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Chronology, Anachronism and *Translatio Imperii*

“History is played along the margins which join a society with its past and with the very act of separating itself from that past. It takes place along these lines which trace the figure of a current time by dividing it from its other, but which the return of the past is continually modifying or blurring.”

(De Certeau 1988, 37–38)

Writing about history (the premise of and condition for both chronology and anachronism) in Arthurian literature is particularly difficult as history underlies the very work we do as scholars of medieval literature and so is everywhere, yet the essence of it is hard to define and harder yet to capture. Arthurian literature itself has a past, a present and a future and forms part of the progress of history and so cannot be isolated in a definable past as the subject. It is perpetually in motion, reconfiguring itself and its own past and so as its readers we ourselves must affirm that this engagement is always fleeting and momentary and that the object will have changed the moment we have sought to define it. Moreover, historicity figures as a foundational myth of Arthurian literature, i.e. King Arthur’s pastness, the historical reaffirmation of this pastness and the potential future it offers – a future that remains present as we rehearse it.¹ Fundamental to this enactment of past and present historicity is imagination. As Nicholas Watson (2010) has so brilliantly shown, imagination figures as the quintessential mode of mediation of what he so aptly terms “the phantasmal past”, through which we seek to encapsulate a mythical past for the present. This imaginary past is perpetually being re-enacted, thereby re-affirming its imaginative relevance and its historical potential. The past as depicted in the stories of King Arthur and his knights – as well as the moment in history of its imaginative re-creation – thus “remains inseparably entangled with the present and will continue to be so.” (Watson 2010, 5)

¹ I draw here on James Simpson’s (2002) concept of a constructed past to articulate the fictive past of Arthurian history.

This chapter engages with questions of temporality, transmission, chronology and history as they relate to Arthurian romance. Given its broad span, the chapter will by necessity be fairly selective. The aim is to tease out some of the relevant and potentially critically engaging recent theorizations about time and historicity and the nuances of the movement of the *matière de Bretagne*, both temporally and geographically speaking. More figuratively, it seeks to foreground Arthurian romances' recombinative potential as a generic framework for the imaginative reconstitution of its own past and its envisioned future.²

1 Temporality, historicity and anachronism

History, historicity and temporality can be said to underlie many of the approaches to Arthurian romance for the past thirty years or so and no single chapter can do its critical history justice.³ In fact, romance has a particularly fraught relationship with history as a subject and with its own historicity and chronological continuity. The romance's generic history is located in historiographical impulses and the specific staging of the topos of *translatio studii et imperii* as a foundational myth, exhibited in works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*. While Arthurian romance thus originates in historiography, it simultaneously forges its own history and reconceives the history of its British past as foundational; a Trojan myth recapitalized to be repeated over and over again with a differing perspective, a shifting focus and an ahistorical mutability.

The concept of history is itself notoriously unstable and historicized. The scholarly shift from the poststructuralist critical heritage towards New Historicism in the 1980s and 1990s reveals a historicizing of the field of medieval as well as Arthurian studies that has had a profound impact on how scholars have conceived of the Arthurian legend in history and the temporality of Arthurian chro-

² I utilize Nicholas Watson's (2010) formulation of the "recombinative imagination" here as a mode of articulating the reconstitution of generic components of the disparate romance material through history by which to reconfigure its contemporary significance or future potential.

³ To name just a few examples of the critical works on historicity or temporality in romance: Whitman (2006; 2010; 2013; 2015); Putter (1994); Ingham (2001); Warren (2000); Aurell (2007); Trachsler (2003); Moll (2003); and Walter (1989). For works that focus on historiography or temporality more generally see, for instance, Spiegel (1990; 1993; 1997; 2014); Ashe (2007); Davis (2008); Patterson (1987, 1991); Bloch (1983); Duby (1973); and Lock (1985). The scope here is limited (more or less) to medieval England and the Francophone realm and so works that focus on Scandinavia, the Germanic (including Dutch), Mediterranean, Iberian or Eastern contexts are not included here. For a more expansive overview see, for instance, Whitman (2015).

nology. In fact, Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico (2009, 1) state, citing Fredric Jameson (1999, 4), that “historicism has become the Jamesonian ‘cultural dominant’ of our field, one whose posture ‘allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features.’” This dominance of New Historicist tendencies in medieval scholarship has, however, been questioned. Andrew James Johnston and others (2016) have queried the presupposition of historical synchronicity. Bruce Holsinger (2011) has similarly raised questions regarding the implicit presumptions of a definable and accessible historical context, while Carolyn Dinshaw (2007; 2012; 2015) has suggested queer history as an alternative mode of approaching the inherent symbiosis of past and present.⁴ What lies at the foundation of “queer historicism” is an acceptance of the unavailability of anachronism, a recognition of nonlinearity, of temporal crossings and non-historicity, and, ultimately, of the subjectivity of the past as a temporal configuration.

