjects, normally limited to English politics, but also, as Stelzer himself admits, exact parallels between the two characters are hard to detect in *Agrippina*, thus making this identification a rather tenuous one.⁶³

Alternatively, Lyndsey Clarke suggests that Agrippina and Claudius should be read as foils for Henrietta Maria and Charles, respectively. Clarke argues that, among the Roman women with a heavily negative reputation, May chose Agrippina because Claudius was most similar to Charles: chiefly, both walked with a slight limp and had a speech impediment, imperfections that would have been immediately recognised by an audience watching the play being performed; both struggled with finding people loyal to them; both heavily confided in their 'loves' (wives and favourites), sometimes becoming unable to recognise the symptoms of excessive power or treachery as a result.⁶⁴ Charles's alleged excess of trust in his wife was deemed particularly dangerous by opponents of Henrietta Maria, a Catholic and French queen at a time when England was involved in wars of religion against, among others, France.⁶⁵ Lisa Hopkins presents another argument in favour of the theory, noting how May adds a novel

⁶² Stelzer, 215-217.

⁶³ Stelzer, 217.

⁶⁴ Clarke, *Introduction*. Charles fought against walking and speech impediments for his whole life. His legs were so weak that he was apparently unable to walk unaided by the age of four and had iron boots specially made to ease his condition; although as an adult Charles mostly succeeded in overcoming this difficulty, his legs remained noticeably short and bowed, and his walk appeared hurried as a result. His speech also came with difficulty, and he was affected by a stammer until the end of his life; the stammer allegedly only left him upon pronouncing his final speech at Westminster Hall. See Gregg, 11-12.

⁶⁵ Clarke, *Introduction*.

element to Agrippina's character by giving her literary ambitions, a notion totally unsupported by historiographical evidence. This facet of the character might have been included to strengthen the comparison with Henrietta Maria, who was a prominent member of literary circles and was said to be the author of at least one masque.⁶⁶ Hopkins also notes how the play, despite May's efforts to paint Agrippina in as negative a light as possible, lacks all references to her real or alleged incest (with her brother Caligula, her uncle Claudius, and her son Nero). Surely, had the play merely been a dramatization of the Roman Empire and not a political play about the English queen, May would have included mentions of one of the most scandalous rumours about Agrippina; yet he does not, possibly because, as Hopkins figures, 'an attack on the queen is one thing, but an attack on the legitimacy of the succession quite another.'⁶⁷

If this hypothesis were to be accepted, it would frame *Agrippina* as the manifestation of May's patriotic fear that Charles's weakness and over-reliance on his counsellors, particularly those with unacceptable Catholic sympathies, would lead to the downfall of Protestant England, just as Claudius' misplaced trust in Agrippina and Nero led to a monarchy, to quote May's own words, 'most heavy and distasteful.'⁶⁸ The reading of the domineering Agrippina as a foil for Henrietta Maria would also indicate that May's hostility towards Buckingham was not determined by the man himself, but rather by his seemingly unstoppable influence over Charles and the consequent destitution of the powers of Parliament and fall into an 'absolute' rule. This interpretation would also help dating the play after 23 August 1628, the day of Buckingham's assassination, with Lollia Paulina, murdered on Agrippina's orders, possibly acting as a foil for the duke. A scene in the opening act of the play in which Agrippina is presented with the head of her former rival is particularly relevant in this regard:

⁶⁶ Hopkins, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars*, 140.

⁶⁷ Hopkins, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars*, 141.

⁶⁸ *Pharsalia*, 1627, a4v.

Pallas. The Tribune, Madam, is returned and brings
Lollia Paulina's head.

...

Agrippina. Let me peruse this face. Ha! 'Tis much changed.
Her teeth shall make me sure: they did not grow
The common way. I am confirmed: 'tis she.

...

O pale death,
Thou mock of beauty, and of greatness too!
Was this the face that once in Caesar's love
Was Agrippina's rival, and durst hope
As much 'gainst me as my unquestioned power
Has wrought on her? Was this that beauty once
That wore the riches of the world about it?
For whose attire all lands, all seas were searched,
All creatures robbed? This! This was that Paulina,
Whom Caius Caesar served, whom Rome adored
And the world feared.

...

Take hence the head, least in her death she gain
A greater conquest o'er me than her life
Could ever do, to make me shed a tear:
I would not wrong the justice I have done
So much as to lament it now. You know,
My friends, she had a spirit dangerous,
And, though my nature could have pardoned her,
Reason of state forbade it, which then told me
Great ruins have been wrought by foolish pity.⁶⁹

The figure of Lollia Paulina is mentioned by Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio, but it does not feature prominently in any account. Lollia Paulina was a noblewoman who had once been the wife of Caligula and who was among the three potential brides presented to Claudius upon the death of his first wife Messalina; Agrippina was chosen instead, and, jealous of Lollia

⁶⁹ *Agrippina*, B2r-B3r.

Paulina, she persuaded Claudius to banish her from Rome and eventually force her to commit suicide. Suetonius only mentions Lollia Paulina as a candidate for marriage, not discussing her fate; Tacitus recounts Agrippina's jealousy of her, the manufactured accusations and Claudius' order to banish her, and her enforced suicide; Cassius Dio, whom May credits in marginal notes as a source for the scene, briefly mentions her once as an example of a victim of Agrippina's jealousy, as well as reporting that Agrippina did indeed examine her teeth to ascertain her identity.⁷⁰ In addition to these sources, Lollia Paulina's fame in early modern England can almost exclusively be credited to an anecdote reported by Pliny the Elder, who describes her, during her marriage to Caligula, as once adorned so lavishly that her jewels were said to be worth four hundred thousand sesterii.⁷¹ References to her between 1577 and 1628 either merely enumerate her among Caligula's wives or, as for example in Jonson's *Volpone*, associate her name with the riches narrated by Pliny. In no case is her murder and the subsequent examination of her head by Agrippina mentioned, not even in Gwinne's petulantly detailed *Nero*, which leads to the tentative conclusion that May included the passage to provide a comparison with a formerly relevant political rival.

All things considered, this hypothesis is not implausible, but it easily engenders another: that Agrippina may not be a foil for Henrietta Maria but rather for Buckingham himself. Although May could hardly have any sympathy for the Catholic Henrietta Maria, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter and as will be discussed with regards to *Antigone*, Buckingham had attracted and would attract much more of the poet's attention and disparagement between 1626 and 1629. Parallels between the early Stuart and the Neronian court were not unheard of and had been possibly invited by Bolton's 1624 pamphlet *Nero Caesar, or Monarchy Depraved*, in which he claims that even a tyrannical monarchy such as

⁷⁰ Suetonius, *Claudius*, 26; Tacitus, 12.1, 12.22; Cassius Dio, 61.32.

⁷¹ The detailed description of the items she was wearing can be found in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, 9.117. It is possible that her name enjoyed renewed popularity after the publication of Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny in 1601.

that under Nero would be preferable to other forms of government; interestingly, the volume was dedicated to Buckingham.⁷² These parallels would be drawn quite explicitly by the manuscript play *The Emperor's Favourite*, attributed to John Newdigate III, in which Nero's favourite Crispinus is a clear foil for Buckingham. Similarities between the play's Crispinus and Buckingham, as meticulously collected by Siobhan C. Keenan, are abundant: their success at court is partly attributed to their good looks and to their ability for dissimulation; they are both fond of curiosities and horses, and have acted as master of horse for their sovereign; both are eventually stabbed and killed by men acting, in their conviction, for the good of the state; both are accused of being sexually corrupt (though Crispinus to a far greater extent); members of Crispinus' entourage, non-existent in historical sources, are modelled on family members and friends of Buckingham. Other similarities exist in Newdigate's portrayal of Crispinus' personality and in the charge, often levelled against Buckingham, of usurping royal power.⁷³ Accepting this reading of the play, it follows that Nero must be a counterpart for Charles. Although it appears – according to Keenan's dating of the play between the late 1620s and the early 1630s, with Wiggins proposing 1632 as the most plausible date – that May could not have read or witnessed a performance of the manuscript play, it is possible that the opposite happened, and that Newdigate was inspired by May's portrayal of Agrippina as a Buckingham attempting to usurp Charles's (i.e., Nero's) throne, and being eventually killed for it.⁷⁴

Martin Butler has made a convincing case for Buckingham to be immortalised in the play in the character of Pallas, Agrippina's lackey. In one of his speeches, Pallas draws a divide between himself and the senators, whom he clearly identifies as his rivals:

Farewell my lords! Go, flattering senators,

⁷² Keenan, 'Staging Roman History', 65-66.

⁷³ Keenan, 'Staging Roman History', 68-80.

⁷⁴ Keenan, 64; Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #2382. Keenan theorises that the potentially compromising play, which has a great number of precise stage directions such as the mention of stage doors, was intended for performance, although that perhaps occurred at a country playhouse or private venue; see Keenan, 88-89.

Go use your best persuasive eloquence
 Whilst I alone upon your envy rise,
 Whilst I enjoy in Agrippina's love
 The fruit of your obsequious diligence.
 What though my birth be humble, and my style
 But one of Caesar's freedmen, though I boast not
 Patrician blood nor in my galleries
 Display old ranks of noseless ancestors,
 Or ear-cropped⁷⁵ images, if I enjoy
 Whatever high nobility can give
 Respect and power: the state can witness it.
 The senate fear me and in flattery
 Have sued to Caesar to confer on me
 Praetorian and quaestorian ornaments,
 Which I at last vouchsafed to accept.
 When my command alone has doomed to death
 The noblest of that order, men whose names
 Old Rome has boasted of, whose virtues raised
 Her to that envied height that now she holds,
 Their murders stupid Caesar rather chose
 To take upon himself than question me.
 Let dull patricians boast their airy titles
 And count me base whilst I commend their lives,
 And for the furtherance of my high intents,
 Make noblest men my hated instruments.

Pallas, argues Butler, is 'clearly a Buckingham ... a new man, contemptuous of birth, breeding or prestige, dislodging worthier men and scorning their attainments'; and, just like 'stupid Caesar', Claudius takes the blame upon himself for Pallas' crimes, Charles had defended Buckingham upon his attempted impeachment by claiming that his ministers' acts were 'his own and above question.'⁷⁶ The self-description of Pallas resembles the charges levelled against

⁷⁵ This is a neologism by May; see OED.

⁷⁶ Butler, 'Romans in Britain', 148-149.

Buckingham too closely for it to be labelled coincidental, which might also help explain why May delayed the publication of *Agrippina* for over a decade.

It is significant that, at a time when May wrote and published several works at the rate of at least one a year between 1626 and 1631, he chose not to publish either *Cleopatra* or *Agrippina* until many years later. This choice supports the theory that May was extremely careful when handling the publication of his works, which he selected and curated with the utmost attention to detail. It also indicates that he was not especially concerned with committing his playwriting efforts to print: he appears not to have been interested in publishing his comedies, for nothing in the 1622 or 1633 edition of *The Heir* suggests that he was involved with the publication, and *The Old Couple* was printed only posthumously, in 1658; as for his tragedies, two were published more than a decade after they were written and one – ‘Julius Caesar’ – was never published and is now lost. The only exception seems to be *Antigone*, which appeared in print only about two years after it was written (more discussion about the date of composition below). This selective approach to publication may also suggest that, particularly in the late 1620s and early 1630s, when he was trying to appeal to court members and rich patrons, May avoided potentially divisive subjects, either translating ‘innocuous’ authors such as Virgil, Martial, and Barclay, or shielding his works against accusations by dedicating them to prominent members of the court or the king himself, as was the case with *Antigone* and the *Continuation* of Lucan. The notion that May opted not to immortalise his tragedies in print because of their sensitive subject matter also answers an obvious question: why would an author struggling for fame and financial support, as May clearly was, discard readily available plays if not for political reasons? All this strongly points to the Roman court depicted here being too closely an exact counterpart to the English one, and to May wishing to avoid censorship and exclusion from potential wealthy courtly patrons.

Perhaps a desire to find parallels between political tragedies focusing on tragic Roman characters has led some scholars to link May with other similar plays, so that the presence of *Agrippina* among his *oeuvre* has sometimes been grounds for attributing the anonymous *The Tragedy of Nero* to him as well. The first proponent of this theory was F. G. Fleay in 1891, who based his suspicion on the fact that *Nero* and May's *The Heir* were part of the same group of plays the rights of which were transferred from Thomas Jones to Augustine Matthews.⁷⁷ Carol A. Morley deems it unlikely that *Agrippina* and *Nero*, so related thematically, could be penned by two different authors in the span of merely four years, and the seamless elision between the two plots would seem to endorse an attribution to May.⁷⁸ Sutton seconds the idea, dismissing improbable past attributions to Jonson or Massinger, but he adds no further justification to his stance, as does another proponent of this theory, Frederick Kiefer.⁷⁹

However, most of these hypotheses are easy to counter. Elliott M. Hill dismisses Fleay's argument by pointing out that any information pertaining to the transfer of rights 'in an age of wholesale transfers of copyright' should not be regarded as evidence in the attribution of anonymous plays.⁸⁰ Morley's observation loses all its force if we accept Wiggins's convincing argument that *Nero* was, in fact, not written in 1624 when it was published, but in 1619, therefore *nine*, and not four, years before *Agrippina*.⁸¹ Schmid, who devotes a section in his edition of *Agrippina* to its comparison with *Nero*, concludes that the two are not the work of the same author.⁸² Chester agrees with Schmid and adds that the author of *Nero* had 'a poetical insight and a mastery of phrase which May ... could never compass', disputing the attribution chiefly on stylistic grounds.⁸³ Wiggins also dismisses the attribution by arguing that not only

⁷⁷ Fleay, 84; Stationers' Register Online, SRO9183. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the list seems to share another common denominator, that is, the fact that they had all been at some point part of the repertory of the Red Bull.

⁷⁸ Morley, 41.

⁷⁹ Sutton, §44; Kiefer, 20.

⁸⁰ Hill, xiii.

⁸¹ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1917.

⁸² Schmid, 216.

⁸³ Chester, 115.

do the two plays stage the events in reverse historical sequence, but that they were also written nearly a decade apart.⁸⁴

Another point that, I think, ought to be considered are a number of references to Lucan and Virgil that occur in *Nero*. As Wilfred P. Mustard points out, two passages in the tragedy are borrowed from Virgil's *Georgics*: one is an almost direct translation of a four-line excerpt from the first book, the other is from the third. Two other passages from *Nero* are quotations from Lucan's first and fourth book, respectively, instead.⁸⁵ When comparing *Nero*'s renditions of the Latin original with May's own, very few – if almost none – verbal affinities can be found:

O you homeborn Gods of our country, Romulus and Vesta, That Tuscan Tiber and Rome's towers defend, Forbid not yet at length a happy end To former evils, let this hand revenge The wronged world: enough we now have suffered. ⁸⁶	Romulus, Vesta, and ye native gods That keep by Tuscan Tiber your abodes And Rome's high palaces, take not away Young Caesar, now the only aid and stay Of this distressed age! Enough have we Already paid for Troy's old perjury. ⁸⁷
Each best day of our life at first doth go, To them succeeds diseased age and woe[.] ⁸⁸	Their first age best all wretched mortals find; After diseases and old age do come[.] ⁸⁹
But that our temples and our houses smoke, Our marble buildings turn to be our tombs, Burned bones and spurned at courses fill the streets, Not Pyrrhus nor thou Hannibal art author: Sad Rome is ruined by a Roman hand. But, if to Nero's end this only way Heaven's justice hath chose out and peoples' love	But now that walls of half fall'n houses so Hang in Italian towns, vast stones we see ... Not thou fierce Pyrrhus, nor the Punic bands This waste have made: no sword could reach so far, Deep pierce the wounds received in civil war. But, if no other way to Nero's reign

⁸⁴ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1917.

⁸⁵ Mustard, 175-176, 178.

⁸⁶ Anonymous, *The Tragedy of Nero*, D2v.

⁸⁷ *Georgics*, B13r.

⁸⁸ Anonymous, *The Tragedy of Nero*, H1r.

⁸⁹ *Georgics*, E7r.

Could not but by this feebling ills be moved,
We do not then at all complain our harms;
On this condition please us, let us die,
And cloy the Parthian with revenge and pity.⁹⁰

The Fates could find, if gods their crowns obtain
At such dear rates,
...
Now we complain not, gods: mischief and war
Pleasing to us, since so rewarded, are;
Let dire Pharsalia groan with armèd hosts,
And glut with blood the Carthaginian ghosts[.]⁹¹

The gods sure keep it, hide from us that live
How sweet death is[.]⁹²

The gods death's sweetness do conceal to make
Men live.⁹³

Assuming that he had been the author of the anonymous tragedy, it may be argued that, with seven to nine years separating *Nero* and May's two classical translations, May might have reconsidered and reworked his previous English versions until they were barely recognisable. However, when observing May's attitude to referencing his own works, it seems improbable: as demonstrated by the various self-borrowings illustrated in this chapter, when quoting so precisely from himself May never deviated too much from his original work, or at least not as conspicuously as is visible in *Nero*.

Finally, May's overall output should be taken into consideration: adding *Nero* in 1619 to May's canon would mark a seven-year gap between it and the first of his other ventures in Roman tragedy and, perhaps even more significantly, his work on Lucan. Given May's penchant for investigating, exploiting, and developing the same topic over multiple works in close proximity, as well as a strong tendency to draw from his own previous works and thus create a web of interconnected publications the internal influences of which can be traced securely, it would prove at the very least odd for him to have nurtured an interest in the Neronian age and Lucan in the late 1610s, then abandoned it completely only to resurrect it seven years later with

⁹⁰ Anonymous, *The Tragedy of Nero*, E4r.

⁹¹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, A1v.

⁹² Anonymous, *The Tragedy of Nero*, E4v.

⁹³ *Pharsalia*, 1627, G3r.

Pharsalia and *Cleopatra*. Throughout his career, May very rarely produced ‘self-standing’ works, impervious to the rest of his production: he wrote two comedies, the second of which references the first; he translated Roman authors and quoted his own translations multiple times throughout his *oeuvre*, particularly in his tragedies; he translated two of Barclay’s works and wrote two historical poems on English history; as shall be discussed, even the seemingly anomalous *Antigone*, with its peculiar (for May) Greek origin, heavily draws from his previous works and is firmly interwoven with the rest of May’s publications. Therefore, it can be concluded that writing and discarding such a refined work as *Nero* would not be coherent with May’s *modus operandi*.

Although possibly as equally interesting as *Cleopatra*, *Agrippina* has not attracted a comparable degree of scholarly attention. After its original 1639 publication, the play was republished after May’s death and during the Commonwealth in 1654. It is hard to gauge the influence, if any, of this tragedy, but the publication of Richards’ *Messalina* in 1640, just one year after *Agrippina*, might indicate that a brief revival of Julio-Claudian plays occurred at the end of the 1630s, perhaps spurred by the turmoil preceding the ensuing civil war. In any case, after the Restoration the tragedy was not printed again for 250 years. The only modern print edition of the play was published in 1914 by F. Ernst Schmid with an appendix comparing it to the anonymous *Nero*; the tragedy was edited again in 2003 by Lyndsey Clarke as an online MA thesis, available online.⁹⁴

3.3 The Tragedy of Antigone

⁹⁴ See Thomas May, Lyndsey Clarke (ed.), *The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina, Empress of Rome*, <<https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/renplays/mayindex.html>> (EMLS, 2003).

As mentioned above, this attempts to propose a 1629 dating for *Antigone*, the last known vernacular tragedy written by May, through an examination of literary and political circumstances.

Contrary to most of May's publications, there is no trace of *Antigone* in the Stationers' Register. The play was printed only once during the seventeenth century, in 1631 by Thomas Harper for Benjamin Fisher; the title page gives *The Tragedy of Antigone, the Theban Princess* as the full title and the author as 'T. May.' Compared to other contemporary publications by May, the edition is relatively ordinary, with no intricate patterns or engravings embellishing the title page and no celebratory poems by friends. An epistle dedicatory immediately follows the title page, then a short argument summarising the plot of the play precedes the tragedy proper. As pointed out by Matteo Pangallo, the resemblance between stage directions in *Antigone* and other plays by May, particularly *The Old Couple*, suggests that this tragedy was printed from an authorial manuscript.⁹⁵

Different dates of composition have been proposed for *Antigone*, though no hypothesis appears conclusive. Based on its verbal similarities with May's translation of Lucan, Chester puts forth 1627 as the earliest possible date of composition of *Antigone*, but ultimately does not formulate a more specific guess.⁹⁶ Edward Lautner, in his critical edition, expands Chester's proposed earlier limit to 1626, arguing that May could just as easily have written it while working on Lucan, and not necessarily after the latter was published. Pangallo argues in favour of a 1630-31 date, indicating that, for a play not intended for performance, four years between composition and publication are 'difficult to justify' and that it is more likely that May wrote it and immediately sought to publish it.⁹⁷ Finally, Wiggins examines all possibilities and

⁹⁵ Pangallo, x.

⁹⁶ Chester, 98-99.

⁹⁷ Pangallo, xvii.

tentatively concludes that the similarities with Lucan ‘exert the strongest pull’, therefore presenting 1627 as *Antigone*’s most plausible date of composition.⁹⁸

However, despite mentioning it among the play’s sources, Wiggins neglects to consider that May was also influenced by another of his own works, namely his translation of Virgil’s *Georgics*, which he references in at least two passages (emphasis mine):

And thus before Dictaeon love did reign
And **impious** nations on slain cattle fed,
His life on earth the **golden Saturn** led.
No classics sounded then, nor mortal blade
Of swords the smiths’ laborious anvil made.⁹⁹

As **Philomel** in shady **poplar tree**,
Wailing her young ones’ loss – whom cruelly
A watching **husbandman**, ere fledged for flight,
Took from her nest – she spends in grief the night,
And from a bough sings forth her sorrow there
With sad complaints filling the places near.¹⁰¹

Aemon. How well this sad and solitary place
Suits with my thoughts? These unfrequented
woods,
Where nature, void of artificial robes,
Presents her naked and ungarnished face.
In such abodes as these dwelt **piety**,
White innocence, and spotless chastity
In that first **golden age** when **Saturn** reigned.¹⁰⁰

No howls, no shrieks, no voice of woe,
Not such as widowed turtles show,
Nor such as **Philomel** when she,
High seated on a **poplar tree**,
Sends sweet sad notes through th’air of night,
Wailing the **husbandman**’s despite
That reaved her of her dearest nest.
Our loss cannot be so expressed.¹⁰²

Although the nod is not as evident as is the case with Lucan, discussed below, I think the thematic and verbal borrowings are enough to suggest that *Antigone* was completed after, or at the earliest during, May’s work on Virgil’s *Georgics*.

⁹⁸ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #2219.

⁹⁹ *Georgics*, D8r.

¹⁰⁰ *Antigone*, B2v. The phrase ‘solitary place’ used to identify the woods reoccurs three times in *The Old Couple*, written in 1630.

¹⁰¹ *Georgics*, I4r-I4v.

¹⁰² *Antigone*, D3v.

However, there is one argument for a date between late 1628 and 1629 that, I think, is even more compelling. Given what has been argued so far in this thesis concerning May's interest in contemporary politics, which he rarely failed to take into account while working on his plays and translations, I think 1629 ought to be considered as the most likely date of composition. As has been discussed, *Antigone* was not a popular subject for the early modern stage, and adaptations of Greek tragedy in general were not the norm; this proved even more so in the case of May, whose *Antigone* was his only engagement with material of Greek origins, which in any case he heavily reworked and adapted to suit his dramatic needs. The theme of denied burial, in particular, was also approached very infrequently, with only two plays featuring scenes in which a character is denied burial in the 1610s, and none in the 1620s. Of the two 1610s plays, in Massinger and Nathan Field's *The Fatal Dowry* (c. 1619) the burial is prevented by the dead man's creditors, who refuse to release the body, but the matter is resolved relatively early on; in Fletcher and Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613) the situation and characters are borrowed from Sophocles' *Antigone*, with the same villain (Creon) denying funeral rites to kings fallen on the battlefield.¹⁰³

The choice to stage *Antigone*'s refusal to comply with Creon's edict prohibiting the burial of Polynices, while possibly motivated by other reasons as well, acquired a political topicality in late 1628 and 1629 that makes these dates the better candidates, in my opinion, for the composition of *Antigone*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in August 1628 John Felton assassinated the Duke of Buckingham. In their studies on *Antigone*, both Karen Britland and Angelica Vedelago briefly touch upon the possibility that the tragedy may have been partly intended as a comment on the political context surrounding Buckingham's assassination and Felton's execution. Vedelago also notes how the play 'explores the issue of disobedience and resistance to a tyrannical ruler' in a time at which, as has been discussed in the previous chapter,

¹⁰³ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1724, #1883.

members of Parliament were imprisoned for speaking out against the king or his favourite.¹⁰⁴ Britland even hints at the existence of an allusion to the conflicts at the Isle of Rhé and La Rochelle in *Antigone*.¹⁰⁵ Most importantly, she points out the strongest clue denoting an intentional parallel between Creon's and Charles's edicts: in a manuscript version of an epitaph composed after Felton's death, the last line is a Latin quotation from Lucan's *Pharsalia* condemning Caesar's decision not to bury the dead – 'caelo tegitur, qui non habet urnam.' This very passage from the seventh book of the *Pharsalia* – which May translates 'and they obtain / Heaven's coverture that have no urns at all' – is reused almost verbatim by May in *Antigone*, along with an entire section of the book.¹⁰⁶ These are the two passages:

This anger boots thee not; for tis all one
 Whether the fire or putrefaction
 Dissolve them: all to nature's bosom go,
 And to themselves their ends the bodies owe.
 If now these nations, Caesar, be not burned,
 They shall when earth and seas to flames are turned.
 ... Earth receives again
 Whatever she brought forth; and they obtain
 Heaven's coverture that have no urns at all.
 Thou that deny'st these nations funeral,
 Why dost thou fly these slaughter-smelling
 fields?
 Breathe, if thou canst, the air this region yields,
 Or drink this water, Caesar; but from thee
 The rotting people challenge Thessaly,
 And keep possession 'gainst the conqueror.¹⁰⁷

Thine anger boots not, Creon. 'Tis all one
 Whether the fire or putrefaction
 Dissolve them: all to nature's bosom go,
 And to themselves their ends the bodies owe.
 If now the Argives' bodies be not burned,
 They shall when earth and seas to flames are turned.
 Earth will, in spite of thee, receive again
 Whatever she brought forth, and they obtain
 Heaven's coverture that have no graves at all.
 Thou that deny'st these people funeral,
 Why dost thou fly those slaughter-smelling
 fields?
 Breathe, if thou canst, the air this sad place yields.
 Those vanquished carcasses alone possess
 The ground and bar the conqueror's access.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Vedelago, 260.

¹⁰⁵ Britland, 'Antigone', 145.

¹⁰⁶ Britland, 'Antigone', 148-149.

¹⁰⁷ *Pharsalia*, 1627, N7r.

¹⁰⁸ *Antigone*, C3r.

Aside from the political edge that such an explicit quotation from Lucan adds to the play, the fact that May chose to reference the very passage used to commemorate Felton hints strongly at the possibility of a parallel between the two situations. Although Britland and Vedelago's analyses have the merit of drawing attention to the political context of May's *Antigone*, they fall short of presenting a conclusion concerning the play's date and they fail to recognise previous engagements, in May's *oeuvre*, with current politics and specifically his semi-public support of outspoken opponents of the duke. Seeing how the plot point of burial prohibited by royal decree cannot be found in any other extant plays from the 1620s, one must conclude that it was not a particularly popular theatrical situation in early Stuart theatre, and that any reference to it immediately after the death of John Felton could hardly have appeared coincidental. Moreover, assuming that *Antigone* really was conceived as a closet drama from the outset, May could have intended the play as private entertainment for his circle of friends and, as Pangallo notes, he could have exploited the written medium 'to explore political ideas that he may have thought infeasible, or at least risky, in performance on the public stage.'¹⁰⁹

Emphasis on the importance of Creon's blasphemous act is stressed in the plot summary that May uncharacteristically prefaces to the text of his tragedy. About a fourth (six lines) of the summary, which is twenty-four lines long, is devoted to explaining the reasons why Creon's decision would be perceived negatively by ancient Greek characters: 'Creon denies to the Argive bodies funeral rites, which among the heathen was therefore esteemed a cruel punishment, because they thought the souls of them that were unburied wandered a hundred years before they could be transported by Charon into Elysium.'¹¹⁰ This unnecessarily overexplained plot point, especially when contrasted with the rest of the plot summary, which otherwise mostly consists of short sentences, suspiciously reads, on May's part, like a justification of the play's focus on the immorality of Creon's actions. The universally perceived

¹⁰⁹ Pangallo, xvii.

¹¹⁰ *Antigone*, A7r.

impiety of a denied burial would hardly have needed to be explained to an early modern audience, or the display of Felton's body would have not been issued and subsequently collectively recognised as punishment. May's insistence on explaining why the act would have been blasphemous specifically for an ancient Greek audience appears like an attempt to distance himself from insinuations of treason, as though only Creon's, and not Charles's, decision would be deserving of the label of 'cruel punishment.'

However, if the hypothesis of *Antigone* as a response to the execution and public display of the corpse of Felton is to be accepted, why, then, the apparently incongruous decision to publish the play in 1631? The answer, I think, has to do with May's continuous search for financial stability by means of a wealthy patron. By late 1630, May clearly had achieved a certain level of fame mainly thanks to his Lucan translation and *Continuation*; however, as the perspective patrons he chose for his works between 1628 and 1630 attest, he did not appear to have secured a stable financial backer at court. As has been and will be further discussed, neither the dedicatee of his Virgil nor that of his Martial were honoured with a dedication again – likely a hint that May's appeal to patronage had been unsuccessful – and the epistle attached to the *Continuation*, which is addressed to Charles, appears to be motivated entirely by May's own initiative rather than by any concrete display of encouragement by the king. In this context, it seems plausible that May, wishing to impress a courtier close to Charles and prone to bestow his patronage upon artists and poets, chose to 'recycle' an older and already available play rather than produce a new one, confident that the few years passed after Felton's execution would significantly lessen the impact of a storyline involving a king's refusal to allow funeral rites. The choice of Endymion Porter as a dedicatee, with his publicly known ties to Buckingham, as will be illustrated, would probably have acted as an insurance against any hint of controversy; additionally, the dedication itself, largely focused on the nature of tragedy and completely

devoid of any allusion to political themes in *Antigone*, appears to be May's attempt at presenting his play in the most neutral manner possible.

Finally, Britland thematically links *Antigone* with Jonson's 1629 play *The New Inn*, which Martin Butler judges a response to the political climate and expectations of the moment. Noting that a similar assessment might be applied to May's *Antigone*, Britland points out that both plays were published in 1631 in octavo by the printer Thomas Harper, a clue perhaps indicative of a close collaboration between the two playwrights at the time.¹¹¹ Although undoubtedly a minor point, the assumption that the two playwrights were close and possibly sharing the same political concerns, coupled with the fact that *The New Inn* was composed in 1629, certainly fits into the theory of *Antigone*'s being written in 1629 very well.

With these arguments in mind, I propose early 1629 as a date of composition of *Antigone*. Late 1628 would also technically be possible, but, as Felton was executed on 29 November, a later rather than earlier date appears more plausible.

As for the performance history of the play, there is no record. Based on textual and contextual clues, Pangallo speculates that the play was never performed, nor was it ever intended to be: in *Antigone*, May employs a more markedly declamatory style compared to *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina*; he chiefly uses Garnier's 'undramatic' *Antigone* as a source for his own; and, like other closet dramatists of the time, he 'makes use of the medium to explore political ideas that he may have thought infeasible, or at least risky, in performance on the public stage.'¹¹² Considering the overarching political theme of the play, which is not entirely obscured by the romantic plot, the absence of traces of performance is easily explained.

¹¹¹ Britland, 'Antigone', 143; Butler is quoted by Britland.

¹¹² Pangallo, xvi-xvii.

May's predecessors in dealing with the myth of Antigone were not many. Chiefly, the first and most widely known adaptation of it in England was the Latin translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* by Thomas Watson, published in 1581 with the title *Sophoclis Antigone*. The translation, which was judged by J. W. Binns to be 'the most formal and "literary" of the Elizabethan Latin verse translations from the Greek', is a very close adaptation of Sophocles' text, with attempts to reproduce the lyric meters of the original in Latin.¹¹³ As testimony to the significant difference in popularity between Latin and Greek drama, the first English translation of a Sophoclean play appeared in 1649, when Christopher Wase's *Electra* was published.¹¹⁴ Even more surprisingly, the first English *Antigone* appeared almost one hundred and fifty years after Watson's Latin one, when it was translated by George Adams in 1729.¹¹⁵ Conversely, continental Europe witnessed a more substantial engagement with Sophocles' play, with vernacular translations starting to appear as early as 1533, when Luigi Alamanni's Italian *Tragedia di Antigone* was published. Of all the other European Antigones flourishing between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the most relevant in the context of this thesis was Robert Garnier's French version *Antigone ou la Piété*, published in 1580.¹¹⁶

Aside from straight adaptations of the myth, and as concerns only English works, *Antigone* is only mentioned in the poem *Oedipus Three Cantoes* (1615) by Thomas Evans and in *Gynaikeion* (1624) by Thomas Heywood.¹¹⁷ As for theatrical works, other than those directly dramatizing Sophocles' narrative arc, *Antigone* features as a character in the 1566 play *Jocasta* (a translation of Ludovico Dolce's *Giocasta*, brought into English by George Gascoigne, Francis Kinwelmersh, and Christopher Yelverton) and in Thomas Newton's 1581 *Thebais* (a

¹¹³ Binns, 146-147.

¹¹⁴ Vedelago, 121.

¹¹⁵ Walton, 218.

¹¹⁶ Vedelago, 134.

¹¹⁷ Vedelago, 227.

translation of Seneca's *Thebais*).¹¹⁸ Of the characters originating from the same cluster of myths, Creon seems to have been a far more popular choice than Antigone, for his story provided different and nuanced opportunities to present him as *exemplum execrandum*: his disrespect of religion and religious rites, his deserved slaying by the hero Theseus, his refusal to bury Polynices, all spurred different forms of engagement with the myth.¹¹⁹ Antigone had generated comparatively less interest, which is why May's approach to her story appears fascinating.

Accepting the proposed date of 1629 for *Antigone*, it is apparent that, in the second half of the 1620s, May devoted himself to the classics and produced the only three extant tragedies of his repertory, and that all of them focus on classical women. The titles chosen for the plays reflect this affinity: all follow the pattern *The Tragedy of* plus the name of the protagonist, then a descriptive designation comprising a honorific title (*Queen, Empress, Princess*) and a geographical denomination (*of Egypt, of Rome, Theban*). The three plays also feature narrative arcs that conclude with the death of the protagonist. In fact, the resemblances between them are so apparent as to prompt the question of whether May had planned some kind of trilogy; in that respect, however, *Antigone* proves the exception in several regards. For one, Antigone is Greek, not Roman; she is a mythical character not grounded in historical reality; and she is indisputably the morally pristine heroine of her play, whereas Cleopatra and Agrippina, when not outright villains, are at the very least morally questionable throughout their respective plays. Moreover, the fact that May chose to publish *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina* jointly in 1639 and *Antigone*

¹¹⁸ Characters named 'Antigona' also appear in Samuel Daniel's 1604 *Philotas* and in Middleton and Rowley's 1619 *An Old Law*, though in both cases the naming has little to do with Antigone's original myth. For the list of plays featuring characters named Antigone or Antigona, see Berger, 19; for the plays' dates, see Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #438, #704, #1440, and #1899, respectively.

¹¹⁹ Miola, 'Antigones', 231.

independently in 1631 should suggest that, if he ever had intended them as a trilogy, he never formalised his original plan.

Indeed, despite being written in the same period as Roman works such as *Cleopatra*, *Agrippina*, Lucan, Virgil, and Martial, *Antigone* is, as I pointed out, inspired by Greek literature, rather than Latin. In fact, it bears the distinction of being the *only* work of May that explicitly draws upon Greek literature and culture, for even the Greek-speaking sources employed by May throughout his *oeuvre* were writing of Roman matters. Tanya Pollard has helped debunk the notion that Greek tragedies were generally unknown to English audiences: for instance, there are more examples of vernacular translations and performances from Greek tragedies than Senecan plays, and influences from Greek drama can be traced in the works of many more early modern playwrights than previously observed.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, Greek theatre was more frequently accessed through translation, Latin or otherwise, and even Jonson, whose scholarly knowledge of Greek is almost proverbial, is known to have owned an anthology of Greek drama that sported a Latin translation parallel to the original text.¹²¹ On top of that, as Vedelago notes, dramatizing the story of Antigone ‘was an unconventional choice for the time’, and, excluding Watson’s and Garnier’s 1580s versions, as discussed above, *Antigone* very rarely appears in contemporary works.¹²²

Precisely the singularity of May’s choice in terms of subject ought to draw attention to any political overtones to the play. In light of the niche nature of the myth of Antigone, it would be unwarranted to judge the choice of subject ‘fortuitous’, and it would be reasonable to conclude that May chose Antigone because of its themes of civil war and its potential for exploring the relationship between a monarch and its subjects.¹²³ Links between *Antigone* and contemporary English politics have been discussed above and will be delved into further below.

¹²⁰ Pollard, 5-6.

¹²¹ Braden, 376.

¹²² Vedelago, 227.

¹²³ Vedelago, 263.

In any case, references to a denied burial in the wake of Felton's execution and public display of his corpse, which could have proved disastrous for the career of the struggling May, were carefully refashioned into yet another appeal for patronage: as though to absolve himself completely from any accusation of treachery or ill-sentiment towards the now-deceased Buckingham, this time May chose to flatter one of the most distinguished and influential members of the court.

The dedicatee of the tragedy, as addressed by May, is 'the most worthily honoured Endymion Porter, Esquire, one of his Majesty's Bedchamber.'¹²⁴ Endymion Porter (1587-1649) was a courtier and, at the time of *Antigone's* publication, one of the closest to Charles I. After spending part of his youth in Spain – becoming a trustworthy confidant of one of the future Philip IV's most powerful ministers and probably momentarily adopting the Catholic faith in the process – in the late 1610s he entered into Buckingham's service, and in 1622 he was sent on a diplomatic mission to Spain to negotiate a potential marital alliance between England and Spain (the so-called 'Spanish match') and concessions regarding the Palatinate, but was unsuccessful on both fronts. Porter held the office of groom of the bedchamber under both James's and Charles's reigns and kept on rising in the social hierarchy at court: after Buckingham's death in 1628, he continued to celebrate the Duke's memory and was rewarded by Charles with grants and offices; additionally, Porter was a very influential member of the court's cultural circles and was patron to numerous artists and poets, being responsible for bringing the painter Anton Van Dyck to England. He was elected to Parliament in 1640 and, upon the outbreak of the Civil War, having displayed pro-Spanish and pro-Catholic sympathies throughout his life, he was the subject of many attacks by opposers of Charles's personal rule

¹²⁴ *Antigone*, A3r.

and was finally displaced from his seat in 1643. During the war he was part of Charles's personal entourage, and he died in 1649, financially destitute.¹²⁵

Glancing at his biography, it becomes apparent why May chose Porter as a patron: his prestigious court connections, his considerable wealth, and his involvement in the artistic scene of Caroline England made him the perfect candidate for any poet pursuing patronage. On the other hand, it is equally clear that Porter embodied everything against which May had stood until 1627, with his *Pharsalia* dedications, and later during his parliamentary years; the choice of Porter as a perspective patron in 1631, which followed the dedication to Charles of May's 1630 *Continuation* of Lucan, was tantamount to a public declaration of allegiance to the court. Whether because of May's growing popularity due to his Lucan, or because Porter effectively sponsored him at court, May's efforts appear to have been successful, for his two subsequent publications after *Antigone* were dedicated to Charles and allegedly written upon his command.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, it is difficult to say for certain whether May succeeded in obtaining Porter's patronage. One clue in this regard might lie in the fact that, in 1637, May infamously lost the honour of poet laureate to William Davenant: Davenant was a protégée of Porter's, who was known to have acted on behalf of the poet 'over a question of censorship' and, more generally, had proved instrumental to Davenant's success; this could suggest that Porter, given his relevance in artistic circles at court, may have successfully lobbied for Davenant against May.¹²⁷

Inevitably, May had to deal with Watson's translation; however, the approach to the character of Antigone is markedly different. Watson's Antigone is explicitly condemned by the poet from the outset, with the prologue-narrating Natura summarising her judgement with 'Sed

¹²⁵ Asch, 'Porter', 947-950.

¹²⁶ Further discussion below.

¹²⁷ Payne, 139, 148.

misera nondum cernit, affectum rudem / Debere patriae legibus locum dare' ('But the wretched woman does not see that raw passion should give way to the laws of a country').¹²⁸ As Robert S. Miola points out, May's play is more clearly indebted to Garnier's version and, more generally, to pastoral themes. Chiefly, May appropriates Garnier's political concerns and refashions them for Caroline England, with reflections on 'the nature and limits of monarchical rule, the origins of sovereignty, the role of citizens and constitutional authority.'¹²⁹ Garnier is also a clear influence in the choice of choruses: in a departure from classical and Jonsonian tradition, May follows Garnier in adding three different choruses, respectively Thebans, old men, and Argive women.¹³⁰ Additionally, the opening scene with Oedipus can also be found in Garnier's *Antigone*.¹³¹

May's *Antigone* was also, as discussed above, indebted to the classics and, particularly, to works previously translated by May. Echoes of Seneca's *Phoenissae* are clearly present in May's *Antigone*, although arguably May might have drawn upon it indirectly, as it was also the chief influence on Garnier's version.¹³² Statius and his *Thebaid* provide the material for several scenes, including the messenger reporting the duel between Eteocles and Polynices, as well as the crucial figure of Argia, King Adrastus' daughter and Polynices' wife. In his handling and reworking of Statius' material, Vedelago notes, May displays all the attributes that pertained to Jonson's definition of *imitatio*, producing a multi-faceted erudite text that is borne of his 'exactness of study' and 'multiplicity of reading.'¹³³ The influence of Lucan in May's *Antigone* can both be detected in verbal, sometimes *verbatim*, borrowings, described above, and in the innovative introduction of necromancy into the play, in which a corpse is resurrected to provide oracles. A detailed and macabre description of this act can be found in the sixth book of the

¹²⁸ Miola, 'Antigones', 236.

¹²⁹ Miola, 'Antigones', 237-238.

¹³⁰ Vedelago, 229.

¹³¹ Usher, 90.

¹³² Waters, 45.

¹³³ Vedelago, 241-242.

Pharsalia, in which a Pompeian soldier is manipulated by the witch Erictho in order to obtain a prophecy about the outcome of the war. In an equally gruesome scene in *Antigone*, three witches wander the field of dead Argive soldiers in search of a body on which to perform their magic; upon finding it, they bewitch it so that, as a stage direction informs the reader, ‘the carcass speaks.’ This scene, not found in any previous iteration of the myth, makes May’s *Antigone* ‘unique in how, via its remixing and rewriting of classical sources, it sets out consciously to experiment with the body and the role it plays with respect to violence and knowledge.’¹³⁴

As was usually the case, May also absorbed and repurposed many of the tropes found in contemporary vernacular drama, thereby creating a Greek tragedy that is essentially English in spirit and form. The romantic ending with the two lovers committing suicide alongside each other, an original take on the noticeably different ending envisioned by Sophocles, is a nod to *Romeo and Juliet*, which May evokes explicit by reprising Romeo’s line ‘tempt not a desperate man’: ‘Do not in vain torment a desperate man.’¹³⁵ *Macbeth*’s influence can clearly be detected in the necromancy scene, in which the one witch of Lucan becomes three witches and the two men witnessing and commenting on the scene, Macbeth and Banquo, turn into Creon and Ianthus. This adaptation provides a particular insight into May’s composition method: whereas the classical source is appropriated for its imagery, the contemporary dramatic source is employed as a structural means of bringing the scene onto the stage.¹³⁶ Echoes of Shakespeare can also be found in the relationship between Aemon and his servant Dircus, which is reminiscent of that between Antony and Eros in *Antony and Cleopatra*, in that, in the final scenes, both servants refuse to comply with their master’s orders and kill themselves instead.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Usher, 85-86, 92.

¹³⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, V.3.59; *Antigone*, E4r; Miola, ‘Antigones’, 237. The Shakespearean quotations throughout are from the second edition of *The Oxford Shakespeare, The Complete Works*.

¹³⁶ Vedelago, 240.

¹³⁷ Vedelago, 241.

Classical and contemporary influences, Britland notes, converge in echoes of the pastoral romances then popular at court, such as Honorat de Bueil's *Les Bergeries* and Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido*, that can be glimpsed throughout May's *Antigone*, particularly in the dialogues between the two lovers Antigone and Aemon.¹³⁸

Unusually for May, the text of the tragedy is preceded by a succinct two-page summary of the entire plot; a similar synopsis is offered here, due to the differences with Sophocles' original and well-known *Antigone*.

The play opens with a dialogue between the blind and bereaved Oedipus and his daughter Antigone. Antigone and Aemon exchange love vows. In the meantime, war has broken out, and the chorus and a messenger recount the fate of Antigone's brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, who have slain each other in single combat; Creon has been crowned king and has immediately ordered that the Argive bodies should not be granted burial.

Deiphile, Ornitus, and Argia, Polynices' widow, lament their fate and the state of unburial in which the Argive soldiers lie. Deiphile sets for Athens to ask for Theseus' help, and Argia vows to plea with Creon or else resort to breaking the law to bury her dead. Creon orders that Antigone be kept under house arrest and forbids his son Aemon from marrying her. Antigone pledges to bury her brother Polynices under cover of darkness.

Argia and her escort Menoetes get to the field where the unburied bodies lie, and there they meet Antigone. Creon is also on the battlefield and, upon seeing three witches, he stays and witnesses them bring a corpse back to life; the corpse prophesies that Creon will soon die.

Antigone and Argia are apprehended for burying Polynices. Creon intends to use the prisoner Argia, daughter of the foreign king Adrastus, as a valuable bargaining chip. Antigone

¹³⁸ Britland, 'Antigone', 141-142.

discusses the nature of divine and human laws, but Creon sentences her to be buried alive and left to starve. Dircus brings the news of Antigone's fate to his friend Aemon.

The augur Tiresias predicts that Creon need not die, provided he spares Antigone; his wife, Eurydice, sets off to give pardon to Antigone in order to prevent any more of her son Aemon's suffering. Meanwhile, Aemon and Dircus run to Antigone's tomb, but too late: fearing a long agony, she has already taken poison and so she dies shortly after their entrance. Aemon orders Dircus to leave him alone, but Dircus kills himself. After uttering a parting speech, Aemon also kills himself. Upon arriving at the scene with servants, Eurydice dies of a broken heart. The play concludes with the arrival of Theseus, who announces the death of Creon and the restoration of justice in Thebes.

If his word in the epistle to Porter is to be taken at face value, May favoured tragedy over comedy and romantic plots, unless the latter were portraying a love 'most distressed and in despairing passion', and he deemed 'love' the main popular attraction of comedies.¹³⁹ Hence, perhaps, stemmed his choice to afford the love story between Antigone and Aemon pride of place in his adaptation of a tragedy conventionally known as political rather than private. Yet, as with all of May's tragedies, the play's overarching concern is with contemporary politics, and, in Britland's view, its adoption of romance drama is a façade disguising a subversion of the courtly trope of 'the Caroline couple's union as the source of all national and international harmony.' Instead of promoting Caroline marriage as a shallow *exemplum*, which in court masques was supposedly capable of spreading harmony throughout the nation by the sole virtue of existing, May's version of love is 'based on active familial responsibility that it then offers up as the basis for good and honourable leadership.'¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ *Antigone*, A5r-A5v.

¹⁴⁰ Britland, 'Antigone', 145-146.

As Britland demonstrates, May's *Antigone* articulates the greatest political concerns of the late 1620s and early 1630s, specifically the matter of foreign invasion and foreign aid, censored speech, and civil disobedience.¹⁴¹ Compared to Sophocles', Miola argues, May's *Antigone* is markedly less fierce, for she loses two of her core characteristics: her subversive 'allegiance to chthonic deities and a fiercely independent capacity for action.'¹⁴² However, while not disputing the conclusion that the tragedy ultimately loses much of its dramatic power and effectiveness, I do not necessarily believe that creating a fierce and compelling heroine was May's aim when refashioning the character. By depriving *Antigone* of part of her agency – the decision of burying Polynices is publicly defended by his widow, Argia, with *Antigone* merely in the background – May transforms her defiance into a collective impulse against tyrannical rule, and the prominence given to her relationship with Aemon, opposed by Creon, becomes yet another *exemplum* of virtue against an overbearing monarch.

Most importantly, the play's engagement with monarchical rule functions as a lens through which to investigate May's political views and to better understand his supposedly unpredictable support of Parliament, a little over a decade later, in the face of a king whose rule without Parliament showed increasingly absolutistic symptoms. In a way similar to the handling of monarchy in *Agrippina*, here May expresses a nuanced view that makes it problematic to brand him with the label of 'republican', at least at this stage of his career. Although absolutistic monarchical rule is questioned and condemned throughout the play, one solution is offered in the person of the just ruler Theseus, just as Britannicus was introduced as a viable alternative to the tyrannical Nero in *Agrippina*. As an external observer of Caroline politics, May was heavily critical of the policies enforced by Charles's worryingly autonomous rule and could not help but voicing his concerns through his translations and the characters of his plays. Indeed, as has been observed, echoes of criticisms towards England's reckless foreign policy,

¹⁴¹ Britland, 'Antigone', 142-143.

¹⁴² Miola, 238.

misgivings towards the usurping character of Buckingham, alarm at the divestment of the powers of Parliament and the incarceration of its members, and worries about the nation's drift from patriotic Protestantism towards Papism can be traced in works penned by May between 1626 and 1630. Yet, ever the moderate, May did not yet appear ready to condemn the institution of monarchy *tout court* and was perhaps still hopeful that Charles could divert the course of his rule, address the concerns he expressed, and reign in harmony with Parliament. Nevertheless, the heroic Theseus, upon being offered the crown at the end of the tragedy, refuses it:

No, still let Thebes be governed by her own.
'Twas not our war's intention to enthral
Your land, but free it from a tyrant's yoke;
And to preserve the conquered, not destroy them.
We drew the sword of justice, not of conquest,
Ambitiously to spread our kingdom's bounds,
But to avenge the laws of nature broke.
This act being done, Theseus is peace again.
Soldiers, march on to Athens; Thebes, adieu.
Now let mankind enjoy a happy peace.
Oh, let no monsters breed on earth to glut
Themselves with human slaughter, let no thieves
Infest the woods, no tyrants stain the cities
With blood of innocents! But if such monsters
Must needs be bred to plague the wretched earth,
'Gainst nature and her holy laws to strive,
Let them appear while Theseus is alive.¹⁴³

After being presented as a just ruler, capable of governing the now kingless Thebes, Theseus delivers this monologue that closes the tragedy and stresses the importance of the city's being governed by 'her own.' Emphasis on justice rather than vengeance is already apparent in the

¹⁴³ *Antigone*, E5v.

last chorus, in which Theseus, in stark contrast to Creon, orders to ‘Let cruel Creon too, though he at all / Deserve it not, have rites of funeral.’¹⁴⁴ Creon is explicitly labelled as a tyrant here and the liberation by Theseus framed as an act of justice rather than anything motivated by personal gain; the whole of mankind, free of the ‘tyrant’s yoke’, in spite of the tragic ending of the play and the death of most of its characters, is left to enjoy a ‘happy peace.’ Patriotic stress is placed on the peace being dependent on the rule of a Theban, rather than an outsider like Theseus, which evokes the fear of foreign influence on England’s internal affairs in the late 1620s. Theseus’ intercession to save a foreign city could also be reminiscent of May’s interventionist attitude towards other Protestant countries struggling to free themselves of the Catholic church’s yoke. Analogies between England’s military interventions abroad and specifically the expeditions at the Isle of Rhé in 1627 and La Rochelle to assist French Huguenots in 1628 have been drawn by both Britland and Vedelago, with Britland noting how the ‘stranded’ Huguenots are evoked in the Argive corpses abandoned on the battlefield.¹⁴⁵ Whereas, however, Vedelago entertains the possibility that Theseus might be a foil for Charles I, envisioned by the hopeful May as a bearer of Protestant peace, analogies between Creon and Charles are in fact stronger, especially if accepting a later date for the composition of *Antigone*. The ending might have been intended as a cautionary tale or as the commentary of a disheartened patriot, still entertaining the hope that Protestant England might one day be saved by the intervention of a positive, heroic monarch acting not out of personal interest, but out of selfless love for justice.

In any case, this epilogue, which frames the play as having a good and desirable outcome and completely fails to acknowledge the tragic deaths of most of its protagonists, firmly establishes the tone of the tragedy as political rather than private, suggesting that the collective good must prevail over personal sacrifices. At its core, despite the bigger role played by the

¹⁴⁴ *Antigone*, E5r.

¹⁴⁵ Britland, ‘Antigone’, 145; Vedelago, 261-262.

romantic plot compared to his other two extant tragedies, May's *Antigone* functions as a mouthpiece for its author's outlook on politics and marks the last work explicitly in opposition to Charles that he penned before his turn to Parliament in the early 1640s.

No testimony survives attesting to the popular success of the play, nor is it known whether May's appeal to Porter's patronage was successful. As concerns the latter, whether it was due to Porter's influence or not, May certainly reaped the fruits of his efforts, for in the years immediately following the publication of *Antigone* he was tasked by the king with the composition of two poems about, respectively, Henry II and Edward III. As for the popularity of *Antigone* (though subsequent editions are not always necessarily indicative of success or lack thereof) the play was not reprinted during the poet's lifetime or later. It was, however, edited twice in the past century: by Edward John Lautner as a PhD thesis in 1970, and by Matteo Pangallo in 2016.¹⁴⁶

3.4 Martial's *Epigrams*

Probably shortly after *Antigone*, May published another translation from a classical author, this time Martial. Curiously, the entry in the Stationers' Register for Martial predates that for Virgil: the record for 'Martial's *Epigrams* translated by Thomas May esquire' was added on 31 March 1628, almost two months before the *Georgics*.¹⁴⁷ The motive for a year's delay between the entry and publication of the volume is not immediately clear. Did May perhaps deem Virgil a more palatable publication and therefore opted to publish the *Georgics* before Martial's *Epigrams* for that reason, wishing to ensure his financial stability before embarking on other prospects? Was he perhaps hoping to 'cash in' on the fame acquired with the publication of the

¹⁴⁶ For Lautner, see Thomas May, Edward John Lautner (ed.), 'A Modern-Spelling Edition of Thomas May's *The Tragedy of Antigone, the Theban Princesse*' (unpublished PhD thesis, Case Western Reserve University, 1970).

¹⁴⁷ Stationers' Register Online, SRO8440.

Pharsalia and thus decided that Virgil would make a more fitting immediate successor to Lucan than Martial? Or is the explanation for this odd decision provided by May himself in the epistle to the reader prefacing his *Epigrams*, in which he confesses himself ‘loath to publish’ his translation for ‘divers reasons’?¹⁴⁸ Although this might seem the most straightforward justification for the delay in publication, the three reasons May offers appear rather weak: first, he claims to be afraid that his selection of epigrams as well as his translation would be liable to negative judgement (although he validates his choice by pointing out that Julius Caesar Scaliger had also operated a selection from Martial’s epigrams). Second, he reasons that, since many before him would have translated some of the epigrams for exercise or pleasure, they might subject May’s versions to ‘a more rigid censure.’ Finally, he claims that ‘having already published two translations, [he] was loath any more to vex the Roman poets.’¹⁴⁹ This third justification, however, does not help explaining the delay, for May had obviously not published Virgil when Martial was first entered in the Stationers’ Register, and he had therefore not yet ‘vexed’ the Roman poets as much. A final comment in the epistle reveals that the translation had very much been a ‘work in progress’ for quite some time: ‘some of them [epigrams] have lain many years by me and were not intended for the press, and many of them in loose papers I have lost.’¹⁵⁰ Perhaps, then, May really postponed the publication because of a lack of confidence in the strength of his work, perhaps in addition to the financial scruples theorised above.

In any case, the volume was eventually printed for Thomas Walkley the following year with the title *Selected Epigrams of Martial* and the author’s name given in full. What is most compelling about the otherwise plain and relatively uninteresting title page is the quotation that follows May’s name: ‘Nec crimen erit nec gloria.’ The quotation is not from any of Martial’s

¹⁴⁸ *Epigrams*, A6r-A8r.

¹⁴⁹ *Epigrams*, A6v.

¹⁵⁰ *Epigrams*, A8r.

epigrams but hails from the seventh book of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, and it is uttered by Pompey during a speech in which, in answer to Cicero's plea, he reluctantly agrees to take up arms against Caesar: in his long monologue, Pompey clarifies that, were it not for Rome begging him to defend her, he would not engage in battle, but would rather sacrifice himself if that meant that war and bloodshed could be avoided. The quotation chosen by May is uttered at the rhetorical height of the speech and is meant to signify Pompey's selflessness in his sacrifice for Rome: this war, he says, will mean neither crime nor glory for him, or, as May himself translates, 'Nor crime, nor honour shall this battle be.'¹⁵¹ The choice of this passage, in which the word 'bellum' is removed to infuse it with a more absolute meaning, is rather puzzling in the context of Martial's epigrams: what was May referring to and why did he choose this quotation to accompany his translation of Martial? On a surface level, it suggests that, in 1629, May was back on his Lucan after the hiatus post-1627 translation and already at work on his *Continuation* – a conclusion, in truth, fairly easy to draw, as the latter was published in early 1630. The contents of the quotation, however, do not lend themselves easily to be heading a selection of Martial's epigrams, and almost read as a personal grievance being aired. Although I am aware that this might be reading too much into too little, I believe it is possible that May, forced to come to terms with the fact that his political stances would have to be severely suppressed in order to climb the ranks at court and ensure financial backing of some sort, signalled this 'moral' defeat through the use of this quotation on the title page. The extent to which he compromised by publishing this volume will be discussed further below, when commenting on the choice of dedicatee.

May was not the first to translate Martial in English, but he still was a pioneer in some respects. The first English Martial to appear in print was a single epigram in three versions by

¹⁵¹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, M4r.

Simon Vachan, published in 1571.¹⁵² A more substantial selection appeared in 1577 in Timothy Kendall's *Flowers of Epigrams*, but Martial is only one among almost forty authors translated in the collection, and, as Chester notes, Kendall's versions are 'inaccurate, full of omissions and distortions.' The small selection by John Weever in 1599 *Epigrams in the Oldest Cut and Newest Fashion* is more akin to adaptation than interpretation; Francis Davison and Ben Jonson had both translated a few epigrams each.¹⁵³ John Ashmore also included several of Martial's lyrics in his anthology *Certain Selected Odes of Horace, Englished; and Their Arguments Annexed. With Poems (Ancient and Modern) of Divers Subjects, Translated*, published in 1621.¹⁵⁴ May's selection was ostensibly the first attempt to publish Martial's epigrams as a collection of works by a single author rather than as part of a larger group of classical and contemporary poets.

In choosing to translate Martial, Chester notes, May displayed a little more entrepreneurial sagacity than he had with his *Georgics*, for the classical epigram and Martial's in particular had been rendered popular by Jonson, and May's work appeared to respond to a request for epigrams *à la* Jonson.¹⁵⁵ In spite of this, he did not thoroughly follow in Jonson's steps, for he maintained the Roman background in his translations, whereas Jonson had fully 'domesticated' the epigrams in setting and therefore rendered them more interesting for an English audience; although we have no information concerning the success of May's endeavour, it is fair to speculate that these stylistic choices resulted in a less than warm reception.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Cummings and Gillespie, 25.

¹⁵³ Chester, 141.

¹⁵⁴ Cummings and Gillespie, 25.

¹⁵⁵ Chester, 140-141.

¹⁵⁶ Chester, 141.

Possibly having decided that appealing to a former Cambridge friend was not enough to secure a living as a poet, the *Epigrams* mark the first time May dedicated one of his printed works to a high-ranking member of court. Henry Rich, 1st earl of Holland (1590-1649) was one of the younger brothers of Robert Rich, 2nd earl of Warwick (dedicatee of the ninth book of May's *Pharsalia* and personal enemy of Buckingham) and an older brother of the now-deceased Charles Rich (dedicatee of the elegy transcribed in the previous chapter); however, his personal and political allegiances could not have been further from those of his brother Robert. Cambridge-educated, Henry was appointed captain of the yeoman of the guard in 1617, apparently on the recommendation of Queen Anne, which marked the start of his climb at court. Around 1620 he managed to become one of Buckingham's clients, and in 1623 was among the party that attended Prince Charles in Spain. His pursuits were successful, for he was created earl of Holland in 1624, sworn on the Privy Council in 1625, and inducted into the Order of the Garter in the same year. In stark contrast to May's previous dedicatees, Holland was among Buckingham's staunchest supporters during the attempted impeachment in 1626, a deed which earned him the title of bedchamber servant to the king and, in 1627, got him a post as a commander of the disastrous expedition to the Isle of Rhé, in which his brother Charles perished. In 1629, at the time of May's dedication, Holland had been appointed chancellor of the University of Cambridge following Buckingham's death and would be appointed, in late 1629, constable of Windsor and high steward to the Queen.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, when the duke died in 1628, Holland became one of the most frequently rumoured successors as chief minister, though his reckless foreign policies with France caused a momentary stop in his ascent. In later years and during the civil war, after initially supporting Parliament, he joined the royalist forces and was among those who most often tried to mediate between king and Parliament;

¹⁵⁷ I think it more likely that May published his *Martial* before October 1629 (when Holland was appointed constable of Windsor) and definitely before December (when he became high steward); otherwise, May would certainly have mentioned these highly honourable titles in his dedication to Holland, which was clearly conceived in an attempt to sound as flattering as possible.

notwithstanding his relatively moderate positions, and despite his brother Robert's plea to fellow parliamentarians, however, Holland was executed by Parliament in 1649.¹⁵⁸

As mentioned above, as a base text May probably relied for the most part on Farnaby's 1615 London edition. Not only had he already used Farnaby – whom, as a friend of Jonson, he probably knew personally – as a source for his Lucan, but May's *Epigrams* follow the structure of Farnaby's edition: the book *De Spectaculis* precedes the epigrams proper, May translates Farnaby's short introductions to the epigrams in the *De Spectaculis*, and the book and number of each epigram correspond to those assigned by Farnaby. Most glaringly, May seems to deviate from Farnaby in the choice of the epigrams' titles: whereas Farnaby assigned titles based on the contents of the epigrams, May used the Latin incipit as title. However, there is also evidence indicating that May must have used another edition as a base text in addition to Farnaby's, for he occasionally adopts a slightly different lection.¹⁵⁹

The choice of epigrams is entirely May's own. As he announces in the preface to the reader, he was 'entreated by a friend ... to do all the *Book of Spectacles*', which he does: the first separate section of the volume is devoted to Martial's *De Spectaculis*, which May translates in full. He leaves out but two short two-line poems, which, according to a marginal note on Farnaby's edition – on which May's *Epigrams* are based – were either corrupt or spurious.¹⁶⁰ In the first part of the volume, the epigrams proper, which are introduced by an engraving depicting wild beasts and the title 'Martial his Epigrams', are not translated in the order they are found in Martial's books, with the exception of the first one; then, from about halfway

¹⁵⁸ Smuts, 665-667.

¹⁵⁹ An example is 1.22, which May titles 'Cum peteret Regem' but which Farnaby reports as 'Dum peteret regem.'

¹⁶⁰ Farnaby, *Martial*, B6v.

through (E3r), the poems are presented in order.¹⁶¹ The first 61 epigrams are therefore in a seemingly random arrangement, with the volume reverting to logical numbering only about halfway through.

As with his previous translations, May produces a fairly concise English version in pentameter that roughly corresponds, length-wise, to the Latin original. The pentameter was evidently deemed by May the best meter for translating Latin, for in the preface to the reader, referring to the first epigram of the *De Spectaculis*, he comments on the difficulty of bringing Latin into the English pentameter specifically: ‘the first epigram [of the book *De Spectaculis*] ... is in the Latin both too full to be rendered in a verse of ten syllables, and subject to divers constructions of sense.’¹⁶² In most other cases, May manages both endeavours, producing a translation which, if not as witty and succinct as the original, still mostly conveys the spirit of Martial’s Latin.

These English versions of Martial’s epigrams published in 1629 were never printed again either in May’s lifetime or later. Several more anthologies of Martial’s epigrams with English translations by other authors were printed, however, and, although a thorough comparison

¹⁶¹ Here follows a full list of the epigrams, divided by book and not given in the order they appear in May’s volume. The book and epigram numbers are as found in May’s edition, with the corresponding modern classification (Loeb classical editions) given in square brackets whenever it deviates from May’s:

- Book 1: 1, 9 [8], 14 [13], 22 [21], 26 [25], 39 [38], 43, unnumbered [56], 65 [64], 98 [97], 100 [99], 103 [102].
- Book 2: 12, 26, 30, 44, 53, 64, 80.
- Book 3: 12, 21, 37, 43, 44, 50 [51], 51 [52], 53 [54], 55 [56], 56 [57], 64 [65].
- Book 4: 21, 22, 32, 35, 44, 49, 56, 59, 66, 72, 73, 78 [epigram today considered spurious; see De Beer, 153].
- Book 5: 10, 13, 43 [42], 53 [52], 56 [55], 65 [64], 70 [69], 73 [72], 74 [73], 74 [74; the epigram number ‘74’ is erroneously indexed twice by May, but it refers to two separate epigrams], 77 [76], 82 [81].
- Book 6: 12, 15, 22, 32, 34, 41, 48, 62, unnumbered [68], 79, 90, 92.
- Book 7: 18 [19], 21 [22], 42 [43], 45 [46], 46 [47], 75 [76], 86 [87], 91 [92], 95 [96], 98 [99], 101 [misattributed to Martial but probably authored by Hildebert of Lavardin; see Busdraghi, 85].
- Book 8: 3, 6, 8, 17, 24, 26, 27, 32, 46, 53 [54], 57, 68, 69, 76, 77.
- Book 9: 4 [3], 11 [9], 15 [14], 20 [19], 31 [30], 35 [34], unnumbered [43], 53 [52], 57 [56], 62 [61], 72 [70], 82 [81], 84 [82], 85 [83], 105 [102], 106 [103].
- Book 10: 2, 4, 8, 23, 26, 35, 71, 72.
- Book 11: 3, 6 [5], 14 [13], 35 [34], 36 [35], 43 [42], 57 [56], 68 [67], 69 [68], 92 [91].
- Book 14: unnumbered [180], unnumbered [181].

¹⁶² *Epigrams*, A7v.

would probably deserve its own space, traces of May's influence in some of these works can be detected even at a cursory glance. As had been the case prior to 1629, selections of epigrams were published as part of bigger collections, including Edward May's *Epigrams, Divine and Moral* in 1633.¹⁶³ Whereas, before May, Martial had never been published as a collection of epigrams on its own, dedicated translations began to appear after the poet's death and then more frequently, with about ten by eight different authors published between 1651 and 1698. The two editions of Henry Killigrew's translation – published 1689 and 1695 – are indebted to May not only in their title, *Select Epigrams of Martial Englished*, which is almost identical to the 1629 edition, but also in terms of selection and order of epigrams in the book.¹⁶⁴

All in all, it is probably safe to speculate that neither the *Georgics* nor the *Epigrams* yielded the fortune that May likely expected when embarking on such literary ventures. It was not until, most likely, late in 1630 that May could finally enjoy some of the financial safety he had been chasing for a few years. Nevertheless, 1629 marked the first time May had produced commendatory poems for works by other authors, which might be read as a symptom of his growing popularity and respectability among the intellectual crowd. Admittedly, the recipients of at least two of these dedications were probably personal friends of May, for one was written for *The Roman Actor* by Massinger and another for Shirley's *The Wedding*. Both plays were published in 1629 and both authors are addressed as 'deserving friend' by May; the dedications themselves, particularly that for Shirley, are also more personal than formal.

May also penned a third dedication in 1629: a poem celebrating the translation of Sallust's historiographical works by the otherwise unknown William Crosse. The dedication opens with the lines 'What in thy labour may I most approve / And show as well my judgement as my love?', which indicates some level of familiarity between the two poets.¹⁶⁵ A William Crosse

¹⁶³ See previous chapter for discussions about potential familial connections between the two poets.

¹⁶⁴ For the full list of translations, see Cummings and Gillespie, 25.

¹⁶⁵ Crosse, *Sallust*, A5r.

matriculating in 1604 can be found among the Cambridge alumni database, and the dedication following May's is signed 'James Saul, Barrister of Gray's Inn'; this easily prompts the conclusion that Crosse was both a Cambridge as well as a Gray's Inn man and therefore must have known May through these two channels.¹⁶⁶ On the page, May's full name features prominently in enlarged font as a signature under the dedication, which is untitled, and the poem chiefly focuses on Roman history and Crosse's choice of subject. Therefore, the hypothesis that May was chosen as a dedicatee mostly because of the popularity of his *Lucan*, so that his fame could boost Crosse's effort in translating another Roman historian, is, in my opinion, not entirely unfounded.

¹⁶⁶ See *ACAD – A Cambridge Alumni Database*, record number CRS604W.

4. The Court Years (1630-1639)

4.1 The English *Continuation* of Lucan's *Pharsalia*

It seems that May finally gained the royal recognition and patronage he so vehemently sought once he published what would possibly become his most famous original work: an English *Continuation* of Lucan's *Pharsalia*.

The work made its appearance in the Stationers' Register in an entry dated 3 March 1630 which read: 'Entered ... A continuation of the subject of Lucan's historical poem till the death of Julius Caesar.'¹ The book was printed in the same year for James Boler (with whom May had never published before) under the title *A Continuation of Lucan's Historical Poem till the Death of Julius Caesar*, with May credited as 'T. M.' and an elaborate engraving accompanying the title page. The volume was published again in 1633 in a revised edition (with the title page bearing the inscription 'The 2nd Edition corrected and amended by T. M. '), and then again during the poet's lifetime in 1650 ('The 4th Edition enlarged by the author T. M. '), though it is unclear whether the book was actually published before May's death in November or later. Obviously, a third edition must have been printed sometime between 1633 and 1650, though I was unable to locate a copy of it anywhere and it is therefore hard to establish when it was published. The *Continuation* was also reprinted in 1657, though in both this and the 1650 edition the original title page decorations were replaced with the engraving that had previously adorned the 1640 edition of the Latin version, *Supplementum Lucani*.

May's feat did not mark the first time a Latin author's work had been supplied a continuation by a modern author; on the contrary, the genre had been relatively popular since the fifteenth century. Famous examples include continuations of Virgil's *Aeneid* by Pier

¹ Stationers' Register Online, SRO8670.

Candido Decembrio (1419) and Maffeo Vegio (1428), Valerius Flaccus by Giovanni Battista Pio (1519), and, in England, the extremely popular ‘bridge’ between Tacitus’ *Annales* and *Historiae* entitled *The End of Nero and the Beginning of Galba*, written by Sir Henry Savile in 1591.² The latter must have proved especially inspirational for May, for Savile himself had also translated the original work in English, and there is little doubt that May was familiar with Savile’s famed ‘archaeological restoration’, particularly as it had been the subject of a celebratory epigram by Jonson.³

In fact, although May published the *Continuation* in 1630, it is plausible that he had been nursing the idea of continuing Lucan’s work for a few years, possibly since he first translated Lucan. Rather than ending the epic abruptly with the final lines of Lucan’s tenth book, May adopted an early modern convention and, like Grotius and Gorges, included a translation of Sulpicius’ short appendix to Lucan. Here May depicts the struggling Caesar not only as fighting to save his life, but also as ‘desperately seeking to preserve his fame’, which lines up perfectly with May’s portrayal of Caesar as an ambition-driven leader.⁴ However, and most significantly, in a spirit opposite to that permeating Sulpicius’ eleven lines, which end with the stranded Caesar swimming to safety unscathed, May adds original lines that subvert the hopeful tone of the ‘Appendicula’ and frame ‘the assassination of Julius Caesar by Brutus and Cassius as the “true” ending of the story’: ‘But he must live until his fall may prove / Brutus and Cassius were more just than Jove.’⁵ It seems, then, that the anti-Cesarist May had already envisioned an epic ending on the Ides of March back in 1627, a hypothesis that may be hinted at by Jonson’s dedication to the translation, in which he writes that May ‘brought / Lucan’s *whole frame* unto

² Kallendorf, 87.

³ Womersley, 313-314.

⁴ Dinter, 152-153.

⁵ Goldschmidt, 106; *Pharsalia*, 1627, T7v.

us' (emphasis mine).⁶ Although Jonson is most likely referring to May's being a full translation, as opposed for example to Marlowe's translation of the first book, it is tantalising to imagine that Jonson was aware of May's intention to finish Lucan's epic and quietly acknowledged it in his dedication.

The choice to conclude the poem with the death of Julius Caesar ought not to be too surprising. In the various speculations surrounding Lucan's supposedly unfinished epic, theories have been advanced as to when the poet originally intended to interrupt the narrative. Four hypotheses naturally present themselves: the death of Cato (AD 46), the death of Caesar (44), the battle of Philippi (42), and the battle of Actium (31). The latter two would lengthen the poem excessively and require the introduction of too many new protagonists; the death of Cato, while more plausible, would have ended the poem on a note of unexpected optimism. Ultimately, the death of Caesar, which cast Rome into a period of despairing injustice and growing absolutism, would have made more sense in the context of Lucan's bleak and ironic view; in framing his poem chronologically, May certainly displays a Lucanian spirit.⁷

Perfectly in line with May's choices of increasingly prestigious dedicatees, the *Continuation* is dedicated 'To the most high and mighty monarch Charles, by the grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland.' The epistle is not particularly remarkable in terms of insights into May's reasons or his working process, for it merely comprises the customary praise of the prospective patron, magnified by the supreme hierarchical status of the king. In a tempting parallel between May's life and Lucan's, Nora Goldschmidt reads the praise of Charles as 'an echo of Lucan's own extravagant eulogy to Nero.'⁸ Whether or not this explanation by Goldschmidt is plausible, the English *Continuation* certainly marked a shift in May's previously

⁶ *Pharsalia*, 1627, a7r.

⁷ Cliff, 82-83.

⁸ Goldschmidt, 107.

radical approach to the character of Julius Caesar and to Lucan in general. In the addendum ‘The Complaint of Calliope against the Destinies’, a short lyric based on Statius’ *Genethliacon Lucani* which May prefaces to the poem, the powerful – and potentially controversial – imagery of Lucan’s death being the consequence of his involvement in Piso’s tyrannicidal conspiracy is downgraded by May, who removes all references to ‘*ingratus Nero*’ present in Statius’ text and ascribes Lucan’s death to fate’s ‘untimely stroke.’⁹ The text itself, when compared to the English *Pharsalia* and to the *Supplementum*, published in 1640, is, according to R. T. Bruère, markedly less anti-Caesarean, and May appears to be making an effort to present Caesar in a more benevolent and sympathetic way.¹⁰ Efforts in this sense might be read as a consequence to the dedication to Charles, a connection that suggests that May implicitly associated the English monarch with both Nero and Julius Caesar and was keen to avoid further accusations of treason. Nevertheless, Cliff partly disagrees with Bruère’s assessment, and suggests that both texts are consistent with May’s view of Caesar as already expressed in his 1627 *Lucan*.¹¹

When paired up together with Lucan’s original ten, May’s seven books add up to a total of seventeen: though a seemingly unlikely number of volumes in a classical epic, May was probably planning his epic with Silius’ *Punica* in mind, a poem modelled on Lucan and also comprising seventeen books.¹² As concerns the historical content of the *Continuation*, May probably relied on similar sources as those employed by Lucan. In the ‘Annotations’ following each book except the seventh, May himself occasionally quotes or references classical historiographers, either to offer alternative historical accounts, to justify his use of one or the other, or, more commonly, to delve more deeply into the matter at hand. To give just a few examples, May writes: ‘this counsel was had while Caesar as yet lingered in Egypt according

⁹ Goldschmidt, 108.

¹⁰ Bruère, ‘Supplementum’, 150-151.

¹¹ Cliff, 81.

¹² Cliff, 82.

to Dion, lib. 42, but Hirtius in his commentaries relates it after that time'; 'and that then he uttered such a speech concerning Pompey, Appian is my authority'; 'of this town Canopus, and the temple of Serapis there, thus Strabo speaks in his seventeenth book [Strabo's account follows].'¹³

According to his own annotations, May most often relied on Cassius Dio's account, to which he explicitly referred over ten times. Other commonly cited sources include Appian of Alexandria, Hirtius, Strabo, and Plutarch; in one instance, May recalls a passage from Lucan's *Pharsalia* better to contextualise events; Florus and Josephus are also mentioned. As had been the case with the translation of the *Pharsalia*, the thorough annotations would have been helpful both to an educated and to a less-educated audience to appreciate the subject matter in more depth. One passage appears especially tailored to the less erudite reader:

How truly the manner of this battle is here expressed, or how far it may be lawful for one writing by the way of a poet to digress, I leave it to the judgement of the reader; and that you may briefly see it without the labour of searching books, thus the cruel battle of Munda by two historians of credit [i.e., Dio and Florus] is described (to omit others for brevity's sake).¹⁴

Forgoing the assumption that his readership would have had books by Dion and Florus handy, May thoughtfully includes passages from his sources in what appears, once again, an attempt to familiarise a thoroughly English audience with Roman history.

Choosing to continue a classical work rather than translating it or imitating it is, as Cliff puts it in a fitting metaphor, 'a supremely complex sort of ventriloquizing', in which the modern translator is no longer the ventriloquist's doll being reanimated by the classical author, but, quite

¹³ *Continuation*, D8r, D5r, C3r.

¹⁴ *Continuation*, I4r.

the contrary, it is the modern author who attempts to revive his dumb and long dead predecessor. May's experiment is, Cliff argues, an effective revocation of Lucan that squarely distances May from the 'bland and flattering' text expected of anyone trying to climb courtly and intellectual ranks.¹⁵

The style is evocative of Lucan yet presents some differences. A key difference between Lucan and May is the latter's apparent unwillingness to indulge in the bloodshed that was proverbially characteristic of Lucan's writing: throughout some of the seven books' most climatic battles, not a single wound appears, and the only deaths mentioned explicitly are drownings.¹⁶ Cliff notes how, despite the similarity, May cannot display a level of talent he does not possess; nevertheless, he is 'a good reader' and is capable of preserving and furthering Lucan's point of view rather than his own.¹⁷ Indeed, May adopts Lucan's strategies and applies them to his own work; as perhaps the most successful example, May constructs Caesar's death so that it mirrors that of Pompey, blow by blow, in the eighth book of Lucan.¹⁸

Norbrook has contended that May's *Continuation* is guilty of diluting Lucan's anti-Caesarism. The last book in particular, he argues, is 'hedged with reservations about the republican cause', exemplified by the scene in the sixth book supposedly illustrating 'What horrid dangers followed liberty.'¹⁹ Observing that attempts to reestablish 'liberty' have failed miserably and simply caused further civil bloodshed, Norbrook notes that the dying Caesar comes out as a martyr rather than a villain.²⁰ Paleit, however, partly disagrees with this conclusion. It is true, he concedes, that Caesar is given compassionate traits by May and written to be showing sincere remorse and sympathetic reactions on several occasions; in these

¹⁵ Cliff, 79.

¹⁶ Runacres, 185-186.

¹⁷ Cliff, 82.

¹⁸ Cliff, 96-97.

¹⁹ *Continuation*, H6r.

²⁰ Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 63.

instances, though, May is often being truthful to his historical sources.²¹ May, writes Paleit, ‘was attempting to understand Roman history, not simply seeking to rewrite it to serve a partisan agenda.’²² Although sensing a thematical shift in the final book, Paleit notes that the first six books are designed to mourn the defeat of ‘the better cause’ and to recount ‘the steady, tragic demise of the Roman republic and, most traumatically of all, freedom.’ May’s appropriation of English constitutional language emerges in his framing of the Roman republic as ‘a symbolic order of “lawes and liberties”, or constitutional government – and freedom’, rather than in terms of specific institutions.²³

Indeed, the final scene of May’s epic, Caesar’s death, rehashes the theme of triumphing – however fleetingly – justice that had also characterised his *Agrippina* and *Antigone*. A comparison of the scenes side by side (respectively, *Agrippina*, *Antigone*, and the *Continuation*) reveals that ‘justice’, which in the *Continuation* is associated with the Roman senate, is explicitly contrasted with tyranny:

Then strike this womb,
This tragical and ever cursed womb,
That to the ruin of mankind brought forth
That monster Nero. Here, here, take revenge!
Here Justice bids you strike. Let these sad wounds
Serve to appease the hatred of the earth
'Gainst Agrippina for dire Nero’s birth.²⁴

'Twas not our war’s intention to enthrall

²¹ Lovascio notes that a particular brand of Caesarean remorse, the one shown after the battle of Pharsalus and over the civil war in general, is singularly English and cannot be traced in classical sources. Out of seven early modern plays featuring Julius Caesar as a character written between 1594 and 1620, as many as four portray a remorseful Caesar; of the remaining three, two do not dramatize events pertaining to the civil war. This trend appears to be limited to theatrical depictions of the character, with two exceptions: May’s English and Latin *Continuation* (see Lovascio, ‘Rewriting Julius Caesar’, 241). Whether May had assimilated this unconsciously, or whether this can be explained as part of his tendency to blend ancient and contemporary sources, is up for debate.

²² Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 278.

²³ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 275-276.

²⁴ *Agrippina*, E6r.

Your land, but free it from a tyrant's yoke;
And to preserve the conquered, not destroy them.
We drew the sword of justice, not of conquest,
Ambitiously to spread our kingdom's bounds,
But to avenge the laws of nature broke.
This act being done, Theseus is peace again.²⁵

and he, who never vanquished
By open war, with blood and slaughter strewed
So many lands, with his own blood embrewed
The seat of wrongèd Justice, and fell down
A sacrifice t'appease th'offended gown.²⁶

The word justice (capitalised in *Agrippina* and the *Continuation*) appears in all these three works, written in consecutive years, and is hailed as revenge or a solution to tyrannical abuses: Agrippina, forced to accept death, invokes justice as a punishment for having birthed Nero; Theseus claims to have acted in the name of justice when freeing Thebes from the tyrant Creon; and Caesar's blood, as he falls under the conspirators' knives, is said to have placated 'the offended gown' by drenching the 'seat of wrongèd Justice' (both metonymns for the senate). In two cases justice is invoked to appease supposedly wronged entities, and the same verb is used; in *Antigone*, Theseus' speech does not feature the verb 'appease', but 'avenge', in reference to the laws of nature being broken, and 'peace', to describe the status achieved after the tyrant's defeat. Although we know that at least two of these protagonists' (voluntary or not) sacrifices were ineffective in their bid to restore justice, the fact that May so clearly associates injustice with tyranny and justice with a legitimately instated form of superior government or entity is especially significant. In fact, parallels between the three scenes force an identification of the *Continuation*'s 'offended gown' with *Agrippina* and *Antigone*'s 'laws of nature', effectively

²⁵ *Antigone*, E5v.

²⁶ *Continuation*, K7r.

endorsing the senate, and therefore Parliament, as an institution hierarchically superior to the whims of individual rulers.

May's *Continuation* was among the most successful of his literary ventures. Barring the editions issued during the poet's lifetime, the volume was printed a few times in the seventeenth century, often alongside translations of the *Pharsalia*.²⁷ This sizable level of fame cemented the association between Lucan and May, whose name, as has been noted in previous chapters, would be forever tied to that of Lucan in all tributes (and offensive satires) written during and after the poet's lifetime. Curiously, despite the level of contemporary attention it garnered, the English *Continuation* has never been edited in modern times, with the even more popular Latin *Supplementum* being edited only once and never in English.²⁸

4.2 *The Old Couple*

Amidst these incredibly prolific years of his life, May appears to have penned the only other comedy of his repertory, *The Old Couple*. This play bears the distinction of being the only extant work by May to have been printed for the first time after his death.

The book was entered in the Stationers' Register on 7 January 1658 with the title and the name of the author.²⁹ The play was published for the first time in 1658 with the title *The Old Couple, a Comedy*, May's name being given in full; the typographical process was handled by James Cottrell for the publisher Samuel Speed, neither of whom had been responsible for the publication of any other of May's previous works. Having been published after the poet's death, the play lacks a dedicatory epistle by its author, as well as any commendatory poems by May's friends.

²⁷ Cliff, 81.

²⁸ See Thomas May, Birger Backhaus (ed.), *Das Supplementum Lucani von Thomas May. Einleitung, Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2005).

²⁹ *Stationers' Register 1640-1708*, Volume 2, 160.

Although the matter of *The Old Couple*'s composition date has been the subject of some debate, it seems it ought to be relatively straightforward to settle. Compared to some other plays or works by May, *The Old Couple* is supported by a good enough amount of evidence, both textual and historical, to make 1630 a fairly secure guess.

In addition to the textual clues that will be discussed further below, the most substantial bit of evidence is provided by an entry in the Master of Revels Henry Herbert's office book dated 1630, which claims that the play was first acted in the same year.³⁰ In Wiggins' *Catalogue* the play is correctly dated 1630 with no speculation, but this is an exception: in the vast majority of scholarly works preceding Wiggins, *The Old Couple* is ascribed to a range of dates from 1619 to 1636.³¹ In his enumeration of May's plays, Fleay dates it earlier than *The Heir*, basing his observation on nothing but the fact that the latter contains a passage that resembles one found in *The Old Couple* and that Fleay judges to be 'diluted', leading him to conclude that *The Old Couple* must have been written before 1620.³² Without guessing an exact date, Robert Dodsley, who edited the play in 1744, places *The Old Couple* later in May's career and in any case before 1641.³³ In his edition of Herbert's records, N. W. Bawcutt notes that a 1923 edition of the manuscript by W. J. Lawrence misreads and erroneously reports 1636 as the performance date, which might at least explain part of the longstanding confusion in dating *The Old Couple*.³⁴ This is certainly true in the case of Bentley, who makes reasonable arguments but unwittingly bases them on the wrong date, and Sister M. Simplicia Fitzgibbons, editor of the only modern edition of the play, who quotes from Lawrence and agrees with the assessment

³⁰ Bawcutt, 169.

³¹ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #2298.

³² Fleay, 83. Aside from Fleay's entirely personal opinion that the passage reads as 'diluted', in her critical edition Sister M. Simplicia Fitzgibbons notes many more borrowings from *The Heir*, which hardly justifies attributing more critical weight to one or the other.

³³ Dodsley, 4.

³⁴ Bawcutt, 169-170.

that the play was written and performed around 1636.³⁵ Despite the existence of Herbert's records, many scholars have ascribed the play to an earlier phase of May's career, often likening it to *The Heir*, seemingly for no other reason than they are both comedies. Claiming there to be no record of a performance of this play, Chester argues in favour of an earlier date mainly on stylistic and biographical grounds. He reasons that it would have been unlikely for May to turn back to comedy so many years after *The Heir* and with many classical publications in between, and he detects 'an element of romanticism' in *The Old Couple* that is mostly absent in his works dating after 1622. Chester then concludes that the play was most likely written in 1619, without offering an explanation as to why 1619 and not any other year between, for example, 1618 and 1622, close to the composition of *The Heir*.³⁶ Other scholars in favour of an earlier date, whose arguments are countered by Fitzgibbons, include W. Carew Hazlitt and Felix Emmanuel Schelling.³⁷ Fitzgibbons also judges *The Old Couple* to be a clear improvement from the occasional awkwardness of *The Heir*, observing that 'May strengthened his dramatic technique and developed greater independence in the handling of source materials.' Borrowings from previous plays or works are no longer forced in the action with little regard for consistency, the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action are handled skilfully, and the play is simply constructed better from a dramatic point of view.³⁸ Additionally, textual evidence provided by the text helps date it firmly after 1629, for the play contains echoes of *Agrippina*, May's English translations of Virgil and Martial, and *Antigone*.³⁹

In addition to there being more than enough textual and historical evidence to date the play securely, any arguments relying on a presumed incongruence with the rest of May's output completely neglect the fact that, had its author had his way, *The Old Couple* would not have

³⁵ Bentley, *JCS*, 4, 839-840; Fitzgibbons, xvii-xxiii.

³⁶ Chester, 76-79.

³⁷ Fitzgibbons, xviii-xix.

³⁸ Fitzgibbons, xxvii-xxix.

³⁹ Fitzgibbons, 51-114.

been published at all. This opens up the possibility that May did in fact write other plays or comedies but never published them, and that the ten-year gap between his two known comedies might have been filled by other similar endeavours. In fact, the very existence of a play that would have remained undiscovered, had it not been for the entrepreneurial spirit of the publishers, makes one wonder just how much of May's dramatic output is and probably will remain lost. Fitzgibbons, when arguing against scholars proposing an earlier date based on May's supposed growing disaffection with the theatre in the last two decades of his life, rightfully points out that May did, in fact, cultivate an interest in drama that can be traced with some certainty to at least the mid-1640s. Aside from his documented attendance of one play at court (as the frequently repeated anecdote of Pembroke's 'breaking his staff' over May's head in 1634 testifies), May continued to pen dedications to published plays by friends until 1646, when he contributed a verse to Shirley's collected plays.⁴⁰

Although the play was not published under the supervision of its author, thus leaving us with no direct source in the form of an authorial preface, it is still stimulating to question why May turned to comedy after three classical tragedies in very close succession (1626, 1628, and 1629). A clue as to the reasons behind this choice is probably to be found in the dedicatory epistle to *Antigone*, written in 1629 but published about one year after *The Old Couple* was first performed. In it, May discusses the nature of tragedy and comedy, and I think it may be worth quoting its most relevant passages:

This *Tragedy of Antigone* may perchance (considering the subject of it) be thought a poem too sad and baleful to be read with pleasure or presented with delight upon any stage. I confess the sadness of it; but if it suffers for that, it will raise a question more general: why tragedies have at any time been allowed? ... Why this hath been generally so (though the cause needs no apology, at least not mine) I will venture some few conjectures. ...

⁴⁰ Fitzgibbons, xx-xxi. May's interest in drama apparently even overcame his Puritan sympathies after 1642.

Moreover tragedies (besides the state of them) are pleasing in the expression, forasmuch as sadness doth usually afford the best strains of writing: to omit other instances, love itself (the usual argument of our new comedy) is there best written where it is most distressed, and in despairing passion; that part of the comedy seeming best which is nearest tragedy, in that strain also go most, or the best, of love-sonnets that now are made.⁴¹

Considering that this was written in 1631, it is difficult not to read disappointment for the lack of success of May's three consecutive tragedies, particularly in the assertion that tragedies might suffer and therefore fail to be staged successfully because of the 'balefulness' of their subject. It is also tempting to infer a possible motive for his composing *The Old Couple*, and perhaps even read the whole passage as May's commentary on the success of his own latest comedy. Although not overtly resentful or embittered, May explicitly admits to being saddened by the fact that tragedies appear to struggle more than comedies; however, as this was not universally the case for all tragedies being brought on the stage in the Caroline age, one must assume that May had a very precise and personal precedent in mind when writing this preface. Perhaps, after three unsuccessful runs of classical tragedy, May had decided to turn to the more profitable comedy and had been disappointed in observing its being staged with far more 'delight' than either *Cleopatra*, *Agrippina*, or *Antigone*. Furthermore, in the preface May also appears to express some degree of dislike for 'carefree' romantic comedies, which might explain why love is usually not the main subject of most of his plays and why even *The Old Couple*, notwithstanding its title, focuses heavily on the theme of avarice, money, and inheritance.

The Old Couple was written in a period during which May produced an incredibly vast amount of works of wide thematic range: original works and translations, classical and contemporary settings, popular and erudite subject matters, theatre and poetry. During his career, May had clearly acted according to a series of personal standards for the publication of his books, so that translations from Latin and original poetical works took precedence, followed

⁴¹ *Antigone*, A3r-A5v.

by tragedies and, finally, comedies (for neither of his two comedies was published under his supervision or even, by all appearances, his authorisation). In this context, it is reasonable to imagine that a venture such as *The Old Couple* might have constituted an easy way to support his career financially between more prestigious projects; tellingly, May is not known to have composed any play from 1631 to the end of the 1630s, a decade during which, by all accounts, he enjoyed a rich pension and the personal support of the king.

As usual, May appropriates and blends a great number of classical and contemporary sources, among which his own works provide *The Old Couple* with the most material. Fitzgibbons provides an extensive list of classical echoes and references, including May's own *Georgics* and *Epigrams*, plus nods to Cicero, Virgil, Strabo, and Juvenal.⁴²

The play shows the influence of several contemporary dramas and plot points, as well as a certain pastoral influence in the scenes in the woods, reminiscent of Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (c. 1608).⁴³ Dodsley identifies a nod to Beaumont and Fletcher's *Bonduca* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.⁴⁴ Thematical closeness to pastoral themes might also help confirm 1629 as proposed date of composition for *Antigone*, for echoes of pastoral plays popular at court can be found throughout the tragedy too. The characters' names, as already partially outlined in *The Heir*, are descriptive as in Plautus' and Jonson's comedies, with Earthworm, Lady Covet, Sir Argent Scrape, and Fruitful all giving some indication of their personality or role in the play. Some of Jonson's comedic situations and references are also borrowed in the play and May's fascination with the classics is ever-present, but, as Fitzgibbons notes, May is as far as possible from Jonson in terms of application of dramatic theory. Where Jonson's comedies are an intricate maze of different plotlines, the plot of *The Old Couple* is clear and straightforward;

⁴² Fitzgibbons, 51-114.

⁴³ Fitzgibbons, xxxiv-xxxv.

⁴⁴ Dodsley, 19, 32.

where Jonson favours moralism over love and friendship, May (however weak his romantic subplots may be) subordinates the moral lesson to genuine affection between the characters; where Jonson prefers an urban scenery, May sets his comedy in an indeterminate world with a pastoral background; where Jonson's language is coarse, May's is more 'decent.'⁴⁵ Again, the almost proverbial association of May with Jonson has even fewer reasons to persist in comedy, in the context of which the two playwrights may perhaps only be accosted on account of the classical references present in their plays – hardly an especially unique trait of one or the other.

The Old Couple also features (an apparently unique occurrence in all of May's repertory) two poems explicitly coded as songs. The first one, 'This is not the Elysian grove', is sung by Eugeny and was probably conceived with accompanying live music, for Eugeny's friend Theodore then comments: 'Ah, Eugeny! Some heavenly nymph descends / To make thee music in these desert woods ... It is so sweet I could almost believe ... it were an angel's voice.'⁴⁶ The second one, 'Dear, do not your fair beauty wrong', is not sung but rather read aloud by Dotterel from a piece of paper (a stage direction explicitly instructs '*He reads*'), but it was evidently known as a song outside of the context of the play, for multiple characters on stage remark that the song is not an original composition by Dotterel.⁴⁷ This second song is known to have been set to music by the composer Robert Johnson, who worked for the King's Men. Wiggins rightfully observes that Johnson could not have composed the song specifically for May's play, for not only was he no longer working for the King's Men in 1630, but Dotterel is repeatedly and covertly mocked for having stolen the song: 'Let him alone, I know the song'; 'Never man stole with so little judgement'; 'Of all the love songs that were ever made, / He could not have chose out one more unfit'; '[M]ost ridiculous theft'; 'It should seem / He could get no other song but this.'⁴⁸ Evidently, May was relying on the popularity of the song for his jokes to land

⁴⁵ Fitzgibbons, xxxvii-xxxviii.

⁴⁶ *Old Couple*, C1r.

⁴⁷ *Old Couple*, D2r.

⁴⁸ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #2298; *Old Couple*, D2r-D2v.

with the audience, which once again contributes to the reassessment of his works as pastiches of popular and learned references.

A plot summary of the play is provided here for the benefit of the reader.