The historicized formulation of temporality as chronological time – and of Arthurian periodization – can in fact be ascribed to the genealogical tendencies of early historiography, evident in medieval chronicles and in Geoffrey’s *Historia*. Spiegel (1997, xv) notes that the chroniclers introduced a new model of time that was “transformed by genealogical conceptual paradigms into a continuous, secular stream, in which past and present became an interconnected succession [...] and time itself, because human, was historicized.” Geoffrey’s *Historia*, although not the first to situate Arthur in the calendarian recording of Britain’s fictive past, firmly entrenched the chronological time within which Arthurian temporality could be arranged as an unbroken lineage and out of which the later romance writers would carve out synchronic spaces to flesh out their adventures of the Arthurian heroes.

The historiographic efforts were themselves constituents of the time period, intended to herald and authenticate the ruling elite’s legitimacy through genealogy (Spiegel 1993, 2–3). The sequential timeline instituted by the *Historia* became the unquestioned chronology upon which later Arthurian romance staged its accounts. Putter (1994, 1) indeed suggests that Geoffrey’s *Historia* was so undisputed “that the Plantagenets frequently claimed Arthur as their forefather, and referred to his alleged conquest of the British Isles to legitimize their ter-

⁴ Holsinger’s critique is not directed at New Historicism as such, but rather his essay aims to qualify the practice of historical contextualization and query its presumptions and nuances. See also Camp (2013), Goldberg and Menon (2005) and articles in the special issue on historical contextualization, *New Literary History* 42 (2011), particularly Rita Felski’s introduction, “Context Stinks!”

ritorial claims to Scotland and Wales.”⁵ Stevens (2015, 75–77) suggests similarly that the interest in the Angevin historical framework exhibited in Gottfried von Straßburg’s *Tristan* (which incidentally expands the pre-existing background) is directly related to the presumed reading communities and performative setting of the romance, suggesting that the court of the King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor, Otto IV (c. 1175–1218), and the courts of his supporters were likely venues for the performance of the romance and that due to Otto’s own dynastic affiliations with the Angevin Empire there might have been a vested interest in the dynastic genealogies.

Geoffrey’s *Historia*, which enacts the topos of *translatio imperii* in its configuration of an unbroken genealogical past, itself became subject to the trope as it was translated, adapted or reworked throughout the ages. Its content was co-opted and reframed within new linguistic and ideological contexts, thus reformulating the pseudo-historical material and reshaping the implicit historical perpetuation the *Historia* sought to promulgate. Wace’s vernacular translation of Geoffrey’s Latin exemplar, *Roman de Brut*, gave the pseudo-historiographic material the shape of romance. Yet, the chronological impulse continued to dominate the reception of the *matière de Bretagne*. Several scholars have, for instance, noted that Chrétien de Troyes’ romances were often placed in a chronological sequence in their manuscript contexts, where they were embedded within the historical progression of the *romans antiques* and/or the narrative history of Britain as depicted in Wace’s *Brut*.⁶

The Arthurian past was thus fundamentally historicized, becoming part of a chronological passage of time. Yet, it served simultaneously (and anachronistically) to reinforce political and dynastic aspirations of the ruling elites of the high Middle Ages and was later called upon to re-affirm British national ambitions. The periodization of the Arthurian reign provided its recipients with a linear conception of a historical progression, stipulating a pre-Arthurian genealogy, a post-Arthurian period and an Arthurian era that was both historicized *and* mythical. The Arthurian chronology served to mythologize the present-day’s own past, providing the current present with an authoritative past, a genealogical lineage and a historicized presence. This self-same periodization of the Arthurian past would later turn on its own creator as the self-conceived Renaissance proclaimed

5 The troubled past of Geoffrey’s *Historia* as a border text and the associated ethnic and socio-political complexities will be discussed further in Fulton (*infra*). See also Warren (2000, particularly 25–59).