The play opens with a dialogue between Eugeny, who believes himself to be responsible for the death of Scudmore, and his beloved Artemia; the two arrange to communicate through Eugeny's friend Theodore, who is the son of the rich Earthworm. The subplot is introduced, with the rich Dotterel wishing to woo Artemia with the 'help' of her cousin Euphues and Barnet. A marriage is being planned between Sir Argent Scrape, manager of Eugeny's estate, and Lady Covet, an old and rich woman.

Earthworm greets his son Theodore, a scholarly man, recently returned from a trip to Europe; the latter, noting how greedy his father has become, concocts a plan to cure him of his avarice: having given him a sleeping draught, he wants to distribute his father's money to his neighbours. Theodore then visits Eugeny in his cave and explains to him that Sir Argent Scrape will inherit Eugeny's wealth if the latter were to die, suggesting that avarice may push Sir Argent to stage Eugeny's murder. Matilda, lover of the presumed deceased Scudmore, is introduced. Dotterel's affection is swayed towards the widow Lady Whimsey by Barnet, who manipulates him into forgetting about Artemia.

Theodore enacts the first part of his plan and, after gathering round his neighbours, he gives them Earthworm's gold, claiming that the latter has converted to charitableness. Lady Covet turns out to have appropriated her nephew Scudmore's manor upon his death; Sir Argent plans to have Eugeny killed in order to also inherit his annuity, but Euphues and Barnet witness the exchange.

Theodore sets fire to Earthworm's barn, and the neighbours willingly turn up to help quench the fire; initially astounded, Earthworm realises that his neighbours' helpfulness had

been motivated by the gifts of money they had received from Theodore in Earthworm's name, and finally understands the importance of kindness, resolving to take in his orphaned niece Matilda. Lady Covet learns from Fruitful that she will lose control of her property if she marries Sir Argent, so she arranges for some agents to take charge of her estate. Upon learning this, Sir Argent calls off the engagement.

In the final act, Eugeny is arrested for Scudmore's murder. Earthworm berates Sir Argent for his avarice; Lady Covet is desperate about having given away her estate, but Fruitful produces a deed that would restore all Lady Covet's properties minus Scudmore's manor. As soon as Lady Covet accepts the deed, Fruitful unmask himself and turns out to be Scudmore, thus freeing Eugeny of all murder accusations. Scudmore and Matilda reunite, and the play ends with announcements of three marriages: between Dotterel and Lady Whimsey, Eugeny and Artemia, and Scudmore and Matilda.

As discussed above, *The Old Couple* is overall a better play than the only other known comedy by May, *The Heir*. The first act is very well constructed, with the play's many characters, characters' motives, and characters' relations being presented in a fluid manner, and, overall, the action is presented in a cohesive manner, with all the scenes advancing the plot in some way. In order better to manage time and place, May is clever enough to set the beginning of the action *in medias res*, when all minor and major plot points have already been set in motion by the different characters; when dealing with the necessary exposition that this entails, May makes clever use of dialogue rather than monologue, creating one dynamic scene after another.⁴⁹

The chief theme is greed: the comedy features more than one character whose arc entails an abandonment of material possessions in favour of selflessness and personal bonds, and the

⁴⁹ Fitzgibbons, xxvii-xxviii.

plot is driven by avarice – and renunciation of it – rather than love. The machinations of the old couple of the title are not guided by their love for each other or even by an otherwise generic evilness, but rather by a desire to enrich themselves, and their harassment of the main younger characters is due to the old couple's belief that Eugeny's and Scudmore's death will benefit them financially. Even the grieving Matilda's suffering is temporarily alleviated by a manifestation of selflessness when her redeemed uncle Earthworm offers to take her in his house. This theme is reflected in the subplot, where Dotterel spreads the false rumour that he is a second son in order to make sure that potential female suitors love him for himself, rather than for his money.

As a matter of fact, as opposed to the strong greed-driven developments, the purely romantic plotlines of the play are also the weakest, with Eugeny and Artemia's love progressing and eventually resolving not because of an effort on their part, but rather because of external circumstances over which they have little control – chiefly, Scudmore turning out to be alive and exonerating Eugeny, but also, in the subplot, Dotterel turning his unwanted attention away from Artemia thanks to Euphues and Barnet's manipulations. Similarly, the clever trick that Fruitful/Scudmore plays on Lady Covet is devised with the aim of recovering his property, with the subsequent reunion and marriage with Matilda feeling like a (welcome) corollary rather than the leading force behind the lover's actions. None of this necessarily makes for a bad play, but, particularly in light of May's comment in the preface to *Antigone* that love is 'the usual argument of our new comedy', it begs the question of whether the poet forced himself to frame the play in a romantic context in order to follow a popular trend and ensure the success of his comedy.

The biggest shortcoming of this well-constructed play, in truth, is a certain soullessness, and the lack of particularly humorous or passionate passages. Fitzgibbons compares May to Massinger in their inability to produce truly funny scenes and, when trying, 'fail[ing], or at best,

confus[ing] vulgarity with wit'; somewhat fittingly, she then comments that 'May describes his scenes and characters; he does not live with them.' There is also some merit to her assessment that 'freedom from the vulgarities common to the time, a habit of repetition' of words, phrases, and situations (which he shares with contemporary playwrights such as Dekker, Ford, and Massinger), 'a tendency to substitute rhetoric for real emotion, and a conversational rhythm' might be the defining characteristics of May's dramatic style.⁵⁰ After all, in almost all contemporary mentions of or tributes to him, he is remembered as a translator, never as a playwright, which in itself is indicative of the fact that his plays perhaps never managed to elevate themselves beyond mediocrity.

Nevertheless, *The Old Couple*, while not especially brilliant, is expertly constructed and offers, perhaps more than any other play by May, testimony to his profound knowledge and understanding of the inner workings of the dramatic craft, as well as to his ability to produce a work that is both eclectic and conventional. Most notably, *The Old Couple* is yet another example of May's brilliance in making use of and effectively blending the most disparate types of sources, even when apparently at complete odds with the text in which they are being referenced.

The only contemporary account testifying to the legacy of *The Old Couple*, if 1698 may be termed contemporary to May, is the comment expressed by Charles Gildon and reported by Fitzgibbons that the play had been 'formerly in repute', as opposed to the ingenious but modest *The Heir*.⁵¹ Unfortunately, with the exception of this comment, *The Old Couple* is perhaps the one amongst May's plays with the feeblest trail, for no other records survive testifying to contemporary appreciation – or lack thereof – and, with *Antigone*, it is the only play that was never republished in the seventeenth century after the first edition. The play was, however, later

⁵⁰ Fitzgibbons, xxxiii-xxxiv, xxxviii.

⁵¹ Quoted in Fitzgibbons, xxiii.

included in Robert Dodsley's *A Select Collection of Old English Plays* (1744) and Walter Scott's *Ancient British Drama* (1810). The only edition published between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries remains that by Fitzgibbons, published in 1943.

4.3 Poem upon the birth of Prince Charles in 1630

The main reason why this short entry deserves its own section is because the poem it covers has been hitherto unpublished; it is helpful, I think, in reconstructing May's motives and moves at court. Again, there is no particular reason for dating it after *The Old Couple*; in fact, given that the prince was born in May, it could have just as likely been written earlier, though still in 1630.

Possibly encouraged by a favourable reception of his *Continuation* at court, May composed another poem to celebrate the royal family. This time, the occasion was the birth of the royal heir, the future Charles II, on the 29th of May 1630. This composition, held in a manuscript miscellanea of seventeenth-century poems at Yale University and also kept in microfilm format at the British Library, has, to my knowledge, never been published nor referenced in any discussion concerning Thomas May.⁵² Within the manuscript, which is estimated to have been produced in the late 1630s, the poem is preceded by another elegy in honour of the newborn Prince Charles written by Robert Herrick.⁵³ May's poem is entitled 'Upon the birth of the Prince May the 29th 1630 by Tho: May' and it is hereby reproduced and modernised for the first time.⁵⁴

Upon the birth of the Prince, May the 29th 1630, by Thomas May

What happy plant is this, so lovely sprung
In Britain's joyful garden, that so young

⁵² Yale, Osborn MS b 356; British Library microfilm RP 7698.

⁵³ 'Upon the birth of the Prince Eclogue', Yale, Osborn MS b 356, pp. 202-204.

⁵⁴ The manuscript appears to wrongly give the year as '1640.'

Does to the season such true lustre bring,
 As makes the spring more glorious than the spring
 That to fair Flora gives a richer pride
 Than all her painted glories do besides?
 What plant is this, whose birth so much should be
 The care of heaven, the hope and joy of thee
 Whose kingdoms, at whose fresh and verdant rise
 The nymphs and beauteous Sylvan deities
 Rejoyce, the fawns and dryads do play?
 Is it a branch of great Apollo's bay?
 Or great Hades' poplar should it be?
 Or Pallas' olive, Venus' myrtle tree,
 Or Liber's vine? No, none of these, alas,
 Could yield an offspring of so fair a race
 Whom all the standards of the woods should be
 So proud to serve. The great and royal tree
 Under whose shadow now we safely live,
 Whose far-stretched arms and spreading branches give
 (Like that so stately an imperial tree
 Which once the great Chaldean King did see)
 Shelter to all the spacious island, now
 Is he, from whom this tender branch doth grow.
 Grow up, sweet plant, still watered from above
 With blessed heavenly dew, do not remove
 From earth too quickly, but in time to come
 Spread far and fill thy royal room,
 That our glad nephews may hereafter be
 Safe in thy princely shelter, as now we
 In thy great father's are, still be the place
 Filled with succession of no other race.⁵⁵

The poem is written in rhyming couplets of pentameter and it showcases some of May's favourite lyrical tropes. The lyrics are littered with Roman analogies, and Latin names of the

⁵⁵ Yale, Osborn MS b 356, pp. 204-205.

deities are used instead of Greek. Pastoral themes and *topoi*, so popular at court at the time, permeate the whole poem: the prince is likened to a ‘happy plant’ springing in ‘Britain’s joyful garden’, and Charles is compared to a tree whose branches offer shelter to the whole island. Emphasis is once again placed on Charles’s reign being safe (‘The great and royal tree / Under whose shadow now we safely live’), just like May’s poem in celebration of Charles’s fleet had praised the king for his peaceful policies. May also appears to acknowledge the loss, almost exactly one year before the birth of Prince Charles, of the firstborn son of the royal couple. On the 13th of May 1629 Henrietta had given birth to a baby boy, christened Charles James, who had died just a few hours later.⁵⁶ With the lines ‘sweet plant ... do not remove / From earth too quickly’, May figuratively dispels the bad luck that had accompanied the first son’s birth and wishes for the newborn Charles, in time, to prolong his father’s ‘princely shelter.’

It is not known when or even *if* the king was given this token of appreciation, but it is safe to assume that at some point he did, and that this poem, together with the dedication affixed to the *Continuation*, ensured that May would be finally granted permission to spend some time at court. Although this is also completely speculative – for the first trace of actual royal patronage is the publication of the two historical poems on Henry II and Edward III in 1633 and 1635 – an argument is made in the following section in favour of May’s being part of the intellectual circle at court by 1631, when his *Mirror of Minds* containing a dedication to the courtier Endymion Porter was published.

4.4 Barclay’s *Mirror of Minds*

A year after the *Continuation*, May went back to his first successful avenue, translation, and published the English version of another work by John Barclay, the *Icon Animorum*. This

⁵⁶ Gregg, 188.

examination of the book is followed by a short account of the poems and dedications written between 1631 and 1632, which helps paint a more accurate picture of May the aspiring courtier.

The first record in the Stationers' Register unequivocally connected to May's *Icon Animorum* is dated 2 July 1635, and it reveals that the financial rights to the books were passed from Thomas Walkley to Thomas Brudnell.⁵⁷ However, there is also an earlier entry, dated 24 May 1628, which reads: 'Entered ... [a] book called *Euphermio* [*sic*] *his Icon Animorum, or a true picture taken of the several dispositions of men*'; no trace of a printed book with such a title exists.⁵⁸ Euphormio, here misspelled 'Euphermio', was the pseudonym adopted by Barclay to publish the series of books collectively known as *Satyricon*, of which the *Icon Animorum* constitutes the fourth part. Given that this book was entered on the same day as May's translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, it is probably safe to assume that this record refers to the book that would eventually be known as *The Mirror of Minds*.⁵⁹ At all events, the volume was printed by John Norton for Thomas Walkley three years after being first recorded by the stationers, in 1631, with the title *The Mirror of Minds, or, Barclay's Icon Animorum* and the subtitle 'Englished by T. M.'; the change of title and subtitle, compared to the 1628 Stationers' Register record, suggests a great deal of revisions between the book's inception and its publication. A second edition was published in 1633 with the same title but the author now credited as 'Tho: May, Esq.' Neither edition is particularly remarkable in terms of decorations, with only the later one enriched by a small ornament on the title page and on the heading of each chapter. Besides the ornaments, the only notable difference between the two editions appears to be the addition of a short chapter index summarising the contents of the sixteen chapters right after the epistle dedicatory.

⁵⁷ Stationers' Register Online, SRO9424.

⁵⁸ Stationers' Register Online, SRO8453.

⁵⁹ Additionally, in the *Mirror of Minds*, May also uses the phrase 'dispositions of men' twice and the word 'dispositions' dozens of times.

The Latin *Icon Animorum* was dedicated to King Louis XIII of France and published for the first time simultaneously in Paris and London in 1614. The book proved so popular that soon many other editions followed throughout Europe, including a second edition in Paris (1617), then in Frankfurt (1625), Leiden (1625), and Milan (1626). The book's fortune entailed many more editions throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, particularly in Germany.⁶⁰ In addition to these editions, in which it was printed individually, the *Icon Animorum* was often included as the fourth part of Barclay's *Euphormionis Satyricon*, and thus published as such; according to Mark Riley, editor of the only modern edition of the work that includes May's translation, it was either on one of these texts or on the 1625 Leiden edition that May relied for his translation. If he did base his work on one of the dozens of versions of *Euphormionis Satyricon*, it probably was the London 1623 *Euphormionis Lusinini, sive, Ioannis Barclaii Satyricon quadripartitum*.⁶¹

Like *Argenis*, the Latin *Icon Animorum* was enormously popular throughout Europe, and, with its panoramic view of Europe, its customs, its people, and its identity, it can even be credited with contributing to shaping the collective European consciousness and sense of identity emerging in the early modern period.⁶² Aside from the aforementioned Latin editions in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy, the book was soon translated in French (1623 and 1625) and later in German (1649 and 1660).⁶³

The reason why May chose to translate this work by Barclay may be multiple. I partly disagree with Riley's assertion that May's experiences at Charles' court might have played a part, for May was not yet an established member of court in 1631 (let alone in 1628, when the

⁶⁰ Riley, 43-44.

⁶¹ Riley, 47.

⁶² Walser, 3.

⁶³ Riley, 46-47.

idea of translating the book was first conceived).⁶⁴ The book's popularity undoubtedly played an important part in his decision, as, thinking it a safe commercial venture, he perhaps hoped to capitalise on it financially. Secondly, May had past experience in translating Barclay, and, moreover, the two different editions of *Argenis* which included his verse translation had just been published, respectively, in 1628 and 1629. Given the interval between the translation's first entry in the Stationers' Register and its eventual publication, however, I think it could be possible that May was opportunistically waiting for the best chance to obtain patronage. As a matter of fact, I think his choice to publish his translation in 1631 was motivated by a combination of factors, namely the book's popularity, his own experience with Barclay's Latin, and a third reason, perhaps the most decisive, which is offered by May himself in the epistle dedicatory to his work: he had found a potential patron at court who had enjoyed Barclay's *Icon Animorum* and might therefore be more willing to finance his efforts.

Indeed, the identity of the dedicatee chosen by May is further proof that he was actively seeking patronage at the highest level. Richard Weston, first earl of Portland (1577-1635), Cambridge-educated, religiously ambiguous, had sat in Parliament as a commoner for Maldon in Essex since 1601. He became chancellor of the exchequer in 1621 and was appointed lord treasurer in 1628. From early 1629 until his death, he served as joint lord lieutenant of Essex alongside Robert Rich, second earl of Warwick, in an attempt by the king to restrain the latter's puritanical influence. He became a member of the Order of the Garter and was later created earl of Portland. His authority at court grew steadily, until in the 1630s he had become one of the most influential members of Charles' court; he died in 1635.⁶⁵

Again, as had been the case with *Martial's Epigrams* being dedicated to Holland, May was conscientious with his pick: aside from being a very influential figure at court, and

⁶⁴ Riley, 36.

⁶⁵ Quintrell, 296-302.

presumably a potentially wealthy patron, Weston was politically opposed to one of May's previous dedicatees – curiously, Warwick again. Whether this plea was successful is unclear, for no trace of interaction between May and Weston survives; however, given the prestige of May's subsequent publications, both of whom were commissioned by the king, it would probably be safe to assume that, at this point, May had achieved the royal recognition he had been seeking. As a matter of fact, the contents of the dedicatory epistle also help shed more light on May's status at court at the time of publication of *The Mirror of Minds*. Aside from insights on May's approach to translation, which shall be discussed below, certain hints in the dedication appear to suggest that the poet might have been finally granted access to court sometime in or immediately prior to 1631. Indeed, after flattering Weston for his apparently well-known mastery of 'the learned languages', May claims that Weston had 'read this acute discourse in the original and enjoyed the author in his own strength and elegance.'⁶⁶ Although the profile of Weston as a master of Latin might have been familiar even outside the court, it seems to me that the notion of him having read and enjoyed the Latin *Icon Animorum* would have required a more in-depth knowledge of court circles, which would indicate that, around 1631, May had at the very least visited the court at some point in some capacity. As was the case with the dedication to Kenelm Digby in the joint edition of *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina*, and as would be the case with the two historical works dedicated to the king, May was careful to highlight *why* a particular work may be appreciated by his prospective patron; no such care is apparent in works published before 1631, suggesting that in those cases May had acted of his own initiative and without first ascertaining that his dedicatee may be interested in sponsoring his work. As a possible counterargument, in 1631 May also published *Antigone*, but the dedication to Endymion Porter reads as more impersonal and generic than the one to Weston; however, this could simply indicate that *Antigone* was published before *The Mirror of Minds*

⁶⁶ *Mirror of Minds*, A3r-A3v.

and before all suspected contact of May with the court, or simply that May could find no specific reason to dedicate the work to Porter. In any case, speculating increasingly frequent contact with the court starting from 1631 would not be entirely unfounded, for, as shall be discussed in the following sections, Charles commissioned two historical works by May, the first of which he published just two years later in 1633.

Due to the semi-obscure nature of both May's translation and his source text, a very brief description of the contents of *The Mirror of Minds* is provided to give the reader a sense of the scope of Barclay's book. All chapters, as noted by Mark Riley, are written according to the same principles and following a similar structure: quotations and *exempla* from classical and other authors; anecdotes and quotations from anonymous people, possibly including acquaintances, which frame the work in the modern world and distance it from mere historical speculation; and sympathetic depictions of each chapter's subjects.⁶⁷

The first chapter, acting as a sort of preface, is devoted to the four ages of man, namely childhood, youth, middle age, and old age. In the second, Barclay's visit to Greenwich serves as a backdrop for his reflections on climate and landscape. Chapters three to nine are devoted to the analysis of individual European nations and population groups, namely France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, Eastern and Northern Europe, and Turks and Jews, respectively. Chapter ten serves to contrast two human innate types, the 'quick-witted fluent talker' and the 'slow, deliberate thinker.' Similarly, chapter eleven also opposes the types of 'the valiant and the timid' and 'the quiet and the talkative.' Chapter twelve is focused on amorous dispositions, with personal anecdotes enriching the discourse. Chapters thirteen to sixteen deal with the court, the courtier, and other professions, respectively: the different types of kings (hereditary, elective, and by usurpation) and nobles; courts and courtiers, in which the influence of Barclay's ten

⁶⁷ Riley, 41.

years at king James' court is evident; magistrates, lawyers, and the legal profession in general; religious authorities, theologians, priests, and the clergy in general, with discussions on the consequences of the Reformation.⁶⁸

Mark Riley offers an in-depth and accurate commentary on translation style and choices which agrees with the proposed idea of May's attempting to create an English canon of Latin works, on par with or at least equally enjoyable as the source texts. Riley's choice to edit Barclay's Latin text parallel to May's almost four-centuries-old translation is in itself testimony to its quality, a point that Riley himself notes: 'That translation of 1631 was ... so skilful that no other has been needed.'⁶⁹ May's translation is reminiscent of 'the fantastic style of Lyly' without being Euphuistic; his best prose is an example of Seneca's fluency and loose style, and perhaps closer to modern English expectations than early modern sensibilities. At the same time, his translation practices reflect a willingness to fashion 'a piece of English literature in its own right' and therefore result in a less close adaptation than would today be considered acceptable. Most remarkably, for he had already displayed this attitude when translating Lucan, May occasionally updates or corrects Barclay's text: when King James is mentioned in the 1614 text, May replaces him with Charles, and wool is added among the sources of English wealth.⁷⁰

This casual and 'relaxed' approach to the Latin text is, when considering the rest of May's production, unsurprising. Far from esteeming Latin necessarily superior in itself, May is determined to provide the English reader with an experience comparable to that of the intended audience. In the dedicatory epistle, in which May describes his translation in humbling terms, Barclay's original is praised not in terms of language, but rather for its 'strength and elegance'; moreover, May explicitly states that his 'pains' belong to the English readers, a presumably less

⁶⁸ I credit Riley with most of these succinct chapter summaries, and quotations in inverted commas are from Riley, 42.

⁶⁹ Riley, 32.

⁷⁰ Riley, 38-40.

educated readership than that approaching the original ('mere English readers ... to whom my pains most properly do belong').⁷¹ Most crucially, May appears to verbalise the aim and scope of his translation:

Barclay ... clothed his work (and that most elegantly) in the Roman tongue. I, lest our English gentlemen (as many of them as cannot master the original) should lose the sense of such a work, have made adventure to benefit them, and with the loss (perchance) of mine own fame, to extend the fame of Barclay.⁷²

Displaying an attitude entirely opposite to that of Jonson in the prefaces to *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, May is not only aware that the target audience of his translation will not be the educated readership accustomed to Barclay's original Latin, but appears to have consciously embarked on the translation with the precise aim to render 'such a work' accessible to an English audience.

As mentioned above, the translation enjoyed another edition in 1633, but then appears to have been largely forgotten. A complete edition of Barclay's original Latin *Satyricon*, which included the *Icon Animorum* as its fourth part, was printed in Oxford in 1634, possibly prompted by the success of May's English translations in 1631 and 1633.⁷³ However, no third edition or even a reprinting of the previously published volumes of the translation ever followed, and nothing seems to have materialised from the transfer of rights between Thomas Walkley and Thomas Brudnell; the only other time May's text appeared in print was also the only modern edition of Barclay's text, edited by Mark Riley in 2013.

⁷¹ *Mirror of Minds*, A4r.

⁷² *Mirror of Minds*, A4r-A4v.

⁷³ The full title of this edition is *Euphormionis Lusinini, sive, Ioannis Barclaii partes quinque. Satyricon bipartitum. L.1. & 2. Apologia pro se. L.3. Icon animorum. L.4. Veritatis lachrymæ. L.5 Cum clavi præfixa* (Oxford: Henry Cripps, 1634).

Evidence that May was now part of a royal circle of intellectuals is mostly circumstantial, but even so it should not be ignored. Between 1631 and 1632, May provided three dedicatory poems for works written by friends or respected scholars, two of which he wrote in Latin – which, according to all evidence, marks the first registered instance of his ever writing in Latin and not in English. Two of these works were written in 1631: Wilhelm Bedwell’s *The Tournament of Tottenham* and Charles Aleyn’s (or Aleyn’s) *The Battles of Crecy and Poitiers*.

Wilhelm Bedwell had been a Cambridge student and part of the committee appointed to translate the Bible by James in 1604 (a feat acknowledged by May, who addresses him ‘To my learned and reverend friend, Mr Wilhelm Bedwell, one of the translators of the Bible’) and later distinguished himself as an orientalist, expert mathematician, and ‘the father of Arabic studies in England’; he died in 1632, just one year after his volume was published.⁷⁴ *The Tournament of Tottenham* was not an original work but rather the reproduction of a fifteenth-century manuscript attributed to Gilbert Pilkington which Bedwell brought to light and printed in 1631.⁷⁵ May’s dedication, although addressed ‘To my learned and reverend friend’, is very formal and deferential, which might betray the respect he must have felt he owed to a much older scholar.

Not much is known about Charles Aleyn. Like May, he matriculated at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, though six years after May left the college, and later became master of Thomas Farnaby’s school in St Giles, Cripplegate, as well as domestic tutor to wealthy pupils.⁷⁶ Whether May knew him through their shared past at Sidney Sussex or, more likely, through his possible friendship with Farnaby, is unclear; some level of friendship must have existed, for May addresses the dedication ‘Doctissimo amico suo.’⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *ACAD*, #BDWL578W.

⁷⁵ Klausner, 676.

⁷⁶ Lievsay, 224.

⁷⁷ Aleyn, *Crecy*, A2r.

In 1632 May wrote a dedication to another ‘Doctissimo amico’, Alexander Gil the Younger, upon the publication of his *Parerga, Sive Poetici Conatus*.⁷⁸ Gil, born around the same time as May, was the son of a homonymous renowned schoolmaster and Latinist and, like Aleyn, had worked at Farnaby’s school in St Giles. He was famous for his corrosive lyrics, such as the one celebrating the death of ninety Catholics following the collapse of a chapel, as well as for his literary feud with Jonson. In 1628 Gil was arrested when he was overheard drinking to the health of Felton, Buckingham’s assassin; he was immediately imprisoned and stripped of most of his academic titles. Although his father petitioned for him, it appears that Gil remained in jail for two years.⁷⁹ No link between the two men except May’s dedication survives, but the two men must have known each other personally: not only were they the same age, but they were also known to associate with Farnaby and Jonson, and up until 1628 had probably shared similar political positions as well as a dislike for Buckingham. At first glance, it might appear perplexing that May, so desperately looking for royal support, would publicly endorse such a controversial figure. However, the anthology *Parerga*, to which May contributed the dedication, was intended by Gil as a sort of atonement for his past offenses: the volume is dedicated to the king and comprises poems designed ‘to reaffirm his loyalty to king and church’, including one upon the birth of princess Mary, several dedicated to potential royal patrons, and one to the archbishop William Laud.⁸⁰ As though wishing to associate himself with a man who had completely recanted his previous dangerous ties with seditious ideas, May took the opportunity to attach his name to yet another work dedicated to the king and, as the following sections will prove, his efforts paid off when he was tasked by Charles to write and publish two historical poems.

⁷⁸ Gil, *Parerga*, A9r.

⁷⁹ Campbell, 155.

⁸⁰ Campbell, 156.

4.5 The poem to Queen Henrietta Maria

After 1630-31, evidence indicates that May was financed by courtly patrons and that he was conceivably enjoying a comfortable life. Further proof of his close association with Charles' inner circle can be found in yet another poem he composed for a member of the royal family, this time Queen Henrietta Maria. The manuscript, which is undated, is part of a bound miscellany of poems and letters of various origins, probably assembled in the 1640s or early 1650s, held by the Bodleian Library. May's poem is entitled 'A New Year's Gift to Her Majesty' and, based on its title and contents, can probably be dated between early 1632 and, at the latest, early 1634. Because it is hitherto unpublished, it deserves, I think, its own section, as well as to be reproduced in its entirety:

A New Year's Gift to Her Majesty

No other gift can we bestow
On you, bright Queen, than learn and know
Your lustre and admire
The sun that fills the world with light,
Receives no more from human sight
Than that his radiant fire
They should perceive and their enlightened sense
Be taught to know his glorious excellence.

2

On you we look not on your height
Nor think you as a diamond bright
Because so richly set;
Your graces, madam, are your own.
Nor to the glories of [the] crown
Are you so much indebted,
But that the jewel of the crown you show,
The crown far brighter in possessing you.

3

'Tis truth our Charles his constant breast,
Where your perfections figured rest,

Does to the world approve
Who finds, though kings' transcendent states
Needs crave no other wealth of fates,
 They are enriched by love,
By your fruition taught, that there may be
Addition given to sovereign dignity.

4

To you let Janus long appear
As joyful as this present year,
 And may you never prove
Nor over, but in story see
That changes and decays may be
 In fortune or in love,
Yet (not to make you poor) let us confess
We wish increase to what you now possess.

5

Not that we wish your majesty
More gold of Inde, or pearls that lie
 Upon the red sea's shore,
The wealth that flows from both the Spains
Or that your native France contains,
 Yet what we wish is more:
No outwards titles, wealth, or growth of state,
But that yourself yourself may propagate.

6

May many royal branches more,
With these we have already, grow
 From your most happy womb,
Nor shall star-bearing Pleione
Nor Berecynthia's cradles be
 Compared with yours, in whom
Great Charles his virtues with your own shall shine
Together mixed in one heroic line.

Thomas May⁸¹

⁸¹ Bodleian MS Rawl. poet. 116, 48v-49v.

The title hints at its being presented to the queen around March.⁸² The celebratory lyrics culminate, in the sixth stanza, in the hope and wish that the queen may soon be pregnant with another child: ‘May many royal branches more, / With these we have already, grow / From your most happy womb.’ The phrase ‘with these we have already’, in the plural, indicates that more than one royal child was living at the time the poem was written; moreover, in the fourth stanza, ‘as joyful as this present year’ could be interpreted as a reference to a particularly fecund year for the queen. Following the death of the royal couple’s firstborn son and then the birth of Charles in 1630, Henrietta gave birth to a daughter, Mary, on the 4th of November 1631 and to a son, James (future James II), on the 4th of October 1633; two more female heirs, Elizabeth and Anne, would follow in 1635 and 1637, respectively.⁸³ Although the poem might just as easily have been written after 1635 or 1637, I do not think it particularly likely that May – or anyone – would explicitly wish for the royal couple to have more children after four or five successful pregnancies. This hope would, I believe, be more appropriate for a smaller family, particularly one recently affected by the death of a son in the cradle. To narrow it down even further, I imagine that the desire for more heirs would have subsided after the birth of a healthy male ‘spare’ in 1633, thus I am more inclined to believe that the poem was written in early 1632, as a celebration for the recent birth of Mary.

As with the lyrics written for the future Charles II, the theme of branches and royal trees resurfaces, as do the many classical references interweaved in the poem. The meter and rhyme are not the heroic couplets employed in most of May’s lyrical production but are nevertheless not unique in his *oeuvre*: May had already used an identical structure (AABCCBDD, a sestet plus a rhyming couplet closing the stanza) for his poem to Charles and the royal fleet written in 1627. If one accepts the 1632 date, the poem marks the first time May had written poetry for a

⁸² Before the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, the year started on the 25th of March.

⁸³ Gregg, 250. Charles and Henrietta had three more children: Catherine, born and died on the same day in 1639, Henry, born in 1640, and Henrietta, born in 1644. As these births were either mournful or occurred after May stopped working for royal patronage, I excluded them as possible ‘royal branches’ being referenced in the poem.

woman; poems to Venetia Digby and Alice Sutcliffe would soon follow, in which some of the tropes employed for Henrietta would be reused. This also seems to have been the only known interaction between May and the queen, for all the rest of his literary attentions would be devoted to Charles; as will be discussed below, this failure to pursue the patronage of Henrietta might have been one of the reasons why Davenant, and not May, would be chosen as a poet laureate in 1638.

An exact chronology of May's collaboration with the king and his permanence at court is hard to draw, as is the extent of the royal favour he enjoyed, so it is difficult to say whether he wrote this poem while at court or shortly earlier, and whether he received any public acknowledgement for it. As a matter of fact, several seventeenth-century historians report that May did indeed receive some sort of pension or financial support. Edward Hyde, earl of Clarendon, who had known May personally, writes: 'he had received much countenance, and a very considerable donative from the king'; the royalist Anthony à Wood similarly claims that 'He was graciously countenanced by K[ing] Ch[arles] I and his royal consort.'⁸⁴ However, these claims cannot be independently confirmed as no kind of official paper sanctioning a pension or donative to May is extant. In any case, in 1633 he finally succeeded in being publicly sponsored by the king, for he penned the first of two epic poems about the lives of English kings on the orders of Charles.

4.6 The Reign of King Henry the Second

The first of these poems was a history centred on King Henry II. No details are known about when May was tasked with this composition, nor about any payment made to him. The work made its first appearance in the Stationers' Register on 30 November 1632, when there was entered 'a book called *The Reign of King Henry the Second written in Seven Books* by Master

⁸⁴ Clarendon, 35; Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume II, 295.

Thomas May.⁸⁵ The book was printed in 1633 by Augustine Matthews for Benjamin Fisher with the same title and the subtitle ‘By His Majesty’s Command.’ The edition is quite ornate, with the normally blank page fronting the title showcasing an elaborate engraving of Henry II by Robert Vaughan. The title page also presents a Latin quotation, as was almost customary for May, from Ausonius – ‘Invalidas vires Rex excitat, et iuvat idem / Qui iubet; obsequium sufficit esse meum’ – which has been slightly altered to fit the theme of the book, with ‘Rex’ replacing the original subject ‘ipse.’⁸⁶ Editions of Ausonius’ works had only been printed in continental Europe, and not in England, before 1633; it is of course possible that May found the lines in a commonplace book or in an anthology of Latin epigrams, so it is rather difficult to determine from where exactly he lifted the quotation.⁸⁷

Interestingly, May’s name does not appear anywhere on the title page but can be found in the short dedication immediately following it. This all-caps inscription reads: ‘To the sacred Majesty of Charles, by the grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, defender of the faith, etc., this historical poem, born by his command and not to live but by his gracious acceptation, is humbly dedicated by the author, his Majesty’s most obedient subject and servant Thomas May.’⁸⁸ Unlike most of the other works by May, no epistle precedes this poem, and no celebratory dedications by friends are affixed before it. As May’s second historical poem, also commissioned by the king and published two years later, does feature a dedicatory epistle to the king, it can be speculated whether publication of *Henry II* was rushed; however, as no other elements can support one hypothesis or the other, it is impossible to move beyond mere speculations.

Henry II is also one of the three printed works by May to have survived in manuscript too. Unlike *Cleopatra*’s manuscript, discussed in Chapter 2, which has been determined to be

⁸⁵ Stationers’ Register Online, SRO9043.

⁸⁶ Ausonius, 1.4.

⁸⁷ Felber and Prete, 200.

⁸⁸ *Henry II*, A4r.

authorial, the manuscript of *Henry II* is harder to attribute and its relationship with the printed copy harder to establish. As concerns the latter point, though, when cataloguing the manuscript, the British Library archivist wrote that the MS copy substantially agrees with the printed version; Götz Schmitz – responsible for the only modern edition of the volume – has different views, chiefly basing his conclusion on the fact that the manuscript lacks all of the marks usually left by compositors, and theorises that May must have produced another copy for printing.⁸⁹

By tracking the whereabouts of the manuscript throughout the centuries, Schmitz has concluded that several circumstances hint at its being part of the king's private library. Indeed, a combination of the MS history and the extreme regularity of the transcribing hand has led Schmitz to speculate that the manuscript may have been prepared specially for the king, a hypothesis that would appear to be confirmed by the printed book dedication's stating that it was 'not to live but by his gracious acceptance.'⁹⁰ This, however, begs the question of whether May could afford such an expensive transcription, or whether he might have tried to cut costs by undertaking the effort himself. The sparse corrections to the text are very minor in nature and have been often added by the scribe, with some others, in a slightly different hand, by a corrector.⁹¹ This corrector, Schmitz speculates, was most certainly May himself. Although, he concedes, corrections are so infrequent as to make identification between known specimens of May's handwriting difficult, Schmitz observes certain similarities that enable to recognise the corrections, and possibly even the main scribal hand of the manuscript, as May's.⁹² Further proof of the main hand's being May's is provided by the copyist's spelling habits: in an age of

⁸⁹ Schmitz, lxi-lxiv.

⁹⁰ Schmitz, xxii-xxv.

⁹¹ The only scribal emendation of some substance is a correction to the number of Yorkshire knights mentioned in Book 5 from 'six' to 'five', but that may be because the knights are then listed by name and the scribe would have noticed the inconsistency and corrected it; see Schmitz, xxix.

⁹² Schmitz's main source of comparison for May's handwriting is his dedication to Daniel Heinsius on a 1640 copy of the *Supplementum Lucani*, already mentioned when discussing the manuscript of *Cleopatra* and further discussed in Chapter 5.

virtual spelling anarchy, it seems highly improbable that a professional scribe would reproduce exactly all of May's known (as displayed in the MS of *Cleopatra*) spelling quirks; yet, as Schmitz painstakingly proves, the same habits can be found consistently throughout both manuscripts. Overall, it seems likely that May was, indeed, the author of both the *Cleopatra* and the *Henry II* manuscripts, and that the affected italic hand he employed for the latter was a result of his efforts to produce a print-like copy for inspection by the king.⁹³

Literary precedents that had dealt with the story of Henry II were numerous and of varying degrees of value, and May did not limit his scope to the many Elizabethan and Jacobean compilations of historical events that would have been widely available.⁹⁴ As Schmitz notes, May was thorough and clever in his use of historical sources, and made sure only to borrow – sometimes verbatim – from the best histories available at the time, an opportunity that would have no doubt been granted to him by his connections to the court, if not by explicit royal permission.⁹⁵ In many cases, May blends several sources at once, or he swaps one for the other on grounds of authority, as well as composing his own version and interweaving it with details from historiography. Occasionally, May adds a marginal note providing the source of his claims, though he only ever does so with the more prestigious Latin sources; Schmitz speculates that the reason for this might have been a desire to protect the most controversial takes as well as giving his work a more prestigious and scholarly edge. When choosing between two accounts, May generally prefers the Latin over the vernacular, although he does use English versions at

⁹³ Schmitz, xxxiii-xxxviii. Interestingly, Schmitz notes a third set of corrections in a different ink, possibly by another hand, that mostly amend punctuation and that are very crudely done, compared to the care with which the manuscript was prepared. He then reports a comment by Kevin Sharpe that alleges that Charles I 'was not above correcting the punctuation of manuscripts that came to his attention', prompting the hypothesis that the king himself took it upon himself to alter the punctuation of May's poem; see Schmitz, xxxviii-xxxix.

⁹⁴ An example of a chronicle based on such accounts is the aforementioned *The Battles of Crecy and Poitiers* by Charles Aleyn, to which May contributed verses. Aleyn would go on to write a *History of King Henry the Seventh* in 1638; see Schmitz, lxix.

⁹⁵ Schmitz, lxviii-lxix.

times.⁹⁶ Among the sources, he appears to be giving precedence to those with a better reputation for impartiality, such as William of Newburgh and Roger of Hoveden, as opposed to more biased authors such as Gerald of Wales, whom May's marginal notes mention only once. Some of the notes are explanatory, expounding upon and clarifying controversial or confusing passages.⁹⁷

As concerns Latin sources, May makes no use of Roman historians but uses the classics almost exclusively for 'decorative purposes.' As Schmitz notes, the classical allusions are so many that it is difficult to trace them to a specific author; furthermore, the theme and structure of *Henry II* are heavily influenced by epic poems, especially (and predictably) Lucan's *Pharsalia*.⁹⁸

Henry II is written in heroic couplets throughout. The structure is reminiscent of May's previous engagement with an original historical poem: like the *Continuation*, the work is divided into seven volumes and each volume is preceded by a short verse argument (between ten and twenty lines). Unlike the *Continuation*, however, the poem lacks annotations at the end of each book and is instead supplied with two appendices. The first, 'The description of King Henry the Second, with a short survey of the changes in his reign', as the title suggest, contains a physical and character description of Henry, then a summary of his reign, which May divides into five periods of time, or 'acts', as he calls them; here the tone is less haughty, the prose relaxed and informative, and May dispenses with praises and references to Charles. The intended target of this appendix is no longer the king, but the 'ordinary' reader, which is apparent by the comment, amidst a summary of the Thomas Becket controversy, stating 'The

⁹⁶ Schmitz, lxxii-lxvi; for example, May uses the marginal notes found in John Hooker's translation of Giraldus' *Expugnatio Hibernica* on more than one occasion.

⁹⁷ Schmitz, lxxvii-lxxviii.

⁹⁸ Schmitz, xciv-xcv.

particulars at large have appeared in the foregoing story, and shall not here trouble the reader.’⁹⁹

The second appendix is an examination and comparison between Henry’s two eldest sons, Henry and Richard, and is appropriately titled ‘The single and comparative characters of Henry the son and Richard.’ Again, the target audience is the ‘common’ reader, as evidenced by the note ‘if the reader thereby may be informed or delighted’ opening the first paragraph of the appendix.¹⁰⁰ Here May passes negative judgement on both sons of Henry for rebelling against him and compares Richard’s belligerent character and his blind willingness to prove himself to Julius Caesar’s, quoting Lucan further to stress the point.

Curiously, although contemporary politics had covertly found their way into almost all of May’s writings, this poem marks his first known literary effort directly centred on English history. It was not, of course, his first time working with historical material, although his previous forays would have fallen under the early modern definition of ‘antiquity’, rather than ‘history’, due to their dealing with the remote past.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, Charles must have thought May qualified for the job and was evidently pleased enough with the results to task him with another history shortly after.

It is left unsaid why Henry II specifically was chosen as a subject for this poem, and it is also unclear whether the choice can entirely be attributed to Charles or May had any say in the matter. Henry II was renowned as a king who had expanded England’s reign over the British Isles and overseas, had quashed several intestine attempts to undermine his rule (including by his own sons and wife), fought against papal impositions, secured alliances throughout Europe, and held a magnificent court.¹⁰² It is therefore easy to see why Charles might aspire to be remembered alongside Henry and, indeed, May makes this very point in the opening lines of his poem, in which, after praising the greatness of Henry, he addresses Charles directly:

⁹⁹ *Henry II*, N6r.

¹⁰⁰ *Henry II*, O3r.

¹⁰¹ This distinction was born in the Elizabethan age; see Woolf, 19-21.

¹⁰² Vincent, 1.

‘Vouchsafe to read the actions of a King, / Your noble ancestor; and what we sing / In Henry’s reign, that may be true renown, / Accept it, Sir, as prologue to your own, / Until this Muse, or some more happy strain, / May sing your virtues and unequalled reign.’¹⁰³ Indeed, royal praises occasionally interrupt the flow of the narrative, and Charles is hailed as a positive example either by comparison or by contrast. Therefore, after a lengthy description of royal genealogy, May writes: ‘And here yourself, most gracious sovereign, / Your ancient right to England’s crown may see’; and after recounting the origins of the rebellion against Henry at the hands of his sons, May is careful to distance Charles from any acts of filial ingratitude: ‘And you, most gracious sovereign, born to be / Th’admired example of true piety / To your deceased father, with an eye / Secure, may read your virtues contrary / In Henry’s sons.’¹⁰⁴

In his long analysis of *Henry II*, Schmitz poignantly observes that May is less concerned with the historical, political, and religious aspects of the subject at hand, and more ‘with moulding it into an epic that can compete with classical models in theme and structure.’ Nevertheless, he also observes that May was heavily influenced by several external factors when composing his poem, namely ‘poetical precedent, contemporary prejudice, and political pressure.’¹⁰⁵ As has already been observed throughout this thesis, the effort to create a unique blend of classical and contemporary English models is one of the defining features of May’s *oeuvre*. It is therefore not surprising to recognise this creative pattern in *Henry II* and *Edward III* too, with which no doubt he felt he had limited creative freedom due in part to the subject matter, in part to his royal client. May has often been dismissed as a mediocre writer, and, truthfully, he was never able to equal some of his contemporary dramatists and poets in terms of lyrical brilliancy. Yet there is also a quality to May’s works that is harder to define but which

¹⁰³ *Henry II*, B1v. ‘Strain’ here can either mean type or character; see OED. Interestingly, May appears to propose himself as future royal chronicler, which, in light of the fact that he actually became historian for Parliament, is of course especially ironic.

¹⁰⁴ *Henry*, B3v, H5r.

¹⁰⁵ Schmitz, lxxxiv, lxxviii.

can be discerned, with more or less clarity, in all of his writings, and that is *balance*. May very proficiently blends separate and sometimes opposite ends of the spectrum – such as history and poetry, erudite and popular, Latin and English – and manages seamless results all the while, avoiding overwhelming the reader with too many and too varied inputs. At the same time, he is a very capable ‘propagandist’, for he succeeds in selecting, adapting, refining, and rearranging historiographical material so as to give an impression of impartiality. In reality, as has been and will be shown, there is always a firm underlining stance informing all of May’s historical writings, though it is barely discernible: his true mastery lies in his ability to mask it underneath a meticulous use of sources and influences.

A case in point: with *Henry II* emphasis is placed on selected aspects of Henry’s life, such as family virtue and heroism, which were pertinent to the idea of himself and his court that Charles wanted to project. Conversely, key features of Henry’s, but not Charles’s, reign such as military endeavours are comparatively muted and retold so as to emphasise their resulting in the union of several territories, an accomplishment that could be shared by James I.¹⁰⁶ The resulting epic, however, as Schmitz puts it, is ‘not sycophantic’: May deals with his subject ‘in a conscientious way’ and his interlocution with Charles within the poem is as advisory as it is complimentary.¹⁰⁷ As Chester notes, May’s brand of royal flattery is in fact rather tame, when compared to other contemporary examples – which could be, in Chester’s terms, ‘nothing short of disgusting’ – and May is always able to maintain a dignified restraint.¹⁰⁸

The poem was never reprinted after 1633, and it apparently left no traces in contemporary accounts. On paper, May was never publicly tied to his historical poems: as shown repeatedly, May’s name was almost invariably mentioned next to that of Lucan or, in his later years, as a

¹⁰⁶ Schmitz, lxxxiv-lxxxv.

¹⁰⁷ Schmitz, xcvi.

¹⁰⁸ Chester, 46.

secretary for Parliament and as author of the *History of Parliament. Henry II* was edited once by Götz Schmitz in 1999; barring this, no major study has ever been devoted to either of May's historical poems, which are rarely mentioned by contemporary scholars even when discussing early modern histories. It is interesting that, although they were possibly among the most crucial publications in May's life – for they represented the concretisation of his numerous attempts at acquiring the financial security and the recognition he craved – they are barely ever mentioned in discussions of May's career. Undoubtedly, the very fact that the subjects of these poems were probably chosen by the king divests them of a great deal of the political significance and poignancy that is, or should be, attached to the rest of May's production. Nevertheless, their presence among May's canon ought to contribute to shaping a more definite portrait of the man and the poet, and they should not be disregarded.

4.7 1633-1635: May's friendships and his poem to Lady Venetia Digby

Indeed, it was probably thanks to the court presence he established while working for Charles on *Henry II* that May was able to form and cultivate relationships with influential peers and members of the court. Probably the most significant of these friendships, which has already been analysed in previous chapters, is the one with Kenelm Digby, to whom May would dedicate, in 1639, the joint editions of *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina*. It is not known precisely when the two men first met, but their relationship had grown relatively close by May of 1633, when Digby's wife Venetia died and May composed a short eulogy to commemorate her. The poem, which is extant in manuscript, has never been printed and for this reason is hereby reproduced:¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Henry Arthur Bright describes the British Library manuscript from which I reproduced the poem as the most complete edition of eulogies written upon Venetia Digby's death, with nine separate pieces by Ben Jonson (who wrote two), Thomas Randolph, Aurelian Townshend, Joseph Rutter, George Digby, William Habington, and of course Thomas May. Bright does note that May's poem is the only one among them to have never been printed, but deems it not worthy enough to set to the task himself; see Bright, 51. Although I do not necessarily disagree

An Elegy Made by Mr Thomas May upon the Death of the Noble Lady Digby

If art were proper in a mourning dress,
If dull amazing sorrow could express
Itself in numbers sweet, in graceful rhyme,
Or keep in sighs and sobs a tuneful time,
How could I wish, fair soul, that I had skill
To clothe so true a grief! That from my quill
The brightest pearls that Helicon e'er knew
Or men admired might drop! That I could strew
The choicest flowers upon thy honoured grave
That all the gardens of the Muses have!
And that myself known in no verse might be
But in the sorrow I express for thee!
But grief's a tyrant: as he does excite
My strongest thoughts, he dulls me when I write;
That my rude accents may be judged to be
A conclamation, not an elegy.
I'll only say the noble Digby's dead,
And that the white angelic soul is fled
From her fair palace, where the graces held
Their seat; where, though the workmanship excelled,
Yet wondrous rich were the materials too;
That in her veins immediately did flow
Two subject-bloods, the greatest in the land:
The bloods of Darby and Northumberland;
That thence this beauteous fabric was composed
Which in itself a purer mind enclosed.
Oh say, my Muse, that jewel now is gone,
Which late with such admirèd lustre shone;
Whose precious metal was her noble stem,
The fashion beauty, and her soul the gem.
But do not thou so much the metal prize,
Nor on the faded fashion cast thine eyes,

with any assessment on the poem's qualities, or lack thereof, I nevertheless deem it important to include it in this thesis for completeness' sake.

Which even the vulgar could discern as well;
Let thy sublime contemplation dwell
About that peerless gem (her soul) alone.
The rates and differences of gems by none
But by true artists are distinguished right.
The diamond's perfect fire and proper light
From baser shining stones they know; and such
The trial is of souls, the odds as much.
But stay, fond Muse: this gem's refulgent light
Will too much dazzle thy aspiring sight;
Therefore, attempt it not, but only take
From those reflections that it here did make,
Survey how pure the essence needs must be:
Look on those virtues eminent which she,
'Mongst all that knew her, daily did express;
And from so many faithful witnesses,
Her soul's fair graces, spite of envy tell;
And for the chief, which should in all excel,
Her piety, the servants that did wait
Her chamber nearest will inform the straight
That many hours' devotions every day
To God's high throne her bended knees did pay;
From thence descend and show how her just mind
In conversation made her wisely kind
And affable to friends; in her fair breast,
Though deep and truly serious thoughts did rest,
Yet such a noble sweetness did allay
Those thoughts, as took th'austerity away,
Yet left the goodness there; her anger ne'er
Reached so far as wrath, nor anywhere
Appeared as causeless from a troubled mind;
And in her noble carriage still conjoined
With modesty did courtly graces flow,
And state with meekness dwelt upon her brow.
This gem, as first from heaven derived, again
Is thither gone for ever to remain.
There, happy soul, enjoy thy latest rest,

Whilst here on earth thy Digby's noble breast
Enters the love and memory of thee.
Within that breast shall thy dear figure be
Preservèd still, still pleased to dwell so near
Th'heroic virtues that inhabit thee,
And to be lodged in that majestic room;
Th'Egyptian queen had not so brave a tomb.

*Flevit*¹¹⁰

Thomas May¹¹¹

Although the poem is unusually long for May's standards, he resorts to many of the tropes he had previously employed to honour both the living and the dead. Like he did in the tribute to queen Henrietta, May compares Venetia to diamonds and precious gems; classical references abound, with appeals to the Muses scattered throughout the poem and a favourable comparison with Cleopatra closing the eulogy; the metre employed is May's favourite, the rhyming pentameter. May also makes sure to honour the newly widowed Kenelm, for whom this tribute was obviously really intended, and to praise his virtue as well as Venetia's.

Digby was suitably impressed by May's tribute and expressed his gratitude in a letter to Joseph Rutter dated 4 June 1633: '[W]hen I return to London I shall be glad to see you as also Mr May, to thank him for his great friendliness to me and his worthy remembrance of my wife. In the meantime, I pray you endear my sense of obligation to him.'¹¹² A connection between May, Digby, and Rutter can also be found in Rutter's *The Shepherd's Holiday*, a pastoral drama probably written in 1633 and published in 1635, which is dedicated to Digby and to which May contributed a celebratory poem. Rutter's words in his dedication to Digby are heavily focused on the two men's friendship and on the grieving time following Venetia's death; dedications by Jonson (who addresses Rutter as 'son') and May follow.

¹¹⁰ From the Latin *flevo*; the signature approximately translates to 'Here cried Thomas May.'

¹¹¹ British Library Add MS 30259, pp. 21-26.

¹¹² Quoted in Gabrieli, 'Digby', 82; modernisation mine.

Further traces of the relationship between May and Digby can be found in a letter written by Digby himself, probably in the early 1630s, in which he presents a critique of Edmund Spenser that would be later known as ‘Discourse concerning Edmund Spenser.’ The letter is undated, but it contains an inscription reading ‘Concerning Spenser, that I wrote at Mr May his desire’, and it is addressed to an unnamed recipient, presumably May: ‘Yet to comply with your desire I will here briefly deliver you some of these rude and undigested conceptions that I have of [Spenser].’¹¹³ This was not the first time Digby had dealt with Spenser: in 1628, again at a friend’s request, he had written *Observations on the 22nd Stanza in the 9th Canto of the 2nd Book of Spenser’s Faery Queen*, which would not be published until 1643.¹¹⁴ Probably as a kind of repayment for honouring his request, May composed a poem to celebrate Digby’s critique of Spenser. The poem, known as ‘As we esteem the greatest princes blessed’, has been printed in recent years and is therefore not reproduced here; suffice to say that it is highly representative of May’s style, verse structure, and lexical paradigms, and yet another tile helpful in reconstructing a profile of the poet and the network of his acquaintances in the 1630s.¹¹⁵

By the mid-1630s, May had evidently become a stable member of a circle of intellectuals closely associated with the court. His inclusion in royal circles is further testified by another dedication he penned in 1634, to Alice Sutcliffe’s *Meditations of Man’s Mortality, or A Way to True Blessedness*. The book was entered in the Stationers’ Register in January 1633.¹¹⁶ Although the title page of the 1634 volume purports it to be ‘The second edition, enlarged’, no earlier editions survive, so it is impossible to determine if May’s dedication was written earlier than 1634; in fact, Ruth Hughey speculates that the congratulatory verses may have made up a

¹¹³ British Library Add. MS 41486, ff. 108-111.

¹¹⁴ Wurtsbaugh, 192.

¹¹⁵ The poem is reproduced in ‘Spenser Allusions’, 188, and in Pask, 110.

¹¹⁶ Stationers’ Register Online, SRO9064.

large part of the additions.¹¹⁷ The author of this collection of religious prose and lyrical writings, Alice Sutcliffe, was, as stated on the title page, wife of John Sutcliffe, Groom of his Majesty's Privy Chamber. John, whom she married before 1624, had also served as a squire under James and his uncle was Matthew Sutcliffe, the dean of Exeter.¹¹⁸ The volume is dedicated to Katherine Villiers, duchess of Buckingham, and to her sister Susanna, countess of Denbeigh; evidence of Sutcliffe's being close with Buckingham's widow is to be found in the dedicatory epistle, in which Sutcliffe informs the duchess that the latter has been 'more than a mother' to her.¹¹⁹ Moreover, another dedication to the earl of Pembroke follows those to the two sisters, cementing the impression that Sutcliffe was part of the most prestigious courtly circles.

May's dedication is one of five, the others being by Jonson, the poet George Wither, Peter Heywood, and Francis Lenton; whether May's contribution was intended as a way to boost Sutcliffe's or his own reputation in intellectual circles is another matter.¹²⁰ As pointed out by Hughey, Wither's dedication might shed some light on the issue: as it is addressed to John Sutcliffe 'upon the receipt of this book written by his wife' and begins with 'Sir, I received your book with acceptation', it suggests that John Sutcliffe sent out copies of his wife's literary efforts (perhaps the first edition of the work) to respected intellectuals in order to obtain public endorsements.¹²¹ If that were the case, it would be a strong indication of May's relevance as an intellectual at court in the mid-1630s. May's dedication itself does not offer any more ground for speculation: it is quite short and is addressed to the reader, rather than to Sutcliffe or her husband, and does not hint at any particularly strong friendship with her. Its placement among the dedications, however, immediately following the one by Jonson, might indicate that the

¹¹⁷ Hughey, 156.

¹¹⁸ Maynard, 149.

¹¹⁹ Sutcliffe, *Meditations*, A6v.

¹²⁰ The identities of Heywood and Lanton are difficult to determine. Heywood is likely to be identified with the Peter Heywood who was Justice of the Peace of Westminster, whereas Lenton, or Lanton, or Langston, may have been an Oxford alumnus, but nothing else is known about him; see Hughey, 156n.

¹²¹ Sutcliffe, *Meditations*, a6v; Hughey, 157-158.

poets paying homage to Sutcliffe were presented in order of popularity and thus that May's name was perceived as more prestigious than the other three. Further proof of his popularity in the early 1630s is found in a register of the *Visitation of Sussex*, taken between 1633 and 1634, in which May's name is accompanied by the description 'poeta celeberrimus.'¹²²

Despite all this circumstantial evidence suggesting that, at this point, May was a well-respected and well-recognised poet, a widely reported contemporary anecdote would appear to contradict the impression that he was a habitu  of the court. As already briefly related in Chapter 2, in February of 1634 May was among the attendees of a masque at court organised by men of the Inns of Court. There he was the victim of a physical attack by William Herbert, Lord Chamberlain and 3rd Earl of Pembroke, as reported by two witnesses of the incident and lately parodied by Andrew Marvell in his satire 'Tom May's Death':

Mr May of Gray's Inn, a fine poet, he who translated Lucan, came athwart my Lord Chamberlain in the Banqueting House, and he broke his staff over his shoulders, not knowing who he was; the king present, who knew him, for he calls him his poet, and told the Chamberlain of it, who sent for him the next morning and fairly excused himself to him and gave him fifty pounds in pieces.

[Pembroke] was intolerably choleric and offensive, and did not refrain whilst he was Chamberlain to break many wiser heads than his own, Mr May that translated Lucan having felt the weight of his staff; which had not his office, and the place, being the Banqueting House, protected, I question whether he would have ever struck again.¹²³

At whose dread whisk Virgil himself does quake,
And Horace patiently its stroke does take,
As he crowds in he whipt him o'er the pate

¹²² Fitzgibbons, xv. It is also interesting to note that his name was still associated with his birthplace, Sussex, long after he had taken residence in London; perhaps this inclusion indicates that he still visited or had ties to his family's manor in Mayfield, although this is speculative as no evidence in this regard survives.

¹²³ Both incidents are quoted by Berry, vi-vii.

Like Pembroke at the masque, and then did rate.¹²⁴

This story, which is probably the only anecdote about May's personal life written while he was still alive, shows that his role at court must have been relatively modest. As Chester rightfully points out, Pembroke, who was a habitu  of Charles' court and Lord Chamberlain at the time, 'must have been well aware whom he could attack with impunity and whom he could not'; if he failed to recognise May, who in 1634 was at the height of his career and in between the publication of two historical poems commissioned by Charles, it must be reasonably concluded that May was 'on the outer edges of court life' and, in all probability, 'merely a professional poet whose work was known to the King.'¹²⁵ Additionally, the fact that both witnesses identified him as the translator of Lucan and one even as a member of Gray's Inn, rather than perhaps as a member of court circles, shows that May's most impressive feat to date remained his *Pharsalia* and that he was not yet recognised as having close associations with the court. The anecdote however also undoubtedly shows that Charles knew very well and appreciated May, to the point of taking his defence publicly against one of the most respected members of his court.

Perhaps the most glaring example of public recognition of May is to be found in the fourth book of Thomas Heywood's poem *Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels*, dedicated to Henrietta Maria and published in 1635. In it, Heywood notes how ancient writers were 'graced with three names at least', whereas contemporary poets are informally known only by their given name; he then proceeds to list his most illustrious contemporaries, and May makes an appearance in the list (emphasis mine):

¹²⁴ Marvell, *Miscellaneous Poems*, G2v.

¹²⁵ Chester, 50.

Greene, who had in both academies 'tained
Degree of Master, yet could never gain
To be called more than Robin;

...

Marlowe, renowned for his rare art and wit,
Could ne'er attain beyond the name of Kit;

...

Famous **Kyd**

Was called but Tom; Tom **Watson**, though he wrote
Able to make Apollo's self to dote
Upon his Muse, for all that he could strive,
Yet never could to his full name arrive.

Tom **Nashe** (in his time of no small esteem)
Could not a second syllable redeem.

Excellent **Beaumont**, in the foremost rank
Of the rarest wits, was never more than Frank.

Mellifluous **Shakespeare**, whose enchanting quill
Commanded mirth or passion, was but Will.

And famous **Jonson**, though his learned pen
Be dipped in Castaly,¹²⁶ is still but Ben.

Fletcher and **Webster**, of that learned pack
None of the meanest, yet neither was but Jack;

Dekker but Tom, nor **May**, nor **Middleton**;
And he's now but Jack **Ford** that once were John.

...

If anyone to me so bluntly come,
I hold he loves me best that calls me Tom.¹²⁷

In an almost chronological enumeration of the most respected poets and playwrights of the age, Heywood includes May. Although the inclusion might have been simply justified by Heywood's need for another poet named Thomas, or perhaps because the two men might have known each other personally, it is nevertheless also evident that in 1635 the name of May must have carried

¹²⁶ Castaly was a variant of Castalia, the name of a spring on Mount Parnassus; see OED.

¹²⁷ Heywood, *Blessed Angels*, S1v.

a certain weight in order for the point to come across. Because Heywood is jesting that even the most famed authors of his time were known colloquially only by a diminutive version of their name, it would have made little sense to include May if he had not been a recognisable or popular name. It would indeed be tempting to speculate that May, had it not been for his political allegiance, would still be counted among the ‘learned pack’ described by Heywood; and while many would not go as far as to call such inclusion completely deserved on sole grounds of artistic talent, I nevertheless think this poem should be presented as evidence that May was, in fact, an important member of the Caroline artistic milieu.

4.8 The Reign of King Edward the Third

Proof of this hard-earned reputation and of May’s continued good fortune at court was yet another epic poem on an English monarch, this time Edward III. May’s *Edward III* made its appearance in the Stationers’ Register on 15 January 1635, under the denomination ‘*The Reign of King Edward the Third in Seven Books* by Thomas May Esquire.’¹²⁸ The book was published that same year with the same title by, once again, Thomas Walkley and Benjamin Fisher. As with *Henry II*, the facing page is adorned with an elaborate portrait of the title character. The subtitle ‘By His Majesty’s Command’ can be found under the book’s title, as can a Latin quotation, ‘Tu mihi, tu Pallas Caesariana, veni’, this time by Martial.¹²⁹ The line can be translated as ‘You, Caesarean Pallas, come to me’, and it belongs to epigram 8.1, a four-line poem – not included by May in his 1629 anthology of Martial – in which Martial, after a dedication to the emperor opening the eighth book of his epigrams, addresses his own work. The full epigram reads: ‘Laurigeros domini, liber, intrature penates / disce verecundo sanctius

¹²⁸ Stationers’ Register Online, SRO9354.

¹²⁹ The comma on the title page is misplaced: ‘Tu mihi, tu Pallas, Caesariana veni,’ which makes little sense grammatically.

ore loqui. / nuda recede Venus; non est tuus iste libellus: / tu mihi, tu, Pallas Caesariana, veni.’¹³⁰ May, as he had done previously, again imagines himself in Martial’s shoes, in the act of offering his work to a worthy patron. In the epistle dedicatory to Henry Earl of Holland attached to his 1629 *Martial*, May had written: ‘with the same modesty that the ingenious author of these epigrams presented some of them to Plinius Secundus ... do I offer these my poor endeavours to your Lordship.’¹³¹ Appropriately, therefore, whereas Plinius Secundus is described as ‘a noble Roman of happy employment under Trajan the emperor’, thus a suitable parallel to Holland, on the title page of *Edward III* the recipient, Charles I, is implicitly equated to the equally high-ranking emperor Domitian.

A dedication proper ‘[t]o the most high and mighty monarch’ Charles follows the title page. In this dedication, May pre-emptively begs for ‘forgiveness’ for multiple reasons: for cutting the story of Edward’s reign short and ending it ‘where his fortune began to decline’; for the quality and pace of the history he has written; for any potential shortcomings in treating such worthy subject.¹³² In here, he explicitly claims to have undertaken the work under Charles’s command: ‘I had the actions of a great king to require my skill, and the command of a greater king to oblige my care.’¹³³ The dedication is followed by a short inscription licencing the book for publication (‘I have perused this book, and conceive it very worthy to be published’); the imprimatur is signed ‘John Coke, Knight, principal secretary of state’ and dated ‘Whitehall, 17 of November, 1634.’¹³⁴

¹³⁰ ‘Book, about to enter the laurelled dwelling of our Lord, learn to speak more chastely with modest utterance. Nude Venus, avaunt! This little book is not yours. Do you come to me, you, Caesar’s Pallas.’

¹³¹ *Epigrams*, A4v.

¹³² *Edward III*, A3r-A3v.

¹³³ *Edward III*, A3v.

¹³⁴ *Edward III*, A4v. In his long-standing career as secretary of state, Coke had been known to act as a censor with regards to political pamphlets or books, so his seal of approval should not garner special attention; see Thompson, 674.

Edward III is also among the very few works by May to survive in manuscript. Schmitz, editor of *Henry II*, does not appear to have been aware of this, for the Bodleian MS Locke c. 46 in which *Edward III* is held is never mentioned in his extremely thorough analysis.¹³⁵ The manuscript, like that of *Henry II*, was prepared with exceptional care and appears to be still in excellent condition.¹³⁶ Several characteristics shared by both manuscripts lead me to believe that they were prepared by the same scribe and with the same aim (a presentation copy to be given to the king or to a royal official); therefore, if Schmitz's hypothesis is correct, the manuscript of *Edward III* was, too, prepared by May himself.

The title and subtitles of the book are written according to the same format as *Henry II*, with the full title being followed by the word 'Written' on a single line, then by the subtitle 'in Seven Books', and then by the name of the author ('T. M.' in *Henry II*, with the full name being added by a second hand later, and 'Tho: May' in *Edward III*). The only difference between the two manuscripts is the absence, in *Edward III*'s case, of the Latin quotation found on the title page in the printed version. Throughout the Bodleian manuscript, book titles are written in a slightly different script, similar to the Jacobean court hand; otherwise, the page arrangement is comparable to *Henry II*. The pages appear to have been prepared with a ruler and each almost invariably comprises twenty-four lines. The hand is extremely regular, almost identical to the print-like italic found in *Henry II*; moreover, *Edward III* presents amendments in a different script too. These corrections, which are very sparse, are almost exclusively non-substantial: in most cases, they adjust the meter by adding or subtracting a word or a syllable, or they amend a mistake without altering the overall sense; even when changing the structure of the line,

¹³⁵ As the manuscript of *Cleopatra* is mentioned and used as a pivotal argument in favour of the manuscript of *Henry II*'s being the work of May's hand, I think Schmitz would have certainly mentioned and referenced the manuscript of *Edward III* if he had been aware of its existence, especially as it is strikingly similar to that of *Henry II*.

¹³⁶ Unfortunately, MS Locke c. 46 is only available to the public by way of a fully scanned copy, so I was not able to handle the original manuscript and cannot comment on physical features such as paper or ink quality. Nevertheless, due to the decent quality of the scans, I am in a position to advance hypotheses concerning the handwriting and stylistic features of the manuscript.

corrections do not significantly alter the meaning of the sentence. By way of example, ‘Whose fame was spread through every land, he’ becomes ‘Whose fame was spread through every land and he’; ‘beatify’d’ becomes ‘beautify’d’; ‘To bear command on all those narrow seas’ becomes ‘To bear command o’re all those narrow seas’; and ‘As England’s Garter dimming all the rest’ is changed into ‘But England’s Garter shall obscure the rest.’¹³⁷ All observations made by Schmitz about the correcting hand and identifying it as the hand responsible for the *Cleopatra* manuscript also apply to these corrections, particularly as concerns the consistent use of the Greek letter *e*.¹³⁸

As with *Henry II*, the printed edition appears to carry all corrections added to the manuscript. Due to the very similar nature of the two manuscripts, it can be reasonably stated that many of the conclusions reached by Schmitz with *Henry II* are likewise valid for *Edward III*, namely that May was personally responsible for preparing the copy and that the precise, print-like script indicates that the manuscript was likely intended as a presentation copy for the king. Unfortunately, the entry in the Bodleian catalogue is not helpful in tracking the ownership history of the book, for only its most recent holder (John Locke) is recorded.

By 1635, Edward III had enjoyed a reputation as one of England’s greatest monarchs, if not the greatest, for many years, and as such had been the subject of many celebratory chronicles as well as plays.¹³⁹ As with *Henry II*, there is little doubt May had access to the most important and reputable sources about Edward, and he appears to have alternatively employed most of them depending on his narrative needs. Some historians provide no more than minor background information, occasionally only relayed in annotations at the end of each book and not in the main poem, which testifies to the scrupulousness with which May undertook the

¹³⁷ Bodleian MS Locke c. 46, f. 86r; f. 21v; f. 25v; f. 38r.

¹³⁸ Schmitz, xxvii.

¹³⁹ McKisack, 1.

endeavour. According to the annotations, he used chronicles written by authors such as Jean Froissart (whom he cites the most often and who seems to form the basis for the narrative), Thomas de la Moore, Thomas Walsingham, Pandolphus Collenutius, Francesco Guicciardini, as well as a number of historians that May only refers to with phrases such as ‘Scottish’, ‘Neapolitan’, ‘other historians.’ As further testament to May’s talent in selectively blending material from different backgrounds to suit his intended political goal, it is interesting to note that *Edward III*’s sources were not exclusively English, as would perhaps be expected of an English historian writing by order of the king, but that May also extensively consulted Scottish and continental historiography. On occasion, he appears to question a source when he believes it not to be entirely reliable, even when it favours the English: ‘Froissart reports that the Frenchmen were four to one English, which may be thought too much [*sic*] odds to be believed.’¹⁴⁰ Although, predictably, the resulting poem ultimately portrays the English monarch in a favourable light, because of the wide variety of sources employed it is tricky to challenge the reliability of *Edward III*, and May’s own voice is likewise difficult to discern.

The structure of the work broadly follows that of *Henry II*, with the partition in seven volumes and a verse argument preceding each book, though the arguments in *Edward III* are shorter, all totalling exactly four lines. More generally, this time May reprises the structure he had used for his Lucan not only in terms of book number, but also as concerns end-of-chapter annotations. *Edward III* lacks the appendices that in *Henry II* add insights into the main historical figures, and each book is supplied instead with a section devoted to annotations. These annotations, which should more appropriately be termed endnotes as they refer to specific passages in the text, are very similar in intent and purpose to those included in May’s *Continuation*: they either provide additional historical context, discuss different historians’

¹⁴⁰ *Edward III*, E6v.

points of view, or cite the sources employed. Occasionally, May legitimises his use of certain sets of data with phrases like ‘by consent of most writers’, while sometimes he reports different scholarly opinions with no comment (‘according to some authors ... according to others ... to others’).¹⁴¹ Uncharacteristically for a writer who, on the surface, strived to appear impartial and unbiased, in one instance May passes qualitative judgement on another historian, Froissart: ‘Those that would see at large the actions ... let them read Froissart, where they shall see them fully (though not elegantly related).’¹⁴²

As he had done in *Henry II*, May occasionally punctuates the narrative with praises to Charles, although they are generally less conspicuous compared to their predecessors, and the narrative is not usually interrupted. There can perhaps be glimpsed an ‘inside joke’ for the benefit of the king in the way John de Coupland relays the Battle of Neville’s Cross upon Edward III’s request: ‘Since you are pleased, dread sovereign, to command, / ... From me, the meanest of your servants, hear / This battle’s great success, and what for you / The same high hand has wrought in England now.’¹⁴³ As May signed the dedicatory epistle to Charles ‘Your Majesty’s most humble subject and servant’, it is possible that the dialogue was intended as a discreet nod to the king and himself.

As with *Henry II*, reasons behind the choice of this monarch are difficult to determine; however, in this case May had already indirectly expressed admiration for Edward III on multiple occasions, which might suggest that he at least agreed with Charles on the worthiness of subject of his poem. Before 1635, May had used Edward as an example of military valour in his works at least twice: once – possibly ironically – in the celebratory poem upon the royal fleet’s departure from Portsmouth (‘I saw third Edward stain my flood / By sluice with

¹⁴¹ *Edward III*, E6v.

¹⁴² *Edward III*, I2v.

¹⁴³ *Edward III*, H2v.

slaughtered Frenchmen's blood'), and then in the eulogy for Charles Rich ('To which of all the conquered ghosts of France, / Which our Third Edward's or Fifth Henry's lance / Frighted from life'), both written in 1627.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, he called Edward 'Gallorum domitor' and 'invictissime Princeps / Cuius adhuc nomen saecula nostra colunt' ('conqueror of the Gauls' and 'most invincible prince whose name our ages still celebrate') in the dedication he contributed to Charles Aleyn's 1631 *The Battles of Crecy and Poitiers*.¹⁴⁵

There is little doubt about the purpose behind May's epic: being an unbridled celebration of Edward's triumphs over foreign powers. The intent is made clear in the title, in which 'reign' is accompanied by the adjective 'victorious'; in the dedication to Charles, where May apologises for cutting the story short when Edward's reign began to decline and the French took possession of their territories back, judging such arguments better suited for a prose history than a heroic poem; and in the annotations upon the seventh book, in which he writes: 'Those eminent victories and great actions, by which the English had gained so much of France, have been the subject of this historical poem; the particular revolts, sly practices, and petty actions by which insensibly it was lost again, you may read distinctly in the chronicles at large.'¹⁴⁶

As a matter of fact, Edward III may seem like a strange choice of subject: Charles's peaceful reign, not to mention his French wife, might have invited unfavourable comparisons with the universally admired but warlike and French-hating Edward. Apparently aware of this possibility, May tackles the matter explicitly and deflects criticisms by claiming that a peaceful reign is as, if not more, worthy of praise than a bellicose one:

My royal James shall to this island bring
By birth, as well as by his reign, a peace.
All rapine, theft, and barbarous feuds shall cease,

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 2 for an analysis of the poems.

¹⁴⁵ Aleyn, *Crecy and Poitiers*, A2r.

¹⁴⁶ *Edward III*, O2v.

Which now our borders do so much infest.
And after him, more to confirm those blessed
And Halcion days, shall Charles from heaven be sent,
Whose pious, just, and temperate government
Shall teach the world that peaceful virtues bring
As true and lasting honour to a king
As by victorious wars can be obtained
Or by the blood of slaughtered nations gained;
That they more sweetly set a monarch forth,
As Aristides' and good Cato's worth
Deserve more solid and enduring praise
Than Marius' triumphs or great Pompey's bays.¹⁴⁷

Here May reuses the parallel between Edward and Charles he had already adopted in the poem written in 1627 to celebrate Charles and his fleet. This time, May manages to construct the claim so as not to make it sound as ludicrously implausible as in the 1627 poem, in which Charles's feat of meeting 'no foe at all' was equalled to Edward's martial valour. It is nonetheless bizarre to find Pompey as a negative term of comparison in a work by May, though it tallies with his inclination to contrast and oppose Charles and Pompey. In any case, the poem must have been well-received by its intended recipient, for, as will be discussed below, Charles continued to sponsor May at court and even (unsuccessfully) vouched for him to assume the post of city chronologer in 1637.

The Victorious Reign of King Edward III appears to have reaped even less success than its predecessor *Henry II*: it was never reprinted, neither in May's lifetime nor later, and it has never been edited by modern scholars; moreover, references to it cannot be found in any contemporary works. Notwithstanding the apparently absolute lack of traces left by this poem,

¹⁴⁷ *Edward III*, E2v.

I think the unfinished play *Mortimer His Fall* by Jonson might have been influenced by the publication of May's *Edward III*.

Included in the second volume of the Jonson second folio, published in 1640-41, the 'play' is really no more than a few fragments: there survive the arguments of the five acts, complete with a description of the different choruses closing each one, a list of *dramatis personae*, and the first two pages (about seventy lines) of the first act. There is also a quotation from Horace's *Ars Poetica* adorning the title page, 'Et docuit magnumque loqui, nitique cothurno.'¹⁴⁸ A short sentence closes the fragment: 'He died, and left it unfinished', although other copies only contain the self-evident note 'Left unfinished.'¹⁴⁹ Although the majority of scholars are inclined to trust the first inscription and accordingly date the play in 1637, some believe it to have been written in response to Marlowe's *Edward II* at an earlier point of Jonson's career, around 1602.¹⁵⁰ I believe a small connection with May's *Edward III* might help cement the hypothesis of a 1637 date or, in any case, no earlier than 1635.

Although Jonson might just as likely have been inspired, as previously suggested, by Marlowe's *Edward II*, the fragment of *Mortimer* was collected upon the playwright's death and given to the publisher Thomas Walkley by Sir Kenelm Digby.¹⁵¹ Obviously, in 1637 May was a friend of Digby and belonged to the same circle of intellectuals of which Jonson was also part, as demonstrated above. Although we have no concrete information concerning the status of May's friendship with Digby at the time of Jonson's death, in 1639 May dedicated *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina* to Digby, which suggests an enduring association from at least 1633 to 1639. We do, on the other hand, have more solid proof of May's personal and professional attachment to

¹⁴⁸ The subject of the sentence is Aeschylus and it translates to 'And taught to speak impressively and walk on the buskin' (buskins were laced boots worn by tragic actors). It is difficult to ascertain whether this quotation was chosen or in any way associated with this tragedy by Jonson himself or by the editors of his Folio. Given its nature as a generic commentary upon theatre and tragedy, I am inclined to think of the latter as the more likely possibility.

¹⁴⁹ Jonson, *Mortimer*, 292; see Britland, 'Mortimer'.

¹⁵⁰ For a survey of all different opinions, see Gómez Martos, 149.

¹⁵¹ Britland, 'Mortimer'.

Jonson persisting up until his death, for May contributed a eulogy to the anthology *Ionsonus Virbius*. The volume was published in 1638 and consisted of a series of poems collected by Brian Duppa, Dean of Christ Church; Digby also took an interest in this publication and wrote to Duppa to congratulate him.¹⁵² The poem, in heroic couplets and simply titled ‘An Elegy upon Benjamin Jonson’, is worth reporting here in its entirety due to its relatively obscure status:

Though once high Statius o’er dead Lucan’s hearse
Would seem to fear his own hexameters
And thought a greater honour than that fear
He could not bring to Lucan’s sepulchre,
Let not our poets fear to write of thee,
Great Jonson, king of English poetry.
In any English verse, let none whoe’er
Bring so much emulation as to fear,
But pay, without comparing thoughts at all,
Their tribute verses to thy funeral,
Nor think whate’er they write on such a name
Can be amiss: if high, it fits thy fame;
If low, it rights thee more, and makes men see
That English poetry is dead with thee,
Which in thy genius did so strongly live.
Nor will I here particularly strive,
To praise each well composèd piece of thine,
Or show what judgment, art, and wit did join
To make them up, but only (in the way
That Famianus honoured Virgil) say,
The Muse herself was linked so near to thee,
Whoe’er saw one must needs the other see;
And if in thy expressions aught seemed scant,
Not thou, but Poetry itself, did want.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Donaldson, 431-432.

¹⁵³ *Ionsonus Virbius*, D3r.

In a reversal of the usual identification of May himself with Lucan, here the Roman poet is being paralleled with Jonson, with May assuming the role of the lesser poet Statius, who had been the author of a poem celebrating Lucan's birthday. Despite the repeated recourse to Latin and classical imagery, the tribute is thoroughly English, with Jonson's status as an incarnation of English poetry being reiterated twice ('king of English poetry', 'English poetry is dead with thee'). May is also apparently aware of the poem's being destined to the anthology, for he mentions 'our poets' striving to write for Jonson and hinges his whole eulogy on this very concept; evidently, Duppa had judged him close enough to Jonson to warrant his inclusion among the thirty or so intellectuals who contributed a poem to *Ionsonus Virbius*.

Having established a connection between the two poets around the mid-1630s, it seems incredibly unlikely that Jonson would be unaware of May's historiographical pursuit, especially as the task had been commissioned by the king. Nevertheless, the fragment of *Mortimer* being very short, it is difficult to find solid evidence of textual relationship between the play and *Edward III*, as well as evidence that the play was indeed written at the end of Jonson's life and not earlier. It could be argued that, as mentioned above, Jonson composed all his other historical tragedies at the start of the seventeenth century: he wrote the two Roman plays *Sejanus* and *Catiline* in 1603 and 1611 and, most importantly in this context, the two lost British histories 'Robert II, King of Scots' and 'Richard Crookback' in 1599 and 1602, respectively.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, the title format of *Mortimer His Fall*, and especially the subject matter (a royal favourite, lover of a royal wife, conspiring to murder the monarch), are highly reminiscent of *Sejanus His Fall*. This argument would arguably indicate that such similarities ought to place the two tragedies closer together and not more than thirty years apart.

Nevertheless, a short phrase repeated in identical contexts in both *Edward III* and the very short *Mortimer* may suggest, on Jonson's part, a nod to May's work, therefore advancing

¹⁵⁴ See Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1412 and #1646; *LPD*, 'Robert II, King of Scots (The Scot's Tragedy)' and 'Richard Crookback.'

another argument in favour of dating *Mortimer* more securely between 1635 and 1637. In the first book of May's *Edward III*, upon witnessing her lover Mortimer's being apprehended by order of Edward, Queen Isabelle wrings her hands and begs her son to 'pity, pity gentle Mortimer.'¹⁵⁵ In the fragment of Jonson's *Mortimer*, the titular character and Queen Isabelle share a scene (in fact, the only extant scene of the play), and the queen addresses him thus: 'Walk forth, my loved and gentle Mortimer.'¹⁵⁶ In *Edward III*, Mortimer is often described by the adjectives 'proud' or 'ambitious'; 'gentle' only occurs once in connection with Mortimer, and it is part of the above line spoken by the queen. Knowing May and his penchant for referencing contemporary plays in his works, it could be argued that it was the younger playwright referencing Jonson and not the other way around, especially since Sejanus is mentioned in *Edward III* shortly after this passage among a list of former favourites who betrayed their sovereign.¹⁵⁷ However, that May would quote so unremarkably from the fragment of a play written more than thirty years earlier, left unfinished, and never printed seems most improbable, as it seems improbable that he would have had access to such an old and minor fragment. In fact, the survival of this fragment for over thirty years, and consequently an early date for *Mortimer*, appears even more unlikely when one considers the number of media produced by Jonson and now lost, including the English histories mentioned above and several other works Jonson claims to have lost during the 1623 fire. The only possible scenario, in my opinion, in which Digby – or anyone else – would consider a two-page fragment worthy of publication is if it had been the last play on which Jonson was known to have worked.

¹⁵⁵ *Edward III*, C5r.

¹⁵⁶ Jonson, *Mortimer*, 292.

¹⁵⁷ '[W]hen the stories / Of her most envied favourites are told, / Who next to kings and emperors did hold / The helm, and keep the nearest rooms in state: / When Plautianus' greatness we relate / With his so sudden ruin; when we tell / How once great Rome's adored Sejanus fell; / Or how Rufinus, torn and mangled, died / In all the height of his ambitious pride'; see *Edward III*, C6r. All figures referenced by May in this passage (Plautianus, Sejanus, Rufinus) were Romans.

This being the case, an interest in the subject of Roger Mortimer might have indeed been sparked by the publication of May's historical poem, and possibly by a desire to revisit the story of a disgraced favourite under an English, rather than Roman, lens. I am fully aware that the allusion, if it can even be called that, is negligible, and could be plausibly explained as just a coincidence. However, the two men were friends, so is it really out of the realm of possibility that Jonson would read and assimilate a recent work by his 'son' May, perhaps even deciding to convert it into a play? Although May's debt to Jonson is far greater, it is nevertheless intriguing to imagine that the older playwright, too, might have been inspired by the works of someone he had once called 'my chosen friend' and whom he esteemed well enough to commend his translation when May was a newly emerging intellectual, totally unknown to the audience.

4.9 1636-1639: biographical notes, dedications, and the question of the laureateship

After 1635, barring dedications and the publication of previously written works, May appears not to have composed anything until 1640, when he wrote and published his *Supplementum Lucani*. Yet, although the 1630s turned out to be far less prolific than the 1620s, they also yield the most concrete biographical information surrounding the life of the poet. As first pointed out by Fitzgibbons, a brief note in the Calendar of State Papers for the years 1636-37 details the expenses encountered for a party and entertainment at Oxford in honour of the king on 30 August 1636. A summary of the expenses is given, and then a list of the financial contributors follows: 'Besides which the Archbishop of York contributed 20£; ... Mr Thomas May, 5£ ... and there were a great many smaller presents, as of melons, grapes, fish, poultry, and so forth.'¹⁵⁸ Fitzgibbons then observes that this apparently small snippet of information is helpful in confirming the hypothesis that May's 'assiduous cultivation' was rewarded with a certain

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Fitzgibbons, xvi.

amount of financial success, for the amount of money contributed was hardly an expense that a struggling poet would have been able to afford.¹⁵⁹

A series of entries in the Stationers' Register appear to indicate that, around 1636, May published a book, possibly an anthology of works by other authors, that is now seemingly lost. An entry in the Register dated 14 June 1642 records the transfer of rights of dozens of works from Benjamin Fisher to James Young. Among these, there are a few by May, some of which we know (Virgil's *Georgics*, Martial's *Epigrams*, *Henry II*, and *Edward III*) and one that is attributed to him but which I could not find anywhere, that is, a volume called *The English Helicon and Wits' Delight, or, the Muses' Recreation*.¹⁶⁰ Further digging reveals that these rights had been transferred in bulk for the first time on 27 March 1637, and would be transferred again (from James Young to his son Robert) on 22 July 1644.¹⁶¹ Yet more research finally yielded the original entry, dated 20 August 1636: 'Entered ... a book called *The English Helicon and Wits' Delight, or, the Muses' Recreation*, containing genethliacons, epithalamia, elegies, and epigrams collected by T. M.'¹⁶² Works with titles similar to this *English Helicon* were not uncommon at the time, but this particular combination appears to be unique, and one that I could not find anywhere, in print or else. The way in which the record is worded suggests that it was not an original work by May, but rather an anthology which he merely put together; if it was eventually published under another title, I do not know.

The year 1637, apparently insignificant in the overall economy of May's writings and publications, was to become, in some respects, the year that would most come to define him in

¹⁵⁹ Fitzgibbons, xvi. Fitzgibbons then gives a corresponding quote in 1940s American dollars; according to the National Archives' currency converter, £5 in 1630 would be equal to around £610 in 2017 money. See <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/> (last accessed 12 December 2023).

¹⁶⁰ *Stationers' Register 1640-1708*, Volume 1, 47.

¹⁶¹ *Stationers' Register 1640-1708*, Volume 1, 126.

¹⁶² Stationers' Register Online, SRO9574.

the words of Restoration-era biographers: following Jonson's death, May allegedly fought and lost the battle for the now vacant post of poet laureate, a professional defeat that supposedly informed the rest of his career and spurred him to side with Parliament in the ensuing civil war. This event would later become ammunition for royalist commentators, as a sort of lens through which maliciously to judge May's entire career and construe sincere anti-tyrannical views as the result of pettiness. The death of Jonson must undoubtedly have been significant for May (and indeed, as May's poem in *Jonsonus Virbius* seeks to illustrate, for many others), but this thesis attempts to reassess the degree of importance that has been attributed to the events that followed it and to its influence over May's political life in general.

On 18 August 1637, Jonson died; until that day, Jonson had occupied two prestigious positions at court.¹⁶³ One was that of poet laureate, at least informally. The honour had not yet been ratified: the royal post of Poet Laureate was officially created in 1668 and the first recipient of the title was John Dryden.¹⁶⁴ Until 1616, the honour of being 'poet laureate' of the court had been dispensed with very little regularity, and it is often difficult to discern between royal laureates and university poets who were dignified with crowns of laurel.¹⁶⁵ Finally, in February of 1616, James I issued a pension of 100 marks *per annum* to Jonson and formalised it with royal letters patent; the pension would be increased by Charles I after a successful petition by Jonson. It should be noted that the selection was more frequently influenced by political, rather than poetical, merit.¹⁶⁶ The other role left vacant by Jonson's death was that of City Chronologer of London. The Chronologer's main function was to record all 'memorable' events in the city,

¹⁶³ There is some confusion regarding his date of death, which has commonly been accepted as the 16th; Mark Bland discusses and clarifies the matter, offering 18 as a more probable date. See Bland, 398-399.

¹⁶⁴ Donaldson, 322.

¹⁶⁵ In fact, in the only known portrait of May, the poet is seen wearing a laurel crown, which perhaps suggests that he eventually got the honour, though no record of any compensation related to it survives.

¹⁶⁶ Hamilton, 32.

and Jonson had been appointed to the post in 1628, by way of his membership of the Bricklayers' Company.¹⁶⁷

Upon Jonson's death, the two vacant posts were not immediately assigned. No details are known about the appointment, but Sir William Davenant nominally inherited the post of poet laureate more than a year later, on 13 December 1638, by way of royal letter patent, although he probably received no direct pension.¹⁶⁸ As for the post of City Chronologer, the process of appointment that followed the vacancy marks the first related mention of May in relation to such official appointments. An entry in the Calendar of State Papers Domestic for August 1637, in the immediate aftermath of Jonson's death, records a letter written by Charles I and addressed to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London in which the king recommends May as a successor to the post:

The King to [the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London].

We understand that the place of historian to the city of London is become void by the death of Benjamin Jonson. We recommend Thomas May, whom we know to be every way qualified for that employment, expecting that you forthwith choose him to the said place.¹⁶⁹

The king's advice, however, was not followed: the post remained vacant for about two years, and then Francis Quarles was appointed in 1639. Ultimately, May was obviously not selected for either of the posts, but for the office of City Chronologer he did at least receive the personal endorsement of the king, who was clearly satisfied with the work May had produced for him. On the other hand, no mention of May's name as a possible candidate for the honour of poet laureate would emerge until 1646, when *Fragmenta Aurea*, an anthology of poems by John Suckling, was published (posthumously, having Suckling died in 1641). The poem 'A Session

¹⁶⁷ Heaton and Knowles, 599.

¹⁶⁸ Hamilton, 35.

¹⁶⁹ *Calendar of State Papers*, 1637, 395.

of the Poets' offers a humorous comment upon the process of assignment of '[t]he laurel that had been so long reserved' to 'him best deserved'; in it, Apollo presides a trial to select the best candidate for the role among a crowd of poets of Caroline England, 'the wits of the time.' To give better context, relevant excerpts are transcribed here (emphasis mine):

Therefore, the wits of the town came thither:
'Twas strange to see how they flocked together,
Each strongly confident of his own way,
Thought to gain the laurel away that day.
There **Selden**, and he sat hard by the chair;
Weniman not far off, which was very fair;
Sands with **Townsend**, for they kept no order;
Digby and **Shillingsworth** a little further;
And there was **Lucan's translator** too, and **he**
That makes God speak so big in's poetry;
Selwin and **Walter**, and **Bartletts both the brothers;**
Jack Vaughan and **Porter**, and divers others.

...

Tom Carew was next, but he had a fault
That would not well stand with a laureate;

...

Will Davenant, ashamed of a foolish mischance
That he had got lately travelling in France,
Modestly hoped the handsomeness of's muse
Might any deformity about him excuse.

...

Toby Mathews (pox on him!) how came he there?
Was whispering nothing in somebody's ear;
Suckling next was called but did not appear,

...

Wat Montague now stood forth to his trial,

...

During these troubles in the Court was hid
One that Apollo soon missed, **little Cid;**

...

Murrey was summoned, but 't was urged that he
Was chief already of another company.

Hales, set by himself, most gravely did smile
To see them about nothing keep such a coil:
Apollo had spied him, but, knowing his mind,
Passed by and called **Faulkland**, that sat just behind.¹⁷⁰

As is apparent, May, who is not even referred to by name by only by the moniker 'Lucan's translator', is merely one of the twenty-two poets mentioned as aspiring to the post; Davenant, who ultimately triumphs, is mocked for his syphilis-disfigured nose ('But in all their records in verse or prose / There was never a laureate without a nose'). Judging by Suckling's assessment of the circumstances, it appears that the title of poet laureate was a highly coveted honour, but it is also apparent that May could hardly have been considered a candidate more plausible than anyone else mentioned in the poem. In fact, such little note is paid to him by Suckling as to suggest that May was, in fact, among the candidates least likely to be selected for the honour; therefore, the widely accepted notion that May was publicly known to be running for the title is, at best, misplaced, and, at worst, the product of malicious propaganda.

Indeed, the first trace of this rumour is to be found in a Civil War-era paper, *Mercurius Vapulans*, dated 4 November 1643. In it May, who at the time was working as a propagandist for the parliamentary cause himself, is described as follows: 'Another though he calls not himself Mercury, yet is *Majanatus*, who, failing of the laureate wreath, envies the Crown itself and puts his fictions into grave pose, as if he stood to be City Chronicler.'¹⁷¹ The veracity of the rumour was cemented by the poem 'Tom May's Death' by Andrew Marvell that is largely responsible, alongside royalist propaganda, for May's posthumous reputation. A relevant excerpt from Marvell's ferocious satire is quoted below:

¹⁷⁰ Suckling, *Fragmenta Aurea*, A4r-A6r.

¹⁷¹ *Mercurius Vapulans; or the whipping of poor British Mercury*, quoted in Wilkinson, 196.

Because someone than thee more worthy wears
The sacred laurel, hence are all these tears?
Must therefore all the world be set on flame,
Because a gazette writer missed his aim?
...
But what will deeper wound thy little mind:
Hast left surviving Davenant still behind,
Who laughs to see in this thy death renewed,
Right Roman poverty and gratitude.¹⁷²

Marvell's political and personal motivations behind this unbridled attack will be discussed in the next chapter. Originally published in an anthology in 1650, so at most a few months after May's death on 13 November of the same year, the poem remains the harshest satires on the poet ever written. It is important to note that this poem laid the foundation for many critics' interpretation of May's political and artistic career in the years, perhaps even centuries, to follow. In 1662, May's earliest biographer, Thomas Fuller, seems to be acknowledging Marvell's poem and royalist propaganda while discussing the snub of May as a candidate for the laurel crown: 'Some disgust at court was given to, or taken by him (*as some will have it*), because his bays were not gilded richly enough' (emphasis mine).¹⁷³ The poem was certainly famous enough to be mentioned casually by John Aubrey in his *Brief Lives*, written between 1669 and 1696, in which he writes that 'Mr Marvell in his poems upon Tom May's death falls very severe upon him.'¹⁷⁴

Whether Marvell initiated the trend of imputing May's republicanism to his losing the laurel crown to William Davenant, all biographers who wrote about him in the seventeenth and eighteenth century present the hypothesis as fact or at the very least lend it some credibility.

¹⁷² Marvell, *Miscellaneous Poems*, G2v-G3r.

¹⁷³ Fuller, 110.

¹⁷⁴ Aubrey 1, 56.

Aside from Fuller, Edward Phillips in 1675 indicates frustration as the reason behind his newfound loyalty to Parliament: ‘he is thought to have vented therein the spleen of a malcontented poet; for having been frustrated in his expectation of being the Queen’s poet, for which he stood candidate with Sir William Davenant, who was preferred before him.’¹⁷⁵ William Winstanley, in his *The Lives of the Most Famous English Poets*, reports the same opinion as if it were fact and appears to be quoting Phillips almost verbatim.¹⁷⁶ Clarendon, one of May’s contemporaries and advisor to the King during the Civil War, writes: ‘[U]pon his Majesty’s refusing to give him a small pension, which he had ... promised to another very ingenious person, ... he fell from his duty.’¹⁷⁷ Gerald Langbaine, writing in 1691, takes a more moderate stance – ‘Whether this accusation be true or no, I know not’ – but still reports the allegation made by previous biographers and does not offer an alternative explanation for May’s Parliamentarism, *de facto* validating his predecessors’ hypothesis.¹⁷⁸

To top off all these speculations, the only known bit of writing by May that is explicitly autobiographical – a manuscript poem – appears to confirm the hypothesis that he did indeed resent the king because of a snub:

Need must best learning there, where Nature’s wrong
 Denies the common freedom of the tongue,
 Or sleep, or else be damned to the quill,
 To feed on forked Parnassus’ barren hill,
 Guerdoned¹⁷⁹ with nought but lean and hungry bays,¹⁸⁰
 Wanting a tongue, she finds no thriving ways
 In schools or pleading court to be expressed.
 Pulpits have wealth, so hath Minerva’s chest,

¹⁷⁵ Phillips, 179.