6 See, for instance, Huot (1987, 21–28); Putter (1994, 4–5); Walters (1985); Trachsler (2003, 24–25); and Green (2002, 89–91).

its own historicized borders by delineating the Middle Ages as their pre-modern Other.⁷

This impossibility of temporal rigidity is made particularly apparent in Arthurian romance, which fundamentally depends on a conscious blurring of such boundaries and a wilful suspension of temporal borders, inasmuch as its later recipients would have to juggle multiple versions of this fictive Arthur, including his previous textual history. Arthurian romance in some sense can be said to celebrate anachronism as it adopts the legend of the pre-courtly warrior king and refashions him as the ultimate symbol of chivalric glory. It then – in a self-conscious meta-fictive manner – plays on this very temporal convolutedness by heralding its own past as the background against which the story is made to materialize. Anachronism is, obviously, directly interlinked with chronology and the failure to position oneself accurately in a chronological timeline, thus indirectly sustaining and qualifying periodization. Margreta de Grazia (2010, 14) notes that while the term “history” has a long and distinguished past in the English language, there is no equivalent “ancient lineage” for the term “anachrony”, which has its first appearance in the seventeenth century. De Grazia (2010, 21) does note that while the concept may be a later invention the notion of anachronistic thinking nevertheless extends further back. Yet, the consciousness of a pre- and postdating temporality intrinsic to anachronism has often been used to define the historical perception of early modern (vs. medieval) thinking.

The notion of anachronism thus firmly and securely places a text and its reader into definable and chronological positions. These positions in turn depend on the sequential boundaries drawn by current presumptions of historical positioning. Yet, the temporal permeance inherent in literary texts is bound to disintegrate those boundaries, throwing the whole linear division into disarray as the past and present inevitably merge to give the text meaning. This meaning draws on the point in time when a literary work is composed (already a fraught notion for medieval literature), its scribal and manuscript history, any intervening periods – which will have loaded the work with referentiality – and ultimately the present position, equally burdened by blurry and indistinct boundaries and only vaguely aware of itself.

The alliterative romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for instance, re-articulates Geoffrey’s foundational myth of British history only to question its

7 For criticism on periodization, both as a critical concept and as a critical practice, see, for instance, Hayot (2011); Watson (2010); Treharne (2006); Davis (2010); Cummings and Simpson (2010); Summit and Wallace (2007) and other essays in the special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37 (2007).

temporal validity as the narrative progresses. The poem reframes its own origin by drawing on the historicity of the post-historiographic Arthurian mythology, only to obfuscate this authority through a destabilization of its own historical and mythical origins. The Green Knight poses as a reader of the textual legacy of Arthur, questioning its authenticity when he is confronted with the “sumquat childgered” Arthur in his court and so does the lady when Gawain fails to live up to his fictive (and historicized) reputation as a courtly lover (Ríkharðsdóttir 2014, 9; *Gawain-poet* 2007, l. 86). *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* thus perfects the art of historical circularity, intrinsic anachronism and meta-fictiveness in the disparity between the perceived reputation and literary legacy of Arthur’s court, as an established past within the poem, and the fictive representation of the court in the narrative presence. The play on the multiplicity of temporalities and narrative levels in the poem reveals the plasticity of time and its fictive malleability in the later Arthurian textual tradition.

The penumbra of historicity and its much-dreaded companion, anachronism, has come to the fore in negotiations of intercultural engagements, post-colonial tensions and the East/West divide.⁸ As Warren (2000, ix) notes “the ghosts of colonized Britons haunt subsequent formulations of imperial Britain, casting long shadows across European historiography”, thus throwing into relief the role of authoritative (Westernized) historiography in shaping the framework of Arthurian romance, both in Britain and in the larger Francophone context. Such socio-political tensions and cultural reckonings underlie the paradigm of *translatio studii et imperii*, which puts such dialectical negotiations of cultural dominion at the forefront.

2 *Translatio studii et imperii*

The concept of *translatio imperii* owes its origin to the historical chronicles and their documentation of the transmission of imperial authority and knowledge from the East to the West. The Latin term *translatio* means “to carry across” and was used originally to indicate the physical movement of objects through space, whether those objects were material entities, such as relics, or more intangible entities, such as knowledge or power:

⁸ For post-colonial approaches to the Middle Ages see for instance Kabir and Williams (2005); Lampert-Weissig (2010); Ingham and Warren (2003); Cohen (2000); and Lynch (*infra*). See also Chakrabarty (2000); Heng (2003); and Huot (2007).