¹⁷⁶ Winstanley, 164.

¹⁷⁷ Clarendon, 35.

¹⁷⁸ Langbaine, 360.

¹⁷⁹ Rewarded; see OED.

¹⁸⁰ This line is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, 1.2.195: ‘Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look.’ It is perhaps fitting that May would quote from Caesar himself when speaking about Charles and his (perceived) lack of recognition of May’s efforts.

But ablest pens can challenge nought but crave
Those aids which learning would disdain to have;
Nor can they find those aids, the fates conspire,
Princes themselves have learned but to admire
And praise the truest and most lasting frame,
As children do their peacock's beauteous train.
Learning that wants a tongue can truly tell
How bootless 'tis to write, though ne'er so well.¹⁸¹

This poem was part of a verse miscellany which had been presented, according to the inscription on its first page, to a Lord Thomas Darcy, Viscount Colchester, who died in 1640, so it must have been compiled before that date.¹⁸² Even without context, the poem reads as the lamentation of a frustrated intellectual who could find no appropriate monetary reward for his efforts, and Chester even identifies bitterness about May's speech impediment in the expression about Nature denying 'the common freedom of the tongue.'¹⁸³ The passage about being rewarded with 'nought but lean and hungry bays' is particularly interesting in the context of the laureateship. As a matter of fact, a straightforward interpretation of the line would suggest that May was, in fact, honoured with a laurel wreath, however 'lean and hungry', which would at least help explain why he sports a crown of laurel in his only known (posthumous) portrait. The expression could, in truth, also be metaphorical, with the laurel crown acting as a metaphor for literary honours. At any rate, the passage also shows that whatever honours did May nominally receive, they were not accompanied by a suitable stipend. Moreover, although the verse miscellany contains mostly poems from the 1620s, and this poem could therefore have been written before May rose to fame, the hint about receiving bays implies that he had already been recognised publicly in some capacity, and this would most likely have occurred after becoming

¹⁸¹ British Library Add. MS 25303, f. 186v. Another copy can be found in Add. MS 21433, f. 165r, with minor differences: the 'best' in the first line is there 'be', and 'pleading court' becomes 'pleading courts' (which would be my preferred choice for editing the poem).

¹⁸² See *CELM*, Add. MS 25303; Add. MS 21433 was transcribed from this copy.

¹⁸³ Chester, 55.

part of the courtly circles. In particular, the lines concerning ‘princes’ appear to point towards a composition date after 1638, for they contain a charge against Charles, who is accused of favouring the ‘flashy’ and the ephemeral against ‘the truest and most lasting frame’ and could accordingly be interpreted as an attack against Davenant.

At the same time, historical and literary circumstances would make any concrete expectations, on May’s part, of succeeding Jonson highly improbable. We cannot disregard the possibility that May did feel some resentment towards Charles for the snub; in fact, as the poem above suggests, he probably did. After all, May had dedicated various literary endeavours to Charles, and the king, in turn, had publicly dubbed May ‘my poet.’ Drawing from the same anecdote of May’s being hit by Pembroke at a masque, Chester does, however, cast some doubt on whether May was actually as prominent in court affairs as his opponents made him out to be. As discussed above, if Pembroke, at the time an influential member of Charles’ court, felt he could attack May without fear of repercussions, it can be assumed that May cannot have been a familiar face at court.¹⁸⁴

Conversely, we cannot ignore the strong likelihood that Davenant may have held better political ties with the court at the time, as his alignment during the civil war would appear to prove: at the outbreak of the war he was swift to demonstrate his loyalty and even served as lieutenant-general, later joining the court in exile. To be sure, Davenant did not embody the ideal spiritual heir to Jonson’s legacy: he was not part of the ‘sons of Ben’ and, in fact, claimed to be, both figuratively and biologically, a ‘son of Will’ (Shakespeare); moreover, his literary production at the time was not particularly indebted to classical authors.¹⁸⁵ Davenant had, however, established a close relationship with Henrietta Maria, and from 1634 had become her servant and was known to belong to her most intimate circle of friends. This led to his being tasked with composing several masques for the queen, despite being almost completely

¹⁸⁴ Chester, 50.

¹⁸⁵ Edmond, 255.

inexperienced in that regard initially, and one for the king in February of 1638, *Britannia Triumphans*. The year 1638 also saw the publication of a collection of poems that reflected the many court connections about which he could boast.¹⁸⁶

Realistically, if May was as engaged with court politics as his detractors claimed he was, it would have been highly improbable for him not to notice the growing relationship between Davenant and the royal couple and the constant bestowing of honours upon him; if May, on the other hand, was not as closely involved with the monarch and his wife, as theorised by Chester, it would be perhaps unfounded to suggest that he would have earnestly expected to succeed Jonson, or at least that the decision to appoint Davenant would not have come as such a surprising disappointment. Moreover, as compared to Davenant's almost frantic literary production in the few years preceding the appointment, May had not published as much. Between 1636 and 1638, after his two historical poems were printed, there exists no record of any publication by May; surely, if he was seriously expecting an official appointment after Jonson's death, he would have been actively trying to demonstrate his literary worth.

Moreover, ascribing such level of resentment to May appears at least partly unjustified: although he had not made him poet laureate, Charles had publicly vouched for May for the post of City Chronologer and went as far as to write to the committee responsible for the appointment and offer them his recommendation. Surely, May could not excessively fault the king for not supporting his venture as a writer after two commissioned works and public support for a position as historian.

Taking all elements into consideration, it is likely that the rumour popularised by Marvell's poem had elements of truth to it: perhaps May did have some hopes of being granted the honour but had downplayed the significance that Davenant's influence over the queen would play in court politics. To be sure, there is no account mentioning a relationship between May

¹⁸⁶ Edmond, 255-256.

and the queen beyond the lone celebratory poem mentioned above and, indeed, May displayed hostility towards Catholicism in his works, something he would surely not have done if he had been actively seeking her approval.¹⁸⁷ Or perhaps, though this is entirely speculative, May had a literary feud with Davenant that was known to the court, and so the latter's appointment had generated some envy in May for having been bested by his rival.

At any rate, if May felt resentment towards Charles for the snub, he did not, as has been claimed by the royalist narrative, let the event influence his career as much as implied. On the contrary, he remained tied to the court until at least two years later, as testified by his dedicating *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina* to Digby and the *Supplementum Lucani* to Charles himself. Furthermore, Chester notes that the autobiographical poem could also be read as the discontented lament of a man 'forced to seek patronage from those whose principles he both disagreed to and detested.'¹⁸⁸ The passage 'ablest pens can challenge nought, but crave / Those aids which learning would disdain to have' does suggest that May had been forced by his circumstances to accept some compromises in order to survive. This pre-1640 poem, therefore, being the only example of explicitly autobiographical writing by May, would indeed appear to confirm the hypothesis that May had nurtured anti-royalist stances well before the start of the civil war.

¹⁸⁷ Chester, 52.

¹⁸⁸ Chester, 56.

5. The Parliamentary Years (1640-1650)

5.1 The *Supplementum Lucani* and May's journey to the Netherlands

Based on the October 1638 *imprimatur* on the printed copies of *Cleopatra* and *Agrippina*, May probably published the two works in early 1639, and later in 1639 he contributed a poem to a published work. At some point in that same year, or possibly in early 1640, he travelled to the Netherlands and lived there until about late 1640, when he returned to England and vanished from all radars until 1642. During his time in the Netherlands May made contact with several European intellectuals and composed the work for which he would ultimately be best known on the continent, the *Supplementum Lucani*; around the same time, he also wrote, I argue, the now lost play 'Julius Caesar.' This section is devoted to the examination of these two works and to an analysis of May's English and European acquaintances, as well as to hypotheses concerning the nature of his declining relationship with Charles and the monarchy.

The Latin continuation of Lucan was first printed in Leiden in 1640 by Willem Christiaensz with the title *Supplementum Lucani Libri VII* and the author being credited as 'Authore Thoma Maio Anglo.' The title page presents a generic typographer's engraving, and it is followed by an introductory poem and a short verse letter from the author to the reader. Here May reveals, with customary modesty, that 'Haec tibi defuncti debilis umbra canit.'¹ A full-page elaborate engraving depicting the poet Lucan with a laurel crown kneeling before the muse Calliope follows, then there is May's epistle to Charles and the numerous dedicatory poems by various friends and colleagues of the poet. An interesting feature of the Dutch edition is the man responsible for its publication. Known to the English public as William Christian or as a Latinised version of his name, the Dutch printer's workshop had been a beacon of Puritan

¹ 'This is sung to you by the weak ghost of the dead poet'; *Supplementum*, 1640, *1v.

printing in the Netherlands since at least the 1620s. Christiaensz could boast connections with several intellectuals such as Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, who occasionally provided him with manuscripts for printing (more on him anon), and, more notably, he sympathised with the Puritan cause; therefore, his was one of the two or three leading sources of English books in the Netherlands and many of his publications reflected a ‘fiery, religious flavour.’² Whether May chose him conscious of his ideological background or whether he was directed there by other Dutch intellectuals, it cannot be said with any certainty.

All the features of the Dutch edition, including the dedication to Charles, would be reproduced almost exactly (with only the order of the dedicatory poems being altered) in the 1646 English edition, published in London by Miles Flesher for Daniel Frere. Although I could find no copy of any English edition earlier than 1646 (if there ever was one), the volume was entered in the Stationers’ Register as early as 29 December 1640 by Daniel Frere.³ As a matter of fact, when the book was printed in England in 1646, the title page bore the inscription ‘Secunda aeditio’, although this could just as easily be in reference to the first Dutch edition. The volume generally appears to be almost identical to its predecessor: aside from title page, dedications, and engravings, the rest of the volume also follows the structure of the Dutch edition, with no additional comments or annotations. This detail, when compared to the rest of May’s extremely curated printed editions, might suggest a lack of personal involvement of the poet in the publication of the 1646 English edition.

The six-year delay between the entry in the Stationers’ Register and the publication of the *Supplementum* is fascinating. According to the reconstructed timeline of his journey to the Netherlands, examined below, May must have left the continent around October 1640, so it can be assumed that he was back in England by December, if not earlier; he must therefore have been aware that his work would be submitted for censorship, and perhaps he even dealt with

² Sprunger, 145-147.

³ *Stationers’ Register 1640-1708*, Volume 1, 8.

the matter himself. Having included a dedication to Charles, it is also plausible that the poet originally intended to present the king with a copy of his work upon his return to England; however, the fact that a work containing a dedication addressed to the king and presumably composed with his approval was not printed until six years later suggests that external circumstances might have influenced its editorial history. On 3 November, possibly while May was still *en route* back to England, the Long Parliament was called, at a time where the relationship between king and Parliament was more strained than ever due to many MPs' covert support of the Scots during the Bishops' Wars. One of the first acts of the newly called Parliament was, starting 11 November, the impeachment, trial, and incarceration of the earl of Strafford, who was imprisoned in late November and whose accusations were formalised in January at the hands of a group of parliamentarians.⁴

As events leading to the civil war were escalating, it is possible that the publication of the *Supplementum* was forestalled on political grounds. Although this is purely speculative, I believe it might have been halted by May himself, and later published in 1646 without his direct involvement. Past evidence, with the manual excision of dedications from his 1627 *Pharsalia*, indicates that May was hyperaware of political controversies potentially arising from the publication of his works. As the anti-Caesarean tone of the *Supplementum* suggests, May had been reviving his previously suppressed anti-tyrannical sentiments and nurturing resentment towards the king for a while; is it really out of the realm of possibility to suppose that he would have wished his name not to be associated with Charles I at a time of political turmoil and widespread disapproval for the actions of the king, a disapproval that, as his pamphlets will prove, he must certainly have shared? Between his period in the Netherlands and his return to England, the civil conflict had harshened so much that even a committed patronage-chaser like May could not fail to take sides; whether association with European intellectuals had heightened

⁴ Worden, *Civil Wars*, 29-30.

his sense of patriotism is a matter of opinion, but a trip to a Protestant haven like the Netherlands might have proved crucial.

As a matter of fact, not much is known about May's departure to the Netherlands. We know that he must have been in England until at least October 1639, for he penned a commendatory poem to his 'honoured friend' William Hodson upon his publication of the religious commentary *The Divine Cosmographer*, for, although this poem was published in 1640, the imprimatur is dated 3 October 1639.⁵ Whenever he departed, it is possible that he wrote the entire *Supplementum* or part of it in the Netherlands, for it seems rather impractical to imagine that he would travel overseas with a book in the works. On the other hand, he could also have travelled there carrying the finished book with the precise intent of publishing it abroad for the benefit of the European readership. This hypothesis appears slightly more likely when considering the contents of the dedication to Charles, which is worthy of being included in its entirety:

Placuit Majestati tuae Serenissime Rex, in Lucano nostro, non solum viri splendidum et mirabile ingenium: sed nobilissimum quoque et regis auribus non indignum ipsius operis argumentum. Hoc (inquam), tibi Domine, in tantum placuit, ut non dedignatus sis conatus etiam meos (qualescunque fuerint) in eodem argumento clementissime accipere et fovere. Non enim ut Lucani aemulus, sed erga te officiosus in arenam hanc ausus sum descendere. Liceat ergo huic opusculus, quod aliquot abhinc annis Majestati tuae in sermone Britannico humillime oblatum fuit, iam Latine reddito maria tua transire; tua, magne Rex, cuius imperium Oceanus Britannicus non terminat, sed est. Sub tutela tanti nominis, quod non magis imperii magnitudine, quam animi tui nobilitate, et heroica virtute metietur fama, protectionem et (quam suo vigore non potest polliceri) vitam sperare non veretur, hic libellus Majestati tuae humillime dedicatus. Deus te diutissime incolumem ad nominis sui gloriam, et Orbis Christiani felicitatem conservet! Quod semper precabitur.⁶

⁵ Hodson, *Divine Cosmographer*; May's poem immediately follows the title page, and there seems to have been an issue with the page order which means page numbers were not printed correctly.

⁶ *Supplementum*, 1640, *3r-*4r.

[Your Majesty, our most serene king, was pleased to find, in our Lucan, not only the splendid and admirable talent of the man, but also the most noble subject of the work itself, not unworthy of the king's ears. This (I say), my lord, pleased you to such an extent that you did not disdain to receive and very graciously encourage my attempts (whatever they may have been) on the same subject. For not as a rival of Lucan, but as a duty to you, I ventured to descend into this arena. Let this work, therefore, which some years ago was most humbly offered to your Majesty in the British language, now rendered in Latin, pass over your seas: yours, great king, of whose empire the British ocean is not the limit, but the heart. Under the protection of so great a name, which will no longer be measured by the greatness of the empire but rather by the nobility of your mind, and by your heroic virtue and fame, this little book most humbly dedicated to your Majesty will not be afraid to hope for protection and (as it cannot guarantee its own worth) life. May God keep you safe for a long time in the glory of his name and preserve the happiness of the Christian world! That will always be prayed for.]

This preface indicates that May was working upon Charles' orders, or at the very least with the confidence that his efforts would have been rewarded by the king. May claims that Charles was 'pleased' with his Lucan (and it is unclear whether 'Lucano nostro' refers exclusively to May's translation or includes his *Continuation* as well) and that he ventured into the 'arena' out of duty to Charles. This passage is again ambiguous on whether May composed only the *Supplementum* or the 1630 *Continuation* as well at Charles' command; in any case, it reveals that the trip to the Netherlands was motivated by a desire to spread the *Supplementum* overseas, and therefore May had probably been ordered there by the king.

His journey to the continent is attested by a number of letters in which he is mentioned, which testify that he was at the heart of the intellectual scene of the period. On 16 August 1640, May was mentioned as apparently having completed the *Supplementum* in a letter by the Dutch geographer and historian Johannes de Laet to Sir William Boswell, English ambassador to the Netherlands. De Laet writes: 'D. Maius Amsterdami mi tradidit poema suum latinum et, quod nollem, iudicium meum postulavit; nescio an T. A. illud legerit. Percurri illud sed nondum rependi singula; quum seculi nostri nauseabundum stomachum considero adhuc recoquendum et ad incudem revocandum censerem; longe enim aliud est latinum poema quam vernaculum

scribere.⁷ The fact May presented de Laet with the poem while in Amsterdam suggests that May had reached Leiden relatively recently, and that he might have spent some time moving around the country before settling there, possibly to oversee the printing of his *Supplementum*.

On 18 October 1640, Daniel Heinsius, Dutch classical scholar, wrote to Patrick Young, royal librarian to Charles I: ‘Haec obiter nunc scripsi, cum ad vos praestantissimus hic vir rediret, qui ne nihil ageret, Lucanum erudite apud nos supplevit.’⁸ Paleit is of the opinion that the wording ‘apud nos’ should indicate that May wrote the *Supplementum* as a guest of the Heinsius family or (more likely, I think, given May’s supposed move from Amsterdam to Leiden) while in the Netherlands.⁹ That very same day, Heinsius reiterated his opinion that May was a ‘praestantissimus vir’ in another letter to the future parliamentarian John Selden: ‘Haec scribebam, cum ad vos praestantissimus eximiusque vir Thomas Maius properaret, qui ne quid nobis in Lucano deesset, scriptorem ipsum bona fide supplevit.’¹⁰ Heinsius makes no other mention of May in his correspondence to the two intellectuals, possibly excepting a follow-up letter to Selden, dated 28 May 1641, in which he refers to a ‘communis hic amicus noster’ who had recently been traveling back to England and could therefore be possibly identified with May.¹¹

Daniel Heinsius was also the recipient of a copy of the *Supplementum* which contains a handwritten dedication by May, probably the only specimen of his handwriting that can be attributed to him with absolute certainty.¹² The Latin inscription reads thus:

⁷ ‘In Amsterdam, Mr May gave me his Latin poem and requested my judgment, which I had rather he did not; I do not know if your excellency has read it. I have gone through it, but I have not yet examined the details; because I believe the nauseated stomach of our century should be reformed and brought back to the anvil again; for it is a wholly different thing to write a poem in Latin than in the vernacular’; British Library Add MS 6395, f. 65.

⁸ ‘Incidentally, I wrote these things to you now that that most excellent man has returned to you, he who – so that he would do something – supplied [his] Lucan while with us most eruditely’; Kemke, 98-99.

⁹ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 286.

¹⁰ ‘I wrote these things while Thomas May, most excellent and distinguished man, was returning to you, he who, lest we should lack something of Lucan, supplied [us] with the author himself in good faith’; Toomer, 129.

¹¹ Toomer, 131.

¹² The copy was brought to my attention by Götz Schmitz, editor of *Henry II*, as mentioned in the previous chapter; see Schmitz, xxxii-xxxiv. As the volume was sold by Sotheby’s in 1990 and now belongs to an anonymous private collector, I was unable to view it directly; however, a scan is preserved in a catalogue of the July 1990 auction kept by the Bodleian Library, so I was able to check that copy.

Nobilissimo viro, omni doctrinarum genere clarissimo, et honorabilissimo in perpetuum inter literatos nomini D Danieli Hensio, illustrissimi ordinis St Marci apud Venetos Equiti, hunc libellum suum mittit observantissimus Tho[mas] May.

Pagina indicium docti subitura movetur Hensiadae, ut Clario missa legenda Deo. Ovid.

[*To the most noble man, most illustrious in every kind of learning and forever most honourable among intellectuals, by the name of Sir Daniel Heinsius, of the most excellent order of St Mark's Knights of Venice, Thomas May sends this small book of his in reverence. 'My page trembles under the judgement of a learned Heinsius, as if it were being read by the Clarian god.'* Ovid.]

In the quote from Ovid's *Fasti*, May substituted 'Hensiadae' to the original 'principis.'¹³ This gift might have been intended as a thank you for Heinsius' hospitality (if that indeed had been the case), as a token of friendship, or, perhaps, as a way to ensure that the Dutch intellectual would contribute a dedicatory poem to the *Supplementum* (as will be shown below, the volume was eventually rewarded with a dedication by Heinsius' son, Nicolaas). Most likely, May envisioned the *Supplementum* as becoming part of the greater European cultural milieu, a notion that Charles possibly encouraged.

Indeed, as indicated by the dedicatory epistle to the king, the birth of the *Supplementum* may have been motivated by a desire – on the king's or May's part – to exploit the success of the English *Continuation* by spreading it throughout Europe: although it was indeed republished in England, the target is clearly a foreign readership. The intellectual relevance of the *Supplementum* in Europe is testified by the number of celebratory dedications attached to it – seven. The dedications, all in Latin, are preserved both in the original Dutch edition and in the first 1646 English edition of the *Supplementum*; most of the authors were noted European or British intellectuals and many of them had traceable connections to May before or during his

¹³ Ovid, *Fasti*, 1.1.

time in the Netherlands. The brief biographies that follow serve to illustrate the artistic and political milieu with which May came into contact in the early 1640s and might help explain why his work would be celebrated more warmly abroad than in his own country.

The first dedication is by Marcus Zuerius van Boxhorn (1612-1653), also known as Boxhornius, a Dutch scholar now mostly remembered for his contribution to the field of linguistics. Boxhorn was admitted to the University of Leiden in 1626 and quickly fell under the patronage of Daniel Heinsius, with whom May was also acquainted; in the early 1630s, Boxhorn became professor of eloquence at the same university and later, in 1648, he succeeded Heinsius to the post of professor of history. Upon his premature death, he left an enormous bulk of work covering the most disparate subjects, including a series of treatises on politics and the importance of religious tolerance.¹⁴ Although there is no concrete evidence of any contact between the two men except this dedication, their friendship with Heinsius (both father and son) suggests that they belonged to the same circles. In his praise of the *Supplementum*, which would be republished, unaltered, as part of a posthumous anthology of poems and letters by Boxhorn in 1662, the Dutch intellectual designates May's 'poema elegantissimum' as the true restoration of the work that was lost with Lucan's death.¹⁵

The second poem is signed 'Nicolaus Heinsius, Dan. Fil.' Nicolaas Heinsius (1620-1681) was the son of Daniel; despite being very young, by 1640 Nicolaas had already published a Latin poem, *Breda Expugnata*, and he would go on to become one of the most prominent Latin philologists of the time.¹⁶ If we accept Paleit's hypothesis that May lived with the family during his stay in the Netherlands, then May must have got to know him rather closely. The poem

¹⁴ Nieuwstraten, 214-215.

¹⁵ *Supplementum*, *4v. For the anthology in which the poem was republished, see Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Epistolae et Poemata* (Amsterdam: Caspar Commelin, 1662).

¹⁶ Aside from becoming a philologist in his own right, Nicolaas Heinsius is known to have travelled to England in 1642 and to have 'met with little courtesy from the English scholars'; see Chisholm, 216. I could not find any more detailed information regarding this, but it is intriguing to imagine that he would perhaps have tried to make contact with May and wonder why he met with hostility.

contributed to the *Supplementum* mentions the work as having been ‘Suppletam, et sub Serenissimi Britanniarum Regis auspiciis ab eodem publicatam’ (‘Supplied, and by the same man published under the auspices of the most Serene King of Britons’), which would seem to give credit to the hypothesis that May composed the *Supplementum* on Charles’ orders.¹⁷

The third and fourth dedication do indeed offer slight evidence that May was still part of royal circles when the *Supplementum* was published. The third one was penned by an Englishman, Richard Fanshawe (1608-1666), who was a close friend of May and a fellow member of the Inns of Court, and who took the royalists’ side during the civil war.¹⁸ The fourth contributor to the poem, Joseph Rutter, similarly proves May’s continued proximity to Charles’ court. Rutter, whose friendship with May and Kenelm Digby has been examined in the previous chapter, had published the first part of his translation of Corneille’s *El Cid* in 1637 and, in 1640, printed the second part – like May – on the king’s command.

The fifth dedicatee is somewhat of a mystery. The poem is addressed to ‘amico suo summe honorando’ and signed ‘S. Jonson’; William Gifford has speculated that the initial must have been a misprint of ‘the foreign press’ and that the author is really Ben Jonson.¹⁹ I do not believe this possible, not least because Jonson had been dead for three years when the *Supplementum* was published and because, I trust, the ‘foreign press’ – particularly a typographer who printed English works often – would have been unlikely to misspell the name of one of England’s most famous authors. The only possible lead is a Stephen Johnson, a merchant who is credited with writing two reports from Dublin in April 1642 during the war against Ireland; since there is no evidence to suppose that this is the same S. Jonson complimenting May, this hypothesis, too, has little ground to support it.²⁰ Likewise, the

¹⁷ *Supplementum*, *5r.

¹⁸ Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 65.

¹⁹ Gifford, 348.

²⁰ The report is entitled *Exceeding good newes from the Newerries in Ireland. Being, the true copie of a letter sent from Dublin the 20. of Aprill, 1642. To Sir William Adderton, now resident in London, from Mr. Stephen Iohnson*

remaining two authors, Thomas Bullock and Samuel Collins, are impossible to identify with certainty. I could not find any works by Bullock at all; on the other hand, there is one Samuel Collins who appears to have authored several religious pamphlets in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, though, again, the evidence is not enough to support positive identification.

In the middle of the group of dedications, probably as a result of a typographer's mistake, is printed a short set of hexameters by the Renaissance commentator Johannes Suplicius Verulanus known as the *Pharsaliae Lucani Appendicula*; the short appendix (eleven lines) was meant to give a more harmonious closure to the abrupt end of Lucan's *Pharsalia*.²¹

The book's unusual status as a Latin supposed 'self-translation' of an original English publication, when custom usually dictated the opposite, has been the subject of scholarly discussion. After considering the allegedly common supposition that the Latin work was composed first, Chester concludes that there would be 'no way of telling what May's method was.'²² However, R. T. Bruère has put forth a great amount of evidence that definitively illustrates that the *Supplementum* was, in fact, composed after the *Continuation*. Firstly, the *Supplementum* is significantly shorter than the *Continuation*, with its 2667 lines against the 4091 of the English version.²³ This is in part due to changes in the structure, such as the verse arguments preceding each book being reduced to short prose synopses, and entire passages being shortened or completely omitted. On the other hand, the *Supplementum* contains several small additions or reworkings so that passages 'will end with a striking reflection on paradox', a favourite technique of Lucan. Occasionally, certain events are rearranged, possibly for added

merchant. Wherein is declared the victorious proceedings of the protestant army in the Neweries (London: T. F. for I. H., 1642).

²¹ Dinter, 148-150. I am led to believe that the printing order was a mistake because in the English 1646 edition the *Appendicula* is printed in the correct order, following the dedications and right before the start of the book.

²² Chester, 156.

²³ Backhaus, 70.

emphasis or for a smoother narrative or even to correct mistakes accidentally included in the *Continuation*.²⁴ Most notably, Bruère's analysis led him to put forth the hypothesis that not only were the two texts printed in the order they were composed, but that the *Supplementum* contains palpable signs of an increasingly anti-Caesarean (and therefore anti-tyrannical) stance that would of course be consistent with May's evolving attitude at the time.²⁵ Although Bruère offers enough convincing evidence in this regard, both Catherine Carroll Cliff and Birger Backhaus have partly disputed this, arguing that examples of opposite nature could be brought forth just as easily.²⁶

On the other hand, Norbrook appears to validate Bruère's hypothesis of a heightened anti-monarchical stance. The 1630 English *Continuation* had included a verse preface spoken by Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, lamenting the fate of Lucan. The 1640 *Supplementum* also included a prefatory poem sung by the muse, but this time the offer to Lucan to drink blood from the muse's cup and return to life is much more explicit, and it is implicitly accepted: although the poem does not specify whether Lucan ultimately exerts vengeance, the engraving facing the lamentation depicts him as drinking from a goblet offered to him by Calliope. To further prove the exacerbation of attitudes, Norbrook notes that, in the revived 1650 edition of the English *Continuation*, the original English poem is expanded to include 'a shift from pathos to action' and to end with Lucan's obeying Calliope's command.²⁷ To add to Norbrook's observations, the Latin poem in the 1640 *Supplementum* already envisages many of the much more violent lexical and narrative tropes found in the 1650 English one. These include: 'Inferno taurus mactatur victima Regi' (with 'Rex' in place of the more commonly used 'princeps' or

²⁴ Bruère, 'Supplementum', 148-154; Bruère's extremely valuable examination includes references to all relevant passages and lines.

²⁵ Bruère, 'Supplementum', 160.

²⁶ See Cliff, 80, and Backhaus

²⁷ Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 227-228.

‘Caesar’); ‘Non hanc, Caesareo madeat dum sanguine Roma, / Claudito: vindictae parsque sit illa tuae, / Ut cuius dederit victoriae sceptrum Neroni, / Manibus occumbat victima caesa tuis.’²⁸

Of all of May’s works, the *Supplementum* achieved by far the greatest and longest-lasting success in Europe. Even contemporaries that were hostile to May acknowledged this: in his short biographical account of the poet, Payne Fisher remarks that the *Supplementum* was written ‘in so lofty and happy Latin hexameter, that he hath attained much more reputation abroad than he hath lost at home.’²⁹ After its initial publication in Leiden, the volume was indeed reprinted numerous times throughout Europe; chiefly, it went through two ‘Elzevir’ editions in Amsterdam (1658 and 1669), and was reprinted in the majority of Latin editions of Lucan. The work also famously earned the praise of Samuel Johnson, who judged May the best among the English poets writing in Latin, preferring him to both Cowley and Milton.³⁰

The influence of the *Supplementum* can even be registered in works by supporters of the royalist faction: in 1643 Abraham Cowley started and, because the royalists never won, could not finish a heroic epic entitled *The Civil War*. Cowley attempted to draw parallels between Lucan’s epic and the ongoing civil war, but, as Nigel Smith notes, he was unsuccessful: in his retelling of the Roman epic, Cowley forced a comparison between Charles’ faction and Pompey’s republicans, which not only made little sense from an ideological point of view, but also defeated Cowley’s own purpose in that Pompey eventually lost.³¹ The fact that the aborted epic emerged so shortly after the *Supplementum* and May’s public support of Parliament suggests that Cowley might have wished to provide a reading of Lucan that would oppose the leading parliamentary interpretation and be consistent with royalist support.

²⁸ ‘The bull is slaughtered in hell as a victim of the king’; ‘Do not end this [poem] until Rome is covered in the blood of Caesar: and let this part of vengeance be yours, so that the one who relinquished the sceptre of victory to Nero dies, murdered at your hands’; *Supplementum*, *2v.

²⁹ Fisher, 103.

³⁰ Bruère, ‘Supplementum’, 145-146.

³¹ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 207-208.

5.2 The lost ‘Julius Caesar’

May’s residency in the Netherlands and the *Supplementum*’s marking the first time he ever published something in Latin has led me to believe that the lost Latin play ‘Julius Caesar’ was composed there around 1640. Because there survives very little information concerning ‘Julius Caesar’, a fact that indeed casts doubts about the play’s very existence, most of my conclusions are heavily speculative and must be read as an attempt to fit this apparently incongruous work into the chronology of May’s production in the way that would make most sense.

The first ever mention of the existence of this play occurs in 1812, in the third volume of the *Biographia Dramatica*, where ‘Julius Caesar’ is included in the section ‘Latin plays by English authors.’ The editor writes: ‘JULIUS CÆSAR. Trag[edy] by Thomas May. The original MS. of this play, which is in five short acts, is in the possession of Mr Stephen Jones. The author has affixed his name at the conclusion of the piece.’³² As ‘Mr Stephen Jones’ is presumably to be identified with the very Stephen Jones responsible for the 1811-12 revision of the *Biographia Dramatica*, it should be safe to assume that he had first-hand knowledge of the MS and therefore chose to include the above information in good faith. Were it not so, it would be rather difficult to find credibility in an assertion not supported by any early modern source whatsoever nor by any biographical accounts of Thomas May written shortly after his death or in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In his *Theatrum Poetarum*, published in 1675, Edward Phillips enumerates the works of Thomas May and makes no reference to ‘Julius Caesar’, naming only ‘his Tragedies of *Antigone*, *Cleopatra*, and *Agrippina*.’³³ Gerard Langbaine attributes five plays to May, though

³² Jones, 437.

³³ Phillips, 179. Although Phillips displays a certain degree of inaccuracy in his tally of May’s literary achievements, for he mentions *The Old Wives’ Tale* among the comedies and *Orlando Furioso* among the histories, he nevertheless includes all his five known theatrical works. The two misattributed plays are, respectively, by George Peele (1595) and Robert Greene (1594). *The Old Wives’ Tale* was probably misattributed due to its title, alphabetically close to *The Old Couple*; as for *Orlando Furioso*, it is thematically far from all other works by May,

he cryptically asserts, ‘Whilst he resided at court, he writ the five plays which are extant’, and later, after giving a brief summary of the five plays, ‘But though he has no more plays, he has other pieces extant in print.’³⁴ It is unclear whether Langbaine thought it feasible that May could have written other plays that are no longer extant, or if he, most likely, simply meant that his five plays are all extant. Likewise, other biographers writing before Jones’ mention of ‘Julius Caesar’, such as Anthony à Wood, Giles Jacob, Theophilus Cibber, and Alexander Chalmers, ascribe to May only the five printed plays.³⁵ The first acknowledgement of Jones’s statement occurs in 1819, when Thomas Campbell, compiling his anthology *Specimen of the British Poets*, ascribes ‘five dramas’ to May but further elaborates in a footnote: ‘to which may be added “Julius Caesar”, a tragedy, still in manuscript.’³⁶ From then on, ‘Julius Caesar’ firmly entered the canon of May’s plays.

Assuming, for lack of arguments against it, the veracity of Jones’ statement, one is faced with the challenge of fitting a previously unidentified play into the already established chronology of May’s *oeuvre*, a play of which nothing is known except the title and the fact that it was written in Latin.³⁷ Indeed, ‘Julius Caesar’ occupies a rather exceptional position within May’s production. First, the play survives (or survived) only in manuscript, and no trace of it

and Gerard Langbaine writes ‘it was printed long before our author was born, at least before he was able to guide a pen, much less to write a play’; see Langbaine, 364. The mistake is reiterated by Nicholas Cox (Cox, B2v) and William Winstanley (Winstanley, 164).

³⁴ Langbaine, 360-361, 364.

³⁵ See Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume II, 295; Jacob, 178; Cibber, 6-9; Chalmers, 487-490.

³⁶ Campbell, *Specimens*, 351.

³⁷ I have tried to retrace the steps of Stephen Jones and his heirs in order potentially to locate the manuscript, but to no avail. I have found the wills of Jones and his widow, but no specific arrangement is mentioned concerning his library or manuscript possessions (see *The National Archives* references PROB 11/1739/25 and PROB 11/1744/264, respectively). Likewise, although he had been a collaborator of the British Museum, he seems not to have made any donation to the Museum or the Library, or none that I could find through careful searches of their archives. Allan Griffith Chester also reports fruitless attempts to locate the play, both by himself and by a Mr B. Barnett. It is nevertheless important to note that Chester, in his search of ‘numerous catalogues’, operated under the assumption that the play had by then switched hands and come into the possession of James Orchard Halliwell-Phillips, author of *A Dictionary of Old English Plays* (1860), based on the fact that the entry for ‘Julius Caesar’ in that volume contains details regarding the number of acts and the author’s signing the piece (see Chester, 99). Halliwell-Phillips, however, merely reported the information available in the *Biographia Dramatica* without adding anything noteworthy, and therefore is not likely to have owned the manuscript, at least not at any point before 1860. It appears that, if the manuscript of ‘Julius Caesar’ ever existed, it is now forever lost.

exists in the Stationers' Register, whereas the rest of May's works were printed, in most cases with the explicit authorisation of the author and with a short preface penned by him. Second, all of the poet's other works known by name are extant, and most biographers prior to Jones's discovery in 1812 only list works that are extant to this day. Finally, barring May's *Supplementum Lucani* and the *Historiae Parliamenti Angliae Breviarum*, published in 1650, 'Julius Caesar' would turn out to be the only fictional work he composed in Latin.

For these reasons, there is some merit in Gerald Eades Bentley's assertion that 'The evidence for the authorship or even the existence of this play is so slight as to make speculation concerning its date futile.' On the other hand, Bentley's assumption is formulated under the suspicion 'that most of this information is not first-hand', a conclusion that neglects the circumstance that the infamous Stephen Jones himself, supposed owner of the manuscript, is the one reporting the existence of the play in the first place.³⁸ Whatever the origin and fate of the elusive manuscript, I believe that it represents a significant anomaly in the works of Thomas May that is worth investigating and worth attempting to insert coherently within his production.

Although some scholars, like Bentley, have refused to advance theories concerning the date of the play, several others have attempted to date 'Julius Caesar' based on the rest of May's production and on the often-scant information about his life. Martin Wiggins discounts the possibility that May wrote it during his time at Gray's Inn as the Inns of Court had 'no tradition of Latin drama' and proposes 1612 as the most plausible composition date, citing the fact that it was written in Latin as an indication that the play was born in an academic context.³⁹ Because, however, Sidney Sussex College 'is not known to have produced plays', Wiggins is open to the possibility that the play was written as mere literary exercise.⁴⁰ Frederick Gard Fleay gives

³⁸ Bentley, *JCS*, 4, 838.

³⁹ Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1669.

⁴⁰ Nelson, 940.

Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, as the venue and ‘c. 1616’ as the year of performance, not offering any evidence to corroborate his assertion.⁴¹ It can be assumed that his speculation is based solely on the poet’s attending Sidney Sussex College and on the belief that the theme and language of the play would have been better suited for an academic context. As for the year of performance, 1616, it is unclear why Fleay chose this date and not any other year May attended Cambridge. In fact, as the poet was admitted at Gray’s Inn in the August of 1615, it is improbable that he continued to write and stage plays for his old College as late as 1616; further, the very notion that anyone could present a play at Sidney Sussex College is dubious at best, as evidenced above. Evidently accepting Fleay’s attribution, George Charles Moore Smith writes, ‘? Acted at Sidney Sussex Coll. c. 1616.’⁴²

Felix E. Schelling, not elaborating on his suggestion, dates it ‘c. 1625’, possibly moved by reasons akin to those put forward a few years later by Allan Griffith Chester, who excludes the possibility that May wrote ‘Julius Caesar’ during his ‘tender years’ at Cambridge and offers two intervals as possible composition dates: 1616-17, his period of residence at Gray’s Inn, and 1625-30, ‘during which years May’s attention was engaged by Roman history.’⁴³ Chester ultimately deems the 1625-30 interval a stronger possibility and concludes that May wrote all his tragedies between 1625 and 1631.⁴⁴ This hypothesis is also supported by Domenico Lovascio in the entry for ‘Julius Caesar’ in the *Lost Plays Database*.⁴⁵ Lovascio, elaborating upon Edward Paleit’s comments on the *Supplementum Lucani*, also briefly advances the hypothesis of May’s crafting the play in 1640 while he was working on the *Supplementum* in the Netherlands but dismisses it on the grounds on there not being any allusion to it in the letters

⁴¹ Fleay, 420.

⁴² Smith, *College Plays*, 105.

⁴³ Schelling, 579; Chester, 99.

⁴⁴ Chester, 99.

⁴⁵ *LPD*, ‘Julius Caesar’.

written by Daniel Heinsius, who on the other hand mentions the *Supplementum* and could reasonably have had some knowledge of May's pursuits at the time.⁴⁶

In all, a date of composition later than 1630 is not explored in depth, and there seem to exist two schools of thought concerning the date of this elusive play: a group ascribing 'Julius Caesar' to the period 1612-16 on the grounds of its language of composition, and another group in favour of a 1625-30 dating due to the play's affinity, in terms of both genre and theme, to May's other works composed in that period. However, when considering the poet's entire production, I think both hypotheses can be challenged on linguistic, thematical, and biographical grounds.

The fact that Latin plays were often a prerogative of colleges and universities apparently validates the argument for an early date. However, this hypothesis does not take into account the only known work composed by May while he was at university, that is, the poem written to commemorate Prince Henry in 1612. The exceptionality of this choice has already been discussed in Chapter 1 and should discount, at least partly, the hypothesis that he composed 'Julius Caesar' while at Cambridge. On the other hand, May's generally positive attitude towards English as a literary language and translation as a perfectly valid method of approaching the classics, examined throughout this thesis, clashes with the second hypothesis. Indeed, all his published works between 1620 and 1639 were in English, and the vernacular *Continuation*, in particular, proved a decidedly radical stance on the value of English in literature as opposed to Latin, to the point where critics questioned whether a Latin version had existed before it.

Within this ideological framework, it seems implausible that May would turn to Latin to narrate the life – or death, or even later events like Shakespeare, for the content of the play is

⁴⁶ *LPD*, 'Julius Caesar'.

unknown – of Julius Caesar in the 1620s or 1630s. After the *Continuation* in 1630, May did not approach Roman history again until 1640 with the *Supplementum*. The epistolary exchanges between English and Dutch intellectuals of the period might be considered a hint that May did not compose ‘Julius Caesar’ while in the Netherlands, or the play would have been mentioned in the letters concerning the poet. However, the references to May are so scarce and so succinct that it is not unexpected to find only mentions of the *Supplementum*, a work of such ambition and scope it would have likely sparked much interest among European intellectuals, as opposed to an original play with few chances of being performed. Furthermore, although the plot of ‘Julius Caesar’ is unknown, it is also worth considering the hypothesis that May, who at least in the first half of 1640 was still bound by royalist ties but was probably already nursing parliamentary ideals, may not have wanted a potentially controversial play to circulate.

At all events, it seems that Latin became a more consistent feature of May’s writing only from 1640 onwards, for in 1650 he published the *Historiae Parliamenti Angliae Breviarium*, which he translated into English and published later that same year. A subtitle on the title page makes it clear that it was preceded by the Latin: ‘Written in Latin by T. M. and for the general good translated out of the Latin into English.’ Again, May’s principal concern when writing in England is ‘the general good’ rather than the benefit of a minority of erudite readers who could enjoy his works in Latin; every time he composed something in Latin, he appears to have done so with a view to having it circulate among a continental audience.

Given this series of circumstances, I argue that ‘Julius Caesar’ is more likely to have been written in the early 1640s, when May was writing about Rome’s civil war in Latin, rather than at an earlier date; it might have been written in the Netherlands and in any case close to his composition of the *Supplementum*, perhaps for a private European audience. The obscure nature of the play, which apparently was preserved in an autograph copy signed by the author himself

and, contrary to all other known plays by May, never published, denotes some level of secrecy that might indicate a desire to keep it away from the public. Even though we know nothing more than the title of the play and this paragraph is therefore pure speculation, the historical subject does indeed lend itself to potentially subversive interpretations of tyrannicide, power, and republic, which would resonate with May's gradual disillusionment with Charles' policies at the time.

For these reasons, I am inclined to date the composition of 'Julius Caesar' between 1640 and 1645. Overall, unless the autograph manuscript were to miraculously resurface, dating 'Julius Caesar' with any degree of certainty remains an illusion. However, I think the story around this play provides proverbial 'food for thought' and an interesting talking point in the reconstruction of May's works, thoughts, and literary practices.

5.3 Back in England: Massinger, the *Observations*, and the first political pamphlets

Whether May wrote 'Julius Caesar' while abroad or not, he was certainly back in England by the end of 1640 and, it seems, ready to inherit a bequest from his recently deceased friend Philip Massinger. Massinger's life is, in some respects, even more mysterious than May's, for 'we know far less of him than we do of Shakespeare' and none of what we do know is autobiographical.⁴⁷ We do, however, have a contemporary account of his death, which occurred 'very suddenly' in his house on the Bankside in Southwark. The playwright's body was then buried after being 'accompanied by comedians' on 18 March 1640.⁴⁸ As we do not know May's exact date of departure for the Netherlands, it is difficult to say whether he took part in the parade of 'comedians' (playwrights or, conceivably, actors) who carried Massinger's body in funeral procession. If he was still in London as of March 1640, it is plausible that he did, for

⁴⁷ Cruickshank, 2.

⁴⁸ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume I, 536.

his relationship with Massinger in 1640 was robust enough for May to have inherited a copy of Massinger's *Lucan*.

This bequest, which has been discussed previously in the context of May's close association with Massinger, proves interesting for multiple reasons. The ownership inscriptions on the volume, a 1618 edition of *Lucan* by Farnaby, unearthed by Robert Weir, reveal that the volume was first given to Jonson by Farnaby himself and then, at a later date, came in the possession of Massinger; a later addition on the title page reads 'Sum liber Th May Ex libris Massingeris Ex dono relictis Farna[bii] 1641.'⁴⁹ The date 1641 indicates that May received the book over a year after Massinger's death, and thus a few months after his return to England. As I could find no trace of Massinger's will – which, indeed, given the allegedly unexpected death of the playwright, might not even have been made – it is possible that his possessions were bequeathed to his closest friends and that May ended up inheriting Massinger's *Lucan* due to his previous well-known engagements with Latin authors.

Perhaps of even greater interest is the fate of this volume *after* May claimed its ownership. At the bottom of the title page of the book, as noted by Weir, lies another handwritten inscription, 'Francis Hacke[r]', the last letter having been trimmed during the binding process in the 18th century. Hacker (d. 1660) was another parliamentarian, though he is most noted for being one of Charles' regicides (namely the one tasked with drafting and signing the king's death warrant) and for being often depicted standing next to the king at the latter's execution.⁵⁰ Although there is no date accompanying Hacker's name on the volume, it can be tentatively assumed that he was the one to inherit it shortly after May's death, for there are no other recorded owners during the Interregnum nor, in fact, the early Restoration.⁵¹ This small piece of information suggests that May, whose will is not extant either, must have been relatively

⁴⁹ Weir, 5.

⁵⁰ Weir, 5-6.

⁵¹ Weir, 6.

close with at least one of the most vocal supporters of Parliament even after Charles' regicide, possibly hinting at a stronger radicalism than previously suspected.

Massinger's bequest marks the last tangible record of May's life before his public support of Parliament in mid-1642. No personal correspondence, no printed work, no autobiographical writing, no mention of May in other works dating from 1641 to 1642 survives; hence, it is difficult to reconstruct the detachment from the king and the eventual espousal of the opposing cause. I am inclined to read the *Supplementum* as the manifestation of his gradually increasing dissatisfaction with the king and his policies, for signs of a deteriorating disillusionment and intolerance of tyranny were already emerging from the text. Mixing with Dutch intellectuals could have contributed to strengthening May's Protestant patriotism, although I believe the 1639-40 Bishops' Wars with Scotland, which marked the beginning of hostilities between the king and Parliament, would have played a much bigger role.

In any case, barring anonymous poems potentially ascribable to him, the first parliamentary publication signed by May dates to the summer of 1642. It was published several times under different titles; the edition that will be referred throughout is the one titled *Observations upon the Effects of Former Parliaments* and published in July 1642, at the outbreak of the civil war.⁵² The pamphlet was not entered in the Stationers' Register and neither of its 1642 editions give the name of the typographer on the title page.⁵³ The small volume was printed again at least twice in 1643 (for 'R. R.' and for 'I. H. and H. White', respectively) and

⁵² Between 1642 and 1644 it was also published, both in full and in a reduced version, with the titles *A Discourse Concerning the Success of Former Parliaments*; *The Observer, upon the Success of Former Parliaments*; *The Glory of this Kingdom*; or, *A Discourse by way of Conference and Arguments of the Happiness and Success of Former Parliaments*. For July as the publication date, see Thomason, 143.

⁵³ The absence of the *Observations* from the Register ought not to appear particularly noteworthy, for, following the establishment of the Long Parliament, the traditional system of licensing through the Stationers' Company 'effectively crumbled' and gave way to a looser, less regulated print market; see Como, 822.

then once in 1644 (for Thomas Walkley, with whom May had previously collaborated). In all cases except for the one printed in 1644, the pamphlets were published anonymously, and May's name, or explicit references to the paternity of the work, do not feature anywhere in the volumes.