In the later Middle Ages, *translatio* is used in conjunction with the words *imperium*, *stadium* and *reliquiae*; *translatio imperii* signifies a transfer of power or dominion (from empire to empire, dynasty to dynasty), *translation studii*, a transfer of learning or knowledge (from one geographic place to another), and *translatio reliquiarum*, a transfer of relics of saints (geographically and between different religions or churches belonging to the same religion). (Stahuljak 2004, 37–38)⁹

The topos of *translatio studii* is articulated as a formulaic and, indeed, a formal means of ordering authoritative transmission and reception in the *romans antiques*, appearing for instance in the prologues of Wace's *Roman de Brut* and Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*. It served as an imperial affirmation of dynastic legitimacy, qualifying the genealogical lineage of the Capetians and their claim to the seat of power through the transmission of *imperium* from Rome and their entitlement to authority as the harbinger of knowledge and learning as passed down from ancient Greece (Stahuljak 2004, 145–146; Campbell and Mills 2012, 1).¹⁰ Historiography and the chronicles thus tend to link the *translatio studii et imperii* with geographical expansionism and – in the Middle English chronicles in particular – with the foundation of Britain by Aeneas' descendant, Brutus.

As Helen Cooper (2004, 26–27) notes, the transmission is however not so clear-cut as the topos of *translatio studii* would imply, particularly with respect to the Arthurian material. The Arthurian legend passed from obscure Celtic folkloric materials from the margins of Britain through Geoffrey (who presumably wrote the *Historia* while located in Oxford) and presumably others, to Brittany, and then from Brittany to Chrétien and later back again to their English adapters, and finally across greater Europe, foregrounding the circuitousness of the movement of literary material across both insular and continental Europe. The movement in space, or across terrain, poses as a geographical as well as a geopolitical movement of materials that contain within them codes, a set of references and signifying patterns that will need to be aligned to the pre-existing set of references, whether linguistic, cultural, or literary, but will simultaneously reshape and reformulate those references. *Translatio* as a concept underlies therefore not only this geographic expansionism and the movement of peoples and ideas, but

⁹ For an excellent discussion of the concept of *translatio* and its metaphorical conceptualisations, see Stahuljak (2004) and works cited there. See also Stahuljak (2005), Tymoczko (2014), Campbell and Mills (2012), Goetz (1958) and Copeland (1991). For a study that deals specifically with the concept in Arthurian romance, see Freeman (1979).

¹⁰ The genealogy of transmission is nuanced further in Stahuljak's later book, *Bloodless Genealogies* (2005), where the destructive power of the topos and the complexities of (dis)continuation are deliberated.

it also envisions a linguistic shift, the transfer of knowledge inherent in Greek and Latin to the vernacular. It therefore underlies the reformulation of history as a vernacularized romance, a generic shift that morphs the content of Geoffrey's historiography into the generic leviathan of romance, a notoriously generically-unstable and encompassing form that defies its own temporality by the constant reinvention of its own genesis, form and modulations.

The act of "carrying across" implies both a border and a movement in space, a spatial transfer and a conservatory notion in the sense that an object, whether physical (such as a manuscript containing texts being brought from one location to another), or more conceptual (an idea or an ideological concept) that is *translocated*. The equivocal object is thus simultaneously preserved – as it captures a moment in time of its existence in the act of transference – and mutated – as it is reformulated or re-enacted within its new location. The process of *translatio* is thus not a one-directional mode of transmission as the act itself transmutes both the object it seeks to transfer as well as the system into which the object is being received. The transposition by necessity realigns the very object that is being transposed rather than preserving it intact. There is indeed no intactness. The act of translation presupposes an act of *elucidatio*, or *interpretatio*, both in the moment of conservation and in the moment of its transposition.¹¹

Suzanne Conklin Akbari (2005, 106) points out that the historiographic account of Paulus Orosius (c. 375–418 AD) frames the account of the movement of imperial power from the kingdom of Babylon through Macedonia and Carthage to Rome through a dichotomy of East and West, with the West framed as a locus of reception rather than as a locus in space. Akbari (108) notes that Orosius' focal point is prescribed by his own geographic positioning and so out of the four cardinal directions, only three of them – the East, the North and the South – are mentioned; the fourth – the West – being his own vantage point, the site from which the others are described. Akbari's astute observation of geographic perspective is relevant here inasmuch as medieval authors' re-enactment of the Arthurian legend prescribe a similar geographic as well as (and more importantly perhaps) temporal vantage point. The site from which the romance figure of King Arthur and his knights is conceived is – like with the Roman historiographer, Orosius – a ground zero, geographically speaking, but significantly also figuratively as it determines the midpoint between the past as material to be harvested and the future where the text will become part of that material presence and thus itself become a part of both its past and its future.

¹¹ For a discussion of the vernacularization of the *translatio* topos and its subversive contingencies, see Copeland (1991) and Ríkharðsdóttir (2012, particularly 24–52).

Romance to some extent in fact exhibits a reversal of the conventional East-West transmissive pattern inherent in the *translatio studii et imperii*. This reversal materializes as a topos within Chrétien de Troyes' romance *Cligès*, where the learning, which, as per the conventional trope, originates in Greece and is passed onwards to Western Europe via Rome, is now to be found in France.

Par les livres que nos avons
 Lez faiz des anciens savons
 Et dou siecle qui fu jadis.
 Ce nos ont nostre livre apris
 Que Grece ot de chevalerie
 Le premier los et de clergie,
 Puis vint chevalerie a Rome
 Et de la clergie la somme,
 Qui or est en France venue.

[...]

Que des Grezois ne des Romains
 Ne dit en mais ne plus ne mains,
 D'eus est la parole remese

Et esteinte la vive brese. (Chrétien de Troyes 1994, ll. 27–44)

[Through the books we possess we learn of the deeds of the people of past times and of the world as it used to be. Our books have taught us how Greece ranked first in chivalry and learning; then chivalry passed to Rome along with the fund of transcendent learning that has now come to France. [...] for no longer do people speak at all of the Greeks and Romans – there is no more talk of them, and their glowing embers are dead. (Chrétien de Troyes 2002, 93)]

Not only is France figured as the new site of learning and knowledge, but the trope now includes the code of chivalry in addition to *studii*. More significantly, the court of Arthur has become the locus for this courtly code of chivalry, reversing the previous axis of transmission. The story tells how Cligès' father "Que por pris et por los conquerre/ *Ala de Grece en Engleterre*,/ Qui lors estoit Breteigne dite" (ll. 15–17) [in order to win a reputation and renown, went *from Greece to England*, which at that time was called Britain (Chrétien de Troyes 2002, 93)] only to return later to Greece.¹² The movement of chivalric learning from Arthur's court back to Greece metamorphoses the *translatio studii* inasmuch as it represents both a geographical shift in orientation and, more importantly, a fundamental

¹² The italics are mine and I have adapted the English translation slightly for syntactical purposes. For a discussion of the topos of *translatio studii* in *Cligès* see, for instance, Freeman (1979) and Nichols (2012, 208), who discusses this reversal as a symptom of an "asynchronous temporality", which he sees as "central to twelfth-century thought" (209).

shift in the *matière* of *translatio studii* by including chivalric behavioural patterns and courtly precepts.

Arthurian romance thus articulates the concept of *translatio studii et imperii* in its re-vocalisation of a Roman past as underlying the reconstitution of a courtly and royal present, while it simultaneously subverts it through a geographic reversal of the point of origin and its transmission. Rather than moving East to West and encompassing cultural authority and knowledge, the cultural transfer is reframed through an act of conscious re-engagement and re-articulation of the Arthurian (British) mythical past as fundamental, both in its ideological message and its inherent value and relevance to its medieval audiences. That modernity has unquestionably assumed this playful re-enactment of cultural transfer and its creative reconstitution to form the material remnants of a cultural heritage of the legacy of Arthur and his knights may itself enact a mode of *translatio imperii* where the myth in transit has become the representative essence of its own obscure and mobile past.