The *Observations* came out at a politically charged moment in the first months of civil war, before armed battle broke out. The clash between Charles and Parliament had reached a peak in November 1641, when the Commons passed the 'Grand Remonstrance', an appeal to public opinion summarising parliamentary opposition to the king's foreign, religious, and legal policies. The bill had been promoted by a handful of MPs including John Pym, who, in 1626, had been among the people responsible for the attempted impeachment of the duke of Buckingham.⁵⁴ The pamphlet angered the king, who issued a response, but the turning point of the thus far 'cold' war was Charles' attempt, in January 1642, to seize five MPs whom he suspected of plotting against him and his wife the queen. The attempted capture failed, and shortly after the king left London for Hampton Court, then Windsor; his departure was met with cheers and banners sporting the word 'Liberty': the king had lost the city's support. From there, the queen sailed to the Netherlands with her children, hoping to gain continental support.⁵⁵ Parliament then sent Sir John Hotham to secure the arsenal at Hull and, in March, passed the Militia Ordinance, which allowed Parliament to raise soldiers without the king's approval; in the meantime, Charles moved quarters to York and was subsequently refused entry at Hull. On 2 June, Parliament issued the so-called Nineteen Propositions, with which it demanded control of the army, the church, the royal children, the law, and all offices of state; the king, outraged, immediately rejected them.⁵⁶ On 11 June, Charles issued Commissions of Array, nationwide

⁵⁴ Worden, *Civil Wars*, 41-42.

⁵⁵ Hibbert, 31-35.

⁵⁶ Hibbert, 47-48.

calls for arms, and ordered leading royalists to spread his orders throughout the country. A committee was nominated by the Commons to draft a polemical response on the grounds that Charles was misusing to his own advantage a Lancastrian precedent that exclusively concerned war with France or Scotland. John Selden, whom we know was in contact with May at least in late 1640, was among the committee and generally assumed parliamentary views from the start of civil frictions.⁵⁷

Taking this context into account, it is apparent that the *Observations* were written and printed at the height of the diplomatic conflict preceding open warfare, and that May actively declared his allegiance early into the civil war, when its outcome was far from predictable. To my knowledge, none of May's contemporary authors and playwrights declared their support for Parliament so early into the conflict, nor had any of them turned propagandists for the cause. If anything, poets associated with the court in the 1630s were far more likely to join the royalists' ranks, some of them actively so. This group of men, sometimes known as 'Cavalier poets', includes: Robert Herrick, who was arrested by Parliament in 1647; James Shirley, who campaigned with royalist forces from 1642 to 1644; Mildmay Fane, who was imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1642; Edmund Waller, active in a conspiracy to secure London for the king in 1643; John Suckling, who had recruited troops against the Scots in 1639 and who fled the country in 1641 to escape parliamentary accusations of involvement with the king to secure the army; Sidney Godolphin, who joined the royalist forces in 1642 and was killed by the parliamentary troops on the battlefield the following year; William Cartwright, who preached a victory sermon upon the king's return to Oxford after the battle of Edgehill in 1642; James Graham, who offered his services to the king in 1640 and was appointed Lieutenant General in Scotland in 1644; John Denham, whose estate was confiscated by Parliament in 1642 after his attempts to defend Farnham Castle; Richard Lovelace, who read the Kentish Petition, a royalist

⁵⁷ Tuck, 150-151.

manifesto, to Parliament in April 1642 and was subsequently imprisoned; Abraham Cowley, who joined the queen in exile in 1646.⁵⁸ Of many others, their political allegiance at the outbreak and during the civil war is not known.

This undoubtedly tiresome list of names and deeds serves to show that May's declaration of support for Parliament could hardly be deemed a popular choice among poets who depended on royal patronage. This is especially relevant when considering May's efforts, since about 1627, to secure financial stability through strenuous pursuit of royal patrons. As evidenced by the significant number of poets who did not express support for either faction, May could have just as likely refrained from taking sides and instead waited strategically for a victor to emerge. Instead, his *Observations* were published when the outcome of the war was far from determined and while his former colleagues and friends were declaring their continued support for the king. This evidence clashes with the once-popular assumption that May had joined forces with Parliament motivated by spite or personal resentment, and the *Observations*, together with the *History of Parliament*, constitute further iterations of notions and beliefs May had been covertly expressing since his translation of Lucan, fifteen years prior.

The claim on the title page of one of the two 1643 editions, boasting that the pamphlet was 'Published to undeceive the people', contextualises May's work within a general climate of parliamentary disinformation dominating the English political discourse in the first years of the civil conflict.⁵⁹ In truth, May's stance 'involved a very moderate kind of parliamentarism', without calls for drastic actions, and suggested the restoration of Parliament as the necessary cure for the 'misfortunes' arisen as a consequence of a monarch's personal rule.⁶⁰ May is wary of excessive innovation and cautions against potential manipulations of the public by 'wicked

⁵⁸ List and full biographies found in MacLean, respectively 103, 186, 197, 231, 252, 273, 281, 289, 292, 305, 326.

⁵⁹ White, 'Parliament, print, and disinformation', 721.

⁶⁰ Peacey, 'That memorable parliament', 198.

royal counsellors', implicitly recommending the intermediary solution of 'regular but brief parliaments', less susceptible to the whims of 'populist rabble-rousers.'⁶¹ In any case, the relationship between king and Parliament is asserted as categorically necessary, and it is likened to that of a ship captain who should always refer to his compass, or a mathematician to his instruments, without thinking it a 'depression' of his dignity 'to be ruled by the sway of [the] great council.'⁶² The language employed is very straightforward and, by all appearances, unbiased, thus demonstrating once again May's ability as a historian to present his own conclusions as a result of logical reasoning rather than motivated by political ideology.

Charles I is never explicitly referenced; May provides several examples of misrule, chiefly Edward II and Richard II, and allows the readers to draw their own parallels with the present situation and king. The culpabilities of previous parliaments are indeed addressed, but they are ascribed to parliament's failure to assert their rights properly rather than to inherent vices or faults intrinsic to its members: when discussing the reign of Richard II, May observes that 'much mischief' might have been prevented 'if [parliament] had timely and constantly joined together in maintaining the true rights of Parliament, and resisting the illegal desires of their seduced king.'⁶³ In the *Observations*, May does not make attempts to predict future historical developments on the basis of past events, but rather employs the past as a tool to draw general observations about certain truths about human nature. Avoiding making conjectures about the future, May contented himself with observing that in the past parliaments had been the 'cure' for loss of political rights to princely abuses, thereby offering that principle as general advice to rulers; his disdain for attempts to predict the future or attribute the rise and fall of kingdoms to indefinable and unpredictable overarching schemes would be reiterated in the *History of Parliament*.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 252.

⁶² *Observations*, A4v.

⁶³ *Observations*, A4r.

⁶⁴ Wong, 765-766.

As ever with his works, this pamphlet, however short, manages to prove May's tendency to 'democratise' his language and present his theses in a manner that would appear understandable by the less educated reader, while remaining pleasing to the erudite audience. As the most glaring example, when he quotes from Polydore Virgil, May transcribes the Latin excerpts verbatim (as though keen to avoid accusations of discourse manipulation) and immediately follows them with their English translation, making the text accessible to all audiences.

The pamphlet also revamps and repurposes May's old crusade against royal favourites, for he suggests that shortcomings on the part of the monarch might sometimes be attributed to 'private fancies and unhappy favourites.' Once again, emphasis is placed on the inability to distinguish private matters from the *res publica*, which appears to be May's greatest concern. Not quite denying the necessity of a hereditary monarchy, May still somewhat obliquely ranks 'the people' higher than their prince, for he notes that 'the adequate object of a prince his love should be the whole people, and that they who receive public honour should return a general love and care', implying that the monarch as a person should be subordinate to the needs of his or her people and, in all cases, rule with the aid of Parliament. Additionally, May presents this condition of political inertia and reliance on the counsel of favourites as an even less desirable trait than outright 'wickedness', for more damage has been inflicted upon kingdoms by thoughtless monarchs than 'evil' ones.⁶⁵

The *Observations* were the first (known) public act of May as a parliamentarian, as well as his first explicitly political pamphlet. The fact that it was republished multiple times and by different typographers after the start of open warfare between the two factions might indicate that it was very successful, or that, as Gary Rivett speculates, May was attempting to gain the

⁶⁵ *Observations*, A2v.

attention of Parliament with a view to future employment.⁶⁶ This, however, is in my view less likely, not least because May's name was completely omitted from the title page of the editions published between 1642 and 1643; moreover, the preface suggests that May was commissioned the *Observations* or already had some sort of personal obligation or arrangement with the individual to whom he addressed the pamphlet, which partially discounts the hypothesis that he was after personal glory. Indeed, whether it really was conceived as a letter or not, the pamphlet is written as if it was, being addressed to an unnamed 'Sir' and beginning with the claim that May had 'fulfilled [his] command' by sending him 'this brief and plain discourse' and that he had done so 'according to [his] ability and the shortness of time.'⁶⁷

The identity of this recipient is unknown; whoever he was, he and May must have been in separate places when the letter was written, for May claims that he would have delivered the letter in person, had he been 'present' with the mysterious addressee. This suggests, I think, that May was the one away from London at the time: in order for it to have been published in such urgency as May's comment about the 'shortness of time' implies, the letter must have necessarily been in the hands of the addressee in London, who must have rushed to publish it upon receiving it so as to capitalise on the topicality of the matter discussed within.

This supposition tallies with what can be presumed to be May's next published work, another letter published just over a month later, on 27 August 1642, and titled *Certain Information from Devon and Dorset concerning the Commission of Array*. This booklet comprises two short letters, one signed 'T. M.' and dated 22 August and the other signed 'H. L.', both addressed to a person referred to as 'brother' and informing him of developments in

⁶⁶ Rivett, *May's Histories*, 166-167. I extend my deepest gratitude to Dr Rivett for kindly – and very promptly – sending me his unpublished PhD thesis and other related articles.

⁶⁷ *Observations*, A1r.

the resistance to the Commission of Array.⁶⁸ The order was being resisted throughout the country; May's report comes from the town of Cullompton where the local constable, Walter Challis, opposed the commission that was being pushed by 'Mr Ashford' and 'Mr Culme' (likely the local sheriff, Richard Culme).⁶⁹ A Sir Thomas Drew is described as opposing the array by 'grounding on that wise man's speech in Parliament against it.' Although it is unclear to whom May is referring with this comment and I was unable to narrow the search down to a specific speech, Selden did draft several speeches and declarations opposing the commissions, which, coupled with the appellation 'wise man', makes him a likely candidate.⁷⁰

Evidently May was acting as a sort of informal 'war correspondent' for the parliament's side, reporting from places of interest in the escalating civil conflict, for all his next known publications are also war reports. Because the letters are always addressed to an individual rather than the whole Parliament, I suspect he might have had an ongoing agreement with a single MP or influential party, whose task would be to publish the letter to promote the cause; these letters may also have been read in the House of Commons, as it was customary to do so.⁷¹ At any rate, May's role as an informer would not receive any formal acknowledgement until 1645, which was the year in which he was also appointed secretary. As C. H. Wilkinson remarks, it is 'probably impossible to discover the full extent to which Thomas May was engaged in journalistic activity on the side of Parliament during the Civil War', and, indeed, there are only a handful of extant printed works bearing May's name or unequivocally attributable to him.⁷²

⁶⁸ Both May and 'H. L.' sign the letter as 'Your very loving brother', which means 'brother' is being used as an affectionate term rather than an indicator of familial bond; *Certain Information*, A2r-A4r.

⁶⁹ Cullompton was just one of the numerous examples of public opposition to the commission: spontaneous rebellions arose in many towns and, indeed, whole counties, where the rural population fought back when royalist commissioners attempted to recruit soldiers; see Hutton, 53.

⁷⁰ Tuck, 150.

⁷¹ Letters with war reports were read almost daily, according to the House of Commons journal; see *HCCJ*, Volumes 2-4.

⁷² Wilkinson, 195.

The first time May signed one of these letters with his name was upon the publication of another field report, *A True Relation from Hull of the present state and conditions it is in, as it was written in a Letter from thence by one of good quality, to a Citizen in London, being dated the 19th of this instant Month of September, 1643; which Letter was brought into London the twenty eight of this Month*. The letter is signed ‘Your assured friend Tho[mas] May’ and it contains a report from the siege of Hull by the royalist earl of Newcastle against parliamentary forces, also mentioning the earl of Essex and Cromwell.⁷³ The subtitle ‘Ordered to be printed’ probably meant that it was officially sanctioned by Parliament and published on their orders.

Another report of a similar nature was identified by Wilkinson as having been written by May on account of its being mentioned and attributed to May in royalist publications and later sanctioned by Parliament as their official report.⁷⁴ The pamphlet was a relation of the battle of Newbury that was published anonymously on 7 October 1643 with the title *A True Relation of the Expedition of His Excellency, Robert Earl of Essex, for the Relief of Gloucester; with the Description of the Fight at Newbury*.⁷⁵ The mentions of May by political opponents and the fact that his name could popularly be linked with pamphleteering activity, not to mention Marvell’s derogatory epithet ‘gazette writer’ in his poem ‘Tom May’s Death’, are proof that he must have been much more active than the number of works attributed to him would suggest.

The first explicit mention of his name can be found in *Mercurius Aquaticus*, a royalist paper published at Oxford and born in response to the parliamentarian *Mercurius Britannicus*.⁷⁶

⁷³ *True Relation from Hull*, A2r-A4r.

⁷⁴ Wilkinson, 195-197; the fact that at least two royalist writers attributed an account of the battle of Newbury to May makes it more than likely that he did, indeed, pen one. This, however, renders the timeline problematic, for it would have been highly impractical for May to travel from the northern town of Hull to Newbury, in the south, in less than a couple of weeks, especially with the city of Hull’s being under siege by the royalists. Since both relations are written in the first-person plural (‘we marched’, ‘we found’), it is implied that May was a direct witness in both circumstances. As only the relation from Hull is signed with May’s name, however, I tend to believe that he was physically there and not at Newbury. Nevertheless, it is possible that the description of the battle of Newbury was not a first-hand account by May, but rather an embellished summary of other accounts, with which May was tasked because of his credentials as a historian; this would explain why no less than two royalist papers thought him responsible for it and concurrently accused him of political bias.

⁷⁵ *True Relation of the Expedition*, A2r-C4r.

⁷⁶ Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*, 190. *Britannicus* was itself an answer to the royalist *Mercurius Aulicus*.

In *Aquaticus*, John Taylor opens the pamphlet as follows: ‘Be it known to all people whom these presents shall come that I, Thorny Aylo, Water-Poet Laureate (if my place be not sequestered for the use of Tho[mas] May for his poetical relation of his Excellency’s victory at Newbury, and more poetical interpretation of *Touch not Mine Anointed*).’⁷⁷ May is then mentioned again later in the same pamphlet, where he is accused of being the main man behind *Britanicus*: ‘Tom May the contriver and chief engineer, but that I thought he was better at translation than invention.’⁷⁸ Although Wilkinson rightfully points out that Taylor was mistaken in believing May to be the author of *Touch Not Mine Anointed* (long title: *A Vindication of Psalm 105.15 (Touch Not Mine Anointed, and Do My Prophets no Harm) from Some False Glosses Lately Otruded on it by Royalists; Proving That This Divine Inhibition Was Given to Kings, Not Subjects*), really written by William Prynne in 1642, the very fact that he was thought to be behind its publication reveals that May must have been a prominent figure in the production of Parliament propaganda.⁷⁹ The relation on the battle of Newbury is also attributed to him by the anonymous author of the royalist paper *Mercurius Vapulans*, published in November 1643. After enumerating a series of parliamentary satirists, the author writes: ‘Another though he calls not himself Mercury, yet is Majanatus, who, failing of the laureate wreath, envies the crown itself and puts his fictions into grave pose, as if he stood to be City Chronicler; and sure however poets have got an ill name, I had rather believe in the supplement of Lucan than in the relation of the battle at Newbury.’⁸⁰

May was referenced in royalist publications – not individually but rather as part of groups of parliamentary propagandists – at least twice more in 1644, and in turn was defended from slander by the parliamentarian John Booker in yet another pamphlet.⁸¹ That year, he also wrote

⁷⁷ Taylor, *Mercurius Aquaticus*, A2r.

⁷⁸ Taylor, *Mercurius Aquaticus*, B2r.

⁷⁹ Wilkinson, 198.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Wilkinson, 196.

⁸¹ Wilkinson, 195-196.

another report from Hull titled *A Particular List of Divers of the Commanders and Officers Taken Prisoners at Marston Moor near York (Otherwise Called Hesham Moor); Also a Relation of Some Remarkable Passages in the Fight, as It Is Sent Up in a Letter From Hull Dated the Sixth of July, 1644*; this time, the letter is not signed with his full name but with his initials.⁸² This publication helps to draw a timeline of May's whereabouts between 1642 and 1644: according to the information that can be surmised from his letters, from about July 1642 to at the very least July 1644 he was away from London, always on the move, following parliamentary generals. At some point, however, he must have returned to the capital, for on 1 February 1645 he published anonymously a satirical pamphlet entitled *The Character of a Right Malignant*.⁸³ This is to be read primarily as an attack on moderates, in that they purport to support Parliament, but in fact only love a Parliament that 'claims no power at all.'⁸⁴ May's target are moderate Londoners, who are framed as 'crypto-royalists' and whose position was regarded by May as contradictory, inconstant, and ambivalent.⁸⁵

Right around this time – the volume was entered in the Stationers' Register on 30 January 1645, though it came out on 11 February – May was among the subjects of an anonymous pamphlet called *The Great Assises Holden in Parnassus by Apollo and His Assessors*.⁸⁶ There, the author conjures a fictional scenario in which twelve renowned poets and playwrights are asked to rule against several London newspapers. May is summoned within a group comprising himself, Carew, and Davenant, 'Renowned poets all, and men of worth, / If wit may pass for worth.'⁸⁷ May is then asked to pass judgment on *Mercurius Aulicus*, a royalist paper, but the

⁸² *Particular List*, A4v.

⁸³ For the exact date, see Thomason, 360.

⁸⁴ *Right Malignant*, A1v.

⁸⁵ Raymond, 220-221.

⁸⁶ *Stationers' Register 1640-1708*, Volume 1, 147. The poem has been erroneously attributed to George Withers, though that is no longer accepted by scholars; attribution remains uncertain. See Raymond, 210.

⁸⁷ *Great Assises*, B4r.

paper objects to the legitimacy of May as a juror and presents him with an accusation in turn (the subject of these lines is Aulicus, the paper):

But he withal exhibits a denial
Against a juror, for his suit it was
That May on his arraignment might not pass,
For though a poet he must him confess,
Because his writings did attest no less,
Yet he desired he might be set aside
Because he durst not in his truth confide;
Of May among twelve months he well approved,
But May among twelve men he never loved,
For he believed that out of private spite
He would his conscience strain t'undo him quite.
He likewise of offences him accused,
Whereby his King Apollo was abused,
And with malicious arguments attempts
To prove him guilty of sublime contempts,
But chiefly he endeavoured to conclude
That he was guilty of ingratitude.⁸⁸

May protests against Aulicus' attacks and responds, 'If by just proofs (said he) thou canst evince / That I have been ungrateful to my prince, / Then let me from these groves be now exiled / To Scythian snows or into deserts wild'; Apollo intervenes, defending May from an accusation he dismisses as being born 'from mere malice.'⁸⁹ The fact that May was pitted against a royalist newspaper is further proof that his name, in the first years of the civil war, was systematically associated with pamphleteering activity for the side of Parliament. After *The Character of a Right Malignant* and this mention in *The Great Assises Holden in Parnassus*, the month of May 1645 marks the first time May can be placed in London with any certainty after 1640. The

⁸⁸ *Great Assises*, C3r-C3v.

⁸⁹ *Great Assises*, C4r.

following section will attempt to reconstruct the start of his official collaboration with Parliament and the formalisation of his role as secretary.

Although the numerous explicit allusions to his name (not to mention the oblique ones that are more difficult to identify) indicate that he must have been a very prolific propagandist, we must be missing a much larger part of May's contribution to parliament's war efforts. Nevertheless, the works in support of Parliament published between 1642 and 1645 must have emboldened him to request direct financial backing for his efforts. Due to the lack of personal information contained in the letters available to us, it is impossible to draw firm conclusions concerning his monetary status at the time. However, losing royal patronage must have proved a significant blow to the finances of a poet whose hereditary prospects had been quashed upon the death of his destitute father and who had started petitioning for sponsors as early as 1627. Although the 1630s appear to have been a relatively prosperous decade for May, it can be safely assumed that royal support stopped shortly after the publication of the *Supplementum* and, in any case, certainly before July 1642; how May sustained himself in the years immediately following his loss of royal employment is difficult to say. It is possible that he received some form of compensation for his propagandistic efforts, either from Parliament directly or from individual members; in any case, if he did, none of it is recorded in the Calendar of State Papers Domestic or in any other official capacity.

The first registered mention of May in official documents is dated 31 May 1645, when the journal of the House of Commons records that May petitioned for a paid post, namely the office of remembrancer of the first fruits.⁹⁰ He was ignored in this instance, but received formal recognition just over a month later when he was tasked, along with John Sadler and Henry Parker, with rearranging and publishing the king's private correspondence intercepted after the

⁹⁰ Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*, 89; *H CJ*, Volume 4, 31 May 1645.

royal defeat at Naseby in mid-June.⁹¹ In truth, the committee had been set up as early as 26 June, and on this occasion May was simply added to the pre-existing team; Peacey speculates that this was due to a desire to monitor Parker closely by his political rivals in Parliament, which prompts the question of just how much input May really had on the final pamphlet, published just a week later on 14 July.⁹² Conversely, R. E. Maddison believes that the bulk of the work, namely the sorting of the letters and the long commentary attached to them, would have been undertaken by May and Parker.⁹³

In any case, their combined efforts resulted in a publication that would prove ‘the most famous and effective example of a parliamentarian campaign to discredit Charles’: *The King’s Cabinet Opened, or Certain Packets of Secret Letters and Papers Written with the King’s Own Hand, and Taken in his Cabinet at Naseby Field, June 14, 1645, by Victorious Sir Thomas Fairfax*.⁹⁴ The subtitles further elaborate the contents of the letters – ‘Wherein many mysteries of State, tending to the justification of that cause, for which Sir Thomas Fairfax joined battle that memorable day are clearly laid open; together with some annotations thereupon’ – and announce that the pamphlet was ‘Published by Special Order of the Parliament.’ Although not necessarily validating Maddison’s opinion that they were the two chief contributors to the pamphlet, May and Parker were also the individuals responsible for submitting it to the Stationers’ Register, in which an entry dated 9 July 1645 reads: ‘Entered ... by special command under the hands of Master Hen[ry] Parker and Master Tho[mas] May, secretaries, and Master Miller, warden, a book entitled *The King’s Cabinet Opened, or...*’⁹⁵ Here May is formally identified as ‘secretary’ in print for the first time.

⁹¹ Rivett, *Thomas May’s Histories*, 167. The entry in the journal reads: ‘Resolved ... That Mr Thomas May shall be desired to join with Mr Sadler and Mr Henry Parker in the preparing and setting forth the declaration upon the treaty at Uxbridge: the letters intercepted with the declaration, or observations upon it; the great declaration to the world; to set forth the justness of the cause undertaken and maintained by the parliament’; see *H CJ*, Volume 4, 7 July 1645.

⁹² Peacey, ‘The Exploitation of Royal Correspondence’, 217.

⁹³ Maddison, 5.

⁹⁴ White, ‘Parliament, print, and disinformation’, 735.

⁹⁵ *Stationers’ Register 1640-1708*, Volume 2, 181.

This publication came as a result of the seizing of the letters after the battle of Naseby. The letters were brought to London and about 150 were read in Parliament on 23 June; in the days that followed, a committee was tasked with making a relevant selection subsequently to be read publicly and eventually published.⁹⁶ As Rivett notes, May provides an account of these events in his 1650 *Breviary of the History of Parliament*, without mentioning his personal involvement: ‘The king’s letters taken at Naseby were publicly read in London before a great assembly of citizens ... and leave was given to as many as pleased ... to peruse them all, out of which a selected bundle were printed by command of the Parliament.’⁹⁷ In the small volume, the letters are prefaced by a four-page epistle in which the authors explain parliament’s reasons for publishing the king’s correspondence. The preface is followed by the individual letters, then by a fourteen-page series of polemical ‘Annotations.’

Again, the extent to which May participated in the publication is difficult to ascertain. Maddison believes that he was mainly concerned with the sorting and arranging of the letters themselves, without much input into preface and annotations, which he attributes to Parker.⁹⁸ It is certainly true that the style is much more polemical and aggressively biased than what was, and would be, customary for May, and it is likewise true that the author of the preface makes a reference to religious scripture (‘as the Psalmist speaks’), which May is not known ever to have done.⁹⁹ The writer of the preface does make a comment in which he invites the public to find in the letters, above all, ‘what affection the king bears to his people’; this sentiment appears to mirror the concern, as already observed above, expressed by May in his *Observations*, in which he writes that ‘the adequate object of a prince his love should be the whole people.’¹⁰⁰ However, aside from this small reference, it is problematic to attribute the paternity of either the preface

⁹⁶ Peacey, ‘The Exploitation of Royal Correspondence’, 215.

⁹⁷ *Breviary*, 1650, I4v; Rivett, *May’s Histories*, 243.

⁹⁸ Maddison, 5.

⁹⁹ *King’s Cabinet Opened*, A3r.

¹⁰⁰ *King’s Cabinet Opened*, A3r; *Observations*, A2v.

or the annotations to May, which makes me partly agree with Maddison and further speculate that May's role might have extended to the editing and reviewing of his colleagues' work.

All in all, whilst of very little significance from a literary standpoint, *The King's Cabinet Opened* marked the official start of May's formal collaboration with Parliament and role as secretary. Its political impact was huge in several ways. In the months following its publication and as late as 1647, it spawned a series of counterattacks by royalists, both in prose and verse, mostly printed at Oxford, which was under royalist control at the time.¹⁰¹ Its importance is also registered in the attested reactions by contemporaries; more importantly, the pamphlet prejudiced all chances of peaceful negotiations between the two parties at war, effectively forcing a diplomatic solution out of the way. The main reason behind the success and topicality of *The King's Cabinet Opened* lies in the fact that, among the 'wild and extravagant papers' dominating the political discourse at the time, it proved 'too precise, too clearly founded upon documents of irreproachable origin' to attract any substantial or credible rebuttal.¹⁰²

This successful coup of propaganda translated to a continued employment of May by Parliament that lasted until his death.¹⁰³ The next mention of May in public records is dated 19 January 1646: it is another commission, this time alongside Sadler only, to collect a series of letters and publish a declaration 'for vindicating to the world the honour of the Parliament in

¹⁰¹ Titles include Anonymous, *Some Observations upon Occasion of the Publishing [of] their Majesties Letters* (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield, 1645); Anonymous, *A Satyr; Occasioned by the Author's Survey of a Scandalous Pamphlet Intituled, The King's Cabinet Opened* (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield, 1645); Anonymous, *A Letter, in which the Arguments of the Annotator, and three other Speeches upon their Majestie's Letters Published at London, are Examined and Answered* (Oxford, 1645); Edward Symmons, *A Vindication of King Charles: or, a Loyal Subjects Duty, manifested in Vindicating his Sovereign from those Aspersiones cast upon Him by certain persons, in a scandalous Libel, Entitled, The Kings Cabinet Opened: And published (as they say) by Authority of Parliament* (London, 1647).

¹⁰² Maddison, 6-7.

¹⁰³ Ironically, as the civil war progressed, his distant cousin sitting in Parliament, also named Thomas May, suffered the consequences of his royalist allegiance. An entry in the House of Commons journal dated 9 July 1646 records a hefty fine being paid by this Thomas May because 'he was a member of this House, and had the command of a troop of horse against the parliament'; the royalist May was subsequently pardoned 'for his delinquency'; see *H CJ*, Volume 4, 9 July 1645.

this great cause of religion and liberty undertaken and maintained by the Parliament.’¹⁰⁴ This entry also contains the first and only record of May’s salary in his years of service for Parliament:

Ordered ... That the sum of two hundred pounds *per annum* pension be paid to Mr Sadler and Mr May, secretaries for the Parliament; to each of them, during their lives, out of the king’s, queen, and prince’s revenue, to be paid quarterly; the first payment thereof to commence and be accounted from the five-and-twentieth day of December last.

Ordered ... That the sum of two hundred pounds be forthwith advanced and paid, by the committee of the revenue, to Mr Sadler and Mr May, to each of them one hundred pounds, for the pains they have taken in the service, and by the command, of the Parliament.¹⁰⁵

The next mention in public records is dated 13 April 1646, when May and Sadler were tasked ‘to prepare and set forth a declaration or declarations to undeceive the people’ in response to ‘two scandalous books’ that had appeared on the market.¹⁰⁶ These were two treatises by Scottish polemicist George Buchanan; May and Sadler drafted their declaration swiftly and on 17 April it was approved to be printed, after Parliament discussed some of its clauses.¹⁰⁷

A curious interlude in this slew of political publications deserves to be mentioned. In 1646, May was among the six who contributed a poem upon the publication of James Shirley’s *Poems*. As briefly mentioned above, Shirley had campaigned for the royalists between 1642 and 1644, before returning to London and abstaining from taking sides again. In the poem, which reads as more sincere than most of his other dedicatory verses, May praises Shirley’s poetry, stating that although theatre is now ‘fitly silenced’ by Parliament, ‘it was not fit / We

¹⁰⁴ *H CJ*, Volume 4, 19 January 1646.

¹⁰⁵ *H CJ*, Volume 4, 19 January 1646; 200£ in 1650 would be equivalent to about 20,000£ in 2024. See <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/> (last accessed 20 January 2024).

¹⁰⁶ *H CJ*, Volume 4, 13 April 1646.

¹⁰⁷ *H CJ*, Volume 4, 17 April 1646; Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*, 57.

quite should lose such monuments of wit / As stowed from thy terse pen.’¹⁰⁸ The dedication could simply be a testament to the extent of May’s friendship with Shirley (also born in 1596), which might have dated back to their time at Gray’s Inn. However, the fact that May, by 1646 a notorious parliamentarian, would choose to compliment a suspected royalist’s publication with his poem might perhaps be an indication that he had not grown so detached from artistic circles as his later detractors would make him out to be.

5.4 The History of the Parliament of England

The most substantial product of May’s collaboration with Parliament materialised, in 1647, in the form of a prose history, *The History of the Parliament of England*. All evidence indicates that the volume was written, or at the very least published, by order of Parliament, which indubitably fuelled the accusations of duplicity and moral ‘prostitution’ he was and would be subject to for centuries to come. When observed through an impartial lens, May’s *History* is in fact the fine work of a fine propagandist, who was fully aware how best to utilise history and present facts to serve a narrative. This section is concerned with the analysis of May’s greatest prose work.

The volume was entered in the Stationers’ Register on 19 February 1647. The entry reads: ‘Entered ... under the hands of Master Langley and Master Whitaker ... a book called *The history of the parliament of England with the last civil war*; written by order and command of the noble houses of Par[liament], by Tho[mas] May Esq[uires].’¹⁰⁹ The *imprimatur* on the back of the title page of the printed book that judges it ‘an impartial truth’ and clears it for publication is signed John Langley and dated 7 May 1647. The volume appears to have been eventually

¹⁰⁸ Shirley, *Poems*, A5r.

¹⁰⁹ *Stationers’ Register 1640-1708*, Volume 2, 263.

published a short while later, for a record in the House of Commons journal dated 14 May reveals that it was yet to be printed by that date: ‘The question was propounded that whereas Thomas May Esquire hath written a book intituled *The History of the Parliament of England, etc.*, which he intends to print and publish, it is ordered that no man shall print or reprint the same, or any part thereof, without the said author’s special licence.’ The question was then put to the vote: because it reached a tie (33 in favour and 33 against), it required the speaker to vote, too; having the latter voted no, the request was dismissed.¹¹⁰

May’s *History of Parliament* was eventually published by Moses Bell for George Thomason with the title *The History of the Parliament of England which began November the third, 1640; With a short and necessary view of some precedent years*; May’s name is given in full and accompanied by the qualifier ‘Secretary for the Parliament’, and the author’s name is followed by the subtitle ‘Published by Authority.’ Then, in somewhat of a departure from May’s habit of inserting a quotation from an existing classical work, there is a Latin motto that appears to be May’s own invention, ‘Tempora mutantur. Mutantur homines. Veritas eadem manet’, which coats the account that follows with a claim of historical truthfulness.¹¹¹

The *History of Parliament* was probably composed following the royalist defeat and subsequent surrender of Charles, at a time of ‘transitional politics’ during which Parliament and the defeated king were attempting to negotiate a ‘peaceful and longstanding settlement.’ As Rivett observes, May evidently wrote with a view to a relatively smooth resolution of the conflict and the enduring survival of the Stuart monarchy, offering a contribution to the political debate by way of historical precedents and justifications. May (or anyone else at the time) could not imagine that a second iteration of the civil war was about to break out the following year,

¹¹⁰ *H CJ*, Volume 5, 14 May 1647. As the discussion that took place, if there was any, is not recorded in the journal, we do not know on what grounds the request was refused.

¹¹¹ ‘Times change. Men change. Truth remains the same.’

nor that England would soon come to be a republic, if a short-lived one; by all appearances, the richly decorated folio-sized volume was intended as ‘a foundational historical statement of parliament’s recent past’ and as the basis for future political discussion.¹¹² A political analysis of the text, then, cannot overlook the historical framework in which it was conceived, nor can one pass judgement on it based on the eventual outcome of the civil war and Charles’ execution; the impression that May was advocating in favour of a parliamentary monarchy rather than a government with republican features should not therefore be surprising.

The prose narrative is preceded by an eight-page preface in which May shares with the reader his professional ethics and the difficulties he encountered while writing about a civil war while it was still ongoing. At the beginning, he asserts that his guiding principle will be ‘truth’ (‘I will only profess to follow that one rule: truth’), and he vows to steer clear of rhetorical ploys to obfuscate the truth to the point of falsehood; at the same time, he admits that the subject of his work prevents him from being entirely objective (‘it is my misfortune to undertake such a subject, in which to avoid partiality is not very easy’). May proclaims the importance of writing such a history for the sake of his countrymen, rather than for continental readers, for the current situation appears to be more often misunderstood by Englishmen than foreigners. He then notes that it would be impossible to convey truthful information about both sides when writing from a single point of view, particularly as concerns battles and war counsels. In a bid for transparency, he then admits to having been, during the war, ‘in the quarters and under the protection of the parliament’, and that this perspective has inevitably informed his account, particularly as concerns ‘whatsoever is briefly related on the soldiery ... towards the end of this book’ (which, as shall be seen, roughly covers the events from October 1642 to September 1643, when May was following parliamentary troops). He claims, nevertheless, to have

¹¹² Rivett, *May’s Histories*, 169.

restricted his account to no more than ‘what the truth of story must require’ and that ‘if those that write on the other side will use the same candour, there is no fear but that posterity may receive a full information concerning the unhappy distractions of this kingdom.’¹¹³

This long preface is followed by the book proper. The *History of Parliament* is structured differently from all of May’s previous historical pursuits. It comprises three books of roughly the same length but made up of a varying number of chapters. The narrative is prefaced by a summary containing book and page numbers, as well as a short synopsis, for all individual chapters; this synopsis is also repeated before the start of each chapter within the volume.

Book 1 (nine chapters, 119 total pages) is Lucanian in spirit and ‘mythologises tyrants.’¹¹⁴ It opens with a short overview of the reign of Elizabeth I – which is profusely praised for its approaches to foreign, religious, political, and internal matters – and then of James I, whose reign could have been equally impressive ‘if he had only gone fairly on in that way which Queen Elizabeth had made plain for him’ and if he had not ‘despised and abused’ Parliament.¹¹⁵ This seemingly (within the scope of the civil war) irrelevant paragraphs set the tone of the whole book and introduce the thesis informing the entire volume: in May’s *History*, Parliament is designated as ‘the continual custodian of English liberty’; consequently, successful governments are dependent on a balanced relationship between it and the monarch.¹¹⁶ The duke of Buckingham’s ascent carries the narrative to the start of Charles I’s reign, immediately qualifying it as heavily and negatively impacted by royal favourites. The first book then covers the years up to around May 1641 and concludes with five pages in which May reflects upon the reasons for royalist MPs to have shifted their allegiance from Parliament to the king. To aid his

¹¹³ *History of Parliament*, A3r-B2v.

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 344.

¹¹⁵ *History of Parliament*, C2v. As observed by Pocock, the royalist Clarendon later remarked that ‘he saw no need to go back to the reign of Elizabeth’ to discuss the origins of the civil war, no doubt with May’s *History* in mind; see Pocock, ‘May and the narrative of Civil War’, 117.

¹¹⁶ Rivett, *May’s Histories*, 192.

reasoning, he purports to use an anonymous pamphlet, which he quotes integrally; whether this anonymous author really existed or, as J. G. A. Pocock speculates, was a way for May to express his own opinion, we do not know.¹¹⁷ However, I am inclined to agree with Pocock, not least because the pamphlet shares May's fundamental concerns with tyrannical abuses of power, concerns that – as discussed in this thesis – he had been voicing more or less explicitly since the 1620s. As Pocock summarises, according to May, parliament's war 'was not against the king but against his evil counsellors; against the king only in so far as he had placed himself in the hands of those counsellors; against the king in his natural person so long as it was unnaturally separated from his political person, which could be manifested only in unity with his Parliament.'¹¹⁸ Although, as has been and will be discussed, May eventually joined the more radical fringes of parliamentarism, his brand of 'republicanism' until the composition of the *History* had been favouring a parliamentary monarchy, and he was evidently still harbouring hope that the conflict would not escalate further.¹¹⁹

Book 2 (six chapters, 128 pages) is mostly concerned with detailing the negotiations and bluffing which eventually gave rise to open hostilities.¹²⁰ It reprises the narrative from the latter half of 1641, with the Irish rebellion, and takes it up to the Commission of Array; among other events, this book contains the detailed description of the royalists' attempts to lay siege to the town of Hull, which we know May witnessed personally. As Pocock notes, May's greatest concern is not necessarily the abuses at the hands of certain individuals, but 'the vacuum of

¹¹⁷ Pocock, 'May's narrative of the Civil War', 127. Rivett, too, was unable to locate the pamphlet; see Rivett, *May's Histories*, 186n76.

¹¹⁸ Pocock, 'May and the narrative of Civil War', 127.

¹¹⁹ I put 'republicanism' in quotation marks because I am hesitant to apply modern political descriptors to May's attitudes towards systems of government. One of the reasons is that I doubt May would have used the term to define his political inspirations, the Commonwealth, or, indeed, any form of government he was familiar with: although May makes frequent use of the adjective 'public' with (apparently exclusively) positive connotations, the word 'republic' or any other declination of it do not appear to feature in any of his political works or relevant translations (*Pharsalia*, *Continuation*, *Supplementum*, *History of Parliament*, *Breviary*); whenever he used 'res publica' in the Latin *Breviarium*, he appears to have translated it as 'Commonwealth.' Although I do agree with Norbrook's general attitude that May's allegiance and political thoughts before and after Charles' death would count him among today's republicans, I prefer the label of 'parliamentarian' because it is the one he probably would have chosen himself.

¹²⁰ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 344.

power itself, the physical space between king and Parliament growing wider as the king moved north.¹²¹

Book 3 (six chapters, 115 pages) opens with the two factions gathering armies in the field.¹²² Here May recounts the first armed clash at Edgehill on 23 October 1642, which was ultimately inconclusive, and takes the opportunity to pass his judgement on those who had waited until that point to declare their allegiance and then chosen the king's side because they thought he was more likely to win:

For the greatest gentlemen of divers counties began then to consider of the king as one that in possibility might prove a conqueror against the Parliament; and many of them, who before as neuters had stood at gaze, in hope that one quick blow might clear the doubt and save them the danger of declaring themselves, came now in, and readily adhered to that side where there seemed to be least fears and greatest hopes, which was the king's party; for on the Parliament side the encouragements were only public, and nothing promised but the free enjoyment of their native liberty; no particular honours, preferments, or estates of enemies; and on the other side, no such total ruin could be threatened from a victorious Parliament ... And how much private interest will oversway public nations, books of history, rather than philosophy, will truly inform you; for concerning human actions and dispositions, there is nothing under the sun which is absolutely new.¹²³

Although interpretations of historical or literary works according to their author's personal life should not be indulged too frequently, it is tempting to read the passage as a response to May's critics, who had been accusing him for a few years of 'prostituting his pen' – to borrow an expression from Clarendon's biography of May – to the services of Parliament. Here May dispenses very harsh opinions about moderates or men who chose to fight for the king out of perceived convenience and who finally switched sides in October, whereas he had been actively campaigning for Parliament since at the very least July. After this harsh attack (in fact, harsher

¹²¹ Pocock, 'May and the narrative of Civil War', 128.

¹²² Pocock, 'May and the narrative of Civil War', 128.

¹²³ *History of Parliament*, Ddd3r-Ddd3v.

than the usual tone of the work, which is why I suspect that it was tinged by May's personal experience), the narrative is then reprised: it moves through parliament's defeats in early 1643 and ends with the victory at Newbury in September 1643.

In the very last paragraph, May teases a '*supplementum*' of his *History* covering the events that ensued: '[O]f [these events] ... there may be a larger discourse in the continuation of this history.'¹²⁴ This continuation, however, never appeared. Pocock observes that May's next known historical works, the *Breviarium* and *Breviary*, are constructed 'along different lines' and cannot therefore be said to fulfil the promise made in the last paragraph of the *History*. It is possible, Pocock speculates, that the radical changes in political circumstances between 1647 and 1650 and the evolving conflicts between parliamentary factions forced May to abandon his project; lacking any concrete explanation, this hypothesis seems more than likely.¹²⁵

The *History* has the peculiar quality, for a historical prose work, of having been written while its subject was constantly mutating and its effects were still unfolding; it thus inevitably lacks the historical perspective crucial for a work of that scope, but at the same time offers a unique insight into contemporary attitudes to the first years of the civil war.¹²⁶ Although May cites precedents of historians, both Roman and European, who wrote about civil wars as they were happening, Pocock remarks that there is also a possibility that May is thereby voicing his own perplexity 'at finding himself in a civil war, when by definition the conventions of shared speech have broken down.'¹²⁷

Somewhat predictably, May imbues his prose history with quotations from his translation of the *Pharsalia* and his own *Continuation* from the very preface. As just an example, in

¹²⁴ *History of Parliament*, Ppp2r.

¹²⁵ Pocock, 135.

¹²⁶ The pamphlets published by May (and many others) in the preceding year do not share this exceptionality, because their very nature – that is, being a commentary on ongoing events – limits their scope.

¹²⁷ Pocock, 'May and the narrative of Civil War', 113.

describing the subject of the *History*, he writes: ‘The subject of this work is a civil war, a war indeed as much **more than civil**, and as full of miracle, both in the causes and effects of it, as was ever observed in any age; a war as cruel as **unnatural**’ (emphasis mine).¹²⁸ The very first line of May’s *Pharsalia* reads: ‘Wars **more than civil** on Emathian plains / We sing’; at the beginning of the third book of his *Continuation*, while lamenting the circumstances that led to a civil war, he writes that the earth drinks blood from the ‘**unnatural** wounds’ of fellow countrymen (emphasis mine).¹²⁹ Allusions to the classics, however, extend beyond verbal references. In his infamous satire on the poet, Andrew Marvell commented scathingly on May’s tendency to draw similarities between current topics and Roman history, no doubt with the recent *History* in mind:

Far from these blessed shades tread back again
 Most servile wit, and mercenary pen.
 Polydore, Lucan, Alan, Vandal, Goth,
 Malignant poet and historian both.
 Go seek the novice statesmen, and obtrude
 On them some Roman-cast similitude,
 Tell them of liberty, the stories fine,
 Until you all grow consuls in your wine.
 Or thou, dictator of the glass, bestow
 On him the Cato, this the Cicero;
 Transferring old Rome hither in your talk,
 As Bethlem’s House did to Loreto walk,
 Foul architect that hadst not eye to see
 How ill the measures of these states agree;
 And who by Rome’s example England lay,
 Those but to Lucan do continue May.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ *History of Parliament*, A3v.

¹²⁹ *Pharsalia*, 1627, A1r; *Continuation*, D6r.

¹³⁰ Marvell, *Miscellaneous Poems*, G2v. Incidentally, it appears that May did not compare anyone to either Cato or Cicero in his *History of Parliament*.

As Anthony Miller points out, Marvell himself was sometimes hypocritically guilty of the same sin he attributes to May, using Rome and Roman *topoi* to draw comparisons with current figures and events.¹³¹ However, John S. Coolidge observes a difference in their use of classical allusions, and posits that Marvell does not necessarily object to their use in itself, but rather to May's factious handling of them:

For example, when May compares the Earl of Strafford with Julius Caesar's agent, Curio, his explicit grounds of comparison are merely that both were able and potentially good men whose evil careers testify to the corrupting atmosphere of their times. He quotes Lucan's character of Curio—ostensibly in order to make this point. But if the reader is thereby caused to think of a further comparison between Strafford's master, Charles, and Curio's master, the villainous Caesar portrayed by Lucan, that implication is clearly not accidental. The secondary implications of May's comparisons always 'check out.' Whatever the immediate grounds for the similitude, there always turns out to be a further implication to the effect that Charles I is like one or another tyrannical Roman emperor. The motto on May's title page is 'Tempora mutantur. Mutantur homines. Veritas eadem manet', and he clearly understands that to mean that circumstances and men come and go but the characteristics of tyranny recur consistently. Thus ... he looks for extended correspondences between events and persons of one historical era and those of another in which the same basic phenomenon occurs.¹³²

Coolidge's remark offers us an image of May as an acute historian, able to observe and recognise recurring historical patterns. It also reaffirms what has been conjectured throughout this thesis, namely that May was an exceptional propagandist in that he was capable of presenting facts and hinting at implications without directly articulating them himself, ostensibly shielding his work from accusations of bias and making it appear as though the reader's inevitable conclusions were natural, rather than guided.

¹³¹ Miller, 171.

¹³² Coolidge, 112.

Thus, when talking about John Elliott, whose opposition to Charles' policies in the late 1620s and early 1630s had landed him in the Tower where he eventually died, May writes that Elliott was 'by the people in general applauded, though much taxed by the courtiers, and censured by some of a more politic reserve', just like, in his histories, Tacitus had condemned Thrasea Paetus.¹³³ May then breaks off and changes the subject, apparently making only a superficial comparison between the two men. In reality, Thrasea Paetus had been a defender of senatorial agency and, later, an outspoken opposer of emperor Nero's abuses of power, finally being put on trial and sentenced to death; the clear implication here, besides a veiled criticism of Tacitus' method, is a 'Roman-cast similitude' between Charles and Nero. As another instance of this manipulation of classical allusions, when lamenting 'how much private interest will oversway public nations', May invites the reader to turn to history books for examples, and he himself mentions Cassius Dio's account of the war between Brutus and Cassius against Octavian and Antony. 'In this war', he writes, 'one side fought to vindicate liberty, the other to bring in tyranny'; he then reinforces the point by stating again that Brutus and Cassius 'stood for liberty' and encouraged their army 'to fight for their ancient freedom and Roman laws', whereas Octavian and Antony 'stood for tyranny' and won their army's support by promising them 'power to rule over their own countrymen.' May concludes his extended comparison by leaving all obvious conclusions to readers, stopping just short of drawing them himself: 'Whether the parallel will in some measure fit this occasion or not, I leave it to the reader, and return to the narration.'¹³⁴

The importance and frequency of Roman parallels starts to decline once the narrative focus shifts to the major events of the civil war, and they are supplanted by 'a rapidly moving account of the operation of a tyranny and the resistance to it.' What remains unaltered is May's voice as 'an informed but removed observer', which, by way of subtle insinuations and

¹³³ *History of Parliament*, D3v.

¹³⁴ *History of Parliament*, Ddd3v-Ddd4r.

carefully placed emphasis, manages to convey his opinion ‘with apparent impartiality.’¹³⁵ The classicism returns in the third book, in which May appears no longer as a committed Lucan or Tacitus, but as the famously impartial Cassius Dio, achieving ‘a kind of majesty, definitely still a republican one’, through a selective and careful use of history.¹³⁶

History, therefore, could be used as a repository of examples and a teacher, rather than a predictor of future events. As with the *Observations*, May rejects the idea of cyclical history, according to which certain events are bound to follow certain others and war is bound to follow peace; this was the view of some other contemporary historians, such as M. P. Clement Walker and Thomas Fuller. For May, there is ‘no sense of inevitability’, and events are simply dependent on ‘people’s state of sin’, which, in the case of the civil war at hand, had been excessive superstition, profanity (and popery), pride; Parliament, whose role was ‘to bring Charles to his senses by acutely pointing out his errors and sin’, had failed in its endeavour because it had been divested of its powers.¹³⁷

Perhaps due to its expensive format, or perhaps to its narrow frame of historical relevance in that its topicality dramatically waned in the aftermath of Charles’ execution, the *History of Parliament* was never reprinted. Nevertheless, in time it turned out to be the work for which May would largely come to be remembered besides his Lucan. The *History* would also serve as inspiration for subsequent political works of the like of John Milton’s *Eikonoklastes*, which is concerned with providing a justification for the execution of Charles I. Although Milton does not acknowledge his debt to May in the list of sources he provides, George W. Whiting has observed that the influence of the *History* on the *Eikonoklastes* is considerable, and that, in May, Milton must have found not only ‘something of a kindred spirit’, but also a ‘reliable

¹³⁵ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 343-344.

¹³⁶ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 344.

¹³⁷ Wong, 766-767.

historical guide.¹³⁸ It is possible that May's *History* also inspired Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, which he began in 1646 but did not finish until the late 1660s.¹³⁹ Likewise, echoes of May's *History* can be traced in Thomas Hobbes' *Behemoth*, particularly in the fourth and last dialogue which, Smith observes, could be said to be 'a reverse version of May's *History*.'¹⁴⁰

Despite its lack of editorial success after 1647, the *History* managed to attain its own brand of recognition.¹⁴¹ It also inspired two of his subsequent publications, the Latin and English *Breviary*, and it arguably played a crucial role in May's being remembered as the historian of Parliament. An intriguing passage in the *Calendar of State Papers* dated 18 November 1650, a few days after May's death, appears to suggest that May might have been at work on the continuation he teased in the epilogue of his *History* at the time of his death. The record, which is among the dispositions ordered by Parliament upon May's death, reads: 'Mr Chaloner, Mr Martin, and Sir James Harrington to consider of some fit person to carry on the writing of the history of Parliament.'¹⁴² A similar entry dated 1 January 1651 reads: 'The

¹³⁸ Whiting, 75-76. Whiting provides an extensive and thorough list of examples that show that Milton's debt to May was both in terms of historical fact as well as phrasing.

¹³⁹ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 345.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 354.

¹⁴¹ As a natural consequence of its being a political history, it also attracted a share of detractors. In a satire on the Earl of Pembroke's death in January 1650, the writer imagines a fictional testament written by Pembroke; one of the items is bequeathed to May: 'To Tom May (whose pate I broke heretofore at a masque) I give five shillings. I intended him more, but all that have seen his history of the parliament think five shillings too much'; see Anonymous, *The Last Will of Pembroke*, 3. In fact, May is referenced more than once in the innumerable satires produced upon Pembroke's death; curiously, when he is not explicitly named, there is mention of a 'Mistress May' – a lover – who supposedly took care of the elderly Pembroke in the last days of his life. A female May is mentioned here: 'May! Zounds – What May dost thou mean? / If my mistress the Lady May be here / To burn in thousands Hells I will not fear ... I had strong hopes the Lady May had been before / To keep me company and be my wh[ore]' (see Anonymous, *The Life and Death of Philip Herbert*, A3r-A3v). Of particular interest is this excerpt from another satire: 'I give unto Mistress May two diamond rings and a gold chain ... also I give and bequest unto her the said Mistress May, my dear concubine, 200£ in gold, to marry her to Tom my groom' (see Anonymous, *The Testament of Philip Herbert*, A3r). I could not find any information concerning any mistress of Pembroke's, although I did find rumours about Herbert's supposed homosexuality or bisexuality when he was one of James I's favourites (see Young, 29, 124). May's sexuality, on the other hand, is very obscure and hard to determine: he never married nor had issue, and, as seen in previous chapters, he is often vaguely described in posthumous biographies as 'debauched'. Is it possible that the Mistress May mentioned by satirist, in one instance in connection with a 'groom' called Tom (whom I could not otherwise identify), could be a crude mockery of May himself and a hint at a supposed homosexual relationship between him and Pembroke? The elements to reach a conclusive answer are, at present, too few; however, particularly given the coupled references to a 'May' and to a 'Tom', I do not find it entirely implausible that these satires might be referring to May, and I think this observation thus deserves inclusion in this thesis.

¹⁴² *Calendar of State Papers*, 1650, 432.

committee appointed to think of some fit person to succeed in carrying on of the history written by Mr May to report thereon; Sir Peter Wentworth added to that committee.¹⁴³ The disposition was not brought up again until October of the same year, when Parliament again discussed finding a ‘fit person to write the history of these times’; however, as no other such work from a parliamentary perspective ever emerged, it follows that Parliament must have failed to find a person capable of carrying on the work commenced by May.¹⁴⁴ It also shows that he was still actively working at the time of his death and that he probably had a number of unfinished papers and works that will never be recovered.

In 1648 and 1649, no works were printed under May’s name, though I think yet another controversial political pamphlet can be attributed to him with near certainty. On 16 October 1649, a highly polemical treatise was published by the title *An Anatomy of Lieut. Col. John Lilburne’s spirit and pamphlets, or, a vindication of these two honourable patriots, Oliver Cromwell, Lord Governor of Ireland, and Sir Arthur Haslerig, Knight Baronet, from the unworthy and false aspersions by him cast on them in two libels*.¹⁴⁵ The pamphlet is anonymous, but the dedication is addressed ‘To the right honourable House of Commons, the supreme authority of England’ and signed ‘Your honours’ most humble servant, T. M.’¹⁴⁶ John Lilburne was a writer and the main representative of the political group known as Levellers, as well as the theorist of the ‘freeborn rights’ movement. Firmly on the side of Parliament until 1645, he then started publishing pamphlets against certain MPs and circulating Levellers ideals, until he eventually abandoned Cromwell’s New Model Army; in early 1649, he was imprisoned for high treason and tried in November of the same year, when he was acquitted.¹⁴⁷ *An Anatomy of Lieut.*

¹⁴³ *Calendar of State Papers*, 1651, 1.

¹⁴⁴ *Calendar of State Papers*, 1651, xxiii.

¹⁴⁵ Thomason, 772.

¹⁴⁶ *Anatomy of Lilburne*, A2r-A4r.

¹⁴⁷ Sharp, 775-782.

Col. John Lilburne came out during Lilburne's imprisonment in the Tower, and it is perhaps the most ferocious attack written by May in his entire career. The movement of the Levellers is condemned as a whole as a treasonous group, threatening to undermine the stability of Parliament, and 'among all this popular and seditious gang, there is none hath more dishonoured this nation and contemned your [parliament's] authority than Lieutenant Colonel John Lilburne, their desperate and wretched instrument.'¹⁴⁸ This unbridled attack was in turn singled out by Lilburn himself, who, a few days later, replied with a letter defending himself and noting that 'a late pamphlet-scribbler and pretended vindicator of Sir Arthur Haslerig, said to be Mr Thomas May, the Council of State's Petitioner, renders me in his late false and lying book to be an atheist...'.¹⁴⁹ The ferocity with which May struck Lilburne is exceptional among his works, and it is probably consistent with the political turmoil that followed the execution of Charles, which evidently called for more stern propaganda. The twin *Breviarium* and *Breviary*, published a few months later, albeit much more moderate in their tone, can be said to share a similar attitude in wanting to preserve the newly acquired status quo and in deflecting potential seditions.

5.5 The *Breviarium* and *Breviary* and May's last published work

May's next two published works were again historiographies in prose, the *Breviarium*, in Latin, and the *Breviary*, in English. Once again, May wrote in Latin first for a wider audience and then translated himself into English for the benefit of his compatriots: according to the title page of the English *Breviary*, the volume was '[w]ritten in Latin ... and for the general good translated out of the Latin into English.' Because the *Breviary* appears to be an almost exact translation of the original *Breviarium*, I will examine them as if they were a single publication.

¹⁴⁸ *Anatomy of Lilburne*, A2v.

¹⁴⁹ Lilburne, *The Innocent Man*.

Though there is no trace of the *Breviarium* in the Stationers' Register, there is an entry dated 14 June 1650 for the *Breviary*: 'Entered ... a book called *A breviary of the history of the Parliament of England etc*, by Thomas May Esq.'¹⁵⁰ The *Breviarium* was printed by Charles Sumpter for Thomas Brewster in late March 1650 with the full title *Historiae Parlamenti Angliae Breviarium, Tribus partibus explicitum*, a subtitle describing the content of each of the three books, and the author's name as 'T. May.'¹⁵¹ The *Breviary* ensued, printed by Robert White for Thomas Brewster and Gregory Moule (full title *A Breviary of the History of the Parliament of England. Expressed in three parts*), with a subtitle specifying that it was a follow-up to the Latin version and crediting the author as 'T. M.', and another subtitle giving a brief synopsis of the three books. Both editions are rather plain, with no embellishments except a simple decoration heading each book, and do not include an index, a reference page, dedicatory poems, or prefaces of any kind. Unlike the relationship between *Continuation* and *Supplementum*, mistakenly believed to be the same text in two different languages, the two versions of the *Breviary* do seem to be nearly identical. Although I did not check the entire text for confirmation, each couple of random samples I compared appeared to be an almost exact translation, minus the necessary changes dictated by the different linguistic medium. By way of example, here is a comparison between three pairs of excerpts:

<p>Quadragesimum aetatis (decimum quintum ex quo regnare caeperat) annum agebat Carolus, cum indictum fuit hoc parliamentum: tot annos violatae (plusquam sub ullo regum) leges regni, oppressa populi libertas, et proculcata auctoritas ipsorum parlamentorum, quibus leges,</p>	<p>Forty years old was king Charles, and fifteen years had he reigned, when this Parliament was called: so long had the laws been violated (more than under any king), the liberties of the people invaded, and the authority of éarliament (by which laws and liberties are supported) trodden</p>
--	---

¹⁵⁰ *Stationers' Register 1640-1708*, Volume 1, 44.

¹⁵¹ George Thomason's catalogue of printed pamphlets gives 29 March as the date; see Thomason, 791.

libertatesque fulciuntur, paulatim Anglos under foot; which had by degrees much
irritassent.¹⁵² discontented the English nation.¹⁵³

Restaurato parlamento, constituta Urbis militia, The Parliament restored, the militia of London
dispositisque aliis praefecturis, Fairfaxius settled, and the other commands fitly disposed,
imperator Londino excessit.¹⁵⁴ the general Fairfax marched out of London.¹⁵⁵

Qua vero ratione, quibusve mediis eo demum But by what means, or what degrees, it came at
perventum, ut Carolus rex in iudicium tractus, last so far, as that the king was brought to trial,
damnatus, et capite plexus sit, quoniam tantae rei condemned, and beheaded, because the full
plena enarratio et indagatio historiam per se search and enarration of so great a business
efficiet, non erit huius opusculi. Et nos tantum would make an history by itself, it cannot well be
aequoris spatium permensi, vela contrahimus.¹⁵⁶ brought into this breviary; which having passed
over so long a time, shall here conclude.¹⁵⁷

Conceived to serve both a foreign audience, who would probably look at the events unfolding in England with a certain apprehension, and a local readership, almost as equally perturbed by the continuous shifts in the political climate of the age, this ‘double feature’ is helpful to understand and define the period of ideological turmoil that followed Charles’ execution. The *Breviary*, like many other efforts by Parliament to counter political attacks, sought ‘to introduce a historical narrative that would counter all those opposing Parliament and unify supporters in a politically divided Kingdom’ and to function as ‘a practical statement of definition that emphasised continuities in Parliamentary ethics and purpose.’¹⁵⁸ Although no formal record attests this, it is indeed possible that May was again working by order of Parliament, so as to produce an approved version of events to distribute in England and abroad as quickly as

¹⁵² *Breviarium*, A1v.

¹⁵³ *Breviary*, 1650, B1v.

¹⁵⁴ *Breviarium*, L5r.

¹⁵⁵ *Breviary*, 1650, M4r.

¹⁵⁶ *Breviarium*, O4r-O4v.

¹⁵⁷ *Breviary*, 1650, P4r.

¹⁵⁸ Rivett, *May's Histories*, 226.

possible. Indeed, as concerns the latter, Pocock speculates that May would have been unlikely to compose the work in Latin had he not been ordered to do so; as a consequence, he advised to approach it differently from the English text. Being written in Latin, the former would have been read by an erudite audience, far removed from the situation at hand, whereas the English *Breviary* would have been distributed among a more heterogeneous readership, involved in the civil war.¹⁵⁹

The mutated historical context (when compared to the *History*) can be perceived throughout the text. At first glance, May's approach to contemporary history is unchanged, in the sense that he exhorts readers to compare the account of the recent past they are reading with their first-hand experience of the preceding years, just like he invited parallels between the present and the classical past in the *History*.¹⁶⁰ As observed by Paleit, linguistic echoes of Lucan revive in May's vocabulary choices, particularly in the stress on the loss of liberty that had accompanied his previous translation of the *Pharsalia*; to May, 'the fall of ancient Roman liberty and the gradual encroachment of English freedoms always seemed virtually identical experiences.'¹⁶¹ However, historical analogies, so prevalent in the *History*, are all but absent from the *Breviary*, almost as if May wanted to emphasise the absolute novelty of the new form of government inaugurated by Parliament after the regicide.¹⁶² Moreover, inviting comparisons between the Roman republic and the current political situation might not have proved wise: whereas comparing the oppressed English Parliament to the defeated Pompey (or to Brutus and Cassius) and Charles to Julius Caesar was effective before 1649, reminding the reader of the fate of republican Rome in 1650 would have potentially achieved undesired results. Political opponents would have probably construed the death of Charles as the beginning of a period of

¹⁵⁹ Pocock, 'May's narrative of the Civil War', 136.

¹⁶⁰ Wong, 777.

¹⁶¹ Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*, 252.

¹⁶² Rivett, *May's Histories*, 229.

tyranny, just as the death of Caesar had translated to the birth of an even more oppressing regime.

Indeed, May's attitude towards the regicide is not spelled out; on the contrary, he seemingly avoids any mention of the execution of Charles in all his known political works published after 1650. As can be seen in the pairs of excerpts shown above, both accounts end with May's proclaiming that the trial and execution of the king would be deserving of a history book of their own, thus interrupting his narrative in the middle of November 1648. Amidst the mockery expressed in Marvell's satire 'Tom May's Death' was the author's gleeful delight that May had died before having a chance to write about the king's execution: 'Yet wast thou taken hence with equal fate / Before thou couldst great Charles his death relate.'¹⁶³ Yet, as evidenced by the closing paragraph of the two breviaries and as noted by Norbrook, this is patently false: May had indeed had the opportunity to relate Charles' death, but he 'had very conspicuously refrained from doing so' when there was 'no obvious reason why he could not.' In fact, his writings in general abstain from levying personal attacks at the king, even when May would have been in a privileged political position to write as he pleased. Indeed, Norbrook observes, this behaviour is clearly at odds with the widely believed claim that May was spurred to support Parliament out of personal spite, or years of writing political treatises would have provided the perfect opportunity to vent some of his personal frustration at the king.¹⁶⁴

Nonetheless (as mentioned in the section discussing the *Supplementum*), May made his opinion of the regicide subtly known to posterity through the expanded complaint of Calliope prefacing the revised 1650 edition of the English *Continuation*. The previously rather tame poem becomes infused with a sentiment that reflects, as Norbrook notes, 'the many defences of the regicide which presented it as a necessary sacrifice.'¹⁶⁵ So the 1650 poem reads: 'that stately

¹⁶³ Marvell, *Miscellaneous Poems*, G2v.

¹⁶⁴ Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 276-277.

¹⁶⁵ Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 228.

lay / Thou leftst unfinished. End it not until / The Senate's swords the life of Caesar spill; / That he, whose conquests gave dire Nero reign, / May as a sacrifice to thee be slain.'¹⁶⁶

The twin *Breviaries* demonstrate that, in 1650, May was still very much an asset to Parliament. On 2 July, the *Calendar of State Papers* records: 'The declaration of the Parliament of England, upon the marching of their army to Scotland, to be sent to Thomas May, to be translated into Latin, that it may be sent into foreign parts.'¹⁶⁷ Norbrook notes that the role of the writer was of secondary importance, because it appears that a committee of MPs had already prepared a draft and was only looking for a 'fit person' to pen the declaration.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, May was evidently the person to whom Parliament would naturally turn for historiography or propaganda-related matters, and it is apparent that, until at least a month and a half before he died, he was in good enough health to be writing consistently.

His last known publication – though printed anonymously – was a short treatise written to justify parliament's reasons for the campaign in Scotland and published on 29 September 1650 by 'G. D.' for Thomas Brewster and Gregory Moule with the title *The Changeable Covenant*.¹⁶⁹ Although anonymous, the pamphlet betrays some of May's linguistic and ideological tropes: when proclaiming that Parliament has 'fought for their laws and liberties against the king and those unnatural English which assisted him in that quarrel', it is easy to find parallels with the laws, liberty, and unnatural civil wars he referenced so many times throughout his oeuvre.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ *Continuation*, 1650, A4r.

¹⁶⁷ *Calendar of State Papers*, 1650, 228.

¹⁶⁸ Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 218n68.

¹⁶⁹ Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*, 267; for the exact date of publication, see Thomason, 813.

¹⁷⁰ *Changeable Covenant*, A2r.

5.6 May's death

Thomas May died on 13 November 1650 and was buried in the west-side of the north isle of Westminster Abbey, with a commemorative marble monument being placed over his grave.¹⁷¹ According to rumours that might have originated during the Restoration, he was found dead in the morning, dying as a consequence of 'tying his nightcap too close under his fat chin and cheeks, which choked him.'¹⁷² Aubrey also gave a similar account, attributing the mistake to May's intoxicated state: 'Came of his death after drinking with his chin tied with his cap (being fat); suffocated.'¹⁷³ A commentary on May's death was first infamously given in Andrew Marvell's long poem 'Tom May's Death.' Here Marvell immortalises May as a drunk ('Tom May ... did not know't ... where the Pope's Head, nor the Mitre lay, / Signs by which still he found and lost his way'), stutterer ('with foot as stumbling as his tongue'), 'mercenary pen', 'gazette writer', who does not deserve to rest in the company of Spencer and Chaucer.¹⁷⁴ An exemplary study of 'Tom May's Death' (a poem which, unfortunately, in time has largely become 'the main authority on Thomas May's life'), complete with an exposé of Marvell's hypocrisy and personal bias in attacking May, has been supplied by Norbrook, who went through every charge levied at May in the satire and examined it within the literary and political context of the 1640s.¹⁷⁵

Whether or not the rumours about May choking on his nightcap were true, his death was almost certainly unexpected. On 18 November, among the day's agenda, Parliament discussed a series of dispositions concerning May's funeral and estate that are worth transcribing in their entirety:

¹⁷¹ For the location of the grave from a contemporary account, see Fuller, 100.

¹⁷² Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume II, 296.

¹⁷³ Aubrey 2, 56.

¹⁷⁴ Marvell, *Miscellaneous Poems*, G2v.

¹⁷⁵ Norbrook, 271-280.

8. To desire Mr Chaloner to take care that the study and papers of Thomas May are secured for the use of Parliament, and Chaloner to peruse his papers, that such as he thinks fit may be preserved for the use of the state.

9. Mr Chaloner and Mr Marten to take care for the interment of Thomas May in a convenient place on the south side of the choir in Westminster Cathedral, and some convenient monument to be set up for him; the whole charge not to exceed 100*l.*, which is to be paid by Mr Frost.

11 [*sic*]. Mr Chaloner, Mr Marten, and Sir James Harington to consider of some fit person to carry on the writing of the history of Parliament.¹⁷⁶

The first point in particular indicates that the death was sudden, because it appears that May had no time to write a will and dispose of his belongings as he saw fit; additionally, it shows that he had no living relatives in London, or none that Parliament knew about. The fact that Parliament believed that May might possess some unfinished bits of writing or, as hinted by the third point, a draft of a continuation of his *History of Parliament*, is fascinating, and it reveals just how much of his work might have been lost.

The burial disposition was eventually carried out, and a white marble monument with an inscription by Marchamont Needham was affixed above May's grave. This plaque, however, is now forever lost: in September 1661, during the Restoration, May's body was disinterred and thrown in a pit in St Margaret's Churchyard, along with other parliamentarians; to add further insult to injury, when William Davenant (who had obtained the post of poet laureate in 1637) later died in 1668, he was buried in the spot where May had originally been placed.¹⁷⁷ The

¹⁷⁶ *Calendar of State Papers*, 1650, 432; the 'Mr Chaloner' and 'Mr Marten' were, respectively, Thomas Chaloner and Henry Marten, both regicides (in that they had signed Charles' death warrant) and both among May's 'intimate associate[s]'; see Worden, *Rump Parliament*, 260.

¹⁷⁷ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume II, 295. Not until 1880 did May receive a proper memorial plaque, which was placed where the original had been and which reads, 'Near this spot were buried William Twisse D.D. 1646, Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly. Thomas May 1650, Translator of Lucan and Secretary to the Long Parliament. William Strong 1654 – Stephen Marshall 1655 Parliamentary preachers. These were removed by Royal Warrant 1661.' A modern inscription financed by the Cromwell Association also records the names of those that were interred in St Margaret's Churchyard. See <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/thomas-may> (last accessed 18 January 2024).

marble monument was thereby destroyed; fortunately, Wood managed to preserve a transcription in his brief biography of May:

Quem Anglicana Respublica habuit vindicem, ornamentum literaria, secli sui Vatum celeberrimus, deliciae futuri, Lucanus alter plusquam Romanus, Historicus fidus, Equitis aurati filius primogenitus Thomas Maius h. s. e. Qui paternis titulis claritatis suae specimen usque adeo superaddidit, ut à supremo Anglorum senatu ad annales suos conscribendos fuerit ascitus. Tandem fide intemeratà Parlamento praestità, morte inopinà noctu correptus diem suum obiit id. Nov.

A libertatis humanae Angliae restitutae MDCLII

Aetatis suae LV

Hoc in honorem servi tam bene meriti, Parliament. Reipub. Angl. P. P.¹⁷⁸

[(Here lies) the avenger of the English Republic, a literary jewel, the most celebrated prophet of his age, the delight of the future, another Lucanus, greater than the Roman, a faithful historian, the firstborn son of Thomas May, Knight. He so far surpassed his paternal titles with the magnificence of his fame, that he was asked by the supreme senate of the English to write their annals. At last, with unwavering faith in the Parliament, he died an unexpected death at night on 13 November. By the restored human liberties of England, 1652. In the 55th year of his life. This in honour of a well deserving servant, through the agency of the Parliament of the Republic of England.]

Similar praise is given by Payne Fisher, who in 1684 writes: ‘Thomas May[,] that most memorable poet of his time, who (abstracted from his sullen siding with the late long parliament) hath done that for the honour of this nation was never paralleled by any English man before ... and though he died a bachelor without bodily issue, yet will he for ever live and be perpetuated to posterity in the lovely and lively issue of his brain.’¹⁷⁹ Although perhaps excessive in their celebrations (and certainly more flattering than May ever was in his honest praise of contemporaries), these tributes hint at what posthumous fame May might have enjoyed

¹⁷⁸ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume II, 295; it is unclear whether ‘1652’ is a typo by Wood or whether it maybe indicates the year the monument was placed beside May.

¹⁷⁹ Fisher, 103.

if his name had not been purged by vicious royalist commentators. Perhaps he still would not be included in any group of literary icons of the seventeenth century, but he would probably be deserving of a mention in multiple contexts. For starters, his name was relevant enough, in Caroline England, to be mentioned many times as the recipient of praise, derision, support, and even parody by contemporary writers, the majority of whom have received far more scholarly attention than him. His relationships with other early Stuart playwrights and poets contribute to paint the picture of a man involved with the most cultivated circles of intellectuals, whereas his acquaintances in the later years of his life place him at the heart of Caroline and Commonwealth politics. It is undeniable that May was one of the most relevant authors of the civil war: especially in a decade – the 1640s – when many of the Caroline playwrights were forced to abandon their dramatic pursuits, May was able to repurpose his talents, his interest in contemporary politics, and his profound understanding of history and its uses for the cause of Parliament. Indeed, May can certainly be counted as one of the most interesting examples of versatility in early Stuart England, with published plays, translations, verse and prose histories, poems, satires, and even groundbreaking texts such as an English *Continuation* of a classical text, a pursuit that had not been attempted by anyone to that extent. His oeuvre is a combination of projects about which he was personally and truly passionate, works commissioned by the king or Parliament, and ventures he probably attempted out of a desperate need for financial sustenance. It is precisely this multifaceted quality that makes May such a compelling character: amidst all these different avenues he walked throughout his life, with varying degrees of success and recognition, his true literary and political ethos is always discernible and always adapted – though never disowned – to best suit the subject, genre, and political circumstance. If not for the literary value of his works, May would certainly be deserving of attention for his chameleonic adaptability; at the same time, it would be unfair not to recognise his brilliance in

certain fields such as translation and historiography, as testified by the enduring influence that some of his works exerted throughout the centuries.

Conclusion

This thesis was conceived with a main objective: to offer a reassessment of the life and career of Thomas May. This reassessment had neither the aim to praise May's *oeuvre* beyond what he deserved, nor to agree with previous negative evaluations to which he had been subjected; essentially, I wanted to outline a profile that would be as complete and unbiased as possible and that would account for the most recent developments in the scholarship on the early Stuart period, especially the works focusing on May himself. To do so, I envisioned my thesis as a biography of the poet with a chronological approach, starting from the history of his family to his death in 1650, so that all external political and historical factors could be taken into account. In this conclusion I intend to highlight the most significant contributions that, in my opinion, this thesis adds to the discourse surrounding Thomas May, early Stuart literature and politics, and the reception of the classics.

In order better to produce a complete profile of May, I decided to start my research by tracing the roots of his family and by investigating his biography. Although Chester produced a well-substantiated examination of May's ancestry, details about his immediate family remained rather scant. Through archival searches and source analysis, I managed to track down a marriage licence documenting the wedding of his parents – Thomas May and Barbara Rich – in London in 1584. This discovery, which paints a picture of May Sr as an ambitious man contracting a prestigious marriage and attempting to secure a place at court, helped unearth another important document: the baptism certificate of May himself. Understandably assuming that May would have been born in Burwash like the rest of his siblings, Chester restricted the scope of his search to the local parish, and therefore concluded that there survived no documented trace of the birth of the poet. By turning my attention to London archives instead,

I finally found the baptism certificate of a 'Thomas Maye', born in London and christened on 22 February 1596, which would make the 20 years, six months estimation of May's age found in a post-mortem document relating to the death of his father exact almost to the day.

Aside from material concerning May's early years, I also found another piece of biographical information helpful in reconstructing both May's life and his beliefs prior to any public declaration of political allegiance. In a register keeping track of volunteer soldiers departing for the Netherlands to fight for the Protestant cause, I found the name of May, who is said to have taken his oath of allegiance in July 1621 alongside a fellow volunteer. This information, though not corroborated by documentary evidence of May's returning to England, is crucial in establishing an early political involvement and, simultaneously, in tracking May's political convictions through the decades. Although one of the accusations most frequently levelled at him has always been the insinuation that May chose parliament out of sheer malice and resentment towards Charles, this early display of political initiative decisively contributes to disputing that assumption once and for all. If anything, his participation in the war for the Palatinate as a volunteer shows that the poet had been voicing his dissent from royal policies since as early as 1621, and that the preservation of a Protestant and nationalistic ideal prevailed over the monarch's personal interests.

Throughout the thesis, I took care to emphasise various biographical details when relevant and helpful in outlining a profile of the poet that would be as complete as possible. For example, although May's friendship with Ben Jonson and his inclusion in a circle of better-known poets has often been pointed out, I endeavoured to collect as much evidence as available to reconstruct the extent of such relationships. With the help of dedicatory poems, hereditary bequests, post-mortem tributes, and literary contingencies, I managed to demonstrate how May was not only part of a group of well-respected contemporary poets, but also the extent to which the mutual friendship with some of them impacted his career, occasionally influencing their works in turn.

By way of example, May started working on John Barclay's *Argenis* shortly after Jonson abandoned the project following the fire that destroyed a large part of his library; conversely, Jonson, at the end of his career and his life, started working on the unfinished play *Mortimer His Fall*, possibly spurred by the publication of May's historical poem on the reign of Edward III. In 1626, one of the reasons why May chose to undertake the translation of the *Pharsalia* might have been Massinger's close acquaintance with the text, a debt that emerges throughout the translation, which displays verbal echoes from Massinger's *The False One*, written with Fletcher; in turn, Massinger acknowledged his friend's tribute by bequeathing him his copy of Farnaby's Lucan upon his death in 1640. This thesis also shows how May's friendships with some of his fellow poets and dramatists, such as the one with the royalist Shirley, even survived the civil war and the supposed allegations of betrayal, contributing to challenging the myth that May was ostracised by his contemporaries upon his declaration of allegiance to the Parliament.

Indeed, politically speaking, May's image has unfortunately been permanently tainted by royalist propaganda and the effort of satirists such as Marvell, whose 'Tom May's Death' has contributed greatly to the general distorted perception of the poet. With the help of the evidence collected while analysing May's works, I sought to dispel most prejudices connected to the poet and to produce a 'political profile' that could explain the choices he made throughout his life. As I have hinted in the previous paragraph, strong political convictions and perhaps a pinch of naïve idealism dominated the beginning of the young adult May's life. Orphaned, with the prospect of living a comfortable life in the countryside faded away with the death of his father, May first attempted a career as a dramatist in London. This venture, briefly interrupted by his departure to the Netherlands in 1621, was not particularly successful, nor was his first attempt at translation. May's breakthrough, and perhaps his most poignant political statement, was the publication of Lucan's *Pharsalia* between 1626 and 1627. The choice, already controversial in

itself due to the subject matter, acquired a decidedly political overtone when May opted to dedicate many of the books to various members of Parliament and military and political figures that had been involved, in some way or another, in acts of opposition to the king or to the Duke of Buckingham. The dedications were aptly chosen and tailored to their respective recipient, with May often likening the defeated Pompey, champion of the Roman republic, and his cause against tyranny to his numerous dedicatees. The ideological force of this decision was such that May, probably realising a little too late that his financial prospects would have been severely impacted by his refusal to engage with wealthy members of the court, quickly intervened directly by excising the dedications from as many copies of the *Pharsalia* he could lay his hands on. The dedications were never reprinted again, and, from 1627 onwards, May's pursuit of financial security and a career as a poet was marked by a significantly more cautious approach.

Indeed, during the years 1627-1630, May published only a selected number of works, which he all dedicated to prominent members of the court, hoping to obtain their support. Nevertheless, during this desperate quest for patronage, May, I argue, never betrayed the principles he had espoused: the plays he wrote in that period show that he was very much still following the ensuing diatribe between Parliament and the king and his advisors, and that his stance remained unchanged. All his extant tragedies, like many other early modern plays, exploit Rome and Greece as tools to discuss contemporary politics; the only difference between his output pre- and post-*Pharsalia* was merely a new cautiousness, dictated by his financial needs, which forced him to select for publication only those works that would not be found deserving of censorship. Indeed, May cultivated a low profile during the 1630s, when he was finally financially secure and could boast, if not a friendship, at least a mutually respectful relationship with Charles. This dependence never fully translated to slavish servility, not even when he wrote clearly because he felt compelled to pay his homages to the royal family, such as the previously undiscovered poem written upon the future Charles II's birth.

Upon the heightening of the tensions between the king and Parliament, through careful examination of the works attributed and those attributable to him, it seems May cut contacts with the king as early as late 1640, when his apparently incongruous decision not to publish right away the *Supplementum*, which is dedicated to Charles, could only be explained by political motives. From then onwards, he exclusively wrote for and in support of Parliament as a pamphleteer first and as a historian later, a career that is outlined chronologically in the last chapter of this thesis. The examples of ideological commitment showcased throughout this thesis should help, I hope, better to understand May's character and why he made some of the decisions that later would earn him the ridicule of royalist commentators.

From a literary standpoint, I attempted to find coherence in the vast array of different works penned by May throughout his career, and to outline a profile of May as a 'man of letters', to quote the title of Chester's monograph. To proceed, I discarded Chester's approach to the texts, which he classified into subcategories according to their genre ('Comedies', 'Tragedies', 'Translations', 'Narrative Poems', 'Political Writings'), and opted for a chronological examination instead. This enabled me to appreciate fully May's eclectic *modus operandi*: because he rarely focused on a single venture at a time, but rather was probably often occupied with multiple endeavours simultaneously, many of his works bear echoes and traces of other plays or translations which he was composing at the same time. Moreover, as May was deeply interested in contemporary politics and would often add references to recent events in his oeuvre, his method demanded an analysis that would consider the year (and sometimes the month) in which a work was published, so that a bigger picture could emerge. This approach allowed me to propose a new date of composition for *Antigone*, late 1628 or 1629, based on evidence found in the text relating to political developments involving the Duke of Buckingham, to which May surely must have paid the utmost attention. Additionally, I found it

helpful to include references to the many dedications written to and by May throughout his career, which are included in Appendix 2. During this ‘reconstruction’, I have come across several previously unpublished poems by May and, as mentioned above, I have even found one that was hitherto undiscovered.

An analysis of the many endeavours undertaken by May has revealed that, as with politics, May’s literary models remained almost unchanged throughout the (almost) forty years of published works to his name. Starting in 1612 with a poem written to commemorate Prince Henry, a peculiarity is immediately apparent: a predilection for English as a literary tool, despite Latin’s overwhelming dominion over erudite literature and May’s excellent classical education. This tendency to favour English and therefore a larger and lower-class audience, I argue, is evident in many, if not most, of May’s works: from the numerous translations, which, by May’s own admission, were intended as a way to present Latin works to a less-educated English-speaking audience; to the various poems in honour of members of the royal family, always in English; to perhaps May’s most innovative endeavour, Lucan’s *Continuation*, conceived in English and translated in Latin only a decade later and only as a way to spread the *Supplementum* to Europe. May’s intentions are made clear by the author himself, who often, as is shown in this thesis, in his endnotes or prefaces remarks how certain information is only included for the benefit of a reader who may not be familiar with a given source or translates Latin quotations in English. This predominance of English, with the few Latin exceptions limited to the later years of his life and career and attributable to a willingness to export his works to Europe, has led me to tentatively date May’s only known lost work, the Latin tragedy ‘Julius Caesar’, to 1640: at that time, May was in the Netherlands among European intellectuals and working on the life of Caesar again after about a decade, which, particularly given the very few details known about the lost play, seems to me a perfectly plausible time for its composition. This positive attitude towards English, I note, accompanies a more general tendency to treat

contemporary works on par with classical sources. The most glaring example is the use of quotations from a popular stage play, the aforementioned *The False One*, to embellish the translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, implicitly revealing the words of Fletcher and Massinger as equally worthy as those of Lucan. More generally, May's works contain a wide array of literary quotations, from Virgil to Shakespeare to Lucan to Jonson, contributing to dispelling the misconception of May as a 'classics' man and more firmly establishing him as a fully early Stuart man.

Overall, this thesis has sought to provide a fresh outlook on a semi-forgotten and often misunderstood poet. In order to do so, I have approached the subject from biographical, literary, historical, and political angles, in order to have as complete a picture as extant works and historical records would permit it to be. This reassessment should help, I think, better to appreciate the importance of May within the context of early Stuart literature and politics. Far too often, the poet has been neglected or relegated to the margins of scholarly commentaries: either he has been exploited as a means of comparison with other authors, or the analysis has centred on a single work of his. This thesis purports to dignify him with the recognition he deserves as an incredibly versatile poet, capable of tackling tragedies, comedies, translations, verse and prose histories, poetry, and original epic works such as the *Continuation*. Aside from the quality of his canon, on which this thesis did not intend to pass judgement, May was an undeniably important figure in Jacobean and especially Caroline England, both in terms of literary output and political commitment. Indeed, it would be difficult to find another similarly prolific author who wrote both before and after the civil war and who was personally involved in the conflict; it would be doubly hard to find such a figure among poets who supported Parliament. This notion of May as a polyhedric poet who had a crucial role in the artistic and political milieu of Caroline England is, I think, an apt summary of the conclusions reached by

this thesis; I hope my contribution will prove important for scholars dealing with May himself, with early Stuart literature and politics, and with the reception of the classics in early modern England, so that May will hopefully enjoy the scholarly recognition he deserves.

Appendix 1: a proposed chronology of the works composed by May

This list excludes the commendatory poems written by May and contributed to works published by other authors and friends of the poet. Subsequent reprints are not mentioned.

Year	Title	Genre	First printed
1612	Poem to Prince Henry	Poem	1612
1620	<i>The Heir</i>	Play (comedy)	1622
1625	<i>Barclay His Argenis</i>	Translation	1625
1626	<i>Lucan's Pharsalia</i> , the first three books	Translation	1626
	<i>The Tragedy of Cleopatra</i>	Play (tragedy)	1639
1627	<i>Lucan's Pharsalia</i> , the whole ten books	Translation	1627
	Poem to King Charles' fleet	Poem	Manuscript
	Poem to Sir Charles Rich	Poem	Manuscript
1628	<i>Virgil's Georgics</i>	Translation	1628
	<i>The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina</i>	Play (tragedy)	1639
1629	<i>The Tragedy of Antigone</i>	Play (tragedy)	1631
	<i>Martial's Epigrams</i>	Translation	1629
1630	<i>Continuation of Lucan's Pharsalia</i>	Verse history	1630
	<i>The Old Couple</i>	Play (comedy)	1658
	Poem to Prince Charles	Poem	Manuscript
1631	<i>Barclay's The Mirror of Minds</i>	Translation	1631
1632	Poem to Queen Henrietta Maria	Poem	Manuscript
1633	<i>The Reign of King Henry the Second</i>	Verse history	1633
	Poem to Lady Venetia Digby	Poem	Manuscript
1635	<i>The Reign of King Edward the Third</i>	Verse history	1635
1637	Poem to Ben Jonson	Poem	1638
1640	<i>Supplementum Lucani</i>	Verse history	1640
	'Julius Caesar'	Play (tragedy)	Lost
1642	<i>Observations upon the Effects of Former Parliaments</i>	Pamphlet	1642
	<i>Certain Information from Devon and Dorset</i>	War report	1642
1643	<i>A True Relation from Hull</i>	War report	1643
	<i>A True Relation of the Expedition of His Excellency</i>	War report	1643
1644	<i>A Particular List of Divers of the Commanders</i>	War report	1644
1645	<i>The Character of a Right Malignant</i>	Satire	1645
	<i>The King's Cabinet Opened</i>	War report	1645
1647	<i>The History of the Parliament of England</i>	Prose history	1647
1649	<i>An Anatomy of Lt. Col. John Lilburne's Spirit</i>	Pamphlet	1649
1650	<i>Historiae Parliamenti Angliae Breviarium</i>	Prose history	1650
	<i>A Breviary of the History of the Parliament of England</i>	Prose history	1650
	<i>The Changeable Covenant</i>	Pamphlet	1650

Appendix 2: May's commendatory poems to friends and colleagues

1. Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor* (1629)

To his deserving friend Mr Philip Massinger, upon his tragedy The Roman Actor.
Paris, the best of actors in his age,
Acts yet, and speaks upon our Roman stage
Such lines by thee as do not derogate
From Rome's proud heights and her then-learned state.
Nor great Domitian's favour, nor th'embraces
Of a fair empress, nor those often graces
Which from th'applauding theatres were paid
To his brave action, nor his ashes laid
In the Flaminian way, where people strowed
His grave with flowers, and Martial's wit bestowed
A lasting epitaph; not all these same
Do add so much renown to Paris' name,
As this that thou presentst his history
So well to us. For which in thanks would he
(If that his soul, as thought Pythagoras,
Could into any of our actors pass)
Life to these lines by action gladly give,
Whose pen so well has made his story live.

Tho: May

2. James Shirley, *The Wedding* (1629)

To my deserving friend Mr James Shirley, upon his comedy The Wedding.
Thou needst not, friend, that any man for thee
Should to the world put in security.
Thy comedy is good; 'twill pass alone,
And fair enough without these ribbons shown
Upon the forehead on't. If high-raised passion,
Tempered with harmless mirth, in such sweet fashion
And with such harmony as may invite

Two faculties of soul and both delight,
Deserve an approbation, in mine eye
Such in just value is this comedy.

Tho. May

3. William Crosse, *The Works of Caius Crispus Sallust* (1629)

What in thy labour may I most approve,
And show as well my judgement as my love?
Shall I commend thy wise election
Of such a subject? Which in right is one
Of Rome's best histories, and rendered here
May please the best, the wisest, sharpest ear?
Or shall I praise thy faith in rendering,
Thine elegance in clothing everything?
Or join them all in one, since here I see,
They all in this translation do agree?
A noble subject, fit to be begun,
Is faithfully and elegantly done.

Thomas May Esquire

4. Charles Aleyn, *The Battles of Crecy and Poitiers* (1631)

Doctissimo amico suo Carolo Aleino de nobili hoc poemate.

Si quid victrices debebunt vatibus umbrae,
Aevum mortali si dare musa potest,
Et decus aeternum praestare, hos doctus honores
Praestitit Alleinus, Rex, Edovarde, tibi,
Gallorum domitor, tibi que inuictissime Princeps,
Cuius adhuc nomen saecula nostra colunt.
Felices animae, laudes agnoscite vestras,
Carminaque[ue] eximios dignae sonare duces.
Maesta suas iterum lugebit Gallia clades,
Damnaque[ue] per calamum iam renovata tuum
Sentiet infelix, lugubria praelia damnans,

Tempora[ue] Anglorum cum pharetrata corrhs
Rumperet hostiles horrenda strage catervas,
Gallaq[ue] Gallorum luxuriaret humus
Sanguine pinguescens, quae ne damnare tenebris
Saecula, vel possit perdere livor edax;
Hos patriae reddit meritos Alleinus honores,
Nec patitur regum fortia facta mori.

Thomas May

5. Wilhelm Bedwell, *The Tournament at Tottenham* (1631)

To my learned and reverend friend, Mr Wilhelm Bedwell, one of the translators of the Bible.

That learned pen, whose aid did heretofore
Enrich our tongue with Salem's wealthy store,
And made our language speak with faithful skill,
The oracle of Sion's holy hill,
Does now vouchsafe (a lower exercise)
To grace, poor Tottenham, thy antiquities.
Let not my humble Muse presume to give
Censure of him that must so truly live;
I'll only say that pen, that honours thee
So highly, can receive no grace from me.

Thomas May

6. Alexander Gil the Younger, *Parerga, sive poetici conatus* (1632)

Doctiss[imo] amico Alexandro Gil.

Quod colis in nostra Latias tellure Camaenas,
Nec tentas patrios, Gille diserte, modos;
Ignosco, augusta est, quo praestat lingua Britanna:
Latior est, illine qua tibi fama venit.
His tamen huic terrae poteris decus esse Camaenis,
Et patriam ingenio nobilitare tuam.
Non tu fucata, aut strepitu protrudis inant

Verba; sed antiqua simplicitate canis,
Cum lepidas pangis nugas festiviter, aut cum
Gustavi resonas arma tremenda Ducis.
Macte tui genij; posthac facundia per te
Romana, et calamus sit rediviva tuum.

Tho. May, Armiger

7. Alice Sutcliffe, *Meditations of Man's Mortality* (1634)

Upon the Religious Meditations of Mrs Alice Sutcliffe. To the reader.

Wouldst thou, frail reader, thy true nature see?
Behold this glass of thy mortality.
Digest the precepts of this pious book:
Thou canst not in a nobler mirror look.
Though sad it seem and may loose mirth destroy,
That is not sad which leads to perfect joy.
Thank her fair soul whose meditation makes
Thee see thy frailty; nor disdain to take
That knowledge which a woman's skill can bring.
All are not syren-notes that women sing.
How true that sex can write, how grave, how well,
Let all the Muses and the Graces tell.

Tho: May

8. Joseph Rutter, *The Shepherd's Holiday* (1635)

To my much-respected friend, Master Joseph Rutter, upon his pastoral.

Why should I vainly strive to vindicate
Thy fame or fear thy well-writ poem's fate?
Why should I wrong the age to think a strain
So clearly sweet, so elegantly plain,
Should be mistaken? That a reader, though
Not of the best, who judge because they know,
But of the venturing rank, should therefore cease
To praise, because he understands with ease?

Because he is not puzzled, but may find
 A quick delight, such as should move the mind
 In plays or pastorals, whose gentle strains
 Should not perplex but recreate the brains?
 Can unjust ignorance offer so much
 Wrong to itself? Yet I have heard that such,
 For whom no language can be plain enough,
 Praise nought but intricate and clouded stuff,
 As if that conscious to their own weak sense
 (Because they know not perfect eloquence,
 And yet would seem), they think that best must be.
 That's farthest off from their capacity.
 Let such, if such there be, have their desire;
 And, though nor pleased nor profited, admire.
 I wish whoe'er shall read thy sweetest strain
 May love the author's skill that made it plain,
 And so be just both to himself and thee.
 But I'll no more anticipate, nor be
 Tedious in censure; to that worthy's breast,
 To whom thou sendst thy book, I leave the rest.

Thomas May

9. William Hodson, *The Divine Cosmographer* (1639)

*To my much honoured friend, William Hodson Esquire, on his elegant and learned
 descant on the Eight Psalm.*

When I peruse with a delighted eye
 Thy learned descant on a text so high,
 The choice of such a subject first I praise;
 And then thy skill and genius, that could raise
 A style in prose so high as to express
 This holy panegyric, and no less
 The life, to view through this variety
 Of creatures the Creator's majesty.
 And must condemn those vain cosmographers,

Who – whilst they strive to search and to rehearse
All creatures' frame and beauty, while they toil
To find the various nature of each soil,
The oceans' depth, through whose vast bosom move
So many wonders, nay, to skies above
And higher spheres their contemplations raise –
They lose the pith of all, the Maker's praise.

Thomas May

10. James Shirley, *Poems* (1646)

To my honoured friend Mr Ja[m]es Shirley, upon the printing of his elegant poems.

Although thou want the theatres' applause,
Which now is fitly silenced by the laws,
Since these sad times that civil swords did rage,
And make three kingdoms the lamented stage
Of real tragedies, it was not fit
We quite should lose such monuments of wit
As flowed from thy terse pen. The press alone
Can vindicate from dark oblivion
Thy poems, friend; those that with skill can read
Shall be thy judges now and shall, instead
Of ignorant spectators, grace thy name,
Though with a narrower, yet a truer fame,
And crown with longer life thy worthy pains.
All Muses are not guiltless; but such strains
As thine deserve, if I may verdict give,
In sober, chaste, and learned times to live.

Tho. May

Bibliography

Primary texts

- Agrippina*: Thomas May, *The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina; Emprresse of Rome* (London: Ric[hard] Hodgkinson for Thomas Walkley, 1639).
- Anatomy of Lilburne*: [Thomas May], *An anatomy of Lievt. Col. John Lilburn's spirit and pamphlets. Or, A vindication of these two honorable patriots Oliver Cromwel, Ld Governor of Ireland, and Sir Arthur Haslerig, Knight baronet, from the unworthy and false aspersions by him cast on them in two libels* (London: John Macock for Francis Tyton, 1649).
- Antigone*: Thomas May, *The Tragedy of Antigone, The Theban Princesse* (London: Thomas Harper for Benjamin Fisher, 1631).
- Argenis, 1625*: John Barclay, *Barclay His Argenis: or, the Loves of Poliarchus and Argenis, Faithfully translated out of Latine into English, by Kingesmill Long, Gent.* (London: G. P. for Henry Seile, 1625).
- Argenis, 1628*: John Barclay, *Iohn Barclay His Argenis, translated out of Latine into English: the Prose upon His Majesties Command: by Sir Robert LeGrys, Knight; and the Verses by Thomas May, Esquire* (London: Felix Kingston for Richard Meighen, 1628).
- Breviarium*: Thomas May, *Historiae Parliamenti Angliae Breviarium, Tribus partibus explicitum* (London: Charles Sumpter for Thomas Brewster, 1650).
- Breviary, 1650*: Thomas May, *A Breviary of the History of the Parliament of England* (London: Robert White for Thomas Brewster and Gregory Moule, 1650).
- Certain Information*: [Thomas May, H. L.], *Certain Information from Devon and Dorset: Concerning the Commission of Array* (London: H[umphrey] Blunden, 1645).
- Changeable Covenant*: [Thomas May], *The Changeable Covenant, Shewing in a brief Series of relation, How the Scots from time to time have imposed upon England, by their false Glosses, and perverse interpretations of the Covenant. Their Iugglings, Tergiversations, and dangerous Designes against the Parliament of England, under pretence of the Covenant, Articles, and Treaty* (London: G. D. for Thomas Brewster and Gregory Moule, 1650).
- Cleopatra*: Thomas May, *The Tragedie of Cleopatra, Queen of Ægypt* (London: Thomas Harper for Thomas Walkley, 1639).
- Continuation*: Thomas May, *A Continuation of Lucans Historicall Poem till the Death of Iulius Caesar* (London: James Boler, 1630).