3 Arthurian romance and the inversion of temporality

“Romance, one might say, is situated in and speaks of timeless moments” declares Corinne Saunders (2004, 1) at the beginning of her volume on romance through history. Romance as a matter of fact exhibits simultaneously historiographic temporality and a more subjective temporality that does not abide by the restraints of chronology or the restraints of the linear passing of hours, days and years. This temporality originates in the dialectic between a character’s presumed subjectivity and that of the reader, and is contingent upon the magical locus of temporal disavowal that the author and reader engage in to make the events come to life, to give them an urgency that defies their transience, their pastness in a sense. Already at the onset of the Arthurian mythography, in the *Prophetiae Merlini*, the stage is set for this time-defying temporality. Prophecies by definition contest chronology as they reach beyond their historical presence to tell of events yet to come, enacting a profoundly anachronistic gesture of temporal defiance. Merlin’s prophecy heralds the coming of Arthur long before his birth, yet the prophecies themselves postdate the very birth that they claim to foretell, signalling a historical consciousness that is simultaneously negated and implemented through the re-enactment of its own historicity.

Like Geoffrey’s *Prophecies*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* hovers on the uneasy border between fictiveness and historicity, foregrounding its own pseudo-

historical impulse, while simultaneously destabilizing the veneer of historicity and temporality. The entire plot of the story hinges on the impending date at which Gawain will have to present himself before the Green Knight to suffer a blow of his axe. The profound temporal awareness in the poem is made material in the focus on the seasons, their movement and the chronological progress of time.¹³ Yet, by its enactment of multiple temporalities, each in turn negated by the other, the chronological passage of time is called into question. As stated before, the legacy of Arthur's court is disputed by his "childgered" presence and Gawain's textual reputation precedes him to Bertilak's castle, where he engages in verbal battles intended to play on those temporal discrepancies. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au lion*, temporal awareness (or more accurately lack of temporal awareness) instigates the series of events that form the basis of the romance. The often debated forgetfulness of Yvain with respect to the timeframe set for his return to his lady (following fast on the heels of his avid declarations of love for his lady) reveals the narrative functionality of temporality not only as a historicizing factor, but as a subjective positioning where narrative time and its passing is measured in subjective realisations of impending doom or love lost.

Insular romance on the whole is more firmly grounded in historiography when compared with continental romance (Ashe 2010, 3). The non-Arthurian Middle English romance *Havelok*, for instance, indeed seems more firmly placed within an insular historiographical convention that seeks authenticity in the historicized past than *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which, conversely, seems to thematize historicity as a trope only to reject it. In fact, unlike the French romances, Middle English non-Arthurian romances seem distinctly to veer towards a chronicle-like historicity, affirming the *translatio* topos, while their emphasis is nevertheless not on authoritative (textual) lineage, but, more specifically, on paternal heredity, its potential rupture or refusal and its eventual reinstatement.

Geoffrey's foundational myth thus endured beyond its pseudo-historiographical intentions and its subsequent perpetuation in romance and was hailed by the Elizabethans as a befitting background to their own national aspirations (Cooper 2004, 24). The post-Chrétien continental romance offered a different direction, one that directly negated the previously established pattern of authoritative transmission and geopolitical orientation of power and knowledge. Following Chrétien's unfinished romance, *Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal*, the Grail material became the foundation for a reformulation of Arthurian historicity as well as its legacy. There is a clear deviation in the Grail material from the previous topos of

13 For a discussion of temporality in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* see, for instance, Whitman (2013, 84–87) and Bishop (1985).

translatio studii et imperii and historiographic temporality. In the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* the foundational myth is shifted from Troy to a Biblical past and the creation of the Holy Grail. Its measure of time is thus radically altered as the past serves not as authentication of the present and a foundational lineage for posterity, but as “an eschatological construction with a precise goal to be reached, after which the writer can put down his pen” (Trachsler 2003, 26). Trachsler (31–32) indeed argues that the introduction of the Grail material fundamentally shifts the historiographic orientation of the Arthurian romance towards a spiritual temporality and that this refashioning indeed spells the end of the chivalric romance as known by Chrétien and his audiences.

Ultimately, Arthurian romance, particularly in the fourteenth century, tells a story that has already begun and ended, yet its grand finale lies still in the future. Arthur’s relevance (and potential return) to the realm of Britain and to the framework of the courtly romance is a fundamental requirement for the perpetuity of the intrinsic appeal, i.e. the resurgence of a history that has already been laid to pass to make itself relevant again. Arthurian romance thus re-enacts a time-defying gesture of raising the dead, the spectre of a past, like the judge in *St Erkenwald*, summoning the dead for a dialogue so the past can be put to rest, disintegrating into dust as it is re-encapsulated by modernity – or by what amounts to modernity at any given time.

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