Continuation, 1650: Thomas May, *A Continuation of Lucan's Historicall Poem till the Death of Iulius Caesar. The 4th Edition enlarged by the Author* (London: William Sheares, 1650).

Edward III: Thomas May, *The Victorious Reigne of Edward the Third, Written in Seven Bookes* (London: Thomas Walkley for Benjamin Fisher, 1635).

Epicedium: Vv. Aa., *Epicedium Cantabrigiense, In obitum immaturum semperq; deflendum, HENRICI, Illustrissimi Principis Walliae &c.* (Cambridge: *Ex Officina Cantrelli Legge*, 1612).

Epigrams: Martial, *Selected Epigrams of Martial. Englished by Thomas May Esquire* (London: Thomas Walkley, 1629).

Georgics: Virgil, *Virgil's Georgicks Englished by Tho: May Esq.* (London: Thomas Walkley, 1628).

Heir, 1622: Thomas May, *The Heire an Excellent Comedie* (London: B[ernard] A[lsop] for Thomas Jones, 1622).

Heir, 1633: Thomas May, *The Heire a Comedie* (London: Augustine Matthews for Thomas Jones, 1633).

Henry II: Thomas May, *The Reigne of King Henry the Second, Written in Seaven Bookes* (London: A[ugustine] M[atthews] for Benjamin Fisher, 1633).

History of Parliament: Thomas May, *The history of the Parliament of England, which began November the third, MDCXL with a short and necessary view of some precedent yeares* (London: Moses Bell for George Thomason, 1647).

Ionsonus Virbius: Vv. Aa., *Ionsonus Virbius, or, the Memorie of Ben: Johnson Revived by the Friends of the Muses* (London: E. P. for Henry Seile, 1638).

King's Cabinet Opened: [Henry Parker, Thomas May, John Sadler], *The Kings Cabinet opened: or, Certain Packets of Secret Letters & Papers Written with the Kings Own Hand, and Taken in his Cabinet at Nasby-Field, June 14, 1645, by Victorious Sir Thomas Fairfax* (London: Robert Bostock, 1645).

Mirror of Minds: John Barclay, *The Mirrour of Mindes, or, Barclays Icon Animorum, Englished by T. M.* (London: John Norton for Thomas Walkley, 1631).

Observations: [Thomas May], *Observations vpon the Effects of Former Parliaments* (London, 1642).

Old Couple: Thomas May, *The Old Couple. A Comedy* (London: James Cottrell for Samuel Speed, 1658).

Particular List: [Thomas May], *A Particular List of Divers of the Commanders And Officers taken Prisoners at Marston Moore near Yorke (otherwise called Hesham Moore); Also a*

Relation of Some Remarkable Passages in the Fight, as it is sent up in a Letter from Hull dated the sixth of July, 1644 (London: Ralph Rounthwait, 1644).

Pharsalia, 1626: Lucan, *Lucan's Pharsalia or the Civill Warres of Rome, betweene Pompey the Great and Iulius Cæsar. The three first bookes. Translated into English by T. M.* (London: J[ohn] N[orton] and A[ugustine] M[atthews], 1626).

Pharsalia, 1627: Lucan, *Lucan's Pharsalia, or: the Civill Warres of Rome, betweene Pompey the Great, and Iulius Caesar. The whole ten Bookes. Englished by Thomas May, Esquire* (London: Thomas Jones and John Marriott, 1627).

Right Malignant: [Thomas May], *The Character of a Right Malignant* (London, 1645).

Supplementum, 1640: Thomas May, *Supplementum Lucani Libri VII. Authore Thoma Maio Anglo* (Leiden: Willem Christiaensz, 1640).

Supplementum, 1646: Thomas May, *Supplementum Lucani Libri VII. Authore Thoma Maio Anglo, Secunda Aeditio* (London: Miles Flesher for Daniel Frere, 1646).

True Relation from His Excellency: [Thomas May?], *A True Relation of the Expedition of His Excellency, Robert Earle of Essex, for the Relief of Gloucester; with the Description of the Fight at Newbury* (London: Ralph Rounthwait, 1643).

True Relation from Hull: Thomas May, *A True Relation from Hull of the present state and conditions it is in, as it was written in a Letter from thence by one of good quality, to a Citizen in London, being dated the 19th of this instant Moneth of September, 1643; which Letter was brought into London the twenty eight of this Moneth* (London: printed by Gregory Dexter for John Bull, 1643).

Other early modern texts

Aleyn, Crecy: Charles Allen [Aleyn], *The Battailles of Crescey, and Poictiers under the leading of King Edward the Third of that name; and his Sonne Edward Prince of Wales, named the Blacke* (London: Thomas Purfoot for T. K., 1631).

Anonymous, Great Assises: Anonymous, *The Great Assises Holden in Parnassus by Apollo and His Assessours* (London: Richard Cotes for Edward Husbands, 1645).

Anonymous, The Last Will of Pembroke: Anonymous, *The Last Will and Testament of the Earl of Pembroke* (London, 1650).

Anonymous, The Life and Death of Philip Herbert: Anonymous, *The Life and Death of Philip Herbert, the late Infamous Knight of Barkshire, once Earle of Pembroke, Montgomery, &c, who departed from this Life to another January 23. 1649* (London, 1650).

- Anonymous, *The Testament of Philip Herbert*: Anonymous, *The Last Will and Testament of Philip Herbert, Burgesse for Bark-shire, Vulgarly called Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery* (London, 1650).
- Anonymous, *The Tragedy of Nero*: Anonymous, *The Tragedy of Nero, Newly Written* (London: Augustine Matthews and John Norton for Thomas Jones, 1624).
- Anonymous, *Wits Recreations*: Anonymous, *Wits Recreations. Selected from the finest Fancies of Moderne Muses* (London: Humphrey Blunden, 1640).
- Barclay, *Argenis*: John Barclay, *Ioannis Barclaii Argenis* (Paris: Nicolas Buon, 1621).
- Brinsley, *Georgics*: Virgil, John Brinsley (ed.), *Virgils Eclogues, with his booke De apibus, concerning the gouernment and ordering of bees* (London: Richard Field for Thomas Man, 1620).
- Farnaby, *Pharsalia*: Lucan, Thomas Farnaby (ed.), *M. Annaei Lucani Pharsalia, sive, De Bello Civili Caesaris et Pompeii Libri X* (London: Richard Field, 1618).
- Farnaby, *Martial*: Martial, Thomas Farnaby (ed.), *M. Val. Martialis Epigrammaton Libri. Animadversi, emendati, et commentariolis lucenter explicati* (London: printed by Felix Kingston for William Welby, 1615).
- Fletcher and Massinger, *The False One*: John Fletcher, Philip Massinger, *The False One, in Comedies and Tragedies Written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher Gentlemen. Never printed before, And now published by the Authours Originall Copies* (London: Humphrey Robinson, 1647).
- Fleming, *Georgics*: Virgil, Alexander Fleming (ed.), *The Bucoliks of Publius Virgilius Maro, Prince of all Latine Poets, otherwise called his Pastoralls, or shepherds meetings. Together with his Georgiks or Ruralls, otherwise called his husbandrie, conteyning foure books. All newly translated into English verse by A. F.* (London: Thomas Woodcock, 1589).
- Gil, *Parerga*: Alexander Gill, *IIAPEPTA, Sive Poetici Conatus Alexandri ab Alexandro Gil Londinensis* (London: Augustine Matthews for Robert Milbourne, 1632).
- Gorges, *Pharsalia*: Lucan, Arthur Gorges (ed.), *Lucan's Pharsalia: Containing the Civil Wars between Caesar and Pompey* (London: Thomas Thorpe, 1614).
- Grotius, *Pharsalia*: Lucan, Hugo Grotius (ed.), *M. Annaei Lucani Pharsalia, sive De Bello Civili Caesaris et Pompeii Lib. X, Ex emendatione V. C. Hug: Grotii* (Amsterdam, 1619).
- Heywood, *Blessed Angels*: Thomas Heywood, *The hierarchie of the blessed angells: Their names, orders and offices, the fall of Lucifer with his angells* (London: Adam Islip, 1635).
- Hobbes, *Peloponnesian War*: Thucydides, *Eight books of the Peloponnesian War written by Thucydides, the son of Olorus. Interpreted with faith and diligence immediately out of the*

- Greek* by Thomas Hobbes, secretary to the late Earl of Devonshire (London: Henry Seile, 1629).
- Hodson, *Divine Cosmographer*: William Hodson, *The Divine Cosmographer; or, A brief Survey of the whole world, delineated in a tractate on the VIII Psalme* (London and Cambridge: Andrew Crook and Roger Daniel, 1640).
- Jonson, *Masque of Queens*: Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens Celebrated from the House of Fame* (London: N. Okes for R. Bonian and H. Wally, 1609).
- Jonson, *Mortimer*: Ben Jonson, *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson, The Second Volume* (London: Richard Meighen, 1640).
- Lilburne, *The Innocent Man*: John Lilburne, *The innocent man's first proffer. Or, The proposition of Lieutenant Collonel John Lilburne, prerogative prisoner, in the Tower of London, made unto his present adversaries, and to the whole nation of England, Octob. 20. 1649* (London, 1649).
- Marlowe, *Lucan*: Lucan, Christopher Marlowe (ed.), *Lucan's First Book Translated Line for Line by Christopher Marlowe* (London: P. Short for Walter Burre, 1600).
- Marston, *The Wonder of Women*: John Marston, *The Wonder of Women or The Tragedie of Sophonisba* (London: John Winds, 1606).
- Marvell, *Miscellaneous Poems*: Andrew Marvell, *Miscellaneous Poems* (London: Robert Boulter, 1681).
- Massinger, *The Roman Actor*: Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor. A Tragaedie* (London: B[ernard] A[lsop] and T[homas] F[awcett] for Robert Allot, 1629).
- Ridpath, *The Stage Condemned*: George Ridpath, *The Stage Condemn'd* (London: John Salusbury, 1698).
- Rohan, *Princes and States of Christendom*: Henri de Rohan, *A treatise of the interest of the princes and states of Christendome. Written in French by the most noble and illustrious Prince, the Duke of Rohan. Translated into English by H. H.* (Paris, 1640).
- Rowley, *The Thracian Wonder*: William Rowley, *The Thracian Wonder. A Comical History* (London: Thomas Johnson for Francis Kirkman, 1661).
- Shirley, *Poems*: James Shirley, *Poems &c.* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1646).
- Shirley, *The Wedding*: James Shirley, *The Wedding* (London: xxx for John Grove, 1629).
- Suckling, *Fragmenta Aurea*: John Suckling, *Fragmenta Aurea. A collection of all the incomparable pieces, written by Sir John Suckling. And published by a friend to perpetuate his memory* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1646).

Sutcliffe, *Meditations*: Alice Sutcliffe, *Meditations of Man's Mortalitie, or, A Way to True Blessednesse* (London: B. A. and T. F. for Henry Seile, 1634).

Taylor, *Mercurius Aquaticus*: [John Taylor], *Mercurius Aquaticus, or, the Water-Poets Answer to all that hath or shall be Writ by Mercurius Britanicus* (Oxford, 1643).

Weever, *Funeral Monuments*: John Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments Within the United Monarchie of Great Britaine, Ireland, and the Ilands adjacent* (London: Thomas Harper, 1631).

Classical texts

Cassius Dio: Cassius Dio, Earnest Cary, Herbert B. Foster (eds.), *Roman History, Volume VIII: Books 61-70*, Loeb Classical Library 176 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

Martial: Martial, D. R. Shackleton Bailey (ed.), *Epigrams, Volume I-III*, Loeb Classical Library 94, 95, 480 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Pliny: Pliny, H. Rackham (ed.), *Natural History, Volume III: Books 8-11*, Loeb Classical Library 353 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940).

Suetonius: Suetonius, J. C. Rolfe (ed.), *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I-II*, Loeb Classical Library 31, 38 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

Tacitus: Tacitus, John Jackson (ed.), *Annals: Books 4-6, 11-12*, Loeb Classical Library 312 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937).

Critical texts

ACAD: *A Cambridge Alumni Database*, online database, accessed at <https://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/Documents/acad/2018/search-2018.html> (last accessed 15 March 2024).

Asch: Ronald G. Asch, '1618-1629', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Thirty Years' War*, edited by Olaf Asbach and Peter Schröder (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

Asch, 'Porter': Ronald G. Asch, 'Porter, Endymion', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 44 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Astington: John H. Astington, 'Dramatic Extracts in the Interregnum', *The Review of English Studies*, 54 (2003), pp. 601-614.

Astington, 'Messalina': John H. Astington, 'The *Messalina* Stage and Salisbury Court Plays', *Theatre Journal*, 43 (1991), pp. 141-156.

- Attree: F. W. T. Attree (ed.), *Sussex Record Society, Vol. 14: Notes of Post Mortem Inquisitions taken in Sussex, 1 Henry VII. to 1649 and After* (Sussex Record Society Digital Editions, 1912).
- Aubrey 1: John Aubrey, Andrew Clark (ed.), *'Brief Lives,' chiefly of Contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey, between the Years 1669 & 1696. Volume 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898).
- Aubrey 2: John Aubrey, Andrew Clark (ed.), *'Brief Lives,' chiefly of Contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey, between the Years 1669 & 1696. Volume 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898).
- Backhaus: Thomas May, Birger Backhaus (ed.), *Das Supplementum Lucani von Thomas May; Einleitung, Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2005).
- Baildon and Walker: William Paley Baildon and James Douglas Walker (eds.), *The Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn. The Black Books, Volume II* (London: Lincoln's Inn, 1898).
- Barclay: Andrew Barclay, 'May, Baptist', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 37 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Barish: Jonas A. Barish, 'Introduction', in *Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Jonas A. Barish (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963).
- Bawcutt: 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 Press, 1996).
- Bentley, *JCS, 1*: Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, Volume I: Dramatic Companies and Players* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941).
- Bentley, *JCS, 4*: Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, Volume IV: Plays and Playwrights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).
- Bentley, *JCS, 6*: Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, Volume VI: Theatres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).
- Bentley, 'Caroline Acting Troupe': Gerald Eades Bentley, 'The Troubles of a Caroline Acting Troupe: Prince Charles's Company', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 41 (1978), pp. 217-249.
- Bercé: Yves-Marie Bercé, *The Birth of Absolutism. A History of France, 1598-1661* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).
- Berger: Thomas L. Berger, *An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama: Printed Plays, 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Berry: Thomas May, Joe Wilkes Berry Jr. (ed.), *A Critical Old Spelling Edition of The Tragedy of Cleopatra, Queen of Aegypt by Thomas May* (unpublished PhD thesis, Rice University, 1964).

- Binns: J. W. Binns, 'Latin Translations from Greek in the English Renaissance', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 27 (1978), pp. 128-159.
- Bold: John Bold, 'May, Hugh', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 37 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Bolton: Ben Jonson, W. F. Bolton (ed.), *Sejanus His Fall* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1966).
- Boswell-Malone, 1: William Shakespeare, Vv. Aa. (eds.), *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, Volume 1* (London, 1821).
- Braden: Gordon Braden, 'Tragedy', in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume 2: 1558-1660* edited by Patrick Cheney and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 373-394.
- Bradner: Leicester Bradner, 'New Poems by George Herbert: The Cambridge Latin Gratulatory Anthology of 1613', *Renaissance News*, 15 (1962), pp. 208-211.
- Bright: Henry Arthur Bright (ed.), *Poems from Sir Kenelm Digby's Papers, in the Possession of Henry A. Bright* (London: Nichols and Sons, 1877).
- Britland, 'Antigone': Karen Britland, 'Buried Alive: Thomas May's 1631 *Antigone*', in *The 1630s: Interdisciplinary essays on culture and politics in the Caroline era*, edited by Ian Atherton and Julie Sanders (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 138-153.
- Britland, 'Mortimer': Karen Britland, 'Mortimer His Fall: Textual Essay', Bevington et al., electronic edition, pp. 1-3. OPPURE in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 7.403-16.
- Brooke: Tucker Brooke, 'The Marlowe Canon', *PMLA*, 37 (1922), pp. 367-417.
- Bruce: William Bruce Bannerman (ed.), *The Visitations of the County of Sussex, made and taken in the years 1530 by Thomas Benolte, Clarenceux King of Arms; and 1633-4 by John Philipot, Somerset Herald, and George Owen, York Herald, for Sir Jon Burroughs, Garter; and Sir Richard St. George, Clarenceux* (London: Mitchell, Hughes and Clarke, 1905).
- Bruère, 'Supplementum': R. T. Bruère, 'The Latin and English Versions of Thomas May's *Supplementum Lucani*', *Classical Philology*, 44 (1949), pp. 145-163.
- Bruster: Douglas Bruster, 'The birth of an industry', in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 1: Origins to 1660*, edited by Jane Milling and Peter Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 224-241.
- Buckley and Paleit: Thomas May, Emma Buckley and Edward Paleit (eds.), *Thomas May, Lucan's Pharsalia (1627)* (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2020).
- Burgess: Glenn Burgess, *Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).

- Busdraghi: Paola Busdraghi, 'Due epigrammi attribuiti a Ildeberto di Lavardin, il "Milo" di Matteo di Vendome e una leggenda su Pier delle Vigne', *Medioevo Romanzo*, 3 (1976), pp. 85-92.
- Butler, 'Romans in Britain': Martin Butler, 'Romans in Britain: *The Roman Actor* and the Early Stuart Classical Play', in *Philip Massinger: A Critical Reassessment*, edited by Douglas Howard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- Calendar of State Papers, 1627-1628*: John Bruce (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I, 1627-1628* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1858).
- Calendar of State Papers, 1637*: John Bruce (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I, 1637* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1868).
- Calendar of State Papers, 1650*: Mary Anne Everett Green (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1650* (London: Longman and Trübner, 1876).
- Calendar of State Papers, 1651*: Mary Anne Everett Green (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1651* (London: Longman and Trübner, 1877).
- Calvert: Ian Calvert, 'Trojan Pretenders: Dryden's *The Last Parting of Hector and Andromache*, Jacobitism, and *Translatio Imperii*', *Translation and Literature*, 26 (2017), pp. 1-22.
- Campbell: Gordon Campbell, 'Gil, Alexander, the Younger', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 22 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Campbell, *Specimens*: Thomas Campbell, *Specimens of the British Poets; with Biographical and Critical Notices, and an Essay on English Poetry*, volume 3 (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1819).
- Carbone: Laura Carbone, 'Le popolazioni dell'estremo nord nella *Icon Animorum* di John Barclay', *Classiconorroena*, 16 (2000), pp. 1-5.
- Carter: P. R. N. Carter, 'Rich, Richard, First Baron Rich', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 46 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Case: Arthur E. Case, *A Bibliography of English Poetical Miscellanies, 1521-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).
- CELM: *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450-1700*, online database, accessed at <https://celm-ms.org.uk/> (last accessed 10 March 2024).
- Chalmers: Alexander Chalmers, *The General Biographical Dictionary*, Volume 21 (1815).

- Cheney: Patrick Cheney, 'Literary Careers', in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume 2: 1558-1660* edited by Patrick Cheney and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 172-186.
- Chester: Allan Griffith Chester, *Thomas May: Man of Letters, 1595-1650* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1932).
- Chisholm: Hugh Chisholm, 'Heinsius, Nikolaes', in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Volume 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).
- Cibber: Theophilus Cibber, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, Volume 2* (London: R. Griffiths, 1753).
- Clarendon: Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *The Life of Edward Earl of Clarendon, Lord High Chancellor of England, and Chancellor of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Printing-House, 1759).
- Clark: Ira Clark, 'Shirley, James', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 50 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Clarke: Thomas May, Lyndsey Clarke (ed.), *The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina, Empress of Rome*, <<https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/renplays/mayindex.html>> (EMLS, 2003).
- Cliff: Catherine Carroll Cliff, *Thomas May: The Changing Mind of Lucan's Translator* (unpublished PhD thesis, Yale University, 1999).
- Como: David R. Como, 'Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War', *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), pp. 820-857.
- Coolidge: John S. Coolidge, 'Marvell and Horace', *Modern Philology*, 63 (1965), pp. 111-120.
- Cooper: Helen Cooper, 'Pastoral and Georgic', in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume 2: 1558-1660* edited by Patrick Cheney and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 201-224.
- Cox: Nicholas Cox, *An Exact Catalogue of all the Comedies, Tragedies, Tragi-comedies, Opera's [sic], Masks, Pastorals and Interludes that were ever yet Printed and Published, till this present year 1680* (Oxford: Nicholas Cox, 1680).
- Cox Jensen: Freyja Cox Jensen, *Reading the Roman Republic in Early Modern England* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
- Cruickshank: Alfred H. Cruickshank, *Philip Massinger* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1920).
- Cummings: Robert Cummings, 'Abraham Fleming's *Eclogues*', *Translation and Literature*, 19 (2010), pp. 147-169.

- Cummings and Gillespie: Robert Cummings and Stuart Gillespie, 'Translations from Greek and Latin Classics 1500-1700: A Revised Bibliography', *Translation and Literature*, 18 (2009), pp. 1-42.
- Curran: John E. Curran, Jr., *Roman Invasions. The British History, Protestant Anti-Romanism, and the Historical Imagination in England, 1530-1660* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002).
- Dalton: Charles Dalton, *Life and Times of General Sir Edward Cecil, Viscount Wimbeldon, Volume I* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1885).
- Daly: James Daly, 'The Idea of Absolute Monarchy in Seventeenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal*, 21 (1978), pp. 227-250.
- De Beer: Susanna de Beer, *Poetry and patronage: literary strategies in the poems of Giannantonio Campano* (unpublished PhD thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2007).
- Dinter: Martin Dinter, *Anatomizing Civil War: Studies in Lucan's Epic Technique* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).
- Dodsley: Robert Dodsley, W. Carew Hazlitt (eds.), *A Select Collection of Old English Plays, Volume 12* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1875).
- Donaldson: Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- Douthwaite, *History*: William Ralph Douthwaite, *Gray's Inn: Its History & Association, Compiled from Original and Unpublished Documents* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1886).
- Douthwaite, *Notes*: William Ralph Douthwaite, *Gray's Inn: Notes Illustrative of the History and Antiquities* (London: Benson and Page, 1876).
- Dunkin, 1914: Edwin H. W. Dunkin (ed.), *Sussex Record Society, Vol. 19: Sussex Manors, Advowsons, etc. recorded in the Feet of Fines, Henry VIII to William IV (1509-1833), Volume I: A-L* (Sussex Record Society Digital Editions, 1914).
- Dunkin, 1915: Edwin H. W. Dunkin (ed.), *Sussex Record Society, Vol. 20: Sussex Manors, Advowsons, etc. recorded in the Feet of Fines, Henry VIII to William IV (1509-1833), Volume II: M-Z* (Sussex Record Society Digital Editions, 1915).
- Early Stuart Libels*: Alastair Bellany and Andrew McRae (eds.), 'Early Stuart Libels: an edition of poetry from manuscript sources', *Early Modern Literary Studies Text Series I* (2005), <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/texts/libels/>>.
- Edmond: Mary Edmond, 'Davenant, William', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 15 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Edwards: G. M. Edwards, *Sidney Sussex College* (London: F. E. Robinson and Co., 1899).

- Felber and Prete: Howard L. Felber, Sesto Prete, 'Decimus Magnus Ausonius', in *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum: Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries, Volume IV*, edited by F. Edward Cranz and Paul Oskar Kristeller (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1980).
- Fisher: Payne Fisher, *The tombes, monuments and sepulchral inscriptions lately visible in St Paul's Cathedral and St Faith's under it* (London, 1684).
- Fitzgibbons: Thomas May, Sister M. Simplicia Fitzgibbons (ed.), *The Old Couple by Thomas May, Edited with Introduction and Notes* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1943).
- Fleay: Frederick Gard Fleay, *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama 1559-1642, Volume II* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1962).
- Fletcher: Reginald J. Fletcher, *The Pension Book of Gray's Inn (Records of the Honourable Society), 1569-1669* (London: Chiswick Press, 1901).
- Forster: Harold Forster, 'The Rise and Fall of the Cambridge Muses (1603-1763)', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 8 (1982), pp. 141-172.
- Foster, *Gray's Inn*: Joseph Foster (ed.), *The Register of Admissions to Gray's Inn, 1521-1889; Together with the Register of Marriages in Gray's Inn Chapel, 1695-1754* (London: The Hansard Publishing Union, 1889).
- Foster, 'Digby': Michael Foster, 'Digby, Ser Kenelm', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 16 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Fuller: Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England who for Parts and Learning have been Eminent in the several Counties* (London: J. G. W. L. and W. G. for Thomas Williams, 1662).
- Gabrieli, *Cleopatra*: Thomas May, Vittorio Gabrieli (ed.), *The Tragedie of Cleopatra Queene of Aegypt* (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1961).
- Gabrieli, 'Digby': Vittorio Gabrieli, 'A New Digby Letter-Book: "In Praise of Venetia"', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 10 (1957), pp. 81-106.
- Gardiner: Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *The Thirty Years' War, 1618-1648* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1912).
- Gifford: Ben Jonson, William Gifford (ed.), *The Works of Ben Jonson, in Nine Volumes. With Notes Critical and Explanatory, and a Biographical Memoir. Volume the Eighth* (London: G. and W. Nicol et al., 1816).
- Gill: Roma Gill, 'Marlowe, Lucan, and Sulpitius', *The Review of English Studies*, 24 (1973), pp. 401-413.

- Goldschmidt: Nora Goldschmidt, *Afterlives of the Roman Poets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
- Gómez Martos: Francisco Gómez Martos, *Staging Favorites: Theatrical Representations of Political Favoritism in the Early Modern Courts of Spain, France, and England* (unpublished PhD thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2018).
- Gregg: Pauline Gregg, *King Charles I* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1981).
- Grosart: Samuel Daniel, Alexander B. Grosart (ed.), *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Samuel Daniel, Volume III: The Dramatic Works* (London: Hazell, Watson and Viney, 1885).
- Gurr: Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- Gwyn: William B. Gwyn, 'Cruel Nero: The Concept of the Tyrant and the Image of Nero in Western Political Thought', *History of Political Thought*, 12 (1991), pp. 421-455.
- Hamilton: William Hamilton, 'The Origin of the Office of Poet Laureate', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 8 (1880), pp. 20-35.
- HCB, Volume 4: *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 4, 1644-1646* (London, 1802), pp. 158-159; *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/commons-jrnl/vol4> (accessed 6 October 2023).
- HCB, Volume 5: *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 5, 1646-1648* (London, 1802), pp. 158-159; *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/commons-jrnl/vol5> (accessed 6 October 2023).
- Heaton and Knowles: Gabriel Heaton and James Knowles, "'Entertainment Perfect": Ben Jonson and Corporate Hospitality', *The Review of English Studies*, 54 (2003), pp. 587-600.
- Hibbert: Christopher Hibbert, *Cavaliers and Roundheads: The English at War, 1642-1649* (London: BCA Editions, 1993).
- Hill: Anonymous, Elliott M. Hill (ed.), *The Tragedy of Nero* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979).
- Hopkins, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars*: Lisa Hopkins, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).
- Hopkins, *From the Romans to the Normans*: Lisa Hopkins, *From the Romans to the Normans on the English Renaissance Stage* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2017).
- Hopper: Andrew J. Hopper, 'May, Sir Humphrey', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 37 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

- Hosington: Brenda M. Hosington, 'Commerce, Printing, and Patronage', in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English, Volume 2: 1550-1660*, edited by Gordon Braden, Robert Cummings, and Stuart Gillespie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 47-57.
- Hudson: Hoyt H. Hudson, 'Edward May's Borrowings from Timothe Kendall and Others', *The Huntington Library Bulletin*, 11 (1937), pp. 23-58.
- Hughey: Ruth Hughey, 'Forgotten Verses by Ben Jonson, George Wither, and Others to Alice Sutcliffe', *The Review of English Studies*, 10 (1934), pp. 156-164.
- Hunt: Maurice Hunt, 'Jonson vs. Shakespeare: The Roman Plays', *Ben Jonson Journal*, 23 (2016), pp. 75-100.
- Hutton: Ronald Hutton, 'The Royalist War Effort', in *Reactions to the English Civil War, 1642-1649*, edited by John Morrill (London and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), pp. 51-66.
- Invernizzi: Davide Invernizzi, *L'Argenis di John Barclay (1582-1621) e la sua influenza sul romanzo italiano del Seicento* (unpublished PhD thesis, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, 2016).
- Jacob: Giles Jacob, *The Poetical Register: or, the Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets* (London: E. Curli, 1719).
- Jones: Stephen Jones, *Biographia Dramatica; or, a Companion to the Playhouse, Volume 3* (London, 1812).
- Kallendorf: Craig Kallendorf, 'Das *Supplementum Lucani* von Thomas May: Einleitung, Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar', *Seventeenth-Century News*, 65 (2007), pp. 87-88.
- Keenan: Siobhan C. Keenan, 'Staging Roman History, Stuart Politics, and the Duke of Buckingham: The Example of *The Emperor's Favourite*', *Early Theatre*, 14 (2011), pp. 63-103.
- Kemke: Patrick Young, Johannes Kemke (ed.), *Patricius Junius (Patrick Young), Bibliothekar der Könige Jacob I. und Carl I. von England. Mitteilungen aus seinem Briefwechsel* (Leipzig: Verlag von M. Spirgatis, 1898).
- Kewes, 'Julius Caesar': Paulina Kewes, 'Julius Caesar in Jacobean England', *The Seventeenth Century*, 17 (2002), pp. 155-186.
- Kiefer: Frederick Kiefer, 'Lost and Found: William Boyle's *Jugurth*', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 28 (2015), pp. 17-29.
- Klausner: David N. Klausner, 'The Harvard Manuscript of *The Tournament of Tottenham*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 74 (1973), pp. 676-685.

- Langbaine: Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets, Or; Some Observations and Remarks on the Lives and Writings, of all those that have Publish'd either Comedies, Tragedies, Tragi-Comedies, Pastorals, Masques, Interludes, Farces, or Opera's in the English Tongue* (Oxford: L. L. for George West and Henry Clements, 1691).
- Lawless: Donald S. Lawless, *Philip Massinger and his Associates* (Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University, 1967).
- Lee: Sidney Lee, 'Cavendish, William, second Earl of Devonshire', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Lievsay: John L. Lievsay, 'Bacon Versified', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 14 (1951), pp. 223-238.
- Lockyer: Roger Lockyer, 'Cecil, Edward, Viscount Wimbledon', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Lovascio, *Catilina*: Ben Jonson, Domenico Lovascio (ed.), *La Congiura di Catilina* (Genoa: ECIG, 2011).
- Lovascio, *The False One*: John Fletcher and Philip Massinger, Domenico Lovascio (ed.), *The False One* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).
- Lovascio, *Fletcher's Rome*: Domenico Lovascio, *John Fletcher's Rome: Questioning the Classics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).
- Lovascio, 'Rewriting Julius Caesar': Domenico Lovascio, 'Rewriting Julius Caesar as a National Villain in Early Modern English Drama', *English Literary Renaissance*, 47 (2017), pp. 218-250.
- LPD: Roslyn L. Knutson, David McInnis, Matthew Steggle, and Misha Teramura (eds), *Lost Plays Database*, online database, accessed at <https://lostplays.folger.edu> (last accessed 10 February 2024).
- MacDonald: William W. MacDonald, 'John Pym and the Impeachment of the Duke of Buckingham', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 41 (1972), pp. 163-178.
- Maclean: Vv. Aa., Hugh Maclean (ed.), *Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974).
- Maddison: R. E. Maddison, "'The King's Cabinet Opened": A Case Study in Pamphlet History', *Notes and Queries*, 13 (1966), pp. 2-9.
- Malcolm: Noel Malcolm (ed.), *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes, Vol. 7: The Correspondence, Vol. 2: 1660–1679* (Oxford Scholarly Editions Online, 2012).

- Malcolm, 'Hobbes and the Virginia Company': Noel Malcolm, 'Hobbes, Sandys, and the Virginia Company', *The Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp. 297-321.
- Martindale: Charles Martindale, 'The Politician Lucan', *Greece & Rome*, 31 (1984), pp. 64-79.
- Maxwell Hooker: Helene Maxwell Hooker, 'Dryden's *Georgics* and English Predecessors', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 9 (1946), pp. 273-310.
- Maynard: Darcy Maynard, 'Alice Sutcliffe, "Epistle Dedicatory", *Meditations of man's mortalitie, or, A way to true blessednesse* (1634)', in *Reading Early Modern Women: An Anthology of Texts in Manuscript and Print, 1550-1700*, edited by Helen Ostovich and Elizabeth Sauer (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 148-150.
- McDowell: Nicholas McDowell, 'Classical Liberty and Cavalier Poetics: The Politics of Literary Community in Caroline London from Jonson to Marvell', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 44 (2014), pp. 120-136.
- McKisack: May McKisack, 'Edward III and the Historians', *History*, 45 (1960), pp. 1-15.
- Miller: Anthony Miller, *Roman Triumphs and Early Modern English Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).
- Miola, 'Antigones': Robert S. Miola, 'Early Modern Antigones: Receptions, Refractions, Replays', *Classical Receptions Journal*, 6 (2014), pp. 221-244.
- Miola, 'Jonson': Robert S. Miola, 'Ben Jonson, Catholic Poet', *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 25 (2001), pp. 101-115.
- Morley: William Heminge, Carol A. Morley (ed.), *The Plays and Poems of William Heminge* (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006).
- Morrill: John Morrill, 'Devereux, Robert, third earl of Essex', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 15 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Nelson: Alan H. Nelson, *Early Cambridge Theatres: College, University, and Town Stages, 1464-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- Nicol: David Nicol, 'The Repertory of Prince Charles's (I) Company, 1608-1625', *Early Theatre*, 9 (2006), pp. 57-72.
- Nieuwstraten: Jaap Nieuwstraten, 'The Power of Custom and the Question of Religious Toleration in the Works of Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612-1653): An Investigation into the Sources of the Transformation of Religion around 1700', in *Enlightened Religion: From Confessional Churches to Polite Piety in the Dutch Republic*, edited by Joke Spaans and Jetze Touber (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
- Nixon: Scott Nixon, 'Carew, Thomas', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

- Norbrook, 'Lucan, May, and Republican Literary Culture': David Norbrook, 'Lucan, Thomas May, and the Creation of a Republican Literary Culture', in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, edited by Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 45-66.
- Norbrook, 'Thomas May': David Norbrook, 'May, Thomas', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 37 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*: David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Oates: J. C. T. Oates, 'Cambridge Books of Congratulatory Verses 1603-1640 and their Binders', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 1 (1953), pp. 395-421.
- Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar*: Edward Paleit, *War, Liberty, and Caesar: Responses to Lucan's Bellum Ciuile, ca.1580-1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Paleit, *Lucan*: Edward Paleit, *Lucan in England, ca. 1580-1630* (PhD thesis, Birkbeck College, 2008).
- Paleit, 'Caesarist Reader': Edward Paleit, 'The "Caesarist" Reader and Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*, ca. 1590 to 1610', *The Review of English Studies*, 62 (2011), pp. 212-240.
- Pangallo: Thomas May, Matteo Pangallo (ed.), *The Tragedy of Antigone, the Theban Princess* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).
- Pask: Kevin Pask, *The Emergence of the English Author: Scripting the Life of the Poet in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- Payne: Deborah C. Payne, 'Patronage and the Dramatic Marketplace under Charles I and II', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 21 (1991), pp. 137-152.
- Peacey, 'That memorable parliament': Jason Peacey, "'That memorable parliament": medieval history in parliamentarian polemic, 1641-42', in *Writing the history of parliament in Tudor and early Stuart England*, edited by Paul Cavill and Alexandra Gajda (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).
- Peacey, 'The Exploitation of Royal Correspondence': Jason Peacey, 'The Exploitation of Captured Royal Correspondence and Anglo-Scottish Relations in the British Civil Wars, 1645-46', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 79 (2000), pp. 213-232.
- Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*: Jason Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda during the English Civil Wars and the Interregnum* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).
- Phelps: Wayne H. Phelps, 'Two Notes on Thomas May', *Notes and Queries*, 26 (1979), pp. 412-415.

- Phillips: Edward Phillips, *Theatrum Poetarum, or a Complete Collection of the Poets, especially the most Eminent, of all Ages* (London: printed for Charles Smith, 1675).
- Pocock, 'May and the narrative of Civil War': J. G. A. Pocock, 'Thomas May and the narrative of Civil War', in *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth-Century England*, edited by Derek Hirst and Richard Strier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 112-144.
- Pollard: Tanya Pollard, *Greek Tragic Women on Shakespearean Stages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Quintrell: Brian Quintrell, 'Weston, Richard, first earl of Portland', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 58 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Raymond: Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks, 1641-1649* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- REED 1: Alan H. Nelson (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge, Volume 1: The Records* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).
- REED 2: Alan H. Nelson (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge, Volume 2: Editorial Apparatus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).
- Riley: John Barclay, Mark Riley (ed.), *Icon Animorum or The Mirror of Minds* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013).
- Rivett, *May's Histories*: Gary Rivett, 'Make Use Both of Things Present and Past': *Thomas May's Histories of Parliament, Printed Public Discourse and the Politics of the Recent Past, 1640-1650* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2010).
- Royan: Nicola Royan, 'Barclay, John (1582-1621)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Runacres: Ian Runacres, 'Bloodless Imitations: Lucan's Sea Fight in Holland's *Naumachia* and May's *Continuation*', *Translation and Literature*, 19 (2010), pp. 170-189.
- SAC: Sussex Archaeological Society (eds.), *Sussex Archaeological Collections, relating to the History and Antiquities of the County, Volume XXVI* (Lewes: George P. Bacon, 1875).
- Salazar: Greg A. Salazar, *Calvinist Conformity in Post-Reformation England: The Theology and Career of Daniel Featley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
- Salzman: Paul Salzman, *Literature and Politics in the 1620s: 'Whisper'd Counsell's'* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- Schelling: Felix E. Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama, 1558-1642*, volume 2 (Boston and New York, Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1908).

- Schmid: Thomas May, F. Ernst Schmid (ed.), *Thomas May's Tragedy of Julia Agrippina, Empresse of Rome. Nebst einem Anhang die Tragoedie Nero und Thomas May* (Louvain: A. Uystpruyst, 1914).
- Schmitz: Thomas May, Götz Schmitz (ed.), *The Reigne of King Henry the Second Written in Seauen Bookes* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in conjunction with Renaissance English Text Society, 1999).
- Scisco: Louis Dow Scisco, 'Sir Christopher Gardyner', *Transactions of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, 38 (1947–51), pp. 3–17.
- Sharp: Andrew Sharp, 'Lilburne, John (1615?-1657)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 33 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Smith, *Cleopatra*: Thomas May, Denzell S. Smith (ed.), *The Tragoedy of Cleopatra, Queene of Aegypt* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979).
- Smith, *College Plays*: George Charles Moore Smith, *College Plays Performed in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923).
- Smith, *Literature and Revolution*: Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997).
- Smuts: R. Malcolm Smuts, 'Rich, Henry, First Earl of Holland', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 46 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 'Spenser Allusions': Ray Heffner, Dorothy E. Mason, Frederick M. Padelford, and William Wells, 'Spenser Allusions: In the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Part II: 1626-1700', *Studies in Philology*, 69 (1972), pp. 173+175-312+315-351.
- Sprunger: Keith L. Sprunger, *Trumpets from the Tower: English Puritan Printing in the Netherlands, 1600-1640* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).
- Stapleton: M. L. Stapleton, 'Translations of Ovid and Lucan', in *Christopher Marlowe at 450*, edited by Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).
- Stationers' Register 1640-1708*, Volume 1: G. E. Briscoe Eyre, C. R. Rivington (eds.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers; from 1640-1708 A.D.*, Volume 1 (London, 1913).
- Stationers' Register 1640-1708*, Volume 2: G. E. Briscoe Eyre, C. R. Rivington (eds.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers; from 1640-1708 A.D.*, Volume 2 (London, 1913).
- Steggle: Matthew Steggle, 'An Emendation to Thomas May's *The Tragedy of Julia Agrippina*', *Notes and Queries*, 51 (2004), pp. 306-307.

- Strube: Hans Daniel Strube, *S. Centlivre's Lustspiel „The Stolen Heiress“ und sein Verhältniss zu „The Heir“ von Thomas May. Nebst Anhang: May und Shakespeare* (PhD thesis, University of Halle-Wittenberg, 1900).
- Strype: John Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, 1720, electronic edition <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/strype/index.jsp> (last accessed 18 August 2022).
- Stationers' Register Online: *Stationers' Register Online*, online database, accessed at <https://stationersregister.online/> (last accessed 3 April 2024).
- Sutton: Matthew Gwinne, Dana F. Sutton (ed.), *Nero (1603). A Hypertext Critical Edition* (2017), accessed at <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/nero/> (last accessed 10 August 2023).
- Usher: Brett Usher, 'Rich, Robert, First Earl of Warwick', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 46 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Thomason: George Thomason, G. K. Fortescue (ed.), *Catalogue of pamphlets, books, newspapers, and manuscripts relating to the Civil War, the Commonwealth, and Restoration, collected by George Thomason, 1640–1661, Volume I: 1640-1652* (London: British Museum, 1908).
- Thompson: Anthony B. Thompson, 'Licensing the Press: The Career of G. R. Weckherlin during the Personal Rule of Charles I', *The Historical Journal*, 41 (1998), pp. 653-678.
- Thomson: Patricia Thomson, 'The Old Way and the New Way in Dekker and Massinger', *The Modern Language Review*, 51 (1956), pp. 168-178.
- Todd: Margo Todd, 'Puritan Self-Fashioning: The Diary of Samuel Ward', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 236-264.
- Toomer: John Selden, G. J. Toomer (ed.), 'The Correspondence of John Selden (1584–1654)', in *Early Modern Letters Online*, <http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/selden-correspondence.pdf> (last accessed 8 January 2024).
- Tricomi: A. H. Tricomi, 'Philip, Earl of Pembroke, and the Analogical Way of Reading Political Tragedy', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 85 (1986), pp. 332-345.
- Trim: D. J. B. Trim, 'Vere, Horace [Horatio], Baron Vere of Tilbury', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 56 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Tuck: Richard Tuck, "'The Ancient Law of Freedom": John Selden and the Civil War', in *Reactions to the English Civil War, 1642-1649*, edited by John Morrill (London and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), pp. 137-162.

- Usher: Penelope Meyers Usher, “‘The Carcasse Speakes’”: Vital Corpses and Prophetic Remains in Thomas May’s *Antigone*’, *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 10 (2019), pp. 82-94.
- Vedelago: Angelica Vedelago, *The Reception of Sophocles’ Antigone in Early Modern English Drama* (unpublished PhD thesis, Università degli Studi di Padova, 2019).
- Venn and Venn, *Alumni*: John Venn and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses: A Biographical List of All Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge, from the Earliest Times to 1900, Part I: From the Earliest Times to 1751, Volume III: Kiles-Ryves* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1924).
- Venn and Venn, *Matriculations*: John Venn and J. A. Venn, *The Book of Matriculations and Degrees: A Catalogue of those who have been Matriculated or been admitted to any Degree in the University of Cambridge from 1544 to 1659* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).
- Vincent: Nicholas Vincent, ‘Introduction: Henry II and the Historians’, in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, edited by Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007).
- Wadey: J. E. Wadey, ‘Schools and Schooling in Sussex, 1579-1686’, *Sussex Notes and Queries*, 14 (1957) pp. 270-277.
- Walser: Isabella Walser, ‘Unitas multiplex: John Barclay’s notion of Europe in his *Icon animorum* (1614)’, *History of European Ideas* (2017), pp. 1-14.
- Walton: J. Michael Walton, *Found in Translation: Greek Drama in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- Waters: Michael Waters, *The Reception of Ancient Greek Tragedy in England 1660-1770* (unpublished PhD thesis, University College London, 2014).
- Weir: Robert Weir, ‘How Ben Jonson Read his Lucan and his Seneca’ (2017, unpublished paper), 1-8.
- Welch: C. E. Welch, ‘An Ecclesiastical Dispute at Woodhouse’, *Transactions of the Leicester Archaeological Society*, 35 (1959), pp. 56-62.
- White, ‘London playhouses’: Martin White, ‘London professional playhouses and performances’, in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 1: Origins to 1660*, edited by Jane Milling and Peter Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 298-338.
- White, ‘Parliament, print, and disinformation’: William White, ‘Parliament, print and the politics of disinformation, 1642–3’, *Historical Research*, 92 (2019), pp. 720-736.

- Whiting: George W. Whiting, 'The Sources of *Eikonoklastes*: A Resurvey', *Studies in Philology*, 32 (1935), pp. 74-102.
- Wiggins, *Catalogue*: Martin Wiggins, in association with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama, 1533–1642: A Catalogue*, 9 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012-18).
- Wilkinson: C. H. Wilkinson, 'A Note on Thomas May', *The Review of English Studies*, 11 (1935), pp. 195-198.
- Williams: W. R. Williams, *The Parliamentary History of the County of Worcester, including the city of Worcester, and the boroughs of Bewdley, Droitwich, Dudley, Evesham, Kidderminster, Bromsgrove and Pershore, from the earliest times to the present day, 1213-1897, with biographical and genealogical notices of the members* (Hereford: Jakeman and Carver, 1897).
- Winstanley: William Winstanley, *The Lives of the Most Famous English Poets* (London: printed by H. Clark for Samuel Manship, 1687).
- Wolf: Heinrich Wolf, *Thomas May's Tragedy of Cleopatra, Queen of Ægypt* (Lowen, 1914).
- Womersley: David Womersley, 'Sir Henry Savile's Translation of Tacitus and the Political Interpretation of Elizabethan Texts', *The Review of English Studies*, 42 (1991), pp. 313-342.
- Wong: Matthias Meng Yan Wong, 'A pause in time: history writers and the regicide of Charles I', *Historical Research*, 94 (2021), pp. 758-781.
- Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume I: Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses. An Exact History of all the Writers and Bishops who have had their Education in the most ancient and famous University of Oxford, from the Fifteenth Year of King Henry the Seventh, Dom. 1500, to the End of the Year 1690, Volume I* (London: printed for Thomas Bennet, 1691).
- Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Volume II: Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses. An Exact History of all the Writers and Bishops who have had their Education in the most ancient and famous University of Oxford, from the Fifteenth Year of King Henry the Seventh, Dom. 1500, to the End of the Year 1690, Volume II* (London: printed for Thomas Bennet, 1692).
- Woolf: D. R. Woolf, 'Erudition and the Idea of History in Renaissance England', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 40 (1987), pp. 11-48.
- Worden, *Civil Wars*: Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars, 1640-1660* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009).
- Worden, *Rump Parliament*: Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament 1648-1653* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).
- Wurtsbaugh: Jewel Wurtsbaugh, 'Digby's Criticism of Spenser', *The Review of English Studies*, 11 (1935), pp. 192-195.

Young: Michael B. Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

Zaller: Robert Zaller, “‘Interest of State’: James I and the Palatinate”, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 6 (1974), pp. 144–175.